

London School of Economics and Political Science

Conflict on High:

The Bolivian Revolution and the United States, 1961-1964

Thomas C. Field Jr.

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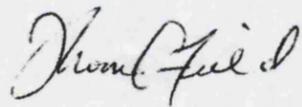
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Declaration

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A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Howard Field".

Abstract

Despite receiving massive injections of US foreign aid in 1961-1964, Bolivia has so far escaped the attention of scholars of American foreign policy toward Latin America during early 1960s. Yet only a thorough analysis of the Alliance for Progress in Bolivia can properly account for the reasons why the highest per capita recipient of Alliance aid funds entered a long period of military rule on 4 November 1964. Most previous accounts have blamed the military coup on the CIA, or the Pentagon, thus acquitting Kennedy-era aid programs of any complicity. This thesis argues that, on the contrary, Alliance programs played the central role in building up the Bolivian armed forces, both through civic action programs in the countryside and harsh labor reforms that were implemented through military force. The narrative suggests that aggressive ideologies of Third World development can often fuel geostrategic foreign interventions that rely heavily on authoritarian regimes. Rather than being a work of US imperialism, the following narrative suggests that the 1964 coup d'état was actually a reaction against the heavy-hand wielded by the politicized intervention represented by Kennedy's Alliance for Progress.

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Acknowledgements

Depending on whom you ask, Bolivia is either a “land of vexing paradox,”¹ or an “Arab-like political world.”² Perhaps, on the other hand, it is merely a “perplexing country,”³ with “byzantine complexity.”⁴ After two years here, I am partial to Hunter S. Thompson’s phrase: “Baffling Bolivia: A Never-Never Land High Above the Sea.”⁵ I count myself fortunate to have stumbled upon such a puzzle. In the process, I have incurred many debts.

My conversations with historian Luis Antezana significantly contributed to my Bolivian orientation. His book on the 1964 coup is passionate and provocative, and I sometimes think I would have never understood anything in this country’s political life without our early conversations. I also benefited from archivists Marta Paredes at the Foreign Ministry Archive, Rossana Barragán at the *Archivo de La Paz*, and Álvaro López, Óscar Hurtado, and Corina Garcia at the National Archive in Sucre. Several people helped me feel at home in La Paz, personally and intellectually. This includes Ricardo Calla, who shared with me many contacts; Hervé do Alto, whose presence in La Paz has been dearly missed since he left for Lyon; Andrés Santana, the only person I know who has been working harder than me; Pablo Quisbert, Eduardo Trigo, Luis Pozo, Evan Abramson, Emilse Escóbar, Lola Paredes, René Rocabado, Uvaldo Nallar, Nancy Nallar, and Jorge Calvimontes. Thierry Noel kept me company – often against his wishes – as I typed through endless drafts. His unparalleled knowledge of the Bolivian armed forces, and his excellent espressos and *araks* have significantly contributed to this thesis’s completion.

¹ General Edward Lansdale to Secretary of Defense McNamara, 3 June 1963, “Bolivia, General, 4-63/-73,” Box 10A, NSF-CO, John F. Kennedy Library, 1.

² Ambassador Douglas Henderson to Secretary of State Rusk, 7 May 1964, “Bolivia, Cables, Volume 1, 12/63-7/63,” Box 7, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

³ Ambassador Ben Stephansky to Secretary Rusk, 29 August 1962, “Bolivia, General, 8/62-12/62,” Box 10, NSF-Co, John F. Kennedy Library.

⁴ Ambassador Henderson to Rusk, 8 May 1964, “Bolivia, Cables, Volume 1, 12/63-7/64,” Box 7, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

⁵ Thompson spent several months in highland Bolivia in 1962. According to legends, the altitude forced him to give up alcohol and he began experimenting with psychedelic substances. Gonzo journalism was thus born. He found in La Paz a “manic atmosphere, compared to the gray formality of Lima, or the tomb-like dullness of Quito.” Hunter S. Thompson, “Baffling Bolivia: A Never-Never Land High Above the Sea,” *National Observer*, 15 April 1963, 11.

At the Kennedy Library, Steven Plotkin and Sharon Kelly were very helpful during the first months of my research, and at the Johnson Library, Regina Greenwell was stupendous. Michael Fouch, at my hometown Hall County Library in north Georgia, accessed many hard to get books during my occasional trips back to the US. As a nomadic and sometimes-indigent graduate student, I owe a great debt to those who offered me a place to stay. This includes Artemy Kalinovsky, Dayna Barnes, Gokhan Sahin, and Teoman Ayas, in London; Giacomo Boati in Paris; Edward Anderson in DC; David Ward in Boston; and Alvis Marino in New York. Alex Bakir shared his home in London for weeks (was it months?) on end, never asking for a penny. Finally, on numerous occasions the family of Colonel Edward Fox shared their hospitality and the enduring affection they feel for their adopted *patria*, Bolivia.

During my master's studies at Johns Hopkins SAIS, Marilyn Young first prompted me to look deeper into US relations with revolutionary Bolivia, and she has been an unstinting supporter of this project. She even read half the thesis, and I am confident she would have read the whole thing if I had finished it earlier. Meanwhile, Piero Gleijeses has been a mentor and friend since I worked as his research assistant at SAIS, and he continues to offer academic direction and support. He read an early draft of Chapters One and Three, offering excellent criticism that has informed recent revisions.

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Travel grants were provided by the George C. Marshall Foundation, the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations, the John F. Kennedy Library Foundation, the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, the University of London, and the London School of Economics. Without the support of these institutions, I would have never been able to concentrate on this project for the time it required, must less travelled to archives around the world to reconstruct the narrative.

Families undergo special sacrifices when someone takes up a project of this magnitude. My parents cringed when they heard I was starting a PhD. They never lost faith, however, and they doggedly stood by me as only parents know how. During the final months, my mother served as an unpaid research assistant, scanning sections of inter-library loan books and emailing them to me in Bolivia. She rightly feels that she is ready to begin her PhD.

Meanwhile, there are two individuals who directly enabled me get through the daily grind. My wife Milena offered limitless, steadfast and loving support. The patience she demonstrated over the past three years as I toiled away in libraries across the world, and typed through the night in La Paz coffee shops, will never be forgotten. Her insights into her own culture have prompted me to rethink many of the notions with which I arrived, and her calm emotional support guided me through several of the thesis's most difficult moments. Finally, my daughter Eleanor was born just as this project entered into its final eighteen months. Many of these pages were written with her sleeping in my arms, and I honestly cannot imagine having finished so quickly without the inspiration she unknowingly provided. To her, this thesis is dedicated.

On 30 August, economist Melvin Burke passed away. He worked for USAID in Bolivia for several years, eventually resigning out of protest. His subsequent research on the politicization of economic development programs in Bolivia is a must-read for anyone interested in this country or US relations with the Third World. To Professor Burke's family, I offer my deepest condolences. We will miss him.

La Paz
September 2010

Abbreviations

CAS – CIA Station
CIA – Central Intelligence Agency
COB – *Central Obrera Boliviana* (Bolivian Workers' Central)
COMIBOL – *Corporación Minera de Bolivia* (Mining Corporation of Bolivia)
DCM – Deputy Chief of Mission (US Embassy)
DIA – Defense Intelligence Agency
FOIA – Freedom of Information Act
FSB – *Falange Socialista Boliviana* (Bolivian Socialist Falange)
FSTMB – *Federación Sindical de Trabajadores Mineros de Bolivia* (Union Federation of Bolivian Mine Workers)
GOB – Government of Bolivia
IDB – Inter-American Development Bank
IDP – Internal Defense Plan
INR – State Department Bureau of Intelligence and Research
JCB – *Juvenil Comunista Boliviana* (Bolivian Communist Youth)
JFKL – John F. Kennedy Presidential Library
LBJL – Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library
MNR – *Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario* (Revolutionary Nationalist Movement)
NARA – National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Maryland
NSAM – National Security Action Memorandum
NSA – National Security Advisor
NSC – National Security Council
NSF-CO – National Security Files – Country File
OPS – Office of Public Safety
PCB – *Partido Comunista de Bolivia* (Communist Party of Bolivia)
PCML – *Partido Comunista Marxista-Leninista* (Marxist-Leninist Communist Party)
PIR – *Partido de la Izquierda Revolucionaria* (Revolutionary Left Party)
POR – *Partido Obrero Revolucionario* (Revolutionary Workers' Party [Trotskyite])
PRA – *Partido Revolucionario Auténtico* (Authentic Revolutionary Party)
PRIN – *Partido Revolucionario de la Izquierda Nacionalista* (Revolutionary Party of the Nationalist Left)
PURS – *Partido de la Unión Republicana Socialista* (Party of the Socialist Republican Union)
RREE – Ministry of Foreign Relations (Bolivia)
RG – Record Group (NARA)
SDDF – State Department Decimal Files (NARA)
SDLF – State Department Lot Files (NARA)
SDANF – State Department Alpha-Numeric Files (NARA)
USAID – United States Agency for International Development
USAIRA – US Embassy Air Force Attaché
USARMA – US Embassy Army Attaché
USIS – United States Information Service

Author's Note

Citations

Unless otherwise noted, all documents cited below are State Department papers from Record Group 59 at the National Archives and Records Service (NARA) at College Park, MD. Documents from other collections at NARA are cited by record group, including files of the United States Agency for International Development (Record Group 286) Embassy Post Files (Record Group 84), and Central Intelligence Agency Records Search Tool (CREST). All documents not from NARA are cited according to their source archive.

When citing from more than one document from the same date, a number, such as (2) or (3) is placed beside the document, to indicate that the cited information comes from multiple documents.

There are often copies of a given document in various archives. When this is the case, I have cited the easiest to access archive, usually a Presidential Library or NARA. In certain cases, however, a less-redacted version of the document can be found at a more remote archive. In those cases, I have cited the more enlightening version, regardless of where it is found.

Spanish Terms

There are a number of Spanish-language terms I have chosen not to translate. "*Amas de Casa*", for example, seems a much better term than "Housewives," especially since it refers to a militant group of Communist Party-affiliated miners' wives at the Siglo XX mining camp who filled the ranks of the *Comité* [Committee] *de Amas de Casa de Siglo XX*. Secondly, I have not translated "*compañero*," because the common translation, "comrade," holds a Communist connotation that does not fit in Bolivia, where "*compañero*" is used amongst members of a noncommunist party, while "*comarada*," or "comrade," is heard amongst members of one of the country's plethora of communist parties. Meanwhile, the use of "*Jefe*" to refer to President Víctor Paz Estenssoro, as undisputed head of the governing party and father of the revolution, can hardly be translated as "Chief," much less "Boss."

I have also chosen not to translate "*Control Obrero*" and "*Control Político*," as the Spanish terms do not translate well into "Workers' Control" and "Political Control." The former is a revolutionary relic in which the miners' federation wielded veto power over decisions made by the nationalized mining company, and held two seats on its board. Meanwhile, the latter refers to President Paz's secret police.

Finally, I have rarely translated "*campesino*," meaning literally "peasant." In Bolivia, the term holds a decidedly ethnic connotation, and should probably be translated as "Indian peasant," or even "Indian." One of the central goals of the Paz government was to turn *Indios* into *campesinos*, or ethnic minorities into country-dwelling Bolivian citizens. Nor have I translated "*Altiplano*," which has no decent correlation in English. "High Plain" reads too much like Kansas.

Introduction

Ideology as Strategy

[W]hat steps...are [we] taking to train the Armed Forces of Latin America in controlling mobs, guerrillas, etc...[T]he military occupy an extremely important strategic position in Latin America.

- *President Kennedy, 5 September 1961*¹

[M]y nation...now proposes officially designating this decade of the 1960s as the United Nations Decade of Development.

- *President Kennedy, 25 September 1961*²

What follows is a tale of revolution and change in the 20th Century Third World.

Neither tucked snugly underneath Washington's nuclear umbrella, nor shuffled firmly behind Moscow's Iron Curtain, the states of Latin America, Africa, and Asia hosted the bitterest and bloodiest conflicts of the era known as the Cold War. Even before the Global South attempted to assert an independent, non-aligned identity at the 1955 Bandung Conference in Sukarno's Indonesia, Washington and Moscow were busy carving it up. The superpowers marked territory not just with heavy weapons and military bases, but also through large-scale development programs designed to court wavering nations into leaning toward one side or the other. In most cases these politicized interventions were actually competitive processes of destabilization, and their strategic foundations belied the technocratic language they employed. To be sure, the aggressive nature of development as a foreign policy was not lost on scholars at the time. Walt Rostow and Samuel Huntington both argued, eventually from

¹ Kennedy, "National Security Action Memorandum No. 88," 5 September 1961, document 80, in U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States: 1961-1963, Volume XII – American Republics* (Washington, DC: GPO, n.d.)

² Kennedy, "Speech Before the General Assembly of the United Nations," 25 September 1961, Speeches, John F. Kennedy Library (hereafter JFKL).

different directions, that development is a full-contact sport.³ Bolivianist Erick Langer puts it directly: “State formation is always and everywhere a violent phenomenon.”⁴

There is a large and growing literature on the role of ideology in US foreign policy, much of which builds on a postmodernist and culturalist turn in diplomatic history. In taking up the question of ideology, this thesis seeks to engage an ongoing debate. At the same time, the conclusions that emerge from the narrative below hem closely to a more traditional concept in diplomatic history: that geostrategic considerations underlie the formation, adoption, and implementation of foreign policy. Power takes on many forms, and ideological development theories were one way geostrategic interventions were carried out during the Cold War. Their technocratic language of economic and social progress was tailor-made for policymakers seeking to exert political control, especially in non-aligned Third World nations.

Theoretical Approach

As Friedrich Nietzsche notes, “philosophical concepts...grow up in connection and relationship to each other...they...belong just as much to a system as all the members of fauna a continent.”⁵ Development economists employed by the US foreign policy bureaucracy in the 1960s theorized within a system of strategic discourse similar to that

³ Rostow’s willingness to back up development theories with military force endeared him to foreign policy circles. Meanwhile, Huntington’s skepticism of development increased as the debacle in Vietnam reached its apex in the late 1960s. See Walt W. Rostow *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960); and Huntington’s *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968). For an excellent biography on Rostow, see David Milne, *America’s Rasputin: Walt Rostow and the Vietnam War* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2008).

⁴ Interview with Langer, 16 March 2010.

⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, tr. Walter Kaufman (New York: Vintage Books, 1966), 27-8.

described by Edward Said in his critique of Oriental Studies in Imperial Britain and France.⁶ With academic theories firmly rooted in politics, it is unsurprising that developmentalism was so thoroughly infused by geostrategy. This idea is powerfully articulated by Timothy Mitchell, in his study of neo-Orientalism in Washington's technocratic approach toward Egypt.⁷ Meanwhile, Arturo Escobar applied the approach to developmentalism in Latin America, arguing that economic theories pitching themselves as messianic paths toward modernity are actually intricately formulated strategies to maintain Western hegemony in the cultural dialogue of Latin American elites.⁸

Theoretical pioneers notwithstanding, the most fascinating works on the strategic underpinning of Western developmentalism are based firmly on empirical research. In his impeccably documented study of World Bank activity in Lesotho, James Ferguson finds that development's apolitical, technocratic approach is highly useful for states seeking to extend political, even military, control over potentially rebellious populations. This side effect of development, according to Ferguson, helps to explain why the approach is adopted time and again, despite its glaring failures to actually "develop" anything other than state, or "bureaucratic," power.⁹ Similarly, James Scott demonstrates that development ideology is often a framework within which the strategic extension of state power is carried out. Resistance to development, in Scott's view, is often a rational response by communities

⁶ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978).

⁷ Timothy Mitchell, *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-Politics, and Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

⁸ Arturo Escobar, *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

⁹ Ferguson draws on Foucault, demonstrating that a policy's unintended side effects, if sufficiently patterned and predictable, can have more to do with its repeated adoption than its stated goals. "Development," for Ferguson, meets this criterium. Apparently pitiful at reducing poverty, Western development organizations have a better track record of strengthening state capacity. It is this side effect, Ferguson argues, that explains the persistence of "development." James Ferguson, *The Anti-Politics Machine: "Development," Depoliticization, and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990).

hoping to maintain autonomy in political struggles against potentially hostile states.¹⁰ Peter Uvin takes this a step further, accusing Western aid organizations of excusing the racism that permeated Rwanda's development-oriented Hutu government throughout the 1970s and 80s, for the precise reason that developmentalists viewed Rwanda's strong state capacity as a model for carrying out rapid economic and social change.¹¹

Cold War history has not escaped this line of inquiry, something presented forcefully by Odd Arne Westad, who employs a wide-range of case studies to demonstrate that First and Second World elites employed development ideologies in their strategic push for political power in the Third World. According to Westad, it was precisely this bipolar ideological competition that led to the tragedy and violence experienced by the Third World during the latter half of the Twentieth Century.¹² Westad's work compliments excellent studies of 1960s modernization theories, which explore the role of ideology in the formation and implementation of American foreign policy.¹³ Especially influential in this genre is Michael Latham's work on President John F. Kennedy's foreign policy in the Third World, where he suggests that heady ideas of rapid economic and social progress drove policymakers to embark upon an adventurous policy of expansive interventionism.¹⁴

¹⁰ James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

¹¹ Peter Uvin, *Aiding Violence: The Development Enterprise in Rwanda* (West Hartford, CT: Kumarian Press, 1998).

¹² Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

¹³ See Nils Gilman, *Mandarins of the Future: Modernization Theory in Cold War America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003); and David C. Engerman, Nils Gilman, Mark H. Haefele, and Michael Latham, *Staging Growth: Modernization, Development, and the Global Cold War* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003). A classic text on the role of ideology in US foreign policy is Michael Hunt, *Ideology and US Foreign Policy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987).

¹⁴ Michael Latham, *Modernization as Ideology: American Social Science and "Nation Building" in the Kennedy Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

Scholars who have examined specific cases of Cold War Western developmentalism have increasingly uncovered the enterprise's strategic underpinnings.¹⁵ Bradley Simpson addresses this concept in his excellent manuscript on political interactions between US liberal developmentalists and Indonesia's modernizing elites. For Simpson, military-led foreign policy ideologies of economic and social progress led directly to a military coup d'état and widespread violence in 1965.¹⁶ Similarly, David Milne's biography of Walt Rostow provides a harrowing tale of militarized development ideology as it played out in Vietnam during the much-heralded "Decade of Development."¹⁷

Studies of US policy in Latin America remain divided on the question of ideology and strategy. While Latham's work preferences ideas, classic scholarship by Stephen Rabe demonstrates that geostrategy often played the preponderant role in Washington's approach to the region. This is partly due to focus: rather than concentrate on US policymakers' perceptions, Rabe centers his attention on target countries, where the effects of foreign policy – namely the rise of military governments throughout the region – belied the lofty development rhetoric so prevalent during the Kennedy administration.¹⁸ Similarly, Jeffrey

¹⁵ See Carlota McAllister, "Rural Markets, Revolutionary Souls, and Rebellious Women in Cold War Guatemala," in Gilbert Joseph and Daniela Spenser, eds., *In from the Cold: Latin America's New Encounter with the Cold War* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 350-77. For other specific case studies of modernization, see "Towards a Global History of Modernization," Special Issue of *Diplomatic History* 33 (June 2009).

¹⁶ Bradley Simpson, *Economists with Guns: Authoritarian Development and US-Indonesian Relations, 1960-1968* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008).

¹⁷ Milne writes: "[F]ive months into his first job in government, Walt Rostow – an economic historian and theorist of Third World development, lest we forget – advised the president that he consider waging nuclear war in two separate theaters." Milne, *America's Rasputin*, 94.

¹⁸ Stephen G. Rabe, *The Most Dangerous Area in the World: John F. Kennedy Confronts Communist Revolution in Latin America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999). Rabe's subsequent case study of Kennedy's foreign policy in British Guiana accentuates his underlying argument that the administration harbored an obsession with strategic considerations from day one. See *US Intervention in British Guiana: A Cold War Story* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

Taffet's survey of the Alliance for Progress finds an almost universal abandonment of ideology in favor of a drive to maintain political hegemony in Latin America.¹⁹

In considering Bolivia's experience within the Alliance for Progress, this thesis suggests that the dichotomy between ideology and strategy is often an illusion. The case is illuminating for several reasons. Firstly, in 1952 Bolivia authored Latin America's second social revolution, after Mexico, in which a fifth of the country's arable land was divided amongst the country's Indian majority, and three of the world's largest tin mining companies were nationalized.²⁰ Secondly, US foreign aid to revolutionary Bolivia far outstripped that given to neighboring nations. By 1964 the country, under development-minded President Víctor Paz Estenssoro, was the second highest per capita recipient of US aid in the world, with Alliance for Progress funding representing roughly 20 percent of Bolivia's Gross Domestic Product (GDP).²¹ Finally, Bolivia began two decades of military rule in 1964, making it an ideal case study of developmentalism *and* militarism, both hallmarks of the 1960s.

¹⁹ Jeffrey Taffet, *Foreign Aid as Foreign Policy: The Alliance for Progress in Latin America* (New York: Routledge, 2007).

²⁰ Between 1953 and 1965, over 6 million hectares of land was redistributed, benefiting over 170,000 Indian families. A 1950 survey estimated total arable land at just under 33 million hectares. Source: Departamento de Estadística, Servicio Nacional Reforma Agraria (February 8, 1966), published in Melvin Burke, "Land Reform in the Lake Titicaca Region," in James M. Malloy and Richard S. Thorn, eds., *Beyond the Revolution: Bolivia since 1952* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1971), 303.

²¹ Between 1953 and 1964, Bolivia received \$368 million in US foreign aid, roughly \$35 million annually. In 2007 dollars, this represents over \$2 billion, or \$187 million annually, the highest per capita amount given to any Latin American nation. Kennedy increased aid to Bolivia from roughly \$23 million annually to \$51 million. By 1964, Alliance for Progress funds made up around 20 percent of Bolivian GDP and 40 percent of the nation's public expenditures. Sources: United States Agency for International Development [USAID], *US Overseas Loans and Grants [Greenbook]*, available online at quesdb.usaid.gov/gbk. Bolivia data from USAID, *Economic and Program Statistics*, nos. 5, 11, supplemented by data from Bolivian Development Corporation, to calculate Bolivian government expenditures, and data from Dirección Nacional de Coordinación y Planeamiento, *Bolivia cuentas nacionales*, mimeographed (La Paz, January 1969). The Bolivian data is published in Malloy, *Beyond the Revolution*, 370, 380.

Historiography

Compared to its counterparts in Mexico and Cuba, the Bolivian revolution remains a relatively neglected field of study. What the literature lacks in manuscripts, it more than makes up for in quality of analysis. The most influential remains James Dunkerley's captivating account of the revolutionary and military periods, in which the author colorfully narrates the victories and defeats of Bolivia's notoriously rebellious workers' movement.²² Amongst US historians, works by James Malloy, Christopher Mitchell, and Herbert Klein set the standard, with all three authors expressing criticism of the governing party, the *Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario* (MNR; Revolutionary Nationalist Movement) for its fascist roots, populist appeal, tendency toward corruption, and eventually submission to United States control.²³ Later works by Kenneth Lehman and James Siekmeier depart slightly from the anti-MNR narrative, placing Bolivia into a regional context of reformist, democratic openings followed by repressive periods of military rule.²⁴ What follows calls into question this recent trend without resorting to the bitter anti-MNR rhetoric of early authors. Instead, this study views Paz Estenssoro's MNR as a prototypical Third World revolutionary nationalist movement that employed ideologies of economic and social development in its sometimes-repressive strategic drive to establish political hegemony. Like its contemporaries elsewhere in Latin America, Africa, and Asia, this revolutionary party sought an alliance with the armed forces in the name of national development, and like other developmentalist parties, the MNR eventually fell to a military coup d'état.

²² James Dunkerley, *Rebellion in the Veins: Political Struggle in Bolivia, 1952-1982* (London: Verso, 1984).

²³ James Malloy, *Bolivia: The Uncompleted Revolution* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1970); Christopher Mitchell, *The Legacy of Populism in Bolivia: From the MNR to Military Rule* (New York: Praeger, 1971); and Herbert Klein, *Bolivia: The Evolution of a Multi-Ethnic Society*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

²⁴ Kenneth Lehman, *Bolivia and the United States: A Limited Partnership* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1999); and James Siekmeier, *Aid, Nationalism, and Inter-American Relations: Guatemala, Bolivia, and the United States, 1945-1961* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1999).

Despite receiving massive injections of US aid during the Kennedy years, Bolivia has escaped the attention of scholars of the Alliance for Progress. This is the case both in Rabe's otherwise masterful survey of Kennedy foreign policy toward the entire region, and in Taffet's up-close analysis of Alliance programs in Chile, Colombia, Dominican Republic, and Brazil.²⁵ Even Jerome Levinson and Juan de Onís's standard text on the Alliance is remarkably brief on Bolivia, which is especially strange given de Onís's extensive coverage of US-Bolivian relations as a correspondent for *The New York Times* in the early 1960s and his central role as an interpreter during the December 1963 US hostage crisis at the Siglo XX mining camp.²⁶ Of US diplomatic historians, only Lehman and Cole Blasier make more than passing reference to the Alliance for Progress in Bolivia, devoting thirteen and five pages, respectively.²⁷ Matters were hardly helped by the State Department's decision to omit Bolivia from the printed edition of its document collection for the Kennedy years.²⁸

Yet only a thorough analysis of the Alliance for Progress in Bolivia can properly account for the reasons why the highest per capita recipient of US aid during the early 1960s entered a long period of military rule in 1964. Many historians, including Dunkerley and Lehman, contend that US officials in La Paz, namely Embassy Air Attaché Edward Fox, gave the green light to General René Barrientos, then serving as Paz Estenssoro's vice president. Dunkerley refers to Colonel Fox as "the CIA chief in Bolivia...[who] secured such control over the interior ministry that he could act without reference to the [Presidential] Palacio

²⁵ Rabe, *The Most Dangerous Area in the World*; and Taffet, *Foreign Aid as Foreign Policy*.

²⁶ Jerome Levinson and Juan de Onís, *The Alliance that Lost its Way: A Critical Report on the Alliance for Progress* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1970).

²⁷ Lehman, 134-46; and Cole Blasier, *The Hovering Giant: US Responses to Revolutionary Change in Latin America, 1910-1985*, revised ed. (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1985), 140-5.

²⁸ A short section on Bolivia was included in the microfilm version. U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963: Volume XII – American Republics* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1996).

Quemado.”²⁹ Meanwhile, Lehman writes that US officials “withdrew their support [for the MNR]...[and] in a number of less than subtle ways...revealed their waning commitment to civilian democracy.”³⁰ Until now, conspiratorial accounts have dominated non-specialist literature on the coup, including popular histories of the CIA and broader Latin American studies.³¹

Similarly, most Bolivian authors pin the blame squarely on Colonel Fox. Former Paz cabinet official Guillermo Bedregal characterizes Fox as the “mentor of the counterrevolutionary regression,” the “visible head” of covert action in Bolivia, who channeled Washington’s “antidemocratic and militaristic policy...of installing military governments that would carry out US dictates.”³² René Zavaleta Mercado, another former Paz minister, writes that the “acquiescence of Fox and CIA agents is so notorious that definite proof is almost unnecessary...Fox was, therefore, the father of 4 November.” In Zavaleta’s view, “the only person who knows all the aspects of 4 November is Colonel Fox.”³³

²⁹ Dunkerley makes extensive use of memoirs and press reports, both of which highlight Fox’s role. See *Rebellion*, 108.

³⁰ Lehman employs a handful of US documents to make this claim, but his study was by no means exhaustive. See Lehman, *Bolivia*, 141.

³¹ William Blum cites Dunkerley and extensive press rumors to suggest that Fox was complicit in Barrientos’s coup. Tim Weiner goes a step further, glancing at one online State Department document before recklessly concluding that “Barrientos...seized power...backed by more than \$1 million from the CIA.” In fact, the document cited by Weiner describes a covert operation (see Chapters Three through Six, below) to support Paz’s government and oppose any attempt to depose him. Sadly, Weiner’s claim was uncritically cited in Sándor John’s otherwise enlightening study of Bolivian Trotskyism. Finally, historian Mark Lawrence apparently feels that the allegation that Washington “supported [a] military coup...in Bolivia (1964)” is so obvious that he need not cite anything at all. See William Blum, *Killing Hope: US Military and CIA Interventions since World War II* (London: Zed Books, 2003), 221-2, 225; Tim Weiner, *Legacy of Ashes: The History of the CIA* (New York: Doubleday, 2007), 281; S. Sándor John, *Bolivia’s Radical Tradition: Permanent Revolution in the Andes* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2009), 183; and Mark Atwood Lawrence, “Exception to the Rule? The Johnson Administration and the Panama Canal,” in *Looking Back at LBJ: White House Politics in a New Light*, Mitchell Lerner, ed. (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2005), 20.

³² Guillermo Bedregal Gutiérrez, *De búhos, políticas, y exilios, Mis memorias* (La Paz: Carlos Montenegro, 2009), 371, 377.

³³ René Zavaleta Mercado, *La caída del MNR y la conjuración de noviembre* (Cochabamba: Los Amigos del Libro, 1995), 112, 150, 178.

On the other hand, Malloy and Klein describe the Barrientos coup in purely domestic terms, pointing to growing local opposition to Paz's use of repression to carry out his developmentalist vision.³⁴ Political scientist William Brill also believes the military takeover emerged from within, basing his analysis on dozens of interviews with key actors before and after the coup.³⁵ A similar line has been taken by Bolivian historian Luis Antezana, who argues that MNR dissidents played the central role in their own party's downfall.³⁶ Military historian Robert Kirkland, the only scholar aside from this author to interview Colonel Fox, claims that the Air Attaché actually intervened to stop his friend General Barrientos from overthrowing Paz on at least one occasion, and argues that Fox was eventually disenchanted with Barrientos when the General failed to heed his advice.³⁷ Finally, at least one CIA memoir suggests that the Agency was firmly behind Paz Estenssoro, and even kept tabs on Paz's political enemies.³⁸

The complex process by which the November 1964 coup came to fruition is reflected in Paz's testimony shortly after his overthrow. While conceding that "on 4 November, the coup came from within," the fallen leader cited two other reasons for the military takeover: "developmentalism, which got us wrapped up in the administrative activity of the government, and we neglected – as a result – politics and the party." Finally, Paz pointed to "contractions within US foreign policy," as another reason why he was not able to remain in

³⁴ Malloy, *Bolivia*, 310-4; and Klein, *Bolivia*, 244-5.

³⁵ William H. Brill, *Military Intervention in Bolivia: The Overthrow of Paz Estenssoro and the MNR* (Washington DC: Institute for the Comparative Study of Political Systems, 1967).

³⁶ Luis Antezana, *Historia Secreta del Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario, Tomo 9: La contrarrevolución del 4 de noviembre de 1964* (La Paz: Carlos Montenegro, 2006).

³⁷ Robert O. Kirkland, "Colonel Edward Fox and the 1964 Bolivian Coup," *International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence* 18 (2005), 473-82.

³⁸ See Philip Agee, *Inside the Company: A CIA Diary* (New York: Stonehill, 1975), 383-5, 400, 601. Another insider CIA history is silent on Barrientos prior to the coup. See Victor Marchetti and John D. Marks, *The CIA and the Cult of Intelligence* (New York: Dell, 1974), 138-45.

office.³⁹ A journalist who interviewed Paz in early 1968 reported that the MNR leader “still insists that Fox was behind his ouster. Among Bolivians with an awareness of politics, it is hard to find anyone who disagrees.”⁴⁰

Did Colonel Edward Fox single-handedly destroy constitutional government in Bolivia, as many claim? Or were his fervent attempts to defend the Paz government stymied by Barrientos’s runaway ambition, as Kirkland recently proposed? In Fox’s own words:

As far as giving Barrientos orders to stop a coup, that’s ridiculous. I would never have gotten into Bolivian politics like that, and I certainly wouldn’t have treated my friend that way.

Barrientos and I never had a riff. Nothing could be further from the truth. When I arrived back in La Paz [in 1962], I told him, “You do what you have to do, René, and I will try and support you when I can. But we can’t bullshit each other.”

I always knew Barrientos would go through with it, and I knew he would succeed. That’s why I tried to convince [Ambassador Douglas] Henderson to support him. I failed, and was not able to give Barrientos any material support. I didn’t agree with Henderson on everything, but it’s *normal* to have disagreements. We were friends, though. Hell, we’re still friends.

November 4th wasn’t our show. They thought they had what they needed, and didn’t want to get too many people in on it. Sometimes you get too many people in on these things, and they get all screwed up. They also had pride, and didn’t want to be a charity case.⁴¹

Ambassador Henderson confirmed Fox’s recollection: “Ed Fox was the #1 freelancer in the world. But he never went rogue.”⁴² The CIA Station Chief at the time, Larry Sternfield, also agreed:

There was no division in US policy; there were just sentiments. Barrientos was a likeable guy, and a lot of us liked him. But as far as supporting a coup, absolutely not. Henderson was very pro-Paz, and that was the policy of our

³⁹ Paz, interview with Sergio Almaraz Paz, in Eduardo Ascarrunz Rodríguez, *La palabra de Paz: Un hombre, un siglo* (La Paz: Plural, 2008), 128-9. Ascarrunz served as Paz’s campaign manager in 1985, and has since published these interview transcripts.

⁴⁰ Josh Goskho, “Latins Blame the US for Military Coups,” *Washington Post*, 5 May 1968, A1. Quoted in Blum, *Killing Hope*, 225.

⁴¹ Interviews with Edward Fox.

⁴² Interviews with Douglas Henderson.

government. Like Ed Fox, we were being asked to carry out a policy we hated – to support Paz Estenssoro.⁴³

It is tempting to search, but an easy villain of 4 November does not exist. As historian Laurence Whitehead writes, “The crucial form of American intervention, in my view, was not this kind of sinister conspiracy...but the increasingly political trend of American pressures over the previous three or four years – pressures which helped create the conditions for a coup, whether it was consciously intended or not.”⁴⁴ Sergio Almaraz Paz, a Communist who joined the MNR in 1952, agrees that it was precisely US *support* for Paz Estenssoro that undermined his government. Once the Alliance for Progress entered Bolivia in full force,

the revolution was damned. Its general ideas were lost, its fundamental thrust had been abandoned, and the Americans monopolized all the power: institution by institution, organization by organization, program by program. If economic organizations were under their dependency, those of security were under their complete control.

Almaraz adds that the “brutality” of US conservatives, many of whom had longed advocated for an end to US aid to revolutionary Bolivia, “would have better preserved the revolution than the liberalism” of development interventionists.⁴⁵

If Washington opposed Paz’s overthrow, did the communists⁴⁶ welcome it? Actually, one of this thesis’s findings is that many Bolivian leftists actively sought a military coup, in the hope that they could take advantage of the chaos to increase their political influence through sympathetic officers or by filling a vacuum left by the MNR in key Bolivian

⁴³ Interviews with Larry Sternfield.

⁴⁴ Laurence Whitehead, *The United States and Bolivia: A Case of Neo-Colonialism* (London: Haslemere Group, 1969), 25

⁴⁵ Sergio Almaraz Paz, *Réquiem para una república* (La Paz: Universidad Mayor de San Andrés, 1969), 21, 30.

⁴⁶ Due to the strength of Trotskyism in Bolivia, not to mention other heterodox forms of communism, it seems more appropriate to utilize a lower-case “c,” when referring to communism, in general. Below, Communist with an upper-case “C,” will refer to the Bolivian Communist Party (PCB), and its members.

institutions. The *Partido Comunista de Bolivia* (PCB; Communist Party of Bolivia) was the last leftist party to adopt such a policy, as it interpreted Moscow's call for peaceful coexistence as a reason to tolerate MNR rule, and Paz Estenssoro repaid this tolerance by permitting PCB activity and maintaining diplomatic relations with Cuba and Czechoslovakia. Paz failed in his drive to neutralize Bolivia leftism, however, and under heavy US pressure, Bolivia was the second-to-last Latin American nation to break with Cuba.⁴⁷ Communists had already succeeded, however, in infiltrating labor and student organizations, and to a lesser extent the government and military. General Barrientos's endearing tendency to parrot the Communist line to his friends in the US Embassy was testament to the extent to which leftists had achieved powerful positions throughout Bolivian society. Once Paz Estenssoro broke with Cuba on 22 August 1964, dissident Communists – especially in the mining camps – joined with Trotskyites and breakaway MNR leftists to agitate strongly for Paz's ouster. The Bolivian right had long conspired against Paz Estenssoro, and throughout 1964, they allied with the left to bring down the regime.

One reason there has been some resistance to the idea that the US supported Paz to the bitter end, opposing Barrientos's adventure, is that it does not easily square with what came later. As Latin American leftists bitterly recall, General Barrientos governed as a strongly pro-US president, meted out fierce repression in the mining camps, and ordered the execution of captured Argentine-Cuban guerrilla leader Ernesto "Che" Guevara. None of this was etched in stone in 1964, however, at which time many of General Barrientos's advisors were leftists. Barrientos conspired against Paz with Washington's main nemesis, labor federation leader Juan Lechín, and on 3 November he called for the communist-led miners to join his revolution. Colonel Fox was confident in his friendship with General Barrientos, and did

⁴⁷ Uruguay was the last. Mexico never broke relations with Cuba.

everything he could to convince Ambassador Henderson that the young, brash pilot was inviolably anticommunist. Many US officials were less convinced, however, worrying that leftists would be able to take advantage of Barrientos's good-natured populism and lack of intellectual sophistication. Washington was correct that the general's youth and insecurity would mean he would require outside counsel and largely rely on others to govern. Rather than benefiting Bolivian communism, however, this played right into the hands of the CIA.

Sources

Government documents, in Bolivia and the United States, have proven most useful to reconstruct the narrative of US development assistance to revolutionary Bolivia in the years leading up to the 1964 coup. This study benefited greatly from documentation at the *Archivo y Biblioteca Nacional* in Sucre, where a massive collection of papers from Paz's presidency was made available to scholars in the early 2000s. Long hidden in the rafters above the presidential palace, these books of correspondence and telegrams demonstrate the centralized manner by which Paz Estenssoro governed, depict the MNR government intentionally utilizing the communist threat to secure ever increasing levels of US assistance, and reveal the extent to which Bolivian officials viewed economic and social development as their only path to national liberation. The narrative also makes use of several collections at the *Archivo de La Paz*, located at the *Universidad Mayor de San Andrés*; the Foreign Ministry archive off La Paz's central plaza, and the records of the state-run mining company, *Corporación Minera de Bolivia* (COMIBOL; Mining Corporation of Bolivia), in El Alto. Each of these repositories provides its own perspective into the intensity with which the Bolivian government sought rapid development in the early 1960s, even at the occasional expense of democratic liberties. The MNR party archive, and the records of the *Central Obrera Boliviana* (COB; Bolivian Workers' Central), both located at the *Bibliothèque de*

Documentation Internationale Contemporaine in Nanterre, France, were also helpful in bringing into stark relief the bitter feud between Paz Estenssoro's technocratic, modernizing approach, and Bolivia's rebellious labor movement that refused to be depoliticized.

During an extensive sojourn in Bolivia, this author also identified dozens of memoirs from key political figures. As noted above, former Paz government officials blame the military coup d'état on Colonel Fox and the CIA, while labor leaders concede that they played a central role in destabilizing Paz's government. Rank-and-file mine workers express little guilt for agitating against the MNR, given the party's almost total submission to the United States during the Kennedy years. Meanwhile, military conspirators proudly recount their decision to lead a popular revolt against what had become a repressive regime. Political pamphlets, dozens of which were generously provided by historian Luis Antezana, have been especially helpful in tracing the ideological trajectory of Bolivia's cornucopia of political movements. As Antezana said, "the history of Bolivia is written on pamphlets."⁴⁸

On the US side, recent declassification projects at the Kennedy and Johnson Libraries, some of which were initiated by this author through the mandatory review process, have shed extensive light on the heavy-handed manner by which Washington's Alliance for Progress interacted with Paz's development-oriented regime. Documents from the State and Defense Departments, and the CIA, as well as oral histories and personal papers, demonstrate beyond a reasonable doubt that US support for the MNR never wavered. On the contrary, Kennedy and Johnson officials battled back any bureaucratic skepticism to an aid program that reached astounding proportions, by Bolivian standards. These documents also reveal the way technocratic ideologies of development were employed as political tools to wage war on the Bolivian labor movement. Embassy post files, United States Agency for International

⁴⁸ Interviews with Luis Antezana Ergueta.

Development (USAID) records, and additional State Department documents, all located at the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) in College Park, Maryland, substantially complimented the presidential library collections, and filled in numerous gaps regarding the process by which US officials offered extensive support to Paz's government.

In addition to official documents, this author made use of the personal papers of one of the Alliance for Progress architects, historian of the Bolivian revolution, Robert Alexander, at Rutgers; Bolivian labor kingpin Juan Lechín, at the Hoover Institution; US covert operations expert, and military-led development extraordinaire, Edward Lansdale, who visited Bolivia in May 1963, also at Hoover; US Ambassador to the UN Adlai Stevenson, who visited Bolivia in June 1961, at Princeton's Mudd Library; and Johnson's Assistant Secretary of State for Latin America, Thomas Mann, at Baylor University. Each of these collections provides a personal view of individual encounters between US officials and Bolivia's revolutionary nationalists. Finally, this author consulted the proceedings of the International Tin Council, housed at the British Library of Political and Economic Science, British government records at the National Archives at Kew, and documents from the Inter-American Development Bank, in Washington, DC.

US aid to revolutionary Bolivia was controversial, and the debate in the American press illuminates a stark divide between liberal developmentalists, who aggressively defended Paz's MNR, and American conservatives, who referred to the regime as "candy-coated despotism."⁴⁹ With the help of ProQuest's historical newspaper database, this author analyzed all articles on Bolivia between 1961 and 1964 in nine US newspapers, including *The New York Times*, *The Boston Globe*, *The Christian Science Monitor*, *The Chicago Tribune*, and *The Washington Post*. *Time* magazine also provides online access to its

⁴⁹ Barry Goldwater, 24 October 1963, in "Bolivian Rule of Paz Rapped by Goldwater," *Chicago Tribune*, 25 October 1963, 15.

historical archive, providing a disturbing view of the extent to which American liberals defended Paz Estenssoro's authoritarianism in the name of Third World development. In an attempt to trace Cuba's growing disenchantment with the MNR, this author read Havana's weekly newspaper *Bohemia*, which is available at the US Library of Congress.⁵⁰

Finally, this author conducted a systematic survey of La Paz's newspaper of record, *El Diario*, a traditionally conservative institution which adopted a strong pro-Barrientos bias in the early 1960s under the direction of Barrientos friends Julio Sanjinés Goytia and Mario Rolón Anaya. This author also read selected months of the independent communist weekly *El Pueblo* and Cochabamba's Marxist daily, *El Mundo*, which gave extensive pro-Barrientos coverage during this period under the direction of another Barrientos friend, Víctor Zannier.

Many of the key players in this narrative were still alive when the research was conducted. Through extensive interviews on both sides of the US-Bolivian relationship, this author was able to identify sentiments and trends not often reflected in the documentary record. Colonel Fox, Ambassador Henderson, and former CIA Station Chief Sternfield spent hours discussing with this author details of US policy toward Bolivia in those years. Their stories built on what the documentary narrative suggests – that Washington was strident in its view that Paz was the only person who could hold Bolivia together, and that US officials – begrudgingly in the case of Fox and Sternfield – were forced to stand by while General Barrientos organized and carried out his revolt. In Bolivia, this author carried out interviews with Paz family members and former Paz official Bedregal, all of whom blame Fox for Paz's downfall. Barrientos confidants scoff at any suggestion that the US orchestrated the 4 November coup, including René Rocabado, a PCB leader in the anti-MNR stronghold of Cochabamba, and Alberto Iriarte, a lifelong leftist friend of Barrientos who served as mayor

⁵⁰ The better-known *Granma* did not begin publishing until 1965.

of their hometown, Tarata. Young military officers agree that the coup's roots were domestic, including Generals Eduardo Claure and Simón Sejas, both of whom supported the Barrientos takeover from its inception. A similar account was provided in interviews with Julio Sanjinés, a powerful anti-Paz figure who at the time served as head of USAID civic action programs and has long been accused of having been one of Barrientos's key conspirators. This author also carried out interviews with important figures on the Bolivian left, both former miners and urban intellectuals, who unanimously concede – sometimes with a poignant sense of regret – the central role they played in Paz's downfall. Finally, this author carried out several interviews with adherents of the MNR's eternal rightwing enemy, the *Falange Socialista Boliviana* (FSB; Bolivian Socialist Falange), including members of the FSB guerrilla struggle against Paz Estenssoro that began in the jungles of Santa Cruz in mid-1964.

Structure

Chapter One of this thesis traces the initial encounter between President Kennedy and revolutionary Bolivia in early 1961. Kennedy saw President Paz as a kindred spirit, a young, fellow modernizer heading up what one Kennedy scholar calls a “regime in motion.”⁵¹ With the Soviet Union offering to provide Bolivia with a long-coveted tin smelter and \$150 million in low-interest credits,⁵² Kennedy and his development-minded aides frantically sought ways to shore up Bolivia within the nascent Alliance for Progress. In practice, this intervention took the form of a cooptation of the MNR's burgeoning reliance on the armed forces in the

⁵¹ David Webster, “Regimes in Motion: The Kennedy Administration and Indonesia's New Frontier, 1960-1962,” *Diplomatic History* 33 (January 2009), 95-123.

⁵² See Juan Lechín, “Comunicado,” undated [late 1960], Presidencia de la República (hereafter PR) 945, Archivo y Biblioteca Nacional, Sucre, Bolivia (hereafter ABNB). Alarmed, the US press reportedly extensively the Soviet offer. See “Bolivia weighing Soviet aid offer,” *New York Times*, 2 November 1960, 11; “Soviet Assures Bolivia,” *New York Times*, 24 December 1960, 3; “US and Soviets Battle over Bolivia's Tin,” *New York Times*, 22 January 1961, F1.

nation-building process, resulting in a military-led development paradigm similar to that depicted in Simpson's study of US-Indonesian relations in the 1960s.⁵³ In Bolivia, the Alliance's principal points of entry were the country's highland mining camps, especially the enormous tin mine at Siglo XX, where the armed, communist-led mine workers fiercely resisted MNR attempts to achieve political hegemony. Alliance for Progress reforms primarily targeted these recalcitrant unions as "obstacles to development," vividly demonstrating the program's strategic implications.⁵⁴ Moreover, the manner by which Alliance reforms were initially adopted through a US-funded June 1961 crackdown on Bolivian leftists provides clear evidence of an intimate relationship between development ideology and political repression.

Chapter Two follows the Alliance for Progress in Bolivia through its first year, in which political crises drove a rapid militarization of development policy. Chief supporters of this process were Kennedy's development-minded appointees, namely Ambassador Ben Stephansky, a high-profile labor economist, and Alliance for Progress Administrator Teodoro Moscoso. As political crises mounted, driven chiefly by leftist resistance in the tin mines, US liberals expressed an unwavering dedication to implement development reforms by armed force. Washington's larger ambivalence toward Bolivian development was stripped bare when the US Treasury Department, under strong Congressional pressure, launched a program in mid-1962, to sell off tin from its strategic mineral stockpile. With the only direct motor of Bolivian development – tin prices – sputtering downward, officials in La Paz once again threatened to take their country down a path to Soviet-leaning neutrality. In September 1962, Paz Estenssoro cancelled his trip to Washington and removed Bolivia from the Organization

⁵³ Simpson, *Economists with Guns*.

⁵⁴ State Department, "Guidelines for Policy and Operations," March 1963, "Bolivia, 2/63-6/63," Box 389A, NSF-Dungan, JFKL, 20.

of American States (OAS), and Ambassador Stephansky warned that “a crisis in Bolivia’s political orientation is near at hand.”⁵⁵

In spite of Washington’s fears, President Paz was not prepared to cleave his country from the inter-American system. Chapter Three demonstrates a dual process by which the Alliance for Progress managed to maintain Bolivia’s Western orientation. Firstly, Alliance programs fueled the increasing militarization of development in the countryside, through civic action programs sponsored enthusiastically by General Barrientos, who traveled frequently to small Indian communities, accompanied by his friend Colonel Fox. These programs received a boost with the May 1963 visit of General Edward Lansdale, a CIA official who headed up covert operations for the Pentagon. Upon his return to Washington, Lansdale convinced the White House’s 5412 Special Group to launch an extensive program of covert support for Paz’s government, and a previously sleepy CIA station in La Paz kicked into high gear. Secondly, the Special Group also approved a contingency fund to support militarized Alliance labor reforms in the tin mines. With the White House’s full backing, Alliance Administrator Moscoso threatened to cut off all financial support – by that time representing at least a third of the Bolivian government’s fiscal budget⁵⁶ – pending military action against the communist-led miners at Siglo XX. With US weapons shipments to arm a paramilitary force dressed as Indians, and a \$4 million cash grant from Washington to cover foreign exchange losses during an extended mine strike, Paz agreed to implement the labor reforms by force. The resulting bloodshed between armed miners and troops from Paz’s presidential guard consolidated Washington’s support for Paz, as US officials were convinced he was “for the first time taking decisive steps to end labor indiscipline in the mines and assure the basis for orderly economic development.” As the State Department reported,

⁵⁵ Stephansky to Rusk, 29 September 1962, “Bolivia, General, 8/62-12/62,” Box 10, NSF-CO, JFKL.

⁵⁶ See footnote 21.

“President Paz is now committed to the economic development of Bolivia under the Alliance for Progress.”⁵⁷

The battle was not over between the miners and Paz’s US-backed government. In December 1963, Paz’s security services arrested Siglo XX union leaders Federico Escóbar and Irineo Pimentel in a shootout, prompting communist rank-and-file miners to take two dozen hostages, including four US officials. Chapter Four recounts the resulting standoff at Siglo XX, which nearly descended into civil war between miners and the US-supplied Bolivian military. Despite Paz Estenssoro’s desire to use the American hostages as cause célèbre to take the mines by force, the State Department vetoed violent action while its officials remained in the line of fire. The miners eventually capitulated in the face of vague US threats to intervene, a massive Bolivian military mobilization, and rumors that tens of thousands of armed, pro-Paz Indians were set to march on Siglo XX. The Americans’ release a few days before Christmas did nothing, however, to resolve the battle of attrition developing between the Paz government and what began to be referred to as the “Free Territory of Siglo XX.”

Chapter Five traces General Barrientos’s meteoric rise from Air Force Chief to Vice President during the first half of 1964, during which he suffered a mysterious assassination attempt hours before he was set to depart for London as Embassy Air Attaché. The affair has long been blamed on Colonel Fox, or the CIA, but Bolivian and US documents suggest that the plot was instead the work of young military officials close to Barrientos, and Washington was never made privy to the attack’s true origins. With public opinion mobilized behind Barrientos’s vice presidential candidacy, Paz reluctantly chose the young general as his running mate. Bolivian sources – written and oral – agree that General Barrientos was loyal

⁵⁷ State Department, “Bolivia – State-AID Contingency Paper for COMIBOL Crisis,” 8 August 1963, “Bolivia, 7/73-6/64,” Box 389A, NSF-Dungan, JFKL, 3.

to Paz in early 1964, bragging widely that he had copiloted the plane that brought Paz back from Buenos Aires in the days following the victorious 1952 revolution. The Bolivian president's dismissal of Barrientos as an uncultured jock, however, gradually pushed the general into eager embrace of civilians opposed to the MNR regime. As Paz's reelection approached, Barrientos was briefly drawn into a conspiracy organized by MNR breakaways, Lechín and former President Hernán Siles Zuazo. The plot received combined, enthusiastic support from the communist miners, the anti-MNR rightwing, and a restless junior officer corps. Strident US opposition to a coup, and the wavering of Armed Forces Commanding General Alfredo Ovando Candía, convinced Barrientos to abandon his civilian co-conspirators. In May 1964, the Paz-Barrientos ticket emerged victorious in an election marred by mass abstention and violence against polling stations in the mines.

The thesis's final chapter begins with Paz's election to a third (second consecutive) term in mid-1964. Immediately, a rightwing Falangist-inspired guerrilla erupted in the jungles of Santa Cruz, and a nationwide teachers' strike garnered unqualified support from the student and miner federations. The anti-MNR coalition, comprising all opposition parties on the right and left, passed into full-scale rebellion, and openly called for the military to remove Paz from office. Predictably, Paz's government reacted with repression, unleashing his feared *Control Político*⁵⁸ secret police, headed by the notoriously brutal General Claudio San Román. Far from abandoning Paz Estenssoro, Washington ordered the CIA to provide San Román with full support. As CIA Station Chief Sternfield explains:

I have served in six countries, and the last days of the Paz Estenssoro government were the most repressive I ever saw. Claudio San Román, with whom I worked on a daily basis, was the most brutal Latin American I ever met...I worked with San Román every day, because that was Uncle Sam's policy. It was a pretty distasteful task. Fortunately, the revolution came soon

⁵⁸ See Author's Note, viii.

after I arrived in Bolivia. I saw a part of the Paz regime that Ed Fox never saw.

When asked why the US supported Paz's repressive government, Sternfield responded, "Well, Uncle Sam doesn't put it that way. They say it's in support of democracy and progress and all that."⁵⁹

It is not hard to see why the Barrientos coup succeeded. Like Colonel Fox, Sternfield says he "knew what was coming. There were just such bitter, hard feelings about the brutality of the Paz regime."⁶⁰ Yet liberal developmentalists never abandoned Víctor Paz, not even during his government's fifth and final state of siege in late 1964. US liberals believed that Paz's armed forces remained loyal, and they felt certain that economic development was just around the corner.

Despite a string of student and miner martyrs in late October, the right and left civilian opposition failed to spark a military uprising. Generals Barrientos and Ovando continued to vacillate, waiting for the proper time to strike. When President Paz ordered the military to invade the mining camps during the All Saints Day weekend (1 November), junior officers pushed their superiors to act. On the morning of 3 November, two La Paz regiments declared themselves in rebellion. General Barrientos had already retired to his home province of Cochabamba, from which he led units into a full-scale revolt. Rather than risk civil war, Paz escaped to Lima on a Bolivian Air Force plane the following day. General Ovando negotiated the peaceful transfer of power, feigning loyalty until Paz had safely departed. Twelve years of MNR rule had come to an end, and US officials were forced to deal directly with the development-minded military they helped create. The Bolivian revolution, and the Alliance for Progress, had been fully militarized.

⁵⁹ Interviews with Sternfield.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

Background

Observers largely agree that the 1952 Bolivian revolution represented a victory of armed civilians, especially workers and miners around La Paz, over the armed forces. The revolt began on 9 April 1952 as a military coup organized by the MNR, whose leader Paz Estenssoro had emerged victorious in the 1951 presidential elections, only to be denied the office by a military takeover just before inauguration. When loyalist military forces rallied to the government's side on 9 April, the MNR coup quickly turned into a popular insurrection under the leadership of party sub-chief Hernán Siles Zuazo. Miners flooded into the city armed with Mauser rifles dating from Bolivia's Chaco War with Paraguay (1932-1935), and local police forces opened their armories to local civilians, including labor unionists. After three days of fierce fighting, the army had been routed, and Paz was called back from exile in Buenos Aires to take up his rightful place as president. Acceding to demands from the armed miners and Indian peasants, the regime granted universal suffrage (April 1952), nationalized the country's enormous tin mining companies (October 1952), and signed into law a thoroughgoing program of land reform (August 1953).⁶¹

Despite these radical reforms, the MNR government skillfully avoided a break with the United States. On the contrary, US officials were convinced that Paz represented the moderate wing of the Bolivian revolution, and the incoming administration of Dwight D. Eisenhower proceeded to dole out tens of millions of dollars in foreign aid, a rare anomaly during the austere 1950s. To the extent that Marxism existed within Bolivia's revolutionary coalition, it was a brand of Trotskyism strongly antagonistic to the Soviet Union. Eisenhower

⁶¹ For accounts of the revolution, see Dunkerley, *Rebellion*, 38-82; and Klein, *Bolivia*, 224-45. A theoretical treatment is offered by Trotskyite leader Guillermo Lora, *La Revolución Boliviana: Análisis Crítico* (La Paz: Difusión, 1963). A less sympathetic narrative is Hugo Roberts Barragán, *La Revolución del 9 de Abril* (La Paz: Cooperativa de Artes Gráficas, 1971). A well-documented, pro-MNR study is Luis Antezana, *Historia secreta del Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario, Tomo 7: La Revolución del MNR del 9 de Abril* (La Paz: Carlos Montenegro, 1988).

officials thus hoped that the Bolivian experience could become a showcase for Third World progress and reform, safe from Moscow's grasp. Washington's love affair with the Bolivian revolution was born.⁶²

Aside from obtaining guarantees from the Bolivian government regarding compensation for the nationalized mining companies, US support for the MNR provided other important benefits. In 1955, the Paz Estenssoro government signed the Davenport Code to open up the Bolivian Chaco region to exploration by foreign oil companies. In 1956, Paz invited the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to oversee – conveniently during the incoming Siles administration – the implementation of an anti-inflationary austerity plan.⁶³ Finally, in 1958, the first tranches of US military aid arrived under the auspices of the Military Assistance Program (MAP), which President Siles used for internal security, relying less on Paz's notoriously repressive civilian security services.⁶⁴ Despite the appearance of submission, these measures dovetailed nicely with the MNR's own ideology of national development and state capitalism. Moreover, the Eisenhower administration does not appear to have pressured the Paz or Siles governments to halt or reverse the radical reforms central to the revolutionary's early period. Land reform marched ahead, and millions of US taxpayer dollars went to compensate the former owners of Bolivia's tin mines.

As Moscow began to turn its gaze toward the Third World in the late 1950s, the MNR's fierce anti-Stalinism gave way to a more neutral foreign policy. Paz had long sought

⁶² For more on Bolivia's success in obtaining US support, see James F. Siekmeier, "Trailblazer Diplomat: Bolivian Ambassador Víctor Andrade Uzquiano's Efforts to Influence US Policy, 1944-1962," *Diplomatic History* 28 (June 2004): 385-406, as well as Siekmeier's longer manuscript, *Aid, Nationalism, and Inter-American Relations*. See also Lehman, *Bolivia*; and Cornelius Zondag, *The Bolivian Economy, 1952-1965; The Revolution and its Aftermath* (New York: Praeger Press, 1966).

⁶³ Dunkerley, *Rebellion*, 84-93; Lehman, *Bolivia*, 122-5; and Klein, *Bolivia*, 240-2.

⁶⁴ Gary Prado Salmón, *Poder y Fuerzas Armadas, 1949-1982* (La Paz: Los Amigos del Libro, 1987), 100-1; and Thierry Noel, "La génération des jeunes officiers issus du collège militaire Gualberto Villarroel: l'armée bolivienne, 1952-1985" (Thèse de doctorat, Université Paris 7 – Diderot, 2007), 27-30.

to take advantage of great power tensions to obtain material benefits for Bolivian development,⁶⁵ and an opportunity arose with Moscow's launching of what one scholar calls the "Soviet Economic Offensive" in Latin America.⁶⁶ Eisenhower officials were in no mood for games, however, and by 1960, the US Embassy in La Paz began openly discussing the strategic benefits of turning Bolivia over to the Soviet Union.⁶⁷ US aid was curtailed, and the MNR took a sharp leftward turn. In October 1960, Moscow offered Bolivia a long-coveted tin smelter, which Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev confirmed at the December meeting of the United Nations.⁶⁸ Meanwhile, Paz Estenssoro had cultivated ties with Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia during his ambassadorship in London (1956-1960), and he returned promising to revitalize the revolution.⁶⁹ Paz's models were neutralist Third World countries like Indonesia, India, Iraq, and Egypt, where development aid flowed from both sides of the Cold War divide.⁷⁰ When he invited Lechín to run as his vice president, and received the

⁶⁵ In the early 40s, Paz strongly advocating for selling – or threatening to sell – tin to the Axis powers, with an eye toward pressuring the Allies to pay higher prices. In short, Paz believed Bolivia should "take advantage of the circumstances so the country could obtain the maximum benefit possible." Paz interview, in Ascarrunz, *La palabra*, 40.

⁶⁶ Bevan Sewell, "A Perfect (Free-Market) World? Economics, the Eisenhower Administration, and the Soviet Economic Offensive in Latin America," *Diplomatic History* 32 (November 2008), 841-68.

⁶⁷ Ambassador Carl Strom, who served from 1959 to early 1961, argued that with Washington agreeing to "meet all possible capital needs [of the] Bolivian economy," the Soviets were being handed an opportunity to "score propaganda victories with visible politically potent development projects." Strom recommended pushing Bolivia into the Soviet embrace, so that "some of their resources got [a] non-productive purpose such as funding [the] country's internal debt." In Strom's view, it "seems certain GOB will accept Bloc aid in some form beginning this year." Strom to State, 24 February 1961, 724.5-MSP/4-160, Box 1563, State Department Decimal Files (hereafter SDDF).

⁶⁸ See footnote 52.

⁶⁹ Paz's trips to Belgrade and Prague provided a foundation upon which Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia offered economic assistance to Bolivia in the early 1960s. Paz interview, in Eduardo Trigo O'Connor d'Arlach, *Conversaciones con Víctor Paz Estenssoro* (La Paz: Comunicaciones El País, 1999), 142.

⁷⁰ Víctor Paz Estenssoro, *La Fuerzas Armadas y La Revolución Nacional* (La Paz: n.p., 1959), 17.

Communist Party's endorsement, Bolivian leftists began to believe that "a revolution within the Revolution" was possible.⁷¹

President Kennedy had no intention of relinquishing control over the Third World, however, and he made it clear that his administration would "pay any price, bear any burden meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe, in order to assure the survival and success of liberty."⁷² These words were meant for Third World modernizers like Víctor Paz, lest they doubt Washington's undying commitment to anticommunist development, in every corner of the globe. One of Kennedy's first acts was to dispatch a "Special Presidential Economic Mission" to La Paz, in order to find out just what it was the Bolivians wanted.

Kennedy's developmentalists were unanimous in their response:

We would regard it as a tragic error to abandon Bolivia under the current circumstances...In all possibility, we will never have a better chance to achieve a turn-about and a take-off in Bolivia⁷³...[T]o resign from combat now, or to take the road that leads to chaos in the hope that a bright phoenix will somehow rise from the ashes, is a choice prudence will not allow.⁷⁴

The way this adventure in militant developmentalism played out on the ground will be the subject of the pages that follow.

⁷¹ Juan Lechín Oquendo, *El pueblo al poder*, 2nd ed. (La Paz: La Razón, 2005), 118.

⁷² Kennedy, "Inaugural Address of President John F. Kennedy," 20 January 1961, Speeches, JFKL.

⁷³ Thorpe, et al., "Report to the President," 24 March 1961, folder 7, Presidential Office Files (hereafter POF), JFKL, 2 (cover letter), and 2, 22 (report).

⁷⁴ Rubin to Kennedy, 3 April 1961, "Bolivia, General, 1961," Box 10, NSF-CO, JFKL.

Chapter One

Authoritarian Development and the Origins of the Alliance in Bolivia

Bolivia is on the verge of being taken over by communist elements favorable to Señor Castro.

- *President Kennedy, 6 April 1961*¹

If developmentalist ideology is an intellectual tool capable of being wielded by state bureaucracies for political ends, its strategic nature should be evident from the very inception of any development-oriented intervention. Indeed, the communist threat was midwife to the extensive foreign aid program launched by the Kennedy administration in Bolivia in early 1961.² President Paz's pesky nationalism, and his continued toleration of domestic communism, motivated US policymakers to redouble their efforts to shore up his government. Bolivia had already implemented thoroughgoing redistributive reforms, and according to Kennedy officials, the country's experience within the Alliance for Progress would be a test case for their view that social reform was precursor to rapid development. What Bolivia needed, in their view, was an extensive program of economic aid, large enough to convince Paz to wage war against domestic leftists, depicted by development economists as the principal obstacles to development. This confluence of ideology and strategy, laid bare in the earliest months of the Kennedy administration, explains the highly-politicized nature of the technocratic development project that was being launched. Far from abandoning ideology in favor of authoritarianism, the Kennedy administration's approach was

¹ "Record of a meeting held on President Kennedy's Yacht, 'Honey Fitz,' 6 April 1961, CAB/129/105, United Kingdom Public Records Office, Kew Gardens (hereafter Kew), 10T.

² Pace Gleijeses, who writes, "Fidel Castro was midwife to the Alliance for Progress." Piero Gleijeses, "Book Review: A Sordid Affair: The Alliance for Progress in British Guiana," *Diplomatic History* 31 (September 2007), 793.

authoritarian from the beginning. Paz Estenssoro, never relinquishing his dream of exercising total political control, was this project's willing accomplice.

Víctor Paz Estenssoro and Authoritarian Nationalism

In their adoption of authoritarian development as foreign policy, Kennedy officials were largely responding to an existing paradigm of authoritarian nationalism in Bolivia. President Paz had demonstrated that he was willing to accept foreign aid from any source – Western or Communist – in his unrelenting drive to “turn Bolivia into a real Nation.”³ The Bolivian leader had also begun to display a more favorable view toward the armed forces, which he hoped to employ in the service of national development. Finally, Víctor Paz ruled with an iron fist – directed at Bolivian conservatives during his first term (1952-1956) – and he revived this repressive machinery when he regained power in 1960.⁴ Kennedy officials were alarmed by the extent to which Paz was courting the Communist world and repressing the domestic rightwing, but they were also confident in their abilities to woo the Bolivian leader back into to the Western camp. In early 1961, US officials sought to bolster Paz's reliance on the armed forces as harbingers of development, while simultaneously convincing the Bolivian president to turn his repressive machinery against the Bolivian left.

A genuine nationalist, Víctor Paz sought to maintain neutrality in foreign affairs. “He loved Tito,” one lower-level Paz official recalled, “and he wanted to be a Latin American

³ Paz, in Ascarrunz, *La palabra*, 47.

⁴ Paz's authoritarianism fell chiefly on the rightist *Falange Socialista Boliviana* (FSB; Bolivian Socialist Falange). The FSB repaid Paz by organizing a panoply of attempted coups throughout the 1950s. The mysterious death of FSB leader Óscar Unzaga in 1959 temporarily silenced the party and opened space on the right for a new political movement, headed by MNR breakaway Wálter Guevara Arze. When Paz returned from his ambassadorship in London, his main opponent was none other than Guevara, whose *Partido Revolucionario Auténtica* (PRA; Authentic Revolutionary Party) waged a fiercely anticommunist campaign. For more on Paz's first term, and his 1960 electoral battle against the PRA, see Dunkerley, *Rebellion*, 38-82, 99-103; Klein, *Bolivia*, 227-41, 243-4; Lehman, *Bolivia*, 91-123; and Malloy, *Bolivia*, 167-242.

Tito, to play both sides of the Cold War.”⁵ Aside from fellow Latin Americans, the only foreign leaders to visit La Paz in the early 1960s shared Paz Estenssoro’s worldview: Indonesia’s Sukarno, Yugoslavia’s Tito, and France’s Charles de Gaulle.⁶ For Paz, this desire for neutrality was nothing new. During World War II, the MNR party chief scored large propaganda victories by criticizing the Bolivian government’s overt alliance with the Allied powers, claiming that it prevented the country from taking full advantage of global tensions to procure higher prices for Bolivian tin.⁷

Paz believed the Cold War was no different, and he actively sought economic and technical assistance from the Communist world. Building on trips to Prague and Belgrade during his ambassadorship in London, Paz signed a cultural agreement with Czechoslovakia on 23 January 1961 providing for “relations between scientific institutions, universities, and cultural sports organizations.”⁸ Meanwhile, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) worried that the Paz government was “under heavy domestic pressure” to accept a standing Soviet offer, first made in October 1960, to provide Bolivia with a long-coveted tin smelter and \$150 million in economic and technical assistance. Moreover, in mid-January, Czechoslovakia’s Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs, Jiří Hájek, visited Bolivia to discuss Prague’s high-profile offer of an antimony smelter.⁹ In late January, Paz Estenssoro scandalized outgoing US Ambassador Carl Strom with his view that “acceptance of Soviet

⁵ Interviews with Antezana.

⁶ Sukarno visited 4-7 May 1961, Tito 28 September-4 October 1963, and de Gaulle 28-29 September 1964. See “Arribará Hoy el Presidente de Indonesia,” *El Diario*, 4 May 1961, 6; “Protocolar Acogida se Dispensó al Presidente Tito en Cochabamba,” *El Diario*, 29 September 1963, 7; and “De Gaulle, Halfway Through Latin Tour, Arrives in Bolivia,” *New York Times*, 29 September 1964, 13.

⁷ See Introduction, footnote 65.

⁸ CIA, Intelligence Bulletin, 3 February 1961, CIA Records Search Tool (hereafter CREST).

⁹ CIA, Intelligence Bulletin, 13 January 1961, CREST. For more on the Soviet aid offer, see Introduction, footnote 52. The Czech visit is reported in Foreign Ministry to Economic Ministry, 13 January 1961, RV-4-E-53, Bolivian Foreign Ministry Archives (hereafter RREE).

bloc economic will not danger the US grant-aid program.” When informed that such aid might enable the Soviets to “score politically in Latin America,” Paz precociously stated that he “feels no obligation to impede such a development.”¹⁰

These Soviet bloc “economic overtures,” in the words of the State Department Bureau of Intelligence and Research (INR), had introduced a “disturbing political issue.” INR also noted that it appeared the Czechs were permitting \$2 million of their exports to be paid for in local currency to their embassy in La Paz, money that was pumped freely into “known Czech political and propaganda activities in Bolivia.”¹¹ Assistant Secretary of State for Latin America Thomas Mann worried that Washington’s failure to provide continued economic aid would “create a vacuum into which the Communists would move,” since the “Soviets are genuinely interested in establishing a foothold in Latin America.”¹²

Paz’s nationalist ideology also reserved a special, albeit complicated, role for the armed forces. Military officials bitterly recall that the MNR temporarily closed the officers’ academy in the aftermath of the revolution, purged the officer corps of 150-200 suspected “counterrevolutionaries,” forced remaining officers to swear loyalty to the party, and mandated that the new academy admit children from the “middle class, workers, and Indian peasants.” Despite opposition from his party’s leftwing, however, Paz reconstituted the armed forces on 24 July 1953 as “an instrument that contributes to the economic development of the country thereby achieving the welfare of the Bolivian people.”¹³ Officers who survived the purges

¹⁰ CIA, Intelligence Bulletin, 3 February 1961, CREST.

¹¹ INR to Secretary of State Rusk, 9 January 1963, “Bolivia, General, 1/63-3/63,” Box 10A, NSF-CO, JFKL.

¹² Mann to Ball, 14 February 1961, “Bolivia, 1961,” Box 2, Lots 62D418 and 64D15, State Department Lot Files (hereafter SDLF).

¹³ Noel, “La génération des jeunes officiers,” 11. Noel bases his doctoral work on interviews with scores of surviving officers, tracing the manner by which the military survived the aftermath of the revolution, going on to rule the country between 1964 and 1982. The 1953 decree reorganizing the armed forces is reprinted in Noel’s annex, 473-5. See also William Handford Brill, “Military Civic Action in Bolivia,” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1965), 80.

latched onto the military's newfound role as a force for development. Indeed, they had little choice. As one expert on the Bolivian armed forces notes, the MNR's early suspicion of the military forced enterprising officers to "develop the idea that the army should move toward self-sufficiency and play an active role in development."¹⁴

When Paz Estenssoro prepared to return to the presidency, he made it clear that "the armed forces would be called upon to perform work of first magnitude," with Bolivia entering its "revolutionary constructive development phase." Meeting with the High Command in 1959, Paz repeatedly referred to officers as *compañeros*¹⁵ of the MNR, thanking them for providing "new evidence of the unity that exists in the revolutionary ranks." Citing ongoing military-led development experiments in Indonesia, India, Iraq, and Egypt, Paz Estenssoro argued that it was "fallacy" to think that the military could not serve as an armed wing of the governing party.¹⁶ The 1960 MNR platform formalized this relationship, calling for extensive military involvement in the revolution's "fundamentally constructive phase." The armed forces were "few in number, but well gifted and instructed with professional cadres," the platform read, stressing the need for technical expertise in the development process.¹⁷ In his August 1960 inaugural address, President Paz confidently declared that "after eight years of a revolutionary regime, it is safe to say that the armed forces have truly been returned to the people."¹⁸

¹⁴ Noel, "La génération des jeunes officiers," 21. For an account based on Bolivian press, see Jerry W. Knudson, *Bolivia: Press and Revolution, 1932-1964* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1986), 295-329.

¹⁵ See Author's Note, viii.

¹⁶ Paz, *Las Fuerzas Armadas*.

¹⁷ MNR, *Programa del Gobierno: Tercer Gobierno de la Revolución Nacional, 1960-1964* (La Paz: n.p., 1960), 118.

¹⁸ Paz, 6 August 1960, quoted in Antezana, *La contrarrevolución*, 2338.

Aside from expressing a desire for international neutrality and seeking warmer relations with the Bolivian armed forces, Paz also revived his previous reliance on police repression in his drive for political power.¹⁹ On 21 February 1961, President Paz responded to a nationwide teachers' strike by declaring a 90-day state of siege and rounding up dozens of rightwing opposition leaders – and one token Communist, Oruro University Rector Felipe Ñíguez – unceremoniously airlifting the majority into Paraguayan exile.²⁰ This modified version of martial law meant that “public manifestations and political meetings are absolutely prohibited,” bars and cafés were forced to close at midnight, and after 12:30am no two individuals could be seen together in public.²¹ Citing “permanent subversive activity by certain far right and far left groups, who view liberty as an environment in which to hone their coup intentions,” pro-MNR Colonel Eduardo Rivas Ugalde, then serving as Paz's Government Minister, accused “petite bourgeois elements...and communist agitators” of “exploiting” the teachers' economic demands. Rivas vowed to “maintain public order, prevent bloodshed, and defend [the] conquests” achieved by the 1952 revolution.²² Meanwhile, Paz's opponent in the 1960 election, former MNR colleague Wálter Guevara Arze, avoided capture by hiding on a friend's roof in Cochabamba before emerging safe and sound in Chile two weeks later.²³

The following day, Kennedy's top aide for Latin America, Arthur Schlesinger, arrived in La Paz for a three day leg of his six-country regional tour. Ostensibly taking part in a fact-finding mission for Washington's Food for Peace program, Schlesinger was also seeking to

¹⁹ Yet Paz shunned executions. As one lower-level Paz official explained, his rule was: “It is better to have 100 prisoners than one martyr.” Interviews with Antezana.

²⁰ “Grupo de 35 Detenidos Será Desterrado Hoy al Paraguay,” *El Diario*, 23 February 1961, 7.

²¹ “Consta de Medidas Estrictas el ‘Auto de Buen Gobierno,’” *El Diario*, 22 February 1961, 7.

²² Rivas, “Comunicado,” 21 February 1961, PR 945, ABNB.

²³ “Guevara Estuvo Escondido en un Tejado Durante 48 horas,” *El Diario*, 9 March 1961, 6.

identify political leaders who were dedicated to the “modernization of Latin American society.” The White House aide believed that the “chief obstacle to modernization” was precisely the “agrarian, semi-feudal economic structure” that had been destroyed by the Bolivian revolution nine years hence. Seeking a “middle-class class revolution...as speedily as possible,” Schlesinger warned that the Soviet Union, “in association with Cuba...[was] exploiting the situation and providing the US with unprecedented serious competition.” He characterized the situation as requiring an “extremely high degree of urgency,” since the middle classes were the only barrier to the “workers-and-peasants,” who would soon take matters into their own hands.²⁴

Víctor Paz should have epitomized the middle-class revolutionary Schlesinger so eagerly sought. Nonetheless, in their first meeting, Arthur Schlesinger referred to the previous day’s roundup of rightwing opposition leaders, preaching to Paz at length that “[i]t was not only necessary to protect the revolution from the oligarchy of the right; it was also necessary to protect it from the conspiracy and sabotage of the left.” Schlesinger drew Paz’s attention to the Cuban revolution, which “may have begun as a national revolution, but...has now been clearly seized by forces from outside the hemisphere intent on destroying free institutions and establishing a Communist state.” President Paz responded confidently that the Cuban system “puts land in the hands of the states,” whereas the Bolivian revolution “puts land into the hands of the peasants,” adding for good measure that Cuban President Fidel Castro “must be eliminated.”²⁵

Despite Paz’s attempt to demonstrate unswerving anticommunism, Schlesinger remained unconvinced. Citing Bolivia’s burgeoning relations with the Soviet bloc, he

²⁴ Schlesinger to Kennedy, 10 March 1961, document 7, *FRUS, 1961-1963: Volume XII – American Republics*.

²⁵ Schlesinger Journal, 24 February 1961, in Andrew and Stephen Schlesinger, eds., *Journals, 1952-2000, Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr.* (New York: Penguin Press, 2007), 104-6.

characterized the meeting as “a typical Paz performance...His words are excellent, but his actions belie his words.”²⁶ In his report to President Kennedy, Schlesinger’s warned that Bolivia was

on the brink of a serious political convulsion...Bolivia might well go the way of Cuba...After Cuba, we simply cannot let another Latin American nation go Communist; if we should do so, the game would be up through a good deal of Latin America...One can already imagine the speeches in Congress on the theme, “Who lost Bolivia?”...The loss of Bolivia would be a catastrophe.

According to Schlesinger, the Kennedy administration needed to launch a “serious effort at economic development” alongside a “shrewd and tough politico-diplomatic offensive” that would “create the conditions which would drive Paz to take an anticommunist line.”

Schlesinger enthusiastically endorsed Kennedy’s ambassadorial appointee, Russian émigré labor economist Ben Stephansky, who was a “liberal opponent of communists and fellow travelers” who could “talk to Paz in Paz’s own language and help nerve him into bolder action.” This “adroit and aggressive ambassador” would be well-placed to implement a development program accompanied by “explicit economic conditions and implicit political conditions, reinforced by a stern and resourceful diplomatic determination.” Schlesinger also concluded that a stronger Bolivian military would “strengthen the government against the possibility of a revolt by the armed miners...[and] help Paz to recover his freedom of action.” Schlesinger ended his report by reiterating that “Bolivia must be saved,” adding that the new administration must “think through with care and precision the requirements of salvation.”²⁷

US Embassy Deputy Chief of Mission (DCM) William Williams seconded Schlesinger’s analysis, agreeing that “[a]nother Cuba in Bolivia would obviously be disastrous.” Williams wrote that if Bolivia went the way of Cuba, a “purely national revolution would be superseded by one managed by International Communism, thus

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Schlesinger to Kennedy, 3 March 1961, “Bolivia,” Box WH-3, Schlesinger Papers, JFKL.

discouraging nationalists in neighboring countries who think it is possible to bring about thoroughgoing reforms under a non-Communist system.” US aid to the Bolivian MNR since 1953 had had “an important and favorable influence on the thinking of South American revolutionaries,” Williams explained, adding that “we still have the chance to turn the Bolivian revolution to our advantage and make it the most potent counterweight to the Castro revolution in Latin America.” Success would require the “wit and will...[to] liberate” Paz from the “left majority in his own party,” Williams continued, recommending that the Kennedy administration “dole the money out bit-by-bit depending on [Paz’s] performance” on key issues such as “Communism in the country, labor indiscipline, [and] relations with the Bloc countries.”²⁸

With the teachers’ strike and state of siege entering their ninth day on 1 March, newly-appointed Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) President Felipe Herrera began a five-day tour of Bolivia. If Herrera was bothered by the lack of political liberties, or the recent round-up of conservative politicians, he made little fuss. On the contrary, the IDB President announced the tentative approval of a US-backed \$10 million economic development program, conditioned on harsh labor reforms in Bolivia’s state-run mining sector.²⁹ Albeit preliminary, Herrera’s dramatic aid offer was just the sort of development-oriented impetus President Paz needed. One day after signing the 4 March IDB loan agreement, the Bolivian president told Ambassador Strom that he was preparing to “take decisive action [to] end [the] teachers’ strike,” including the “arrest [of] Communist trade union leaders [in] all sectors with [the] exception of mining,” where he would need “at least

²⁸ Williams to Strom, 16 March 1961, “320, General and International Political Relations, 1959-60-61, Vol. III,” Box 1, Post Files, Bolivia, RG 84.

²⁹ “Los Presidentes de Bolivia y del BID Firmaron Ayer una Declaración Sobre el Crédito de 10 Millones de Dólares,” *El Diario*, 5 March 1961, 7.

another month to strengthen [the] party position in [the] mines before attempting [to] arrest Communist leaders there.”³⁰

President Paz further revealed that he would order the Bolivian army to occupy major rail centers during the crackdown and that he was fully committed to “defend [the] Bolivian revolution against [a] communist attempt [to] sabotage economic recovery.” Ambassador Strom reported to Washington that his would be the “first use [of] uniformed forces to impose GOB [Government of Bolivia] policy” since the revolution began and that the US would have “much to gain” if Paz followed through. Strom forwarded a list of military equipment Paz requested in connection with the operation, including hundreds of rockets (2.25-inch, 3.5-inch, and 5-inch), 1,450 bombs (fragmentary, chemical, incendiary, and pyrotechnical), 300 boxes of airplane ammunition, 20 airplane machine guns, and 5,000 tear gas grenades. Secretary of State Dean Rusk immediately approved the shipment, and two days later, 28,400 pounds of weaponry landed in La Paz.³¹ The teachers promptly gave up their grievances.³²

Apparently pleased, President Kennedy announced the following day that he was dispatching his first special economic mission, which would arrive in Bolivia on 9 March to “review the status and effectiveness” of US aid programs and provide recommendations that would “give strength and viability to the Bolivian economy...keeping [the] country in [a]

³⁰ Strom to Rusk, 5 March 1961, 724.5411/3-161; Box 1564, SDDF.

³¹ CIA, Intelligence Bulletin, 7 March 1961, CREST; Strom to Rusk, 5, 6, and 7 March 1961, Williams to State, 6 March 1961, and Rusk to Embassy, 7 March 1961, 724.5411/3-161; Box 1564, SDDF.

³² “Comité Nacional de Huelga Suspende la Huelga,” *El Diario*, 9 March 1961, 7.

friendly posture toward [the] US.”³³ Incoming Ambassador Stephansky later explained that Kennedy dispatched the mission to see “whether or not Bolivia was really over the brink.”³⁴

Five days later, Kennedy would unveil his heralded Alliance for Progress program of extensive development assistance to Latin American reformers. It was not a coincidence that his speech waxed lyrical on the benefits of rapid social and economic progress, while giving very short shrift to the importance of political democracy.³⁵ Indeed, the Kennedy administration’s very early commitment to Bolivia demonstrated that the Alliance’s development ideology had little to do with democratic liberties. It did, however, have everything to do with authoritarian anticommunism, and Bolivia was well-poised to play a central role in this emerging program.

President Paz was a genuine nationalist, who sought to take advantage of global tensions to increase foreign development assistance to Bolivia. Moreover, the governing party was slowly warming to the armed forces, and the repressive state apparatus Paz controlled could be deployed at will against political enemies. Authoritarian development ideology predated the Alliance for Progress in Bolivia, but there is no evidence that liberal developmentalists in Washington were bothered by it. On the contrary, they viewed Paz’s strong-armed rule as well suited for a large-scale, politicized development intervention. With Paz continuing to court the Communist bloc, however, it remained to be seen whether or not he would live up to his promises, thus fulfilling Schlesinger’s dream of saving Bolivia from the scourge of communism.

³³ Kennedy, News Conference #6, 8 March 1961, Historical Resources, JFKL; and Rusk to Embassy, 8 March 1961, 724.5-MSP/3-161, SDDF.

³⁴ Stephansky Oral History, JFKL, 13.

³⁵ Kennedy, “Address at a White House Reception for Members of Congress and for the Diplomatic Corps of the Latin American Republics,” 13 March 1961, Speeches, Reference Desk, JFKL.

The Triangular Plan

From its inception, the Alliance for Progress in Bolivia was an authoritarian project, and it was in the country's massive tin mines that US aid was most clearly wielded for political ends. Development economists employed by the Kennedy administration pointed to Bolivia's rebellious miners as the principal obstacles to economic progress, and these liberal intellectuals readily served on the front lines of Washington's anticommunist crusade. In sophisticated, technocratic language, they called for the depoliticization of the Bolivian labor movement, providing an elegant theoretical smokescreen for what was an unmistakably political project. With US development funding firmly secured by mid-May 1961, President Paz Estenssoro unleashed his long-promised crackdown on the left. In so doing, he enjoyed no shortage of weaponry from the United States.

After eleven days in Bolivia, President Kennedy's special economic mission reported back on 24 March that the country "offers substantial opportunities for economic development," despite its current "unfavorable trend." The mission, headed by Marshall Plan economist and former Assistant Secretary of State for Economic Affairs Willard Thorpe, condemned Eisenhower-era aid programs to Bolivia for having given Washington "no control over the secondary use of aid funds," a leverage that these economists believed should be used to require harsh economic reforms. Recommending that the Kennedy administration incorporate future aid within an "integrated plan for development," the Thorpe mission honed its sights on so-called "labor-coddling" in the nationalized mining sector. Noting that President Paz had intimated a willingness to crack down on the miners' unions, the mission estimated that he would only do so with "proper encouragement and assistance" from the United States. Due to the uncertainty of Paz's political will, the economic mission conceded that a large-scale program would be a "gamble, possibly against odds." They nonetheless argued that Washington would "never have a better chance of achieving turn-about and take-

off in Bolivia.” The mission concluded that it would be a “tragic error to abandon Bolivia under the current circumstances.”³⁶

In its formal recommendations, the Thorpe mission reiterated the importance of cracking down on the miners, where the “hard and tough core of the labor movement is to be found.” The mission went on to argue that Bolivia’s state-run mining company, COMIBOL, was employing “four to five thousand more workers than are necessary for the efficient functioning of the mines.” The economists recommended that these miners be laid off as soon as possible to test Paz’s willingness and capacity to “introduce increased labor discipline in the economy.” The Thorpe mission believed that the “principal roadblock” to this “rationalization” effort would be Vice President Lechín, Executive Secretary of the *Federación Sindical de Trabajadores Mineros de Bolivia* (FSTMB; Union Federation of Bolivian Mine Workers), whose “strongly leftwing or communist influenced and inspired...anti-American” sector of the governing MNR would resist any action against the “known communist leaders” in the mines. The Lechín threat was aggravated, according to the economic mission, by the fact that the miners were organized into armed militias, and thus able to impose their will on COMIBOL’s management rather than the other way around. The mission, therefore, recommended strengthening the “morale of the army,” both by supporting military-led “economic development through construction and other engineering works” and by providing increased equipment for “internal security,” to counterbalance the armed miners.³⁷

In a separate letter to the White House, mission member Seymour Rubin, who had been appointed as USAID legal counsel, stressed that any development program would fail in

³⁶ Thorpe, et al., “Report to the President,” 24 March 1961, folder 7, POF, JFKL, 2-4 (cover letter); 2, 39 (report).

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 5-8, 13, 15-7, 44-9.

Bolivia unless “labor leaders whose actions are dictated by pro-Communist and pro-Castro sentiment...[are] removed.” Rubin warned that “[i]f Bolivia turns the way of Castro, the failure of United States support to bring benefits to a country will be publicized throughout the continent.” Conceding that the “hazards and difficulties...are admittedly great,” Rubin concluded that “to resign from combat now, or to take the road that leads to chaos in the hope that a bright phoenix will somehow rise from the ashes, is a choice which prudence will not allow.”³⁸

The Thorpe mission report made quite a wave in Washington. *Time* magazine hailed “Kennedy’s fact-finders” for recognizing that under the Eisenhower administration, “the US [had] been acting too much like an indulgent uncle.” An unnamed Kennedy official told *Time* that Washington would no longer just “dump \$50 million in there, or \$10 million, and say, ‘Here you are, fellows, have a ball.’” Instead, the Kennedy administration would ensure that future aid went toward “businesslike development.” *Time* cleverly titled its article, “After the Ball.”³⁹

Meanwhile, Secretary Rusk’s top aide, Theodore Achilles, reported to Alliance for Progress architects Lincoln Gordon and Adolf Berle that the Thorpe mission had recommended “not so much an increase in American assistance as its reorientation” toward development. Despite the fact that this would be “a gamble and will be dependent on the Bolivian Government taking the necessary measures to make our aid effective,” Achilles concluded that it was “difficult to see any alternative...Clearly we cannot abandon Bolivia.”⁴⁰

As State’s INR had previously reported, economic development would be “unlikely to succeed...unless President Paz can impose certain reforms in the mines over the probable

³⁸ Rubin to Kennedy, 3 April 1961, “Bolivia, General, 1961,” Box 10, NSF-CO, JFKL.

³⁹ “After the Ball,” *Time*, 14 April 1961.

⁴⁰ Achilles to Gordon and Berle, 27 March 1961, 724.5-MSP/3-161, Box 1563, SDDF.

objections of opposition mine union leaders.” INR agreed, therefore, with the Thorpe mission’s view that Washington should fully support the IDB’s demands that Paz apply the harshest labor reforms “as soon as possible, to determine whether the MNR has sufficient power to enforce them.” Due to the country’s “labor and political anarchy,” INR believed that the Alliance would fail in Bolivia “unless Paz has the intent or power to act against the social and labor ills in the mines.”⁴¹

Incorporating the Thorpe mission findings, the State Department released a “Proposed New Program for Bolivia” on 30 March. Since the mission had been the “first that President Kennedy has sent specifically to any single country in Latin America,” the Department noted that “[b]oth the friends and enemies of the United States will be keenly awaiting the first news of any New Program.” State believed that the “greatest difficulty in achieving the objectives of our program...[is] Bolivia’s dearth of adequate human resources” and it therefore proposed working closely with IDB economists, who were already conditioning development programs on tough COMIBOL labor reforms. Recognizing the difficulties of taking on armed miners, the State Department concluded by recommending that the US provide the Bolivian military with “sufficient hardware to meet any internal threat.”⁴²

Two weeks after reading the Thorpe mission report, President Kennedy warned British Prime Minister Macmillan that “Bolivia is on the verge of being taken over by Communist elements favorable to Señor Castro.”⁴³ Several days later, the head of US Southern Command, General Andrew O’Meara, arrived in Bolivia to begin preparations to reinforce the Bolivian military’s capacity to repel an attack by the miners. Since his visit

⁴¹ INR, “COMIBOL Problems Considered,” 1 March 1961, “Bolivia, 1961,” Box 7, Lot 64D24, SDLF, 1, 3.

⁴² State Department, “Proposed New Program for Bolivia,” 30 March 1961, “Special Mission to Bolivia, 3/9-20/61,” Box 2, Lots 62D418 and 64D15, SDLF, 1, 3, 8-9.

⁴³ Kennedy to Macmillan, “Record of a meeting held on President Kennedy’s yacht, ‘Honey Fitz,’ 6 April 1961, CAB/129/105, Kew, 10T.

coincided with Kennedy's CIA-sponsored invasion of Cuba, General O'Meara was greeted by violent student and worker riots. American flags were burned, the US and Guatemalan Embassies were stoned, and hundreds of leftists queued up to give blood for Cuban army casualties.⁴⁴

In Washington's frantic desire to crackdown on communism in Bolivia's labor unions, it would work closely with Guillermo Bedregal, COMIBOL's young, headstrong president. A fervent nationalist, Bedregal actively sought to leverage foreign investment in his spirited drive to wrest control of the mining camps from leftist union leaders, who he referred to as "feudal lords," whose "hatred of the State" was a "type of suicidal and anti-historical anarcho-syndicalism" that had to be destroyed. Bedregal writes in his memoirs that the miners "viewed and treated COMIBOL as if it were any other boss, as opposed to a company that had been recovered for the nation." It comes as little surprise that Bedregal enthusiastically supported the US-backed IDB proposal to condition foreign aid on harsh labor reforms.⁴⁵ Bedregal accompanied IDB President Herrera on his 6 March return flight to Washington, where he held two months of "truly satisfactory" meetings with State Department officials. In a letter back to President Paz in April, Bedregal boasted that his conversations had resulted in the "COMIBOL program constituting the nucleus around which all other [US aid] programs will function."⁴⁶

In his memoirs, Bedregal recalled that Herrera's personal interest in COMIBOL put IDB economists in a position of exercising "leadership over the entire project." When the

⁴⁴ Ambassador Strom filed a complaint with the Bolivian Foreign Ministry regarding the attacks. See Strom to Arze Quiroga, 19 April 1961, LE-3-R-340, RREE; "Varias banderas Americanas Quemó la Multitud Exaltada," *El Diario*, 19 April 1961, 7; "Existen 370 Voluntarios Para Cuba," *El Diario*, 19 April 1961, 7; and "Más de 25 Heridos y Contusos Atendió la Asistencia Pública," *El Diario*, 19 April 1961.

⁴⁵ Bedregal, *Búhos*, 263-5.

⁴⁶ Bedregal to Paz, 25 April 1961, PR 985, ABNB.

West Germans signed on in late April, the Triangular Plan mine rehabilitation program was born.⁴⁷ All three of Triangular Plan's partners – the US, the IDB, and West Germany – agreed that labor was primarily responsible for COMIBOL's losses, and the German participants wrote to Bedregal to stress the need for a “considerable reduction in the number of workers,” a reform that would require “strict administration” in the face of “opposition by the armed miners and especially their leaders.”⁴⁸ No participant was more intransigent than the IDB, however, prompting Embassy DCM Williams to worry that the development bank's economists were being “unrealistic” to insist that the Bolivian government proceed with “stripping labor leaders of their control in the mines” as a precondition for foreign aid.⁴⁹

There was no doubt that Triangular's labor reforms would be fiercely opposed by Bolivia's mine workers. Yet as stipulated in the *Control Obrero*⁵⁰ section of the 1952 nationalization decree, any change to COMIBOL's structure would require FSMTB approval. To overcome this obstacle, Paz asked Vice President Lechín to pass through Washington in April, on his way back from a five-month trip abroad. Ambassador Strom was concerned that the leftist firebrand would create the “impression...[that] he successfully negotiated increased aid during [his] US visit,” but Paz explained that Lechín's cooperation would be

⁴⁷ Bedregal, *Búhos*, 299. West German participation was Bedregal's idea, as he attended high school there. But bringing Bonn into the program also dovetailed with the Kennedy administration's view that – given Washington's balance of payments problems – Bonn's payments surplus was “a bank...for our grandiose Third World programs.” Undersecretary Ball, quoted in Frank Costigliola, “Nuclear Arms, Dollars, and Berlin,” in Thomas G. Paterson, ed., *Kennedy's Quest for Victory: American Foreign Policy: 1961-1963* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 36.

⁴⁸ Salzgitter to Bedregal, undated [April 1961], PR 985, ABNB.

⁴⁹ IDB documents are dry, technocratic treatises on the urgent need for efficiency in Bolivia's tin mines. It is only possible to grasp their significance through an understanding of the authoritarian process by which the reforms were carried out. “Documents on the Triangular Plan,” IDB Archives, Washington, DC. Incidentally, the reforms had their roots in a 1956 study by the US consulting firm, Ford, Bacon, & Davis, which argues that “[u]nless the government removes political activities from the management of the mines...the entire mineral industry will continue to suffer.” It even chides the government for, in an effort to “avoid violence...constantly yielding to the demands of irresponsible agitators” and fomenting a “lack of discipline...disregard for authority.” *Ford, Bacon, & Davis Report: Volume I*, December 1956, COMIBOL Archive, 14, 25, 74.

⁵⁰ See Author's Note, viii.

necessary if the Triangular Plan were to pass through the FSTMB *Control Obrero* hurdle.⁵¹ In his memoirs, Lechín claims that he was unaware of the harsh conditions attached to the Triangular Plan, and when he arrived back to Bolivia, he boasted widely that he had “secured the Triangular Operation” during his time in Washington. Lechín went directly to the 11th FSTMB Congress on 7 May to defend Triangular by explaining that “countries which have not won economic independence” were justified in “do[ing] a series of [foreign policy] zigzags until we obtain objectives in the interests of the workers.” Despite attempting to couch his position as analogous to Stalin’s 1939 pact with Hitler, Lechín was forced to rebuke charges that he had become an agent of American imperialism. “I am an agent only of the Bolivian people,” Lechín responded magnanimously.⁵² The communist-led delegation from Bolivia’s largest mine, Siglo XX, had already walked out of the congress, however, issuing a statement that it would “reject the Triangular Plan because it understands that it is an imperialist plan.”⁵³

In mid-May, the Kennedy administration officially announced the Triangular Plan, which included \$13.5 million in technical assistance to COMIBOL, the first tranche of three.⁵⁴ Hidden from public view was a confidential set of conditions known as the “Accepted Points of View,” which committed the Bolivian government to sharply restrict *Control Obrero*, lay off 20 percent of the mine labor force – approximately 5,000 workers –

⁵¹ Strom to Rusk, 21 and 26 April 1961, Rusk to Embassy, 24 April 1961; and MEMCON, 2 May 1961, 724.5-MSP/3-161, Box 1563, SDDF.

⁵² Lechín, *El pueblo*, 126-7; Williams to Rusk, 8 May 1961, 724.12/8-960, Box 1563, SDDF; and “‘Sólo Soy Agente del Pueblo Boliviano,’” *El Diario*, 9 May 1961, 7.

⁵³ “Borrascosa Sesión Hubo en el Congreso Minero,” *El Diario*, 4 May 1961, 7.

⁵⁴ “US Gives Bolivia 10 Million in Aid,” *New York Times*, 15 May 1961, 1; and “La Casa Blanca Anunció un Préstamo de Cincuenta Millones de Dólares,” *El Diario*, 15 May 1961, 5.

and remove communist union leaders from their posts.⁵⁵ Despite boasting the tepid support of Lechín's Left Sector of the MNR, Paz realized he would have trouble with communists outside the governing party, who were already planning a hunger march against the Plan.⁵⁶ In conversations with the US Embassy, President vowed to "crackdown on communist elements" hell-bent on "sabotaging Bolivia's economic recovery." Paz's military High Command subsequently informed US officials that the government was preparing to arrest dozens of "Communist trade union leaders, university rectors, and many teachers," adding that army units would be deployed around Siglo XX to prevent its miners from marching to La Paz, or from mobilizing its militia in opposition to the crackdown.⁵⁷

On the afternoon of 6 June, fifty arrests were carried out without bloodshed. To facilitate one roundup, Bedregal called union leaders to La Paz under the pretense of discussing their complaints regarding Triangular. When they arrived, Bedregal never appeared. Instead, agents from Paz's *Control Político* arrived, permitted MNR union leaders to go free, and flew the Communists and Trotskyites to Puerto Villarroel, a makeshift detention camp in the Amazon jungle.⁵⁸ One Communist union leader, Simón Reyes, was

⁵⁵ The confidential "Accepted Points of View" have not emerged in US government archives, but they were leaked to the Bolivian press in June 1963, and Embassy officials fretted that papers published were "identical...[to the] Accepted Points of View." Embassy to State, 26 July 1961, 824.25/5-961, Box 2390, SDDF. See "La Operación Triangular muestra en otros 5 puntos su trágico sello anti-obrero," *El Pueblo*, 24 June 1961, 1; and "La Ayuda Norteamericana en Dólares Exigiría que se Cumplan Condiciones," *El Diario*, 23 July 1961, 6.

⁵⁶ "Amenazan con Movilización de Mineros Hacia La Paz," *El Diario*, 30 May 1961, 6.

⁵⁷ Williams to Rusk, 7 June 1961, 724.5/3-460, Box 1563, SDDF; State Department, "Report on Current Situation in Bolivia," undated [mid-June]; and Lane to Coerr, 13 June 1961, "Memoranda, Jan-June 1961," Box 1, Lots 63D389 and 63D61, SDLF.

⁵⁸ When asked about these detentions, Bedregal shrugged it off. "I have read the sad tales of the detainees. Give me a break. They were held for a few weeks. No torture, nothing." Bedregal denied that he knew anything of the detentions before they took place. "That was something between Paz and [secret police chief] San Román." Interviews with Bedregal. See also "A San Ignacio de Velasco y Puerto Villarroel Fueron Confinados 50 Comunistas," *El Diario*, 8 June 1961, 6. Trotskyite union leader from Siglo XX, Filemón Escóbar, recounts his detention at Puerto Villarroel in *De la Revolución al Pachakuti: El aprendizaje del Respeto Recíproco entre blancos e indios* (La Paz: Garza Azul, 2008), 52-61.

fortunate enough to have missed the meeting. When he heard of what had happened, he immediately called Bedregal, explaining that there was going to be a “terrible reaction in the mines.” The COMIBOL president feigned sympathy with Reyes’s point of view, and asked the union leader to come immediately to the presidential palace to formulate a plan. When Reyes arrived, he too was arrested and put on a plane with a score of university students and professors. This second group – all Communist Party members – was flown away to internal exile in the Amazonian village of San Ignacio de Velasco.⁵⁹

Anticipating a violent reaction by sympathetic unions, the following morning President Paz announced the existence of a “communist plot,” and declared yet another 90-day state of siege, his February siege having expired seventeen days earlier.⁶⁰ Flaunting Paz’s decree, 4,000 factory workers and students marched through the streets of La Paz on 8 June, chanting slogans against the Bolivian government and the United States. The urban unions declared belligerently that they were “not afraid of repression because they are accustomed to defeating armies,” and the student federation erected barricades and declared a “state of emergency” throughout the country’s universities.⁶¹ After dispersing these protests with copious amounts of US-supplied tear gas, Paz’s MNR organized a counterdemonstration that evening by loyalist Indian peasant groups. In front of 10,000 Indians chanting “Death to Communism!” President Paz proudly announced that his government was holding fifty Bolivian communists incommunicado in Amazon detention camps. The crowd responded boisterously, “To the firing squad!”⁶² Meanwhile, MNR-affiliated Indian communities

⁵⁹ Interviews with detainees René Rocabado and Simón Reyes.

⁶⁰ “Dictóse Estado de Sitio y Auto de Buen Gobierno,” *El Diario*, 8 June 1961, 6.

⁶¹ Lane to Coerr, 13 June 1961, “Memoranda, Jan-June 1961,” Box 1, Lots 63D389 and 63D61, SDLF; “Los Fabriles no Temen Represiones porque Están Acostumbrados a Derrotar Ejércitos,” *El Diario*, 8 June 1961, 7; and “Empezó el Paro Universitario con Barricadas de Adoquines,” *El Diario*, 14 June 1961, 7.

⁶² Lane to Coerr, 13 June 1961, “Memoranda, Jan-June 1961,” Box 1, Lots 63D389 and 63D61, SDLF; and “Llegaron Ayer Campesinos de Achacachi,” *El Diario*, 8 June 1961, 6.

around the nation sent cables to President Paz expressing their “unconditional support for the government,” thanking Paz for once again invoking a state of siege to “defend the government, the homeland, and the Catholic religion.”⁶³

Washington did not delay in showing its gratitude for Paz’s decision to round up dozens of Bolivian leftists under the pretext of what the CIA conceded was a “government-fabricated coup.”⁶⁴ In response to Paz’s “favorable actions,” the State Department authorized its Embassy to “release [USAID] cash grant payments for April, May, and June,” expressing satisfaction that “for the first time after ten months in office,” President Paz had taken “positive action toward controlling the communist movement within Bolivia and to re-establish the authority of the Bolivian government over labor.”⁶⁵

Meanwhile, Paz followed through on his plan to send a military regiment to the mining region, and on 8 June Bolivia’s High Command requested US assistance in creating a “modified battle group” that would be “highly mobile with heavy power.” Designed to contain the “latent danger for Bolivia inherent in communism,” especially in the highland mining camps, Army Commanding General Ovando “urgently” requested \$650,000 in “emergency material materiel...to be airlifted...for use [by the] Bolivian army in strengthening GOB to meet [the] current political crisis.” The request received an enthusiastic endorsement by Kennedy’s recently arrived ambassadorial appointee, Ben Stephansky, who reported to Secretary Rusk that a mobile artillery battalion “would strengthen anti-Commie forces in [the] present situation,” since the “army is loyal to Paz and

⁶³ These cables can be found in PR 971, ABNB.

⁶⁴ CIA, Intelligence Bulletin, 13 June 1961, CREST. *Time* magazine was not so wise, parroting the Bolivian line that “Castro agents working out of the Cuban embassy hatched a plot with Local Communists to overturn the government of Reformer-President Víctor Paz Estenssoro.” “Who’s Intervening Where?” *Time*, 16 June 1961.

⁶⁵ Lane to Coerr, 13 June 1961; and State Department, “Report on Current Situation in Bolivia,” undated [mid-June 1961], “Memoranda, Jan-June 1961,” Box 1, Lots 63D389 and 63D61, SDLF.

is [the] force most likely [to] resist [a] further shift...[in the] government apparatus to [the] extreme MNR left.” On 30 June, President Kennedy signed the request, and military airlifts began arriving on 16 July.⁶⁶

Nine days after Paz invoked his second state of siege and rounded up Bolivian leftists opposed to the Triangular Plan, Washington’s UN Ambassador Adlai Stevenson arrived in La Paz for a two-day leg of his regional tour. The liberal icon offered strong support for President Paz’s actions, expressing confidence to members of the press welcoming him at the airport that Alliance for Progress would “make Bolivia a leading example of free world development cooperation.” According to Stevenson, “rapid economic and social advance is urgently needed.” This would “be difficult and require painful sacrifices,” he explained, but “progress is certain if free men join together in a spirit of responsibility and discipline.” Ambassador Stevenson closed his first speech in La Paz by proclaiming that “the Bolivian revolution will demonstrate to peoples of this continent that social and economic progress can be achieved under free institutions and Western Christian traditions.”⁶⁷

Unfortunately for Stevenson, fatal street riots on 15 June prevented him from seeing much of the city. Instead, he spent three hours discussing economic and social development with President Paz at the latter’s suburban home, while students and workers battled throughout day with police and pro-MNR Indian militias, clashes that resulted in at least four

⁶⁶ Commander-in-Chief Rodríguez to US Embassy, 8 June 1961; Williams to Rusk, 9 June 1961; Rusk to Embassy, 23 June 1961; Stephansky to Rusk, 25 June 1961; Rusk to Embassy, 30 June 1961; and Bolivian Foreign Ministry to Embassy, 14 July 1961; 724.5411/3-161, Box 1564, SDDF. Confirmation of shipment arrivals can be found in Stephansky to Foreign Minister Arze Quiroga, 14 and 24 July 1961, LE-3-R-340, RREE.

⁶⁷ Stevenson, “Statement on Arrival at La Paz,” 15 June 1961, 5, Box 453, Stevenson Papers, Mudd Library, Princeton University, 4-5. See also “La Ayuda Extranjera Hará de Este País un Ejemplo de la Cooperación del Mundo Libre,” *El Diario*, 16 June 1961, 6.

deaths.⁶⁸ A student delegation was dispatched to Stevenson's hotel, where they pled with Washington to end aid to Bolivia, as it "just enrich[es] the governing party." They complained that the Triangular Plan was "an attack on national sovereignty, because its conditions require the firing of workers and the imprisonment of union leaders."⁶⁹

Stevenson was unfazed by what he witnessed in "that embattled city on top of the world," telling US Embassy officials a few days later that he "found the whole thing fascinating – in spite of the altitude – and left full of anxieties and admiration."⁷⁰ A day after he returned to Washington, Stevenson wrote to President Paz that his trip had given him a "better understanding of the frustrating conditions you confront, and great hope for the way you are coming to grip with the political challenge." He concluded his letter by stressing "my Government's deep interest in Bolivia's plans for that social and economic progress which is at once so difficult and so imperative."⁷¹ Meanwhile, since Paz's police services had "seriously depleted" their tear gas supplies battling the students and workers, Secretary Rusk authorized an emergency shipment of 3,500 additional tear gas grenades from US Southern Command in Panama and existing Embassy supplies in Quito, Ecuador.⁷²

Since this violence was directly related to the passage of the Alliance for Progress's Triangular Plan, President Kennedy could not remain a passive observer. Aside from approving the creation of a mobile artillery battalion for deployment in the mining region,

⁶⁸ "Hello, but no Help," *Time*, 23 June 1961; "Tres Horas Conversaron Reservadamente en Calacoto el Presidente y Stevenson," *El Diario*, 16 June 1961, 6; and "Cuatro Muertos y Más de Treinta Heridos es el Resultado de las Luchas Callejeras," *El Diario*, 16 June 1961, 7.

⁶⁹ "Permanecen en la Universidad Alrededor de 80 Estudiantes," *El Diario*, 16 June 1961, 9.

⁷⁰ Stevenson to Williams, 22 June 1961, folder 5, Box 453, Stevenson Papers, Mudd Library, Princeton University. Stevenson did not respond to a FSB letter complaining that Paz was imposing a "dictatorship under the belated cover of anticommunism." See "Al Amparo de Tardía Postura Pretende el MNR Implantar una Dictadura: Carta de Falange al embajador Stevenson," *El Diario*, 17 June 1961, 9.

⁷¹ Stevenson to Paz, 17 June 1961, folder 5, Box 453, Stevenson Papers, Mudd Library, Princeton University.

⁷² Williams to Rusk, 18 June 1961; US Embassy (Quito) to Rusk, 18 June 1961; and Rusk to Embassies (Quito and La Paz), 19 June 1961, 724.5411/3-161, Box 1564, SDDF.

Kennedy also personally authorized \$3 million to reimburse President Paz's expensive settlement with Bolivia's urban factory workers in late June, an agreement that succeeded in breaking the general strike. When the payment was made four months later, President Kennedy notified Paz Estenssoro that he was "impressed by the courage and determination with which your government has undertaken measures to achieve social progress and embark upon a long-range development program."⁷³ On 22 June, Kennedy took advantage of a sick day to pen a personal letter to Paz, in which he reiterated that his administration "regards the economic and social development of Bolivia as one of the principal goals of the Alliance for Progress." Kennedy further expressed his "deep admiration for your courage and vision in confronting the difficulties which your nation is now undergoing, and to wish you every success."⁷⁴

Thus began Kennedy's foreign policy toward Bolivia, a program of politicized, authoritarian development that took dead aim at the country's miners' unions. Incoming Ambassador Stephansky later recalled that there had been a "sense of real anxiety and...unease about Bolivia" during the first half of 1961. Many US officials believed the country was "half way over the brink to chaos," worrying that "it could slide down and be the second Cuba."⁷⁵ With Kennedy's economists providing technocratic language regarding the importance of labor discipline for economic and social progress, US policymakers waged a political crusade under the unabashed auspices of the Alliance for Progress. The enterprise was enthusiastically supported by President Paz, who Stephansky called "a real egghead,

⁷³ Paz to Kennedy, 5 October 1961, "Security, 1961-3," Box 112, POF, JFKL; USAID Director Hamilton to Ambassador Andrade, 7 November 1961, "Bolivia, General, 1961," Box 10, NSF-CO, JFKL; and Weise to Lane, 9 November 1961, "Memoranda, July-December 1961," Box 1, Lots 63D389 and 63D61, SDLF.

⁷⁴ Kennedy to Paz, 22 June 1961, "Bolivia, General, 1961," Box 112, POF, JFKL.

⁷⁵ Stephansky Oral History, JFKL, 11.

which is awfully nice...a man with an extraordinary breath of intelligence.”⁷⁶ Yet Paz was an egghead with guns,⁷⁷ which he was decisively turning against the miners.

A View from the Mines

The Alliance for Progress in Bolivia faced no greater enemy than the communist-led union at the country’s largest tin mine, Siglo XX. Armed and organized, these miners brazenly rejected the Triangular Plan conditions, and they refused to give in without a fight. Recognizing that US aid programs were being used to carry out an aggressive political project, the communists called for all out war against the Paz government. Still enjoying support from the MNR left, however, Paz Estenssoro would emerge victorious his first offensive against the Bolivian labor movement.

Despite US support for the MNR since 1953, Bolivia’s popular militias remained a thorn in Washington’s side. Far outnumbering the armed forces, which barely outfitted 7,500 soldiers in 1961, Bolivia’s Indian and worker militias boasted 16,000 men. The CIA reported that the militias had “enjoyed a privileged position in Bolivia because [they] are credited with playing the major role in the MNR defeat of the army in the 1952 revolution,” adding that the miners’ militia was the “most effective paramilitary element...in part because of their access to explosives.” According to the CIA, the communist-led militia at Siglo XX represented the “single greatest threat to the stability of the country.”⁷⁸ A Pentagon handbook agreed that

⁷⁶ Ibid., 20.

⁷⁷ Pace Bradley Simpson, whose marvelous book on Kennedy’s foreign policy of authoritarian development in Indonesia is one of this thesis’s central influences. Simpson, *Economists with Guns*.

⁷⁸ Thorpe, et al., “Report to the President,” 15-6; and CIA, Current Intelligence Memorandum, 30 July 1963, “Bolivia, General, 3/63-7/63,” Box 10A, NSF-CO, JFKL, 1-2.

while the miners' militias were "not the largest forces," they were still "considered the most effective because they are better organized, trained, disciplined, and equipped."⁷⁹

Despite having been officially disbanded when the MNR reorganized the armed forces in 1953, the miners militia at Siglo XX continued to operate under the command of respected MNR leftist Octavio Torrico. Poorly armed in anything but dynamite, Torrico's militia relied heavily on the cooperation of the two communist party militias, affiliated with the PCB and the Trotskyite POR, which organized late-night gangs of mineral-robbing *jukus* and used the proceeds to buy arms from soldiers, police officers, and members of the legal MNR-affiliated Indian militias. The POR *juku* was especially efficient, and by 1964 the Trotskyites collected nearly 100 weapons, including two US-made M-1 carbine machine guns. Nevertheless, the miners' most effective weapons were homemade bombs, coffee cans filled with dynamite plastique and metal screws, which they launched using Indian-style slingshots or rigged underneath planks of wood as landmines to stymie the advanced of military vehicles that dared approach the mining camps.⁸⁰

Despite traditional Trotskyite strength in Siglo XX, the PCB had made large strides during the late 1950s, and by 1961 Communists controlled the entire union leadership.⁸¹ The party boasted hundreds nonaffiliated supporters who, motivated by sympathies for the 1959 Cuban revolution, filled the red-shirted ranks of the party's Lincoln-Castro-Murillo

⁷⁹ Special Operations Research Office, *US Army Area Handbook for Bolivia* (Washington, DC: American University, 1963), 661.

⁸⁰ *Juku* activity reached its apogee in 1964, but it began in the late 1950s. Interviews with PCB members Leónidas Rojas and Víctor Reinaga; POR member Filemón Escóbar, and MNR leftist Arturo Crespo. For three political groups that rarely agree, their testimony was remarkably similar. See also a 1964 COMIBOL report on *jukus*, in Embassy to State, 24 August 1964, INCO Mining, Minerals, and Metals BOL, Box 1190, State Department Alpha Numeric Files (hereafter SDANF).

⁸¹ The General Secretary was Irineo Pimentel, an unaffiliated communist who had previously belonged to the Stalinist *Partido de la Izquierda Revolucionaria* (PIR; Revolutionary Left Party). Meanwhile, the union's *Control Obrero* was Federico Escóbar, the head of the PCB at Siglo XX.

Brigades.⁸² According Arturo Crespo, a powerful MNR leftist at the adjacent camp of Catavi, the PCB used Siglo XX as a base from which it “played a very important role in Bolivia in its fight against US imperialism and the MNR governments.” PCB members, according to Crespo, “were organized into cadres [and] observed an internal discipline and solidarity comparable only to the Trotskyite organizations.”⁸³ The PCB was especially impressive in organizing security for the raucous visit of a Soviet parliamentary delegation to Siglo XX in December 1960, a necessary precaution as Trotskyite leaders responded to the visit with a spirited anti-Moscow protest.⁸⁴ A US diplomat later recalled that Siglo XX

was politically volatile territory...I used to think when I traveled to the district that they should put a big red star up over the mine entrance...It was like traveling to North Korea or something like that. For me, it was just a Commie land of 25 different varieties.⁸⁵

The Communist Party cadre in Siglo XX was headed by *Control Obrero* Federico Escóbar Zapata, a loose-tongued orator and rough-and-tumble miner who was loved and despised in equal measure. Affectionately called *Macho Moreno* by his followers, Escóbar – who had visited Havana in December 1960⁸⁶ – “knew how to understand everybody’s needs,” one miner recalled, “He was always seen solving problems for the benefit of his class, for his comrades and also for those who were not in the Party.” Another miner recounted that Escóbar “treated everybody equally, be it a woman or a man, an Indian or a miner. He made

⁸² Interviews with Crespo, Reinaga, and Lincoln-Castro-Murillo Brigades Vice President Leónidas Rojas. Pedro Domingo Murillo was a martyr for Bolivian independence, executed in 1810 by Spanish authorities in La Paz’s central plaza, which today bears his name.

⁸³ Arturo Crespo, *El rostro minero de Bolivia: Los mineros...mártires y héroes* (La Paz: Sygnus, 2009), 295. PCB member Rojas confirms Crespo’s view that the Trotskyite POR had an “amazing nucleus of followers, and they knew how to inspire the masses.” Interviews with Rojas.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*; and interviews with Reinaga, 19 August 2010. For an account of the Trotskyite counterdemonstration, see sections of Filemón Escóbar’s unpublished manuscript, in Dunkerley, *Rebellion*, 106-7.

⁸⁵ Anthony Freeman, Oral History, Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training.

⁸⁶ Interviews with Emilse Escóbar, daughter of Federico.

no distinctions...someone like Federico Escóbar had never been seen around here.”⁸⁷

Escóbar’s children recall that their mother Alicia would complain that her husband was never home, nagging him to “just marry the union and go live there!”⁸⁸ According to another miner’s wife, when Escóbar was at home, there was a line of “twenty fellow miners and miners’ wives with twenty different calamities waiting their turn.”⁸⁹ The US Embassy agreed that Federico Escóbar was a “romantic Marxist and a hero to his people...He regards the interests of his miners as paramount.” The Embassy added that Escóbar had “spent twenty-one years in the mines [and] knows as much about mining and mining conditions as most COMIBOL engineers,” a quality proudly confirmed by his friends and colleagues.⁹⁰

The wife of one Siglo XX miner, Domitila Barrios de Chungara, recalls that she first met Escóbar after COMIBOL forced her out of the company house where she was living with her family. She was nine months pregnant at the time, and her husband was away attending his mother’s funeral. When the company guards left her crying on the street, surrounded by her children and the family belongings, neighbors took her to see Escóbar. “I had never seen a man like him, so simple, so good,” Domitila recalls, “He took my hand as if he had known me for years.” After serving Domitila dinner, Escóbar drove her to COMIBOL’s local headquarters, where he “chewed out the guards” for having evicted her. He then drove them all back to the house, where he forced the company guards to put everything back in its place, scolding them that “a lady lives here, and ladies don’t have their things thrown about like this.” Four days later, Domitila gave birth to a son, Rodolfo, at which point she received a

⁸⁷ Miners’ interviews in José Ignacio López Vigil, *Una mina de coraje* (Quito: Aler/Pio XII, 1984), 55-6.

⁸⁸ Interviews with Emilse.

⁸⁹ Domitila Barrios de Chungara interviews, in Moema Viezzer, “*Si me permiten hablar...*” *Testimonio de Domitila, una mujer de las minas de Bolivia*, 3rd ed. (Mexico, DF: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1977), 69.

⁹⁰ Embassy to State, 26 April 1963, INCO-Mining, Minerals, and Metals BOL, Box 3540, SDANF; and interviews with Rojas, Reinaga, and Emilse.

letter from Escóbar, along with the official COMIBOL order authorizing her to live in the house. He wrote: “Look madam, this is the order that permits you to live here. No one has the right to put you out of this house.” Shortly afterward, Domitila joined the Communist Party.⁹¹

Fully aware that Kennedy’s Alliance for Progress had targeted them for extinction, these leftists prepared for battle. Trotskyite Filemón Escóbar (no relation to Federico) writes that the Triangular Plan was “much more sinister” than anything that had come before, since it “sought nothing less than the liquidation of the revolutionary workers’ movement...the liquidation of all union interference, and the sweeping out of the mines all workers considered ‘extremist.’” Filemón concludes that US aid funds were nothing more than a “price paid to destroy the workers’ movement.”⁹² Federico Escóbar’s PCB comrade Víctor Reinaga agrees that “the Plan’s foreign technicians saw only one problem with COMIBOL: the workers’ so-called ‘high salaries.’”⁹³

Melvin Burke, a USAID economist working on the Triangular Plan in the late 1960s eventually came around to the miners’ point of view, telling his superiors upon his resignation that “AID [has] nothing to do with economics or the development of Bolivia.” For Burke, the Plan was a “Trojan Horse,” which “had no economic basis except to destroy...the communist union,” and he praised the miners for having “fought against the so-called ‘rationalization’ (elimination) of ‘redundant’ mine workers.”⁹⁴ In academic work published years later, Burke provided extensive evidence that COMIBOL was using “creative

⁹¹ Domitila, in Viezzer, *Si me permiten hablar*, 69-72; and interviews with Domitila.

⁹² Filemón Escóbar, *Testimonio de un militante obrero: la frustración de la dirección revolucionaria en Bolivia a través de la crisis del POR*, (Unpublished manuscript, 1977), 41.

⁹³ Interviews with Reinaga.

⁹⁴ Burke email to author, 9 October 2009.

accounting,...[and] overstated and understated actual profits and losses at will” in order “create a pretext to ‘rationalize’ (reduce) the labor force.” According to Burke, the Triangular Plan was a fig leaf that hid its “covert political” goal, which was to “destroy the workers’ union and denationalize the mining industry of Bolivia.”⁹⁵

Despite the fact that Vice President Lechín was “seduced” by the prospect of US aid to COMIBOL,⁹⁶ the FSTMB’s disparate factions closed ranks in June by declaring a nationwide strike in the wake of President Paz’s anticommunist crackdown. COMIBOL responded by closing the company commissaries and pharmacies, “paralyzing the sale of meat, medicine, and other supplies,” according to *Catavi Control Obrero* Crespo. It was clear to the miners that the Bolivian government “had carefully prepared for this strike” by cutting back on recent shipments to the mining camps, and that President Paz sought to “obtain the surrender of the workers and their families by way of hunger.” Miners wives travelled to nearby Indian communities to trade personal effects for produce, and the unions organized a commando column that planned to hijack a cargo train carrying grain from Argentina to the Bolivian capital. Crespo concedes that the plan “appeared crazy, but we had to try it. There was no other alternative, as we could not let our children die of hunger.” He recalls that “we imagined seeing the faces of COMIBOL’s administrators when they learned the workers had enough flour to make bread for a month.”⁹⁷

In mid-June, COMIBOL offered to lift the blockade and release the majority of the communist detainees, but refused to grant liberty to Siglo XX union leaders Federico Escóbar

⁹⁵ Melvin Burke, “The Corporación Minera de Bolivia (COMIBOL) and the Triangular Plan: A Case Study in Dependency,” *Latin American Issues* 4 (1987); and Melvin Burke, *Estudios Críticas del Neoliberalismo* (La Paz: Plural, 2001), 275, 279.

⁹⁶ Lechín, *El pueblo*, 123.

⁹⁷ After retiring from the mines, Crespo spent two decades in COMIBOL and miner archives. His account of the June strike is based on personal memories substantiated with official documents. See *El rostro minero*, 284-5. Interviews with Rojas, Reinaga, and Filemón Escóbar were helpful in corroborating Crespo’s narrative.

and Irineo Pimentel. The FSTMB leadership rejected any deal that did not include the two popular union leaders, forcing the Paz government to turn to more sinister methods of strike-busting. Bribing the MNR-affiliated union leaders at San José, on the outskirts of Oruro, with “400 American coats and 500,000 pesos,” the government convinced them to go back to work. Alarmed, the FSTMB strike committee rushed to San José, where they were greeted by an angry mob chanting, “Our children are hungry, Down with the Strike!...Get out of the camp, communist traitors!” The strike committee leaders were then chased out of San José under a “shower of hurled rocks.” As he fled for his life, committee member Crespo thought to himself that “the sacrifices of thousands of workers and their families in a strike that had lasted over fifteen days...had been futile. The sharks had won.”⁹⁸

With the general strike broken by San José, whose leaders the FSTMB disparaged as “traffickers of unionism,”⁹⁹ the government blockade closed in on Siglo XX, where the union refused to resume work until its leaders were released from their Amazonian detainment. Bedregal railed against this “illegal strike,” claiming that it “demonstrates the level of indiscipline and repudiation of obligation on the part of the workers.”¹⁰⁰ President Paz once again turned to the United States, pleading with UN Ambassador Adlai Stevenson for a \$12 million emergency credit “to cover Bolivia’s critical needs pending the re-establishment of social peace.”¹⁰¹ Upon his return to the US, Stevenson testified to Congress in support of

⁹⁸ “Intento Extremista para un Nuevo Paro Minero en Oruro Rechazaron los Trabajadores,” *El Diario*, 17 June 1961, 7; and Crespo, *El rostro minero*, 287-9.

⁹⁹ “Resolución de la Federación Sindical de Trabajadores Mineros de Bolivia (FSTMB),” 25 June 1961, in Crespo, *El rostro minero*, 289.

¹⁰⁰ Bedregal to Paz, 26 June and 1 July 1961, PR 985, ABNB.

¹⁰¹ MEMCON, 21 July 1961, 724.12/8-960, Box 1563, SDDF.

Paz's measures, calling the Triangular Plan impasse "the most explosive situation in South America."¹⁰²

With Ambassador Ben Stephansky's arrival in La Paz in late June, Paz Estenssoro boasted a powerful new ally. Stephansky carried with him a personal note from President Kennedy, stressing Washington's desire to "bring to fruition" the Triangular Plan,¹⁰³ and the Ambassador did not hesitate to lend support for Paz's \$12 million request. Stephansky explained that the Bolivian government was on a "dead-end street" and would likely resort to "inflationary spending" without an immediate credit.¹⁰⁴ The State Department agreed that

we are faced with an immediate emergency...Soviet pressure is strong, the Bolivian Government is in a precarious situation, [and] the immediate economic problems are severe...Despite strong Communist infiltration in the labor movement...the Bolivian government is basically still oriented toward the free world...[W]e cannot regard Bolivia as a loss.

Once again, however, the economists at USAID and the IDB were the most intransigent, demanding that labor reforms be enforced before another dollar was released.¹⁰⁵ Embassy DCM Williams renewed his complaint that the economists were being "unrealistic," but the developmentalists would not budge.¹⁰⁶

Fortunately for President Paz, the Bolivian government boasted an important ally in Siglo XX, a group of Canadian priests who had gone into the mining camp on a mission to ensure "the defeat of communism in Bolivia." The Oblate priests of the Order of Mary Immaculate warned their superiors throughout the year that "communism had infiltrated the region like never before," and solicited financial support, without which they said it would be

¹⁰² Stevenson, in "Bolivia Constituye la Situación más Explosiva en América del Sur," *El Diario*, 16 July 1961, 7.

¹⁰³ "El Presidente Kennedy Envió Nueva Carta al Doctor Paz," *El Diario*, 30 June 1961, 7, 9.

¹⁰⁴ Stephansky to Rusk, 26 July 1961, "Bolivia, General, 1961," Box 10, NSF-CO, JFKL.

¹⁰⁵ Barall to Labouisse, 10 August 1961, 724.12/8-960, Box 1563, SDDF.

¹⁰⁶ Williams to Rusk, 18 August 1961, in *idem*.

impossible “not only to resist the avalanche of atheistic materialism that seeks to defeat us, but also to chalk up a huge triumph for our Holy Cause.” With generous donations from the Canadian faithful, the Oblates erected Bolivia’s most powerful radio transmitter, aptly named *Pio XII*, from which they broadcast vitriolic anticommunist screeds and called for Federico Escóbar’s permanent expulsion from Siglo XX.¹⁰⁷

The Oblate mission leader, Father Lino Grenier, refused even to baptize Escóbar’s children, prompting the union leader to take to the miners’ radio, *Voz del Minero* (Voice of the Miner), and declare that “if there is a God who takes into account the human race, he will see that the majority is made up of the poor.” Escóbar added, “I am sure that Karl Marx up there in Heaven, with our Lord Jesus Christ, has more influence than the mercenaries who have wagered on the Church.” Condemning those “who say we need priests to teach us how to pray,” Escóbar explained that “we have already prayed plenty, and the more the poor pray, the poorer they stay.” The Communist leader concluded his diatribe by proclaiming: “Fellow workers: what our country needs is to liberate itself. Let us say with our fists raised to the air, ‘Liberty for our People!’”¹⁰⁸

When Paz Estenssoro’s *Control Político* rounded up communists in early June, Father Lino provided COMIBOL with lists of Siglo XX “troublemakers” and sent a constant stream of cables to La Paz vowing to “cooperate completely” with the government’s anticommunist crackdown.¹⁰⁹ One miner later recalled that the Oblates “shameless supported the Triangular Plan...they only saw communism in our demands.” When *Pio XII* began handing out food to

¹⁰⁷ Siglo XX Missionaries, “La situación insostenible de los Católicos en Siglo XX y el campo circundante,” 8 December 1961, in López Vigil, *Una mina de coraje*, 63-5.

¹⁰⁸ Escóbar, 2 September 1961, in López Vigil, *Una mina de coraje*, 57-8. Conservative Catholics and orthodox Communists alike were consistently frustrated by Escóbar’s declarations that he was “100 percent Catholic...[and] 100% Communist.” Escóbar, in López Vigil, *Una mina de coraje*, 119.

¹⁰⁹ Lino to COMIBOL, undated [June 1961], in Crespo, *El rostro minero*, 288.

miners who agreed to go back to work, union members declared, “If the priests want to bust our strike, we’ll bust them first!” On 4 July, communist miners attacked the Catholic radio station, first clashing with a group of nuns and then with members of the Catholic Workers’ League who rushed to defend *Pio*. When one of the union miners launched a dynamite stick onto the roof of the station, all hell broke loose. A Catholic miner inside *Pio* at the time recalls that “it was all rocks, pistol shots... They wanted to destroy the transmitter and drag Father Lino outside, eliminate him.”¹¹⁰

Amid the chaos, *Pio XII* transmitted a nationwide call for help, declaring that “now is the time to put an end to communism in Bolivia!” Warning the population “not to be tricked by the miserable and disgusting communists,” the Catholic station declared, “Women of Bolivia: it would be preferable for you to kill your children this moment if you are not capable of defending the Catholic religion!” From inside the building, Father Lino – a black-belt in karate – told his followers, “God says you have to let yourself take punches, but we cannot tolerate this outrage! We must defend ourselves!”¹¹¹ Local pro-MNR Indian communities cabled their unwavering support to President Paz, assuring him that they were “ready to march on Catavi” should he give the word.¹¹²

Early the following day, the Bishop of Oruro arrived to Siglo XX with a government commission. The highest Catholic official in the region scolded the Oblates and the Catholic workers, reminding them that they were called to love all human beings, even communists. The Bishop suggested that capitalism was just as evil, and even claimed he was “prepared to

¹¹⁰ Miners’ interviews, in López Vigil, *Una mina de coraje*, 66-9. See also “Comunistas Promovieron Desórdenes en Siglo XX,” *El Diario*, 5 July 1961, 1.

¹¹¹ *Pio XII* broadcast, 4 July 1961; and miners’ interviews, in López Vigil, *Una mina de coraje*, 69, 70-1. One Communist recalled, “Father Lino’s Catholic Workers were armed, as well! I know, because we clashed with them many times! Lino was enormous. More like a Marine dressed up like a priest!” Interviews with Reinaga.

¹¹² “Laimes y Jucumanis Reiteraron su Adhesión al Gobierno del Presidente Paz Estenssoro,” *El Diario*, 6 July 1961, 6.

kiss the hand of the miner who is about to throw dynamite against my breast.” One-by-one, miners told the commission that they were devout Catholics, but that they despised Father Lino, who they accused of being an agent of the CIA. Meanwhile, thousands of miners marched through the camp, carrying signs that read, “Foreign Priests Get out of Siglo XX!” and “Death to Lino!” Giving Lino 48 hours to leave the mining camp, the demonstrators then proceeded to burn his effigy in the central plaza. Several months later, Father Lino slipped away in the middle of the night in the company of six armed guards. A Catholic miner recalls, somewhat bitterly, “He just disappeared. He didn’t bid farewell to anyone.” Shortly afterward, Lino left the priesthood, married, and became a successful businessman in Brazil.¹¹³

If the situation in Siglo XX gravely endangered the Triangular Plan, the Bolivian government’s attitude at the August 1961 OAS meeting at Punta del Este, Uruguay, threatened to drive the final nail in the coffin. US Treasury Secretary Douglas Dillon, who headed the American delegation complained to President Kennedy that Bolivia “followed [a] straight communist line throughout the conference, taking clear guidance from the Cubans.” Dillon reported that many Cuban amendments meant to undermine the Alliance for Progress “were voted down unanimously, except for Bolivia,” and he characterized the conference as a “remarkable show of solidarity on the part of all except Cuba and Bolivia.”¹¹⁴ Secretary Rusk asked Stephansky to warn President Paz of the “difficulty such action causes the US in carrying out our aid programs in Bolivia,” since it was “most disturbing to [the] highest levels in [the] US government.”¹¹⁵

¹¹³ Miners’ interviews, in López Vigil, *Una mina de coraje*, 75-89. Lino’s afterlife was uncovered by his successor, Father Gregorio Iriarte, who ran into him later in Uruguay. See Gregorio interview, in López Vigil, *Una Mina de coraje*, 88-9. See also “Es Grave la Situación en Siglo XX,” *El Diario*, 8 July 1961, 7.

¹¹⁴ Dillon to Kennedy, 16 August 1961, document 30, *FRUS, 1961-1963: Volume XII – American Republics*.

¹¹⁵ Rusk to Embassy, 22 August 1961, “Bolivia, General, 1961,” Box 10, NSF-CO, JFKL.

Bolivia's High Command was also growing anxious. The US-built Max Toledo First Motorized Battalion had just been festively inaugurated in Viacha, just outside La Paz, on 5 August, and the generals were feeling bold.¹¹⁶ Two weeks later, three of Bolivia's top generals informed Embassy officials that Paz had "lost control of the situation and could not remain in office much longer." Commander-in-Chief General Ovando and Air Force Commander General Barrientos explained that "within the next six months it would be necessary to establish a military junta," adding that they planned to "eliminate the MNR party and get rid of the gangsters." Vowing to establish a "completely pro-Western civilian government," the generals acknowledged that "they could not do this unless they had the support and backing of the US government."¹¹⁷

When he returned from Washington on 22 August, Ambassador Stephansky conceded that Paz's "failure to take decisive action on [the] political-labor front," and his instability to "provide some assurance [of the] successful implementation...[of] the Triangular Operation," meant that his government was "politically weak and growing weaker." Nonetheless, Stephansky believed that the US should leverage the generals' threat, coupled with the intransigence of economists at the IDB and USAID, in order to "apply all available pressure [on] Paz to obtain GOB decision [to] take genuinely decisive action" in the form of an "all-out win or lose battle" against the miners at Siglo XX.¹¹⁸

The pressure worked. In "tense meetings" with IDB economists, Vice President Lechín finally agreed to accept significant restrictions on *Control Obrero* veto power, paving the way for COMIBOL to make administrative decisions – including mass firings and the

¹¹⁶ "Creóse Ayer el Primer Batallón Motorizado 'Tnl. M. Toledo,'" *El Diario*, 6 August 1961, 6.

¹¹⁷ Army Attaché Wimert via Williams to Rusk, 19 August 1961, "Bolivia, General, 1961," Box 10, NSF-CO, JFKL.

¹¹⁸ Stephansky to Rusk, 24 August 1961, in idem; and Stephansky to Rusk, 25 August 1961, 824.25/5-961, Box 2390, SDDF.

removal of individual union leaders – without labor interference.¹¹⁹ Late on 28 August, Lechín addressed a special session of the FSTMB in Oruro, with dozens of his communist colleagues still sweltering in the Amazon jungle. The only voice to oppose the Triangular Plan was Siglo XX Trotskyite César Lora. Filling in for Escóbar and Pimentel, Lora angrily denounced the plan as “submissive” to the United States, but Lechín responded that they were dealing with “an issue of food.” Lechín went on to denounce Lora for seeking to turn the session “into a place to defend political positions...[and] put us where the reactionaries want, so that due to a lack of money they can denationalize the mines. They want to drown us in division.” Under the combined pressure of President Paz, the IDB, USAID, and the Bolivian High Command, Lechín delivered the unanimous votes of his MNR left sector, and the Triangular Plan was “half-heartedly approved.”¹²⁰

Having forced the FSTMB to capitulate, President Paz signed a supreme decree on 31 August, stipulating that *Control Obrero* “would not be recognized if [its] veto will prejudice production,” and he privately committed his government to “make use of all power available to it in preventing strikes.”¹²¹ It was a time of jubilation for US officials. Ambassador Stephansky gave special credit to the IDB economists, “without whose push it is probable [that the] decree, if issued at all, would have been watered down.” Stephansky also stressed the importance of providing US support for an “intensive propaganda campaign,” including stuffing miners’ pay envelopes with pro-Triangular literature and bringing “selected groups of workers” to La Paz for “indoctrination as propaganda agents [in] support [of the] mine

¹¹⁹ “Tensas Discusiones Motivó la Conservación del Veto Obrero en la Corporación Minera,” *El Diario*, 25 August 1961, 7.

¹²⁰ Prefect-Oruro to Paz, 29 August 1961, PR 975, ABNB. For a US account of this meeting, which is almost identical to Bolivian reports, see Stephansky to Rusk, 29 August 1961, 824.25/5-961, Box 2390, SDDF. See also ““El Gobierno ha Quedado con las Manos Libres para Firmar y Aprobar hoy el Plan Triangular,” *El Diario*, 30 August 1961, 7.

¹²¹ “Por decreto supremo se aprobó ayer el plan triangular para la Comibol,” *El Diario*, 1 September 1961. Paz’s strike-busting vow is referenced in COMIBOL Advisory Group to Paz, 13 July 1962, PR 985, ABNB.

rehabilitation program.”¹²² Meanwhile, the White House thanked Paz in two weeks later with a \$7 million credit to cover losses during the strike, and authorized \$750,000 in USAID funds and \$260,000 in “Presidential Funds” to organize two new Bolivian army engineering battalions for development programs in the countryside.¹²³ Stephansky was optimistic that “if we carry out [the Alliance for Progress] program with [a] sense of urgency before year’s end, we could possibly channel GOB thinking into [a] constructive development approach.”¹²⁴

Despite publically rejecting charges that US aid programs were conditioned on harsh labor reforms, Ambassador Stephansky and IDB economists were the very individuals driving the toughest line.¹²⁵ Ideological technocrats who sincerely believed their developmentalist theories, they were in fact serving the Kennedy administration’s anticommunist crusade. The Bolivian miners refused to be depoliticized, however, and their organized resistance to the Alliance for Progress would continue to cause headaches in La Paz and Washington. Political strategists and development-minded economists were firmly wed, however, in their eager desire to rid the Bolivian mines of communism, and US aid programs served them both as powerful, authoritarian tools.

¹²² Stephansky to Rusk, 4 September 1961, 824.25/5-961, Box 2390, SDDF.

¹²³ Prior to 1961, Bolivia had two engineering battalions. These funds went to build the “General Pando” 3rd Engineering Battalion, and soon afterward, Alliance funds covered the full expenses of the “Alto de la Alianza” 4th Engineering Battalion. See Noel, “La génération des jeunes officiers,” 463.

¹²⁴ Stephansky to Rusk, 1 and 15 September 1961, 724.12/8-960, Box 1563, SDDF. The \$7 million package was authorized in late August, but Stephansky withheld this from President Paz until after Triangular had been approved. See Rusk to Embassy, 17 August 1961, same folder.

¹²⁵ Stephansky was publically adamant that “the US government has not established any conditions to lending aid.” Meanwhile, IDB officials consistently swore that Triangular “has no conditions,” and that it “does not contain negative measures for the workers.” See “El Gobierno de EEUU no ha Establecido Condiciones para Prestar Ayuda a Nuestro País,” *El Diario*, 31 July 1961, 4; and “Afirma el BID que el Plan Triangular para Comibol no Establece Ninguna Condición,” *El Diario*, 29 July 1961, 7.

Development and its Discontents

In order to obtain approval for the Triangular Plan, President Paz suspended constitutional liberties for almost the entire year. Yet his second 90-day state of siege was set to expire on 7 September, and fifty communist leaders still remained incommunicado in Amazonian detention camps. Bolivian leftists, especially communist miners from Siglo XX, agitated for their colleagues' release, and Paz Estenssoro finally relented once Triangular had been safely approved. It was quickly clear that the Alliance for Progress in Bolivia would meet with fierce resistance in the mines, and that it would continue to be used to justify growing military strength and unceasing shipments of tear gas and riot gear.

Aside from battling Oblate priests and nuns, Siglo XX's communist miners took advantage of the long strike in mid-1961 to organize fresh cadres, especially among the women of the mining camp. One miner's wife recalls that the Triangular Plan, and its accompanying repression, "awoke the indignation of the entire mining population." Wives of those arrested had gone to La Paz one-by-one to demand their husbands' release, but the government "turned a deaf ear" to their pleas. When they returned to camp, several of the women met with Communist Party members, who agreed to help them organize the *Comité de Amas de Casa de Siglo XX*.¹²⁶ In late July, the committee, which its founders later admitted had been "chiefly aligned with the PCB," sent a delegation to the capital where they declared themselves on hunger strike pending the union leaders' release. The *Comité* lost one hunger striker, Manuela de Cejas, to death before President Paz finally agreed to release the prisoners. A poem written in homage to Manuela vividly demonstrates the level of anger amongst the Siglo XX miners and their families regarding Triangular and its US backers.

You went to the La Paz hunger strikes,
arriving at the doors of COMIBOL,

¹²⁶ See Author's Note, viii.

tear gas surrounded your children,
launched by agents paid by the Yankee dollar.
Manuela de Cejas,
valiant woman without equal,
you offered your life for the working class,
fighting alongside your husband
against the Triangular Plan,
opposing the White Massacre...

...Onward, women!
Toward the liberation of a people
oppressed by American capitalists,
tyrants, wagers of massacres, murdering dogs.
One day they will fall
into a disgusting, endless abyss.¹²⁷

Hours after Paz Estenssoro signed the 31 August Triangular Plan decrees, he released Escóbar and Pimentel.¹²⁸ When the two union leaders arrived in La Paz that afternoon, they told the *Amas de Casa* that they would be unable to immediately return to the mining camp, explaining that “we have many commitments to take care of here.” The women were furious. “How are you going to say this to us after we have been in La Paz for so many days on your behalf?” The women decided to trick Escóbar and Pimentel onto their bus, promising them that when they arrived in the suburb of El Alto, high on the Altiplano, the two men could return to the city. When they reached El Alto, however, three of the women positioned themselves in front of the doorway. “No, *compañeros*, you are coming with us! We came here to fight, we sacrificed, we carried out the hunger strike to bring you back. So you are coming with us!” Escóbar and Pimentel were livid, but the women held their ground. When the two flustered union leaders retook their seats, Escóbar’s wife Alicia broke out in tears, saying,

¹²⁷ “White Massacre”: mass firings. At first, the *Comité* was ad-hoc. Later, it became a permanent fixture in Siglo XX. Gerónima Jaldín de Romero interviews, in María L. Lagos, ed., *Nos Hemos Forjado Así: Al Rojo Vico y a Puro Golpe: Historias del Comité de Amas de Casa de Siglo XX* (La Paz: Plural, 2006), 37, 43-7. See also “Conmoverador Cuadro Ofrecen 200 Huelguistas en Sede Fabril,” *El Diario*, 17 August 1961, 7; and “Hasta Ayer 11 Huelguistas de Hambre se Hallaban Graves y Había 46 Casos de Inanición,” *El Diario*, 19 August 1961, 7.

¹²⁸ “Recuperaron su Libertad Tres Dirigentes Mineros Confinados,” *El Diario*, 1 September 1961, 6.

We have fought so much and still now they say this, that they don't want to return with us. I really don't know what to say. All of these women, not just your wives, have sacrificed so much, and they receive this in return? No, you two are badly mistaken. You have no idea how you are making these women feel right now. But you better pay attention. You ignore us, but you better pay attention to these women.

As the bus approached Bolivia's mining region, the women began to see masses of workers who came out to celebrate Escóbar and Pimentel's release, with marching bands greeting them in each village. When they reached the outskirts of Siglo XX, the freshly-liberated union leaders were lifted onto the shoulders of their fellow miners and carried the rest of the way to the *Plaza del Minero*. During a celebratory feast the following day, Escóbar turned to one of the women and said, "You were right to say that we should be sure. I now feel prouder, happier, because I know that I have support." The women were not so lucky. One of them notes that "afterward came the fights in each home. We hunger strikers won the fight in La Paz only to end up in fights with our husbands."¹²⁹

With Paz's decision to release the leftists, the CIA fretted that "Bolivia's most effective Communist agitators" were back at their posts, a development that "enhanced the possibility of disorders."¹³⁰ Meanwhile, the State Department worried that Bolivia remained the "weakest of all the countries on the continent," and that it was still the "prime Soviet target in South America." US officials compared Bolivia to an "under-nourished, ill-clad, ill-housed individual who is exposed to tuberculosis," and believed that the only way to prevent the country from catching the disease – communism – was to do "everything we can to prevent Soviet access to the internal affairs of Bolivia." The State Department warned that, if permitted, Moscow would have more success at rapid economic development since it would have the

¹²⁹ Gerónima, María Fernández de Valeriano, and Brígida Fernández de Velarde, in Lagos, ed., *Nos hemos forjado así*, 43-7.

¹³⁰ CIA, CIWS, 12 October 1961, CREST.

assistance of a Castro-type government which, being less responsive to public pressure than is the present government, might well engage in sufficiently repressive measures to bring about by force the reforms we have been maintaining are necessary.¹³¹

If by “Castro-type government” the State Department meant authoritarian, the Alliance for Progress was rapidly moving in that direction. On 5 September, President Kennedy signed National Security Action Memorandum (NSAM) 88, in which he ordered his administration to take additional steps to “train the Armed Forces of Latin America in controlling mobs, guerrillas, etc.” Explaining his view that the “military occupy an extremely important strategic position in Latin America,” Kennedy – who days later heralded to the UN the “Decade of Development” – called on his government to “increase the intimacy between our Armed Forces and the military of Latin America.”¹³² The following month, Kennedy met with Pentagon officials at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, where he reiterated his desire for the US armed forces to work “in conjunction with indigenous military forces toward the attainment of US national objectives in Latin America.” The Defense Department responded enthusiastically with a list of ways it could support “existing US political, economic, and social measures” in Latin America, and contribute directly to the “implementation of the Alliance for Progress.”¹³³

Nowhere was President Kennedy’s interest in “controlling mobs, guerrillas, etc.” more evident than in Paz Estenssoro’s Bolivia. Shortly after Kennedy issued NSAM 88, the Paz government announced yet another fabricated coup, its third such ruse that year, and rounded up what the CIA called a “heterogeneous group of rightists and leftists.” Two days later, on 21 October, President Paz declared his third 90-day state of siege in eight months,

¹³¹ Belcher to Woodward, 29 September 1961, 724.5411/3-161, Box 1564, SDDF.

¹³² Kennedy, “NSAM 88,” 5 September 1961, National Security Action Memoranda, NSF-JFK, JFKL.

¹³³ Joint Chiefs to Kennedy, 30 November 1961, document 89, *FRUS, 1961-1963: Volume XII – American Republics*.

and proceeded to implement a reform long sought by US officials, the raising of fuel prices.¹³⁴ These dual measures sparked violent riots by thousands of students, who destroyed a gas station; the offices of the government newspaper, *La Nación*; and two police stations. Paz responded by closing schools for the remainder of the year, imposing press censorship, and ordering his security services to brutally repress the demonstration.¹³⁵

A Bolivian general told the US Embassy that the death toll was five times what the government had admitted, meaning as many as twenty students lay dead. Far from being moved to reproach, Ambassador Stephansky requested an immediate shipment of 3,000 tear gas grenades, explaining that the Bolivian police were using them up at a rate of 200 per day. Two days later, a CIA-contractor plane delivered 3,300 grenades to USAID's mission director in La Paz. Secretary Rusk asked Stephansky to stress to President Paz that this shipment was "clear-cut evidence of support for his government," which should completely quash any thought...that elements [in] this government [are] sitting by waiting for Paz to fall."¹³⁶

After three more years, and tens of millions of dollars in US assistance, Paz did fall. In the meantime, development-minded US policymakers interpreted Paz's repressive machinery as providing the necessary "authority...[and] discipline...[to] bring [Bolivia's]

¹³⁴ Stephansky later boasted that he had threatened to "hold back on [USAID] disbursements and programs" when he "required the GOB to increase gasoline prices." MEMCON, 28 May 1963, INCO Mining, Minerals, and Metals BOL, Box 3540, SDANF. See also "Fue Develado un Complot!" *El Diario*, 19 October 1961, 1.

¹³⁵ CIA, CIWS, 27 October 1961, CREST; "Ha Sido Autorizado la Elevación del Precio de la Gasolina a 700 el Litro," *El Diario*, 21 October 1961, 7; "Declaróse concluido el año escolar," 22 October 1961," *El Diario*, 22 October 1961, 6; "Enérgica reacción estudiantil por el aumento de las tarifas de transporte," *El Diario*, 22 October 1961, 7.

¹³⁶ Stephansky to Rusk, 26 October 1961, 724.00/6-162, Box 1560, SDDF; Stephansky to Rusk, 25 and 26 October 1961; and Rusk to Embassy, 27 October 1961, 724.5411/3-161, Box 1564, SDDF. State Department cables refer to the airplane as a "private contractor" operated by "Southern Air Transport." The former CIA Station Chief confirmed that this company "was ours." Interviews with Sternfield.

illiterate, unskilled population into the modern world.”¹³⁷ Celebrations would have been premature, however, and Stephansky noted that “the real test [of the] government’s determination to live up to [its] commitments...will of course come when labor troubles develop” during the application period of Triangular’s mass firings.¹³⁸ With Escóbar and Pimentel back at the crucial Siglo XX mine, the Alliance for Progress in Bolivia was certain to meet with fierce resistance. It would continue to reveal a strongly authoritarian face.

Conclusion

It seems that the closer historians study President Kennedy’s foreign policy in individual countries, the more heavy-handed it appears.¹³⁹ From its very inception, political goals drove the Alliance for Progress, and the administration’s fierce ideological bent served merely to exaggerate and radicalize the level to which Washington intervened abroad. In Bolivia, Kennedy’s much-heralded program brought with it deep American involvement in nearly every aspect of the country’s social, political, and economic life. Their main paradigm was authoritarian development, which built upon ongoing Bolivian programs wherein Paz sought total political control, and in which the armed forces had embraced a central role. Taking the nationalized mines as its logical starting point, the Alliance for Progress adopted a strongly authoritarian mine rehabilitation plan drafted largely by the Bolivians themselves. Resistance by the non-MNR miners was swift and fierce, however, forcing the Alliance to rest squarely on political repression. Bolstered by Paz’s apparent

¹³⁷ Hilsman to Woodward, 18 July 1961, document 4, *FRUS, 1961-1963: Volume XII – American Republics*, microfiche supplement.

¹³⁸ Stephansky to Rusk, 29 August and 4 September 1961, 824.25/5-961, Box 2390, SDDF.

¹³⁹ See Simpson, *Economists with Guns*; Rabe, *US Intervention in British Guiana*; and Victor V. Nemchenok, “In search of stability amid chaos: US policy toward Iran, 1961-63,” *Cold War History* 10 (August 2010), 341-69.

resolve, US developmentalists showered the Bolivian government with police, military and economic assistance, willingly serving as foot soldiers in Washington's geostrategic battle against communism in the heart of South America.

Within eight months of taking office, the Kennedy administration had successfully pulled Bolivia back from the brink. Basking in the new administration's development orientation, Paz Estenssoro had warmed to the Alliance for Progress as the most promising path forward for his revolutionary regime. Communism had not yet been defeated in Bolivia, however, and as the Alliance moved along, liberal developmentalists would be called upon to justify ever growing levels of repression against leftist opponents of the Triangular Plan labor reforms. For US and Bolivian officials seeking political hegemony in these regions, economists' anticommunist theories were a Godsend, as were their tendency to justify the rise of the Bolivian armed forces.

Chapter Two

Crisis and Intervention: the Alliance for Progress in Action

A crisis in Bolivia's political orientation is near at hand.
- *Ambassador Stephansky, 29 September 1962¹*

Before the ink could dry on Kennedy's Alliance for Progress in Bolivia, tensions began to emerge both in Washington and La Paz. US conservatives, viewing the Paz regime as both repressive and socialist, were the first to question the wisdom of large-scale assistance to the MNR. Meanwhile, Paz's domestic opposition on the right and left fiercely resisted his authoritarian measures, creating an environment of perennial political crisis. From the mines to the cities, supposed beneficiaries of US aid rejected its harsh conditions and accompanying repression. The Kennedy administration had initially adopted development as a tool to combat political unrest, and anti-Paz disturbances only strengthened US liberals' resolve to deepen Washington's commitment. For the Alliance for Progress, these crises gave rise to an increasingly authoritarian program, demonstrating clearly the geostrategic nature of development ideology as a form of foreign intervention.

The Debate in Washington

Despite the enthusiasm with which the Kennedy administration approved economic and military assistance to revolutionary Bolivia, there was significant resistance especially in conservative circles. Viewing the MNR regime as a leftist authoritarian state, some foreign policy bureaucrats and conservative US press outlets decried the White House's rapid incorporation of Bolivia within the nascent Alliance. The debate between these "realists" and

¹ Stephansky to Rusk, 29 September 1962, "Bolivia, General, 8/612-12/62," Box 10, NSF-CO, JFKL.

Kennedy's liberal developmentalists delayed the approval of additional aid money until mid-1962, and it revealed the geostrategic nature of both sides of the US foreign policy debate.

The underlying question – for conservatives and liberals alike – was how best to ensure that Bolivia remained a loyal ally safely beyond the reach of international communism.

Almost as soon as the Kennedy administration successfully adopted Bolivia within its Alliance for Progress, the White House asked Congress to authorize the sale of 50,000 tons of tin from US strategic stockpiles, one quarter of total world production.² This affront prompted President Paz to pen a frantic letter to Kennedy, noting that the stockpile sale “does not coincide...with the plans of the Alliance for Progress.” COMIBOL President Bedregal told White House aide Richard Goodwin that the selloff went “in flagrant contradiction” to the Kennedy administration's developmental goals, adding that he considered it to be “an act of real economic aggression.”³

In a lengthy response on 6 October, which received widespread coverage in the Bolivian press, Kennedy wrote Paz Estenssoro that he should “be assured that my Government retains a deep interest and concern in the rapid development of the Bolivian nation and the economic and social program of the Bolivian people.” Kennedy told the Bolivian President, “I assure you that we will not take any action – in tin or in any other matter – which will tend to frustrate our mutual goal of a better life for the people of Bolivia,” adding that Washington would “sell no tin from our stockpile without first consulting with your government.” President Kennedy explained that he was merely seeking Congressional authorization for stockpile sales that he would consider only “at a time of world-wide shortage” with the purpose of “discouraging tin consumers from substituting

² World production was 187,000 tons in 1961. US Geological Survey, *Tin Statistics* (Washington, DC: GPO, 2005), 2.

³ Paz to Kennedy, 16 September 1961, “Bolivia, General, 1961,” Box 10, NSF-CO; MEMCON, 13 September 1961, PR 985, ABNB; and “U.S. Aid Program Undergoes Test,” *New York Times*, 20 September 1961, 12.

other materials for their normal tin consumption.” Kennedy assured Paz of his commitment to “protect the long-term stability and continued prosperity of the tin market.”⁴

In the two days before receiving this bold statement of support, Paz wrote two additional letters to President Kennedy. One was private and referred to the June 1961 anticommunist crackdown Paz Estenssoro launched in order to gain approval of the Triangular Plan over the strong objections of communist miners. In order to pass the mine rehabilitation program, Paz explained that it had been “necessary to seize the communist labor union leaders,” whose opposition threatened to thrust Bolivia “into a period of disorder and anarchy, with the government unable any longer to maintain itself.” Paz wrote that the resulting general strike had made it “essential...to break up the unity of the labor unions and to separate the masses of workers from the leaders in the service of International Communism.” The Bolivian President explained that he had engaged in “direct negotiations” with urban unions, promising raises for those who broke the general strike, a tactic that bore fruit and occurred with the “full cooperation” of US Embassy officials. The government’s instability to come up with the money was “giving rise to a reactivation of the social demands, against under the direction of pro-Communist leaders.” The situation was becoming critical, Paz explained, since the end of October had been “fixed as the last date for meeting the demands.” The Bolivian president implored Kennedy to consider providing his government with “a minimum of \$3 million immediately in order to meet the just demands of the workers.”⁵ In early November, Kennedy sent word through USAID Director Fowler Hamilton that Paz’s request had been approved and that Kennedy was “impressed by the

⁴ Kennedy to Paz, 6 October 1961, “Bolivia, General, 1961,” Box 112, POF, JFKL. “No Daré Ningún Paso en Cuanto al Estaño o Cualquier Asunto que Afecte Bolivia,” *El Diario*, 7 October 1961, 7.

⁵ Paz to Kennedy, 5 October 1961, “Security, 1961-3,” Box 112, POF, JFKL. See also “Fabriles Amenazan con una Huelga a Partir del Día 5,” *El Diario*, 30 September 1961, 6.

courage and determination with which your Government has undertaken measures to achieve social progress and embark upon a long-range development program.”⁶

Finally, a third, public letter from President Paz reminded Kennedy that at the August 1961 OAS meeting, Bolivia had been one of the first Latin American nations to submit a ten-year “National Economic and Social Development Plan” as called for by the Alliance. Since his government had been so quick to fulfill the requirement, Paz hoped President Kennedy would look favorably on a \$45 million request to fund an “emergency program” that would permit the “immediate commencement of the execution” of the development plan. Much to the chagrin of the Kennedy White House, this letter remained unanswered until early 1962, due in part to growing doubts in the State Department regarding the wisdom of continued aid to revolutionary Bolivia.⁷

Supporting the \$45 million request was Kennedy’s “Special Economic Representative” to Bolivia, University of Virginia developmental economist Rowland Egger. Sent to Bolivia in the wake of Washington’s adoption of the anticommunist mine rehabilitation program, Egger was a consistent pro-Paz voice in the US foreign policy establishment. After several weeks in La Paz, the economist praised President Kennedy’s “profoundly perceptive” decision to “stay with the Bolivians.” Acknowledging that the Bolivian Revolution had been “messy,” and conceding that it had “skidded dangerously close to communism,” Egger felt sure that President Paz was “now moving – perhaps less rapidly than some of the more impatient among us desire – to consolidate the revolution...[and] slowly beginning to turn in favor of a firm alignment with the democratic forces of world

⁶ Hamilton to Ambassador Andrade, 7 November 1961, “Bolivia, General, 1961,” Box 10, NSF-CO, JFKL. See also Weise to Lane, 9 November 1961, “Memoranda, July-December 1961,” Box 1, Lots 63D389 and 63D61, SDLF.

⁷ Paz to Kennedy, 4 October 1961, “Security, 1961-1963,” Box 112, POF, JFKL. According to *Time* magazine, as late as August 1962, only Chile, Colombia, and Bolivia had submitted plans. “Troubled Alliance,” *Time*, 10 August 1962.

politics.” Given Paz’s favorable political disposition, the economist recommended that Kennedy approve the \$45 million request, which would alleviate the “short-term stresses and dislocations” caused by Triangular’s labor reforms, especially if a portion of the aid were set aside for local development projects “along the lines of the TVA [the Depression-era Tennessee Valley Authority.]” It is impossible to know if Egger was bothered by Paz’s repression; it merited no mention in his first letter back to the White House. On the contrary, the economist closed his letter: “In short, I am having a wonderful time.”⁸

Conservatives in Washington were less sanguine. Almost three months after Paz’s October request, Kennedy aide Arthur Schlesinger threatened to “file some sort of protest” against USAID’s failure to move forward on the \$45 million request. White House Assistant Budget Director Kenneth Hansen answered combatively the following week, accusing the developmental crowd of advocating that Washington “blindly accept the burdensome support of Bolivia’s development on the basis of a rather esoteric plan and great faith in a dramatic turn-around in the political orientation and administrative efficiency throughout many levels in that society.” Rather than generously funding Bolivia’s ten-year development plan, which he disparaged as an “attempt at hasty pump-priming,” Hansen recommended the administration restrict its developmental efforts to Triangular and its accompanying anticommunist labor reforms. Hansen admitted that his proposal was harsh, but he offered that “the realities of development and social and economic growth are also harsh.” He concluded that it would be better to invest “time, money, and manpower” into strictly-controlled programs like Triangular than to make a “precipitate and headlong plunge into an

⁸ Egger to Kennedy, 5 October 1961, “Bolivia, General, 1961,” Box 10, NSF-CO, JFKL.

adventure which, in my judgment, could prove to be exceedingly disappointing and which may result in considerable damage to the Alliance for Progress.”⁹

Conservative criticism of Kennedy’s aid programs in Bolivia also appeared in the US press. In the *Los Angeles Times*, political scientist William S. Stokes criticized Kennedy’s generosity toward Paz Estenssoro, writing that “[e]ven in the face of the most overwhelming evidence that the government of the MNR is authoritarian and that its economic system of socialism is a colossal failure, the United States has almost literally leaped to extend financial aid and support.” Stokes warned that “[i]t seems fair to say that there is a good chance that Bolivia will continue its leftist path and might move into the Communist or Cuban orbit,” adding that “it is questionable that American interests are advanced by using foreign aid to support political authoritarianism and economic socialism.” The *Chicago Tribune*’s Jules Debois agreed, writing in early 1962 that “Paz Estenssoro only allows fragmentary political parties, including the Communists,” keeping anticommunist Bolivians like ex-President Enrique Hertzog in “enforced exile.” Debois condemned the Paz government for leaving the “easily mobilized...Indian masses...vulnerable to exploitation by the Communists.”¹⁰

Liberals answered these criticisms with their own opinion pieces. British academic John Halcro Ferguson wrote in the *Washington Post* that the MNR was “perhaps the most stable regime Bolivia has ever known,” adding that despite “calamitous” economic conditions, there was hope that the “carefully worked out” mine rehabilitation program would encourage Bolivian development. The *New York Times* praised President Kennedy for responding favorably to Paz’s requests for economic assistance, a move that convinced the

⁹ Schlesinger to Smith, 30 December 1961, “Bolivia, General, 1/62-7/62,” Box 10, NSF-CO, JFKL; Hansen to Schlesinger, 3 January 1962; and Hansen to Moscoso, 3 January 1962, “Bolivia,” Box WH-3, Schlesinger Papers, JFKL, 1, 3.

¹⁰ “Latin American Reds Present Threat to U.S.,” *Los Angeles Times*, 10 December 1961, B3; and “U.S. Program of Aid Faces a Tough Task with Bolivia Reds,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 22 January 1961, 2.

Bolivian leader to spurn Moscow's more generous aid offers. The newspaper also expressed its enthusiastic support for the Triangular Plan, including its labor reforms requiring the Bolivian government to "discharge...some 7,000 surplus workers."¹¹

The Bolivian government provided fuel for its conservative enemies in early 1962 by once again demonstrating reluctance to go along with Washington's attempts to sanction Cuba at the January 1962 OAS meeting. *Washington Post* columnist Drew Pearson complained about the "six abstaining nations [whose] pussyfooting position" undermined hemispheric unity. Meanwhile in La Paz, deadly street battles between Cuba's supporters and detractors broke out, each side pressuring the government position at the OAS.¹² US officials relentlessly pressured Paz to come out against Cuba, and Secretary Rusk recruited a bipartisan US Senate delegation to lean on Latin American holdouts at the meeting. Nonetheless, Bolivia's recently-appointed Foreign Minister, leftist José Fellman Velarde,¹³ remained immune to US arguments that Cuba's participation in the regional organization would represent an "unfortunate precedent."¹⁴

For Kennedy's economists and top aides, Bolivia's MNR was a model regime for economic development. It repressed its right and left opposition with equal vigor, defended previously enacted redistributive reforms, and looked unswervingly toward the United States for political direction and economic support. Where liberals saw an authoritarian reformer,

¹¹ "Largesse did little for Bolivia," *Washington Post*, 5 November 1961, B3; "Bolivia Hunts Funds to Avert Collapse," *New York Times*, 10 January 1962, 49.

¹² The street battles were recorded by an American eyewitness. See Richard Patch, "The Pro and Anti-Catristas in La Paz: An Eyewitness Account of a Political Riot," *West Coast South American Series* 9 (February 1962). See also "Un muerto y 28 hubo ayer," *El Diario*, 24 January 1962, 7.

¹³ When Paz appointed Fellman in early January, the US Embassy was concerned that he was "vigorous and outspoken" in favor of "formalizing relations with the Soviet Union. See Williams to State, 9 January 1962, 724.12/8-960, Box 1563, SDDF.

¹⁴ Williams to Fellman, 18 January 1962; Williams to Ambassador Arze Quiroga, 6 February 1962, LE-3-R-357, RREE; and "Bipartisan plaudits won by Rusk," *Washington Post*, 7 February 1962.

however, US conservatives saw only Marxist-inspired dictatorship. Kennedy's detractors despised the MNR's state-led growth model and sympathized with Bolivia's long-suffering rightwing opposition. Ideologies mattered little, however, in a US government bureaucracy dominated by strategic considerations. Neither conservative anticommunists, nor liberal developmentalists, would win the day without convincing policymakers that their approach would best protect US geopolitical interests in the heart of South America. The persistence of political crisis in Bolivia would play directly into the liberals' hands, as they had consistently advocated for Washington to make a full-scale commitment to Bolivia's economic and political trajectory.

Political Crisis and Economic Development

The strategic debate in Washington pitted conservative realists against liberal interventionists, each arguing that its approach would better shore up Bolivia within the US sphere of influence. Had the Paz government governed a more stable country, it is very likely the conservatives would have won. By contrast, as political crises snowballed, liberals gained the upper hand. Kennedy and his economists offered an aggressively militarized version of economic development, and they capitalized on Bolivian crises to gain the reluctant approval of the foreign policy establishment.

Ambassador Ben Stephansky, who later complained that "Bolivia was a place that was being shat on" by conservative bureaucrats,¹⁵ warned the State Department in mid-November 1961 that the Bolivian left was mobilizing to "frustrate not only the Triangular Plan, but also [the] expanded US aid program under [the] President's Special Program for Bolivia and [the] Alliance for Progress." Stephansky was "encouraged by [the] Bolivian

¹⁵ Stephansky Oral History, JFKL, 17. The interview transcript incorrectly reads, "shad on," which has been corrected in the text above.

government's alertness [to] the problem," but believed that Washington "may have to help GOB when it comes really firm to grips with the communists." For the economist-turned-ambassador, development would require a one-year supply of riot gear, thus avoiding repeated emergency shipments of the sort provided in support of Paz Estenssoro's state of siege decrees in February, June, and October. Stephansky's request included 60 tear gas guns, 200 US army helmets, 500 gas masks, 13,000 tear gas projectiles, 250 12-gauge riot guns, 15,000 rounds of 12-gauge ammunition, 400 38-Special revolvers, and 15,000 rounds of 38-Special ammunition.¹⁶

In mid-January 1962, Stephansky was the only Latin American ambassador to participate in the "Working Group on Problems of the Alliance for Progress," which also included Kennedy aide Richard Goodwin, Alliance Administrator Teodoro Moscoso, and military-led development extraordinaire Walter Rostow, at the time serving as the State Department Policy Planning chief.¹⁷ The working group acknowledged that Bolivia posed "profoundly difficult problems," but felt confident that the country's ten-year development plan had "passed through the Punta del Este barrier." Recommending that Washington push forward with new development programs, the working group concluded that "the country's leaders are well-endowed with that indispensable precondition for development – the will to modernize – and this may be the most important ingredient of all."¹⁸

Development-minded voices for intervention received yet another boost in January, when President Kennedy's multi-agency "Assessment Team on the Internal Security

¹⁶ Stephansky to Rusk, 13 November, 724.5411/3-161, Box 1564; and Stephansky to Rusk, 20 December 1961, 824.25/10-161, Box 2390, SDDF.

¹⁷ For more on Rostow's affinity for bombs as harbingers of economic development, see Milne, *America's Rasputin*.

¹⁸ "Highlights of the First Meeting of the Working Group on Problems of the Alliance for Progress," 16 January 1962, document 37, *FRUS, 1961-63: Volume XII – American Republics*.

Situation in South America” revealed that Bolivia and Colombia were two countries that “require urgent attention.” Made up of officials from the State and Defense Departments, USAID, the FBI, and the CIA, the assessment team reported that both countries suffered from “critical problems in internal security accompanied by violence.” The “principle problem” was the need for “recognition of the urgency to do something now,” especially to contain “disorders developing from economic and social pressures,” which were precisely where “much of the communist threat is based.” In Bolivia, ongoing authoritarian development programs provided a ready-made answer.¹⁹

A week after Kennedy’s assessment team pegged Bolivia as needing urgent attention, the State Department INR praised Bolivia’s employment of the military for development in a report entitled “Creating Allies for Socio-Economic Progress with Political Stability in Latin America.” Already, “one-third of its small army...is engaged in colonization and road-building in eastern Bolivia,” INR explained, adding that “another one-third is working on agricultural projects on the Altiplano.” The report waxed lyrical on the benefits of Bolivia’s civic action projects, which were bringing about an “improvement of living standards at the same time that they involved the military in the Alliance, increased popular respect for the military and indoctrinated the military in the benefits of widespread socio-economic progress.” Recognizing that not all Latin American militaries would be as “eager to participate” in the Alliance for Progress, INR recommended nonetheless a “large-scale expansion of the present limited civil [sic-civic] action programs” into neighboring countries.²⁰

¹⁹ “Report and Recommendations of the Washington Assessment Team on the Internal Security Situation in South America,” 10 January 1962, document 90, in *idem*.

²⁰ INR, “Latin American Political Stability and the Alliance for Progress,” 17 January 1962, document 38; and Hughes to Woodward, 19 January 1962, document 39, in *idem*.

Despite his frequent skepticism of the development program in Bolivia, Secretary Rusk found INR's ideas regarding military civic action to be "provocative and stimulating." Rusk authorized Stephansky to visit US Southern Command in Panama on his way back to La Paz to discuss "military matters related to Bolivia," and noted that the Alliance for Progress was "primarily political in nature, ultimately designed to encourage the growth of reasonably stable governments capable of absorbing reform and change, secure from both the extreme Left and the extreme Right." Concerned that "Bolivia, Ecuador, and one or two others could well become Cubas," Rusk was warming to military-led development, which might permit Washington to break the communists' "monopoly of sympathy toward change."²¹

Back in La Paz, Ambassador Stephansky continued beating the drums of authoritarian development. "Past training of the *carabineros* [police] has been eminently successful," the ambassador reported in March, "with notable success in quelling riots." By bolstering President Paz's security services, Stephansky was sure that the Bolivian government would discontinue its "toleration of communists within the party," move to "curb labor anarchy," and resolve to shepherd the country down the "long, difficult road of development." Conceding nonetheless the existence of "cabinet-level criticism" of the Alliance in Bolivia, Stephansky believed it was wise to hold off on new projects until Washington could work out its differences. Bolivian political crises, of which Paz Estenssoro had no shortage, were the key to convincing holdouts.²²

²¹ "Highlights of Discussion at the Secretary of State's Policy Planning Committee," 13 February 1962, document 40, in *idem.*; and US Southern Command to Rusk, 17 January 1962, 724.5/3-460, Box 1563, SDDF.

²² Stephansky to State, 17 March 1962, attached to Osborne to State, 25 April 1962, 724.5411/3-161, Box 1564; US Embassy to State, "Annual Politico-Economic Assessment – 1962," 8 March 1962, 824.00/1-2362, Box 2387, SDDF; and Battle to Smith, 20 March 1962, "Bolivia, General, 1/62-7/62," Box 10, NSF-CO, JFKL.

On 20 March 1962, Ambassador Stephansky hosted a meeting with President Paz and key cabinet ministers. The Bolivian President expressed frustration that, despite the fact that his government had submitted a development plan back in August 1961, Chile and Argentina had received privileged treatment. Ongoing negotiations with Washington had begun to make his government “look absurd,” Paz complained, characterizing delays as a “violation [of] US word with respect [to an] emergency interim program until [the] Alliance²³ got started.” His regime was at a crisis point, Paz warned, threatening to consider “desperate measures in order [to] save his country.” Intimating that he would give the Kennedy administration one more chance, President Paz informed Stephansky that he was dispatching two of his most trusted ministers to Washington to achieve a “breakthrough.”²⁴

With Paz providing the crisis, White House aides brought pressure to bear on the foreign policy establishment. Richard Goodwin complained to Secretary Rusk in early April that “[c]onsidering the amount of emphasis we have placed on Bolivian development, this record is very, very poor.” Goodwin was concerned that Washington’s “lack of vigorous action” was prompting “severe criticism of the Alliance for Progress by important figures of the noncommunist left” and warned that “we are headed for possible disaster” if a major development program were not approved “within the next four months.” Pointing to a recent Soviet offer to establish a “permanent trade mission” in La Paz, Goodwin predicted that if the US did not “make good on [the] Alliance for Progress,” Moscow would “make Bolivia a showpiece of Socialist development, just as it was helping Cuba become a Socialist showpiece in the Caribbean.”²⁵

²³ “*Alianza*” in the original.

²⁴ Stephansky to Rusk, 20 March 1962, “Bolivia, General, 1/62-7/62,” Box 10, NSF-CO, JFKL.

²⁵ Goodwin to Rusk, 7 April 1962, “Bolivia, 5/61-12/62,” Box 389, NSF-Dungan, JFKL; Stephansky to Rusk, 6 and 7 April 1962, “Bolivia, General, 1/62-7/62,” Box 10, NSF-CO, JFKL.

Hoping to rally support for Paz's MNR, President Kennedy sent USAID General Counsel Seymour Rubin as his "personal representative" to Bolivia's tenth anniversary celebrations of the 9 April 1952 revolution. Rubin, who had served on Kennedy's economic mission in 1961, reported back that Paz went "out of his way to excoriate communism and the local communists, largely on the ground of their disservice to the Bolivian national interest." In a long report to White House aide Schlesinger, copied to newly-appointed Assistant Secretary for Latin America Edwin Martin, and Alliance Administrator Moscoso, Rubin warned that there "exists considerable pressure to accept aid from the Soviet bloc" within Bolivia, attributable in large part to "dissatisfaction with progress made so far under the Alliance." Rubin expressed confidence, nonetheless, that "Paz is for the present and foreseeable future firmly in control and...his policy will be firmly pro-Alliance." Arguing against those who questioned continued aid, Rubin wrote that "a base has been formed in Bolivia for a breakthrough on economic progress." He concluded that "continued assistance to Bolivia is in the best interests of the US and presents substantially fewer risks than a 'hard' line which would terminate aid unless and until basic reforms, political and economic, are made."²⁶

Despite White House pressure, bureaucratic doubts persisted, and the State Department's 20 April "Guidelines for Policy and Operations" represented its harshest anti-Paz position to date. Proposing that the US begin seeking alternatives to the "dictatorship of the Marxist-oriented MNR party," the Department recommended encouraging a "greater influence of the military in Bolivian politics," which would exert a "moderating influence" on the Bolivian government. The report also suggested the need to begin working closer with

²⁶ Rubin to Moscoso, Martin, and Schlesinger, 16 April 1962, "Bolivia, 5/61-12/62," Box 389, NSF-Ralph Dungan, JFKL.

Paz's rightwing opposition, and prepare for the possibility that "the violent overthrow of the present Bolivian government" could occur.²⁷

Stephansky issued a passionate retort to this latest attack on Paz's MNR. Explaining that the MNR had merely "adopted...[the] repressive political system that existed before the revolution," the economist argued that authoritarianism "would probably be adopted in greater or lesser degree by any other political group that assumed power while Bolivia remains in its present state of political and economic underdevelopment." The US ambassador therefore roundly rejected the State Department's view that "opposition parties could and would do a better job of developing Bolivia economically and along more democratic lines." Stephansky did not believe that a political role for the military was *ipso facto* desirable, but conceded that "qualified individual military officers in many cases could exercise a moderating influence." Instead of encouraging the rightwing opposition to "replace the present party by the only means presently at their command – violent revolution," Stephansky urged "toleran[ce], in the short run, of a good deal of the non-Bolshevik Marxism of the socialist brand that has such wide currency in the intellectual life of the country." By "resigning ourselves to working with those who think they are Marxists," Washington could shore up the Paz regime against the most likely alternative, "a communist takeover by non-violent means."²⁸

Once again, crisis played into the hands of liberal interventionists. In mid-April 1962, the Chilean government announced that it would begin unilaterally diverting the rivers of the border-skirting Lauca River for a hydroelectric project, prompting tens of thousands of

²⁷ While the paper remains classified, much of it is quoted in the Embassy response. See Williams to State, 8 May 1962, "Bolivia, 1/62-7/62," Box 10, NSF-CO, JFKL.

²⁸ Williams to State, 8 May 1962, in idem. Stephansky was in Washington at the time, so the cable is signed by Williams. It bears Stephansky's indelible stamp, however, and Williams notes at the end that it was largely drafted by the Ambassador.

Bolivians to take to the streets. The unrest was seized upon by Paz's left and right opposition, and massive riots quickly moved from the Chilean Embassy to Bolivian government buildings. The headquarters of the MNR newspaper, *La Nación*, was bombed and sacked, several government ministries were stoned, vehicles were overturned and burned, and dynamite, Molotov cocktails, and firearms were used against riot police.²⁹ At least three fatalities resulted, and Stephansky reported that "large numbers on both sides [were] injured." Predictably, he requested an immediate weapons shipment, and at 2:30am on 29 April a CIA-charter plane carrying 4400 tear gas grenades left Miami destined for La Paz. Paid for by USAID's Office of Public Safety (OPS) and approved by Secretary Rusk, the shipment was followed by another charter flight the following day, filled with 1600 tear gas grenades, 500 38-Special revolvers, 250 12-gauge shotguns, 50,000 of 38-Special ammunition, and 12,500 shotgun shells.³⁰

During the rebellion, General Barrientos explained to US officials that Paz was "not demonstrating his former force in controlling the MNR party." Barrientos said the Bolivian leader was therefore "losing political strength" and failing to prevent the left wing of his party from "being used by the communists...[and] doing all they could to destroy" the Alliance for Progress. Barrientos assured the Embassy that he had no plans to intervene, saying that "because of tradition, the armed forces would never successfully govern Bolivia." He nevertheless requested Washington to "send more people" to training schools in the

²⁹ Wimert (Army Attaché) to Rusk, 18 April 1962, 724.00/4-262, Box 1560, SDDF. See also "Violenta Manifestación Estudiantil Registróse Contra Agresión Chilena," *El Diario*, 17 April 1962, 6.

³⁰ Ball to Embassy, 30 April 1962, 724.5411/3-161, Box 1564, SDDF; Stephansky to Rusk, 26 April and 5 May 1962, "Bolivia, General, 1/62-7/62," Box 10, NSF-CO, JFKL.

Panama Canal Zone and military facilities in the United States, and to continue providing materiel support and training to the Bolivian armed forces.³¹

The following day, the White House approved dispatch of a 16-man “Counterinsurgency Training Team” for a 40-day mission in La Paz. The team included experts in Special Forces, psychological warfare, civil affairs, and intelligence, and was charged with training 52 army officers and 10 air force officers in “counterinsurgency/counterguerrilla methods and practice.” Two weeks later, the Bolivian armed forces announced plans for series of maneuvers near the Chilean border, prompting the State Department to fret that such action with “US-equipped forces would be particularly embarrassing” and order Embassy officials to try and “head them off.” When approached, Bolivian officers answered innocently they had received vast amounts of US equipment, but that they had “no experience using it in the field.”³²

Bolivia received so much military aid under the aegis of the Alliance for Progress that Paraguay lodged a “detailed and worried” complaint with Washington in early April 1962. Asunción was principally concerned that a “Castro-Communist takeover in Bolivia would lead to a new war with Paraguay,” and accused the United States of “effectively disrupting the military and political balance now in existence among the American states.” Secretary Rusk responded to Paraguayan concerns by explaining that the “Bolivian armed forces have been subordinated to the discipline of the MNR party and have been under rigid control by the government.” Rusk wrote that Washington was merely assisting in the “restoration of the military establishment as a force needed to maintain internal security against Communist

³¹ Keating (Army), “White House Fact Sheet,” 24 April 1962, “Bolivia, General, 1/62-7/62,” Box 10, NSF-CO, JFKL.

³² MEMCON, 23 April 1962, “Political – General, 1962,” Box 2, Lot 64D518, SDLF; and Stephansky to RREE, 24 and 26 April 1962, LE-3-R-357, RREE. These maneuvers took place as a series of war game exercises in late July. President Paz attended approvingly. See “El Capitán General de las FFAA Inspeccionó la Zona de Maniobras,” *El Diario*, 31 July 1962, 7.

subversion...and to assist in the economic development of Bolivia.” Military hardware had nothing to do with disturbing the regional balance of power, Rusk stressed, reiterating that US military aid was meant to “counter internal communist threats, as well as to contribute to certain economic and social projects in which the Bolivian army is engaged.”³³

Kennedy’s appointment of a development-minded liberal, Edwin Martin, as Assistant Secretary for Latin America brought another pro-Paz voice to Washington. In late April, Martin requested that State Department analysts draft a thorough accounting of US attempts to undercut communism’s appeal in Bolivia, especially amongst the unions, students, and teachers. The Department reported back that the United States Information Service (USIS) had recently sent a Labor Information Officer to Bolivia to work in “close coordination” with Embassy Labor Attaché Emmanuel Boggs “in an effect to reach the rank and file of mine and factory workers through various information media.” Meanwhile, the State Department was sending “150 to 200 Bolivian students and university teachers” to the US each year, and USAID was training labor leaders in Puerto Rico. A key goal of US policy in Bolivia was the creation of a “more independent labor movement...[and] an intellectual class with a healthy skepticism of out-dated socio-political theories such as theoretical Marxism.”³⁴

The Department also believed it was important to aid in the “creation of a Bolivian national culture” relying especially on the “important culturalization role of the armed forces in this primitive, multiracial, multilingual society.” The military’s “moderate political orientation” convinced the Department that Washington should provide “early tangible support to existing army literacy programs, looking toward greater use of army facilities and personnel in a national program” that could “make use of the Peace Corps” to develop a

³³ US Embassy (Asunción) to Rusk; and Rusk to US Embassy (Asunción), 5 April and 17 August 1962, 724.5/4-562.

³⁴ Belcher to Martin and Goodwin, 26 April 1962, “Memoranda, 1962,” Box 2, Lot 64D518, SDLF.

“Bolivian Youth Corps.” US officials viewed Mexico’s revolutionary experience as a model, in which a national identity was adopted that “included folkloric tradition based upon indigenous cultures, a revolutionary tradition, and people skilled in handicrafts.” US information programs should “[e]ncourage Bolivian pride in the contribution to the nation’s culture by its indigenous people,” the State Department recommended, adding that it should try to create an “appreciation of Bolivian culture by other Latin American and European countries.”³⁵

Having fully come around to the liberal interventionist point of view as a result of the Lauca River riots, the State Department reported in mid-May that “[i]ncreased political stability in Bolivia will depend on getting economic development projects under way.” Despite acknowledging that the country’s capacity to absorb large quantities of aid was “unquestionably limited,” State’s INR wrote that “substantial progress can be registered with modest programs.” The Department began to echo Kennedy’s economists, pointing out that “President Paz is under strong pressure from the left to establish diplomatic relations with Soviet bloc, accept bloc development aid, scrap the monetary stabilization effort, and cease close cooperation with the United States.” For the time being, pro-Paz voices were on the rise in Washington.³⁶

The US debate over economic assistance to the Paz regime was long and drawn out. Conservative skeptics of development ideology believed that US support for Bolivia’s revolutionary regime went against democratic, capitalist values. Fortunately for the development-minded economists and diplomats appointed by the Kennedy White House, Bolivia’s suffered from constant political crises, and the authoritarian development paradigm

³⁵ “Bolivia: Department of State Guidelines for Policy and Operations,” 20 April 1962, “Bolivia, General, 1/62-7/62,” Box 10, NSF-CO, JFKL.

³⁶ Hilsman to Martin, “Bolivia and the Alliance for Progress,” 15 May 1962, “Bolivia, 5/61-12/62,” Box 389, NSF-Dungan, JFKL, 2-5.

they adhered to provided a useful solution. Rather than encourage its abandonment, political unrest accelerated authoritarian development, its apolitical, technocratic language serving as a powerful anticommunist weapon.

Triangular in Trouble

The centerpiece of the Alliance in Bolivia was the Triangular Plan mine rehabilitation program, conditioned on harsh labor reforms in COMIBOL. From a technocratic standpoint, the program was adopted to increase COMIBOL's profitability and therefore improve the Bolivian government's fiscal position. Economic theories notwithstanding, the program's convenient political side effect – the de-unionization of the miners' unions – was the central reason why it was enthusiastically adopted by Washington. Once again, technocratic theories of authoritarian development were ready-made tools for a politicized strategic intervention. For their part, the communist miners refused to give up without a fight.

The fiercest resisters of the US-backed Triangular Plan were the communists at Bolivia's largest tin mine, Siglo XX. Both the union's general secretary, Irineo Pimentel, and *Control Obrero* Federico Escóbar boasted legendary followings amongst the miners for their insubordination toward COMIBOL's administration and their tireless advocacy for rank-and-file workers.³⁷ In early January 1962, COMIBOL's Advisory Group – a selection of foreign experts sent to ensure implementation of the Triangular conditions – wrote to President Paz that the “real cause of the deterioration in COMIBOL's mines...is the total lack of respect by union members for management's authority.” The technicians explained that the “[c]orrection of this lack of authority was and is one of the major points considered when the Triangular Plan was formulated,” adding that it was precisely “the commitment of the

³⁷ For examples of their persistence, see Escóbar to Paz, 11 September and 17 October, 1961, PR 1658; Escobar to Paz, 21 September 1961; Pimentel to Paz, 16 November 1961, PR 985; and Escobar to Paz, 11 February 1962, PR 1609, ABNB.

Bolivian government to give back to management the rights to manage” that had convinced Triangular’s partners to participate. The experts warned Paz that a “[f]ailure to restore the rights of management...will seriously endanger the Plan.”³⁸

In late April, COMIBOL’s managers began a Triangular-required tour of the mines. COMIBOL President Bedregal later wrote that his colleagues “thought it was crazy to go to Siglo XX, especially in circumstances of such severe social unrest.” Other technicians warned Bedregal “that the unions are armed, that the MNR command units had practically disappeared from the region, and that no state authority existed at all that could respond to emergency situations.” Nonetheless, Bedregal recalled, “I was stubborn and decided to go.”³⁹ Indeed, he had no choice.

When the delegation arrived to the outskirts of Siglo XX, Bedregal “immediately recognized the corpulent figure of Federico Escóbar Zapata from the distance.” The union leader approached the managers’ car and said, “Good afternoon, Mr. President...I can see that you have no bodyguards.” Bedregal responded immediately, “Look here, Escóbar, what need do I have for bodyguards or ‘security’ as you call it? I need neither to watch my back nor be afraid. I have come to this mine to talk with my countrymen, the mine workers, in the name of the National Revolution. The rest is nonsense. Where shall we go?”⁴⁰

Escóbar escorted the company executives to the mining camp’s theater, accompanied by “three men armed with rifles, who flaunted cartridges across their entire chest.” Bedregal felt a cold chill, “possibly from the irrational fear that any human being would perceive when he more or less intuits what could possibly occur in that immediate future where the seconds

³⁸ COMIBOL Advisory Group to Paz, 5 January 1962, PR 985, ABNB.

³⁹ Bedregal, *Búhos*, 302; and “Comisionados de Comibol están Detenidos en Calidad de Rehenes en Zona de Catavi,” *El Diario*, 1 May 1962, 6.

⁴⁰ Bedregal, *Búhos*, 306.

seem days, the minutes hours, weeks, and months.” Bedregal’s chill warmed, however, when he entered Siglo XX’s theater to face thousands of miners “who began to shout aggressive and stereotypical slogans.” The stage was surrounded by images of Lenin and Marx, and enormous red flags, many including the Hammer and Sickle, “overwhelming a small national flag that waved modestly in the corner.”⁴¹

Feeling rather out of place, the COMIBOL president later recalled that he “immediately called up in the depths of my spirit the presence of Jesus and the Virgin Mary, his Divine Mother,” and proposed that the assembly start with the singing of the Bolivian National Anthem. “The melody and the lyrics of our Anthem contain a bit of magic, a bit of fancifulness, and a great deal of symbolism,” Bedregal recounts, lamenting however that the miners appeared to stumble over the words. Once the half-hearted show of patriotism reached its final line, the theater full of workers broke out into more slogans, “Long live the Bolivian Proletariat!” “Down with Yankee Imperialism!” “Death to COMIBOL!” “Death to the President of COMIBOL!” Bedregal was haunted by the distinct feeling that he “had not a single friend in the room.” When Escóbar rose to open the meeting, the COMIBOL president silently began praying the Rosary. Once Siglo XX’s leaders had presented their speeches, the meeting was adjourned until the following day, and Bedregal’s commission of managers retired to the company sleeping quarters. Bedregal writes that his “brain worked feverishly, possibly incited by a fear that would not go away and would certainly increase when I faced the hostility of masses of workers and their families the following day.” After another round of prayer, the corporation president drifted off to sleep.⁴²

The following morning, 30 April, Bedregal admits that “I could not hide my discomfort toward the arrogant attitudes and rude manners of the union leaders,” who he

⁴¹ Ibid., 307; and Boggs to State, 15 May 1962, 824.25/1-462, Box 2390, SDDF, 1-2, 5-7.

⁴² Bedregal, *Búhos*, 307.

called a “union aristocracy.” The tense meeting lasted five hours, at which point several members of the *Comité de Amas de Casa* served Bedregal a bowl of sardine soup. A “silence fell over the room,” at which time Bedregal realized that the women had used rotten sardines. He tried to complain, but it was no use. “[T]he masses wanted to see me humiliated, eating this rank swill.” Bedregal recalls, “I do not know where I found the indispensable patience to take the affront, but I grabbed the plate with my left hand and with the right I raised the spoon and declared, ‘I am going to eat this poison that you have prepared, in order to demonstrate that I reject your provocation.’” Bedregal then “took a deep breath of air...and in less than three minutes, I engulfed the noodle soup mixed with rotten sardines.” Upon finishing, Bedregal immediately felt ill. The woman who had served him the soup “took pity on me,” Bedregal writes, and advised him to “withdraw to the balcony, stick a finger in your throat, and vomit.” Despite following her recommendation, Bedregal’s state did not improve, and he was taken to the hospital to have his stomach pumped. “For the ten years that followed,” Bedregal writes, “I suffered from almost constant gastric problems.”⁴³

Once he was released from the hospital, Bedregal slipped out of the mining camp without a word, prompting the Miners’ Federation to “angrily protest” on 2 May, accusing Bedregal of having “abandoned the area without fulfilling his commitment to remain until various outstanding issues were resolved.” The COMIBOL president responded that he could not negotiate in the face of such “belligerence,” nor subject the corporation’s foreign technicians to the “threatening” atmosphere at Siglo XX.⁴⁴ In early June, dozens of miners from Huanuni declared themselves on hunger strike, occupying the corporation headquarters in La Paz, and several unions threatened to strike unless Bedregal resumed his tour of the

⁴³ Bedregal, *Búhos*, 312-3; and Boggs to State, 15 May 1962, 824.25/1-462, Box 2390, SDDF, 1-2, 5-7. For a miner’s version, see Crespo, *El rostro minero*, 329-30.

⁴⁴ FSTMB to Bedregal, 2 May 1962; and Bedregal to FSTMB, 10 May 1962, PR 1609, ABNB.

mines. Government officials in the region cabled President Paz to ask that COMIBOL “make whatever effort is necessary to resume his visit and thus avoid serious conflict.” On 25 June, Bedregal began his second foray into the mines.⁴⁵

Bedregal began with the Huanuni mine, where miners’ once again “attempted to serve Bedregal a dish of obviously decomposed food.” The COMIBOL president protested that he “didn’t come here to be tortured!” and the miners responded by letting loose a of vitriolic series complaints regarding poor pay and working conditions. Matters took a turn for the worse when Federico Escóbar arrived with a contingent from nearby Siglo XX, announcing that they had come to take the commission back to their mine. “This time Bedregal is not going to run away,” the Siglo XX leader declared. That is just what the mine corporation president did, however; driving through the night in a rented jeep, and arriving back in La Paz at 7am.⁴⁶

For the next leg of his mine tour in late July, Bedregal picked the less radical mines of San José and Colquiri. The first went off without a hitch, but during the commission’s visit to Colquiri, the miners presented COMIBOL with a list of 250 requests, including a “Westclox watch for each worker, one aviator type uniform per worker per year, a library in the mine, new lunch pails every six months,” and other items Bedregal found to be “ridiculous.” After looking over the list, he “excused himself from the meeting, climbed into

⁴⁵ Boggs to State, 25 July 1962, 824.25/6-162, Box 2390, SDDF, 1-4; Subprefect-Huanuni to Paz, 12 June 1962; and Bedregal to Presidency Minister, 14 June 1962, PR 985, ABNB. See also “Están en Huelga de Hambre 14 Dirigentes Sindicales y Nueve Delegados de Base de Huanuni,” *El Diario*, 21 June 1962, 7; and “Inició Ayer su Viaje por las Minas la Comisión de Comibol,” *El Diario*, 24 June 1962, 7.

⁴⁶ Boggs to State, 25 July 1962, 824.25/6-162, Box 2390, SDDF, 1-4; “Guillermo Bedregal Está Afectado por el Esfuerzo y el Mal Trato de los Mineros,” *El Diario*, 28 June 1962, 6; and “El Presidente de COMIBOL Logró Burlar la Vigilancia de los Mineros y Fugó de Huanuni,” *El Diario*, 29 June 1962, 7.

a car with four other members of the commission... fled the community, and came to La Paz.”⁴⁷

Profoundly rattled, the COMIBOL president promptly drafted a letter of resignation. President Paz would hear nothing of it, however, and the letter was never made public.⁴⁸ Washington’s Embassy was frustrated by COMIBOL’s lack of seriousness, writing that the “ludicrous situation” surrounding Bedregal’s trips demonstrated the “serious need for education in labor-management relations,” both on the part of COMIBOL’s administration and the unions.⁴⁹ The foreign experts in charge of implementing the mine rehabilitation program warned Bedregal that unless COMIBOL was able to bring Siglo XX under control, “we will see ourselves obliged to recommend the suspension of the Triangular Plan’s financial aid.”⁵⁰

The development economists who designed and carried out Kennedy’s Alliance for Progress in Bolivia were unwavering that harsh labor reforms should condition foreign aid. In so doing, they received the enthusiastic cooperation of Bolivia’s nationalist leaders, who dreamed of establishing political hegemony over the rebellious mining regions. Given fierce resistance to the Triangular Plan among the Bolivian miners, however, it was clear that the Alliance for Progress would eventually require some form of armed force. US liberals and their Bolivian allies never flinched. Instead, they deepened their commitment to authoritarian development, an antidemocratic approach that was being laid barer with each passing month.

⁴⁷ Prefect-Oruro to Paz, 5 July 1962, PR 1019, ABNB; Boggs to State, 2 August 1962, 824.25/6-162, Box 2390, SDDF. “Está en Rehenes Parte de la Comisión que fue a Colquiri,” *El Diario*, 27 July 1962, 7.

⁴⁸ Bedregal, *Búhos*, 323-4.

⁴⁹ Boggs to State, 2 August 1962, 824.25/6-162, Box 2390, SDDF.

⁵⁰ COMIBOL Advisory Group to Paz, 13 July 1962, PR 985, ABNB.

Development vs. Democracy

By mid-1962, conservative US opposition to the Alliance for Progress in Bolivia had been silenced by crisis. Ongoing anarchy, especially in the mine region, only strengthened the Kennedy administration's resolve to remain deeply involved in Bolivian affairs. When the Paz administration presided over obviously rigged congressional elections in 1962, conservatives once again raised their voices in doubt, but liberal interventionists felt vindicated. Paz was an authoritarian leader, and he was in favor of anticommunist development. What more could Washington want? Political democracy was a luxury only advanced countries deserved; for Bolivia, authoritarianism was the only path to progress.

Prior to the May 1962 congressional election, US Embassy officials hosted a meeting with conservative politician Hugo Roberts Barragán, an anti-Paz "conspirator and revolutionary" who expressed confidence that the Bolivian president was "certain to fall, possibly shortly after the elections." The MNR leader had "nurtured communism in Bolivia," Roberts explained, condemning US support of Paz for "only help[ing] to build up communist strength." Given Embassy officials' "significant confidence in [the] accuracy [of] Roberts' analysis," DCM Williams predicted that "significant political changes could occur in the next few months."⁵¹

The US Embassy acknowledged that the MNR exercised control over "all phases of electoral campaigns and balloting" during the June elections, including the "physical intimidation of opposition candidates and their activities." Embassy analysts concurred that the poll was marred by "widespread fraud...harassment and often violent repression...by the MNR and Government agents," adding that "public apathy" and a general "disorganization" made it clear to all observers that the "official results do not reflect the relative popularity of the competing parties nor the actual votes cast." It appeared to the Embassy that Paz had

⁵¹ Williams to Rusk, 18 May 1962, "Bolivia, General, 1/62-7/62," Box 10, NSF-CO, JFKL.

“decided [the] contest in advance and arranged [the] election and tally to come out that way. The rightist opposition returns were “so low it is absurd,” the Embassy reported, adding that the only opposition party to receive favorable treatment was the PCB, which issued a press statement “congratulating the successful work” of the electoral commission. Paradoxically, the US Embassy believed that the rigged poll was good news for the Alliance for Progress, since Paz would be now able to “proceed with [the] economic development plan.” Embassy officials worried, nonetheless that the governing party’s “poor showing” could not be papered over by the “obvious manipulation [of the] tabulation.”⁵²

Secretary Rusk had never been comfortable with the unrelenting pro-Paz enthusiasm of Kennedy’s developmental economists and top aides.⁵³ Upon receiving news of the fraudulent poll, Rusk was livid, and he strongly condemned the Paz government’s “rigging” of the parliamentary election and the MNR’s decision to “intensify persecution [of the] non-communist opposition.” Referring to ongoing negotiations between USAID and Bolivian Ministers, and rumors that Kennedy was preparing to invite President Paz to Washington, Rusk worried that the White House’s “seeming endorsement of [the election] by possible early announcement of [a] new aid package and [a] Presidential guest visit incurs hostility toward [the] US of non-communist opposition leaders and groups presently suppressed or victimized who might one day succeed [the] MNR in government.” Rusk warned that Paz’s growing authoritarianism “encourages violence, with all its political and economic disadvantages, as [the] only means by which [the] non-communist opposition can effectively give expression [to] its views,” adding gravely that the Bolivian government’s “intentional and calculated inflation of [the] PCB vote creates the appearance of growth which enhances

⁵² Williams to Rusk, 4-6 June 1962; Gavrishoff to State, 16 and 27 June 1962, 1, 8, 11-3; Stephansky to Rusk, 19 June 1962; 724.00/6-162, Box 1560, SDDF.

⁵³ Stephansky later recalled that Rusk was “thoroughly pissed off at my appointment.” Stephansky Oral History, JFKL, 15.

their attractiveness to non-communist leaders as allies.” Rusk concluded that Paz’s selective repression would “increasingly push dissidents into [the] arms [of the] extreme left,” and characterized the election as an embarrassment to the Alliance for Progress.⁵⁴

Ambassador Stephansky responded that while it was “evident [the] MNR has slipped...there is no viable alternative as yet to its leadership and none will be available for some time.”⁵⁵ After “pondering the problem of democratic processes in underdeveloped countries,” the development-minded ambassador issued a dogged defense of MNR authoritarianism in a nine-page treatise entitled, “Bolivia and Democratic Processes.” Stephansky conceded that “[b]y any standard tests of democratic processes derived from maturely operating democratic systems, the elections were not democratic.” Rather than apply “such standard tests,” however, which “disclose glaring weaknesses,” the US ambassador recommended asking “what are the appropriate tests” that apply to Bolivia, “one of the most backward countries.” Stephansky explained that the rightwing harbored a “fanatical hatred of the MNR,” leading it to “cling grimly to the hope of [its] violent defeat.” He explained that there were “constant rumors of possible coups” in the lead-up to elections, and warned that the right, in alliance with the anti-Paz left, was attempting to “make their strongest effort to undermine the MNR” before USAID announced a new aid package. For Ambassador Stephansky, approval of this package was “last hope for [the] Alliance.”⁵⁶

Stephansky then turned to the issue of the Bolivian armed forces. “The MNR destroyed an oligarchic army,” he explained, “and created in its place (mostly under Paz) a popular army strongly oriented to civic action.” For Stephansky, this “interesting

⁵⁴ Rusk to Embassy, 10 July 1962, “Bolivia, General, 1/62-7/62,” Box 10, NSF-CO, JFKL.

⁵⁵ Stephansky to Rusk, 9 June 1962, in *idem*.

⁵⁶ Stephansky to State, “Bolivia and Democratic Processes,” 29 August 1962, “Bolivia, 3/61-10/63,” Box WH-25, Schlesinger Papers. Stephansky’s “last hope” comment can be found in Stephansky to Rusk, 9 June 1962, “Bolivia, General, 1/62-7/62,” Box 10, NSF-CO, JFKL.

‘nationalizing’ institution” was the key to the Alliance in Bolivia, since it “takes the Indian recruits from all parts of the country, often provides the beginnings of literacy, a craft, and hygiene...assimilating a kind of ‘internal immigrant’ from many scattered cultures and regions in Bolivia.” The armed forces are “overwhelmingly anticommunist and actively campaigning against communist influence here,” Stephansky explained, adding that they were also “committed to social and economic reforms,” including the “aims and objectives of [the] 1952 revolution.” Continued US aid to the military “permits GOB [to] take [a] strong stand against subversion and [the] communists,” Stephansky wrote, while it simultaneously “helps to identify them with the common people, particularly in remote areas where guerilla activity may arise.” With Alliance funds, the Bolivian Air Force was “flying food, building materials, jeeps and other equipment to areas not served by commercial airlines,” Stephansky continued, and “80 percent [of the] GOB military budget is spent for civic action programs.” The ambassador stressed that these programs were a bedrock of US policy in Bolivia, and that they were “in keeping with the theory of guerrilla warfare that gives advantages to the side that has the support of the local populace.” Stephansky was adamant that a “[f]ailure [to] continue military assistance would play into communist hands and nullify [the] aid program designed [to] restore order and economic progress to Bolivia.” In the event that communists seriously threatened to take power, “US interests would be served by a military-assisted takeover against communism,” Stephansky conceded, acknowledging that “[d]octrinaire attitudes toward [the] military in politics can play into communist hands.” He believed that “the time could come in Bolivia when we could be forced with [the] alternatives of [a] Castro-type state or [a] military-backed government,” noted that the “communists here oppose Bolivian military strength as vigorously as the Alliance for Progress,” and proposed that the development-minded military remain a central aspect of US aid programs.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Stephansky to Rusk, 30 June 1962, 724.5/3-460, Box 1563, SDDF; Stephansky to Rusk, 15 August 1962, and

Stephansky concluded his epic cable by discouraging US officials from becoming overly concerned with political democracy. Instead, Washington should be asking “[h]ow can the MNR win in the fight against communist efforts to take over the revolution...[and] how can sufficient order and discipline be evoked in order to achieve economic development.” He argued that “economic development...provides the possibility of reducing the communist threat,” after which “political development could proceed.” He pointed to rising young leaders like “Bedregal, [Economy Minister] Gumucio, [and] Barrientos,” who would be able to accede to power in 1968. For now, Stephansky stressed that “only Paz can hold the country together” and urged the State Department to “recognize that Bolivia is a backward place, with a rudimentary democracy.” If Washington could “refine our analysis in these terms,” Stephansky concluded, “we might perhaps enter the fray with greater skill to move this country our way, insofar as our feeble perspectives permit us to see what our way is in this complicated and perplexing country.”⁵⁸

Assistant Secretary Martin believed that Stephansky had done a “masterly job.” The Ambassador’s defense of President Paz was a “more sophisticated and penetrating analysis of a complex political and economic situation than any I have seen since I came into the bureau or for a long time before that.” Martin was nonetheless concerned that Stephansky’s recommendations were “tying the United States too closely to one political party,” and he wondered if there were “ways to moderate the degree of repression exercised by the MNR” toward Bolivia’s rightwing opposition, “without making it a major or obvious objective.” Martin was concerned that US support for the “exceedingly fragile” MNR was akin to backing a “losing horse,” and recommended against Washington “committing itself political

Stephansky to State, 29 August 1962, “Bolivia, General, 8/62-12/62,” Box 10, NSF-CO, JFKL.

⁵⁸ Stephansky to State, 29 August 1962, “Bolivia, General, 8/62-12/62,” Box 10, NSF-CO, JFKL.

one way or another.” Noting that he was battling strong Paz skepticism in the Department, Martin urged Stephansky to concede that the “MNR’s virtues are not overly numerous.”⁵⁹

In late July, the State Department Policy Planning Council weighed in on the debate. Led by one of Washington’s foremost proponents of military-led development, economic historian Walt Rostow, the council lamented that “[d]ealing with Bolivia seems to generate an exceptional amount of emotional heat among the majority of American officials involved.” On the one hand were those who “frequently take a stand which might be summarized as a conviction that the United States has committed or promised financial and technical aid, and therefore we must give it to Bolivia regardless of the soundness or completeness of the proposed project, and with little consideration of political developments in Bolivia.” The council warned that this point of view “drifts into the personality cult when it maintains that we must support President Paz at all costs – that only he can control the situation and work well with us.” On the “other extreme,” Rostow’s group noted that some US officials believed the Bolivians were “opportunistic liars, corrupt, with interests concentrated on self-enrichment, and somewhat second-rate and undeserving of help because they are lacking in skills.” Both these approaches were “inaccurate and disappointing,” the council argued, adding that an “objective, dispassionate approach...is scarce both in Washington and in the field.” The group fretted that “all of the senior members of the staff of our Embassy in La Paz are disturbed about the presentation which the Ambassador makes of the Bolivian situation,” which was “more delicate and explosive than he indicates.” According to these officials, Stephansky was obscuring the fact that “disorder and violence are always just beneath the surface, that the MNR is now paying only lip service to the ideal of political freedom of expression, and that the leftist extremists are in greater control of the

⁵⁹ Martin to Stephansky, 26 September 1962, “Bolivia, 1962,” Box 4, Lots 62D418 and 64D15, SDLF.

government.” The council warned that Paz skeptics in La Paz and Washington believed that “we didn’t really mean our commitment to assist Bolivia, and that if things are prolonged it may go away.” The group concluded that they would need “a convincing presentation and forceful action” to overcome the doubts of US officials who lacked the “desired drive and determination” to continue economic aid to Bolivia.⁶⁰

As this debate dragged on throughout the summer of 1962, two members of Paz’s cabinet remained bogged down in negotiations with USAID and IDB officials in Washington.⁶¹ Hoping to apply maximum pressure for a proposed \$80 million Alliance for Progress development program, in May the Bolivian president had dispatched Economy Minister Gumucio, who had threatened to resign the previous month as a “blast” against the Alliance, and Peasant Affairs Minister Jordán, who announced to attendees at an April IDB meeting in Buenos Aires that he sought to determine “whether the Alliance is fact or fiction.” The State Department initially expressed confidence that negotiations would conclude by 31 May, with USAID and IDB economists “moving ahead with engineering studies to fill in the outlines by the generalized and impatient expectations of the Bolivians.” The Department wrote to White House National Security Advisor (NSA) McGeorge Bundy that “given [Kennedy’s] personal interest in Bolivian development as publicly expressed to President Paz, and the still extremely precarious political situation in Bolivia, we consider it important that the Ministers be received by the President.”⁶²

In late June, with the IDB stalling negotiations due to persistent communist sabotage in Bolivia’s mines, USAID Director Fowler Hamilton warned Kennedy aide Goodwin that

⁶⁰ Topping to Rostow, 30 June 1962, “Bolivia, 7/30/1962,” Box 213, Lot 73D363, SDLF.

⁶¹ The Ministers’ trip was given frequent coverage in Bolivia. See “Enviados bolivianos esperarán a Kennedy para Entrevistarlos,” *El Diario*, 1 July 1962, 6; and “Debió Ganarse una Dura Batalla para Conseguir el Crédito de 80 Millones,” *El Diario*, 22 July 1962, 7.

⁶² Brubeck to O’Donnell and Bundy, 27 May 1962, “Bolivia, General, 1/61-7/62,” Box 10, NSF-CO, JFKL.

despite the fact that “Bolivia lacks an adequate development plan,” the “urgent political and economic problems of Bolivia require an immediate program.” The situation “continues to be extremely precarious,” he explained, with the Paz government under “intense pressure” to accept large-scale Soviet bloc assistance. Denying the \$80 million aid request would lead to repercussions that “would be serious indeed,” Hamilton added, since forcing Gumucio and Jordán to “return home empty-handed would be exploited by the Communists to claim the Alliance is long on words but short on deeds.” Hamilton stressed to the White House that further delays would represent a “serious political blow to Paz.”⁶³

A week later, Paz expressed frustration over the now two-month delay, asking Stephansky impatiently if he could expect his Ministers to return home any time soon. Publicly denying the existence of any stalemate, Stephansky warned the State Department that the impasse was “embarrassing to [Paz] from [a] local political point [of] view with increasing public speculation” regarding Washington’s position.⁶⁴ Gumucio visited the White House on 18 July to share what Arthur Schlesinger called “his anguished tale.” Schlesinger wrote that the Economy Minister “bears all the aspects of a man tried beyond endurance until his spirit is substantially broken,” adding that Gumucio had spent every day for two-and-a-half months suffering “unexampled confusion and frustration,” principally in his negotiations with the IDB. Schlesinger asked his colleague Ralph Dungan to receive Gumucio immediately “for the sake of our future relations with Bolivia,” urging him to find some way to obtain approval and avoid forcing Gumucio to “return to Bolivia a most irritated and discouraged man at the end of the week.”⁶⁵

⁶³ Hamilton to Dungan, 28 June 1962, “Bolivia, 5/61-12/62,” Box 389, NSF: Dungan Papers, JFKL.

⁶⁴ Stephansky to Rusk, 10 July 1962, “Bolivia, 1/62-7/62,” Box 10, NSF-CO, JFKL. Stephansky told the Bolivian press that “if there was a stalemate, I would be informed.” See “Dos Ministros Gestionan en Washington la Financiación del Plan de Ingeniería Global,” *El Diario*, 11 July 1962, 7.

⁶⁵ Schlesinger to Dungan, 18 July 1962, “Bolivia, 3/61-10/63,” Box WH-25, Schlesinger Papers, JFKL.

White House pressure broke the stalemate. The following day Bolivia won approval of an \$80 million Alliance for Progress package, the first large-scale program approved since the May 1961 mine rehabilitation plan was launched. Thanks to President Kennedy's development-minded aides, Washington resolved to provide Paz Estenssoro with its "full backing" in his drive to "maintain effective government while getting on with some of the important tasks of development." Stephansky's passionate defense of the MNR helped convince a hesitant foreign policy apparatus that "[t]here is no preferable alternative presently available" to Paz, and in its 19 July "Experimental Policy Paper for Bolivia," the State Department stressed the importance of demonstrating results in economic development "without delay."⁶⁶

The MNR skeptics had been defeated, but they continued to advise a cautious approach. After the new program was approved, Assistant Budget Director Hansen urged the White House consider it a "test" of whether or not the Paz government was "capable of effectively utilizing a higher level of grant and loan funds." The "hard facts" of the Bolivian situation "indicate that this commitment is a high-risk undertaking," he wrote, explaining that Washington would soon see if it could "reasonably commit itself and invest its funds in Bolivia without making a mockery of the development concepts in the Alliance for Progress." If Paz failed to "gain sufficient party control and general political initiative to move toward the realignments and reforms he professes to seek," Hansen warned that the new round of US aid would "do nothing but finance the *status quo*."⁶⁷

MNR partisans in Washington were not swayed by these words of caution. After months of debate, the clear policy that had emerged was that Paz was precisely the

⁶⁶ State Department, "Experimental Policy Paper on Bolivia," 19 July 1962, "Bolivia, General, Experimental Policy Paper, 7/19/1962," Box 10A, NSF-CO, JFKL, 8-11, 18-23, 30-1, and Annex I, 1-7.

⁶⁷ Hansen to Dungan, Bundy, and Schlesinger, undated, "Bolivia, 3/61-10/63," Box WH-25, Schlesinger Papers, JFKL.

development-oriented leader for which the Alliance was created. The State Department wrote in late July that the Bolivian government had “already made major land reforms and moved decisively toward greater social equality,” adding that the country’s 1952 revolution had “brought more rapid and fundamental changes than those experienced by any other country on the continent.” For this very reason, the Kennedy administration had come to believe that its aid program to Bolivia was a “test case of the thesis that social and political reforms are essential for development.” The State Department stressed that “[s]hould the effort fail in Bolivia, it will bring in doubt the underlying concept of the Alliance.”⁶⁸

Throughout the better part of 1962, development-oriented appointees battled back bureaucratic skepticism regarding the wisdom of US support for revolutionary Bolivia. Their argument was that the Paz regime was sufficiently authoritarian to encourage development without permitting Bolivia to fall into communist hands, a rubric into which the rigged congressional elections neatly fit.⁶⁹ Despite outbreaks of conservative resistance, liberal developmentalists continued to emerge victorious. With strong support from the Kennedy White House, it seemed that Paz Estenssoro would remain a centerpiece of Kennedy’s development policy in Latin America.

Tin Dumping and Counterinsurgency

For a country whose main export is tin, nothing is more damaging than a fall in mineral prices. Unfortunately for Bolivia, as one former ambassador put it, “Washington

⁶⁸ State Department, “Experimental Policy Paper on Bolivia,” 19 July 1962, “Bolivia, General, Experimental Policy Paper, 7/19/1962,” Box 10A, NSF-CO, JFKL, 1-3, 16-7.

⁶⁹ Nor was the liberal allergy to participatory democracy unique to Bolivia. The Alliance for Progress Study Group paradoxically theorized that “the principal task of the democratic movement is to create the skills of politics in the ‘emerging elite.’” Alliance Study Group, “Draft Program,” 10 December 1962, folder 16, Box 3, Professional Activities Files, Alexander Papers, Rutgers, 6.

doesn't pay too much attention to what's going on there until you're in trouble."⁷⁰ Under strong pressure from Congress in 1962, the US Treasury Department began an extensive, and extended, selloff of tin from the US strategic stockpile. Citing a growing US payments imbalance, the White House had previously requested such authority, brutally demonstrating that the economic wellbeing of the United States trumps that of weaker countries.⁷¹ Despite the fact that US tin dumping raised the ire of Kennedy's economists who were so invested in Bolivia's economic development, the crisis paradoxically supported their position that without a deeper Alliance for Progress commitment, Bolivia would surely be lost to communism.

Before the ink had dried on the \$80 million Alliance for Progress package, the State Department announced that Washington would immediately begin selling 200 tons of stockpile tin each week for the foreseeable future. Tin prices had already been moving downward, prompting Stephansky to warn that the selloff would "probably be construed here as 'dumping.'" Undersecretary George Ball responded that tin prices were still "well above [the] 1953-1960 average," but Stephansky explained that this argument "means nothing to a country which suffered extreme depression during this period precisely because of [the] abrupt and large drop in tin prices following the Korean War." Ball was unmoved. Instead, he suggested that lower tin prices would put more pressure on the Bolivian government to implement Triangular Plan's labor reforms and "reduce costs through rationalization [of the] mining industry." Stephansky retorted that the tin selloff "seriously undermines propaganda benefits to be derived from [the] \$80 million," adding that, "so far as Bolivia [is] concerned,

⁷⁰ Henderson Oral History, Association of Diplomatic Studies and Training.

⁷¹ The tense debate between State Department officials and tin producing countries makes for surprisingly interesting reading. To witness US officials weeping to Bolivian delegates that "we are literally scrounging every way to save \$50 million here and \$50 million there," see "Meeting Between the US and the Delegation from the International Tin Council," 24 July 1962, Collection of the International Tin Council, British Library of Political and Economic Science.

[it] will damage the Alliance for Progress itself.” Stephansky predicted that the selloff would appear to many Bolivians as an “example of US hypocrisy,” and would lead to a situation in which President Paz “could fall or be forced [to] take [a] strongly antagonistic attitude toward US Alliance.”⁷²

In late July, Assistant Secretary Martin joined Stephansky in questioning why Washington was considering a tin selloff in spite of the fact that such a move “conflicts with our commitments to Bolivia” and “hands the communists a made-to-order propaganda issue.” Martin expressed concern that the selloff threatened to derail the Triangular Plan, which “has as one of its important political objectives the weakening of communist hold on mine labor by demonstrating that the best hope for the miners’ welfare lies in a cooperative effort by Free-World capital supplies and Bolivian labor.” The stockpile sales would “permit the communists to appear as the defenders of the miners and will thereby favor their efforts...to frustrate the Triangular operation.” Martin echoed Stephansky’s view that the selloff had neutralized the “psychological impact of the recent joint announcement of US-IDB financing of an \$80 million interim development program,” complicated President Paz’s attempts to resist Soviet bloc economic aid, made it “more difficult for us to insist that the GOB effectively implement” labor reforms in the mines, and would probably lead to a cancellation of Paz’s upcoming trip to Washington.⁷³

As the crisis mushroomed, the Bolivian press reprinted sections of Kennedy’s October 1961 letter, in which he vowed that the US would do nothing to harm the tin market.⁷⁴ In conversations with the US Embassy, Foreign Minister Fellman Velarde demanded \$9 million

⁷² Martin to Johnson, 18 July 1962, “Bolivia, 1962,” Box 4, Lots 62D418 and 64D15, SDLF.

⁷³ Ball to Embassy, 28 June 1962; and Stephansky to Rusk, 19 and 30 June 1962, “Bolivia, General, 1/62-7/62,” Box 10, NSF-CO, JFKL.

⁷⁴ “EEUU Lanzará a la Venta 3 Mil Toneladas de Estaño,” *El Diario*, 26 August 1962, 1.

in order to “compensate Bolivia for loss [of] income resulting from [the] fall in tin prices” caused by selloff. Stephansky believed that \$4 or \$5 million would probably satisfy the Bolivians, adding that a failure to respond favorably would put Paz’s “head in [a] political noose.” Kennedy’s White House invitation was “extremely embarrassing,” Stephansky wrote, warning that Paz would certainly decline unless he could “receive advanced assurance that talks on tin will result in some measure [on] our part” to compensate Bolivia. Anything less, Stephansky concluded, would be “political suicide.”⁷⁵

Secretary Rusk was in no mood to humor the Bolivians. Long a voice of Paz-skepticism, Rusk wrote to his Ambassador that he did “not wish to negotiate with him as to terms on which [Paz is] willing to accept [the] President’s invitation and need [to] know soonest whether there is to be [a] visit.” Deeply angered, Paz issued a press release hours later that he had “decided to postpone his visit to the United States in view of the situation created on the tin market by the sales from the American strategic reserve,” adding that it had not been possible “to achieve assurance regarding the special consideration due Bolivia.”⁷⁶ For good measure, Paz pulled Bolivia out of the OAS later that afternoon.⁷⁷

US tin dumping and Paz Estenssoro’s subsequent decision to cancel his White House trip to and boycott the OAS sent shock waves through Bolivia’s body politic. Members of Parliament raked Washington over the coals for having broken written commitments regarding tin price stabilization, and wondered aloud if Alliance funding had been

⁷⁵ Stephansky to Rusk, 13 and 28 August 1962; and Ball to Moscoso and Embassy, 23 August 1962, “Bolivia, General, 8/62-12/62,” Box 10, NSF-CO, JFKL.

⁷⁶ Rusk to Embassy, 3 September 1962; and Stephansky to Rusk, 3 September 1962, in *idem*. See also “El Primer Mandatorio Canceló su Viaje a EEUU Debido a la Venta del ‘Stock-Pile,’” *El Diario*, 4 September 1962, 7.

⁷⁷ This was ostensibly over the Lauca River conflict with Chile, but by removing itself from the OAS, Bolivia also avoided taking a stand in Washington’s diplomatic war against Cuba. Fellman denied, however, that the Cuba issue had anything to do with his government’s decision. See Stephansky to State, 10 September 1962, “Bolivia, General, 8/62-12/62,” Box 10, NSF-CO, JFKL; and “Bolivia Se Retiró de la OEA,” *El Diario*, 4 September 1962, 1.

conditioned on the rejection of Soviet bloc aid offers. Bolivian legislators asked President Paz “how you can explain that the offer made by Nikita Khrushchev in 1960 to provide a tin smelter and a \$150 million credit has not yet been accepted?...What powerful forces have prevented, and apparently continue to prevent, the dispatch of a Commercial Mission to the Soviet Union?” Another group of parliamentarians demanded that President Paz explain the “antinational and antirevolutionary agreements with foreign signatories and with the IDB,” condemned the Bolivia president’s “vacillating policy toward US tin dumping,” and demanded that he immediately send a mission to Moscow to “arrange and finalize the \$150 million credit.”⁷⁸

Ambassador Stephansky, who would later refer to an “unseen diabolical hand whose special purpose is to perturb relations between Bolivia and ourselves on the question of tin,”⁷⁹ reported to Secretary Rusk that the Alliance was receiving a “severe trouncing” in the Bolivian Parliament. Warning that the Communists were “mounting a vigorous campaign [for] Bolivia [to] accept Soviet aid,” Stephansky lamented that US government agencies “do not have [a] common approach to this country,” and he requested that he be recalled for “immediate consultation in Washington.”⁸⁰

Rusk phoned Undersecretary Ball to ask if his colleague had seen the “alarming telegram from Bolivia.” Ball immediately called State Department analyst Herb May, wondering if the situation was “nearing a critical stage.” May replied that things in Bolivia

⁷⁸ Diputados to Paz, 20 and 29 August 1962, PR 1009, ABNB.

⁷⁹ Stephansky to Rusk, 19 July 1963, “Bolivia, General, 3/62-7/63,” Box 10A, NSF-CO, JFKL.

⁸⁰ Stephansky to Rusk, 8 September 1962, “Bolivia, General, 8/62-12/62,” Box 10, NSF-CO, JFKL.

“have been critical for a long time,” and told Ball that they should “get Ben back as soon as possible.”⁸¹

The day after Paz declined his White House invitation, Kennedy issued NSAM 184, which assigned Bolivia to the Special Group on Counterinsurgency (CI), declaring that it was “sufficiently threatened by Communist-inspired insurgency to warrant...specific interest.”⁸² Created by the president in January 1962, the Special Group (CI) aimed to use “all available resources with maximum effectiveness in preventing and resisting subversive insurgency and related forms of indirect aggression in friendly countries.” The group, which included Attorney General Robert Kennedy, Deputy Secretary of Defense Roswell Gilpatric, USAID Director Hamilton, NSA Bundy, and Director of Central Intelligence John McCone, recognized that “subversive insurgency (‘wars of liberation’) is a major form of politico-military conflict equal in importance to conventional warfare,” and sought to ensure that this was “reflected in the organization, training, equipment, and doctrine of the US armed forces and other US agencies abroad and in the political, economic, intelligence, military aid, and informational programs conducted by the State Department, Defense Department, USAID, USIA, and CIA.”⁸³

When the Special Group (CI) first met on Bolivian in mid-September, it considered an Embassy-drafted Internal Defense Plan (IDP). The plan warned that the Paz government “does not adequately recognize the seriousness of the communist threat either to itself or the hemisphere.” Communists were “working hard to subvert the government and turn Bolivia

⁸¹ Rusk/Ball and Ball/May, 24 September 1962, “Memoranda of Telephone Conversations,” George Ball Papers, JFKL.

⁸² Kennedy, “National Security Action Memorandum 184,” 4 September 1962, “National Security Action Memoranda,” NSF-Meetings and Memoranda, JFKL.

⁸³ Kennedy to Rusk, McNamara, and Robert Kennedy, “Establishment of the Special Group (Counter-insurgency),” 18 January 1962, in US Department of Defense, *The Pentagon Papers: The Defense Department History of United States Decisionmaking on Vietnam* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), 660-1.

into a worker-peasant state,” the reported added, and the communists’ “salami tactics” sought to take advantage of the “illiterate, poverty-stricken Indians who...lack the knowledge and means to improve their lot.” The IDP explained that communists “operate so freely and openly in their efforts to proselytize labor and peasant segments of the population” that they were unlikely to resort to armed revolution “until they are certain they can succeed.”

Communists “already dominate the majority of the larger labor unions and at least some of the major peasant syndicates as well as primary and secondary teachers’ organizations,” the IDP lamented, adding that they had also “deeply penetrated the government,” leaving “few, if any agencies...free of communist influence.” Noting that the Kennedy administration had “consciously taken” a risk by trying to “provide the country with a degree of prosperity and to put it on the road to social, political, and economic development,” the IDP nevertheless warned that it “may not be possible to achieve this in time to be effective against the communist threat.”⁸⁴

Before leaving for emergency consultation in Washington in late September, Stephansky filed a string of alarming cables. Since the cancellation of Paz’s White House visit, the “[s]ituation has gravely deteriorated,” Stephansky wrote, warning that President Paz had “given up and evidence [is] piling up that we may well be in the process [of a] complete [MNR] left sector takeover with large-scale Soviet aid.” Ambassador Stephansky declared that a “[c]risis in Bolivia’s political orientation is near at hand,” since the MNR left sector was pushing for “advanced stage socialism with greater ties to [the] Soviet Union and at least partial collaboration with the Communist Party.” Stephansky advised Washington to be “flexible [in] this situation to permit support of Paz so long as he appears able and willing [to] take firm steps in [the] face [of the] Communist threat, but to seek another alternative

⁸⁴ Embassy to State, “Internal Defense Plan,” 31 August 1962, 724.5/3-460, Box 1563, SDDF, 1-3, 5.

should Paz prove too weak or unwilling to do so.” It was high time, Stephansky concluded, to begin “serious consideration [of] contingency alternatives.”⁸⁵

Assistant Secretary Martin agreed that recent events demonstrated the “continuing threat that the extremist and communist-infiltrated MNR Left Sector would take over control of the badly-divided MNR party and the apparatus of government.” President Paz appeared to have “neither the ability nor the will to oppose the growing influence of the MNR party’s left wing or to rid it of its pro-Castro, pro-Communist elements.” Martin wrote ominously that the White House’s “optimistic expectation that Paz would impose internal discipline in carrying out the conditions for the \$80 million is fast on the wane,” and cited “growing evidence that a complete takeover by the MNR Left Sector, accompanied by large-scale Soviet aid, may be in process.”⁸⁶

Despite President Kennedy’s strong commitment to the Alliance for Progress in Bolivia, the highland nation remained small in the eyes of the larger US government apparatus. The need to alleviate Washington’s balance of payment problem far exceeded any importance Bolivian economic development might have held for the United States. Through its aggravation of Bolivia’s political crisis, however, the Treasury Department’s tin sales provided yet another reason to deepen US support for President Paz’s authoritarian regime. Ideological development had been initially adopted as a form of political intervention; a heightened threat only strengthened the developmentalists’ commitment to carrying it out via political repression.

⁸⁵ Stephansky to Rusk, 22 and 29 September 1962, “Bolivia, General, 8/62-12/62,” Box 10, NSF-CO, JFKL.

⁸⁶ Martin to Rusk, undated [September 1962], “Memoranda, 1962, Box 2, Lot 64D518, SDLF.

Conclusion

Despite the fact that it is cloaked in technocratic, economic language, development ideology is adopted by governments for purely political reasons. Yet Third World development, as a form of geostrategic intervention, is much easier to approve than implement. For the Alliance for Progress in Bolivia, crisis fuelled authoritarianism and conservative resistance redoubled liberal resolve. The Alliance was riddled with political problems from the beginning, but the ideologists of intervention were never swayed. With a political program backed up by apolitical language, they proceeded to offer diplomatic and materiel support to an authoritarian Third World regime. Democracy did not belong in Bolivia; economic development did. Paz's repression – backed up by USAID weapons shipments – was just what the Bolivian people needed to rapidly develop. Rather than concern himself with political liberty, Stephansky believed rather that it was “necessary to put all emphasis on economic development.” With enough dollars, tear gas and riot gear, progress would eventually come, and “the Bolivians will show a kind of discipline and ability that they are not generally credited for.”⁸⁷ The Bolivian Communist Party put it another way, quipping in October 1962 that the Alliance for Progress was bringing “nothing but tears to the eyes of Bolivians.”⁸⁸

The Kennedy administration struggled to defend its development policy in Bolivia, and the country's repeated political crises during 1962 encouraged the policy's continued shift toward authoritarianism. When US tin dumping made a mockery of Washington's commitment to Bolivian economic development in mid-1962, the Paz government once again veered to the left. If the Alliance for Progress was initially approved as an anticommunist strategy, the growing communist threat crystallized liberals' resolve to continue intervening

⁸⁷ Stephansky, interview with Alexander, 8 April 1962, folder 58, Interviews, Alexander Papers, Rutgers.

⁸⁸ Osborne to State, 6 and 7 October 1962, “Bolivia, General, 8/62-12/62,” Box 10, NSF-CO, JFKL.

in Bolivia in an aggressive, authoritarian manner. It was not hard to see that this experiment was reeling toward a tragic apogee, one that would be experienced entirely by the Bolivians themselves, the Alliance's supposed beneficiaries.

Chapter Three:

Development and Bloodshed: the Militarization of the Alliance for Progress

[The] Bolivian Government [is] staking its all on... economic development. To do so it [is] prepared [to] prescribe some bitter medicine.

- *Ambassador Stephansky, 30 July 1963¹*

From its inception, the Alliance for Progress in Bolivia was a politicized, authoritarian project. As crises continued to threaten President Paz's grip on power, US liberals deepened their commitment to his repressive, modernizing regime. Communism in Bolivia – both domestic and international – drove an increasingly heavy-handed policy of thoroughgoing intervention into Bolivia's internal affairs, elegantly articulated through a development discourse. While Cuban-sponsored guerrilla activity unnerved Washington, US policymakers were most immediately concerned by the possibility of a political takeover by the semi-autonomous MNR Left Sector, headed by Vice President and miners' federation leader Juan Lechín. To face down this threat, US officials relied heavily on the Bolivian armed forces to carry out their developmental experiment. In mid-1963, the CIA entered the country in full force, charged with shoring up MNR moderates, including President Paz, and ridding leftism from Bolivian society. This policy took the form of military-led development in the countryside, and militarized development in the mining camps. Given the aggressive nature by which US liberals intervened, and the sheer quantity of military hardware the Kennedy administration was sending, it was only a matter of time before Bolivian blood would be shed in the name of Alliance for Progress.

¹ Stephansky to Rusk, 30 July 1963, "Bolivia, General, 4/63-7/63," Box 10A, NSF-CO, JFKL.

Communism in Revolutionary Bolivia

The Kennedy administration adopted developmentalism in Bolivia to wage war against communism, but battle lines in the country's revolutionary environment were far from clear. The heterogeneous governing party, which the State Department occasionally referred to as "the Marxist-oriented MNR,"² displayed a troubling toleration of communism – both domestic and international – and members of the PCB and the MNR Left Sector were given free rein to cooperate with Cuban-backed guerrilla movements targeting military regimes in Peru and Argentina. Indeed, in the early 1960s, the Cuban Embassy operated with near total impunity in La Paz, as President Paz sought to neutralize both the Bolivian left and Havana by permitting their activity. Meanwhile he simultaneously employed the communist threat to secure ever higher levels of US support.

The phenomenon of Communism revolutionary Bolivia is complex.³ In exchange for PCB endorsements in his 1951 and 1960 presidential contests, Paz had generally eschewed political repression against the PCB. As one Party member explains,

the MNR's principal enemy was the [rightwing] Falange, so [Paz] considered the Communist Party to be a bad ally but not an enemy...I don't think Dr. Paz was ever an anticommunist in the ideological sense...he considered them competitors, not a group that needed to be defeated.⁴

A Paz scholar and MNR member agrees that "his idea was to neutralize the Communists, and meanwhile use them to scare the Americans. He was a fantastic manipulator."⁵ Moreover, communism was hardly restricted to the PCB and Trotskyite POR. The MNR Youth faction represented one of Bolivia's strongest pro-Cuba organizations, and there were many Marxists

² Williams to State, 8 May 1962, "Bolivia, General, 1/62-7/62," Box 10, NSF-CO, JFKL.

³ For an analysis of the PCB's vacillating position toward the MNR in the Siles years, see Dunkerley, *Rebellion*, 89-92, 98.

⁴ Arguedas interviews, in Roberto Cuevas Ramírez, *Arguedas* (La Paz: Artes Gráficas Latinas, 2000), 74.

⁵ Interviews with Antezana, who claims to have witnessed President Paz write checks to the Communist daily, *El Pueblo*, in an attempt to buy its moderation.

in the governing party, including Lechín, Marxist political scientist René Zavaleta, ex-PCB intellectual Sergio Almaraz, and ex-POR labor unionist Edwin Möller.

One of the earliest political effects of the Alliance for Progress was the radicalization of Bolivian leftism, both inside and outside of the governing party, which began to distance itself from Paz regime. In mid-1961, a large group of MNR Youth leaders condemned Paz for ramming the Triangular Plan through by rounding up Bolivian communists. The crackdown “fills us with shame,” they wrote, adding that Paz’s actions “bring dishonor to the party, and not just that, they also bring dishonor to the country.” Explaining that they were officially resigning from the governing party, the MNR Youth declared that

communism is in the just demand of the workers who cannot live on starvation wages; it is in the demands for better social conditions; it is in the condemnation of the wicked sale of our mines to the Almighty Power of the North, the desire to preserve jobs, rejecting the Triangular Plan conditions...[which] will plunge the country into a constant wave of strikes and could bring us to the verge of civil war.

Calling for a “revolution that is not betrayed,” the dissidents asked rhetorically, “When will the true revolution arrive?”⁶ Meanwhile, MNR leftists in Parliament asked incredulously “why the Executive Branch signed the so-called Triangular Plan if its application...will result in a serious impact on national dignity and a damaging precedent that will damage the sovereignty of the Homeland?”⁷

As Bolivian leftists distanced themselves from Paz’s MNR, they also grew noticeably closer to the Cuban Embassy. The CIA reported in April 1963 that “the militantly leftist youth organization of the [MNR]...has been receiving funds for propaganda purposes from the Cuban Embassy in La Paz.” The Agency added that MNR Youth were “present at a 19

⁶ MNR Youth to Paz, 21 July 1961, Wálter Guevara Arze Papers (hereafter WGA), ABNB. See also “Renunciaron al MNR 1964 jóvenes,” *El Diario*, 29 June 1961, 7.

⁷ Diputados to Paz, 25 August 1961, PR 979, ABNB. See also “Dirigentes Sindicales del MNR Desconocen Medidas de Seguridad del Gobierno,” 28 June 1961, 7.

April [1963] party at the Cuban Embassy commemorating the second anniversary of the Bay of Pigs invasion,” where several “boasted that they were responsible for covering La Paz with pro-Cuban posters and for an illuminated sign on a hillside overlooking the capital declaring that Bolivia supports Cuba.”⁸ Despite denying having received funds from the Cubans, one breakaway MNR Youth leader concedes that

it probably appeared to many that we were receiving money from the Cubans, because we were very publicly identified with their Embassy. We were strongly pro-Cuba, and our contacts with the Embassy were very close. We attended huge parties at the Embassy, and the Ambassador was a good friend of ours.⁹

In mid-1961, a Cuban Embassy employee informed the Bolivian government that Havana was indeed providing financial support to several groups of domestic leftists, adding that “an enormous quantity of individuals from every social class came by.” Most troubling was the employee’s claim that Siglo XX’s union leaders Escóbar and Pimentel appeared to “enjoy the full confidence of Embassy personnel, such that they would be received at any hour of the day or night.”¹⁰

In an attempt to neutralize growing leftist dissent, Paz continued to tolerate communist activity in Bolivia. Doggedly resisting US pressure to break diplomatic relations with Cuba and Czechoslovakia, the Paz government stood aside while the Czech government – according to the US Embassy – “shipped 15,124 pieces of propaganda directly into Bolivia

⁸ CIA, Intelligence Bulletin, 25 April 1963, CREST. A former Cuban intelligence official, Juan Benemelis (who was never involved in Latin America) also claims that Havana provided funds to the MNR Youth, and to Muñoz in particular. The fact that Benemelis knows the name of the obscure youth leader suggests a relationship, even if funds were not exchanged. See Juan F. Benemelis, *Las Guerras Secretas de Fidel Castro* (Madrid: Fundación Elena Maderos, 2002), 72.

⁹ Interviews with Alberto Muñoz de la Barra.

¹⁰ “Empleado de la Embajada Cubana Reveló la Entrega de Fondos a Elementos Comunistas,” *El Diario*, 24 July 1961, 6.

in 1962.”¹¹ Paz also moved forward with economic aid programs generously offered by Communist bloc countries. In early 1963, the Czechs eased the terms of a 1961 antimony smelter proposal, and according to Ambassador Stephansky, the deal was “irresistible...and it is difficult to see how GOB can refuse to accept it.”¹² The CIA agreed, adding that it would be “just as hard to turn down Yugoslavia’s offer of a \$5 million loan.”¹³

According to the State Department, Havana was meanwhile “making a concerted effort to fish in Bolivia’s troubled waters,” and the hundreds of MNR leftists and PCB members who travelled to Cuba and the Soviet bloc represented the “largest number from any one Latin American nation.”¹⁴ *Time* magazine reported that “Bolivia is an extreme” case, where Marxism had infiltrated nearly every aspect of the country’s revolutionary environment.¹⁵

It would be an error, nonetheless, to interpret Cuban activity as having been directed against the Paz government. On the contrary, Havana’s intervention was principally aimed at maintaining local support for its continued diplomatic presence in Bolivia. As Muñoz points out, “the Cuban line was that Paz was a revolutionary, but with some obvious differences. They expressed a moderated sympathy for his government.”¹⁶ In its occasional articles on

¹¹ This only included materials entering through the US-surveilled postal service. Embassy to State, 7 December 1963, DEF Defense Affairs 6 BOL, Box 3432, SDANF.

¹² Stephansky to Rusk, 15 March 1963, INCO Mining, Minerals and Metals BOL, Box 3540, SDANF.

¹³ CIA, CIWS, 22 March 1963, CREST.

¹⁴ State Department, “Policy Paper: Cuban Subversion,” 18 October 1963, “Bolivia, Subjects, Paz Visit, Paz Briefing Book, Tabs I-III, 10/22/63-10/24/63,” Box 11, NSF-CO, JFKL, 3. Bolivians who travelled to Cuba in 1961 and 1962 confirm that their trips were paid for by the Cuban Embassy. Interviews with Muñoz and Simón Reyes.

¹⁵ “Back to the Books,” *Time*, 29 March 1963. *Time* also cites US government sources claiming that 1,000 Bolivians visited Cuba in 1962, and that 400 remained there in March 1963. “The Subversion Airlift,” 29 March 1963. While these numbers are exaggerated, many Bolivians visited Communist countries in the early 1960s, and a large proportion were MNR members. Interviews with Reyes and Muñoz.

¹⁶ Interviews with Muñoz.

Bolivia during the early 1960s, the Cuban weekly *Bohemia* praised Paz Estenssoro for standing up to the United States on the issue of diplomatic relations and pointed to the miner dominated MNR Left Sector as the “vanguard” of the Bolivian revolution.¹⁷ In this way, Havana and La Paz engaged in an intricate minuet that amounted to a tacit agreement of mutual toleration, a favorable situation Cuba sought to exploit in its policy of sponsoring guerrilla warfare against neighboring military governments.

The extent to which Cuba was using its Embassy in La Paz to organize regional subversion was partially revealed in mid-March 1963, when a civilian DC-6 airliner operated by Bolivia’s Lloyd Aéreo Boliviano crashed high in the Andean mountains on its way from Arica, Chile, to La Paz. A Cuban courier and a Czech officer were aboard, but US officials were not overly suspicious until receiving reports that Cuban Ambassador Ramón Aja Castro was “frantic.” Stephansky immediately dispatched three military teams to climb up to the snowy crash site from nearby villages, and at 4am on 18 March, Embassy Army Attaché Paul Wimert was the first to reach the wreckage, having climbed overnight from Tacna, Peru. Working for “almost [a] full hour undisturbed,” Wimert was able to “take possession [of] all [the] papers on or near [the] body of the Cuban courier, who he noted to have a “machine pistol...clutched” in his arms. When Peruvian authorities arrived and sought to obtain from Wimert “any papers he may have picked up...he passed them secretly to the other US team.” For their part, the Peruvians were more forthcoming, and promptly handed over a second pouch of Cuban papers to US officials in La Paz, bragging all the while how they had barred entry to Cuban officials who had also sought to reach the crash site.¹⁸ Meanwhile,

¹⁷ “Bolivia,” *Bohemia*, 2 November 1962, 27; and “El estaño, una tragedia boliviana,” *Bohemia*, 4 January 1963, 42-4.

¹⁸ US Embassy (Lima) to Rusk, 19 March 1963; and Stephansky to Rusk, 16-19 March 1963, “Bolivia, General, 1/63-4/63,” Box 10A, NSF-CO, JFKL. Obviously, Washington’s role in the operation was never publicly revealed. For more on the crash, see “Hallaron Ayer los Restos del Avión DC-6B del Lloyd,” *El Diario*, 17 March 1963, 1. The Bolivian press is silent on Cuban and Czech couriers, but *Time* magazine embellished the

Washington's Ambassador to Chile complained that Aja Castro was well-known as being "the center and coordinating figure in [the] entire Cuban intelligence operations set-up in South America."¹⁹

Days after the crash, two Peruvian leftists were arrested in Cochabamba "with [a] considerable sum of money on their person." Rather than informing US or Cuban officials, Paz Estenssoro whisked the two detainees away to Peru, where they were subjected to harsh interrogation by Peruvian military officials. Lima reported back, apparently once again without informing the Americans, that the two leftists confessed to having been part of large-scale, Cuban-sponsored guerrilla – termed "Operation Matraca" – that was planning to enter Peru via Puerto Maldonado, an isolated Amazonian military outpost just across the border with Bolivia. The would-be guerrillas also admitted to having been sent by Havana "to spread Castro-Communist propaganda among [the] Bolivian working class with [the] chief target [being] Bolivian labor unions."²⁰

According to the youths' testimony, they had been holed up in the house of one of President Paz's close friends and associates, Cochabamba Marxist Víctor Zannier, who was also director *El Mundo*, of one of the city's two daily newspapers. When local police searched Zannier's house, they found "200 Castro-Communist books and pamphlets and some arms," information the Paz government also appears to have withheld from US officials.²¹ There appears little doubt that, in helping the Cuban-trained Peruvians prepare for

story, suggesting the plane went down when the Communists tried to hijack it. "The Subversion Airlift," *Time*, 29 March 1963.

¹⁹ US Embassy (Santiago) to Rusk, 25 March 1963, "Bolivia, 1/63-4/63," Box 10A, NSF-CO, JFKL. Cuban intelligence agent Juan Carretero (aka "Ariel") was posted in Havana's Embassy at the time. See Jon Lee Anderson, *Che Guevara: A Revolutionary Life* (New York: Grove Press, 1997), 556.

²⁰ Stutesman to Rusk, 1 and 7 June 1963, CSM US-BOL 1963, Box 3687, SDANF.

²¹ *Ibid.* According to Zannier's brother-in-law and close Communist associate, Rocabado, "Zannier was the only person in the country who called Dr. Paz, 'Victor.'" Zannier later admitted to having been tasked by the Cubans to "help a small group of militants avoid arrest as they prepared themselves in Cochabamba for their

their Operation Matraca, Zannier believed he enjoyed Paz's protection. Indeed one of the Peruvian guerrilla leaders, Héctor Bejar, later declared assuredly that "Paz Estenssoro and the head of Bolivian Political Police, Colonel [Claudio] San Román, were aware of the operation and supported it."²² Bolivians across the political spectrum also contend that "Paz knew about Puerto Maldonado. He had no interest in getting involved."²³ But by quietly handing over to Peruvian authorities two guerrillas in March, Paz had already gotten involved. Typically, he was playing both sides and hedging his bets. Thanks in part to his double dealing, Peruvian authorities quietly reinforced the border, waiting for the guerrillas to attack.

Meanwhile, Washington stumbled around for intelligence. In April, a new USAID employee ran into a Venezuelan friend in Lima, who casually informed her that "he had recently completed guerrilla warfare training in Cuba and was on his way into [the] hills of Peru to engage in guerrilla activities there." The loose-lipped guerrilla did not reveal that preparations were being made in Bolivia, however, and US officials apparently did not connect the dots until mid-May, when a dozen guerrillas were ambushed by Peruvian authorities just after they arrived in Puerto Maldonado.²⁴ On reports that one group had retreated back into Bolivian territory, the Paz government agreed to seek their arrest, asking

departure to Puerto Maldonado." See "Los bolivianos que salvaron los 'tesoros' del Che," *Los Tiempos*, 12 October 2008. Zannier is most famous for having been "the messenger" who carried Che Guevara's Bolivian Diary to Havana in 1968 on behalf of General Barrientos's Interior Minister, Communist-turned-CIA Agent-turned-Communist Antonio Arguedas. See Henry Butterfield Ryan, *The Fall of Che Guevara: A Story of Soldiers, Spies, and Diplomats* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 146-53. Interviews with Rocabado.

²² According to Bejar, "the reason was simple, the Peruvian military junta supported the Bolivian government's enemies number one, Falange Socialista Boliviana... Falangists received logistic and economic support from the Peruvian military junta, above all in Arequipa, where they had their principal base and along the Peru-Bolivian border." See Bejar interview, in Humberto Vázquez Viaña, *Una guerrilla para el Che*, 2nd ed. (Santa Cruz de la Sierra, 2008), 53.

²³ Interviews with PCB members Rocabado, Reyes, Reinaga, and Carlos Soria Galvarra. Interviews also with former lower-level Paz official Antezana. Historian Elizabeth Burgos makes the same claim, namely that the Paz government had a tacit agreement that included Cuban use of Bolivia as a launching pad. See "L'emprise du castrisme en Bolivie," *Problèmes d'Amérique Latine* 69 (2008), 83-4.

²⁴ It was in the ensuing shoot-out that celebrated Peruvian poet, Javier Heraud, lost his life. Little has been written on this operation. See, however, Vázquez, *Una guerrilla para el Che*, 47-61.

US officials that this be held in “strict confidence” to avoid political recriminations among the Bolivian left.²⁵

On 30 May, eleven Peruvian leftists were arrested in Manuripi, just on the Bolivian side of the border from Puerto Maldonado. A US Embassy officer, Edmundo Flores, “worked out” the ensuing interrogation, but much to Washington’s chagrin not one of them “deviated from [the] group story that they are no more than leftwing Apristas trying to seek political asylum in Bolivia.”²⁶ The Paz government agreed to submit the group to the civilian courts, where judges accepted their story, and all eleven were released five weeks later.²⁷ The Peruvians spent the following months mostly in hiding, some in La Paz, others in the Bolivian mines, where Communist Party members helped them to organize their next attack on Peru.²⁸

Meanwhile, seeking to avoid a similar fate for its impending guerrilla attack on Argentina, termed *Operación Sombra*, Havana sent to Bolivia a highly respected intelligence agent, José María Martínez Tamayo (aka “Papi”). In July 1963, Papi entered the country on a Colombian passport under the name “Ricardo Aspuru.”²⁹ According to one of Papi’s PCB contacts in Cochabamba, “*Sombra* was much better organized, respecting total confidentiality.” More importantly, Zannier was kept far away, and not a word regarding

²⁵ Stutesman to Rusk, 30 May, 1-2 June 1963, CSM Communism BOL 1963, Box 3616, SDANF.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Stutesman to Rusk, 9 July 1963, CSM US-BOL 1963, Box 3687, SDANF.

²⁸ As Cuban intelligence agent Carretero explained, “Fortunately, there were good relations between the Bolivian and Cuban governments.” Carretero interview, in William Gálvez, *El sueño africano del Che* (Havana, 1973), 49, quoted in Vásquez, *Una guerrilla para el Che*, 59. Confirmed in Interviews with Loyola Guzmán, Rocabado, Rojas, Reinaga, and Soria. See “Ya han Sido Capturados Diez Miembros Del Grupo que se Internó en Manuripi,” *El Diario*, 31 May 1963, 4; and “Serán Sometidos a la Jurisdicción de la Justicia Ordinaria Guerrilleros Peruanos,” *El Diario*, 6 June 1963, 5.

²⁹ Benemelis, *Las Guerras Secretas*, 72. Confirmed in interviews with Soria, Rocabado, Reyes, and Guzmán. For more on *Operación Sombra*, which also ended in failure, including the death of Che Guevara’s close friend Jorge Ricardo Masetti, see Vásquez, *Una guerrilla para el Che*, 61-75; and Pierre-Olivier Pilard, *Jorge Ricardo Masetti: Un révolutionnaire guévarien et guévariste de 1958 à 1964* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2007).

Operación Sombra was said to President Paz.³⁰ While the extent to which Paz Estenssoro knew about the guerrillas remains controversial, there is no doubt that – for the time being – Havana was not targeting his government. In exchange, President Paz was doing little to curtail Cuban activity in Bolivia.

Despite having fully incorporated his country within the Alliance, President Paz was not an anticommunist. On the contrary, he was a genuine nationalist, who believed he could maintain international independence even while he accepted massive quantities of US aid funds. In late April 1963, Paz sent a new ambassador to Yugoslavia, along with a personal note praising Marshal Tito for following, along with India and the United Arab Republic, “the line of international neutralism,” which advocated for “the coexistence of the community of nations, known as the Third Way.” Two weeks later, Paz Estenssoro dispatched an ambassador to Algeria, with a note hailing Ben Bella’s “policies of anti-colonialism and the defense of the principle of self-determination.”³¹

Paz Estenssoro’s *modus vivendi* with selected groups of Communists won him few accolades amongst his enemies on the right and the dissident left. Bolivian conservatives had long pointed to the mutual tolerance as proof positive that the MNR was covertly communist.³² Meanwhile, dissident Marxists – both in the MNR and the PCB – railed against the Communist Party leadership for not fighting harder against growing US influence in Bolivia under the auspices of the Alliance for Progress.

³⁰ Interviews with Soria. See also Soria’s “La izquierda armada,” *Barataria* 2 (March-April 2005).

³¹ Foreign Ministry to Prudencio (Ambassador to Yugoslavia), 29 April 1963; and Foreign Ministry to García (Ambassador to Algeria), 17 May 1963, RV-4-E-54, RREE.

³² Former President Enrique Hertzog (1947-1949) was one of this argument’s foremost proponents. See *Communism in Bolivia* (Buenos Aires: n.p., 1954); as well as conversations Hertzog had with US Embassy officials in Buenos Aires, US Embassy (Buenos Aires) to State, 30 October 1964, “Bolivia, Cables, Volume II, 7/64-11/64,” Box 7, NSF-CO, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library (hereafter LBJL).

But the *modus vivendi* did enable Paz to neutralize two potential enemies: the PCB leadership and the Cuban government. Meanwhile for Washington, communist activity in Bolivia increased the sense that the Alliance for Progress, already an authoritarian program, should to a greater extent rely on the armed forces as conduits and harbingers of economic development. Recognizing that the principal threat to anticommunist stability in Bolivia was Vice President Lechín, rather than the PCB, Kennedy officials resolved to make use of economic aid funds to politically destroy the legendary labor leader.

Internal Defense Plan I: The Lechín Threat

With communist activity fueling Washington's perceptions of a growing threat, the stage was set for the Alliance for Progress to become fully militarized. Central to US concerns was Vice President Lechín, whose MNR left sector was strongly oriented toward accepting Soviet bloc economic aid and strengthening Bolivia's ties with Cuba. The key to defeating Lechín was in the mining camps, where the Alliance's Triangular Plan called for a series of authoritarian labor reforms. With Ambassador Ben Stephansky taking the lead, US policymakers finalized an "Internal Defense Plan for Bolivia," which recommended implementation of these labor reforms without delay. Desiring to use the Alliance for Progress to precipitate a split between Paz and Lechín, the Kennedy administration once again found the armed forces to be its preferred method of carrying out development as a politicized foreign policy intervention.

Bolivia's leftward turn in the wake of US tin dumping and the cancellation of Paz's White House trip left Ambassador Stephansky deeply depressed. Kennedy's Special Group on Counterinsurgency (CI) placed Bolivia on its watch list in September 1962, and asked Stephansky to draft an Internal Defense Plan that would shore up Paz's regime along anticommunist lines. Stephansky's spirits were buoyed by the Cuban Missile Crisis the

following month, an event which he characterized as a “most fortunate coincidence” for US-Bolivian relations. Throughout the year, Stephansky explained, Lechín’s MNR Left Sector had been “openly taking major steps to consolidate its organization and move into contention for victor in [the] 1964 elections” on a platform that was “strongly pro-Cuban, and advocating trade, aid, and diplomatic relations with Soviet Russia.” The Missile Crisis “caught [the] left sector with its ideological pants down,” Stephansky reported, adding that Paz’s supporters in the MNR had “visibly stiffened resistance to [the] left sector’s penetration and consolidation activities.” Citing a gushing letter Paz wrote to Kennedy in support of Washington’s handling of the crisis, Stephansky reported that anticommunists in the governing party were finally pushing for a “stronger wedge between Paz and Lechín.” Stephansky warned that the “Castro-Commie machine [is] not yet defeated,” but he believed that Alliance for Progress aid money, “complemented by programs attacking areas [of] Commie influence,” would ensure that a Paz-Lechín break would occur.³³

In its anti-Lechín crusade, Washington boasted powerful allies in the Bolivian armed forces. In late October 1962, Generals Barrientos and Ovando visited the US embassy to explain that while “time [is] not ripe for [an] open break [between] Paz and Lechín,” the military was firmly in the Paz camp was planning to promptly make these sympathies known. In return, the generals asked for a fresh shipment of military equipment. Stephansky did not delay, cabling Secretary Rusk hours later a request for 14,000 tear gas canisters, 400 M-1 carbine machine guns, 400,000 rounds of machine gun ammunition, 50,000 rounds of 38-Special ammunition, and 25,000 shotgun shells. A perennial MNR skeptic, Rusk hesitated, referring reports that Paz’s security services was using these weapons to crackdown principally on Bolivian conservatives, and had engaged in an “apparently unprovoked attack

³³ Stephansky to Rusk, 17 December 1962; and Paz to Kennedy, 26 November 1962; Bolivia, “General, 8/62-12/62,” Box 10, NSF-CO, JFKL.

on school children” during its most recent state of siege. Stephansky was unshaken, replying immediately that the “appearance of carbines in [the] hands [of the] *carabineros* [police]...might have avoided bloodshed,” because the students “might have fled earlier.”³⁴

Ironically, Stephansky harbored a latent personal affection for Juan Lechín. As he later explained, “[Lechín] was one of the most charming and loveable people you’ll ever meet, charmed the pants off you.” Stephansky used to argue tirelessly with Lechín that there was “nothing incompatible between modernization and efficiency” called for in the Alliance for Progress and “your type of socialism, whatever it may be.” Lechín was immune to this line of argument, however, responding that “this present revolution is the bourgeois revolution. We’re going to have the real revolution one day.” Stephansky later scoffed, “This is the kind of crap I’d get from him...He was one of the most capriciously irresponsible guys...[who] never really worked in the directions I felt would pull along with what was happening constructively.”³⁵

Lechín might have believed the real revolution was coming, but Ambassador Stephansky’s push for “modernization and efficiency” was backed up the dollars and the political weight of the United States. In his late 1962 Internal Defense Plan, Stephansky coldly detailed how to “precipitate a conflict between Lechín and Paz, or between the left and moderate wings of the MNR.” White House aide Goodwin loved the program, explaining on 2 November that it was the best hope of “keeping the extremists out.” According to Goodwin, for the plan to succeed, “someone has to be given the authority to commit and spend a decent-sized chunk of aid money with permission to deviate from normal criteria.” Three weeks later, Assistant Secretary Martin – another pro-Paz voice – reported that “many

³⁴ Stephansky to Rusk, 28 October 1962, in *idem.*; and Stephansky to Rusk, 24-26, and 29 October 1962, 724.5/3-460, Box 1563, SDDF.

³⁵ Stephansky Oral History, JFKL, 33-4.

of the specific programs mentioned by Ambassador Stephansky are moving ahead and some have even broke loose for signatures.”³⁶ Martin later added that it was “essential” that military assistance be employed in addressing “large political elements” through aggressive participation in civic action programs that would “promote development as well as improve the political attitudes and acceptability of the military.”³⁷

USAID’s new administrator, David Bell, joined the chorus shortly after his appointment, explaining to the White House in early February 1963 that “Bolivia has become the target of increased penetration by the Soviet bloc.” The only way to ensure that the country did not fall “into the hands of communism” was to “demonstrate to the Western Hemisphere and the world that a national revolution which profoundly altered the social and political life of a feudal country can, with US assistance, gradually become a viable, free, mixed society.” It was clear that he had thoroughly adopted the pro-Paz line set out by Schlesinger, Stephansky, Goodwin, and Martin, when he wrote that US aid should be used as a leverage to convince Paz to reduce the influence of the leftist-dominated miners’ unions, meanwhile seeing to it that the armed forces were “quietly strengthened” through engagement in road building, land clearing, and school building. Bell was certain that a stronger military would permit Paz to “better cope with the armed miners and *campesinos*.”³⁸

Even Paz skeptics, like the White House Bureau of the Budget, was willing to go along. Warning that the Alliance for Progress in Bolivia was a “classic example of US development assistance in form and not substance,” the Bureau conceded nonetheless that an

³⁶ Goodwin to Martin, 2 November 1962; and Belcher to Martin, 29 November 1962, “Bolivia, 1962,” Box 4, Lots 62D418 and 64D15, SDF.

³⁷ Martin to Stephansky, 4 March 1963, “Defense Affairs, Agreements, 1963,” Box 3, Lots 65D160 and 66D458, SDF.

³⁸ Bell, “Bolivian Strategy Statement,” 11 February 1963, “Bolivia, 2/63-6/63,” Box 389A, NSF-Dungan, JFKL, 1-2, 4. On “*campesino*,” see Author’s Note, viii.

expanded program would have a chance if it were used to “exert maximum leverage” to ensure that the Bolivian government moved forward to “rationalize employment” in the mining camps, through the firing of 5,000 “surplus” miners.”³⁹

President Paz initially planned to visit Washington in May 1963, at which point Stephansky stressed that the “most important feature” of the upcoming trip was Paz’s candidacy for the 1964 elections. Having changed the constitution during his June 1961 state of siege to permit re-election, Paz was demonstrating a “stronger interest in running again,” thereby blocking Lechín’s candidacy. On this topic, Stephansky was unequivocal: “the best chance for political moderation and for the Alliance to succeed is [for] Paz to repeat [in] 1964.” In fact, Stephansky believed that “the success of the Paz visit will be measured by our ability to work out the basis for his candidacy in 1964,” and he urged Kennedy to “be as flexible as necessary to get him to run again.” In return for US support, Stephansky explained that Paz would offer “commitments on a harder line on Cuba, a harder line on the internal Communist problem...a harder line on Soviet bloc aid...and increasingly better performance for economic development.” Aware of the potential criticism that Paz was becoming a dictator, Stephansky recommended that Washington cultivate a new generation of MNR leaders, like Barrientos and Bedregal, who could take over in 1968.⁴⁰

Once again, however, Paz’s trip was postponed. He surprised US officials on 10 April with news that a White House visit would be “impossible at this time,” since Lechín

³⁹ Hansen to Bundy and Bell, “The Finances of the Public Sector of Bolivia,” 5 March 1963, “Bolivia, General, 1/63-4/63,” Box 10A, NSF-CO, JFKL.

⁴⁰ Stephansky to Rusk, 8 April 1963, in *idem.*; Stephansky was later asked about his role in Paz’s decision to run for re-election. He replied misleadingly: “The re-election issue didn’t come up until late in the game, and it was a rather complicated story...the notion that I campaigned for Víctor...that I rather favored that he should have a second [sic-third] term, you might say that without a doubt I discussed it on several occasions with Paz.” Stephansky Oral History, JFKL, 28.

planned a visit home from his ambassadorship in Rome to coincide with Paz's trip abroad.⁴¹ According to the Paz, Lechín planned to use his absence to "force cabinet resignation," attempt to divide the armed forces, and "push through [the] Czech smelter project" long delayed by MNR anticommunists. Paz's decision to postpone his trip "puts Lechín on the spot," since Lechín would either have to return to Rome or continue on to Bolivia and "end up in [an] open fight." Paz was sure Lechín "would lose," even if the coming months would prove a "rugged time." He assured Stephansky that he had the "upper hand," and that by September or October, Lechín would be "licked." Paz wanted to visit the White House with his re-election "lined up," and he coquettishly revealed that he was mulling over tapping General Barrientos as his running mate.⁴²

Lechín did return to Bolivia. One of his first actions was to visit Barrientos in mid-May, who lived next door on Avenida 6 de Agosto, where he offered the General the vice presidency in exchange for support for his presidential run. Lechín then unwittingly shared with Barrientos the details of his plan to "embarrass the government," which Barrientos later spilled to US Embassy Air Attaché Fox.⁴³ By encouraging dissident communists at the Siglo XX mining camp to organize a series of "strikes and slow-downs," Lechín would force Paz to "come to terms with him." In their intransigent opposition to the Paz government, Siglo XX leaders Escóbar and Pimentel found themselves squarely at odds with the PCB leadership,

⁴¹ Foreign embassies were chosen respites for MNR leaders. Paz served as Siles's ambassador to London from 1956 to 1960, and Siles returned the favor by representing Paz's government in Madrid and Montevideo from 1960 to 1964. Lechín had not originally planned to spend his vice presidential years in Rome, but a nervous breakdown resulting from scurrilous accusations of cocaine smuggling convinced him to take a break. Lechín believed this golden exile was prelude to his 1964 presidential run. See Lechín, *El pueblo*, 137-8; and numerous articles from *El Diario* beginning in late 1961. For more on Bolivia's move to curtail narcotics trafficking during the early 1960s, and accusations against Lechín, see Paul Gootenberg, *Andean Cocaine: the making of a global drug* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press), 275-89.

⁴² Stephansky to Rusk, 22 April 1963, "Bolivia, Subjects, Paz Visit, 10/22/63-10/24/63," Box 11, NSF-CO, JFKL; and Paz to Kennedy, 24 April 1963, "Bolivia, 1962-3," Box 112, POF, JFKL.

⁴³ Barrientos was sly, and Lechín was no doubt flattered by a series of letters from the General calling Lechín the "lighthouse that enlightens the people," among other flowery accolades. See Lechín, *El pueblo*, 159.

something Lechín believed he could exploit in order to “regain his lost strength before the 1964 elections.” Barrientos disappointed Lechín, explaining that he was firmly in the Paz camp and would remain there. Lechín then set out on a countrywide campaign tour, falsely claiming to his supporters that “the American Government favored his candidacy and US aid funds would continue” if he were elected.⁴⁴

General Barrientos visited the US Embassy on 24 April, just before he was to depart to Washington for the Inter-American Air Force Chiefs Conference. Accompanied by Colonel Fox, Barrientos explained that the armed forces were preparing to declare themselves in support of Paz’s re-election, with Barrientos as running mate. Stephansky responded that it was “too early” to discuss vice presidential candidates, but assured the General that the US “would not look upon his nomination with disfavor.”⁴⁵ Three days later, General Barrientos accepted the military’s official proclamation in favor of the Paz-Barrientos ticket, and promptly departed for Washington. He expressed concern to Fox, however, that the armed forces had jumped the gun, and revealed that he would stay in the US for a few extra weeks, “ostensibly to have some dental work done, but actually to let the public interest in his candidacy die down.” The wily General was perfecting the art of a reluctant leader, confidently telling Colonel Fox that his political career would extend “twenty years or more into the future.”⁴⁶

On 16 May 1963, one week after General Barrientos shook hands with President Kennedy in the White House Rose Garden, the Special Group (CI) approved a final draft of Stephansky’s IDP. It began:

⁴⁴ MEMCON, 10 May 1963, Government POL BOL 1963; and Stephansky to Rusk, 7 May 1963, Elections POL BOL 1963, Box 3829, SDANF. See “Inicia Mañana Jira Política Vicepresidente Juan Lechín,” *El Diario*, 25 May 1963, 7.

⁴⁵ MEMCON, 24 April 1963, Elections POL BOL 1963, Box 3829, SDANF.

⁴⁶ MEMCON, 10 May 1963, Government POL BOL 1963, Box 3829, SDANF.

Bolivia is threatened by an extreme left wing takeover that would place in power a sector of the governing...MNR...which is heavily infiltrated by communists. Such a takeover would be likely to result in a government of the Castro-communist mold, antagonistic toward the United States and having close ties with the communist world. The MNR Left Sector...is headed by...Lechín, an opportunist with extreme leftist, if not communistic, ideas, who has distinguished himself mainly for his political rabble rousing and oppositionist activities. The loss of Bolivia to Castro-communism would signify a serious failure by the United States, despite more than a decade of assistance, in its effort to channel a genuine national revolution into the course of stable economic and democratic development.

The plan added that only Paz was “strong enough to prevent” a Lechín victory in 1964, but the President’s “present lack of will...to resist communist and extreme leftwing infiltration and activities...[was] the single greatest threat to internal security.” The IDP called for using Alliance funds as a “powerful instrument...[toward] obtaining...many of our political goals,” including the “elimination of the basis of power of [the] MNR Left Sector, especially in the mining unions,” the “development of alternatives to the MNR,” the creation of a “more disciplined and responsible free labor movement,” and the “prevention of Sino-Soviet bloc penetration.” Central to the IDP was an increased reliance also on the Bolivian armed forces, “identified with the aspirations of the people” through Alliance-backed civic action program, which received Paz’s unqualified support. The plan stressed the “urgency” of moving forward, since the 1964 would be the culmination of the “struggle between extremist followers of Vice President Lechín and the more moderate supporters of President Paz.”⁴⁷

Thanks to the enormity of the Alliance for Progress in Bolivia, the Kennedy administration was deeply involved in the country by late 1962, and Washington had become a key political arbiter in internal affairs. It was through this intervention that US policymakers felt confident in their ability to convince Paz to make a decisive break with his party’s Left Sector. In this way, Alliance development programs were serving as an

⁴⁷ “Internal Defense Plan for Bolivia,” 10 May 1963, “Bolivia, 3/61-10/63,” Box WH-25, Schlesinger Papers, JFKL, 1-2, 11, 14-5; and “Minutes of the Special Group (CI) Meeting,” 16 May 1963, CREST.

aggressive vehicle with which a political goal was pursued. By strengthening the Bolivian armed forces through civic action programs in the countryside, and by employing military force to implement Alliance reforms in the mining camps, the Kennedy administration hoped to finally consolidate the Bolivian revolution along strictly anticommunist lines.

Internal Defense Plan II: Military Civic Action

One of most important aspects of the Alliance in Bolivia was a program of military civic action in the countryside, which aimed to put USAID funds to work in rural development projects carried out by US-built army engineering battalions.⁴⁸ Civic action was a paradigm that had been seized upon by Bolivian officers in order to survive the aftermath of the 1952 revolution, and the idea was enthusiastically adopted by Kennedy's development-oriented officials. No Bolivian benefited more from civic action than General Barrientos. The approach also received high marks from the Pentagon and the CIA, bureaucracies seeking the best way to implement counterinsurgency doctrine within the Kennedy administration's developmentalist paradigm.

A key asset in Washington's use of development as intervention was Air Force Chief General Barrientos. A fervent supporter of the 1952 revolution, Barrientos never tired of reminding Bolivians that he had copiloted the plane that brought Paz back from Buenos Aires in the days following the insurrection.⁴⁹ In the early 1960s, Barrientos had become a visible public figure, thanks to his role inaugurating these civic action programs, his legendary

⁴⁸ See Chapter One, footnote 123.

⁴⁹ A documentary by historian Carlos Mesa shows still footage of Barrientos deplaning with Paz on 15 April. See *Bolivia Siglo XX: Tata Barrientos* (La Paz: Plano Medio, 2009). See also interviews with Arguedas, who served as radio operator on the plane, in Cuevas, *Arguedas*, 67-70.

bravado,⁵⁰ a fluency in Quechua,⁵¹ and friendships with the leftist directors of two major newspapers, *El Diario* in La Paz and *El Mundo* in Cochabamba.⁵² Throughout 1962, the General's speeches, beautifully elegant but utterly meaningless,⁵³ received wide play in the Bolivian press. Barrientos declared that "the armed forces will never divest themselves of the beautiful treasure of constitutionality, nor will they permit Bolivia to lose this amazing reward won by blood and agony."⁵⁴ In March 1962, Barrientos explained that the "participation of the nation's entire armed forces in this present process of the National Revolution has always been selfless, silent, and decisive." By putting down numerous rightwing conspiracies since 1952, the armed forces

has sealed with valor, loyalty, and bloodshed its definitive membership in the cause of the Bolivian people, of the Indian peasants, of the workers in the mines and cities, in the cause of the men who struggle and work to mobilize Bolivians' most audacious, dignified, and decisive efforts against illiteracy, exploitation, and the indignity that had denigrated the Republic and aggravated our backwardness.

⁵⁰ Anyone who goes to Bolivia asking about Barrientos hears the following legend: In October 1961, during an air show outside La Paz, three Airmen lost their lives when their parachutes failed to open. In the face of criticism in the press, Barrientos had journalists to accompany him to where the bodies lay. He asked them to pick one parachute among the three that had supposedly failed, and he proceeded to put it on. Barrientos then carried out a dramatic jump, sailing safely to the ground and then being carted away on the shoulders of the masses who had come out to witness the stunt. This is essentially what happened, although Barrientos had the decency to wait until the unfortunate Airmen had been buried, and there is little evidence that he used one of the supposedly-failed parachutes. See "El Comandante de la Fuerza Aérea se Lanzó en Paracaídas," 19 October 1961, 6. There is no shortage of Barrientos legends. He is also said to have set up a delicious barbecue in front of hunger strikers to convince them to give up their demands. And in one altercation with a dynamite-wielding miner, Barrientos apparently grabbed the dynamite stick, bear-hugged the miner, and asked around if anyone had a match.

⁵¹ According to Barrientos's friends in Cochabamba, he spoke poor Quechua until 1961. He then began taking lessons from Rocabado and Zannier, both of whom spoke fluently. Interviews with Rocabado and Alberto Iriarte.

⁵² Mario Rolón was director of *El Diario* beginning in late 1961, and Víctor Zannier was director of *El Mundo*. Rocabado puts it thus, "Zannier was much closer friends with Barrientos than I was. That's why *El Mundo* took such a pro-Barrientos line." Interviews with Rocabado.

⁵³ Rocabado told Barrientos that, despite the fact that he gave "such lovely speeches, full of passion and energy," he was "in big trouble" when the press published transcripts. Rocabado told him: "When you read your speeches verbatim, they are meaningless!" Interviews with Rocabado.

⁵⁴ "Enérgica Declaración de Legalidad y Apego Constitucional de las FFAA," *El Diario*, 25 July 1962, 6.

Continuing with this arousing language, Barrientos assured the Bolivian people that the process of “raising the banner of economic independence and social justice...has awoken the unanimous fervor and profound conviction of the components of the armed forces.”⁵⁵

Barrientos’s rustic vigor did not square, however, with the bureaucratic schisms that were overtaking his beloved revolutionary party. He warned that “it is unjustifiable for the [MNR] sectors to bring about the distraction of the essence of the nationalist revolution, to bring about the ignoring of its authority or to weaken its unity.” Expounding at length on the “dangers of the struggle between sectors,” Barrientos stressed that a “member of the armed forces has the obligation to help overcome these negative conditions, providing an example of authority, order, and discipline, living up to his conciliatory role and his mission as guardian,” and ensuring that the “enemies of the Revolution” could not take advantage of divisions in the revolutionary family. The general continued:

Authority is the fundamental basis of all human organization, and it is the great force employed by mankind as an indispensable and decisive instrument to overcome primitivism and all the dangers and obstacles that oppose the ordering of societies in their methodical pursuit of advanced stages of civilization and progress.

Barrientos concluded his lengthy communiqué by once more stressing that the “new military” had become “an instrument in defense of the National Revolution, an armed, productive organization at the service of the overwhelming majority, with a firm conscience in the struggle for the liberation of the Indian peasants and the workers who will later make up a prosperous and content Homeland.”⁵⁶

It is not difficult to see how this approach dovetailed nicely with the President Kennedy’s, articulated in NSAM 119, which called for militaries to play a central role in

⁵⁵ René Barrientos, *La Unidad de las Fuerzas Armadas de la Revolución Nacional* (La Paz: n.p., 1962).

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

Third World development.⁵⁷ Kennedy built on this idea at a July 1962 gathering of Latin American officers in Panama, where he declared that “armies can play constructive roles in defending the aims of the Alliance for Progress by striking at the roots of economic and social distress.”⁵⁸ Kennedy’s appointee to head up the Alliance for Progress, Teodoro Moscoso, echoed his boss at another meeting of Latin American officers in mid-1963, explaining that economic development “has a great deal to do with the military,” because even a “few isolated clashes of violence...[could] scare investors, domestic as well as foreign, from risking their capital.” In Moscoso’s view, one country’s military was especially worthy of praise:

I was in Bolivia several months ago, and what I saw the armed forces doing in the name of the betterment of their country and the lives of their people was something truly incredible. Roads are being built and repaired, virgin lands are being colonized, maps of the country are being drawn up, rural schools are being built, potable water is being provided to tiny communities, and medical services are being given to people who live in remote areas. And all of this and more is being realized through the resources, the energy, and the dedication of the Bolivian armed forces.⁵⁹

One of the areas where General Barrientos was most interested in making an authoritative impact was his native Cochabamba Valley, where tensions between Paz and Lechín were fueling violent clashes. MNR infighting had become the target of intense criticism “for its permissive attitude toward these acts of violence,” according to José Gordillo, who has written extensively on Cochabamba Indian experiences. Gordillo writes: “In contrast to these violent political events, there began to circulate a series of news stories and images of soldiers’ benevolent attitudes toward the peasant sectors of the Valley, to

⁵⁷ Kennedy, NSAM 119, 18 December 1961, National Security Action Memoranda, NSF-JFK, JFKL.

⁵⁸ Kennedy, “Final Report, 3rd Conference of American Armies,” 16-20 July 1962, in Brill, “Military Civic Action,” 30.

⁵⁹ Teodoro Moscoso, *Lo que he visto hacer las fuerzas armadas en Bolivia es impresionante* (La Paz: USIS, 1963).

whom they periodically gifted school buildings and health centers.” These civic action programs were often inaugurated by General Barrientos himself, who informed the Indians that the funds came from Kennedy’s Alliance for Progress. This process led to the emergence of a “military developmentalist discourse,” according to Gordillo, “which – while maintaining itself within the framework of the discourse of revolutionary nationalism – implicitly challenged the MNR project and signaled a viable political alternative.” Barrientos went to great lengths to spread his message, telling members of the press in early 1963 that rural development “is our revolutionary language.”⁶⁰

In order to facilitate his political ascent, General Barrientos called the Pentagon in early 1962, requesting the presence of his old friend Colonel Edward Fox, with whom he had “played cards and done bachelor things” in Cochabamba during Fox’s 1952-1955 stint as aviation advisor to Washington’s military group.⁶¹ Colonel Fox, who a former CIA Station Chief refers to as “practically the Godfather of the Bolivian air force,”⁶² eventually brought his fiancée, Evelyn, to Cochabamba, and the two started a family in tight quarters with their Bolivian friends. A genteel but fiery Texan, Evelyn recalls that when one attempted coup d’état broke out in 1954, her husband handed her a grenade and said, “If anyone comes in the house, you know what to do.” She later said, “I had no *idea* what to do! But that was the kind of adventure that was commonplace during our time in Bolivia.”⁶³ Antonio Arguedas, a close Barrientos associate, recalls that “the difference between Fox and the other [Americans] was that he was more a man of the people, which agreed with Barrientos’s nature.” Arguedas

⁶⁰ José Gordillo, *Campesinos Revolucionarios en Bolivia: Identidad, territorio y sexualidad en el Valle Alto de Cochabamba, 1952-1964* (La Paz: Plural, 2000), 131-5.

⁶¹ Interviews with Fox.

⁶² Interviews with Sternfield.

⁶³ Interviews with Evelyn Fox.

adds that Colonel Fox “was not a self-absorbed American who thought he was the center of the universe...in a word, he was not the kind of *gringo* who went around saying, ‘America is the best in the world.’”⁶⁴ Colonel Fox reflected this humility in interviews with this author:

So many of our people went in there trying to change their way of life, their beliefs, their religions. I shouldn’t really speak for the Indians, but I would imagine they liked any leader – Paz or Barrientos – who would improve their way of life and not treat them like animals. They weren’t political people. They supported anyone who gave them support and recognition. Recognition of their way of life...I got along very well with them. I didn’t try to tell them how to live. The only time you should ever tell them anything is if they ask.⁶⁵

Colonel Fox recalls that in early 1962, “somebody important must have pulled some strings, because René made one call and within two days two C-130s were sent to pick up our whole family.”⁶⁶

Once Colonel Fox was back in his adopted country, as Embassy Air Attaché and undercover agent for the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA),⁶⁷ he requested Stephansky’s permission to visit his old friend in Cochabamba. According to Fox’s report, Barrientos was “surprised [and] thrilled to have me there and provided me with a car and driver which is a rare treat in Cochabamba.” On his first evening back in town on 6 October 1962, Fox received Barrientos in his hotel room where the two caught up over the course of several “meaty” hours. The General revealed to his friend that he was considering entering politics as Paz’s running mate in 1964, and spoke confidently of his stellar working relationship with

⁶⁴ Arguedas, in Cuevas, *Arguedas*, 155-6.

⁶⁵ Interviews with Fox. Fox’s views did not mesh well with the developmentalists, such as Alliance architect Robert Alexander, who believed Washington’s task was “the conversion of the fifteenth-century Indian peasant into a twentieth-century agriculturist and citizen.” Alexander, “Nature and Progress of Agrarian Reform in Latin America,” *The Journal of Latin American History* 23 (December 1963), 569-70. For his part, Stephansky told Alexander that “the whole orientation of the country must shift east,” away from the Indians’ millenary lands on the Altiplano. Stephansky, interview with Alexander, 8 April 1962, folder 58, Interviews, Alexander Papers, Rutgers.

⁶⁶ Interviews with Fox. At the time, he was posted in Santiago, Chile.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.* With regard to accusations that he worked for the CIA, Colonel Fox was dismissive: “CIA is for civilians!”

Army Commander Ovando. He assured Colonel Fox that the military was firmly “behind Paz and not Lechín,” adding that any officer who allied with Lechín would be fired. They would carry out a coup, Barrientos stressed, before permitting Lechín to succeed Paz in 1964.⁶⁸ Fox’s response, which did not make its way into the official report, was: “You do what you have to do, René, and I will try and support you when I can. But we can’t bullshit each other.”⁶⁹

When the two arrived in the countryside the following day, it quickly became clear to Fox that “the General had won the love and confidence of the Indians in this area.” Amidst hugs and confetti, Barrientos praised US economic assistance in front of a gathering of at least a thousand Indian peasants. Speaking in their native Quechua, Barrientos explained that schools “were being constructed throughout the country under a joint United States and Bolivian effort,” detailing the civic action programs and the “part that the military was to play.” He then told the peasants that the food and milk the children would receive at the schools came from the United States, stressing that “they should be grateful for the help that is coming from the North Americans.” During the massive *chicha*⁷⁰-fueled lunch that followed, eight chiefs from other Indian tribes approached the General, asking him to “visit their sections as soon as possible.” In a neighboring village, Barrientos “once again...praised the United States and explained the civic action program to the people.”⁷¹

Interestingly, Barrientos’s entourage also included several leftists, including Zannier and his hometown mayor, and lifelong friend, Alberto Iriarte.⁷² When Barrientos revealed

⁶⁸ Fox, “Field Visit – Cliza Valley, October 6-7, 1962,” 16 October 1962, 724.5/3-460, Box 1563, SDDF.

⁶⁹ Interviews with Fox.

⁷⁰ *Chicha* refers to various Latin American drinks. In Bolivia, it is a corn-based intoxicant traditional to Cochabamba.

⁷¹ Fox, “Field Visit – Cliza Valley, October 6-7, 1962.”

⁷² Interviews with Rocabado and Iriarte.

their ideological inclinations to Fox, he assured the Air Attaché that these “Reds...are weak people who can do nothing concerning my efforts in this Valley” as long as he had the Indians on his side. Fox did not seem bothered by these acquaintances, reporting back to the Embassy that “the entire week of activities was most successful and General Barrientos put on the show that I had expected to see.”⁷³ Fox later revealed to this author his view that

“Communist” is just a word. It doesn’t mean anything in that country. They might be leftists or they might not be, but there weren’t any real communists down there. There, you have to take things on a person-by-person basis.

Fox explained that Cochabamba Communists were like Southern Democrats in America, adding that many were opposed to Paz, which further endeared them to the colonel.⁷⁴ Former CIA Station Chief Sternfield agrees that “there was always a sense that the people in Cochabamba – even the nominal Communists – were ‘part of the family,’ and better than those guys” in the MNR.⁷⁵

Alliance for Progress civic action programs also boasted a powerful ally in the Pentagon. Once the IDP had been approved, Deputy Undersecretary of Defense for Special Operations, General Edward Lansdale, visited Bolivia accompanied by the head of US Southern Command, General Andrew O’Meara.⁷⁶ Lansdale, a CIA agent who headed US covert operations in the Philippines and Indochina in the late 1940s and 1950s, was now in charge of Operation Mongoose, the Kennedy administration’s program of sabotage against Castro’s Cuba. Lansdale’s interest in Bolivia arose from country’s politically mobilized peasantry, a similar demographic he faced in Southeast Asia. He later recalled that although

⁷³ Fox, “Field Visit – Cliza Valley, October 6-7, 1962.”

⁷⁴ Interviews with Fox.

⁷⁵ Interviews with Sternfield.

⁷⁶ For obvious reasons, Lansdale’s presence in Bolivia was not revealed to the public. See “Llegó Alto Jefe Militar Norteamericano a Cooperar en Programa Cívico de las FFAA,” *El Diario*, 28 May 1963, 7.

the Kennedy administration was “highly sensitive about my showing up in foreign countries,” he had “begged to be permitted to go down and take a look” at Bolivia and Venezuela.⁷⁷

In his report back to the Special Group (CI), Lansdale wrote that Bolivia was a “land of vexing paradox for the US.” Its people were “warmly friendly toward us (the smiles and waved hands of the children reminded me of the Philippines) yet it has fallen in love with Marxism (of both the Lenin and Trotsky version).” He noted that the country could be summed up by “the basic paradox: a land of wide-open spaces, Bolivia has hidden its capital city down in a crevice, almost as though it wanted its leaders to become moles.” Central to Lansdale’s developmentalist narrative were US and Bolivian efforts to colonize the country’s Amazonian lowlands. He wrote with effusive praise for Bolivian Colonel Julio Sanjinés Goytia, at the time serving as the head of USAID’s Military Civic Action program, whose “fire and enthusiasm” for military-led development had caught on in the local officer corps. Sanjinés represented, for General Lansdale, the “beginning of a path off towards objectives more in harmony with US beliefs, and away from the “left fork of the political road,” which Washington had followed since the 1952 revolution.⁷⁸

General Lansdale was so impressed with Sanjinés – a scion of one of Bolivia’s founding families whose anti-MNR attitude was thinly veiled by the colonel’s resignation to the revolution’s irreversibility⁷⁹ – that he recounted at length how Sanjinés had put Alliance for Progress funds to use in the leftist Indian stronghold of Achacachi:

Achacachi is a dry and dusty place, noted for its shortage of water. It was picked for a Civic Action well-drilling project. Rather than announced this

⁷⁷ Lansdale Oral History, JFKL, 39.

⁷⁸ Lansdale to McNamara, Gilpatric, and Bundy, 3 and 6 June 1963, “Bolivia, General, 4/63-7/63,” Box 10A, NSF-CO, JFKL, 1-2, 4; and interviews with Sanjinés. In a Pentagon-endorsed study of military civic action in Bolivia, William Brill writes that Sanjinés was “a man whose name is indeed inseparable from civic action in Bolivia.” Brill, “Military Civic Action,” xxxii. In early 1963, Sanjinés took over as interim president of *El Diario*, which further accentuated the paper’s pro-Barrientos bias.

⁷⁹ Interviews with Sanjinés.

early, as a *politico* would be tempted to do, Sanjinés moved into Achacachi with a crew of engineers, including Army men in civilian clothes, and made a quietly unobtrusive survey for potential water sources; the survey showed promising sites. The well-drilling crews and equipment were readied and put on a standby basis in La Paz, alert to move on signal. Sanjinés then had a leading La Paz newspaper (owned by Sanjinés...) send reporters to Achacachi to ask the people how they would like a Civic Action project to provide free water in the city. The people interviewed replied, "All the government ever does is talk, not act," "The Army is worthless and would never do anything for us," and similar comments. Sanjinés met with town officials, told them of the proposed project, and was invited to give it a try. He signaled to La Paz, the Army engineers (in uniform), and equipment showed up promptly and went to work, completing the new water works in record time. The La Paz newspaper then publicized the Civic Action project complete with earlier scoffing interviews. It made quite a convincing story.⁸⁰

In his report to the Special Group, Lansdale praised Kennedy's Alliance for "back[ing] civic action projects aggressively with plans, funds, advice, materiel, and other help." These "imaginative" projects were "making a dramatic change in the psychological climate" by stressing a "public service role" for the armed forces and changing the "vividly brutal portrayal of the military as monsters inflicting pain and suffering on the lowly Indian." For Lansdale, the most important aspect of the civic action program was the colonization of Bolivia's Amazonian lowlands, where many of the displaced miners were to be settled. The whole enterprise was analogous to the "opening of our own West," he wrote, where military battalions act as "pathfinders, engineers, and guardians." Lansdale warned, however, that since Bolivia "serves the Communists as a Switzerland – a transit area to other Latin American places for people, funds, and materiel," there was a danger that the civic action colonies would become hotbeds of Communist influence. "It would be a macabre joke," he

⁸⁰ Lansdale to McNamara, Gilpatric, and Bundy, 3 and 6 June 1963, "Bolivia, General, 4/63-7/63," Box 10A, NSF-CO, JFKL, 1-2, 4. The *El Diario* article is indeed dramatic. Indians are quoted, "If the *gringos* help, then we must believe that potable water for Achacachi will be a beautiful reality," and, "Our dream has finally been fulfilled...I give thanks to the national army." See "Agua Potable en Achacachi: Dentro de Tres Meses," *El Diario*, 26 May 1963, 6. The denouement of the story is less glowing. The Indians saw little use in paying for indoor water when they could get it free from community sources. The inauguration of the water system was marred by a bombing attempt on the pump, which eventually required 24 hour army security. Worse, only 150 families out of 5,000 were willing to pay, and the rest – when asked about the project – "simply shrugged." Brill writes that army units needed to do a better job "to educate the people as to [the pump's] value and induce them to pay for the service." See Brill, "Military Civic Action," 191-5.

wrote, “if the US and Bolivian governments helped these people get a fresh start in life – and the Communists then taught them how to live it, the Communist way.”⁸¹

Washington’s struggle to win the propaganda battle in Bolivia reminded Lansdale of the situation in Laos in 1958, where a “technical beautiful psychological operation” was defeated by the Communists, who “just kept going for the jugular.” He sought ways to “put some effective bare-knuckles into our psychological operations,” adding that he was especially concerned with “invitations to the Communists among the Bolivian military.” Civic action could be “just the right political touch to help carry the fight for us,” he wrote, stressing its “psychological appeal,” which could help to pave the way for a “strong Vice Presidential candidate” in 1964, namely “Air Force Chief General Barrientos.”⁸²

Lansdale concluded his report by noting that Government Minister José Antonio Arze Murillo had requested CIA cooperation with Bolivia’s nascent anticommunist efforts, and he wrote that Washington “would profit if CIA were to go into a huddle with [US Southern Command] soonest on how best to go all the way in, now that an opening has been made.”⁸³ Three months later, Larry Sternfield took over as CIA Station Chief in La Paz, tasked with working closely with Arze Murillo and Paz’s feared *Control Político* to destroy all threats to the MNR regime.⁸⁴

In a Pentagon-endorsed study of military-led development in Bolivia, William Brill praised Washington’s military mission in La Paz for being a “forward-looking, civic action-

⁸¹ Ibid. According to Brill, these colonization projects were only successful when they recruited landless Indians, “who had little choice but to stay and work.” See “Military Civic Action,” 169 (footnote 12).

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid. Arze Murillo’s offer was made on 30 May. See Stephansky to Rusk, 30 May 1963, “Bolivia, 4/63-7/63,” Box 10A, NSF-CO, JFKL.

⁸⁴ Interviews with Sternfield. Another former CIA Agent writes that Arze Murillo “worked closely with the La Paz station” in support of the Agency’s “Bolivian operations” in support of Paz. Agee, *Inside the Company*, 385.

oriented group.” Brill gives credit for this attitude to an “enlightened Mission Chief,” Colonel Truman Cook, “one of those model officers one often hears about...[who] fully grasped the importance of civic action for Bolivia.”⁸⁵ Cook attended Sanjinés’s water treatment inauguration in Achacachi and later contributed the prologue to the latter’s Alliance-funded book on civic action, in which the military mission chief wrote that although the “absorbing task of nation building is both intricately complex and challenging,” civic action provides the “blend of military assistance with indigenous self-help” that best fits the “needs of underdeveloped nations.” The armed forces, according to Colonel Cook, “can be a creative institution in the dynamic process of economic and social development,” and it was important to guard against “negative reasoning” by military skeptics, who argued that “the involvement of the military in...development irrevocably leads to the assumption of power by the military.”⁸⁶

Colonel Cook was technically correct that military-led development does not necessarily produce coups d’état, but in Bolivia there is little doubt that the employment of army engineers to carry out Alliance programs was paving the way for Paz’s overthrow. As Brill notes, the US-built engineering battalions were the “best fed, best equipped, trained and paid branch within the Bolivian army.” Moreover, the engineers had an “independent air,” and their “professionalism...was accompanied by a lukewarm or anti-MNR position, and may even indeed have been a cloak for such a sentiment.”⁸⁷ Thanks to Sanjinés, the engineers were even exempt from taking the despised MNR oath of loyalty.⁸⁸ Most

⁸⁵ Brill, “Military Civic Action,” 52-3.

⁸⁶ Colonel Cook, “Prologue,” in *Civic Action: the Role of the Armed Forces in the Social and Economic Development of a Country*, by Sanjinés (La Paz: Alliance for Progress, 1964), 1-3.

⁸⁷ Brill, “Military Civic Action,” 90-1, 128-31.

⁸⁸ Interviews with Sanjinés and army engineer, Eduardo Claire.

importantly, General Barrientos, who would eventually launch his 1964 revolt from Cochabamba, “evidenced an unquestioned enthusiasm for civic action,” and the Indians who were benefiting from these projects were unanimous in crediting Barrientos for US-provided largesse: “It is because of him that we have this school. He is a great man and he is a Cochabambino.”⁸⁹

The Alliance for Progress in Bolivia was principally implemented through the country’s armed forces. The program was highly successful in improving the popular image of the once-maligned Bolivian military, and Barrientos made efficient use of Alliance funds to further his political ambitions. For US policymakers seeking political stability within an ideology of authoritarian development, civic action appeared to offer a tidy solution. These armed forces were part-and-parcel of the Alliance for Progress, a development program implemented in large part via the Bolivian military. With civic action meeting with significant success in the countryside, Washington’s attention turned to the second aspect of its development policy, the increasingly militarized labor reforms required by the Alliance’s Triangular Plan in the mining camps.

Contingency Plan for Bolivia: The Attack on Siglo XX

Despite the high-profile nature of civic action in the countryside, the labor reforms called for by the Alliance for Progress’s Triangular Plan remained USAID’s “number one” priority.⁹⁰ The program strictly conditioned development assistance on a Bolivian government commitment to “support with the entire wherewithal in its power” a decisive crackdown on the miners’ unions, “making use of all its powers to prohibit strikes and other

⁸⁹ Brill, “Military Civic Action,” 103 (footnote 2), 209.

⁹⁰ USAID, “Briefing Paper,” 1963, in Brill, “Military Civic Action,” 41.

activities that prejudice mining production.”⁹¹ In mid-1963, this approach coincided with a growing militarization of US development programs and a burgeoning role played by the CIA in support of the Paz’s repressive apparatus. The approach culminated in a White House-approved covert paramilitary operation against the miners at Siglo XX, carried out in the name of Kennedy’s Alliance for Progress.

COMIBOL President Bedregal, later conceded that the application of Triangular’s conditions was “hard work, and at the same time inhumane.” In his memoirs, he writes that “the restructuring was grueling, especially when one imagines what it means to a family of mine workers to lose their job...the human problem was heart-wrenching.” He remains unrepentant, however, characterizing the Triangular Plan as his brainchild, a “‘major surgery’ that thankfully brought us out of the red ink.” Bedregal was a convinced believer that Paz’s government was the “most gallant in Bolivian history” for its revolutionary vision in building a “True Nation” in the face of fierce resistance by the “feudal lords” in the miners’ union at Siglo XX.⁹²

In late June 1963, President Paz gave assurances to a correspondent for *Time* magazine that a “breakthrough” in the mining situation was expected within the “next three months.” The journalist told US officials that Paz “seemed to convey a genuine concern about communist potential within the trade unions,” adding that he appeared “visibly proud of the army,” reserving “particular praise [for] the civic action program.”⁹³ Days later, Barrientos told US Embassy officials that Paz would implement the Triangular conditions by September. When asked why this date had been chosen, Barrientos said that “it was no magic number but a time when the Government would be well prepared to handle any leftist

⁹¹ COMIBOL Advisory Group to Paz, 13 July 1962, PR 985, ABNB.

⁹² Bedregal, *Búhos*, 302, 337, 339.

⁹³ MEMCON, 19 June 1963, “Government,” POL BOL 1963, Box 3828, SDANF.

uprising in the mine areas.” The General was confident that the armed forces would be called upon to “participate actively in the September crisis.”⁹⁴

The Kennedy administration eagerly sought ways to participate, and from late May until mid-July, Stephansky held meetings with USAID and IDB officials in Washington. He convinced them of the “necessity of using all our pending loan applications as incentives to Paz to carry out the COMIBOL reforms.” By “holding back on disbursements and programs,” Stephansky was confident that “Paz’s will to carry out the reforms will remain strong.” USAID officials agreed that “we should use our entire AID program as an instrument to obtain GOB performance in COMIBOL,” but wondered “how Paz could exert pressure on the miners if they resist.” The meeting ended with Stephansky vaguely explaining that “the government would have to engage in rough tactics.”⁹⁵

In his meetings with midlevel USAID and IDB economists, Stephansky did not elaborate on these “rough tactics,” but on 9 July, Alliance Administrator Moscoso approved Stephansky’s “Contingency Plan,” which authorized USAID’s OPS to arm a paramilitary force that would attack the Siglo XX miners.⁹⁶ The Contingency Plan also recommended that the Bolivian government withhold food from the mining camps. Despite approving of the Plan in its entirety, Embassy DCM Stutesman – a hard-boiled realist who later called developmentalists like Moscoso and Stephansky “poor saps” for believing so strongly in the Alliance⁹⁷ – warned that, while “drastic and effective action [is] needed,” withholding food could have “violent consequences.” Instead, Stutesman recommended that Washington work

⁹⁴ MEMCON, 25 June 1963, in *idem*.

⁹⁵ MEMCONS, 28 May and 7 June 1963, INCO Mining, Minerals, and Metals BOL, Box 3540, SDANF.

⁹⁶ State Department, “Contingency Plan for Meeting Possible COMIBOL Crisis,” 8 August 1963, “Bolivia, 7/63-5/64 and undated,” Box 389A, NSF-Dungan, JFKL.

⁹⁷ “You had these poor saps in the Kennedy administration...going down to Bolivia...and deciding that if you just put enough money in an aid programs, that the Bolivians would become a new Puerto Rico. Well, they didn’t.” Stutesman Oral History, Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training.

closely with the Bolivian government to ensure that the miners' food supplies were "maintained at reasonably low levels" for the duration of the crisis. The Paz-skeptic reminded his superiors that "our focus here should be political, not economic," adding that he had reasons to doubt "President Paz's willingness to employ military forces" against Siglo XX.⁹⁸

Throughout early July, Siglo XX and neighboring Catavi were on partial strike in opposition to the Triangular conditions. Bedregal referred to this strike as "unparalleled criminality," and imposed a total lockout, freezing salaries and halting shipments of food and medicine. On 12 July, the FSMTB responded by called a rolling strike throughout the mines, and Paz – just back from the second anniversary celebration of the US-built Max Toledo 1st Motorized Battalion – declared, "Now is the time to crush anarchy in the unions."⁹⁹

Then-Catavi union leader Crespo writes that, in addition to imposing a lockout, the Paz government began to "orchestrate and equip [a] pseudo-Indian" paramilitary force, under the command of rabid anticommunist Indian cacique Wilge Nery, whose group "committed all kinds of abuses meant to intimidate and threaten the trading community of the civilian populations, in their eagerness to obtain fuel, coca and alcohol" from local civilians. According to Crespo, Nery's paramilitary activity "created a general upheaval in all the nationalized mining centers, particularly in Catavi-Siglo XX."¹⁰⁰ MNR Left Sector officials in nearby Uncía complained to Paz that the paramilitary force created a situation in which "violent acts could occur at any moment, as party members are determined to defend

⁹⁸ Stutesman to Rusk, 28 June 1963, "Bolivia, 3/61-10/63," Box WH-25, Schlesinger Papers, JFKL.

⁹⁹ "La Huelga de Catavi es una 'Criminalidad sin Paralelo,'" *El Diario*, 8 July 1963, 5; "A Partir de Hoy la Comibol no Pagará Salario a Ningún Trabajador de Catavi," *El Diario*, 9 July 1963, 5; and "Celebró Ayer Aniversario el Batallón Motorizado 'Toledo,'" *El Diario*, 9 July 1961, 5.

¹⁰⁰ Crespo, *El rostro minero*, 332.

themselves, rifle in hand.”¹⁰¹ Siglo XX union leader Pimentel warned COMIBOL that the miners “have no arms but they do have other means” to defend themselves, complaining that the “arms trafficker” Nery was “continually provoking workers in Uncía.”¹⁰² Local leftists decried Paz’s move to “contract mercenaries headed by Wilge Nery...to physically liquidate” MNR leftists, declaring that “the workers will not tolerate a policy of repression” and warning that if Paz sought to “avoid bloodshed in this region, we advise you to not persist in these measures.”¹⁰³ Even some Indian communities cabled that they were “watching with puzzlement as authorities give ear to the mercenary and traitor to the Indian peasant class, Wilge Nery,” expressing their “complete solidarity with the miners.”¹⁰⁴

Paz’s use of loyalist Indian caciques like Wilge Nery had a long history in the countryside surrounding the mines of Northern Potosí. Anthropologists Olivia Harris and Xavier Albó write that beginning in the late 1950s, Nery “created divisions between miners and Indian peasants to prevent a possible alliance, saying that the miners were ‘communists,’ and that communists sought to rob the Indians’ land and make it community property.” Harris and Albó write that Nery “took advantage” of the ancient rivalry between two tribes – the Jucumani and the Laime – “obtaining arms for the former.” The Laime “obviously were obliged to seek aid from other sources,” they explain, “in this case the miners union of Siglo XX.” In late 1962, Federico Escóbar “struck up an agreement in which the miners would obtain arms for the Laime and would send cadres to the Laime ranches to educate the Indian peasants in literacy and political awareness.” In exchange, the Laime would come to the

¹⁰¹ MNR-Llallagua, 1 July 1963, PR 1051, ABNB.

¹⁰² Pimentel to Bedregal, 20 June 1963, in Crespo, *El rostro minero*, 332.

¹⁰³ MNR-Uncía to Paz, 18 July 1963, in *idem*.

¹⁰⁴ *Campeño*-North Potosí to Paz, 20 July 1963, in *idem*.

miners' defense in case of labor conflicts."¹⁰⁵ In December 1962, Nery sent an alarming cable to President Paz to warn that Escóbar was providing clothes, housing, and education to the Laime, and stressed that "we are not able to act because cooperation from superior authorities does not exist." Nery asked the Bolivian president to furnish him with a "rural police force" whose purpose it would be to halt communist-miner influence amongst the Laime.¹⁰⁶ Harris and Albó write that the region's tension increased to the point at which mining town leftists would capture Indians in the streets and ask them if they were Laime or Jucumani: "if they were the former, they would let them pass; but if they ended up being Jucumani, they would beat them and expel them."¹⁰⁷

Into this ideological and ethnic battle waltzed a supremely confident Ben Stephansky. After six weeks in Washington, Stephansky returned to La Paz on 15 July and rushed directly to Paz's suburban home. There, he produced a harsh letter from Moscoso, threatening to freeze Alliance funds until the Triangular conditions were met. Realizing this could only occur through armed force, President Paz became "deeply depressed and discouraged," complaining that Washington was "not responsive to [the] requirements of an electoral year." Expressing frustration at "being compelled to adopt the most rigorous measures" six months prior to the MNR convention, where party "infighting would be [the] toughest," Paz warned that Moscoso's demands would cause him to "lose total labor support as well as partisans [to] their cause." Recognizing Washington's resolve, Paz finally relented, promising to follow through "to [the] bitter end even if [a] national crisis results," hinting that he might pull out of the presidential race and apply the conditions "with no concern as to the political

¹⁰⁵ Olivia Harris and Xavier Albó, *Monteras y Guardatojos: Campesinos y Mineros en el Norte de Potosí en 1974*, (La Paz: Alenkar., 1986), 91-4.

¹⁰⁶ Nery to Paz, 24 December 1962, PR 1610, ABNB.

¹⁰⁷ Harris and Albó, *Monteras y Guardatojos*, 91-4.

consequences.” At the mere mention that he would not run for re-election, Stephansky flinched, stressing that “it was too early to throw in the sponge.” He explained that Washington was prepared to approve a laundry list of development projects once the reforms were applied, including “public works...IDB housing...rural schools...warehouse...loan agreements...roads...[and] power projects.” Stephansky then sweetened the deal with a personal White House invitation from President Kennedy, and Paz melted, assuring Stephansky that the crisis would soon be over.¹⁰⁸

In a separate cable sent only to Rusk, Martin, and Moscoso, Stephansky elaborated on his meeting with President Paz. “After my pep talk on not throwing in the sponge, I informed Paz [that] we are prepared to support him to assure victory” in the mine operation. Paz replied that he would need \$4 million to cover foreign currency losses for one month. Additionally, he said he would need funds to cover “outlays for internal measures which could conceivably on an acute crisis come to \$1 million.” Paz added that “these estimates not repeat not applicable” if the crisis lasted over one month, in which case “civil war would be [a] real possibility.” Having just returned from Washington, where the State Department had approved a \$4 million contingency fund for the crisis, Stephansky did not hesitate to assure Paz that the US was “prepared to support him within the levels he indicated.” Paz was “encouraged [by] my expression [of] our support,” Stephansky reported, and he appeared to be “standing firm in Catavi.”¹⁰⁹

Three days later, Paz met in “secret session” with Barrientos, Armed Forces Chief General Luis Rodríguez, and Army Commander General Hugo Suárez. Paz assured his

¹⁰⁸ Stephansky to Rusk, 17 July 1963, “Bolivia, General, 4/63-7/63,” Box 10A, NSF-CO, JFKL. See also MEMCON, 17 July 1963, INCO Mining, Minerals and Metals BOL, Box 3540, SDANF.

¹⁰⁹ Stephansky to Rusk, 17 July 1963, “Bolivia, General 4/63-7/63,” Box 10A, NSF-CO, JFKL. US documents suggest that UK-based tin smelting company Williams Harvey contributed \$800,000 to this paramilitary operation. See Stephansky to State, 31 July 1963, INCO Mining, Minerals, and Metals BOL, Box 3540, SDANF.

generals that “he was not repeat not backing off COMIBIOL situation but that on the contrary he was prepared to go all the way in fighting troublesome leftist and communist mining groups.” The generals likewise “assured [the] president that their forces will support him completely”¹¹⁰ and Barrientos later informed Colonel Fox of the government’s plan. Paz’s notoriously-brutal secret police chief,

San Román, head of...the government’s covert action arm...had organized a 200-man battalion of civilians armed with 170 rifles and 30 machine guns and disguised as Indians for deployment in the Catavi area. This battalion will descend on Catavi when the hunger marchers are about to leave for La Paz and will attack the miners to prevent the movement to La Paz, kill as many of the extremist leaders as possible, and force the miners into a defensive situation.¹¹¹

The following night, Paz’s Government Minister Arze Murillo, since May a close CIA contact, explained to Stephansky that this paramilitary operation would “virtually certain[ly] bring on [a] general miners’ strike” and that the ensuing bloodshed would create the pretext for the military to “move into the mine areas to restore order...[and] eliminate commie and leftist mine leadership.”¹¹² Meanwhile, Barrientos told Fox that a “state of siege would probably be declared tonight and that it is highly possible civil war may break out soon.” Barrientos added that “the armed forces would go all the way to stop the miners or any other group from marching on La Paz.” He then “specifically asked that General O’Meara be informed of this impending situation and that if open conflict should break out the Bolivian Government may find it necessary to request Special Forces assistance in

¹¹⁰ Stephansky to Rusk, 19 July 1963, “Bolivia, General, 4/63-7/63,” Box 10A, NSF-CO, JFKL.

¹¹¹ CIA, Information Report, 20 July 1963, in idem.

¹¹² Stephansky to Rusk, 20 July 1963, in idem.

backing up the Bolivian Armed Forces in maintenance of internal security.”¹¹³ Stephansky poignantly declared that “the crunch is on in Catavi.”¹¹⁴

The prospect of direct US military intervention prompted Kennedy to request an immediate report on the Bolivian situation. Hours later, Assistant Secretary Martin replied to the White House that:

[i]n anticipation of what might happen as [a] result of Bolivian President Paz’s decision to enforce labor discipline in the mines, a US contingency fund of [\$4,000,000] was set up. In response to an emergency request received yesterday, [\$325,000] was authorized for two projects [to assist in the mining areas] based on a program discussed with President Paz. We will make available [overt and covert] financial assistance and appropriate equipment for use in Bolivia, upon request.

Martin added that Stephansky would ask Paz “today whether he thinks non-Bolivian units will be required to deal with the situation.” If so, Martin explained that “we would consider any request he might make in the OAS framework,” reserving the right to intervene unilaterally only if OAS members displayed a “reluctance...to ‘interfere’ in affairs of a neighboring state.”¹¹⁵

Three days later, on 23 July, Stephansky cabled to Rusk, Martin, and Moscoso a list of \$110,000 of military equipment, to be drawn on the \$4 million contingency fund, partly for use in equipping Nery’s paramilitary army. The proposed shipment included 4500 tear gas grenades, 200 semi-automatic M-1 carbine machine guns, 200,000 rounds of machine gun ammunition, 50,000 rounds of 38-Special ammunition, and 12,500 shotgun shells. The following day, the US Military Mission Chief in La Paz submitted an “urgent” request for

¹¹³ Stephansky to Rusk, 19 July 1963, in *idem*.

¹¹⁴ Stephansky to Rusk, 19 July 1963, INCO Mining, Minerals, and Metals BOL, Box 3540, SDANF. This cable is one example of Stephansky’s use of “Confidential” channels to report half-truths that he fully revealed only in “Secret” cables to Rusk, Martin, and Moscoso. Nothing on the US role in the paramilitary operation was reported in “Confidential” cables.

¹¹⁵ Martin via Reed to Bundy, 20 July 1963; and Smith to McHugh, 20 July 1963; “Bolivia, General, 4/63-7/63,” Box 10A, NSF-CO, JFKL.

408 3.5-inch high explosive rockets. The Embassy recommended that the entire shipment be “airlifted immediately to support [the] anticipated internal security action.”¹¹⁶

Meanwhile, Stephansky pondered an unprecedented evacuation of US citizens, writing that while the Embassy’s “emergency burn facilities...[are] adequate,” he was forced to “balance [the] catastrophic political consequences of any mass evacuation of American families from La Paz against [the] dangers of keeping the American community in pawn by delaying [an] evacuation movement.” He decided that it would be best to send a helicopter and crew to La Paz immediately, “ostensibly...to conduct high altitude performance tests.”¹¹⁷ On 24 July, Secretary Rusk approved the helicopter and the entire weapons shipment, imploring Stephansky to “insure that [the] Special Fund [is] actually used for purposes approved.” At 11:05am on 26 July, the Alliance for Progress weaponry arrived at USAID’s OPS office in La Paz.¹¹⁸

That afternoon, Arze Murillo employed the weaponry to reinforce Nery’s paramilitary army,¹¹⁹ and Paz Estenssoro sent a handwritten note to regional authorities ordering them to “offer their cooperation...to Wilge Nery.” San Román likewise ordered transit police to “grant free circulation throughout the Republic” for Nery’s automobile.¹²⁰ The CIA reported that Paz planned to use the paramilitary “to avoid using the army as a repressive force against

¹¹⁶ Stephansky to Rusk, Martin, Moscoso, 23 July 1963; and Cook to O’Meara, 24 July 1963, in *idem*.

¹¹⁷ Rusk to US Embassy (Lima), US Embassy (La Paz), and US Embassy (Panama), 22 July 1963; Stephansky to Rusk, 24 and 26 July 1963; O’Meara to Rusk, 26 July 1963; and Joint Chiefs to O’Meara, 26 July 1963, in *idem*.

¹¹⁸ Rusk to Embassy, 24 July 1963, INCO Mining, Minerals, and Metals BOL, Box 3540, SDANF; OPS Technical Services Division to Engle, 31 July 1963; and Engle to Bell, 31 July 1963, “Special Group (CI) Meetings – August 1963,” Box 6, OPS, Numerical File, RG 286.

¹¹⁹ CIA, Information Report, 26 July 1963, “Bolivia, General, 4/63-7/63,” Box 10A, NSF-CO, JFKL.

¹²⁰ Paz letter, 22 July 1963; and Menacho letter, 25 July 1963; in Crespo, *El rostro minero*, 336. Miners captured these documents and incorporated them into a Bolivian Senate investigation. Some documents can be found in PR 1035, ABNB.

the miners, to create a climate for [an] army occupation to pacify the area, and to create a climate for [the] elimination of extremist labor leaders.”¹²¹

Before Nery could launch its attack, however, the miners struck the first blow in the early morning hours of 29 July. Under the command of MNR leftist Octavio Torrico, several dozen Siglo XX miners approached Nery’s encampment in the village of Irupata under the cover of darkness. Once they were in position, Torrico spoke up, ordering Nery’s men to give up their weapons. The Indian leader responded, “If you want these weapons, come and get them, you fucking communists.” According to the subsequent Bolivian Senate investigation, Torrico then ordered his men to throw live dynamite around Nery’s encampment as a noisy show of force. Nery then announced his surrender, and invited Torrico to collect the armament. When Torrico and two of his men approached, they were cut down in a barrage of machine gun fire. In their “desperation and rage, all the miners began launching dynamite and discharging their rifles,” prompting the majority of Nery’s contingent to flee. The only ones to offer resistance were Nery, his wife, who were both killed, and undercover soldiers from Paz’s Presidential Guard, who were captured because “they did not know the terrain well enough to escape.”¹²² As Harris and Albó write, “thus died Nery, the culprit of the exacerbation of the feud between the Laime and the Jucumani and miner-peasant tensions.”¹²³

According to the CIA, the Irupata clash demonstrated President Paz’s “determination to win the issue in the tin mines, even at the cost of violence.”¹²⁴ On 31 July, Colonel Fox

¹²¹ CIA, Information Report, 26 July 1963, “Bolivia, General, 4/63-7/63,” Box 10A, NSF-CO, JFKL.

¹²² By capturing soldiers from Paz’s Presidential Guard, the miners obtained documentation and testimony regarding the government’s role in organizing the paramilitary. See Crespo, *El rostro minero*, 335-6. See also, “Mineros de Catavi Atacaron una Población con Armas y Dinamita: Mataron a 6 Personas,” *El Diario*, 30 July 1963, 7.

¹²³ Harris and Albó, *Monteros y Guardatojos*, 94.

¹²⁴ CIA, Intelligence Memorandum, 30 July 1963, “Bolivia, General, 4/63-7/63,” Box 10A, NSF-CO, JFKL.

reported through DIA channels that the “communists struck the first blow in the final confrontation between the Paz moderate forces and the leftists,” adding that “a large number of arms was seized by the miners.” According to Fox, Barrientos was “concerned over the violence...and the government’s failure to use sufficient force in the fight against the Communists.” It was clear to him that the armed forces “will not let [Paz] back down or quit the fight,” and Barrientos stressed to Fox that “if Paz tried to back out, the Armed Forces would take over.” Colonel Fox concluded by warning that “the possibility of civil war is coming closer.”¹²⁵ Meanwhile, using CIA Station channels, Ambassador Stephansky cabled Rusk, Martin, and Moscoso a new laundry list of military necessities, to be used for the “immediate support [of] militia operations [in the] Uncía area.” Stephansky warned that a “failure to reply promptly” would mean the “failure [of] GOB will and capability [to] confront [the] mine situation.”¹²⁶

The State Department relayed this information to the White House’s Special Group (CI) and to Attorney General Robert Kennedy, pointing out that “this showdown was brought about by our insistence that the Bolivian Government carry out these mine reform programs, which will weaken the mining unions that form Lechín’s major base of support.” Reporting that contingency funds had been provided “to aid Bolivian military movements in the mining area,” the Department explained that the “fast breaking situation affords the Group a unique opportunity to determine the adequacy of our counterinsurgency efforts.”¹²⁷ In its talking points for the Special Group, the Department elaborated in alarming tones:

¹²⁵ DIA, Intelligence Summary, 31 July 1963; and CIA, Intelligence Memorandum, 31 July 1963; in *idem*.

¹²⁶ Stephansky refers to his CIA cable in Stephansky to Rusk, Martin and Moscoso, 31 July 1963, POL 25 Demonstrations, Protests, Riots BOL, Box 3830, SDANF.

¹²⁷ State Department, Memorandum for the Attorney General, 31 July 1963, “Bolivia, General, 4/63-7/63,” Box 10A, NSF-CO, JFKL.

We are not averse to seeing a violent confrontation between Paz and Lechín forces since this will tend to place them in irreconcilable positions from which they will find it difficult to retreat, and we believe that Lechín's political standing will suffer in the event of such clashes...Were the situation to indicate the desirability of sending Special Forces, this would require a decision at the highest level of government.¹²⁸

It is surprising to note how much the US press was aware of these events. Henry Lee of the *Chicago Tribune* acknowledged that the tension resulted from the Alliance's Triangular Plan, framing the battle as a clash between the free world and communism. If the miners could be defeated, Lee wrote, "communism in this country will be crippled if not destroyed." The *New York Times*' Juan de Onís reported that the conflict marked a "turning point in the Bolivian Revolution," adding that it was a "decisive test of the will and ability of the central authorities to maintain a national development policy." De Onís wrote assuredly that the Kennedy administration was "right behind Dr. Paz on the mining question," before outlining in remarkable detail the Triangular conditions.¹²⁹

In the *Washington Post*, Dan Kurzman wrote that a "major Latin American test between communism and democracy was heading toward a possibly violent climax in Bolivia," where President Paz was battling leftist miners over "labor reforms recommended by American and West German technicians." Kurzman added that the Alliance for Progress's resolute support for the Bolivian president "could set Bolivia on the road to prosperity," since "President Paz is in no mood to let the Communists stand in the way." The *Los Angeles Times*'s George Natanson wrote that "Bolivia survives thanks to Paz Estenssoro who refuses to accept the dictates of the far left."¹³⁰

¹²⁸ Cottrell via Harriman to the Special Group (CI), 31 July 1963, in idem.

¹²⁹ Henry Lee, "Threatened strike could bring down Bolivian government," *Washington Post*, 24 July 1963, E14; and Juan de Onís, "Bolivia is facing mine showdown," *New York Times*, 4 August 1963, 3.

¹³⁰ Dan Kurzman, "Red Labor Leaders in Bolivia Seek Political Showdown," *Washington Post*, 17 August 1963, E14; and George Natanson, "A Latin Country Praises the US: Bolivia's President Breaks Rule," *Los Angeles Times*, M3.

Finally, *Time* magazine misreported that

a gang of miners with a vague and perhaps imaginary grievance dragged a member of the legislature from his home, strapped a stick of dynamite to his body, and blasted him to bits. When his pregnant wife came running out of the house waving a white handkerchief, a miner shot her to death.

One wonders how *Time* could characterized the miners' grievance as imaginary when, two paragraphs later, the article concedes that the Bolivian government was preparing to "put into effect an announced plan to cut the workforce at the Catavi mine by 30%," representing approximately 4,000 men. Without flinching, however, *Time* reports, "If [Paz] succeeds, it will be an important victory for him and for Bolivia."¹³¹

There is no doubt that the fiercest advocates for – and organizers of – armed action against the Siglo XX miners were Kennedy's development-minded appointees, White House aides Goodwin and Schlesinger, Assistant Secretary Martin, Alliance Administrator Moscoso, and Ambassador Stephansky. To be sure, MNR skeptics in Washington were not doves; they were busy trying to convince the White House to cut off economic assistance and channel support to the rightwing opposition. This narrative clearly suggests, however, that the military was far from Kennedy's track-two. It was, instead, the Alliance for Progress in action, a politicized developmental ideal implemented through armed force. Days after the bloodshed at Irupata, the State Department reported that

United States policy toward Bolivia for the last ten years...will have been largely justified if our current efforts succeed...[T]he MNR government for the first time is taking decisive steps to end labor indiscipline and assure the basis for orderly economic development...In oversimplified terms, President Paz is now committed to the economic development of Bolivia under the Alliance for Progress.¹³²

¹³¹ "Solvency and Self-Respect," *Time*, 16 August 1963.

¹³² State Department, "Bolivia: State-AID Contingency Paper for COMIBOL Crisis," 8 August 1963, "Bolivia, 7/63-6/64, and undated," Box 389A, NSF-Dungan, JFKL, 3.

Conclusion

When asked later about the Alliance's militarization in Bolivia, Ben Stephansky replied, "I don't think it was counterinsurgency so much as it was a major effort to improve communications."¹³³ A shocking reply, given that Stephansky was the central proponent of militarized development, and he strongly believed that the Alliance could only be carried out with a dose of "some bitter medicine."¹³⁴ Indeed it did, and the side effects of this medicine would surely be suffered by the Bolivians who were supposed to be development's principal beneficiaries.

The Alliance for Progress was adopted in Bolivia in response to the Kennedy administration's perception of the communist threat. Paz's *modus vivendi* with Cuba and the PCB, and rising dissidence on the MNR left, aggravated Washington's sense that a deeper intervention in Bolivia was the only way forward. Never abandoning the development-oriented rubric with which they initially intervened, Kennedy officials accelerated and accentuated their commitment to the Bolivian MNR. Their intervention took two forms: military-led development in the countryside and militarized development in the mines. Alliance technocrats, with their apolitical language of economic progress, were tools in a larger geostrategic battle. Unfortunately for Washington, Siglo XX leaders Escóbar and Pimentel survived the initial showdown. As Paz prepared for his triumphant White House visit, there was no escaping the prognosis that – as an increasingly militarized, authoritarian project – the Alliance's toughest battles lie ahead. For their part, the miners had just seized 200 US-made weapons, and they awaited the next showdown.

¹³³ Stephansky Oral History, JFKL, 73.

¹³⁴ Stephansky to Rusk, 30 July 1963, "Bolivia, General, 4/63-7/63," Box 10A, NSF-CO, JFKL.

Chapter Four

An Alliance for Progress Standoff: US Hostages at Siglo XX

What you are attempting to do in your country is what we hope all of us in all of our countries in this hemisphere would try to do for our peoples.

- Kennedy to Paz, 24 October 1963¹

We moved...to the union building with our children and husbands, arranging the sticks of dynamite in such a way that...we could destroy the entire building, insuring that no one survived.

- Wife of Siglo XX Miner Domitila de Chungara²

[I am] sick and tired of this economist's way of looking at things...What the government is trying to do, with the urging of the United States, is to break the labor movement as it is now.

- Siglo XX Hostage, USAID Labor Officer Bernard Rifkin³

Central to the Alliance for Progress in Bolivia were was order and authority.

Throughout the Alliance's implementation, political crises strengthened US liberals' resolve to redouble developmental efforts in support of Paz's repressive regime. Indian and miner blood was shed at Irupata in the name of authoritarian development, and Kennedy administration officials continued to view their intervention in Bolivia as a battle between ordered progress and chaotic backwardness. The latter paved the way for communism, the developmentalists argued, and they offered ready-made solutions for Washington's geostrategic needs. Meanwhile, anti-Paz forces in Bolivia persisted in resisting Alliance reforms. When miners at Siglo XX took four US officials hostage in December 1963, Washington's commitment to politicized development was put to the test. The Johnson

¹ "Kennedy Lauds Bolivian President," *New York Times*, 23 October 1963, 4.

² Domitila, in Viezzer, *Si me permiten hablar*, 92; and interviews with Domitila.

³ Rifkin, interview with Alexander, 23 December 1963, folder 51, Interviews, Alexander Papers, Rutgers.

administration answered resoundingly: Bolivian economic reforms were a useful vehicle for geostrategic intervention, but they certainly were not worth American blood.

Aftermath of Irupata

The Kennedy administration had long pressured President Paz to crack down on communist influence in the mines and implement a series of labor reforms in the name of economic development. For this reason, the White House and its hand-picked ambassador to Bolivia could not have been more pleased when Paz used USAID funds to organize a paramilitary force to attack striking Siglo XX miners in late July 1963. With the Bolivian left split over whether to continue tolerating Paz or join the MNR's rightwing opposition, Paz proceeded to fully commit his government to the Alliance and move decisively toward implementation of the anticommunist labor reforms.

Having taken a firm stand against the Siglo XX miners, President Paz suspended *Control Obrero* by supreme decree on 3 August, and a few days later the first 100 retirement notices were issued.⁴ US Embassy officials performed "spot-checks" to ensure that "Commie-liners" were the first to be released, including of course Escóbar and Pimentel.⁵ Siglo XX responded by once again going on strike, which Stephansky characterized as a "desperation move."⁶ COMIBOL President Bedregal meanwhile condemned the miners for their "ethical and mental underdevelopment" and for having been "lulled to sleep by the

⁴ Embassy to Rusk, 4 August 1963, "Government," POL BOL 1963, Box 3829, SDANF; and "Fue Cancelado Ayer el Control Obrero con Derecho a Veto en las Minas Nacionalizadas," *El Diario*, 4 August 1963, 7.

⁵ One miner recalled that communists – both PCB and POR members – were indeed the first to be fired. He added, however, that with forced retirements at weekly rate of 200, it was not long before noncommunist miners received pink slips. Interviews with Rojas. See Stephansky to Rusk, 9 August 1963, CSM Communism 13 BOL," Box 3616, SDANF; and Stephansky to Rusk, 24 September 1963, "Bolivia, General, 8/63-1/64," Box 11, NSF-CO, JFKL.

⁶ Stephansky to Rusk, 10 August 1963, INCO Mining, Minerals, and Metals BOL, Box 3540, SDANF. See also "Estalló Ayer una Huelga General en Catavi Bajo Inspiración Comunista," *El Diario*, 10 August 1963, 6.

Marxist drug.”⁷ USAID’s Mission Director in Bolivia, Alexander Firfer, hailed the Bolivian government’s efforts, declaring that “the Alliance for Progress is being executed better in Bolivia and than any other country,”⁸ and Assistant Secretary Martin dropped by for three days to congratulate Paz Estenssoro for finally having adopted the Alliance’s reforms. Stephansky cabled Martin several days later to report, “You were a terrific hit with President Paz, who spent a half-hour after the white tie dinner the day you left, repeating to me how impressed he was with you.”⁹

Convinced that its pressure was working, Washington doubled down on Paz’s government. On 8 August, Kennedy’s 5412 Special Group, in charge of authorizing CIA operations throughout the world, approved a “covert subsidy...to take the necessary covert actions to overcome the emergency situation...and, once the situation normalized, to enable Paz to consolidate his control.” The plan called for the CIA, under the auspices of USAID and USIS, to eliminate communist and MNR Left Sector influence throughout Bolivian society. The Indian peasant confederation was targeted, as was the national labor confederation, and CIA funds would go toward creating a parallel labor organization, fully subservient to Paz’s wing of the governing party.¹⁰

While Assistant Secretary Martin was still in Bolivia, President Paz presented his annual report to Parliament on 6 August. Showing signs of moderating his former neutralism in foreign policy, the Bolivian president declared that the world was “divided into two great

⁷ Embassy to Rusk, 4 August 1963, “Government,” POL BOL 1963, Box 3829, SDANF.

⁸ “La Alianza para el Progreso se Ejecuta en Bolivia Mejor que en Cualquier Otro País,” *El Diario*, 9 August 1963, 7.

⁹ Stephansky to Martin, 9 August 1963, “Travel-Bolivia,” Box 21, Edwin Martin Papers, JFKL.

¹⁰ Excerpts of the minutes from the 5412 Special Group’s 8 August meeting, in State Department, Memorandum Prepared for the Special Group, 10 March 1964, document 148, *FRUS 1964-1968: Volume – South and Central America; Mexico*. Confirmed in interviews with Fox, Henderson and Sternfield.

camps,” and that Bolivia’s alignment was “determined by geography, tradition, and the democratic convictions that inspire us.”¹¹ Paz went on to declare:

Never before have such wide horizons opened before Bolivia, yet never before has our future been so risky...Today we have arrived at the point where we can yield no further...COMIBOL must move forward, if not all Bolivia will suffer a disaster.¹²

In other speeches that month, President Paz explained that “the mines [must] serve the interest of the Bolivian community,”¹³ vowing to “maintain his attitude...even at the risk of falling from power.”¹⁴ Finally, President Paz ominously stated that “as long as Pimentel and Escóbar are in Catavi, there will be no solution to the conflict.”¹⁵

With their plans to march on the capital stymied by Paz’s paramilitary at Irupata, in mid-August Siglo XX’s miners turned their sights on the provincial capital of Oruro. Paz vowed to US officials that he would “block their access using whatever degree of force necessary,” and ordered newly-promoted Commander-in-Chief General Ovando to “protect Oruro and cut off Huanuni mine” from Siglo XX. Labor unions in La Paz threatened to call sympathy strikes and, smelling blood, Paz’s rightwing opposition encouraged the left’s demands in order to “create a revolutionary situation.” With a generous injection of CIA funds, Government Minister Arze Murillo sought to head off urban sympathy strikes using “sizeable bribes if needed.” The tactic was successful, but the right continued to see potential

¹¹ Osborne to State, 16 August 1963, POL Government BOL 1963, Box 3829, SDANF

¹² Stephansky to Rusk, 9 August 1963, INCO Mining, Minerals, and Metals BOL, Box 3540, SDANF.

¹³ One cannot help but imagine that, from the miners’ perspective, Paz was saying that the “miners [rather than the ‘mines’] must serve the interests of the Bolivian community,” meaning the burden of economic development would fall squarely on their backs. Stephansky to Rusk, 23 August 1963, in *idem.*; and “Comienza hoy una nueva etapa que tipificará la influencia política,” *El Diario*, 23 August 1963, 7.

¹⁴ “El Presidente Mantendrá su Actitud Sobre el Problema Minero aun a Riesgo de Caer,” *El Diario*, 17 August 1963, 8.

¹⁵ “Mientras Estén Pimentel y Escóbar en Catavi no Habrá Solución del Conflicto,” *El Diario*, 24 August 1963, 7.

in a tactical alliance with the miners, who were “reacting aggressively since they find themselves directly threatened and [realize] that their national leaders are impotent to help them.”¹⁶

Bitter negotiations between COMIBOL and the FSTMB took place throughout late August and early September. Bedregal responded that he was willing to discuss the timing of the Triangular conditions, not the terms, and the two parties signed an agreement, stipulating that they would reach a final accord by 15 September. The major sticking point was the fate of Escóbar and Pimentel, who COMIBOL demanded be physically removed from Siglo XX. Bedregal wrote that “the mere presence” of the two mine union leaders “puts the government and our entity in an impossible situation with respect to exercising any sort of management” over Siglo XX. Bedregal added that unless an agreement was reached that removed the two union leaders from the mining camp, Triangular’s international financiers would freeze economic assistance.¹⁷

With the miners rejecting any agreement that removed the two popular union leaders, the Bolivian government announced on 15 September that it would “proceed with [the] application [of the] terms [of the] rehabilitation...on [its] own authority.” Most of the mines were subjected to the labor reforms immediately, but COMIBOL admitted to US officials that Siglo XX would require a “major effort.” If they could get Escóbar “out,” however, and put Pimentel under “judicial proceedings,” Triangular could move ahead as scheduled.¹⁸

Stephansky reported that Paz’s determination to move forward with the conditions represented a “historic change toward moderation in [the] Bolivian Revolution.” Only time

¹⁶ Stephansky to Rusk, 13 and 24 August 1963, “Bolivia, General, 8/63-1/64,” Box 11, NSF-CO, JFKL.

¹⁷ Stephansky to Rusk, 24 August 1963, in *idem.*; Bedregal to FSTMB, undated, in Crespo, 338; and Stephansky to Rusk, 9 September 1963, INCO Mining, Minerals, and Metals BOL, Box 3540, SDANF.

¹⁸ Stephansky to Rusk, 24 September 1963, “Bolivia, General, 8/63-1/64,” Box 11, NSF-CO, JFKL.

would tell if this shift could be “consolidated,” Stephansky wrote, and he recommended the US “do all we can to encourage GOB [to] continue its policy of firmness.” He was pleased that the Paz government had taken steps toward “raising productivity and reducing costs” in COMIBOL and appeared to be pushing the revolution into its “constructive era.” This was “not anti-labor policy,” he stressed, “but rather policy to restore balance against excessive and anarchical influence as long exercised by labor unions.” In order to “maintain very favorable momentum” in this endeavor, Stephansky recommended an additional \$1.6 million in economic assistance in late September, funds that would be used to offset the costs of the “increased number [of] layoffs programmed.” Stephansky reiterated that “[p]rompt action” was crucial, since the firings were “basically addressed to getting rid of Commies,” an enterprise in which the “GOB deserves our fullest support.”¹⁹

Two weeks before Paz left for Washington, Siglo XX once again announced a general strike against the firings. “[F]urious,” President Paz called an emergency cabinet meeting on 5 October to discuss “definitive measures,” which included the “use of force to displace [the] miners and [the] arrest of communist mine union leaders.” Stephansky expressed satisfaction that the Bolivian president was preparing to take “drastic action” against leftists, and asked Secretary Rusk to be “alert [to] possible resort [to the] special fund,” previously approved by the Special Group.²⁰ COMIBOL once again froze food shipments, and by 17 October, the US Embassy reported that “there is no meat or bread at Catavi-Siglo XX.”²¹ Meanwhile, the Bolivian government hired airplanes to drop leaflets over Siglo XX imploring workers to “Free Yourself from Union Dictatorship! It is the Motto of Free Workers!”²²

¹⁹ Stephansky to Rusk, 24 September 1963, in *idem*.

²⁰ Stephansky to Rusk, 4 and 8 October 1963; in *idem*.

²¹ Embassy to Rusk, 17 October 1963, INCO Mining, Minerals, and Metals BOL, Box 3540, SDANF.

²² Embassy to Rusk, 9 October 1963, in *idem*.

The miners responded to COMIBOL's threat of starvation on by sending a delegation of thirty women to La Paz, representing the PCB-affiliated *Comité de Amas de Casa*, who declared themselves on hunger strike on 14 October along with almost a hundred children.²³ A week later, the Bolivian government brought criminal charges against Escóbar and Pimentel, accusing them of "attempted murder" for instigating the hunger strike.²⁴ Demanding they both leave the mining camp immediately, the government announced that "both men have been deprived of legal status, and orders for their arrest have been issued."²⁵ Escóbar responded that he would leave, if his family and Pimentel were allowed to stay, and on the condition that COMIBOL pay for him to travel to Cuba and the Soviet Union. The "retired" *Control Obrero* vowed that the miners would accept the Triangular conditions, and he would take up an administration position with the FSTMB in La Paz. The US Embassy scoffed that Escóbar's conditions "virtually preclude [an] agreement."²⁶

Stephansky planned to accompany Paz to Washington, after which he would take up a senior position in the State Department's Latin American office. He later recalled, "I was eventually going to get back to academia...I had not started in the Foreign Service; I had just kind of slithered in." Stephansky admitted to having clashed with career diplomats in La Paz. "The clubby side of...the State Department was really one of...its most heinous aspects...They didn't like the lateral entry program at all."²⁷ Colonel Fox told this author that

²³ "A Extremos Deplorables Llegó Ayer la Huelga de Hambre de Mujeres Mineras," *El Diario*, 17 October 1963, 6.

²⁴ Embassy to Rusk, 25 October 1963, INCO Mining, Minerals, and Metals BOL, Box 3540, SDANF.

²⁵ Embassy to Rusk, 1 November 1963, in idem.

²⁶ Embassy to Rusk, 5 November 1963, in idem.

²⁷ Stephansky Oral History, JFKL, 37.

“Stephansky always talked down to you, like he was better than the rest of us. A real superstar.”²⁸

For the Paz government, this superstar had been a Godsend. According to Bedregal, Stephansky’s departure was “bad news for all of us.” Affectionately called *Compañero* Stephansky by members of Paz’s inner circle, the economist had battled tirelessly against MNR skepticism in the US foreign policy bureaucracy. Bedregal writes that no other diplomat could possibly boast “the abilities and affections that this short, bald American Jew possessed,” adding that, “more than a diplomat, [Stephansky] was an admirer of the Revolution and an intimate friend of the President.”²⁹

Before bidding La Paz farewell, Stephansky singled out one Alliance effort that had been “unusually successful in the fulfillment of its original objectives.” The military’s employment of USAID funds to carry out “civic improvement and development-oriented projects” had made the institution “more acceptable to the people of Bolivia,” Stephansky wrote. This program of civic action was a “model for other countries,” he declared, before admonishing that without continued US support, the valuable effort “would collapse.”³⁰

By October 1963, few doubted that Víctor Paz Estenssoro was Washington’s man. After over two years of debate regarding the wisdom of US support for revolutionary Bolivia, Kennedy’s development-minded liberals had convincingly demonstrated the geostrategic efficacy of employing foreign aid in the anticommunist crusade. With Paz preparing for his historic White House visit, the Kennedy administration had made it abundantly clear that he was a model Latin American leader in the era of the Alliance. He had demonstrated that he

²⁸ Interviews with Fox.

²⁹ Bedregal, *Búhos*, 349.

³⁰ Stephansky to State, USAID, and Pentagon, 14 October 1964, “Internal Security,” POL BOL 1963, Box 3830, SDANF, 1, 3.

was willing to implement anticommunist, development-oriented reforms, even at the cost of violence.

Víctor Paz Goes to Washington

In late October 1963, President Paz had the bittersweet honor of being the last head of state to meet with President Kennedy before the latter's assassination in Dallas. The visit was accompanied by generous pomp, as the Kennedy betrayed personal sympathy for Paz's development-oriented regime. According to one of the foremost historians of the Bolivian revolution, Kennedy saw in Paz "a man after his own heart, a politician capable of substituting for the progressive national bourgeoisie that Bolivia so manifestly lacked for its necessary transformation into a modern state."³¹ By the time he arrived in Washington, Paz had fully committed his repressive state apparatus to the anticommunist Alliance, and Kennedy had no shortage of praise for his Bolivian ally.

In its pre-visit White House briefing paper, the State Department stressed the importance of Paz's commitment to development, highlighting his recent paramilitary actions against the Siglo XX miners. The Department wrote that July's bloody showdown at Irupata "indicated [a] determination to enforce the discipline essential to economic development." Continued support was necessary, State reported, in order to frustrate communist plans to take the country "farther to the left toward instability, continuing economic unreality, and the possible emergence of a Castro-communist type state." The briefing paper explained that Paz had "shown his desire to lead the revolution into a constructive development phase" with the

³¹ Dunkerley, *Rebellion*, 105.

enthusiastic support of Bolivia's "new armed forces," backed heavily by Alliance funds.

According to the Department, "the potential gains are large."³²

Bolivia offered Washington an opportunity, the State Department continued, to demonstrate "continuing US support for the second profound revolution in Latin America" after Mexico's, and especially for Paz Estenssoro as the "father of this revolution." If the White House could "strengthen the identification of Paz and Bolivia with the United States and the Alliance for Progress," the Department believed it could demonstrate to the Hemisphere that communists were the "enemies of the existing order in Latin America and of the efforts of the Alliance for Progress to accomplish major improvements there." Specifically, the State Department urged President Kennedy to openly "admire and support" President Paz for following through on the Triangular Plan conditions and for moving to undercut communism in the mines. The mine rehabilitation was the "most important single mutual US-Bolivian effort," the Department explained, since it was designed to "weaken the political opposition to the development programs supported by President Paz." By standing up to "gangster-disruptive elements" who sought to "obstruct our programs in Bolivia," President Paz was well on his way to implementing the rehabilitation plan and making his country's economy "viable for the foreseeable future." In the opinion of the State Department, the most important aspect of the upcoming meeting was to convince Paz to "make a final break with Lechín."³³

Finally, the State Department recommended that President Kennedy use his meetings to remind the Paz of the "threat of communist subversion in underdeveloped countries."

³² State Department, "Background Paper: Political, Economic, and Social Conditions in Bolivia," 18 October 1963, "Bolivia, Subjects, Paz Visit, Paz Briefing Book, Tabs IV-VII, 10/22/63-10/23/63," Box 11, NSF-CO, JFKL, 1-2.

³³ Ibid., 7-8; "Policy Paper: The COMIBOL Showdown," 18 October 1963, "Bolivia, Subjects, Paz Briefing Book, Tabs I-III, 10/22/63-10/23/63," 1; and Read to Bundy, 18 October 1963, "Bolivia, Subjects, Paz Visit, Briefing Memorandum, 10/18/1963," Box 11, NSF-CO, JFKL, 1-3, 8.

Bolivia was a “logical target because of its unsettled political and economic conditions,” the Department explained, and it was therefore important to pressure Paz to “control Bolivian travel to Cuba...and prevent the use of Bolivian territory for the movement of Cuban-trained subversives to neighboring countries.” The briefing concluded by warning that Havana was “making a concerted effort to fish in Bolivia’s troubled waters,” adding that the hundreds of Bolivian students who were studying in Cuba and Soviet bloc countries for studies represented the “largest number from any one Latin American nation.”³⁴

On 22 October 1963, President Paz opened his first face-to-face meeting with President Kennedy by expressing concern at the growing divide within Bolivian Communism. Implicitly referencing the miners, who despised PCB tolerance of the MNR regime, Paz blamed the deepening Sino-Soviet split for encouraging many Latin American leftists to spurn Moscow’s view of “peaceful coexistence” in favor of the “Chinese Communist thesis of violence.” Paz warned Kennedy that these adventurers welcomed military coups, even those fomented by Latin American conservatives, because they recognized that the “counter to a military government is not a democratic, progress government, but a radical one.” Finally, Paz explained that his country was susceptible to regional trends, and expressed concern that the previous year’s coups in neighboring Peru and Argentina did not bode well for the MNR. After Kennedy expressed agreement, Paz requested the US continue its military assistance, which “goes into a very effective civic action program.”³⁵

³⁴ Read to Bundy, 18 October 1963, “Bolivia, Subjects, Paz Visit, Briefing Memorandum, 10/18/1963,” 1-3, 8; “Background Paper: Bloc aid, trade, and diplomatic relations,” 18 October 1963, “Bolivia, Subjects, Paz Visit, Paz Briefing Book, Tabs IV-VII, 10/22/63-10/23/63,” 2; and “Policy Paper: Cuban Subversion,” 18 October 1963, “Bolivia, Subjects, Paz Visit, Paz Briefing Book, Tabs I-III, 10/22/63-10/23/63,” Box 11, NSF-CO, JFKL, 1, 3.

³⁵ MEMCON, 22 October 1963, “Bolivia, Subjects, Paz Visit, 10/63, MEMCONS,” Box 11, NSF-CO, JFKL, 2-4 (Part I), and 3 (Part II).

One portion of their conversation did not make it into the official record. Three weeks earlier, Yugoslav President Josip Broz Tito had spent five days in Bolivia, where he and Paz signed a laundry list of economic agreements, including a \$5 million credit for industrial equipment and technical training.³⁶ Stephansky had reported that the Embassy was doing everything possible to block the offer, but Kennedy appeared unbothered.³⁷ He reportedly told Paz, with a “sidelong glance... ‘Yes, but of course President Tito is a very conservative communist.’”³⁸

When the two resumed their talks the following day, it was Kennedy’s turn to begin. He expressed concern regarding Bolivian youth who were traveling to Cuba and the Soviet bloc for studies and possibly guerrilla training.³⁹ Promising to address this “travel problem,” Paz explained that his successful liquidation of the Bolivian right had led the left had becoming the new “enemies of the revolution.” He vowed therefore to take steps toward “preventing or reducing the movement of students who go to Cuba not for academic study but for subversive guerrilla training.” The two Presidents concluded their second meeting by considering the bloodshed at Irupata and ongoing tension at Siglo XX. Paz confidently agreed that the implementation of the mine rehabilitation program was a “prerequisite to Bolivian development” and boasted that he was taking decisive steps to “impose its authority on the mine union extremists.”⁴⁰

³⁶ “Otorgará Yugoslavia Crédito de 5 Millones de \$us para Plantas y Equipos Industriales,” *El Diario*, 3 October 1963, 8.

³⁷ Stephansky rejected the view that “Yugoslavia may not be as bad as USSR or ChiCom...Yugoslavia is admittedly a Communist country and is following a neutralist line.” Stephansky to State, 16 August 1963, INCO Mining, Minerals, and Metals BOL,” Box 3540; and CIA, Intelligence Bulletin, 20 August 1963, CREST.

³⁸ Herbert Thompson Oral History, Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training.

³⁹ According to Bolivians who went to Cuba in the early 1960s, most trips were short and included neither studies nor guerrilla training. Interviews with the Emilse Escóbar, daughter of Federico; Reyes; and Muñoz.

⁴⁰ MEMCON, Department of State, 22 October 1963, “Bolivia, Subjects, Paz Visit, 10/63, MEMCONS,” Box 11, NSF-CO, JFKL, 2-3 (Part III).

According to Kennedy's interpreter, the two heads of state spoke with "complete frankness – no great beating around the bush – no protocol – two men, both busy men, just saying, 'We have a couple of hours. Let's talk our problems out.'" President Kennedy reportedly listened with "great, vital interest," paying "very close attention" as Paz revealed that "he had been for years waiting till he felt strong enough politically, especially vis-à-vis the mine workers in Bolivia, and Lechín...to embark on a new approach to modernizing the mines...And he was sure it would be successful."⁴¹

At a press conference later that day, Kennedy hailed Paz as a "pioneer of the Alliance for Progress," who had been "engaged in this effort for more than ten years." Kennedy then turned to Paz in front of the nation's press and declared, "What you are attempting to do in your country is what we hope all of us in all of our countries in this hemisphere would try to do for our peoples."⁴² The Bolivian Foreign Ministry was thrilled by the result of Paz's White House visit, relishing in Republican Senator Barry Goldwater's attacks on President Kennedy for offering the Bolivian president such a generous show of support.⁴³

Several days after Paz left Washington, Kennedy sent him a glowing letter, which was given wide coverage in Latin America. It read, in part:

[Y]our visit has given me the opportunity to become personally acquainted with you and to appreciate your qualities of leadership in this momentous period of hemispheric development... These days you have spent with us have enabled us to know more intimately and therefore to value more highly than ever the valiant efforts which Bolivia has made in her social revolution and within the Alliance for Progress to accelerate the rate of economic and social advance.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Donald Barnes Oral History, JFKL, 98-101.

⁴² "Kennedy Praises Bolivian President for 'Revolutionary Efforts,' *Washington Post, Times Herald*, 23 October 1963, A14.

⁴³ Alipaz to Sánchez, 12 November 1963, folio EEUU-2-E-31, RREE. On 24 October, Goldwater called Paz's government a "candy-coated despotism." See "Bolivian Rule of Paz Rapped by Goldwater," *Chicago Tribune*, 25 October 1963, 15.

⁴⁴ Kennedy to Paz, 27 October 1963, POL 15-1 BOL, Box 3829, SDANF, RG. See also "Su Visita Nos ha Permitido Apremiar Mejor El Gallardo Esfuerzo que Realiza Bolivia," *El Diario*, 29 October 1963, 5.

During his visit, Paz also met Douglas Henderson, Kennedy's appointee to replace Ambassador Stephansky. A career foreign service officer who had earned kudos for guiding the Lima embassy, as DCM, in Washington's opposition to the 1962 Peruvian coup, Henderson had a reputation as a political liberal and a military skeptic. The ambassador-designate appeared the perfect choice to promote Kennedy's development-oriented policies in Bolivia, without ruffling the feathers of career diplomats. Fox recalled that "Doug was just great. He'd really listen to you and talk to you like your equal. I felt very much a part of Henderson's team. We shared our opinions in private, and then Henderson came up with a policy, which we supported."⁴⁵ Former CIA Station Chief Sternfield agrees, characterizing Henderson as an "Alliance for Progress ideologue, just like Stephansky, but at least Henderson knew a thing or two about diplomacy."⁴⁶ Perhaps most importantly, Henderson had had spent three years in the US Consulate in Cochabamba, and unlike Stephansky: "I knew the country well. I liked the people."⁴⁷

During a speech in early November, Henderson noted the "diametrically opposed views" toward Paz Estenssoro in Washington. Citing Senator Goldwater's harsh criticism, Henderson conceded that Paz "came to power by violence, and Paz's party is the only political party in Bolivia today that can field a winning candidate." Henderson explained, however, that "since 1952, two presidential elections have been held and power has been transmitted peacefully to the elected successor." This was "without precedent in Bolivia."

According to US Ambassador to Chile Charles Cole, these words "create almost a sense of shock among other Latin Americans," who could not understand why Washington rewarded a government with policies of "arming the workers, confiscating land without compensation, and taking over mines and other foreign enterprises." Cole to Martin, 29 October 1963, "Travel-Bolivia," Box 21, Edwin Martin Papers, JFKL.

⁴⁵ Interviews with Fox.

⁴⁶ Interviews with Sternfield.

⁴⁷ Henderson Oral History, Association of Diplomatic Studies and Training.

Henderson praised Paz's developmentalism, noting that "even the armed forces have been engaged in this program through civic action projects." Characterizing Paz as "the rare revolutionary who recognizes the need for construction as well as destruction," Henderson admitted nonetheless that "Bolivia is still a difficult problem, and no bed of roses for any American Ambassador." Revealing the development-oriented approach he would employ as ambassador, Henderson pointed out that Third World masses were becoming a "potent new political force, unpredictable unless carefully directed." Washington would be unable to influence the course of events "by abstention or negative action," he warned, stressing that "we have no acceptable alternative to making the effort."⁴⁸

On 20 November, just before leaving for La Paz, Henderson held a private meeting with President Kennedy. Praising Paz's "helpful attitude toward the Alliance for Progress," Kennedy revealed his desire to become the first US president to ever visit Bolivia.⁴⁹ According to Henderson, "a good bit of my conversation with him that day was about Bolivia, about what he could expect, what kind of accommodations were available, what affect the altitude would have, a whole series of things and it was quite obvious that Kennedy was planning a state visit, a reciprocal state visit, probably in January [1964]."⁵⁰ Henderson left to pack his bags. It was Wednesday afternoon. Friday morning, Kennedy was shot dead in Dallas.

When Paz received news of the Kennedy assassination, he was "deeply grieved," according to Bedregal. He stated ominously that "the assassin's bullet in Dallas could also hurt the Bolivian National Revolution, because we have lost a great friend and the world will

⁴⁸ Henderson, undated [late October 1963], "Amb: Data for Senate Hearings, 1963," Box 6, Series 2: Subject Files, Henderson Papers, JFKL.

⁴⁹ MEMCON, 20 November 1963, "Bolivia, General, 8/63-1/64," Box 11, NSF-CO, JFKL.

⁵⁰ Henderson Oral History, JFKL, 70.

never be the same after this dreadful tragedy.”⁵¹ Henderson recalls that after Kennedy’s death, “I wasn’t even sure if my appointment would stand. I was afraid Johnson would want to review all the recent appointments, but my sources told me to go ahead to La Paz.”⁵²

Four days after the assassination, the State Department circulated a “Bolivia Strategy Statement,” in which it strongly recommended the continuation of Kennedy’s support for Paz. Washington’s “strategic objective,” the Department wrote, was to “exploit the existing development potential and improve the political situation” so that the Paz government could “fight off communist threats to its existence...[and] make the difficult decisions” necessary to “foster speedier development.” The Department urged the incoming administration to use Bolivia to “prove to other Alliance countries” that social reform and US economic assistance could together “transform a feudal society without slipping into a communist or military dictatorship.” State argued that USAID should continue working with the Pentagon to “utilize military personnel to the maximum extent feasible” in the development process, recommending that the Bolivian armed forces continue to “receive training and commodities to cope better with the threat of dissident armed miners, *campesinos*, and other disruptive elements.”⁵³

With these goals in mind, President Johnson sent a personal letter to Paz on 29 November, assuring the Bolivian leader of his commitment to “work with you and your government toward the successful outcome of the plans discussed with President Kennedy.” Johnson noted that Paz had been “the last official visitor received” by Kennedy, and added that that he had “asked Ambassador Henderson to meet with you to consider further those

⁵¹ Bedregal, *Búhos*, 352.

⁵² Interviews with Henderson.

⁵³ “Bolivia Strategy Statement,” 26 November 1963, “Bolivia, 7/63-5/64 and undated,” Box 389A, NSF-Dungan, JFKL, 1, 4.

issues discussed during your visit.” Johnson concluded his letter by stressing that his embassy would “cooperate in every way with your government in seeking to achieve the objectives of the Alliance for Progress.”⁵⁴

During the Kennedy years, development-minded appointees tirelessly defended Bolivia’s revolutionary regime. Paz’s White House visit demonstrated that he had succeeded in gaining Washington’s near-unconditional support, and Kennedy’s appointment of a developmentalist ambassador shortly before his death would ensure a continuing US commitment to the Paz regime. Despite demonstrating his willingness to move against the miners, however, Paz had yet to win the war. Escóbar and Pimentel would have to be removed from Siglo XX, Paz and Kennedy agreed, regardless of the consequences. When the Bolivian government arrested the two firebrands in early December, the miners reacted with a frontal attack, taking four US officials hostage that very night.

US Hostages at Siglo XX

In Paz Estenssoro’s US-backed push to bring the mining camps under government authority, he ran up against the intransigent resistance of the union at Bolivia’s largest mine, Siglo XX. Union leaders Escóbar and Pimentel, independent-minded communists who refused to respect the PCB’s *modus vivendi* with the Paz government, were champions of the violent battle against the labor reforms required by the Triangular Plan. The two boasted such enormous influence at Siglo XX that the technocrats who designed the mine rehabilitation program included the removal of Escóbar and Pimentel in the list of foreign aid conditions. In a revolutionary environment governed by popular militias, however, the communists’ removal was easier said than done. When Paz’s agents arrested the union

⁵⁴ Johnson to Paz, 29 November 1963, “Bolivia, Paz Correspondence,” Box 8, NSF-CO, LBJL.

leaders in early December 1963, Siglo XX miners took thirty-one hostages, including four US officials. The Johnson administration harbored no desire for American martyrs in the name of Bolivia's economic development, and US officials strongly resisted Paz's pleas for approval of large-scale military action. Meanwhile, for President Paz, the existence of American hostages in the mining camp offered a golden opportunity to invade, and his hesitations had given way to authoritative resolve.

In August 1963, the White House 5412 Special Group had approved covert action funds to battle communist influence in the labor unions, and these funds were flowing freely by December. Shortly before Henderson arrived in La Paz, USIS Labor Officer Thomas Martin – “a pioneer in reaching out to the miners”⁵⁵ – made contact with union leaders at Catavi, informing them that \$45,000 had been earmarked for two schools in the rebellious region. Martin's contact was Catavi union leader Crespo, an MNR leftist who subsequently invited Martin to deliver the funds directly to the community. Martin happily accepted, and set off toward the mine region in the company of three other US officials, USAID Labor Advisors Bernard Rifkin and Michael Kristula, and Peace Corps Volunteer Robert Fergerstrom. Their trip coincided with the 12th FSTMB Conference at Colquiri, which they attended as Crespo's guest.⁵⁶

Lechín writes that the Colquiri conference “was important because it would take a different path: the independence of the labor movement from the MNR right, and therefore from Paz.” The miners planned to “repudiate all the programs that the MNR had implemented,” including the “Triangular Plan...and the construction of a new, repressive army.” At the Colquiri conference, the FSTMB proceeded to “denounce the terror used by the government” and announce itself “clearly in favor of a destiny formulated by the workers

⁵⁵ Anthony Freeman Oral History, Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training.

⁵⁶ Crespo, *El rostro minero*, 340; and interviews with Fergerstrom.

themselves...It was the break with the MNR.”⁵⁷ Crespo adds that “like never before in the miners’ conference,” Colquiri managed to bring together “all the political currents” on the left and right behind a “unanimous” proclamation in favor of the miners’ “future opposition to all the government’s political, economic, and social programs.” The federation declared itself in a “head-on struggle...until the ultimate consequences” against the Triangular Plan, representing the “workers’ definitive break from the MNR.”⁵⁸ For the first time, anti-MNR rightist parties allied with the miners, and the convention unanimously endorsed Lechín’s declaration that it was necessary “to rise in arms to struggle against Paz’s ‘police state.’”⁵⁹

On Friday 6 December, the conference adjourned, and USIS Officer Martin departed for Catavi with his three colleagues. Meanwhile, as Escóbar and Pimentel left Colquiri, agents from Paz Estenssoro’s *Control Político* opened fire on their truck. Their driver was injured, and the two union leaders were taken prisoner for the second time since 1961. The news went out on radios throughout the country, and within hours communist miners from Siglo XX – armed with rifles and dynamite – burst into neighboring Catavi, kidnapped thirty hostages, including the four Americans.⁶⁰ Peace Corps Volunteer Robert Fergerstrom, who was taken hostage that night, recalls:

We were having dinner with the boss [of Catavi], and they came in looking for him. They immediately spotted Martin, who was very well known there. They took him and I laid low. A few minutes later, they came back in and took the rest of us. When we got outside there were 150-200 miners yelling,

⁵⁷ Lechín, *El pueblo*, 141-2.

⁵⁸ Crespo, *El rostro minero*, 342.

⁵⁹ Embassy to Rusk, 6 December 1963, INCO Mining, Minerals, and Metals BOL,” Box 3540, SDANF; and “Dramático Rompimiento de Lechín con el Presidente Paz Estenssoro,” *El Diario*, 6 December 1963, 7. PCB union leader Reyes recalls that the congress was “so strange! All the rightists appeared, and the whole convention agreed that we had to bring down Paz Estenssoro. But no one spoke about who would be president afterward! The only thing I could think about at that moment was, a military general!” Interviews with Reyes.

⁶⁰ Lechín, *El pueblo*, 142. Interviews with Reyes, Reinaga, Rojas, and Fergerstrom. See also “En Rápida Acción Policial se Detuvo a Pimentel y Escóbar,” *El Diario*, 7 December 1963, 7.

“Fucking *gringos*! Death to the *gringos*!” I could see that they would have killed us.⁶¹

Gerónima Jaldín de Romero, interim head of the *Comité de Amas de Casa de Siglo XX*, recalls rushing to the union building that Friday night when the sirens went off. She was principally worried that something might have happened to her husband on his way back from Colquiri. When she arrived, Gerónima saw that a mass of workers had already gathered in the plaza. Escóbar’s wife, Alicia, grabbed Gerónima and told her, “Look, they took our leaders prisoner again, and right now the miners are bringing prisoners from Catavi. Word has it there are a lot of foreigners in the group.” Alicia revealed that the *Amas de Casa* would be taking charge, and she told Gerónima, “You will be responsible for everything that happens over the next few days.” With a “bit of fear,” Gerónima accepted, asking Escóbar’s wife, “What are we supposed to do?” Alicia replied, “We’ll see.”⁶²

The two women went into union building where the other wives had begun to gather. Before they could call an assembly, the hostages arrived and were sequestered in a second floor room. Gerónima then explained to the group that the *Amas* would be “staying here as guards, all of us, as long as there are prisoners in that room,” adding that, “those men will not come out from inside...until they release our union leaders.” The women were proud of their leadership role, and responded, “Now we really are going to earn respect as the women we are! These men will not get away! Not a single one of them is going to get out!” At that point, Gerónima’s husband arrived back from Colquiri. He asked her somewhat impatiently, “Who is going to cook?” to which she answered, “Well, we’ll have to arrange to have

⁶¹ Interviews with Fergerstrom, who used the Spanish terms, “*Gringos de Mierda! Muera los Gringos!*” which are translated above.

⁶² Gerónima, in Lagos, ed., *Nos Hemos Forjado Así*, 81-5. The committee’s Secretary General, Norberta de Aguilar, was on leave to accompany her husband in the hospital.

someone come to the house and cook.” With that, Communist leader was off the hook; her husband shrugged his shoulders and responded, “Ok. You can stay.”⁶³

Fergerstrom recalled, “I was really afraid of the women. They had awful, mean looks on their faces.”⁶⁴ Another hostage, Bernard Rifkin, agreed that “the real hellions were the *Amas de Casa*... These were regular Madame Defarges, and [I] used to kid [my] guards concerning whether they were afraid of the *Amas de Casa*.”⁶⁵ When Lechín arrived, the *Amas* demanded that he declare a general miners’ strike “in solidarity with the Siglo XX union” until Escóbar and Pimentel were freed.⁶⁶ Crespo recalled that Gerónima and her colleagues “were very heated, and we could see that any talk of liberating the hostages would be futile.” He nonetheless tried to explain that the US officials were in the area to provide funding to build schools and that “the treatment they were receiving was not right.”⁶⁷

The following afternoon, 7 December, Bolivian Foreign Minister José Fellman Velarde paid a visit to freshly arrived Ambassador Henderson at the latter’s residence to assure him that the Paz government was “most concerned about the situation and determined [to] take action against [the] kidnappers.” Fellman wanted to make it “perfectly clear, however, that [the] government could not consider using Escóbar and Pimentel as exchange for [the] Americans,” explaining that the two union leaders faced “criminal charges.” Henderson stressed that Martin and his colleagues had been “on legitimate business in [the] area,” adding that “their proposed travel plans had been cleared with COMIBOL.”⁶⁸

⁶³ Gerónima, in Lagos, ed., *Nos Hemos Forjado Así*, 81-5.

⁶⁴ Interviews with Fergerstrom.

⁶⁵ Rifkin, interview with Alexander, 23 December 1963, folder 51, Interviews, Alexander Papers, Rutgers.

⁶⁶ Lechín, *El pueblo*, 142.

⁶⁷ Crespo, *El rostro minero*, 342-3.

⁶⁸ Henderson to Rusk, 7 December 1963, “Bolivia, US Hostages,” Box 8, NSF-CO, LBJL.

Minister Fellman then outlined President Paz's "three phase operation" to bring an end to the crisis. First, the government would open indirect negotiations with the FSTMB, making the case that the "Americans and COMIBOL technicians have nothing to do with [the] arrest of Escóbar and Pimentel" and warning that the "mine workers and their leaders run grave risks by keeping hostages." Phase two would begin on Monday, Fellman explained, at which point the air force would drop "ultimatum" leaflets notifying the miners of the "government threat [of] eventual action" after 24 hours, and army regiments would "commence [a] show of force directed toward the mining area but without provoking conflict." If these steps did not secure the release of the hostages, phase three would begin on Tuesday, Fellman continued, with military units "mov[ing] in force against Siglo XX, using [a] special para[trooper] company." In his report to Secretary Rusk, Henderson asked if a US Special Forces deployment would be possible, stressing that their mission "would be limited to [the] publicly announced and sole objective [to] protect American hostages in [a] joint operation with the Bolivian military."⁶⁹

Having presented his credentials to Paz Estenssoro in a brief ceremony just hours earlier, Henderson had yet to hold his first policy meeting with the President.⁷⁰ Henderson cabled Rusk on Saturday night to warn that he would not see Paz again until Monday evening, hours before the ultimatum was set to expire and a "military showdown" likely. Henderson wrote that it was "probable" that the situation would disintegrate into "open civil war with unforeseeable consequences." He further predicted that the crisis could lead to the "postponement or cancellation of elections" and the "increased possibility, especially if civil unrest [is] prolonged, of [a] military coup." Henderson also expressed concern that Paz's

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ "Fue Ovacionado por Miles de Personas el Nuevo Embajador de los Estados Unidos," *El Diario*, 8 December 1963, 6.

plan to attack Siglo XX included the “possibility that [the] hostages will be killed, either in deliberate retaliation or as a result of mob action.” The ambassador was generally supportive of the Bolivian government’s resolve to “remain firm,” but wondered if there were “some intermediate steps available to it, e.g., cutting off shipments [of] food supplies, which might help persuade the miners [to] avoid violence and release the hostages.” Henderson concluding by recommending that the US government “avoid...any suggestion which Paz might use as rationalization for temporizing and eventually for ineffectual half measures,” while still making steps to “cautiously sound out Paz along [the] lines [of] possible intermediate steps.”⁷¹

Before receiving a reply from Washington, Henderson hosted a meeting at his house with several FSTMB leaders, who assured him that the “American prisoners at Siglo XX were not harmed.” Explaining that the miners had “taken...prisoners without thinking beyond [the] terms [of] their anger over [the] capture [of] Escóbar and Pimentel,” the union leaders described the “public feeling” in Bolivia that the US embassy “ran” the country and could therefore “influence Bolivian government actions.” They expressed their conviction that President Paz was “determined to persecute them,” revealed that they personally feared arrest, and asked Henderson to help them set up an indirect line of communication with the Paz government. Henderson agreed to try, but added that “release [of] American hostages could not be related to success or failure of my effort or of negotiations to follow.”⁷²

Secretary Rusk responded to Henderson’s cables late that night, ordering him to “see Paz soonest Sunday and inform him USG [is] opposed [to the] use of military force as outlined in phases 2 and 3 of Bolivian plan while US citizens [are] held hostage.” Rusk explained that the State Department “consider[s] use of Bolivian military [a] very dangerous

⁷¹ Henderson to Rusk, 7 December 1963, “Bolivia, US Hostages,” Box 8, NSF-CO, LBJL.

⁷² Henderson to Rusk, 8 December, 1963, in *idem*.

move not only for GOB (in view [of] pre-revolutionary military-miner clashes) but particularly for [the] safety [of] US personnel.” Rusk added that the “same reasoning applies to possible request from GOB re[garding] use [of] any US Special Forces.” Coaching the new ambassador through the crisis, Rusk recommended that in his conversations with Paz, Henderson “emphasize the political dangers inherent [in the] use of military force while US hostages remain cause célèbre for action.” Rusk expressed doubts that it was possible to carry out military action while simultaneously “prevent[ing] miner retaliation against hostages,” and recommended that “high-level, highly component negotiators” were needed to break the stalemate. Rusk suggested putting pressure on Lechín, who as “*jefe máximo* of the miners,” could be backed into offering a “*quid pro quo*” that might result in the exile of Escóbar and Pimentel in exchange for the hostages’ release. Pushing Paz to revoke Lechín’s immunity would “seem to be the first order of business,” Rusk concluded.⁷³

On Sunday morning 8 December, Secretary Rusk briefed President Johnson on the crisis, explaining that Escóbar and Pimentel were the “ring leaders of elements opposing implementation of the US-supported mine rehabilitation program,” and informing the president that the State Department was “opposed to portions of the Bolivian proposal which include the use of force basically because we do not see how the safety of our personnel can be assured.” Rusk added that using “Americans as a cause célèbre for military action by the Bolivian army against the miners has deep-rooted political significance and dangers,” and proceeded to inform Johnson that Henderson’s would meet with Paz the following day. Finally, Rusk detailed his proposal to put maximum pressure on Lechín and to recommend exile for Escóbar and Pimentel “in lieu of trial.”⁷⁴

⁷³ Rusk to Henderson, 7 December 1963, in *idem*.

⁷⁴ Rusk to Johnson, 8 December 1963, in *idem*.

Later that day, Assistant Secretary of Defense William Bundy wrote to his brother, NSA Bundy, to report that the Pentagon was readying forces “which might be necessary to respond to Bolivian government call for assistance.” Assistant Secretary Bundy explained that US Southern Command in Panama had a 30-man Special Forces Mobile Training team on 6-hour alert, a group that included “specialists of the exact sort which would be needed in a rescue operation of this type.” The Assistant Secretary wrote that Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara believed “the US should use military force only in an extreme emergency not only because of the physical restrictions on military operations in the area, and the great distances involved, but also because of the violent reaction against the military in Bolivia which seems certain to follow.” One of the principal aims of the Alliance for Progress been to “erase the bitter feeling of the peasants and miners against the Bolivian military,” William Bundy added, noting that this effort was sure to be frustrated if the crisis developed to a point of armed confrontation.⁷⁵

The Pentagon Joint Chiefs of Staff reported to the White House that despite Paz’s “past policy of not employing military forces against the miners, it appears that President Paz is prepared to risk the serious domestic violence which would almost certainly follow such a move.” The Joint Chiefs believed that “[i]n view of lingering anti-army feelings which date back to the 1952 revolution, Bolivian peasants, miners, and armed militiamen would probably react violently to any military move against them,” putting the “stability of the government and the lives of the hostages...in grave jeopardy.” For this reason, the State Department was “strongly opposed to use of Bolivian military as has been proposed by Bolivia, or to possible use of US military Special Forces, as has been mentioned by the US Ambassador in La Paz.” As a precautionary measure, however, the Pentagon drafted an

⁷⁵ William Bundy to McGeorge Bundy, 8 December 1963, and attached “Talking Paper for the Joint Chiefs of Staff,” 8 December 1963; in *idem*.

action plan outlining precisely “what we could do...[and] how long would it take,” and considered the future possibility of “combat operations in conjunction with local government forces.”⁷⁶

After receiving the Pentagon report, NSA Bundy submitted a long memorandum to Johnson on Sunday afternoon, detailing Washington’s plan to “support Paz in pressure plus negotiations, pay no blackmail, avoid military action if possible, and try to make Lechín lose ground in the upshot.” This policy was supported, Bundy explained, by the State and Defense Departments, the Joints Chiefs of Staff, and US Southern Command, and contained only a “low” chance that the hostages would be harmed. Military action should not be encouraged, threatened, or executed, he added, because it “greatly increases danger to hostages, is likely to weaken the government, and increase danger of civil war.” If Johnson rejected this proposal and the hostages were harmed, Bundy warned that “very heavy criticism, both foreign and domestic, would fall on the new Administration.”⁷⁷ At Bundy’s recommendation, Johnson issued a press release on Sunday evening, condemning the “indefensible seizure of four United States officials in Catavi-Siglo XX, Bolivia.” The White House statement, which was interpreted in Bolivia as the prelude to US intervention, offered “full assistance to President Paz in his actions” to secure the hostages’ release, “in line with [Johnson’s] determination to protect United States citizens everywhere.”⁷⁸

Shortly after the White House statement was made public, Henderson held his first meeting with President Paz. The Bolivian President launched into a soliloquy about how the crisis offered his government an “opportunity...[to] impose discipline on [the] miners and

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Bundy to Kennedy, 8 December 1963, “Chronological File, December 1963,” Box 1, NSF-McGeorge Bundy, LBJL.

⁷⁸ White House Press Release, 8 December 1963, in idem.; and “Plena ayuda ofrece EEUU para conseguir la libertad de los rehenes,” *El Diario*, 10 December 1963, 1.

take agreed measures [to] increase productivity and efficiency.” After repeating “several times and with great emphasis” that he was “determined to take all necessary measures to this end,” Paz explained that Lechín had been “falling more obviously under communist influence during recent weeks.” Paz relished the fact that Lechín was faced with a dilemma, telling Henderson that “he must either release [the] hostages and face hostility from his erstwhile supporters or accept international and national opprobrium for violation [of] criminal law and international code.”⁷⁹

When Paz finished, Henderson expressed some hope that “intermediate steps would be followed” prior to military action and relayed the miners’ federation offer to negotiate. Paz was adamant, however, expressing confidence that the crisis would be over as soon as his government completed phase two the following day. He categorically rejected negotiations with the FSTMB and made no mention of needing US Special Forces.⁸⁰ Using the “Roger Channel,” for highly sensitive, limited distribution,⁸¹ Henderson sent a separate cable to Secretary Rusk and the White House, reporting his discomfort in being asked to stand up strongly to Paz’s proposal for military action against the miners. Conceding that he could not “give assurance beyond reasonable doubt that any repeat any step which is taken [to] bring pressure on the miners [to] effect release of hostages may not result in retaliation on hostages,” the US ambassador believed nonetheless that “GOB must be prepared to use [a] combination of measures [to] assure maximum extent possible [the] safety of [the] hostages.” Paz had already authorized covert action without consulting the embassy, Henderson

⁷⁹ Rusk to Henderson, 8 December 1963; and Henderson to Rusk, 8 December 1963, “Bolivia, US Hostages,” Box 8, NSF-CO, LBJL.

⁸⁰ Henderson to Rusk, 8 December 1963, in *idem*.

⁸¹ State Department, “Captions and Handling Instructions for the Information Management Specialist (IMS),” in *US Department of State Foreign Affairs Manual: Volume 5, Handbook 2 – Telecommunications* (Washington, DC: GPO, 2008), 4.

explained, expressing his belief that “any attempt by US now to halt or reverse operation could result at best in such confusion as to increase risk of exposure.”⁸²

On Monday 9 December, day four of the hostage crisis, General Ovando informed US officials that phase two was well under way. The Viacha-based Max Toledo 1st Motorized Infantry Division – created by the Kennedy administration during Paz’s first anticommunist repression in June 1961 – was on its way to the mine region, along with 21 men from the 1st Airborne Infantry Company in Cochabamba and 200 police officers from La Paz. The remaining members of the 1st Airborne had begun a road march from Cochabamba to Sucre, where they would join the 3rd Infantry Regiment and a police detachment and head northward toward Siglo XX. General Ovando then explained that two Indian peasant militia units from highland Cochabamba – consisting of 500 and 1,000 men – planned to block all the roads surrounding the mine and serve as a “rear guard for the Motorized Battalion if committed.” The mobilized men – soldiers, Indian peasants, and police – had been instructed to travel with fifteen days ration, Ovando explained, and the armed forces “will draw 5 million rounds [of] 7.65mm ammunition from [the] La Paz arsenal.”⁸³

In reaction to labor reforms called for by the US-backed Triangular Plan, Siglo XX miners took their fight to the heart of the Alliance for Progress. By kidnapping four US officials in early December, the miners courted possible disaster. Despite his previous reluctance to engage uniformed military forces against the miners, Paz hoped to take advantage of the crisis to finally bring Siglo XX under government authority. While it is possible that the Bolivian president believed a show of military force would push the miners would capitulate, it is also likely that he hoped any resulting bloodshed could be blamed on the Americans. Paz still considered himself the father of the 1952 revolution, and he had no

⁸² Henderson to Rusk and White House, 8 December 1963, “Bolivia, US Hostages,” Box 8, NSF-CO, LBJL.

⁸³ Henderson to Rusk, 9 December 1963, in *idem*.

desire to go down in history as yet another Bolivian president to order the massacre of miners. The Johnson administration opposed a military solution as long as US officials were in the line of fire, but Johnson's press release offered Paz Washington's "full assistance," ominous words for the inhabitants of Siglo XX.

If, however, Paz sought to avoid a massacre – and there are reasons to believe he did not – the Bolivian president underestimated the miners and their wives. Shows of military force only strengthened the women's determination to fight to the death, taking their families (and the hostages) down with them. For liberal developmentalists, authority and order would bring anticommunist progress,⁸⁴ but the enterprise first had to face off with the miners who stood to lose most.

A Massacre Approaches

The US approach to the hostage crisis was purposely opaque. On the one hand, Johnson's press release created fear amongst the miners that the US military could intervene. At the same time, there were four American lives on the line, greatly diminishing Washington's previously enthusiastic attitude regarding a mine invasion. The Alliance for Progress sought anticommunist labor reforms, and one of Washington's principal objectives was to force an open break between Paz and Lechín's MNR Left Sector. By putting the blame for the crisis squarely on Lechín and pressuring the FSMTB to strike a deal with the government leading to the release of the hostages, US officials hoped to save the lives of their colleagues while at the same time delivering a political blow to Lechín. This approach was well-served by the Bolivian military, which had little desire to follow Paz's orders to invade,

⁸⁴ In case there is doubt that Stephansky would have driven a hard line, he assuredly told Robert Alexander that the crisis "will work itself out...[Paz] cannot give into the miners." Stephansky, interview with Alexander, 10 December, folder 51, Interviews, Alexander Papers, Rutgers.

but every reason to use the crisis in order to secure increasing levels of US military equipment.

Ambassador Henderson recognized that FSTMB leaders were more “rational” than the Siglo XX’s miners and their wives, who were “more willing [to] run serious risks in defiance of the government.” In response to Paz’s mobilization of the armed forces and Indian militias, Siglo XX interim leader Nicolás López announced to members of the press that the miners boasted alliances with several anti-Paz Indian communities and were “ready to defend ourselves to the last drop of blood.”⁸⁵ CIA Director John McCone told Johnson that the situation was “extremely dangerous...because the miners in this area were notorious, vicious men who ruled with guns and placed a very low value on human life.”⁸⁶ The CIA reported on day five of the crisis that the hostages were being kept on the second floor “almost directly” above a “large stock of dynamite,” which the miners threatened to discharge if the mining camp came under attack.⁸⁷ Secretary Rusk warned Johnson that the crisis “is coming to a head here in the next day or so.”⁸⁸

Inside the Siglo XX union building, Gerónima recalls that rumors of Indian militias and US Special Forces led the women to become “psychologically ill...pale.” She adds, however, that she “looked around at every single one of my *compañeras*. They may have been pale but they were unwavering. Not a single one wanted out.” One of the women suggested that, in the event of an attack, they could escape through the union building

⁸⁵ Henderson to Rusk (3), 9-10 December 1963, “Bolivia, US Hostages,” Box 8, NSF-CO, LBJL.

⁸⁶ MEMCON, 9 December 1963, “Meetings with the President, 23 November – 27 December,” Box 1, John McCone Memoranda, LBJL.

⁸⁷ CIA, Information Report, 10 December 1963, “Bolivia, US Hostages,” Box 8, NSF-CO, LBJL.

⁸⁸ Recording of Telephone Conversation, 10 December 1963, K6312.06, PNO 18, LBJL.

basement, but the group resolved to wage a counterattack, regardless of the risks it entailed.

“We lived in a constant state of nervous tension in there,” Gerónima recalled.⁸⁹

One of the *Amas*, Domitila, explains that with the military and Indians approaching, the women decided that “we could not leave our children to suffer at the hands of those people” and that “our duty was to die together with our kids.” At that moment, Domitila recounts, “We all moved permanently to the union building with our children and husbands, arranging the sticks of dynamite in such a way that, if it were necessary, we could destroy the entire building, ensuring that no one survived – neither us nor the hostages.” She explains that they “put dynamite on the tables, around the doors, on the windows, and also on our bodies, our children’s bodies, ready to light them in the event of an attack.” The *Amas de Casa* planned to “light the matches and blow everything away,” Domitila recalls, adding that “I am sure that if that moment had arrived, we would have carried it through! There was such certainty!”⁹⁰

On Sunday, day three, when Lechín tried to convince the *Amas* to permit the hostages to go to the Catavi camp and communicate with their families, Gerónima responded, “Mr. Lechín, this is not the first time you have tried to set a trap for the working class... Every time the working class is about to win a battle, you always appear trying to make deals, and you have your talks with the government. And our strikes all come to nothing.” She added that, “this time, you won’t succeed. We want to see our union leaders here first. Only then will we let these hostages go.” After a fruitless argument, Lechín complained that “How is it that

⁸⁹ Gerónima, in Lagos, ed., *Nos Hemos Forjado Así*, 88-9.

⁹⁰ Domitila, in Viezzer, *Si me permiten hablar*, 85-97. This is not an embellishment. Interviews with Crespo, Reyes, Fergerstrom, and numerous reports in the Bolivian and US press.

I can get myself across to thousands of workers, but I can't get myself across to these few dozen women here?" With that, Lechín left for La Paz.⁹¹

With the Bolivian government's ultimatum hours away, US officials turned their sights squarely on Lechín. Henderson phoned him to say, "The crime of kidnapping is viewed with horror and repugnance throughout the civilized world" and that he could not believe that a government official "could for one moment lend his office to the countenancing of such a criminal act." Alliance Administrator Moscoso followed this up with a two-sentence message: "Juan, you know me well as a friend of Bolivia. If anything happens to my countrymen the miners are holding I will have to consider you personally responsible." US labor leader Victor Reuther piled on, cabling Lechín that he was "deeply shocked by...[t]his outrageous effort," which was "an affront to all who respect human dignity." Finally, White House Press Secretary Pierre Salinger expressed to Lechín his "sense of dismay and outrage...that you, as acknowledged leader of the mines, have not yet made any effective move to obtain [the hostages'] release is inexplicable to me."⁹²

As Tuesday night's deadline approached, US officials tried desperately to identify the Bolivian government's intentions. They were comforted, therefore, when General Barrientos revealed that he had "no knowledge of any planned attack on Siglo XX today." General Ovando echoed his colleague's views at a Tuesday press conference, "categorically den[ying] that there was any truth to any report of proposed attack by military or *campesino* forces in present situation," and stressing that "[w]e have no offensive plans." Defense Minister, General Luis Rodríguez Bidegaín, interjected that the government had not

⁹¹ Ibid., 91-2.

⁹² Henderson to Rusk, 9 December 1963; Moscoso via Rusk to Lechín via Henderson, 10 December 1963; Reuther via Rusk to Lechín via Henderson, 10 December 1963, "Bolivia, US Hostages," Box 8, NSF-CO, LBJL; and Salinger via Rusk to Henderson, 10 December 1963, "Juan Lechín (Bolivia, 1964), Aide Files – Pierre Salinger, LBJL. All these were made public. See "Cables de Personalidades," *El Diario*, 12 December 1963, 6.

ruled out acting forcefully against “those who are trying to take possession of the nation for their own capricious interests,” and Labor Minister Anibal Aguilar stated flatly that “[o]ur problem is to bring reason to [the] communists of Siglo XX.”⁹³

General Rodríguez followed up the press conference with a statement that “if miners at Catavi-Siglo XX do not release the hostages within 48 hours,” the Paz government would take “subsequent measures” to assume control of the mining camp. He added that “Lechín, as the leader of the miners, must assume sole responsibility for what happens.” Meanwhile, a CIA source revealed that Paz was feverishly attempting to negotiate the release of the four Americans, after which he would order the military to attack the mine “even if other hostages continue in detention.”⁹⁴

Still stymied in his pursuit of US approval to attack, Paz asked Henderson late Tuesday night whether he “considered a week long enough to exhaust intermediate steps before undertaking direct military action.” Henderson responded that he was “opposed to artificial deadlines,” but conceded that the “responsibility for a decision with respect to such action must vest entirely in [the] Bolivian government and that only he could take that responsibility.” Paz continued to press, asking “how [the] American government and [the] American people would react to a Bolivian government decision to commit the Army to action.” Henderson, who two days earlier revealed his sympathy for Paz’s push for military action, responded half-heartedly that his role “would always be to insist to [the] Bolivian government that it must do everything in its power to protect the American citizens involved and that this would certainly be the position of the American government.” Receiving the last word, Paz complained that “it should be obvious to any objective observer” that he had

⁹³ Henderson to Rusk (2), 10 December 1963, “Bolivia, US Hostages,” Box 8, NSF-CO, LBJL.

⁹⁴ Henderson to Rusk, 10 and 11 December 1963, in idem.; and “Dio Plazo de 48 Horas a Catavi,” *El Diario*, 11 December 1963, 1.

“very limited alternatives and almost no room for maneuver.” He stressed that “his eventual decision must be to attack in force and take the risk that American citizens might be harmed.”

Paz concluded the meeting pointing out that his only alternative was to “resign Bolivia to extremist control” and handed Henderson a lost list of military equipment he would need.⁹⁵

Paz’s laundry list, most of which received a hearty endorsement from the US Military Group in La Paz, included 200 rockets, 36 mortars, 12,600 mortar rounds, 5,000 hand grenades, 2,000 tear gas grenades, 16 75mm recoilless rifles, 500 M-1 rifles and carbines, 650,000 rounds of ammunition, 3,000 winter coats, 3,000 pairs of combat boots, 9 armed airplanes, and armored car, and a howitzer.⁹⁶ The inventory was leaked to the US press, however, prompting substantial embarrassment and the requisite denials by US and Bolivia officials. Henderson drafted a dummy cable – meant to be leaked – which read “no assistance required,” but to be sure, he cabled Secretary Rusk a third time to assure him that the request was “still valid.”⁹⁷

The flurry of contradictory cables disoriented Secretary Rusk, who told President Johnson on Tuesday afternoon that

there seems to be some confusion in the Bolivian government about whether...asking or not...the Foreign Minister has told us....given us a note saying that they are not asking for anything, but we are studying the shopping list, and we will probably be...if the Bolivian government clarifies that it wants it, we’ll send them some ammunition and tear gas and a few things of that sort...we’ll try and keep you informed.

⁹⁵ Henderson to Rusk, 10 December 1963, “Bolivia, US Hostages,” Box 8, NSF-CO, LBJL.

⁹⁶ Ibid. The entire list can be found in Military Group to Rusk, Pentagon and Southern Command, 12 December 1963, DEF 12-3 BOL, SDANF.

⁹⁷ Rusk to Henderson, 11 December 1963; and Henderson to Rusk, 11 December 1963, “Bolivia, US Hostages,” Box 8, NSF-CO, LBJL. The dummy cable is in the same folder.

Johnson was unfazed by Rusk's stuttering statement, approving the military shipment with a simple, "Alright."⁹⁸

By Wednesday 11 December, day six of the crisis, Paz's inner circle grew increasingly impatient with Washington's hesitant attitude toward military action. Government Minister Arze Murillo warned Henderson that Lechín's popularity was on the rise, the Siglo XX miners were successfully stalling for time, and rumors of an impending government capitulation abounded. Arze Murillo believed that the miners would never release the hostages, which "form the barrier of protection [the] miners now have against action by the government," and warned that soon "it may be necessary to risk [the] lives of hostages by conducting military action to take Siglo XX." The "only thing holding up [the] operation," Arze Murillo complained, "is [the] problem of [the] Americans." Henderson continued to demonstrate sympathy for the Bolivian position, and responded that "while [the] embassy understands [the] minister's position and [the] problem of [the] Bolivian government, and has even considered the possibility that armed action to rescue the hostages may be required, our primary interest [at] this time must be [the] welfare of [the] American citizens...being held." Once again, Henderson let the Bolivian government have the last word, which Arze Murillo used to explain that Paz would give the miners 48 hours to release the hostages, after which the government would "move in with Armed Forces to affect their release, accepting any necessary risks to [the] hostages."⁹⁹

As Henderson met with Arze Murillo, the 1st Motorized Infantry was moving from Oruro to the Huanuni mining camp, 60km from Siglo XX. Simultaneously, "forty truckloads" of pro-government Indian militiamen arrived in Oruro from Achacachi, near La Paz, and 1,500 armed Indians prepared to deploy from Ucureña in the Cochabamba Valley.

⁹⁸ Recording of Telephone Conversation, 11 December 1963, K6312.07, PNO 24, LBJL.

⁹⁹ Henderson to Rusk, 11 December 1963, "Bolivia, US Hostages," Box 8, NSF-CO, LBJL.

The US Embassy reported that “*campesinos* throughout the nation are mobilized behind [the] Paz government in crisis,” and the Indian peasant federation of Potosí declared it had 120,000 militiamen ready to “crush [the] revolutionary outbreak.”¹⁰⁰

Meanwhile, it was becoming clear that that Washington’s pressure campaign against Lechín was working. Hostage Thomas Martin smuggled a letter out to his wife on Wednesday, reporting that Lechín appeared to have “been real worried the last couple of days.”¹⁰¹ White House Press Secretary Salinger followed up his previous day’s cable with a letter, claiming to Lechín that if Kennedy were still alive, “he would tell you what I tell you – that no matter how difficult the problems...the course you now pursue cannot possibly do anything but severely endanger the relations between our two countries and set back the spirit of United States and Latin American friendship and cooperation for which President Kennedy fought so hard.”¹⁰² Peace Corps Director Sargent Shriver and Secretary Rusk followed this up with similarly worded letters, and that afternoon Lechín agreed to accept any mediator to resolve the standoff.¹⁰³

Late Wednesday night, Paz revealed to Henderson that early negotiations with Lechín through the student federation had been fruitful. Paz offered to permit Escóbar and Pimentel to stand trial and to withdraw military regiments from the mining areas in exchange for the release of the hostages. Paz explained that Lechín rejected the idea of a trial for the two union leaders, and further demanded that the military withdraw before the hostages were released. Paz asked Henderson what the US government would think if he were to offer to

¹⁰⁰ Henderson to Rusk (2), 11 December 1963, in *idem*.

¹⁰¹ Henderson to Rusk, 13 December 1963, in *idem*.

¹⁰² Salinger to Lechín, 11 December 1963, “Juan Lechín (Bolivia, 1964), Aide Files – Pierre Salinger, LBJL.

¹⁰³ Shriver via Rusk to Lechín via Henderson, 11 December 1963; and Rusk to Lechín via Henderson, 11 December 1963, “Bolivia, US Hostages,” Box 8, NSF-CO, LBJL.

exile Escóbar and Pimentel to Cuba or Russia. Having already received word from Rusk that the State Department was amenable to this option, Henderson did not hesitate to respond that this “seemed like [a] plausible initiative which might break [the] deadlock.”¹⁰⁴

Despite his opposition to military action, and his previous approval of exile, Rusk responded that the student-mediated talks appeared to represent “substantial GOB surrender to [a] major illegal challenge to its authority with serious danger for US nationals in Bolivia and elsewhere and to Paz government.” Rusk conceded, however, that the breakthrough could work, if “followed promptly by vigorous GOB action to establish its authority in [the] mine areas and bring perpetrators to justice.” He stressed that the Department was not opposed to Paz’s proposal, but he urged Henderson to request specific details as to the “likely terms of [the] negotiated release, [the] ability [of] GOB [to] withstand immediate political consequences [of] such [an] agreement, [and the] potential danger to widely dispersed US nationals and prospects for GOB disciplinary action thereafter.”¹⁰⁵

On day seven, Thursday 12 December, student leaders set off for Siglo XX to speak “directly with the persons holding the hostages.” They praised Paz’s attitude, which they found “disposed [to] reach [a] peaceful accord.”¹⁰⁶ Meanwhile, Indian leaders in Cochabamba declared their intention “to repel [the] red conspiracy which [has] fooled the miners,” adding that they were “ready to march on a moment’s notice where we are needed to free our brothers the miners who are terrorized by persons who are thinking only of their own personal interests.”¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ Henderson to Rusk, 12 December 1963, in *idem*.

¹⁰⁵ Rusk to Henderson, 12 December 1963, in *idem*.

¹⁰⁶ Henderson to Rusk, 13 December 1963, in *idem*.

¹⁰⁷ Henderson to Rusk, 12-13 December 1963, in *idem*.

In the midst of the crisis, General Barrientos decided to pay a visit to US Southern Command in Panama. Using the crisis situation as justification for bypassing normal diplomatic channels, Barrientos explained that he was planning to go to the “highest military authorities” in the Pentagon in support of Paz’s recent request for emergency military equipment. Barrientos revealed that Paz had already made the “political decision” to accept whatever “local and international repercussions” accompany the “arrival of US assistance for use against the miners,” claiming that a shipment was “vital since [the] miners are as well if not better equipped than [the] government armed forces.”¹⁰⁸

Henderson endorsed the Paz-Barrientos request, reporting to the State Department that materiel such as airplanes, helicopters, and army clothing “should be considered not only from [the] viewpoint of long-range military planning, but also with recognition [of the] importance [of] hav[ing] some immediate impact on the present situation, particularly with respect [to the] morale of the armed forces and their consequent support [for the] Paz government.”¹⁰⁹

US Southern Command agreed. Despite the fact that the list was “excessive from the point of view of meeting the immediate situation with respect to the hostages,” the regional command believed that “in light of the current situation and the long-range requirements for government stability and increased morale, and a continuing pro-US orientation among the Armed Forces... certain equipment should be furnished to the Bolivian Armed Forces at an early date.”¹¹⁰

Deputy Secretary of Defense Roswell Gilpatric phoned President Johnson about the shipments on Friday morning, explaining that

¹⁰⁸ Southern Command to Joint Chiefs, 12 December 1963, in *idem*.

¹⁰⁹ Henderson to Rusk, 12 December 1963, in *idem*.

¹¹⁰ Southern Command to Joint Chiefs and White House, 13 December 1963, in *idem*.

some things we can get off quite quickly, such as hand grenades, field packs, clothing, and some ammunition. Some things, like vehicles, will take longer, but we are getting back to State this afternoon what can be made quickly, either from the Canal Zone...or what can be moved from the Z.I. [Interior Zone]. And the word over here is, unless you direct otherwise, to do as much as we can as quickly as we can.

President Johnson replied nonchalantly, "Yeah, that's right. That's what I'd do."¹¹¹

Hours later, Secretary of Defense McNamara "directed that an impact shipment of military equipment be made immediately to the Bolivian government for use in the present crisis." The Pentagon demurred on the armored car and the howitzer, but an "impact shipment," paid for through Special Group-approved "contingency funds," was loaded onto five C-47s. The first transport carrier landed in La Paz at 5pm on Saturday 14 December,¹¹² including 3,000 pairs of combat boots, 3,000 winter coats, 3,000 field packs, 1,000 rockets, 2,250 grenades, 300 M-1 carbines, 730,000 rounds of ammunition.¹¹³

The evening before, Siglo XX's *Amas de Casa* issued a dramatic call to arms:

Women of the heroic Bolivian nation, sisters of our social class, sisters in daily miseries and hardship; mothers, wives, and daughters who love your peaceful homes; women who aspire for progress and happiness: We call on you to meditate for a moment the grave situation that confronts in the country, a situation that has been created by this anti-popular government with its atrocities and repression against labor leaders...We have truth and righteousness on our side, and for that reason we send out this fervent call for mobilization in defense of the rights and liberties we obtained by blood in difficult battles."

The communiqué condemned the Paz government, "sold out to US imperialism," for mobilizing the military, and vowed to "fight until the death if that is what this reactionary government obliges us to do."¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ Recording of Telephone Conversation, 13 December 1963, K6312.06, PNO 18, LBJL.

¹¹² Southern Command to Military Group, 14 December 1963, DEF 19-3 US-BOL, SDANF.

¹¹³ Joint Chiefs to Southern Command, Military Group, and Rusk, 13 December 1963, "Bolivia, US Hostages," Box 8, NSF-CO, LBJL.

¹¹⁴ Comité de Amas de Casa de Siglo XX, 13 December 1963, in Lagos, ed., *Nos Hemos Forjado Así*, 90.

Their bellicose declaration notwithstanding, the women of Siglo XX began to seek a more sophisticated plan of defense. With rumors of an impending invasion, Gerónima recalls that “I began to experience a nervous tension, and it wasn’t just me.” Gerónima looked at the other women. “It was 1 or 2 in the morning. Pale. Every one of them was pale.” The committee leader was scared and asked the women what was wrong. “We are frightened because word has it the helicopters are arriving. Word has it they are going to take the prisoners out through the window.” Gerónima responded, “Well, what do you think the workers are doing outside? They are obviously armed, as well.” The women persisted, asking if she wanted a massacre. “No, no. There will be no massacre,” Gerónima responded, “and to make sure there will be no massacre, we will finally move into the interior of the mine,” taking the US hostages with them.¹¹⁵

With Siglo XX on the brink of massacre, frantic moves were being made to resolve the standoff. On Friday morning, 13 December, Eugene Victor Rifkin, brother of USAID Labor Officer – and hostage – Bernard, received President Paz’s permission to visit Escóbar and Pimentel in prison. Playing up the fact that his namesake was the great US Socialist icon, Eugene Victor Debs, the desperate American attorney struggled to convince them to avert bloodshed by recording a statement and drafting a letter imploring Siglo XX to release the hostages. Relying on *New York Times* columnist Juan de Onís as his interpreter, Eugene Victor held three separate meetings with Escóbar and Pimentel over the course of several hours. Escóbar was at first unconvinced, and he offered to remain in prison if Pimentel were released. Arze Murillo responded with two words: “No deal.” At this, Escóbar finally relented, drafting a public letter which Pimentel promptly signed.¹¹⁶ It read:

¹¹⁵ Gerónima, in Lagos, ed., *Nos Hemos Forjado Así*, 93-4.

¹¹⁶ Rifkin, interview with Alexander, 23 December 1963, folder 51, Interviews, Alexander Papers, Rutgers; and Henderson to Rusk, 14 December 1963, POL 25 BOL, Box 3830, SDANF.

Deeply penetrated...by the revolutionary firmness of the Siglo XX and Catavi working class...In the face of the military mobilization, and desiring to avoid a bloody massacre, leaving aside all sectarian attitudes, thinking in the future of the workers of Siglo XX and Catavi...we call and we beg for you to teach a lesson to the "barbarians," granting liberty to the hostages...Your sacrifice, *compañeros* miners, is very well regarded among all the patriotic forces of the country, and they realize that there are great troubles facing the working class, with the cancer of divisionism, rising unemployment, all fomented by the government...Allow us to carry the full weight of these injustices on our backs, here in the national penitentiary.¹¹⁷

With this powerful letter in hand, Eugene Victor and de Onís rushed to see Lechín, who immediately declared that the FSTMB would accept all of Paz's conditions and begged to take the letter to Siglo XX.¹¹⁸ That following afternoon, as Pentagon "impact shipments" began landing in La Paz, Lechín broadcast an urgent statement by radio, pleading with Siglo XX to accept the deal and release the hostages "in order to show that the FSTMB has authority."¹¹⁹

On Sunday night, 15 December, Lechín arrived at Siglo XX accompanied by US Embassy officer Charles Thomas and Archbishop of La Paz, Abel Antezana. They met for two hours with the *Amas de Casa*, who agreed to call a miners' assembly in the morning to discuss the Escóbar-Pimentel letter.¹²⁰ On the morning of Monday 16 December, the union siren called for an assembly, in front of a banner that read, "The Working Class Against the Calamity Known as the Alliance for Progress."¹²¹ Lechín dramatically recounts that, as the

¹¹⁷ Escóbar and Pimentel to Siglo XX union, 14 December 1963, in Lagos, ed., *Nos Hemos Forjado Así*, 95-6. See also "Pimentel y Escóbar Piden Que se Libere a Rehenes," *El Diario*, 14 December 1963, 7.

¹¹⁸ Henderson to Rusk, 14 December 1963, POL 25 BOL, Box 3830, SDANF.

¹¹⁹ Henderson to Rusk, 14 December 1963, POL 25 BOL, Box 3830, SDANF; and Henderson to Rusk, 15 December 1963, folder "Bolivia, US Hostages," Box 8, NSF-CO, LBJL.

¹²⁰ Thomas Report, 6 February 1964, POL 23-8, Demonstrations, Riots BOL, Box 1923, SDANF.

¹²¹ "Free at Last," *Time*, 27 December 1963.

miners gathered, “warplanes circled low overhead and then disappeared over the horizon.”¹²²

A small group of intransigents close to the union building balcony began to shout, “We are not afraid of the soldiers, let them come and we will beat the tar out of them!...If we have to die, let it be now!...Death to Paz Estenssoro!...Death to the Army!”¹²³ According to Lechín’s account, an old miner then rose to speak, his granddaughter in his arms.

It has been days since my granddaughter has had a drink of milk, because there is none in the commissary. But that’s not so important. What’s important is that if this assembly decides that we should fight, I will fight even if my granddaughter dies, by bullet or by starvation, and I will die with her.

The crowd went wild, and the old miner continued:

I see that we are armed and resolved to die. I have seen many combats in this area. Given my age, I have seen quite a lot. But, what possibility do we have to win this battle and then the war? Don’t you think the imperialists will send more troops, more planes? We need to think, *compañeros*...This is the moment to think, because later there won’t be time. Emotions are good when you are in combat, but they do not counsel well before the combat.”¹²⁴

Lechín writes that this old miner’s speech “changed the direction of the assembly.”

Lechín then got up to speak, explaining that “we will be able to win these battles once we get weapons, but at this point the enemy is better equipped...What we are facing is more a massacre of miners than a battle.” Lechín urged that “the hostages must be freed, and we will continue our struggle for the liberation of the two detained union leaders and for the objectives of the Revolution.” The most important thing, he explained, was “to save our lives so we can continue the struggle...If there is a massacre, everything will be over.” He concluded his speech by warning that a massacre of workers is just “what the government

¹²² Lechín, *El pueblo*, 145-7. Lechín’s memoirs are a mixture of reality and fantasy. He claims, for example, to have been solely responsible for obtaining the Escóbar-Pimentel letter, making no mention of Eugene Victor.

¹²³ *Ibid.*; and Thomas Report, 6 February 1964, POL 23-8, Demonstrations, Riots BOL, Box 1923, SDANF.

¹²⁴ Lechín, *El pueblo*, 145-7.

wants, and we must not play their game at the cost of our lives.”¹²⁵ At 2pm the assembly voted to release the hostages, having received nothing in return.¹²⁶

US Embassy Officer Thomas then accompanied Lechín to the neighboring Catavi mining camp, where the less-radical union promptly ratified the hostages’ rendition. Lechín suddenly disappeared, and Thomas was confused about what came next. He called the Siglo XX union building, where Martin answered the telephone, explaining that their guards were gone, and that they were thinking of fleeing. Frightened, Thomas rushed to the union building, where he witnessed the four hostages climbing into one of the automobiles he had brought from La Paz. The people surrounding them were “far from being hostile.” Instead, they “were cheering and trying to shake hands with the hostages.” Thomas scrambled to organize a caravan, and the group sped away in a cloud of dust. At the gate of the camp, guards from the miners’ militia stopped them and demanded they take the wives of Escóbar and Pimentel with them. Thomas recalls that “this we were very happy to do...to help insure our safe passage.” Once Alicia de Escóbar and Bertha de Pimentel were on board, the caravan hightailed to Oruro. According to Thomas, “The rest of the trip was gay...without incident.”¹²⁷

The women in the *Comité de Amas de Casa* were “completely destroyed” by this turn of events. “Our spirits were crushed,” Domitila recalls, “as if it was our personal defeat, because all of our efforts had failed to achieve their objective.”¹²⁸ Gerónima recounts that they were furious, protesting to Lechín that “Every time we are one step away from winning the battle, the Miners’ Federation, or the Labor Confederation, or our union leaders, always

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid.; and Thomas Report, 6 February 1964, POL 23-8, Demonstrations, Riots BOL, Box 1923, SDANF.

¹²⁷ Thomas Report, 6 February 1964, POL 23-8, Demonstrations, Riots BOL, Box 1923, SDANF.

¹²⁸ Domitila, in Viezzer, *Si me permiten hablar*, 85-97; and interviews with Domitila.

make a deal with the government. How long must this struggle continue?” Depressed and desperate, Gerónima approached members of the Siglo XX militia, asking them to train her in riflery. “Why would you want to learn how to use these rifles?” they responded, explaining to her that they had no ammunition. “What?” Gerónima replied incredulously, “Then how were we going to defend ourselves all those nights?” Laughing, the militiamen responded, “With nothing more than our dynamite!” Gerónima also laughed, but mostly out of anger and sadness. Upon leaving the union building, Gerónima began to feel pain in her womb and went straight to the hospital. After eleven days and ten nights guarding the hostages, the pregnant committee leader was bed-ridden for a week. “I almost lost my daughter,” she recalls. Three months later, Gerónima de Romero, Communist head of the Siglo XX hostage takers, gave birth to a healthy baby girl.¹²⁹

The Johnson administration did everything it could to protect the lives of the Americans held hostage in Siglo XX. At the same time, US officials never abandoned their larger strategy of using development programs as anticommunist political tools. The hostages were taken as a response to Alliance for Progress labor reforms, and it was imperative that the Bolivian government not give in. Technocratic labor reforms required absolute authority over communism, a geostrategically useful side effect. Through its complicated game of cat-and-mouse, Johnson officials sought to raise doubts amongst the miners regarding possible US military intervention, while restraining Paz’s push to move forward with a mine invasion. This delicate minuet culminated in “impact shipments” of US military equipment, which was enough to break the stalemate and ensure the miners’ total capitulation. When asked what convinced Siglo XX to give up, Catavi union leader Crespo is unequivocal: “It was the US.”¹³⁰

¹²⁹ Gerónima, in Lagos, ed., *Nos Hemos Forjado Así*, 97-8.

¹³⁰ Interviews with Crespo.

Conclusion

Ironically, although they never spoke out publicly, the hostages later demonstrated sympathy for the miners. Days after his release, Bernard Rifkin said in a private interview:

The situation in the mining camps at Catavi and Siglo XX is a terrible one...Sometimes the workers get no more than \$4 a month in case, the rest being in the form of basic foodstuffs... The whole slant of the United States in dealing with this is wrong...[I am] sick and tired of this economist's way of looking at things...What the government is trying to do, with the urging of the United States, is to break the labor movement as it is now...They are trying to break the independence of the labor movement and the miners in particular and to substitute a labor movement controlled by the government...In the face of this, when Pimentel and Escóbar tell the government that it is not going to fire any of the workers there, the workers rally behind them.

Rifkin added that "Lechín is not as black as he is usually pictured" and complained that US economists pushing Alliance reforms so aggressively "have no conception what it is like to work in a 15,000 [ft] altitude, digging coal."¹³¹ When asked about his kidnapers,

Fergerstrom said:

I have to say that I am really sympathetic to them. I mean, the army had invaded the mines so many times and would have done it again. From their point of view, they had to do something. It is reasonable, even if it is wrong.

Fergerstrom added that "it was all very friendly. We played cards with Escóbar's mom and argued politics. Man, did they love Cuba."¹³²

Once the hostages had arrived safely in Oruro, Henderson intimated that the Paz government had no intention of releasing Escóbar and Pimentel. Tom Martin became furious, and according to the story he later told a colleague, he declared, "I'm going to go back and turn myself over as hostage again to my friends. These are my friends. They've been betrayed, and I'm not going to be a part of the betrayal." According to the legend,

¹³¹ Rifkin, interview with Alexander, 23 December 1963, folder 51, Interviews, Alexander Papers, Rutgers.

¹³² Interviews with Fergerstrom.

Henderson then turned to Air Attaché Fox and asked, “Colonel, do you have your .45?...If

this man leaves the room, shoot him!” Martin later told the same colleague:

The miners had justification for taking [us] hostage; it was the only practical way they could deal with the double dealing their union leaders Escóbar and Pimentel had received from the hands of the government.¹³³

Alliance for Progress ideologues were in no mood to listen to former hostages suffering from Stockholm syndrome. *Time* magazine wrote disparagingly of Lechín, “who is part Arab and part Indian,” noting that the real authority in the mines “lies in the primitive breasts” of the “dynamite-laden” *Amas de Casa*. Reporting that “in Bolivia there was talk of helicopter-equipped US Army Special Forces troops standing by in Panama, ready to fly to Bolivia for a lightning rescue,” *Time* gave credit to “an angry President Johnson” for having “immediately offered the Bolivian government ‘full assistance’ – whatever it wanted, including arms and men – to secure the prisoners’ release.”¹³⁴

Two weeks after the crisis ended, Kennedy White House holdover Dungan cabled Henderson to “congratulate you on your excellent performance.” He added that he “had a bit of a chuckle – I have a somewhat perverted sense of humor – when I learned that the balloon went up shortly after your arrival.” Dungan wrote jokingly that the “sequence of events fits my own conception of executive training,” explaining that “I belong to the ‘push them off the boat’ school, and I must say that you landed in deep water.” Dungan told Henderson, “You acquitted yourself with great coolness and courage and I offer you my sincere congratulations.” Dungan closed his note by mentioning that “[p]erhaps what’s more

¹³³ Anthony Freeman Oral History, Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training. When this author mentioned Martin to one Communist miner, he smiled effusively. “Tom Martin was a very good friend of mine. We used to have long theoretical discussions. He would say he was a Kautskyist! Such an interesting guy!” Interviews with Rojas.

¹³⁴ “Free at Last,” *Time*, 27 December 1963.

important, your performance was noted well and with approbation in another office in this building.”¹³⁵

President Johnson was indeed proud of his administration’s response to its first foreign policy crisis. When unrest broke out in Panama in the following month, the US president vowed that “we are not going to get slugged around any more than we did in Bolivia when they captured our men and we told ‘em, you better get ‘em back or, by God, we’ll come and get ‘em.”¹³⁶ In a personal letter to Henderson, Johnson praised “the success of your efforts to release the hostages,” complimenting him for “behaving courageously.”¹³⁷

If the Indian militias surrounding Siglo XX made the miners’ blood run cold, rumors that Washington planned to participate in a Bolivian military invasion was enough to force their surrender. The Alliance for Progress had reached its apogee in Bolivia, with the Paz government finally able to rid Siglo XX of its communist leaders and move forward with the Triangular labor reforms. More importantly, the event made an indelible mark on the new US President and his Kennedy-appointed Ambassador. If the previous administration saw President Paz as a model of the authoritarian modernizer it sought for Latin America, the incoming administration’s support for Paz had been baptized by crisis. Whether Johnson sought development or stability, Paz Estenssoro would be his man.

¹³⁵ Dungan to Henderson, 3 January 1964, “CO-Bolivia,” Bolivia, White House Central File, LBJL.

¹³⁶ Telephone Recording, 31 January 1964, WH6401.26, PNO 25, JFKL.

¹³⁷ Johnson to Henderson via Rusk, 20 December 1963, “Bolivia, Cables, Volume I, 12/63-7/64,” Box 7, NSF-CO, LBJL.

Chapter Five

Seeds of Revolt

Revolution always causes dislocations...it is necessary to have binding elements. The armed forces are this binding element. The vanguard of the Bolivian people in the construction of this New Society.

- Victor Paz, 6 August 1964.¹

I am not a coup wager. I want to help [Paz], by being in the party leadership.

- General Barrientos, early 1964.²

[The] Embassy believes a possible Barrientos threat is potentially serious.

- Ambassador Henderson³

By time the President Johnson arrived in the White House, Víctor Paz had fully consolidated his revolutionary regime within Washington's Alliance for Progress. The program's technocratic language of development was driving rapid militarization in the Bolivian countryside and state violence had been unleashed against leftist miners. Much to the pleasure of US liberals, who continued to control foreign policy in 1964, communist "enemies of progress" had finally received their share of Paz's repression, an honor previously bestowed solely on the Bolivian right. As leftists shed the MNR in droves, it became a hollow redoubt of developmentalist technocrats and military officers. With strong backing from Washington, Paz set about to drag Bolivia toward his vision of modernity, while he simultaneously forced the labor movement into the awkward embrace of his eternal

¹ Paz, "Informe presentado al Congreso Nacional el 6 de agosto de 1964," in *Pensamiento político de Víctor Paz Estenssoro: Compilación*, Ramiro Antelo León, ed. (La Paz: Plural, 2003), 191, 197, 199, 206-7.

² Arguedas, in Cuevas, *Arguedas*, 70, 85.

³ Henderson to Rusk, 6 May 1964, "Bolivia, Cables, Volume I, 12/63-7/64," Box 7, NSF-CO, LBJL.

rightwing enemies. As Paz began his constitutionally dubious third term,⁴ armed miners and rightwing guerillas both agitated to bring him down. Through it all, the Johnson administration continued Kennedy's pro-MNR approach, even as Paz Estenssoro faced widespread popular revolt. By mid-1964, the Bolivian government operated completely at the pleasure of the armed forces, and the Alliance for Progress's paradigm of military-led development began to take a more literal meaning.

Barrientos's Magic Bullet

When an assassin's bullet ended President Kennedy's life, Bolivia's revolutionary leaders were understandably concerned. Víctor Paz had just received a magnanimous reception by the late US President, and his supporters worried that the incoming Johnson administration would be less sympathetic. The Bolivians were soon comforted. Far from abandoning President Paz to his multiplying enemies on the right and left, Washington's new leaders only increased US support for Paz's regime. The December 1963 hostage crisis had forged Paz's reputation as an iron-fisted reformer, and a Kennedy-appointed Ambassador further ensured that the authoritarian paradigm encompassed by the Alliance for Progress since early 1961 never missed a beat.

Recent scholarship on President Johnson's hands-on approach to public diplomacy in the Third World tend to suggest that he could have found a kindred spirit in General Barrientos, with his man-of-the-people approach to the Indian peasantry.⁵ Unfortunately for

⁴ With Lechín's support, Paz changed the constitution under a state of siege in July 1961 to permit re-election. See "No es Posible Reunir una Asamblea Constituyente Bajo un Estado de Sitio Ilegal, dice FSB," *El Diario*, 2 July 1961, 6.

⁵ Mitchell Lerner's excellent article on Johnson's vice presidential travels demonstrates a rejection of airy protocol. Johnson's approach to Third World communities strongly reflects General Barrientos's relationship with Bolivia's Indian peasantry. See Lerner, "'A Big Tree of Peace and Justice': The Vice Presidential Travels of Lyndon Johnson," *Diplomatic History* 34 (April 2010), 357-93. For more on Johnson, see H.W. Brands, ed., *The Foreign Policies of Lyndon Johnson: Beyond Vietnam* (College Station: Texas A&M Press, 1999); and Lerner, ed., *Looking Back at LBJ*.

Barrientos, Johnson rarely concerned himself with Bolivia. It is therefore seems strange that some historians believe the Johnson administration “squandered whatever promise the Alliance possessed and left behind a heavy-handed policy based on militarism, narrow anticommunism, and naked economic exploitation.”⁶ In Bolivia, at least, the heavy-hand was Kennedy’s, and the Johnson administration adopted a preexisting policy of militarized development based squarely on anticommunist authoritarianism.

The defining moment for new administration was the hostage crisis, which President Johnson saw as proof positive that Paz was the only man to guide such a chaotic country.

Again, to quote Henderson:

We never really had any problems of deciding whether Johnson was as good a man as Kennedy... We went immediately into this [hostage] issue and the next eleven days we got thoroughly immersed in it.

If Johnson’s 1964 presidential contender’s criticism that “Cuba is gone, Bolivia is going” had any effect on the White House’s approach, it was only to further accentuate Washington’s unconditional support for the MNR regime. The Bolivians eventually realized that Kennedy-appointedes continued to control US foreign policy toward Bolivia. Henderson explains that “the fact that I was named, nominated, and confirmed under Kennedy, [and] that I was reconfirmed under Johnson, was all that they, the Paz government, needed to know.” Even Thomas Mann, Johnson’s appointee as Assistant Secretary for Latin America, described the Paz regime as so authoritarian that he “had difficulties in distinguishing politically between” it and the Alfredo Stroessner dictatorship in neighboring Paraguay. He meant that as a compliment.⁷

⁶ These words are Mark Lawrence’s, who goes on to claim – devoid of citation – that Johnson “supported” the 1964 coup. See Lawrence, “Exception to the Rule?” 24.

⁷ Henderson Oral History, JFKL, 78. Goldwater’s full quote reads: “Cuba is gone, Bolivia is going, Brazil is on the brink, not to mention the mess in Panama.” In “Go-Day,” *Time*, 7 February 1964. Mann quoted in “US May Abandon Effort to Deter Latin Dictators,” *New York Times*, 19 March 1964, 1.

President Johnson showed no signs of reevaluating US foreign policy toward Bolivia. He wrote Paz days after the hostage crisis that he hoped “we can move ahead with renewed vigor on our many cooperative endeavors,” expressing his “earnest desire to continue strengthening the Alliance for Progress.”⁸ With this White House imprimatur, Ambassador Henderson and local CIA officials issued a joint request for an increase in Washington’s covert subsidy, first approved during the Irupata violence of mid-1963, to assist President Paz in his drive “to wrest control of labor organizations away from Juan Lechín Oquendo, the MNRI [Left Sector], and the PCB.” Before leaving office, Kennedy-appointee Assistant Secretary Martin, “agreed that an increase in the subsidy was justified,” which the 5412 Special Group promptly approved at its next meeting on 10 March 1964.⁹

By early 1964, Washington’s entire foreign policy bureaucracy saw Paz as sufficiently authoritarian to bring about needed economic reforms and secure US political interests. The State Department reported that the regime’s willingness to authorize violence against the miners “had shown a readiness to orient its policies more to development needs and take some of the difficult political decisions required to move that primitive economy forward.” President Paz had finally taken steps, long advocated by the Kennedy administration, to “quell forces of anarchism in Bolivia, to foster economic stability, and to marshal resources for development.” The Department continued to express unquestioned support for Paz’s reelection, which would make it “possible to maintain present gains and accelerate the low rate of development” in Bolivia. “The mine management has gained a dominant position in the struggle with communist elements in the mine unions,” State argued, meaning “more efficient management practices can be carried out.” Continuing its

⁸ Johnson to Paz, 19 December 1963, POL 25 Demonstrations, Protests, Riots BOL, Box 3830, SDANF.

⁹ This subsidy is errantly cited by Tim Weiner, who claims the Johnson administration supported Barrientos’s 1964 coup. See Weiner, *Legacy of Ashes*, 281; and State Department, Memorandum Prepared for the Special Group, 10 March 1964, document 148, *FRUS, 1964-1968: Volume XXXI – South and Central America; Mexico*.

predecessor's development-oriented bellicosity, the new administration hoped to "encourage and assist [Paz] to continue and expand attacks on major impediments to stability, self-sufficiency, and development."¹⁰

Like his predecessor, Ben Stephansky, Ambassador Henderson worried that the Paz government continued to have problems "exercising effective control over Bolivian territory." Despite its efforts, the regime had not yet "established authority over the mine areas, nor have the miners accepted the necessity of measures to make COMIBOL break even." Vice President Lechín and his MNR Left Sector were "committed to continued anarchy in Bolivia," Henderson explained, warning that if Lechín turned to violent subversion, "the Cuban Embassy, Bolivians trained in guerrilla warfare in Cuba, Communists oriented toward the current Red Chinese activist theories, and even some Trotskyites, would be sorely tempted" to follow his lead.¹¹

Henderson acknowledged that the military-led paradigm begun under Kennedy posed a dilemma for Paz Estenssoro. If Paz demurred in his attempt "to establish his authority throughout the country, particularly in the troublesome mine areas where the crucial mine rehabilitation must be carried out...he cannot expect a continued flow of substantial foreign aid on which both his development program and the economy of the country depend." On the other hand, if military action to "subdue the mine areas...[was] not swift and decisive for lack of adequate planning or lack of equipment and materiel, a failure or prolonged conflict could ensue and the military forces badly mauled." Such an outcome would risk "violence and perhaps a coup," Henderson estimated, recommending the Johnson administration continue its predecessor's policy of "supporting the Bolivian military with training and

¹⁰ State Department, "Aid and Alliance for Progress, Program and Project Data Related to Proposed Program, 1 of 2," undated, [early 1964], Box 3, NSF-Agency Files, LBJL, 61-2.

¹¹ Henderson to Rusk, 11 January 1964, "Bolivia, Cables, Volume I, 12/63-7/64," Box 7, NSF-CO, LBJL.

equipment.” The military was “deeply concerned for its prestige and popularity,” Henderson noted, gauging that the conditions for a coup d’état had not been reached, “nor [are they] likely to be reached in the near future.” To maintain military support for Paz, especially in the mines where resistance to Alliance programs was fierce, Henderson believed that a higher profile for the armed forces, with their “middle-of-the-road orientation,...[is] not necessarily an undesirable development.”¹²

Happily riding the coattails of this approach was General Barrientos. During the hostage crisis, Barrientos courted increased military assistance, warning that Alliance reforms were “mak[ing] [the] miners enemies of [the] Paz government.” Barrientos explained that Lechín was sure to “create chaos,” and he asked for extensive equipment to ensure that the armed forces were “stronger to act as deterrent forces.” In mid-January 1964, General Barrientos once again approached US officials, concerned that Lechín, “strongly supported by the Cuban Embassy,” was in the “planning stage [of a] major effort [to] overthrow [the] Government by violence.” Requesting that “military equipment previously requested be hastened,” Barrientos also recommended that US Embassy “keep as close an eye on [the] Cuban Embassy as possible.” Barrientos further revealed that Lechín was courting military officials for conspiratorial activity,” intimating that he had be subject to such pressures.¹³

Henderson took the Lechín threat as seriously as had Stephansky, warning Washington that the MNR Left Sector was “more militant, better organized and disciplined, and more willing to fight in the streets for their cause” than Paz’s enemies on the conspiratorial right. The MNR left also boasted huge numbers, something that could hardly be said for the PCB, whose cadres were principally concentrated in the mines and urban labor unions. To avoid a violent Lechín takeover, Henderson asked Washington to provide

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Henderson to Rusk, 14 January 1964, “Bolivia, Cables, Volume I, 12/63-7/64,” Box 7, NSF-CO, LBJL.

“technical assistance to review and recommend measures to improve presidential security.”¹⁴

On 28 February, recently arrived USAID Public Safety Officer Jacob Jackson dutifully offered Paz’s secret police chief, Claudio San Román, a “list of Preliminary Recommendations which may assist you in your important responsibility of protecting the Chief of State,”¹⁵ and the new CIA Station Chief began to work with San Román on a “daily basis.”¹⁶

The January 1964 MNR convention would be a test of the new administration’s support for Paz. The State Department feared that “violence may flare” at the convention between Lechín’s Left Sector and pro-Paz party bureaucrats, since Paz planned to formally expel Lechín from the party, bringing about a fierce struggle “between two mass-based political forces which have long been united.” The Department expressed concern that “the right opposition parties are inclined to join with the Left Sector, or with any other group challenging the power of the MNR.” Ironically, the possibility of a Lechín alliance with the right worried US policymakers more than any communist conspiracy. INR believed that the PCB and the Cubans would continue to tread lightly, as “both have something to lose...and would wish to avoid giving the Bolivian government an excuse” to crack down on their operations.¹⁷

On 22 January 1964, the 9th MNR Party Convention began, five days after it had originally been scheduled.¹⁸ The reason for this delay was a growing rift in the governing party over the vice presidential nomination. Developmentalist MNR bureaucrats, known as

¹⁴ Ibid.; and Henderson to Rusk, 21 January 1964, in the same folder.

¹⁵ Jackson to San Román, 28 February 1964, “Bolivia, 1 of 2, 1964,” Box 5, Latin American Branch Country Files, Office of Public Safety, RG 286.

¹⁶ Interviews with Sternfield.

¹⁷ Hughes to Rusk, 16 January 1964, “Bolivia, Memos, Volume I, 12/63-7/64,” Box 7, NSF-CO, LBJL.

¹⁸ “Finalmente se Constituyó la Convención del MNR,” *El Diario*, 23 January 1964, 6.

the *maquinita*, or “little machinery,” coalesced around Senate President Federico Fortún, who was apparently so close to the Bolivian president that “when Paz and Fortún enter an empty room, only one man is there – Víctor Paz.”¹⁹ Members of the governing party opposed to Paz’s iron grip threw their backing to General Barrientos, who also boasted strong support in his native Cochabamba Valley. Accused by the party machinery of “pressuring the convention delegates” in the days leading up to the convention, Barrientos responded with typical populist flair that “the people are defining this situation.” He claimed to be heir to the “tradition of valiant officers who opened the revolutionary horizon,” and he vowed to “defend the principles of the revolution and whatever cost, including the sacrifice of my own life.”²⁰

Unmoved by the General’s flowery rhetoric, President Paz told Ambassador Henderson later that day, “Barrientos and Lechín are plotting a coup.” Paz was confident that Armed Forces Commanding General Ovando would “remain loyal,” but he feared Barrientos had become “unpredictable.”²¹ Seeking to outflank this threat, Paz’s supporters closed rank, and on 27 January the convention nominated Fortún for vice president. As expected, General Ovando promptly announced that the military would accept the party decision,²² but civilian protests immediately exploded in Barrientos’s native Cochabamba. Thousands of Quechua Indians, who had benefited most from the General’s disbursement of civic action funds, amassed at Cochabamba’s air base on 31 January. They were joined by hundreds of urban anti-MNR leftists and rightists, who saw Barrientos as a useful thorn in Paz’s side. When the

¹⁹ A commonly heard refrain in La Paz in early 1964, quoted in Brill, “Military Civic Action,” 104-5.

²⁰ René Barrientos, *Mensaje a la Nación del General René Barrientos O. del 22 de enero de 1964* (La Paz, n.p., 1964).

²¹ Henderson to Rusk, 22 January 1964, “Bolivia, Cables, Volume I, 12/63-7/64,” Box 7, NSF-CO, LBJL.

²² “Los militares afirman que acatarán lo que se decida en la convención del MNR,” *El Diario*, 28 January 1964, 6.

General failed to fly over from La Paz to greet the crowd, thousands marched to the city center, demanding that local pro-Paz local officials resign in favor of Barrientos supporters. By the end of the day, Cochabamba's municipal and provincial offices were occupied by MNR officials loyal to Barrientos, and the General announced that he was "still prepared to be the candidate" if Paz chose to reconsider.²³

Aside from rejecting General Barrientos, the MNR convention also dramatically expelled Vice President Lechín and his massive Left Sector. Lechín recalls in his memoirs that "since Paz had lost his influence over the MNR left, over the unions, he convoked an illegal, rigged MNR convention...with one sole purpose: to expel me from the party." At the convention, Paz loyalists maintained strict control over the speakers' list, relegating Lechín and his followers to "hisses and boos" as the expulsion resolution was presented. Shortly afterward, "at the suggestion of the proletarian rank-and-file," Lechín writes, "those of us who were expelled founded the *Partido Revolucionario de la Izquierda Nacionalista* [PRIN; Revolutionary Party of the Nationalist Left]...The turnout was massive."²⁴ The State Department fretted that "for the first time since [the] MNR seized power in 1952, the party faces the prospect of organized opposition on the left."²⁵

In the convention's aftermath, Barrientos became a lightning rod for all those opposed to Paz, both inside out outside the MNR, and Ambassador Henderson cabled the State Department on 18 February to warn that Paz's cabinet was in an "ugly mood" and that the President was "threatening resignation" to regain unity.²⁶ The following morning, newly-

²³ US Consulate (Cochabamba) to State, 15 February 1964, POL 23-8 Demonstrations, Riots BOL, Box 1923, SDANF. See also "Jefe de la FAB está aún dispuesto a ser candidato," 30 January 1964, 6.

²⁴ Lechín, *El pueblo*, 148. See also Henderson to Rusk, 16 January 1964, "Bolivia, Cables, Volume I, 12/63-7/64," Box 7, NSF-CO, LBJL; and "El MNR expulsó ayer a J. Lechín," *El Diario*, 29 January 1961, 1.

²⁵ Hughes to Rusk, 16 January 1964, "Bolivia, Memos, Volume I, 12/63-7/64," Box 7, NSF-CO, LBJL.

²⁶ Henderson to Rusk, 18 February 1964, POL 15-1 Head of State BOL, Box 1922, SDANF.

appointed Assistant Secretary Thomas Mann, warned to President Johnson, “We’ve got problems in Bolivia right now.” Mann agreed completely with the Kennedy administration view that “Paz is the only man there who can hold things together,” and he worried that “his whole cabinet is splintering in all directions because they want to be president four years from now.” Doubtlessly recalling the traumatic December hostage crisis, President Johnson exclaimed, “Well, can we get in there and do something to help him before it all goes to hell?” Mann responded, implicitly referencing the expanded pro-Paz action plan under discussion, “We were working on that this morning.”²⁷

Three weeks after the combative convention, Henderson wrote that “there has been [a] remarkable acceptance [of] our ideas that military are essentially servants of [the] people and constitutionally subordinated to civilian authority.” Henderson was confident that “US military assistance to Bolivia is not, repeat not, increasing [the] danger [of] military takeovers,” and he pointed to Paz statements “in complimentary terms [regarding] newly-developed military strength.” The armed forces were “conscientiously, even enthusiastically, engaged in civic action programs,” one of the keystones of the Alliance for Progress.²⁸

Henderson failed to grasp the extent to which Bolivians – civilians and military officers – were growing weary of Paz’s heavy hand. In the aftermath of the bitter MNR convention, Generals Barrientos and Ovando began to hold secret lodge meetings, realizing that the Paz government’s days were numbered. To be sure, the generals were leading no conspiracy. They were merely aware of unrest in the lower ranks, and “broke hierarchical barriers to establish direct relations”²⁹ with junior officers, many of whom had begun to

²⁷ Recording of Telephone Conversation, 19 February 1964, WH6401.18, PNO 2, LBJL.

²⁸ Henderson to Rusk, 24 February 1964, “Bolivia, Cables, Volume I, 12/63-7/64,” Box 7, NSF-CO, LBJL.

²⁹ Noel, who interviewed dozens of military officers, writes: “The staging is important: certain chosen young officers are convoked, in the middle of the night, to a mysterious secret rendezvous during which they are solemnly invited, in the presence of Barrientos and Ovando, to join a secret lodge. A brief ceremony by

view Barrientos as the “tip of the spear that would weaken the power of the MNR chief,” Paz.³⁰ Junior officers had played no role in the 1952 revolution, and many had suffered the worst years of MNR repression during the mid-1950s.³¹ In keeping lower-ranking officers close, however, Ovando and Barrientos appeared to some too reluctant to act. Antonio Arguedas, a strongly anti-MNR air force major recalls that whenever the young officers brought up the idea of a coup, Barrientos responded angrily:

Don’t talk to me about that...We are friends, but I will not tolerate that. I am loyal to my party, the MNR, and to its *Jefe*. What you are saying to me is truly absurd. I am not a coup wagger. I want to help the *Jefe*, by being in the party leadership.

Arguedas went on to say that “Barrientos was in awe of Dr. Paz...Even on 4 November he continued to call him *Jefe!*”³²

After passing over Barrientos’s vice presidential bid, President Paz ordered the young general to take up a position in the Bolivian Embassy in London. Barrientos accepted, informing the US Embassy that he would pass through Washington on his way to explain to the Pentagon “that [the] political situation in Bolivia is not as serious as it appears.”³³ When Barrientos informed a gathering of officials – young and old – of his decision, Arguedas and

candlelight, a kiss upon the sword, an oath to die for the cause, and the officer now belongs to an elite group, carefully selected to carry out dangerous missions assigned by direct orders from the institution’s two leaders. What honor! What emotion! Something difficult to resist.” See “La génération des jeunes officiers,” 35-6, 466-7. Confirmed in interviews with Claire and Simón Sejas. The lodge meetings are also described by Gary Prado, who was a young instructor at the Military Academy at the time. See Prado, *Poder*, 147, 155.

³⁰ Prado, *Poder*, 155.

³¹ According to Noel, military funding in the mid-1950s was so poor that Academy cadets in the were relegated to parading with batons. Rifles were too hard to come by. See Noel, “La génération des jeunes officiers,” 18. Before the revolution, funding for the armed forces hovered around 25 percent before the revolution. It reached a low point in 1957, at 6.7 percent, but by the early 1960s, it was over 12 percent. See James W. Wilkie, *The Bolivian Revolution and US Aid Since 1952: Financial Background and Context of Political Decisions* (Los Angeles: University of California, 1969), 70-3.

³² Arguedas was not a career officer. He was bestowed the rank of major by Barrientos. Arguedas, in Cuevas, *Arguedas*, 70, 85. *Jefe* was how MNR *compañeros* referred to Paz. It means, literally, “boss,” or “chief.” Barrientos’s respect for Paz was confirmed in interviews with Rocabado, Iriarte, Antezana, Trigo, Claire, and Sejas. See Autor’s Note, viii.

³³ Henderson to Rusk, 25 February 1964, “Bolivia, Cables, Volume I, 12/63-7/64,” Box 7, NSF-CO, LBJL.

several other self-proclaimed anti-Paz *ultras* were “indignant.” According to Arguedas, they told him “in no uncertain terms...that he had made a grave political error...that he should have gone in front of the assembly at that moment and launched a coup d’état.” Arguedas recalls that “[i]t was at that moment that we proposed to him the [staged] attack.”³⁴

When Arguedas and another anti-MNR *ultra*, Air Force Colonel Óscar Quiroga Terán, proposed to General Barrientos that they stage an assassination attempt on the general’s life, Barrientos was scandalized. “That’s just terrible,” Arguedas recalls him responding nervously, “I’ve already spoken with the *Jefe* and cannot not violate party structure...you guys can help me when I get back from England.” The two young pilots continued to press, however, and according to Arguedas, Barrientos reluctantly accepted. Noting that he was visibly shaken, Arguedas told him not to worry, “You will supposedly be injured...leave the rest to us.”³⁵

At 2am the following morning, hours before General Barrientos was set to leave for London, he was apparently shot while leaving his sister’s house in La Paz’s middle-class neighborhood of Miraflores. When Bolivian police arrived, they were met only by the

³⁴ Arguedas, in Cuevas, *Arguedas*, 105. Arguedas’s membership in the Communist Party was confirmed by PCB members Rocabado, Soria, and Reyes. He used his position in the Air Force to fly PCB propaganda to remote corners of Bolivia during the late 1950s.

³⁵ Arguedas, in Cuevas, *Arguedas*, 106. According to Iriarte, “It was a staged assassination attempt, planned by Arguedas. All of Barrientos’s staged attacks helped him tremendously.” Barrientos never told Colonel Fox the true origins of the attack, but another close Barrientos associate, General Alberto Guzmán, told Fox’s son many times that “Barrientos shot himself.” When asked about Arguedas’s claims, Fox responded begrudgingly, “It is possible, but more importantly, the attack served its purpose.” For his part, Ambassador Henderson responded to this line of inquiry by saying: “That’s right! That’s exactly right! And in that sense, he was really crazy! It was so Barrientos. There was something weird about his thinking, that he was prepared to shoot himself to get power. More importantly, it worked!” Former CIA Station Chief Sternfield responded wryly, “I don’t know, but it would be perfectly consistent with Barrientos’s personality.” Interviews with Iriarte, Chico Fox, Colonel Fox, Henderson, and Sternfield.

General's "bodyguards," Quiroga and Major Hugo Bozo Alcocer, who explained that Barrientos was undergoing treatment at a nearby clinic, Santa Barbara.³⁶

At Barrientos's bedside was his good friend Colonel Fox, who called Ambassador Henderson around 3am to request an airlift. At 3:30am, Henderson cabled Secretary Rusk, copying the White House, the CIA, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff,³⁷ and an hour and half later, the Pentagon's National Military Command Center gave the go-ahead, despite acknowledging that Barrientos's condition was "good."³⁸ At 8am, Barrientos's stretcher was loaded onto a US Air Force C-54 at the El Alto air base, and flown out of the country.³⁹

Arguedas recalls rushing to the airport to see the general off, only to be told that Barrientos refused to see him.⁴⁰ What Arguedas did not realize was that General Barrientos had consciously decided to withhold from US officials – including Colonel Fox – the true nature of the attack.⁴¹ Nevertheless, Fox knew the injuries were minor and that "Barrientos really stretched things out."⁴² In the days that followed, the General issued a series of press releases regarding his slow, painful recovery, even declaring that he was "resigning from the

³⁶ "Fue herido el General Barrientos con disparo de arma automática," *El Diario*, 26 February 1964, 1. See also Rusk to US Embassy, "Report on Attempted Assassination of General Barrientos, February 1964," 6 October 1964, "Bolivia, (1 of 2), 1964, Box 5, Latin American Branch Country File, Office of Public Safety, RG 286.

³⁷ Henderson to Rusk, 25 February 1964, POL 23-8 Demonstrations, Riots BOL, Box 1923, SDANF.

³⁸ Fahey to Strauss, "Shooting of Gen. Barrientos," 25 February 1964, "Bolivia, Memos, Volume I, 12/63-7/64," Box 7, NSF-CO, LBJL.

³⁹ Interestingly, the C-54 was first directed to Lima, where Barrientos was transferred to a C-118. It was not until 6pm that evening that the general finally arrived to the Canal Zone's Gorgas Hospital. See "Unánime repudio de la Fuerza Aérea hubo al conocerse el ataque contra su comandante," *El Diario*, 26 February 1964, 1.

⁴⁰ Arguedas, in Cuevas, *Arguedas*, 106.

⁴¹ Interviews with Fox, whose sincerity is defended by son, Chico, who has no doubt – based on close friendships with Barrientos colleagues – that the attack was staged. In Chico's view, his father had difficulty accepting that Barrientos would withhold such information. Interviews with Chico Fox.

⁴² *Ibid.*

air force “to dedicate himself to politics.”⁴³ As an added embellishment, the General gave credit for his miraculous survival to a set of US Air Force wings – gifted by Fox – which he was wearing on his lapel.⁴⁴

Hours after Barrientos left for Panama, the young *ultras* convoked an enormous, armed assembly at the air base,⁴⁵ characterized by “hot tempers and violent words,” according to Henderson. Recognizing that anti-Paz officers were on the verge of provoking mutiny, the High Command attempted to regain control of the meeting, proclaiming “in stern terms that any talk of the military seeking revenge... would not be tolerated.”⁴⁶ In subsequent days, junior officer unrest grew, however, and Ovando finally the formation of a commission that would present Paz with an ultimatum: nullify Fortún’s vice presidential nomination and replace him with General Barrientos. Heading the commission was former President Siles, who had recently arrived from his ambassadorship in Spain with the express purpose of opposing Paz’s re-election. The commission members were General Ovando, Defense Minister General Luis Rodríguez, and two *ultras*, Arguedas and Quiroga. On 4 March, commission set out for Paz’s house. As Arguedas recalls, almost as soon as they arrived, Paz declared that Fortún no longer enjoyed his support. Barrientos would be his new running mate.⁴⁷

Upon witnessing Paz’s immediate capitulation, the commission rushed to Fortún’s house. Siles announced that Paz “did not approve of the *maquinita*,” and that “if he [Fortún]

⁴³ “René Barrientos dejará el ejército para la política,” *El Diario*, 27 February 1964, 6; and “René Barrientos estará aún hospitalizado de 5 a 7 días,” *El Diario*, 1 March 1964, 7.

⁴⁴ “Un brevete metálico desvió la trayectoria del proyectil,” *El Diario*, 26 February 1964, 1.

⁴⁵ According to Arguedas, they toted M-1 carbine machine guns, demanding revenge. Arguedas, in Cuevas, *Arguedas*, 106.

⁴⁶ Henderson to Rusk, 25 February 1964, POL 23-8 Demonstrations, Riots BOL, Box 1923, SDANF.

⁴⁷ Arguedas, in Cuevas, *Arguedas*, 106.

would resign it would resolve all the frictions within the party.” Fortún was furious, and responded that it was Paz’s idea that he run in the first place. Siles recommended that he call the Bolivian President to hear the news directly, an invitation the Fortún accepted. According to Arguedas, Fortún’s conversation with Paz took on “increasingly violent tones,” until Fortún finally called Paz a “son of a bitch” and slammed down the receiver. He returned to the commission, begged apologies for his previous behavior, shared a few choice words regarding Paz Estenssoro, and bid Siles and the military commission farewell.⁴⁸

The next day, Paz told Henderson that he had been “reluctant [to] accept Barrientos, but felt [the] situation had reached [a] point where he had no other alternative but to dump Fortún.” The General was also hesitant to embrace the alliance, until Paz explained that rumors of a possible Lechín-Barrientos ticket abounded, making it “necessary for him to make the announcement at once.”⁴⁹ Meanwhile, Paz praised the general publicly as:

a typical representative of the Armed Forces of the National Revolution; that is to say...a soldier identified by his actions with the people...determined to contribute to the efforts...in favor of economic and social development.

Paz added ominously that “the armed forces are inseparable from the revolution.”⁵⁰ Three weeks later, General Barrientos returned to Bolivia a national hero. During his welcome-back tour through the Cochabamba Valley, one could even hear prescient proclamations of “Barrientos, President!”⁵¹

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Henderson to Rusk, 5 March 1964, “Bolivia, Cables, Volume I, 12/63-7/64,” Box 7, NSF-CO, LBJL. See also “Federico Fortún renunció de candidato a vicepresidencia,” *El Diario*, 5 March 1964, 1; and “René Barrientos aceptó ser candidato a vicepresidencia,” *El Diario*, 8 March 1964, 6.

⁵⁰ Paz, *Repudio a la contrarrevolución Discurso del Jefe Nacional del MNR* (La Paz: Dirección Nacional de Informaciones, 1964), 17-9.

⁵¹ Gordillo, *Campesinos Revolucionarios*, 143-4. See also “Fue recibido por sus adherentes el nuevo candidato del MNR a la Vicepresidencia,” *El Diario*, 25 March 1964, 6.

By March 1964, Paz Estenssoro was surrounded by military men. His party had bitterly expelled leftists, ignored growing civilian opposition, and placed all its authoritarian hopes on technocratic development theories. In his attempt to marginalize General Barrientos, however, Paz overstepped. As one young anti-MNR officer recalls, after the Magic Bullet catapulted Barrientos into the Vice Presidential nomination,

Paz was obliged to seek backing increasingly in the armed forces in order to guarantee the stability of his government and the very structure of his own party. A general was his running-mate, another general [Eduardo Rivas Ugalde] was Executive Secretary of his party, generals were governors of the main provinces, likewise with the government's ambassadors abroad. And all of the political decisions now required the previous consent of the High Command.⁵²

From early 1961, Washington sought to convince Víctor Paz to implement economic development by military force, a policy loyally adhered to by the incoming Johnson administration. The January 1964 MNR convention and its aftermath was the culmination of a three year process by which Bolivia's revolutionary government was turned over to the armed forces. A uniformed circle was closing around Víctor Paz, and the beleaguered leader could do nothing but sit by and hope that the generals did not take matters into their own hands. Meanwhile, a unanimous alliance of opposition parties would do everything in its power to spark a military uprising.

Civilians and Soldiers: The Aborted May 1964 Coup d'État

As the 31 May 1964 presidential election approached, civilian opposition to Paz Estenssoro coalesced into a united front of rightwing and leftwing parties, whose organized electoral abstention eventually received the support of dissident MNR leaders Lechín and Siles. This coalition openly courted military leaders, hoping they would move against Paz

⁵² Prado, *Poder*, 141.

before his new government could be consolidated. Meanwhile, Johnson officials universally opposed these maneuvers, repeatedly stressing to the Bolivian High Command that Washington would never approve of a coup against Paz. Like its predecessor, the Johnson administration viewed all anti-Paz conspiracies as anarchic opportunities for leftist resurgence, and it strongly encouraged Bolivian military officials to continue repressing any threats to the Paz regime.

Recognizing that Paz relied on the armed forces to defend him against conspiratorial activity on the left and right, the Johnson administration continued Kennedy's policy of military assistance. On 4 April, NSA Bundy telephoned Johnson, asking him to "say you that are you willing to have us determine in your name a million dollars of special assistance to Colombia and Bolivia." Seeking to move matters along, Bundy added that "this is a perfectly routine thing, but I hate to sign something that says you've determined it unless I mention it to you." Johnson was in no mood to dispense rubber stamps, however, and interjected to say, "I'm sure slow on determining something on *Bolivia*...What are we doing?...Why are we doing it?" Bundy began to explain, "training equipment of \$150,000...I don't know..." before Johnson interrupted. Stung by the December 1963 hostage situation, he began to inquire, "They're not going to use it to arrest our..." but Bundy jumped quickly, saying, "No, sir. These are the goodies, not the baddies." Bundy continued by reminding Johnson that "it was Lechín's crowd who arrested our people in the field," adding that "these are the people working against them." With that, Johnson was satisfied, responding, "Alright. Okay. That's good."⁵³

Having received White House approval, two weeks later the Special Group (CI) turned its attention to the "problem of incipient or existing terrorist activities in...Bolivia."

⁵³ Recording of Telephone Conversation, 4 April 1964, WH6404.05, PNO 22, LBJL.

By sending a new shipment of “soft goods” to the Challapata-based Ranger Battalion that would “operate in the strategic Oruro area” near the mining camps, the Special Group aimed to make a “significantly favorable impact on the morale of the armed forces, and...make the troops self-sufficient in the field and allow their deployment to isolated areas.” The group also considered the “need for an additional rural adviser to help...counterinsurgency programs for [the] sparsely populated jungle areas of Pando, Beni, and eastern Santa Cruz.” The Special Group sought to “prevent [the] development [of] eastern Bolivia as [a] highway and safe-haven for Cuban and other communist-trained guerrillas planning terrorist activities in Bolivia, Peru, and possibly other neighboring countries.”⁵⁴

Aside from taking steps to secure Bolivia’s highland mining region and its remote Amazonian east, the White House resolved to provide Paz with enhanced personal security detail. The Latin American Policy Committee – made up of representatives from the State and Defense Departments, the CIA, USAID, and USIS – approved a “Contingency Plan” that sought to prepare for the “distinct possibility” that elements within the growing right-left opposition movement would wage an assassination attempt on Paz’s life. Concerned that this would pave “the way for Lechín to the presidency...the opening wedge for extremist communist domination of the government,” the committee recommended that Embassy officials find out “whether President Paz had given thought to preventing Lechín from assuming power in the event of an assassination.” The group also drafted an action plan, including possible direct military intervention, for implementation if Lechín took power.⁵⁵

At the end of April, Assistant Secretary Mann reported to the Special Group that the Bolivian “political picture has clarified somewhat.” Paz’s belated selection of Barrientos as

⁵⁴ State to Embassy, “Insurgency in Eastern Bolivia,” 17 April 1964, “Bolivia, Cables, Volume I, 12/63-7/64;” and Mann to Special Group (CI), 23 April 1964, “Bolivia, Memos, Volume I, 12/63-7/64,” Box 7, NSF-CO, LBJL.

⁵⁵ Rusk to Henderson, 21 April 1964, “Bolivia, Cables, Volume I, 12/63-7/64,” Box 7, NSF-CO, LBJL.

his running mate had “strengthened and consolidated armed forces support for President Paz.” According to Mann, it also “lessened somewhat the remote possibility that Vice President Lechín and other extremist forces might obtain some armed forces support for a coup d’état.” The central threat, Mann reported, was Lechín’s attempt to “form a popular front of rightist and leftist opposition parties,” and he noted that there was some evidence that the Vice President had begun to seek arms and financial support from the Cuban Embassy. Mann believed, nonetheless, that Paz’s security services were “capable of controlling any attempt by Lechín-led forces, as presently constituted, to overthrow it.”⁵⁶

Julio Sanjinés Goytia, an inactive Bolivian colonel who headed up USAID’s civic action program and La Paz’s pro-Barrientos newspaper of record *El Diario*, agreed with Mann’s estimation of the Lechín threat, but told Embassy officials that Barrientos was not squarely behind Paz. Instead, he reported that the General was in “constant communication with Lechín and former President Siles,” both of whose criticism of Paz’s re-election had begun to radicalize into conspiratorial activity. More importantly, Barrientos’s personal relationship with Paz was deteriorating, as Barrientos sensed that Paz looked down on him, both politically and intellectually. Sanjinés predicted that “President Paz will not last more than a year,” and he urged US officials to consider contingencies to Paz’s rule. In Sanjinés’s view, Lechín was “promising the workers the sun and the moon,” and would pose a significant threat should Paz fall from power.⁵⁷

Lechín’s campaign took him first to the Cochabamba Valley in early April, where he attempted to mobilize leftist Indian peasant communities behind his candidacy. To snuff out this challenge, Paz dispatched his running-mate, Barrientos, who traveled to the region in the

⁵⁶ Mann to Special Group (CI), 23 April 1964, “Bolivia, Memos, Volume I, 12/63-7/64,” Box 7, NSF-CO, LBJL.

⁵⁷ MEMCON, 16 April 1964, “Bolivia, Cables, Volume I, 12/63-7/64,” Box 7, NSF-CO, LBJL.

company of MNR national party leader and former Minister of Peasant Affairs, General Eduardo Rivas Ugalde. Since early 1962, the two generals had employed generous sums of civic action funds in the Valley, and Paz's strategy to block Lechín's ascent therefore met with significant success. On 9 April 1964, the revolution's twelfth anniversary, Cochabamba's Indian federation signed the historic Military-Peasant Pact at the foot of the Agrarian Reform monument at Ucureña, proclaiming Paz the undisputed father of the revolution, declaring communism anathema to Indian peasant values, and vowing to support the armed forces in putting down threats to MNR rule. For Paz, it was a pyrrhic victory. Despite his name appearing at the top of the document, the anticommunist Military-Peasant Pact demonstrated to the Bolivian public the extent to which Paz relied on the good graces of the armed forces, and it served as a powerful vehicle for the continued militarization of the revolution.⁵⁸

Attempting to deliver Lechín a knock-out blow, Paz then sent Barrientos to the mining camps. At the communist-led Huanuni mine, the swashbuckling General called on the miners to "abandon their extremist leadership," prompting a group of pro-Paz workers from a nearby cooperative to attack the massive Huanuni radio station, killing four in the process. Leftist miners from Huanuni and Siglo XX mounted a counterattack, retook the station, and proceeded to sack the police department, government offices, and private homes of MNR members. A group of leftists captured and beat to death the head of Huanuni's pro-Paz faction, Rafael Montenegro, and the remainder of the town's Paz supporters fled for their lives. Lechín rushed to the district, blamed Paz and Barrientos for having fomented the violence, and called on his supporters to "fight to the death against American imperialism and

⁵⁸ For Lechín's campaign in the Cochabamba Valley, see Gordillo, *Campesinos Revolucionarios*, 143-4. For the Military-Peasant Pact, see Cesar Soto, *Historia del Pacto Militar Campesino* (Cochabamba: Centro de Estudios de la Realidad Económica y Social, 1994).

the tyranny of Víctor Paz.” He then warned the government that if it used fraud in the upcoming elections, they would “resort to armed insurrection.”⁵⁹

It looked like Paz had the military on his side, but civilian opposition marched apace. In January 1964, Guevara Arze’s middle-class PRA, which had broken with Paz four years earlier, joined with the MNR’s eternal rightwing nemesis, the FSB, and the traditional conservative parties, to form the “Bolivian Popular Alliance,” whose manifesto condemned Paz for using the “spurious” 1961 constitution to wage an “indescribable attack against the State charter, a reckless challenge against the Bolivian people, in order to submit them to a regime of the Trujillo mould.” The alliance’s declaration called Paz’s re-election bid a “monstrous infraction of basic law,” and invited the left to join their call for electoral abstention. Finally, the Bolivian Popular Alliance vowed to use “any means necessary...to prevent the carrying out of this crime against the Homeland.”⁶⁰

The national university student federation was the first to join the rightist parties. Led by anti-MNR Falangist Guido Strauss, the student federation also boasted strong leftist representation, mirroring the growing coalition against Paz’s re-election. On 29 January, the university students declared that “re-election violates the spirit of the Republic and is an attack against the most elemental and basic democratic norms.”⁶¹ They later added that the Paz government had “failed miserably in its attempt to reestablish the principle of authority in the Nation,” adding that “this waning principle of authority has only served in practice to unload responsibility for its failure on the suffering backs of the working people through a

⁵⁹ Henderson to Rusk, 27 April 1964, “Bolivia, Cables, Volume I, 12/63-7/64,” Box 7, NSF-CO, LBJL; and “Refríega en Huanuni arrojó 4 muertos y varios heridos,” 27 April 1964, 1.

⁶⁰ “Comunicado de la ‘Alianza Popular Boliviana,” 10 January 1964; and “Invitación de la Alianza Popular Boliviana,” 16 January 1964, WGA 68, ABNB. See also “Alianza Popular incita a la abstención electoral,” *El Diario*, 16 February 1964, 7.

⁶¹ “Pronunciamiento de la Confederación Universitaria Boliviana ante la Prorroga Presidencial,” 29 January 1964, WGA 68, ABNB.

political system of terror and intimidation.” In the view of the student federation, “this policy executed slavishly by Dr. Paz, places the country in a situation of full submission to foreign interests.”⁶²

Leftist parties were not far behind the student federation, and Lechín’s newly-organized PRIN declared in late February that “the impending dictatorship in Bolivia has not only violated democratic practices, but it has also nullified constitutional liberties using terror and violence as instruments of political struggle.” The Cochabamba-based anti-MNR Marxist *Partido de la Izquierda Revolucionaria* (PIR; Revolutionary Left Party) also acceded to the coalition, denouncing Paz for attempting to “perpetrate in Bolivia a dictatorship that denies the most basic rights,” and accusing him of seeking to “consolidate in the country a regime of persecution, terror, starvation, [and] unemployment.” In its communiqué opposing re-election, the PCB’s regional committee in the mining province of Potosí argued that “the main benefactor of this maneuver is Yankee imperialism, because US monopolies encourage Paz Estenssoro’s cult of personality and his dictatorial policies.” Predicting that “the Yankee embassy will continue supporting him, as long as they believe he has control,” the Communist miners warned that “as soon as they believe he is weak, they will turn their back on him, as that is how the devil pays its servants.”⁶³

Noting the obvious silence of the Communist Party’s national organization, Henderson wrote that the PCB had little desire to see Paz fall from power. “Bolivia would not be much of a prize,” the Ambassador explained, “and a take-over attempt might further alarm Chile, Peru, and Argentina, which are more attractive targets.” For this reason, the PCB believed that Bolivian territory was more valuable as a “safe-haven and transit area...[a]

⁶² Student Federation, “Pronunciamiento de la Confederación Universitaria Boliviana Ante la Prorroga Presidencial,” undated [1964], Arturo Crespo Rodas Papers, Archivo de La Paz (hereafter ALP).

⁶³ PRIN Communiqué, 29 February 1964; PIR Communiqué, 27 February 1964; and PCB-Potosí Communiqué, February 1964, WGA 68, ABNB.

point from which to attack those countries.” The Party hierarchy recognized that “it would be against Communist interests to turn Bolivia into an actively anticommunist state,” even if it desired to frustrate political stability under Paz’s MNR which would “make their clandestine efforts more difficult.” As a result, the PCB leadership sought to encourage Lechín and other leftists whose activities “create discord and chaos, but not to challenge the government too openly or go too far and above all [to] avoid a government crack-down.” Henderson believed that Paz recognized this and was therefore basing his tolerant attitude toward the PCB and continued diplomatic relations with Cuba on a “sound instinct for survival.”⁶⁴

Many in the Communist rank-and-file, especially in the mining camps, were livid that their party refused to join the anti-Paz alliance. As the US Embassy reported, PCB dissidents argued that “the party should unite with all groups, right and left, to destroy the Paz government, the symbol of imperialism.”⁶⁵ At the party’s Second National Conference in early April, dissident Communists accused the PCB hierarchy of “converting the party into a parasite of the MNR,” and began to consider forming a schismatic party along the Maoist Chinese line in favor of armed struggle. During party elections, the anti-Paz group nominated several mine union leaders, including the head of the hostage-taking *Amas de Casa*, Norberta de Aguilar, and proposed Siglo XX union leader Federico Escóbar as First Secretary. They were repeatedly stymied by the party leadership, who they condemned as blindly interpreting Moscow’s calls for peaceful existence as a reason to tolerate Paz. The dissidents left the party conference with a “very profound sense of frustration,” and vowed to independently continue the fight against Paz.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Henderson to Rusk, 8 May 1964, “Bolivia, Cables, Volume I, 12/63-7/64,” Box 7, NSF-CO, LBJL.

⁶⁵ Embassy to State, 27 November 1964, POL 12-6 Membership Leaders BOL, Box 1921, SDANF.

⁶⁶ Comité Central del PCMLM, *Historia del Partido Comunista (Marxista-Leninista-Maoista) M-L-M* (La Paz: Liberación, n.d.). See also PCB, *Documentos: II Congreso Nacional del PCB* (La Paz: n.p., 1964).

Despite the PCB's official reluctance to join the anti-Paz conspiracy, the party declared itself in support of Lechín's PRIN candidacy. Meanwhile, rightist parties agreed to field no candidate, presumably leaving their supporters free to cast their vote in favor of Lechín. Ambassador Henderson noted, however, that Paz's total control of the electoral machinery made "terrorist activity attractive" to both the left and the right, and predicted that the opposition would eventually resort to an organized electoral abstention. Citing reports that Lechín had approached the Cuban embassy for support, Henderson wondered "how far the Cuban and Czech embassies will go to provide the arms, money, and organization necessary to make terrorism meaningful in a political sense."⁶⁷

Former President Siles soon became known as the chief civilian conspirator who favored a military solution. Siles's subversive maneuvers drew Washington's wrath, and Henderson complained that Siles was taking advantage of "widespread apathy, the dissidence created within the party by the nominating process, [and] the ineptitude of men like Barrientos...who do not recognize Siles is using them as pawns." According to Henderson, Siles hoped to "foment doubt in the ability of Paz to dominate the situation," in the belief that the MNR rank-and-file would abandon Paz "if they thought he is losing the fight to remain in power." By encouraging "chaos and discord," Siles desired to create conditions in which "the military would be forced to take over and would probably look for a civilian leader to head their regime." Henderson doubted that Barrientos had the political skill to depose Paz, however, and believed that if Siles succeeded in "coax[ing] Barrientos into a backing a plot," the upheaval would probably result in a military junta led by General Ovando, who was more "capable of navigating Bolivia's Arab-like political world." Ovando would likely frustrate

⁶⁷ Henderson to Rusk, 6 May 1964, "Bolivia, Cables, Volume I, 12/63-7/64," Box 7, NSF-CO, LBJL.

Siles's plans, Henderson added, since he "has sufficient stature and intelligence to achieve and maintain the presidency even as a 'civilian.'"⁶⁸

With three of the four original MNR leaders – Lechín, Siles, and Guevara Arze – agitating for the military to depose President Paz, the rightwing Popular Alliance officially announced that it would follow a policy of organized electoral abstention. The rightists called on all those opposed to the Paz government to "begin an immediate campaign of vigorous civil disobedience which will make the government's electoral machinery impossible."⁶⁹ Lechín joined the abstention on 23 May, announcing that he was going on hunger strike against Paz's reelection, and even challenging the MNR leader to a duel.⁷⁰ He was closely followed by Siles,⁷¹ and on the following day, the PCB became the last to announce it would boycott the poll.⁷² In the face of this astonishingly universal rejection, Paz responded belligerently, "If the opposition takes to the streets, we will be there to meet them."⁷³

In the midst of widespread opposition to Paz's reelection Henderson worried that "a possible Barrientos threat is potentially serious." On 6 May Henderson reported that Embassy officials had "taken every opportunity [to] dispel any belief among Bolivian politicians that USG is encouraging military coups or would favor a 'constitutional military coup' that might be possible when Barrientos is Vice President." Sensing a "deep distrust" between Barrientos and Paz, Henderson wrote that the General's incessant criticism of the

⁶⁸ Henderson to Rusk, 7 and 8 May 1964, "Bolivia, Cables, Volume I, 12/63-7/64," Box 7, NSF-CO, LBJL.

⁶⁹ "Alianza Popular Boliviana – Prorroga No!" March 1964, WGA 68, ABNB.

⁷⁰ Lechín's dare was laughed off by the Bolivian president. See "El PRIN Conformó abstención," *El Diario*, 24 May 1964, 1; and "Bolivian Chief Spurns Duel Bid," *Washington Post*, 24 May 1964, A24.

⁷¹ "Siles anuncia que irá a la huelga de hambre," *El Diario*, 25 May 1964, 1.

⁷² "Reds in Bolivia Quit Election; Join Lechín in Attacks on Paz," *New York Times*, 24 May 1964, 33.

⁷³ "Si la oposición sale a las calles, allí nos encontraremos," *El Diario*, 22 May 1964, 1.

governing party's bureaucratization had succeeded in forming a bloc within the MNR opposed the party's "professional politicians...[and] support [the] use [of] Barrientos" to foment a military coup.⁷⁴

The following day, General Ovando warned Henderson and US Southern Command chief General O'Meara that Barrientos remained a "possible source of future trouble," characterizing the young officer as "impulsive and unpredictable." Intimating that "if things came to [a] showdown between Paz and Barrientos, Paz could count on" him, Ovando warned that Paz would continue facing unrest, because he was "violating a Bolivian tradition against re-election...[and] turning against the extreme left." Ovando added that Paz was aware of ongoing discussions between Lechín and the Cuban Embassy, but that he would "not take action against Cuba soon for fear of turning the left even more against him."⁷⁵

Ovando predicted that during and after the elections, Lechín – with the cooperation of Siles and perhaps Guevara Arze – would try to "draw the armed forces away from La Paz to the mine areas," before proceeding to "mount an attack in La Paz using the labor unions who support him." Ovando said he was building up forces in Oruro and in the capital "in order to meeting a combined threat from the mine areas and in La Paz." Ovando then began to feel US officials out on a preventative coup d'état. Making reference to the Chilean presidential campaign, where Socialist Salvador Allende was making gains, Ovando asked what Washington would think of a "military takeover in Chile to prevent Allende from assuming power." Henderson responded that this would be a "matter for the Chilean people to decide." Ovando asked the same question in reference to Lechín, and received the same response.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Henderson to Rusk, 6 May 1964, "Bolivia, Cables, Volume I, 12/63-7/64," Box 7, NSF-CO, LBJL.

⁷⁵ Henderson to Rusk, 8 and 14 May 1964; and Southern Command to Joint Chiefs, 14 May 1964; in *idem*.

⁷⁶ Henderson to Rusk, 8 May 1964, in *idem*.

With the armed forces under civilian pressure to remove Paz from office, Henderson provided Washington with a thorough analysis of what he called the “Barrientos threat,” beginning by expressing his belief that “Paz and Barrientos are an unequal match.” Warning that General Barrientos “injects a new, and in many ways disturbing note into Bolivian politics,” Henderson wrote that the General’s “unpredictability, egocentricism, ambition, and naiveté are only partly offset by his (present) willingness to listen to US advice.” In listing Barrientos’s positive qualities, Henderson pointed to his history of praising “the Alliance for Progress, US objectives in Bolivia, and free world ideas.” Henderson added that he was “friendly to American officials in Bolivia, and is quick to see how our objectives are useful to Bolivia (and, incidentally, to his own interests),” and he gave Barrientos credit for being “lucky, and usually land[ing] on his feet despite his occasional ineptness or adversity.” Finally, Henderson conceded that Barrientos had a “good sense of public relations,” and that his speeches, while “usually fatuous, prolix, and sparse in content, move the humble people to whom they are addressed.”⁷⁷

On the other hand, Henderson was harshly critical of Barrientos for naively lacking “the capacity to handle the deviousness, immorality, and byzantine complexity of Bolivian politics.” Noting that Barrientos “distrusts all professional politicians,” Henderson was concerned therefore that he was “unable to elicit their support.” General Barrientos’s poor intellect also made him “easy putty to amateur politicians, self-seekers, and opportunists, probably including communists, who use his name or use him for their own purposes.” Henderson noted that the General’s “egocentricism” caused him to be “apparently incapable of believing that anyone who professes admiration or support could be other than sincere.” When US officials criticized Barrientos for maintaining close contact with anti-Paz leftists,

⁷⁷ Henderson to Rusk, 6 and 8 May 1964, in *idem*.

especially in Cochabamba, he responded that they were just communists who happened to like his speeches. Barrientos even claimed to have “converted” one communist, Víctor Zannier, who had given refuge to Cuban-trained Peruvians guerrillas in 1963. After viewing Washington’s file on Zannier, Barrientos appeared scandalized, replying, “Zannier could not be a communist...he intends to become a Trappist monk!” Henderson later joked wryly that Barrientos had even “from time to time unconsciously parroted a communist line to US officials, apparently quoting from some source close to him.”⁷⁸

One of Barrientos’s Communist confidants concedes that

many communists, inside and outside the party, wanted to use Barrientos. It was really a thing of friendship. We simply wanted to have influence in his government. Barrientos asked us questions about technical matters. I felt like an advisor, explaining to him the country’s problems, especially in the mining industry. Arguedas and Zannier were dying for Barrientos to take power. But in the end, he ended up using them instead of the other way around. Barrientos might have been a simple man, but he was very perceptive.⁷⁹

Henderson was concerned that the general’s lack of sophistication made him “an attractive target for this type of communist feeding,” and even suggested that Barrientos was “capable of playing a double game with us in the innocent belief that he is being Machiavellian.” There was the possibility that Barrientos would “deceive himself into thinking he should risk a ‘constitutional military coup’ as being in Bolivia’s best interest,” Henderson continued, stressing however that Barrientos was “not foresighted enough nor coldly calculating enough to estimate his chances accurately.” If he took the subversive route, Henderson estimated that “he would have limited civilian and military support” and predicted that “his tenure, if he won, would probably be brief.” Expressing his belief that Washington’s “best hope” remained Paz, who could “work effectively for our objectives,”

⁷⁸ Henderson to Rusk, 8 May 1964, in *idem*.

⁷⁹ Interviews with Rocabado.

Henderson recommended that US officials “maintain closest possible relations with Barrientos” to discourage him from engaging in “rash adventures.”⁸⁰

Paz was also disdainful toward Barrientos, an attitude that did little to discourage his flirtations with the opposition. COMIBOL President Bedregal recalls running into Barrientos waiting patiently in the anteroom room of Paz’s office in May 1964. When the President sent word through his secretary that he wanted to see Bedregal first, Barrientos’s “face appeared distraught with clear signs of degradation.” Once inside Paz’s office, Bedregal mentioned that the vice presidential candidate was waiting outside, to which Paz replied, “Don’t worry, Guillermo, let him wait. Aside from flying his planes and parachute jumping, he doesn’t have much work to do.”⁸¹

This treatment was commonplace. Despite harboring an almost devotional respect for Paz, Barrientos was repaid with little more than intellectual disdain. Paz referred without exception to Barrientos as “my cadet,” and barely hid his feelings of superiority.⁸² According to one Barrientos confidant, Paz believed the General was “of such a low political level that he denigrated the party.”⁸³ Ambassador Henderson later recalled, however, that Barrientos “sandbagged a lot of people who thought he was a clown. They underestimated him and he played up to their underestimation of him. And in a way, he sandbagged Paz, too.”⁸⁴

In a meeting with Henderson on 13 May, Barrientos warned that the way in which “Paz has treated Barrientos” was leading to increasing anger in Cochabamba, especially among the region’s Indian peasantry. Explaining that the Indians were “ripe for insurgency

⁸⁰ Henderson to Rusk, 8 May 1964, “Bolivia, Cables, Volume I, 12/63-7/64,” Box 7, NSF-CO, LBJL.

⁸¹ Bedregal, *Búhos*, 360-1, 370.

⁸² Interviews with Paz friends Antezana; Eduardo Trigo O’Conner d’Arlach; and Barrientos confidants Rocabado and Iriarte.

⁸³ Arguedas, in Cuevas, *Arguedas*, 102.

⁸⁴ Henderson Oral History, JFKL, 93.

against Paz,” Barrientos added that junior officers were becoming “frantic.” Seeking US backing for a coup, Barrientos stressed that he was the only political force that could control the Indians and the military, thereby “keep[ing] them out of the hands of Siles and Lechín.” Barrientos complained at length about Paz’s attitude of “disloyalty” to him, and he stressed to Henderson that he desired to continue and deepen Paz’s pro-Alliance for Progress “constructive revolution.” Profoundly unsympathetic, Henderson promptly reported to Washington that Barrientos’s “unpredictable nature will...continue to pose a potential threat to Bolivia’s political stability.”⁸⁵

General Ovando approached US officials the following day to express his “deep concern” that Barrientos had entered into conspiracy with Siles and Lechín. Characterizing this as “not healthy,” Ovando said Barrientos’s “sour grapes attitude” toward Paz had encouraged unrest among Cochabamba military regiments, and he warned of a “possible split between his units there and in La Paz.” According to the Ovando, Barrientos was “headstrong, unpredictable, and fighting President Paz rather than cooperating as running mate.” At Ovando’s request, and with Henderson’s approval, Colonel Fox, was dispatched to Cochabamba on a mission to bring his friend Barrientos back in line.⁸⁶

Once in Cochabamba, Fox realized that Ovando’s concerns were justified. He encountered “considerable unrest among the army officers there,” and reported that the city’s anti-MNR rightist and leftist politicians were attempting to use local regiments as a “political football with [the] concerted effort of turning them against Paz and the government of Bolivia.” Fox succeeded in convincing Barrientos to return to La Paz, where the General met with Henderson and Paz and vowed to cease conspiring with Siles and Lechín. Barrientos also agreed work with Ovando in a “re-orientation” of the Cochabamba regiments “toward

⁸⁵ Henderson to Rusk, 13 May 1964, “Bolivia, Cables, Volume I, 12/63-7/64,” Box 7, NSF-CO, LBJL.

⁸⁶ AIRA and ARMA to RUEAHO/COFS USAF, 14 May 1964, in *idem*.

[the] necessity of maintain[ing] [the] unification of [the] Bolivian Armed Forces.” Before the two generals departed for Cochabamba, Fox warned Henderson that Ovando would meet with limited success unless he could count on the full acquiescence of Barrientos, who he characterized as “all powerful” in the area.⁸⁷

Four days after assisting with the “re-orientation” of Cochabamba’s regiments, Barrientos sent an urgent message asking for Fox to return. With Henderson’s approval, Fox flew to the Cochabamba air base on 17 May, where he encountered a “very worried” Barrientos. The general asked his friend Fox how he had found out about “it.” Having no idea what Barrientos meant, Fox replied nonetheless, “René, you know that I know all that goes on here.” Barrientos responded,

Yes, Ed, we know that you know our situation very well, but this is top secret, and the officers here in Cochabamba are frightened and feel that you or your ambassador has told the president about our plan to overthrow the government on the 20th of this month.

Fox assured Barrientos that neither he nor Henderson had mentioned anything to Paz, suggesting that the information had been passed by some other source, possibly Ovando. Barrientos wanted to know how Fox found out about the plot, to which Fox responded that he had expected something during his previous week’s visit, adding that Ovando likely felt the same way. Barrientos explained that Ovando’s visit had played a major role in “settling down the troops and stopping the proposed coup,” and he thanked Fox for his “guidance and support.” In closing, Fox said that while he was “not about to get into Bolivian politics,” Barrientos should “use his head for something other than a hat rack.” Barrientos agreed and vowed to “get with the program...[and] positively support Paz.”⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ AIRA and ARMA to RUEAHQ COFS USAF, 19 May 1964, “Bolivia, Cables, Volume I, 12/63-7/64,” Box 7, NSF-CO, LBJL.

That evening, exactly two weeks before the Bolivian elections, Fox accompanied Barrientos to a meeting of “approximately 500 leading Cochabamba citizens,” which he characterized as “without a doubt pro-Barrientos and anti-Paz.” When Barrientos revealed his decision to loyally support Paz in the upcoming elections, the anti-MNR crowd screamed angrily, “Paz, no!...Only Barrientos can do it!” Fox reported that Barrientos “stuck to his guns and insisted that if the people were his friends they must do as he asks and support Paz for the presidency.” After the meeting, Fox expressed concern that “the hysterical crowd looked upon him as a wonder-boy who will solve all their problems at the stroke of a wand.” Warning Barrientos that the “myriad problems in Bolivia were very real and complex,” Fox asked Barrientos to “appreciate the difficult task that President Paz has had with these very same problems.” Barrientos agreed, admitting that his supporters in Cochabamba would be “crying for his head when he cannot solve their problems overnight.” He then left to join Paz on the campaign trail.⁸⁹

On 28 May, the White House received a State Department policy statement praising Paz for having taken the Bolivian revolution into “its new, ‘constructive,’ development phase.” Warning that tensions had “intensified” between Paz and former MNR colleagues Lechín, Siles, and Guevara Arze, however, the Department worried that matters were reaching a “breaking point.” State recognized that the MNR Left Sector had been pushed into opposition by “United States pressure on the government to carry out reforms in the state-owned mines, and worried that that Barrientos had been “involved in a plot to overthrow Paz earlier this month.” The Department felt confident nonetheless that the High Command was “loyal and able to control sporadic violence by the opposition as well as any further attempts by Barrientos or Siles to use middle and junior officers to advance their

⁸⁹ Ibid.

personal ambition.” Stressing that “Paz seems committed to Bolivia’s economic and social development under the Alliance for Progress,” State believed that his re-election meant “our aid policy should be able to show dramatic results in the near future, and forces of political instability will be weakened.”⁹⁰ Henderson agreed, reporting that “Paz’s headaches are rapidly disappearing,” with Barrientos “no longer causing trouble and Siles evidently impotent.”⁹¹

The Kennedy and Johnson administrations both went to great lengths to ensure that Víctor Paz ran for re-election in 1964. As an authoritarian modernizer, Paz appeared the model Latin American leader to bring the Alliance for Progress to Bolivia. As political opposition to his government coalesced into a united, conspiratorial movement, US officials redoubled support for their beleaguered ally. At no point did Washington consider a coup to be in its best interest, repeatedly rejecting conspiratorial intimations by Bolivian military leaders. Paz’s MNR represented pro-US stability in one of the most complex countries in the hemisphere, and US officials had no sympathy for those who sought to open Pandora’s Box. With the opposition parties joined in conspiratorial activity, however, it was far from clear how much longer Paz’s generals would resist.

Communist Miners and Rightwing Guerrillas

By late May, US officials believed they had headed off the Barrientos threat. Unbothered that all seven opposition parties boycotted the upcoming poll, the Johnson administration proceeded to offer its full backing as Paz consolidated his third term. His obstacles were significant. The mines had been converted into autonomous soviets, and rightwing guerrillas launched an impressive insurrection in the jungles of Santa Cruz.

⁹⁰ Read to Bundy, 28 May 1964, “Bolivia, Memos, Volume I, 12/63-7/64,” Box 7, NSF-CO, LBJL.

⁹¹ Henderson to Rusk, 20 May 1964, “Bolivia, Cables, Volume I, 12/63-7/64,” Box 7, NSF-CO, LBJL.

Through it all, US support for Paz's government never wavered. Despite signs that the Bolivian military had grown weary of supporting Paz, Johnson officials adhered strictly to the pro-MNR foreign policy set out by the Kennedy administration. US liberals' continued to believe that authoritarian development was the only way forward for Bolivia.

In mid-1964, civilians were Paz's central threats. When Barrientos informed Siles on 22 May that he was planning to "support Paz and serve as his loyal vice president," Siles responded angrily that Barrientos would "therefore fall along with Paz." The former Bolivian president then declared his support for electoral abstention and joined Lechín in a hunger strike at Oruro's San José mining camp, demanding Paz's resignation. Just as Ovando had predicted the week before, Lechín and Siles planned to foment unrest amongst the leftist miners, draw the armed forces away from the capital, and then encourage the urban unions and the right-left student alliance to create revolutionary conditions in La Paz. Ovando told US embassy officials, however, that he very much doubted that Siles and Lechín would be able to "rouse adequate enthusiasm for a massive attack on the capital."⁹²

As expected, the FSTMB called a nationwide mine strike on 30 May "in protest against the re-election of Paz," and 8,000 anti-government miners marched through the streets of Oruro. Meanwhile in La Paz, rightist and leftist university students barricaded the capital's main thoroughfare, announcing they were joining the hunger strike, and 2,000 young Falangists marched through the streets, shouting "Down with Yankee Imperialism!" Responding to accusations of communism, the rightists responded angrily that "[t]he people of Cuba are suffering from the money of the Soviet Union, and the people of Bolivia are suffering from the money of the United States."⁹³

⁹² Henderson to Rusk, 20 and 29 May 1964, in *idem*.

⁹³ George Natanson, "Bolivian Miners Call Election-Eve Strike," *Los Angeles Times*, 31 May 1964, 20; Juan de Onís, "Bolivians Stage a Hunger Strike," *New York Times*, 30 May 1964, 4; and Juan de Onís, "Bolivians Clash on Election Eve," *New York Times*, 31 May 1964, 26.

Boasting to Henderson that he was “probably [the] only presidential candidate to campaign on [the] principles of [the] Alliance for Progress,” Paz was re-elected on 31 May in the face of what the Embassy conceded was “widespread abstentionism in a climate of tension.”⁹⁴ White House aide Robert Sayre told NSA Bundy that “the only ballots available were the pink ones of the MNR.”⁹⁵ In the mines, workers “stymied the presidential election...by burning MNR ballots publicly, beating up election officials, and taking hostages,” eventually declaring the mining camps “free territories.” Henderson fretted that throughout the mining camps there were “no civil authorities,”⁹⁶ and the university students followed suit, declaring their campuses “free territory for all those seeking liberty.”⁹⁷

At its first meeting, Paz’s cabinet considered the combined threats facing them. Paz opened by expressing his desire that Government Minister Fellman take measures “against any disturbance of public order or attack on legal norms,” including the “erection of roadblocks on public thoroughfares, destruction of property, or the declaring of free territories outside the authority of the State.” Education Minister Ciro Humbolt agreed with Paz’s hard line, explaining that “to avoid anarchy and maintain State authority, energetic measures must be taken.” COMIBOL President Bedregal agreed, complaining that “the persistence of Siles and Lechín in the opposition is proof that they seek an insurrection and wish to take advantage of the government’s laxity.” According to Bedregal, an “action plan is needed, because excessive tolerance is counterproductive and interpreted as governmental weakness.” Fellman offered a word of caution, revealing that he was only willing to use

⁹⁴ Henderson to Rusk, 1 June 1964, “Bolivia, Cables, Volume I, 12/63-7/64,” Box 7, NSF-CO, LBJL.

⁹⁵ Sayre to Bundy, 1 June 1964, “Bolivia, Memos, Volume I,” Box 7, NSF-CO, LBJL.

⁹⁶ Regis Debray and his partner, Elizabeth Burgos, were on hand, filming the entire thing. Unfortunately, the reels were lost in Paris never to reappear. Henderson to Rusk, 18 June 1964, INCO Mining, Minerals, and Metals BOL, Box 1190, SDANF. Confirmed in interviews with Rojas and Reinaga. Email from Elizabeth Burgos, 30 August 2010.

⁹⁷ Henderson to Rusk, 1 June 1964, “Bolivia, Cables, Volume I, 12/63-7/64,” Box 7, NSF-CO, LBJL.

“legal recourses and employ ordinary justice,” and he urged the rest of the cabinet to avoid “acting against persons in their capacity as politicians...[or] taking union leaders prisoner.” Vice President-Elect Barrientos agreed with Fellman. Revealing threateningly that Siles and Lechín had offered him the presidency if he launched a coup, Barrientos explained that the military’s refusal had “proven loyalty, its decision not to go against its conscience, and the fact that its position is clearly defined by service to the Homeland and to the National Revolution.”⁹⁸

President Paz was not listening to Fellman or Barrientos, and the following week he requested from USAID’s OPS additional automobiles and machine guns for his security services. OPS did not hesitate, explaining that USAID was working on a “shift of SA [Security Assistance] and contingency funds between Bolivia and Vietnam.” This shift was “not expected to take much longer,” OPS promptly reported.⁹⁹

For US liberals, the principal enemies of democracy and progress might have been the miners, but the immediate threat was an anti-Paz guerrilla army that exploded in Santa Cruz’s Alto Paraguá region in late May.¹⁰⁰ CIA Agent Nicolas Leondiris (or “Sternfield’s assistant” as San Román called him) had arrived in La Paz under the cover of a USAID OPS Officer earlier in the year. Leondiris was first tasked with aiding San Román,¹⁰¹ but when the rightwing guerrillas began their campaign, he was sent to train Bolivian police units in

⁹⁸ Minutes of Cabinet Meeting, 1 June 1964, PR 1680, ABNB.

⁹⁹ USAID, Public Safety Memorandum for the Record, 11 June 1964, “Bolivia, 1964,” Box 5, Latin American Branch Country Files, Office of Public Safety, RG 286.

¹⁰⁰ The Paraguá River flows northward from the Chiquitano village of San Ignacio de Velasco toward the Brazilian border. “Alto Paraguá” refers to the cattle ranching region around San Ramón and San Simón. The “Bajo Paraguá” is a rubber producing region lying north around the villages of Cafetal and Mateguá.

¹⁰¹ Leondiris’s position as a CIA Agent was revealed during the Arguedas affair in 1968, something confirmed to this author in interviews with Fox and Sternfield. San Román’s characterization of Leondiris as “Sternfield’s assistant” can be found in US Embassy (Asunción) to Rusk and US Embassy (La Paz), 7 April 1965, POL 29 Arrests, Detentions, SDANF. With regard to Leondiris’s arrival, see Henderson to USAID, 9 January 1964, “Administration, Bolivia, 1962-63,” Box 5, Latin American Branch Country File, Office of Public Safety, RG 286.

counterinsurgency, in the company of USAID's Chief OPS Advisor in Bolivia, Jacob Jackson.¹⁰²

Washington had poor intelligence on the guerrillas, and the Bolivian government had little trouble stoking fears that the group was Communist-inspired. Paz Estenssoro's ruse was enabled by the fact that one of the guerrilla leaders, Carlos Valverde, indeed had a Communist past. By the early 1960s, however, Valverde had renounced his previous leftism, and had joined the rightwing Falange. Meanwhile, the principal organizer of the movement was lifelong Falangist Luis Mayser Ardaya, a wealthy young rancher with extensive holdings in the Paraguá region along Bolivia's northeastern border with Brazil.¹⁰³

Valverde writes that "our guerrilla struggle had no relationship with communist guerrillas," and he explains that they launched their campaign in the firm belief that "the people would follow our example and rise up against the dictatorship." Valverde and the other guerrillas also "believed that members of the army – which had been transformed into an armed wing of the MNR party and were being mistreated – would also follow us." The Falangists were certain that "honorable soldiers remained who would respond and support us in our struggle."¹⁰⁴ Guerrilla leader Óscar Bello echoed Valverde, explaining that "there was nothing communist about Valverde. Maybe when he was young. But at that point, no." Bello adds that in the weeks leading up to their campaign, "there was talk everywhere in Santa Cruz about a guerrilla," and he, Valverde, and Mayser all contend that the FSB was in

¹⁰² USAID OPS, "Staffing Positions," 29 April 1964, "Public Safety Program/Bolivia – 1963," Box 5, Latin American Branch Country File, Office of Public Safety, RG 286.

¹⁰³ See Carlos Valverde, "Guerrillas del Alto y Bajo Paraguá: Derrocamiento de Víctor Paz Estenssoro," in *Tres hechos históricos narrados por uno de los protagonistas* (Santa Cruz: n.p., 2002), 1-96; and Luis Mayser, *Alto Paraguá: Verdaderas Guerrillas Bolivianas* (Santa Cruz: Editorial e Imprenta Universitaria, 2008). Confirmed in interviews with Mayser and guerrilla leader Óscar Bello.

¹⁰⁴ Valverde, "Tres hechos," 23.

contact with Barrientos and Ovando.¹⁰⁵ According to Bello, Barrientos said in one of these meetings, “You start it, I’ll finish it.” When the Falangists asked, “How can we be so sure?” Barrientos responded, “Assurance arises out of action.” Bello recalled, “With that, we believed him.”¹⁰⁶

Mayser later laughed that “the Americans thought guerrilla warfare was a tactic only used by Marxists.” He conceded nonetheless that “the incorporation of Valverde in our ranks gave rise to accusations that were believed.”¹⁰⁷ Indeed, Henderson wrote in late June that Valverde, “reportedly Cuban-trained, was the leader of one band.” A few days later, Henderson again errantly reported that Valverde was a “member of the Bolivian Communist Party.” With the Bolivian government laboring to paint the guerrillas red, and later claiming they were merely “gang of about 50 cattle rustlers and horse thieves,”¹⁰⁸ Ambassador Henderson threw up his hands, reporting that the “precise political character of [the] guerrillas [was] unknown.” He noted, however, that for many Bolivians, Mayser appeared to be a “type of Robin Hood, struggling against government injustice.” Henderson warned that the group was “apparently well-armed and well-disciplined.”¹⁰⁹

After capturing several sleepy Amazonian villages north of San Ignacio de Velasco in late May, Mayser disappeared on horseback to Brazil, leaving the rest of the column at his hacienda in San Simón. After a few days, a splinter group led by Valverde began to set its sights on the remote headquarters of the 5th Army Division in Roboré, 400km east of Santa

¹⁰⁵ Interviews with Bello and Mayser; and Valverde, “Tres hechos,” 48-9. See Mayser, *Alto Paraguá*.

¹⁰⁶ Interviews with Bello.

¹⁰⁷ Interviews with Mayser.

¹⁰⁸ Henderson to Rusk, 30 June and 2 July 1964, POL 23-7 Subversion, Espionage, Sabotage BOL, Box 1923, SDANF. See also “No hay guerrilleros en el oriente,” *El Diario*, 1 July 1964, 1.

¹⁰⁹ Henderson to Rusk, 3 August 1964, POL 23-9 Rebellions and Coups, SDANF. For their part, the guerrillas claim they only possessed “shotguns, small rifles, hunting weapons.” Interviews with Mayser and Marcó.

Cruz. Mayser and Bello had been strongly opposed to Valverde's adventure, but many guerrillas were anxious. "They wanted to take the garrison right then and there!" Bello recalls.¹¹⁰ Valverde writes that "the seizure of Roboré was planned...to take advantage of the fact that the majority of the youth in Roboré were Falangists, especially those who had presented themselves for military service." Once they reached the outskirts of the town, Valverde's group set up a safe house and made contact with a group of sympathetic soldiers. They told them that "their mission on the night of the assault was to lock the soldiers in their barracks with padlocks and open the doors of the garrison to the Falangist guerrillas." Meanwhile, they met with an FSB officer, Lieutenant Francisco Monroy, who agreed to disarm his fellow officers and secure the garrison's command headquarters. Once the guerrillas raided the armory, that they would have control of the garrison.¹¹¹

On 31 June, the guerrillas returned to their safe house to sleep. The attack would begin the following night. Monroy demurred, and, concerned that he might be responsible for any bloodshed, he notified superior officers. Valverde writes that "at dawn on D-Day, the army surrounded our safe-house and officers entered to arrest us." Once detained, the guerrillas immediately began to plot their escape. Their first plan was to take turns urinating on the wall of their cell and digging a hole with metal spoons. Upon hearing the racket, one of the officers told them, "you can keep digging, but if you try to sneak out through a hole in the wall, the guards will shoot...Death before escape!" Two days later, the military permitted journalists to interview the prisoners, and Valverde denounced "the unfortunate error of the United States government, which is setting up and maintaining a counterinsurgency school in

¹¹⁰ Interviews with Bello and Mayser. Valverde, "Tres hechos," 21; Mayser *Alto Paraguá*, 327, 315-6, 333-5, 351-3, 367, 371-2. See also Henderson to Rusk, 30 May 1964, "Bolivia, Cables, Volume I, 12/63-7/64," Box 7, NSF-CO, LBJL.

¹¹¹ Valverde, "Tres hechos," 21.

our country, as if only communists can be insurgents.”¹¹² FSB leader Mario Gutiérrez ominously declared – from an undisclosed location in southern Santa Cruz – that guerrillas remained in Alto Paraguá, and they had been ordered to “continue [the] struggle.”¹¹³

After a week at Roboré, the prisoners were transferred to the main civilian jail in the city of Santa Cruz,¹¹⁴ where they continued to plot their escape with the help of sympathetic Cruceño citizens, of which there was no shortage. “The plan was simply, but dangerous,” Valverde recalls. “Two rented jeeps were needed...and arms had to be smuggled into the jail...for our defense and to open a way out for us if needed.” From their many visitors, the guerrillas chose a group of young, dedicated Falangists who would organize an assault on the jail. Several revolvers were passed to the prisoners by sympathetic citizens, and on 29 July the assault began. When local Falangists sped up to the jail in two jeeps, police resisted. The assault team shot back, fatally wounding two officers. Meanwhile, the prisoners shot out their locks with the smuggled revolvers, and in a dramatic firefight they made their way to the jeeps. Valverde writes that “the escape lasted no longer than four minutes.” Driving through the night, the guerrillas set off in the direction of Mayser’s ranch at San Simón.¹¹⁵

During the month-long confinement of Valverde’s group, Mayser had returned from Brazil, the San Simón guerrillas were once again operating in Alto Paraguá, and US counterinsurgency efforts were in high gear. Moving parallel to Valverde’s group of escapees was a 25-man Bolivian police contingent, accompanied by CIA Agent Leondiris and USAID Public Safety Officer Jackson. According to Leondiris’s subsequent report, they

¹¹² Ibid., 58-9; and “Cuatro guerrilleros fueron capturados en San Ignacio de Velasco: Versiones contradictorias,” *El Diario*, 2 July 1964, 1.

¹¹³ Henderson to Rusk, 8 July 1964, POL 23-7 Subversion, Espionage, Sabotage BOL, Box 1923, SDANF.

¹¹⁴ Henderson to Rusk, 6 July 1964, in *idem*.

¹¹⁵ Valverde, “Tres hechos,” 26-29; and “Varios presos a raíz de fuga de guerrilleros falangistas,” *El Diario*, 30 July 1964, 1.

set off northward in two jeeps from San Ignacio de Velasco at daybreak on 2 August, entering the Alto Paraguá at “about 7:30.” As they approached the village of San Ramón, which “appeared deserted,” the contingent read graffiti on the huts proclaiming “Long Live the FSB!” and “Down with the MNR!” According to Leondiris, “one man was seen running and was fired upon.” A few minutes later

both vehicles [were] ambushed almost simultaneously...Latter jeep containing seven men was....shot to pieces...Jackson [was] wounded at first fire and other casualties occurred in [an] exchange of several minutes with [the] hostiles.

After the ambush, in which one Bolivian officer died and five were wounded, the embattled contingent managed to regroup and “march north some 17 kilometers.” There they stumbled upon the village of Villa Nueva, cleared a field large enough to land a police Cessna, and evacuated Jackson and the wounded Bolivians.¹¹⁶ The following day, Jackson was airlifted from La Paz to the Panama Canal Zone. He had been paralyzed by a “small caliber slug that entered his back around the 10th vertebrae.” Henderson reported that Jackson’s “prognosis regarding paralysis [is] grave.”¹¹⁷ It was. Jackson would never walk again.¹¹⁸

In his report, Jackson explained that the “discipline of [the] attackers [was] impressive, as was their ability to hit and run and to use local terrain to their advantages.” He believed reports that the guerrillas were native to the area and “exclusively FSB members.” Meanwhile, Leondiris collected shell casings that demonstrated the guerrillas wielded a “heterogeneous collection of old weapons,” not unlike hunting rifles and common

¹¹⁶ Leondiris Report, 18 August 1964, POL 23-8 Demonstrations, Riots BOL, Box 1923; Henderson to Rusk, 4 August 1964, POL 23-9 Rebellions and Coups BOL, SDANF; and CIA, CIWS, 7 August 1964, CREST. Interviews with Mayser. See also Mayser, *Alto Paraguá*, 333-5, 351-3, 367, 371-2; and “Chocan falangistas y fuerzas policiales,” *El Diario*, 3 August 1964, 1.

¹¹⁷ Henderson to Rusk, 3 August 1964, POL 23-9 Rebellions and Coups BOL, SDANF.

¹¹⁸ “Sniper’s Bullet Couldn’t Kill His Courage,” *The Miami News*, 11 April 1965.

shotguns.¹¹⁹ As guerrilla leader Bello described, “Our tactic was to attack and disappear. We didn’t stick around for long. It was 13-14 cartridges and *chau!* Our mission was harassment.” Mayser agrees: “Our tactic was the surprise attack, so the enemy wouldn’t have time to respond.”¹²⁰

Despite overwhelming evidence that the guerrillas were local rightwing nationalists, Washington remained supremely confused. NSC member Sayre reported to NSA Bundy that, although it was now obvious that the guerrillas were “much more than...cattle thieves,” their “political orientation is not clear.”¹²¹ FSB leader Gonzalo Romero declared adamantly that the guerrillas “had nothing to do with foreign influences,” and Government Minister Fellman acknowledged the “surprise blow by the Falangists.” But Henderson shrugged, explaining that the “Embassy does not yet have concrete evidence to make [the] assumption” that the guerrillas were not tinged with the Red of Communism.¹²² On the contrary, Henderson still believed that “Mayser’s group includes [a] mixed bag of Falangists, nonpolitical adventurers, local *campesinos* irritated by police brutality, communists, and even some MNR members.”¹²³

Furious at Washington’s continued support for the Paz regime, on 10 August the guerrillas sent a threatening note to Gulf Oil’s headquarters in Santa Cruz, explaining that they

are not enemies of the people of the United States...but the attitude that some mercenaries of your country have taken...at the service of the dictatorship of Paz Estenssoro...has obliged us to make the following warning...In case the retirement of these mercenaries does not occur within a short time, the groups

¹¹⁹ Henderson to Rusk, 2 and 3 August 1964, POL 23-9 Rebellions and Coups, SDANF.

¹²⁰ *Chau*: “Good-bye.” Interviews with Bello and Mayser.

¹²¹ Sayre to Bundy, 4 August 1964, “Bolivia, Cables, Volume I, 12/63-7/64,” Box 7, NSF-CO, LBJL.

¹²² Henderson to Rusk, 4 August 1964, POL 23-7 Subversion, Espionage, Sabotage BOL, Box 1923, SDANF.

¹²³ Henderson to Rusk, 7 August 1964, POL 23-9 Rebellions and Coups BOL, SDANF.

of the guerrilla command will take reprisals against you, your friends, and your personal belongings...We reiterate that the guerrillas...are nationalists and do not have pacts with any foreign power. Therefore, the presence of foreigners in the counterinsurgency means a lack of recognition of freely determined peoples.¹²⁴

Despite this threat, the Johnson administration continued to believe the guerrillas included communists, and it showed no signs of backing down in its support for the Paz regime. After the ambush, the Bolivian government announced that the armed forces would take over operations in the guerrilla zone, airlifting ninety troops from La Paz's Ingavi regiment.¹²⁵ Meanwhile, on 3 August, the Bolivian air force unleashed a fierce bombing raid on Mayser's hacienda.¹²⁶ The few ranch houses missed by warplanes were dutifully torched by a large police contingent that arrived on 9 August. Robbed of their safe houses, the 100-strong guerrilla band fled northward into the rubber plantations and jungles of Bajo Paraguá.¹²⁷

Ironically, the militarization of the counterinsurgent campaign was just what the guerrillas desired. When the guerrillas made contact with the 5th Division Army Commander, Colonel Hugo Banzer Suárez, who assumed responsibilities in the guerrilla zone in early August, they received encouragingly friendly responses. Banzer, who hailed from the nearby Santa Cruz countryside, pled with the young Falangists to give up the struggle, writing mockingly that "Alto Paraguá is by no means the nerve center of the nation." With Banzer

¹²⁴ Henderson to Rusk, 13 August 1964, in idem.; and CIA, CIWS, 21 August 1964, CREST.

¹²⁵ Henderson to Rusk, 2 and 4 August 1964, POL 23-9 Rebellions and Coups BOL, SDANF; and "Ejército remplaza a policía en lucha antiguerrillas," *El Diario*, 13 August 1964, 1.

¹²⁶ Henderson to Rusk, 5 August 1964, POL 23-9 Rebellions and Coups BOL, SDANF. Interviews with Bello and Mayser.

¹²⁷ Henderson to Rusk, 10 August 1964, POL 23-9 Rebellions and Coups, SDANF; and "La 8z. división anunció la toma de San Simón: Guerrilleros de FSB se retiraron sin oponer resistencia," *El Diario*, 9 August 1964, 1. Interviews with Bello and Mayser.

signing his letters as “your warmest friend,”¹²⁸ the guerrillas felt sure that their goal of sparking a coup d’état was nigh. As Valverde later wrote, “we never intended to stop the army advance, much less defeat it. We only sought to resist long enough to achieve an uprising of junior officers.”¹²⁹ After seizing several remote navy garrisons without a shot in August and September, the Falangist Guerrillas of Alto Paraguá disappeared across the Brazilian border, waiting to harvest the seeds of upheaval they had sown. Once Paz fell, they planned to return to Bolivia as heroes.¹³⁰

If Víctor Paz ruled with an iron fist during his first two terms, his third term was turning out to be the most brutal yet. For his enemies on the right and left, Washington’s dogged support for Paz represented an arrogant interventionism, backed up shamelessly by the language of economic development. If the Kennedy administration set the standard by launching its Alliance in a wave of anticommunist crackdowns, the Johnson administration showed no signs of reconsidering. In mid-1964, civilians sparked the revolt. Time would tell whether military officers would join in.

Conclusion

Despite the fact that Paz Estenssoro appeared an unshakably authoritarian leader in the eyes of US officials, multiple nationwide conspiracies had begun. Paz’s expulsion of MNR leftists from the governing party radicalized their opposition, pushing them into a conspiratorial alliance with the MNR’s eternal rightwing enemies. Meanwhile, there was a profound restlessness in the junior officer corps, and Henderson conceded that the young

¹²⁸ Banzer to FSB guerrillas, 23 August 1964, in Valverde, “Tres hechos,” 37.

¹²⁹ Valverde, “Tres hechos,” 47. Interviews with Bello and Mayser.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 38-9. Interviews with Bello and Mayser. See Mayser, *Alto Paraguá*, 367, 371-2. See also, “Jefe de guerrillas dice que no desean luchar con FFAA,” *El Diario*, 11 September 1964, 1.

soldiers' "hot-head approach" meant that that "possibility of [a] 'captain and major revolt' attempt remains [a] continuing threat."¹³¹

US liberals like Henderson remained in control of policy toward Bolivia, however, and there was no sign of wavering. As *Time* magazine reported in the wake of Paz's controversial reelection, President Paz represented a new guard of Third World economist-politicians, who were "being called upon to build, revive or draw together national economies."¹³² In *Time's* view, Paz had "organized a heavy-handed political police and created almost a one-party state." In short, he "gave the country its first taste of competent government."¹³³

For his part, Paz declared in his third inaugural address that "the fundamental goal must be to dominate our territory," an enterprise in which the "armed forces, with its technical expertise" would play a central role. By harnessing military "'know-how' to use at the service of the immense majority of the Bolivian people," Paz sought the "construction of a National State." For President Paz, revolutionary development

always causes dislocations in society, and it is necessary to have binding elements. The armed forces are this binding element. They are an element of supreme importance...the vanguard of the Bolivian people in the construction of this New Society.¹³⁴

Within weeks, this "people's vanguard" would begin to take matters into their own hands. By relying so heavily on the military, and by advocating for such a high degree of political repression, Washington's Alliance was ironically undermining one of its most steadfast allies. When Paz abdicated later that year, US officials were left with only a consolation prize – a

¹³¹ Henderson to Rusk, 19 May 1964, POL 14 Elections BOL, Box 1921, SDANF.

¹³² "Doctors of Development," *Time*, 26 June 1964.

¹³³ "Progress Toward a Third Term," *Time*, 29 May 1964.

¹³⁴ Paz, "Informe presentado al Congreso Nacional el 6 de agosto de 1964," 191, 197, 199, 206-7.

junta that offered unstinting praise for the military-led development paradigm that had paved its way to power.

Chapter Six

Revolutionary Bolivia Puts on a Uniform

I know they [in the US Embassy] are opposed to what I'm doing. It doesn't matter. I'll just do this myself.

- General Barrientos, 29 October 1964¹

Barrientos has repeatedly demonstrated his inability to discern communists and crypto-communists among his advisors.

- Ambassador Henderson, 12:30am, 4 November 1964²

With the unwavering backing of the Alliance for Progress, President Víctor Paz proceeded to create a development-oriented authoritarian state. Conspiracies against his government abounded, but the beleaguered leader survived thanks in part to Washington's resistance to a military coup. Relentless US pressure for the Paz regime to break relations with Cuba, however, would pull the rug out from Paz's Machiavellian attempt to neutralize domestic Communism. As the Bolivian left increasingly joined the anti-Paz conspiracy, the country's military leaders grew immune to Washington's pressure. Facing a society in rebellion, Paz's generals finally balked. Rather than turn their guns against their countrymen, the Bolivian High Command pushed Paz to resign in early November. During its twelve years in power, dozens of intricate conspiracies failed to bring down the MNR. For Bolivia's self-styled revolutionary nationalists, it was cruel irony that they should fall to a halting, haphazard coup waged by one of their own, General René Barrientos.

¹ Interviews with Fox.

² Henderson to Rusk, 4 November 1964, "Bolivia, Cables, Volume II, 7/64-11/64," Box 7, NSF-CO, LBJL.

The Limits of Nationalism: Bolivia's Break with Cuba

Washington was deeply frustrated by Paz's refusal to break relations with Cuba. After Brazil's military junta sent Cuban emissaries packing in April 1964, only four Latin American countries remained immune to US pressure: Chile, Uruguay, Mexico, and Bolivia. As the highest per capita recipient of Alliance for Progress funding, Bolivia's insubordination embarrassed the Johnson administration, which was unsympathetic to Paz's claim that a break would push the left into conspiratorial alliance with the right, thus imperiling the development programs so heavily financed by the United States. Paz had long seen his *modus vivendi* with Havana, and his permissive attitude toward domestic communism, as a key link in his strategy to neutralize the PCB and prevent its well-organized cadres from seeking his ouster. Not even Johnson's personal intervention could convince Paz to go along with Washington's anti-Cuba crusade, and the State Department's angry reaction vividly demonstrated the limits of nationalism in Latin America. Bolivia's eventual capitulation revealed the extent to which Bolivia's revolutionary mysticism had been hollowed out in favor of Paz's US-backed technocratic ideology of economic development. More importantly, Paz's abrogation of his gentleman's agreement with Havana increasingly pushed the strongly pro-Cuban Bolivian left into open confrontation with the government.

Just after Brazil's military government broke relations with Cuba in April 1964, Henderson explained to Paz that sooner or later he would "have to face up to [the] anomaly of continued relations while committing himself to the Alliance for Progress." Paz responded that there was talk in Washington of reconciliation with Castro, and told Henderson that he did not want to break relations with Havana only to be "faced shortly thereafter with a new US-Cuban rapprochement." Henderson recommended that Johnson write a personal letter to Paz, "correcting any misapprehension about [a] possible new trend in US policy and urging him to consider his position on Cuba in light of' the Brazilian coup d'état. He added that

“Paz had responded well in the past to personal letters from US presidents and might be receptive presently to an approach on [the] Cuban issue.”³

Henderson even provided a draft letter that would highlight the importance of economic development over political ideology, recommending that Johnson stress his “unswerving determination to carry forward the policies of the Alliance for Progress, dedicating all the resources we are able to apply to further our common objective.” The letter would then stress the “urgent need to take strong, meaningful actions” against Cuba for backing insurgency against Bolivia’s anticommunist neighbors. Henderson’s draft letter to President Paz went on to warn that, in its “campaign to bring about the overthrow of the governments of this hemisphere, [Cuba was] giving priority to governments that are striving for basic social and economic reforms,” and implored Paz to help Washington “combat the threat of communist subversion so that the partners in the Alliance for Progress may devote even greater resources to the economic development and well being of our peoples.”⁴

During a short trip to Washington in mid-July, Henderson held a private meeting with Johnson in the White House. The first word out of Johnson’s mouth was “how Bolivia would vote on the Venezuelan complaint [against Cuba]⁵...and specifically whether Bolivia would be helpful on this issue.” Henderson explained that he had just spoken with Bolivia’s anticommunist Foreign Minister Carlos Iturralde, who had “indicated in a general way that, provided the conference only recommends a break in diplomatic relations with Cuba, Bolivia would maintain diplomatic relations with that country. If, however, the resolution as passed

³ Henderson to Rusk, 14 April 1964, “Bolivia, Cables, Volume I, 12/63-7/64,” Box 7, NSF-CO, LBJL.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ The Venezuelans claimed they were “the target of a series of actions sponsored and directed by the Government of Cuba, openly intended to subvert Venezuelan institutions and to overthrow the Government of Venezuela through terrorism, sabotage, assault, and guerrilla warfare.” The complaint specifically dealt with an arms cache that washed up on a Venezuelan beach in November 1963, allegedly of Cuban origin. See OAS, *Ninth Meeting of Consultation of Ministers of Foreign Affairs*, (Washington, DC: Pan American Union, 1964).

would make it mandatory under the Rio Treaty to break with Cuba, Bolivia would comply.” Realizing that Washington had the votes to make a diplomatic rupture mandatory, Johnson was tepidly pleased, and Henderson returned to La Paz to continue the administration’s anti-Cuban crusade.⁶

Despite receiving assurances that Bolivia would respect the will of the OAS, the Johnson administration still pressured the Bolivians vote in favor of the mandatory break. Over lunch two days later, Secretary Rusk convinced Johnson to send a personal telegram to Paz, along the lines of Henderson’s previous suggestion, which would “instruct his Foreign Minister to vote with us” at the coming meeting.⁷ Rusk followed up with a phone call to Henderson the next day, asking him “to do his very best” with Paz. Rusk believed “this could make quite a lot of difference... We could get very good result if [you are] successful.”⁸ That afternoon, Henderson had a “two-hour long discussion” with Paz. Citing ongoing diplomatic strife with Chile over the Lauca River issue, Paz told Henderson that “Bolivia would vote as Chile does of issue of obligatory break in relations with Cuba.” He assured Henderson, however, that his country “would vote to condemn Cuban aggression and would break with Cuba if the OAS vote made such a step obligatory.” Paz’s reasoning was three-fold: his government remained disappointed with the OAS’s lack of action on the Lauca River affair; it did not want the Bolivian public to believe his country enjoyed less foreign policy independence than its neighbor; and finally, any impression that he was taking foreign policy dictates from the United States would “greatly weaken his government domestically.”⁹

⁶ MEMCON, 20 July 1964, “Bolivia, Memos, Volume II, 7/64-11/64,” Box 7, NSF-CO, LBJL.

⁷ These words are NSC member Sayre’s, who was at the lunch. Sayre to Bundy, 23 July 1964, document 22, *FRUS, 1964-1968: Volume XXXI: Regional*.

⁸ Rusk to Henderson, 24 July 1964, 2:50pm, Telephone Calls 7/1/64-8/5/64, Rusk Files: Lot 72D192, SDLF.

⁹ Henderson to Rusk, 25 July 1964, 120, “Bolivia, Cables, Volume II, 7/64-11/64,” Box 7, NSF-CO, LBJL.

Henderson was unsympathetic to Paz's last claim, that a break with Cuba would radicalize his leftist opposition. He told Paz that it was "extremely difficult for us to understand his position...in light of his recently proven strength with an overwhelming majority of voters." Paz reiterated that, if he broke with Cuba under a non-obligatory situation, "his political opponents would be able to take advantage of a turn-about by him...to proclaim that he had turned to the right, that he was a traitor to revolutionary principles, and that he had become a puppet of the US." Henderson continued to press, but lamented that Paz had "already made up his mind."¹⁰ In a message to Johnson, NSA Bundy conceded that "we did not succeed with Paz," but missed the significance of Paz's arguments regarding the strength of the Bolivian left. Bundy wrote instead that, despite Paz's "good will," he was resisting a break "based on a different issue – a river war with Chile."¹¹

Bolivia voted to condemn Cuban intervention in Venezuela, but abstained on the question of sanctions against Havana. The vast majority of Latin American states supported Washington's push to make a diplomatic break with Cuba obligatory, however, and Paz told Henderson that he would comply soon after his re-inauguration, scheduled for the 6th.¹² The following day, however, Foreign Minister Iturralde told Henderson that Paz was demurring, and that he had "decided that Bolivia will not be [the] first country" of the four remaining holdouts to break relations with Cuba. Iturralde assured the US ambassador that he had "argued with [the] president that his decision [was] not in Bolivia's best interest," but that he had been unable to convince him.¹³

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Bundy to Johnson, 25 July 1964, "Bolivia, Cables, Volume II, 7/64-11/64," Box 7, NSF-CO, LBJL.

¹² Henderson to Rusk, 3 August 1964, in *idem*.

¹³ Henderson to Rusk, 4 August 1964, in *idem*.

With Bolivia remaining silent on Cuba, Rusk cabled Henderson on 7 August that a “prompt GOB break with Cuba deserves first priority of attention in relations between our two governments.” Rusk added that recent statements “led us to suspect that Paz [was] attempting to extricate himself from what we consider his clear commitment to us, made even before [the Foreign Ministers Meeting], to break if sanctions [were] mandatory.” Given Paz’s previous assurances, personally communicated to Johnson, Rusk characterized his vacillation as “deeply disappointing.”¹⁴

Like most US officials, Rusk was unsympathetic to Paz’s argument that a break with Cuba would have serious repercussions on his government’s stability. Rusk wrote that Paz had “recently been elected on a pro-Alliance and anticommunist platform, after threats to his government, winning 85 per cent of over a million votes cast, and the opposition being in such disarray that it did not offer him an opponent.” Rusk failed to mention that the opposition had organized an electoral abstention. Bolivia’s political stability was not Rusk’s immediate concern, however; Cuba was. Placing the importance of isolating Havana at front and center, Rusk asked that Henderson “speak to Paz as soon as possible to request [an] explanation [on] how he reconciles August 6 statements with previous assurances,” adding that Henderson should “make very clear the importance we attach to Bolivia’s breaking with Cuba.”¹⁵ Henderson did just this on 11 August, and Paz once again pled for patience and understanding, both of which were in short supply. He explained to Henderson that he was waiting for the “opportune moment” to break relations and recommended that Washington turn its attention toward Chile instead. Henderson, a strong Paz supporter, finally conceded that Paz’s domestic concerns were “genuine,” although he believed them to be “exaggerated.”

¹⁴ Rusk to Henderson, 7 August 1964, in *idem*.

¹⁵ Rusk to Henderson, 7 August 1964, in *idem*.

Henderson noted that Paz seemed to be obsessed with the Chilean position, perhaps hoping that Santiago's resistance offered some room for maneuver.¹⁶

Unfortunately for Paz Estenssoro, Chile ceded later that day.¹⁷ On 13 August, Paz's cabinet held an emergency meeting to take stock of its difficult position. Paz explained to his ministers that "the alternative [to breaking with Cuba] would be to disavow the Rio Treaty, isolating ourselves in the Latin American community, and losing US aid which, for the moment, is the only basis on which to pursue national development." His cabinet agreed, and the decision to break diplomatic relations with Havana passed "without opposition," leaving Mexico and Uruguay as the only two Latin American countries left standing in opposition to Washington's anti-Cuban crusade.¹⁸

COMIBOL President Bedregal recalls that when Paz received Johnson's personal entreaty that Bolivia oust its Cuban embassy, Paz was visibly "angry." Bedregal writes that when he entered the president's office that day, "in [Paz's] hand he held a cable from the State Department's West Coast Desk" and asked one of his ministers to read it aloud. It was "such an abusive message," Bedregal recalls, and "the next few days were terrible." Johnson's personal note was followed by pressure from other Latin American nations, Bedregal recalls, admitting that "given the Cold War...we little Bolivians could expect nothing less." According to Bedregal, when Chile gave into US pressure on 11 August, "few times in the long period of time I got to know Víctor Paz did I see him so pained as I saw him in the face of that miserable and insupportable situation."¹⁹

¹⁶ Henderson to Rusk, 11 August 1964, "Bolivia, Cables, Volume I, 12/63-7/64," Box 7, NSF-CO, LBJL.

¹⁷ Henderson to Rusk, 21 August 1964, in *idem*.

¹⁸ Minutes of Cabinet Meeting, 13 August 1964, PR 1800, ABNB.

¹⁹ Bedregal, *Búhos*, 366.

Once Bolivia broke with Cuba, Paz's cabinet desired "urgently that the issue become water under the bridge," but the opposition was not so amenable.²⁰ For many Bolivians on the left *and* right, Bolivia's break with Cuba grimly demonstrated the technocratization of Paz's revolutionary government, and its submission to the United States, trends that were both praised in liberal US press outlets.²¹ Dissident Communists began a split that would be formalized the following year, pointing to Paz's capitulation on Cuba as evidence that this government had become "the principal agent of Yankee imperialism"²² The schismatics declared ominously that "the struggles against Yankee imperialism and the MNR government are inseparable."²³

For its part, Havana began an all-out propaganda offensive against the MNR government, accusing Paz of "betraying the Indians, who once believed in his promises." Cuba's weekly *Bohemia* called Paz, "yesterday a nationalist, today Washington's peon," accusing the "ex-revolutionary" of "committing abuses against protesters and cutting down university students with bullets." Angrily declaring that Paz was "copying Rómulo" Betancourt, Castro's enemy number one, Cuba suddenly characterized the MNR as "one of

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Acknowledging that the Bolivians were "given no choice" and that "it was a case of conforming or of facing a severe cut in United States aid," *The New York Times* nonetheless believed the break was a good thing. "There is still plenty of tin to be got out of the mines at a price that could be competitive," the paper wrote. With the Cuba issue out of the way, "President Paz Estenssoro can now concentrate on economics." See "Bolivia Gets in Line," *New York Times*, 24 August 1964, 26.

²² "Informe orgánico aprobado por el III Congreso Regional de La Paz del Partido Comunista de Bolivia, 30 November 1964," *Espartaco* 12 (March 1965), 110-2, 117-8.

²³ Guido Quezada G., "En torno a un artículo 'sobre la pugna comunista,'" *Espartaco* 11 (October 1964), 19. These dissidents later became known Bolivia's "Chinese" Communists, for their ideological adherence to armed struggle, and they upbraided PCB leadership for "dragging our party along the tail of the MNR government...imped[ing] the mass struggle in order to favor Paz's pro-Yankee government." In early 1965 they formalized their break at the Siglo XX mining camp by founding a Maoist PCB. Interviews with dissidents Reinaga and Domitila; and with nonschismatics Rojas, Soria, Guzmán, Rocabado, and Reyes.

the most hostile regimes toward the Latin American people.”²⁴ Paz had lost his ability to neutralize Bolivian Communism, and his awkward *modus vivendi* with the PCB only served to fuel the party’s bitter divide. With anti-Paz dissidents joining the revolt, especially in the mining camps and universities, powerful segments of the Bolivian left joined the rightwing in a rebellion that would eventually bring down the Paz government.

Paz’s Last State of Siege

Despite having begun as another rightwing anti-MNR revolt, the nationwide rebellion against Paz soon enjoyed the enthusiastic support of the left. Mobilized by the break with Cuba, students and workers throughout the country firmly expressed support for FSB subversives. As he had before, Paz relied squarely on political repression, calling on his secret police to harass, intimate, and attack all threats to his government. Despite his government being in its death throes, Washington never abandoned its development-oriented ally. Even when Paz invoked his fifth – and final – state of siege in late September, he enjoyed the constant backing of the entire US government, including the CIA. For a time, this well-worn tactic appeared to be working.

On inauguration day, 6 August, Vice President Lechín’s final duty was to place the presidential sash across Paz’s breast. As Lechín recalls, “I planned to enter the National Congress and denounce that his election was illegal.” Lechín assumed that “Paz’s thugs would not have reacted within the parliament, in front of the diplomats and parliamentarians.” At noon, however, Lechín was intercepted by agents from Paz’s secret police, who gave him what Henderson called a “sound beating.” Lechín recalls that local residents came to his defense, but “before [the agents] left they took me down with a rifle butt

²⁴ “El último títere,” 28 August 1964, 59; “Bolivia,” 16 October 1964, 89; “Bolivia,” 30 October 1964, 86; and “Bolivia,” 6 November 1964, 85; *Bohemia*.

to the kidney...I was bleeding...for one week, I urinated blood.” Years later, a Paz colleague revealed to Lechín that Paz told *Control Político* chief San Román: “Don’t kill him, just leave him paralyzed.” According to Henderson there was “little doubt that security police were instructed to prevent Lechín’s attendance at [the] inaugural ceremonies.” *Control Político* did not even bother to hide their role in the attack, utilizing their well-known “covert” jeeps.²⁵

In the wake of the attack, the labor federation declared a general strike, provoking massive, violent demonstrations with belligerent students on the 13th.²⁶ Paz called an emergency cabinet meeting two days later, at which he declared that subversion could not be tolerated, as it was a threat to his government’s plans to “execute public works and give a constructive direction to the revolution.”²⁷ During the meeting, the cabinet heard an ominous Labor Ministry report regarding the “serious and frail social situation that confronts the country.” The report warned that subversives were preparing to pass from an “intellectual and verbal” approach to an “active, organized, and violent opposition.” Normal party debate and democratic structures “are not appropriate for uniquely orienting national development,” the report added, criticizing the government for “losing its combativeness and revolutionary mysticism,” and thus fighting from a consistently defensive position. “The people do not believe in ‘development’ due to a lack of adequate propaganda,” the report concluded.²⁸

Once the report had been read, COMIBOL President Bedregal declared that it was “lamentable to have adopted a democratic path for the Revolution, which is a luxury that demands ironclad discipline to the *Jefe*,” Paz. He added that “democratic centralism is not

²⁵ Lechín, *El pueblo*, 149-50. “Lechín fue agredido ayer en vía pública,” *El Diario*, 7 August 1964, 1; and Henderson to Rusk, 10 August 1964, INCO Mining, Minerals, and Metals BOL, Box 1190, SDANF.

²⁶ Henderson to Rusk, 10 August 1964, INCO Mining, Minerals, and Metals BOL, Box 1190, SDANF; “Colegiales promovieron ayer varios incidentes callejeros,” *El Diario*, 14 August 1964, 1.

²⁷ Minutes of Cabinet Meeting, 13 August 1964, PR 1800, ABNB, 2-3.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 3-5.

possible in an underdeveloped country,” and recommended instead that there be a “political norm fixed by the Party *Jefe*.” Bedregal concluded by saying that “we cannot continue tolerate the existence of division...the opposition must be liquidated and we must create democracy through the Party, dictating a state of siege.” Paz agreed, declaring that “subversive action harms the country because it creates a climate of distrust that is not propitious to development.” At the meeting, only Vice President Barrientos expressed opposition to a state of siege.²⁹

Two weeks later, Paz’s commitment to authoritarianism was put to the test by a nationwide salary strike by the teachers’ federation.³⁰ He did not disappoint. When the student and labor federations took to the streets in support of the teachers on 3 September, Paz responded by closing schools for the remainder of the year³¹ and called on San Román to deploy CIA-equipped party militias against political gatherings. San Román also vowed to “strictly control” travel by suspected subversives,³² and called on Barrientos to demonstrate loyalty by addressing crowds in provincial capitals.³³ This was a dangerous tactic, as

²⁹ Ibid. 5-7. Paz’s personal secretary, former Government Minister Fellman Velarde, also meekly expressed opposition to a state of siege. He had been removed from his position for this very reason, replaced with hardliner Ciro Humbolt.

³⁰ “Los maestros decretaron huelga general,” *El Diario*, 2 September 1964, 1.

³¹ Referencing the coming presidential elections in Chile, some of the demonstrations carried signs reading “Onward [Salvador] Allende! Tomorrow is your triumph!” Henderson to Rusk, 4 September 1964, POL 23-9 Rebellions and Coups BOL, SDANF; “Incidentes en esta ciudad,” *El Diario*, 4 August 1964, 1.

³² Throughout the month of September, there are dozens of telegrams between San Román and his underlings throughout the country. They document the use of MNR militias to attack and intimidate the students and teachers. See telegrams from Menacho, Román, Montenegro, and Blanco, 1-4 September 1964, PR 1894, ABNB. When asked if the *Control Político* was as brutal as it rumors suggest, Bedregal responded, “Without a doubt.” Interviews with Bedregal. For more on the CIA role, see below.

³³ Román to San Román, 4 September 1964, PR 1894, ABNB.

Barrientos had already delivered scathing public critique of the “excesses of *Control Político*.”³⁴

For the moment, Barrientos agreed to cooperate, ominously declaring to thousands of friendly listeners in Cochabamba and Santa Cruz that order would soon be brought to the country.³⁵ He also intimated that he might travel abroad, prompting twenty-two parliamentarians from various parties to plead for him to stay, declaring that Barrientos’s presence in Bolivia “constitutes a guarantee that...constitutional liberties will be respected.”³⁶ It was clear that Barrientos had become a figurehead for the resistance, accusations to which he responded, “nothing is definite, but I have the firm intention of coming to an understanding with” Paz.³⁷

Paz’s problems were multiplying. On 6 September, the Siglo XX miners declared themselves in support of the teachers, and a week later the entire miners’ federation announced a series of rolling strikes. Paz issued a statement that “in the face of anarchist attitudes,” COMIBOL would “tenaciously oppose the climate of violence that prevails.”³⁸ Miners responded to this call to arms by bombing a passenger train on his way from Oruro to La Paz,³⁹ and a pipeline between Oruro and Cochabamba.⁴⁰

³⁴ “Barrientos censura al Control,” *El Diario*, 11 August 1964, 1; and Henderson to Rusk, 10 August 1964, INCO Mining, Minerals, and Metals BOL, Box 1190, SDANF.

³⁵ Román to San Román, 7-8 September 1964; and Ibañez to San Román, 4 and 7 September 1964; PR 1894, ABNB.

³⁶ “Veintidós diputados dicen que Barrientos es garantía,” *El Diario*, 8 September 1964, 1.

³⁷ “No pudo definir sus relaciones con el presidente,” *El Diario*, 7 September 1964, 1.

³⁸ “Mineros de Siglo XX apoyan las demandas del magisterio,” *El Diario*, 7 September 1964, 3; “Huelga minera en apoyo a maestros,” *El Diario*, 14 September 1964, 1; and Presidencia de la República to Cámara de Diputados, 14 September 1964, PR 1661, ABNB.

³⁹ Since the train was moving slowly, no one was injured. The train left the tracks but fortunately did not turn over. “Dinamitan ferrovía Estación-El Alto,” *El Diario*, 18 September 1964, 1.

⁴⁰ Prefect-Oruro to Paz, 24 September 1964, PR 1061, ABNB.

Meanwhile, Paz faced violent demonstrations by students in every provincial capital. In Cochabamba on 16 September, students sacked the Bolivian-American cultural center on three separate occasions, destroying all its windows.⁴¹ In Sucre, students marched while chanting slogans declaring that “soon we students and intellectuals will bring down the Paz government.” They attacked US installations and stoned several Bolivian government buildings. Students in Tarija issued a statement on 17 September declaring a “state of emergency in the entire student ranks” due to the “terrible wave of repression,” heralding that “the time to liberate the country from the pro-Yankee government is coming.” In Potosí, students attacked US government buildings, “causing considerable damage,” before moving on to attack private homes of MNR party members.⁴²

On 18 September, the teachers rejected a government settlement offer and announced a “Hunger March” to coincide with the upcoming visit of French President Charles de Gaulle to Cochabamba.⁴³ Furious, at 3am on 20 September, President Paz decreed a 90-day nationwide state of siege, his fifth since 1961. It would be his last.

Two hours later, San Román’s agents snatched sixty opposition figures and labor leaders from their beds. Former President Siles was stuffed onto a plane with thirty members of Lechín’s PRIN and dumped unceremoniously in Paraguay. Lechín went into hiding. The detainees who were lucky enough to avoid exile were held in cold, wet *Control Político* cells, listening intently to radio broadcasts of the ongoing revolt.⁴⁴ Press censorship was harshly enforced three days later, and the siege meant “no political gatherings; no parties or drinking;

⁴¹ Henderson to Rusk, 16 September 1964, POL 23-8 Demonstrations, Riots BOL, Box 1923.

⁴² Menacho to San Román, 10 September 1964; Montenegro to San Román, 17 September 1964; and Blanco to San Román, 18 September 1964, PR 1894, ABNB.

⁴³ “Los maestros realizarán en Cochabamba ‘Marcha del Hambre,’” *El Diario*, 19 September 1964, 1.

⁴⁴ Henderson to Rusk, 21 September 1964, POL 23-9 Rebellions and Coups, SDANF; and Henderson to Rusk, 20 September 1964, “Bolivia, Cables, Volume II, 7/64-11/64,” Box 7, NSF-CO, LBJL. Interviews with prisoners Reyes, Crespo, and Sanjinés.

and no sale of liquor.”⁴⁵ Beginning 24 September, no newspapers appeared on the streets of La Paz, aside from the MNR daily *La Nación*.⁴⁶

Meanwhile, *Control Político* in Oruro reported proudly to San Román that MNR militias were “breaking up teachers’ meetings at this moment.”⁴⁷ San Román also distributed generous bribes to labor unions and Indian organizations in exchange for their support.⁴⁸ Far from being bothered by all this, Henderson was bolstered, imploring Paz to reveal if the stage of siege would lead to “more civilian controls in the mines,” a technocratic euphemism for military invasion.⁴⁹ As for the teachers, they promptly gave up their demands.⁵⁰

In case there was any doubt regarding Paz’s warm feelings toward his secret police, he had purchased a book on the Nazi Gestapo in early September, joking to the press that “This one is for San Román.”⁵¹ Former CIA Station Chief Sternfield found Paz’s humor distasteful, but accurate:

Paz Estenssoro was a Nazi. Most of those around him were Nazis. It like Nazi Germany. Same jails, same brutality. Bolivia was still fighting the war, even though it had ended two decades earlier.

I have served in six countries, and the last days of the Paz regime were the most repressive I ever saw. Claudio San Román, with whom I worked on a daily basis, was the most brutal Latin American I ever met. All San Román

⁴⁵ CIA, Information Cable, 20 September 1964, “Bolivia, Volume 2, 7/64-11/64,” Box 7, NSF-CO, LBJL.

⁴⁶ Henderson to Rusk, 24 September 1964, POL 23-8 Demonstrations, Riots BOL, Box 1923, SDANF.

⁴⁷ Ayaviri to San Román, 22 September 1964, PR 1894, ABNB. Throughout the country, *Control Político* agents were tasked with enforcing the state of siege. See telegrams from General Prado, Ibañez, Menacho, and Montenegro to San Román, 20 September 1964, same folder.

⁴⁸ San Román gave 10,000 pesos to the COBUR labor federation in September, and in early October, he gifted another 7,000 pesos to Indian leaders in Cochabamba. San Román to Hugo Paz Torrez, 27 August 1964; San Román to Reque Terán, 8 September 1964; and San Román to Jorge Gómez, 1 October 1964; PR 1676, ABNB.

⁴⁹ Henderson to Rusk, 21 September 1964, POL 23-9 Rebellions and Coups, SDANF.

⁵⁰ Teachers in La Paz and Oruro refused to recognize the deal and remained on strike. “Gobierno y maestros firmaron convenio,” 22 September 1964, 1; “Maestros paceños rechazan arreglo y siguen en huelga,” *El Diario*, 23 September 1964, 1; and Henderson to Rusk, 22 September 1964, POL 23-8 Demonstrations, Riots, BOL, Box 1923, SDANF.

⁵¹ “Un libro para San Román,” *El Diario*, 5 September 1964, 1.

ever wanted was guns. He asked me for guns every day. The only thing that kept Paz in power was the United States.

According to Sternfield, “our weapons went to Paz’s *Control Político* and to his MNR militia. All the butchers got weapons. San Román certainly got his share. It was a pretty distasteful task.” When asked why the US supported such brutality, Sternfield wryly answered, “Well, Uncle Sam doesn’t put it that way. They say it is in support of democracy and progress, and all that.”⁵² Indeed, it was precisely San Román’s brutality that necessitated CIA involvement, since the State Department refused to ship USAID weapons to his “harsh and repressive” cadres.⁵³

Paz’s reliance on repression to carry out his developmental vision boasted no shortage of support in liberal US press outlets. George Natanson wrote in the *Los Angeles Times* that the “[o]verthrow of the Paz Estenssoro administration would be a severe blow to US policy in Latin America,” adding that both Kennedy and Johnson had “made a point of backing moderate, democratic government in answer to Communist charges that it supports only conservative oligarchic regimes.”⁵⁴ Later Natanson added that Paz had been “primarily responsible for the measure of economic development and political stability the country has enjoyed,” praising US aid for being “wisely and effectively used.”⁵⁵

A *New York Times* editorial opined that “it is a good thing for Bolivia and for the hemisphere as a whole that Mr. Paz Estenssoro continues at the helm.”⁵⁶ In the *Christian Science Monitor*, James Nelson Goodsell proclaimed that “Bolivia, with massive United

⁵² Interviews with Sternfield.

⁵³ USAID, Briefing Memorandum for the Administrator, 9 April 1964, “Bolivia, 1 of 2, 1964,” Box 5, Latin American Branch Country Files, Office of Public Safety, RG 286.

⁵⁴ George Natanson, “Wounding of Bolivian General May Result in Political Upheaval,” *Los Angeles Times*, 3 March 1964, A5.

⁵⁵ Natanson, “President of Bolivia Begins Second Term,” *Los Angeles Times*, 7 August 1964, 4.

⁵⁶ “The Bolivian Election,” *New York Times*, 2 June 1964, 36.

States aid, is embarked on a major program of economic and social advancement,” praising Paz for his determination to “push Bolivia further along the path of social and economic reform.”⁵⁷ The following day, Goodsell added US aid had been a “marked success” in Bolivia, thanks to Paz’s “firm hand,” which was seeking to “keep economic development going at a faster rate than the mounting social pressures,” namely leftists’ “snarling mine strikes,” which were “a threat to the generally favorable economic climate.”⁵⁸ Finally, *Time* magazine rushed to Paz’s defense, calling him the “Latin America’s ablest President when it comes to anticipating and disarming trouble before it starts.” *Time* hailed Paz for having “once more firmly cinched his authority.”⁵⁹

Only the *Chicago Daily News*’ arch-conservative Georgie Anne Geyer had the gall to question Washington’s support for what she called “police rule in Bolivia,” where “[t]raffic is closely controlled...at roadblocks by ‘transit authorities’ [who] record who is passing and why.” Referencing reports that Paz government agents attacked any press outlet that went too far, Geyer warned that the regime was entering a “new era of toughness” and predicted that Paz extensive use of “political persecution” harkened “an era of embarrassment” for the United States.⁶⁰

By late September, President Paz faced a nation in revolt. If rightwing guerrillas sparked a rebellion, leftist teachers were fueling it. Rightist student leaders had taken to the streets with their leftist classmates throughout the nation, demanding political liberties and calling for an end to the Paz government. Never abandoning his technocratic rhetoric of development, Paz responded in the same fashion he had since early 1961 – with repression.

⁵⁷ James Nelson Goodsell, “Paz Wins Bolivian Elections Easily,” *Christian Science Monitor*, 2 June 1964, 1.

⁵⁸ Goodsell, “Aid, Self-Help Lift Bolivia,” *Christian Science Monitor*, 3 June 1964, 6.

⁵⁹ “Preventing Trouble Before it Starts,” *Time*, 2 October 1964.

⁶⁰ Georgie Anne Geyer, “Police Rule in Bolivia May Embarrass US,” in *Washington Post*, 27 August 1964, F3.

Despite believing he would once again ride out the storm, there was no shortage of evidence that this revolt was different. For the first time, the right and the left were working closely together in conspiratorial activity, and there was growing military reluctance – principally by Barrientos – to Paz’s repressive machinery. For an insurrection to achieve critical mass, however, it needs martyrs. These were delivered by Paz’s security services in late October 1964.

October’s Martyrs

Paz’s implementation of a state of siege in late September 1964, a welcoming gift to President de Gaulle, provided a semblance of order. It was a mirage. He was facing a nationwide coalition of communists and Falangists, many of whom were prepared to die to bring an end to what they saw as a dictatorship that used economic development as a smokescreen to justify brutal political repression. In this environment, Barrientos’s October defection spelled trouble, and a series of student and miner deaths at the hands of Paz’s security services would symbolize the culmination of Paz’s development project. US support for Paz never wavered, and Washington even approved fresh arms shipments for Paz’s militias. The anti-MNR revolt unfolded independent of foreign influence. On the contrary, it was a reaction against US intervention, with left *and* right unfurling the anti-imperialist banner.

On 2 October 1964, Víctor Paz celebrated his 57th birthday. He was given full honors, including protestations of loyalty from the High Command. According to one Minister’s account, General Ovando said:

I wish to express my personal devotion to you, and I would like to transmit this personal loyalty to you through a solemn oath...I swear on the Cross of

my sword my absolute personal loyalty to the President, Dr. Paz Estenssoro and the constitutional government over which he presides.⁶¹

Barrientos's troubling absence "for health reasons" was somewhat mitigated by a note in which he promised that "your proposals and programs of economic and social liberation will soon be transformed into reality for all Bolivians." Barrientos neglected to mention that he planned to be the one to implement them.⁶²

During the coming weeks, Barrientos repeated his demands that Paz lift the state of siege, condemning the government's belligerent approach to the violent opposition. Instead of repression, Barrientos called on Paz – in his typical lyrical style – to "eradicate the causes" of the insurrection "by procuring for the Bolivian people a closer relationship to the National Revolution." Meanwhile, Cochabamba regiments ominously expressed their "absolute moral and materiel support for the Vice President, General René Barrientos."⁶³ The CIA fretted on 9 October that "Barrientos is incensed" at Paz, and that a "showdown between" the two "may be imminent."⁶⁴

Barrientos's new wave of criticism sparked fresh demonstrations in Cochabamba. When San Román's agents rounded up rightwing students charged with leading them,⁶⁵ "serious rioting developed" on 21 October. After several hours, Paz's security services ran out of tear gas, and students broke through a police cordon and began "moving through the city at will." The police then resorted to their US-supplied M-1 carbines, a decision that left

⁶¹ Guillermo Bedregal, *Victor Paz Estenssoro, el político: Una semblanza crítica* (Mexico, DF: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1999), 544-5.

⁶² "Réplica del Gral. Monje Roca al Presidente de la República," undated, Arturo Crespo Rodas Papers, ALP.

⁶³ This was quoted in a report by CIA contact Arze Murillo, Paz's former Government Minister who was serving as Ambassador to Uruguay, for the express purpose of keeping tabs on anti-Paz exiles. See Bolivian Embassy (Montevideo) to Foreign Ministry and Paz, 16 October 1964, PR 1065, ABNB. For more on the CIA's role tracking Bolivian exiles on behalf of the Paz government, see Agee, *Inside the Company*, 400.

⁶⁴ CIA, CIWS, 9 October 1964, CREST.

⁶⁵ Henderson to Rusk, 22 October 1964, POL 23-8 Demonstrations, Riots BOL, Box 1923, SDANF.

one student dead and another, René Ferrufino, fatally wounded. Henderson morosely reported to Washington that that “police restraint shown in repeated clashes with students over [the] last month...has come to an end.” Recognizing the gravity of the Cochabamba uprising, Henderson wrote that the anti-Paz movement had “apparently achieved its first martyrs.”⁶⁶

The following evening, Ferrufino died of his wounds. His funeral was set for 3pm on Friday 23 October, a date marked by simultaneous riots in every major city. The CIA reported that morning that a “[b]attle [is] now taking place at the university of La Paz. Police have forced students back into university grounds, streets full of gas, students are in an extremely belligerent mood.”⁶⁷ Paz’s announcement that he would lift press censorship only emboldened the nationwide revolt, which Henderson characterized as showing “strong discipline...[and] a pattern of conspiracy.”⁶⁸

Over the weekend, Paz mobilized Indian and MNR militias to face off with rioters in Santa Cruz and Oruro, and he shipped in “truckloads of armed *campesinos*” to bring La Paz under control. On Monday 26 October, violence marred a mock funeral by leftist students in Oruro, meant to honor those slain the previous week in Cochabamba. When the dust cleared, four more students lay dead, having clashed with police and military forces throughout the day.⁶⁹ Similar riots targeting US and Bolivian government buildings broke out in Sucre, Potosí and Cobija, and the CIA warned that Paz was “expecting serious trouble in La Paz” in

⁶⁶ Henderson to Rusk, 21 October 1964, “Bolivia, Cables, Volume II, 7/64-11/64,” Box 7, NSF-CO, LBJL.

⁶⁷ CIA, Information Cables (2), 23 October 1964, “Bolivia, Vol. 2, 7/64-11/64,” Box 7, NSF-CO, LBJL.

⁶⁸ Henderson to Rusk, 26 October 1964, “Bolivia, Cables, Volume II, 7/64-11/64,” Box 7, NSF-CO, LBJL.

⁶⁹ CIA, Information Cables (2), 27 October, “Bolivia, Vol. 2, 7/64-11/64,” Box 7, NSF-CO, LBJL; and Henderson to Rusk, 28 October 1964, “Bolivia, Cables, Volume II, 7/64-11/64,” Box 7, NSF-CO, LBJL.

the coming days. Meanwhile, rightwing students in Santa Cruz attacked the regional headquarters of the USIS, burning an American flag in the central plaza for good measure.⁷⁰

On Tuesday 27 October, Paz's secret police arrested another wave of opposition leaders, and the student federation called for a "Liberty March" to take place in the capital on Thursday. Henderson reported that Paz was facing the "most important test of will to date...by Falangist-Communist opposition groups." He expressed pleasure that Paz was "prepared to take [a] firm stand," and approved of Paz's use of Indian militias against students in La Paz, Oruro, and Santa Cruz. Henderson was also encouraged that General Ovando had offered Paz a "completely unqualified statement [of] loyalty," including his assurance that the "military [is] ready [to] carry out any orders [the] president might issue."⁷¹

Despite Henderson's optimism, the CIA reported that "the military has refused to assist in containing riots" in Oruro on Tuesday evening. The Agency also reported that Barrientos was in ongoing conversations Falangist conspirators, who claimed to have convinced Ovando that "the FSB should stir up trouble nationally until there is sufficient anarchy...that the military would move in." The FSB reportedly warned that they were "losing control of anti-government agitation to the leftists," and was pushing the military to "move quickly." Some civilian conspirators had reportedly proposed that Barrientos "take charge of the government, along with [USAID civic action chief] Julio Sanjinés Goytia, as Vice President."⁷²

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Henderson to Rusk, 27 and 28 October 1964, "Bolivia, Cables, Volume II, 7/64-11/64," Box 7, NSF-CO, LBJL.

⁷² CIA, Information Cables (2), 27 October 1964, "Bolivia, Vol. 2, 7/64-11/64," Box 7, NSF-CO, LBJL. Sanjinés, an inactive army colonel, was also the Interim Director of *El Diario*. He had been hiding in the home of a pro-Barrientos officer since 20 September, as *Control Político* sought his arrest. Interviews with Sanjinés.

A few hours later, Barrientos approached Colonel Fox in Cochabamba, asking that Washington evacuate him [on the] basis [of a] medical emergency.” When Fox phoned the Ambassador that night, Henderson told him that he was “not prepared to respond to this request unless support by [a] request from [the] President,” and Henderson reported to Secretary Rusk that Barrientos appeared to be “seeing pressure building up [and] wishes to absent himself during [the] showdown after which he could return as constitutional successor to Paz if [the] opposition manages to overthrow Paz.”⁷³

Late that night, Tuesday 27 October, Henderson informed Paz of Barrientos’s request. Paz showed “impatience,” and was unequivocally opposed to airlifting Barrientos to Panama. Paz said that he “did not want [the] Vice President running out of [the] country, but rather doing his job in La Paz,” and he revealed the dispatch of a commission to Cochabamba that would “bring Barrientos back.” Henderson inquired if he could defeat the insurrection, to which Paz replied confidently that he had “more than enough forces to deal with [the] situation, including militia, *campesinos*, and some armed forces upon which he can count on without reservation.” Henderson was comforted by these words, reporting that the Bolivian President was “angry, unrattled, and firmly determined to make no more concessions.” Washington was backing a winning horse, Henderson stressed, who had “now chosen the ground on which to make a stand, and will if necessary commit maximum forces available to him.”⁷⁴

The next day, Paz demanded Barrientos make himself present in the capital. Barrientos obliged, and gave a full report to Colonel Fox that evening. Barrientos revealed that Paz had requested him to be his side for the following day’s showdown between pro-Paz Indians and rebellious students. Barrientos told Fox that he had refused, “because he did not

⁷³ Henderson to Rusk, 27 October 1964, “Bolivia, Cables, Volume II, 7/64-11/64,” Box 7, NSF-CO, LBJL.

⁷⁴ Henderson to Rusk, 28 October 1964, in *idem*.

want to appear as one of Paz' servants." Barrientos added that the meeting had produced "no meeting of the minds and, after mutual recriminations, Paz accused him of planning to overthrow the government and establish a military junta." The CIA reported that "Barrientos personally dislikes Paz and [says] that he cannot cooperate with him because of what he considers to be the corruption and unpopular attitudes of his regime."⁷⁵

Barrientos then revealed to Fox that the "armed forces would depose Paz within [a] week." He again stressed that that he "wished to be absent from [the] country so [he] could return with clean hands as constitutional successor after Paz [is] deposed." Barrientos believed that his best chance to succeed Paz, and thus guard against a takeover by Lechín, "required [that] he remain unblemished in [the] crisis."⁷⁶ When Fox stutteringly explained that he had not yet received authorization for the airlift, Barrientos responded wryly, "You're a lousy liar. I know they are opposed to what I'm doing. It doesn't matter. I'll just do this myself."⁷⁷ Barrientos then reiterated that he "definitely broke" with Paz, and that – if necessary – he would remain in the country to "direct the fall of Paz...there is no escape for him." He was waiting to make his move, he explained, because he "feared the communist[s] may try to capitalize on the break between him and Paz, and for that reason would remain 'quiet' for a while in order that it not appear that he was supporting the communists in their fight against Paz."⁷⁸

At this point, the White House sought a second opinion. Late Wednesday night Bill Dentzer, head of the State Department's Chile/Bolivia Desk, told NSC member Gordon

⁷⁵ CIA, Information Cables (2), 29 October 1964, "Bolivia, Vol. 2, 7/64-11/64," Box 7, NSF-CO, LBJL. See also Jaime Otero Calderón, "Dilucidación Histórica," 23 November 1968, Arturo Crespo Rodas Papers, ALP, 1a.

⁷⁶ Henderson to Rusk, 29 October 1964, "Bolivia, Cables, Volume II, 7/64-11/64," Box 7, NSF-CO, LBJL.

⁷⁷ Interviews with Fox.

⁷⁸ CIA, Information Cable, 29 October 1964, "Bolivia, Vol. 2, 7/64-11/64," Box 7, NSF-CO, JFKL.

Chase that the “present disturbances can be characterized as a popular reaction to a repressive government.” The students were a “big factor in this reaction,” Dentzer added, explaining that the revolt was being led by an alliance between young rightwing Falangists and their leftist classmates. Dentzer believed that military support for Paz was firm, and therefore predicted that a coup, while “in the ballpark,” was not “highly likely.” According to Dentzer, the chances of a communist takeover were “nil,” because the military was “violently opposed to them.” The main threat existed in the communists’ ability to take advantage of “instability or transition,” in which “other parties will be looking around for support.” Dentzer concluded by confidently declaring that “there is little likelihood of something happening in Bolivia which we cannot live with.” At the same time, “given our druthers...we would probably just as soon see the disturbances end with Paz still in the saddle.”⁷⁹

As he had promised, Paz ordered his police and Indian militias to retake Oruro on Wednesday. Armed, leftist miners from the city’s San José mine joined the students, and clashes resulted in the deaths of four Indians, two policemen, and two miners, and ended with the San José union taking several Indian militiamen hostage. Upon hearing of the deaths of their fellow miners, workers from Siglo XX and Huanuni rushed toward Oruro. Intercepted by an army regiment on the plains of Sora-Sora close to midnight on Wednesday, the miners dispersed by foot under a heavy barrage of machine gun fire. Eleven were wounded, one fatally. From the hills around Sora-Sora, survivors waged a pitched battle for several hours, launching dynamite-based homemade bombs against the US-equipped Bolivian military.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Chase to Bundy, 28 October 1964, in *idem*.

⁸⁰ Henderson to Rusk, 29 October 1964, “Bolivia, Cables, Volume II, 7/64-11/64,” Box 7, NSF-CO, LBJL. Interviews with Rojas, Reinaga, and Filemón Escóbar. Rojas had gone to Oruro on 26 October for the first wave of marches. Reinaga did not go. Escóbar went on the night of the 28th, and was with the contingent that clashed with troops in Sora-Sora.

When word got back to Siglo XX that the miners were engaged in combat, women making up the Communist-affiliated *Comité de Amas de Casa* scrambled toward Sora-Sora with fresh stocks of dynamite. They first tried to approach the front line in an ambulance, but military forces opened fire. Two of the women, Domitila and Julia de Siles, both several months pregnant, donned hospital smocks and began to crawl across the battlefield. The army continued to fire warning shots. “I almost went deaf,” Domitila recalls, adding that “we began to crawl along the ground, following trails of blood.” When they located the wounded, they began to lift them up and carry them back to the ambulance. “It was a ‘titanic’ effort,” Domitila recounts, “because imagine it, she was pregnant, I was pregnant.” Once the women had brought the last wounded miner to the ambulance, they set off for the nearby Huanuni mine, from which they had been charged with securing more dynamite.⁸¹

The following morning, Thursday 29 October, a new wave of miners rushed to Sora-Sora, under the command of Communist Party leaders from Siglo XX and Huanuni. Within hours, Paz notified Henderson that the “military fell back on [Oruro] from Sora-Sora in [the] face [of] heavy pressure from miners armed with automatic weapons.” Nonetheless, Paz stated that “troop morale [was] high” with the arrival of two US-built *Altiplano* battalions. He told Henderson that “since his forces were brutally and criminally attacked, he [sees] no sense in his not going forward into [the] mines.” It was “not going to be nice,” Paz warned, but he assured Henderson that the “issue [was] firmly joined.”⁸² The CIA predicted that

⁸¹ Domitila, in Viezzer, *Si me permiten hablar*, 97-101. Interviews with Domitila. Interviews also with Filemón Escóbar, who feels the Communists fought poorly, and praises Trotskyite militiamen who first clashes with troops that night. See Escóbar, *Testimonio de un militante obrero*, 53-5.

⁸² Henderson to Rusk, 29 October 1964, “Bolivia, Cables, Volume II, 7/64-11/64,” Box 7, NSF-CO, LBJL. Interviews with Domitila, Escóbar, Rojas, and Reinaga.

“[t]his appears to be the long awaited move to take the mines,” since Paz had “finally found its pretext in the recent violent demonstrations.”⁸³

Hoping to extract maximum support from Washington, at 11am President Paz requested an “immediate shipment” of 500,000 rounds of M-1 carbine ammunition.

Henderson promptly relayed this request to the State Department, explaining that he had already released the Embassy’s remaining stock of ammunition, just under 100,000 rounds.⁸⁴

It is likely that Assistant Secretary Mann read these cables together with reports of Barrientos’s conversation with Fox the previous evening. Mann cabled Henderson at 1:30pm to ask that, if he had not read the CIA report on the conversation, “you should do so immediately.” Mann wrote that the State Department was under the impression that Paz appeared “to have [a] good chance to ride out [the] present disturbances,” and asked the Ambassador to confirm this assessment. Secondly, Mann solicited Henderson’s views on what a successor government would look like, since the State Department was under the impression that it would be military or non-communist civilian, adding that “we do not deduce from your reports that there is any possibility at this time of a communist takeover of [the] Bolivian Government.” Mann concluded that there appeared to be “no US national purpose to be served by US intervention into present political situation in Bolivia and many disadvantages to intervention by us.”⁸⁵

Mann’s neutralist proposal would have put Washington in the position of having good relations with whoever came out on top, Paz or Barrientos, and required the US Embassy to keep Barrientos at a safe distance while being careful “not [to] become identified at this particular time with Paz’ maneuvers.” Mann recommended that Henderson call a meeting of

⁸³ CIA, Information Cables, 29 October 1964, “Bolivia, Vol. 2, 7/64-11/64,” Box 7, NSF-CO, JFKL.

⁸⁴ Henderson to Rusk, 29 October 1964, “Bolivia, Cables, Volume II, 7/64-11/64,” Box 7, NSF-CO, LBJL.

⁸⁵ Mann via Ball to Henderson, 29 October 1964, 1-Z-322, Mann Papers, Texas Collection at Baylor University.

“all principle officers on your staff and warn them to refrain from intervening in the next days ahead and suggest that Air Attaché have no further conversations with Barrientos until [the] situation is more stable.” During the crisis, all US contacts with Bolivian officials should be “strictly controlled by you,” Mann added, reminding the Henderson that “[o]ur non-interventionist attitude would of course change if in your estimation there is any substantial risk of a takeover of [the] Bolivian government by communists or pro-communist elements.”⁸⁶

Minutes later, Mann gave a similar presentation to the White House Special Group (CI), expressing his doubts that Washington should continue to “go all out for Paz as the only one who can control the situation,” complaining that “he is in trouble because he has not displayed strong leadership.” Mann informed the Special Group that Paz had requested an additional 500,000 rounds of carbine ammunition, adding that the US Embassy had no idea “whether Paz plans to give this ammunition to the army, the *campesinos*, or to the police.” According to Mann, it was “an uneasy situation in Bolivia.” He agreed that riot gear was appropriate, but also proposed that the State Department send a special emissary to Bolivia “to evaluate the situation and make an estimate of the loyalty of the army.” The Special Group agreed across the board, resolved to take up the issue again the following week, and authorized Chile/Bolivia Desk Chief Dentzer to leave for La Paz two days later.⁸⁷

While Mann presented his concerns to the Special Group, Henderson cabled a passionate retort to the neutralist argument. With Paz’s military engaging the miners’ militia at Sora-Sora, and with pro-government Indians bringing students to heel in La Paz and Santa Cruz, Henderson wrote that “Paz [is] in control and remains determined in [the] face of [a]

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Memorandum for the Record, 29 October 1964, “Special Group (CI) Meetings, Oct, Nov, Dec, ’64,” Box 6, Office of the Director, Office of Public Safety, RG 286.

difficult situation.” While he admitted that some members of the military High Command might be tempted to “step in and remove Paz to stop current bloodshed” or to “forestall [an] extremist takeover,” Henderson did not see this as a favorable option, since he did “not r[e]p[ea]t not believe [that the] armed forces have better chance [of] remaining in power than any group.”⁸⁸

Paz’s fall would lead to a “highly unstable situation,” Henderson explained, in which the rightwing Falange would “drive for power with communist cooperation.” Barrientos might attempt to claim the right of constitutional succession, “but would be unable to muster strength,” Henderson explained, or Ovando would take power to restore order and “face same oppositional elements now facing Paz.” Given this unpredictable contingency, Henderson recommended that, “while it is prudent to look beyond Paz, he and his present backing (including military) appear sufficiently strong to overcome opposition’s current challenge.” Henderson was confident that “[the] government will maintain control in most of these cities though perhaps [through a] substantial cost of life.”⁸⁹

Mann was a career Latin American diplomat, and he trusted his man in the field. Four hours later, he responded that, given Henderson’s convincing presentation, “and especially in view of [the] possibility that Commie elements might have the maximum chance of take-over in chaos should Paz fall, we believe we have no alternative for time being but to support Paz.” Mann recommended that US officials “quietly and orally encourage Ovando and all other key figures currently supporting constitutional government to continue to do so,” and he also asked that “to [the] extent possible,” US officials “avoid our identification in Bolivian public mind with excesses which Paz partisans may commit.” If the course of events changed, and Paz looked certain to fall, Mann stressed that “we would have to decide quickly

⁸⁸ Henderson to Rusk (2), 29 October 1964, “Bolivia, Cables, Volume II, 7/64-11/64,” Box 7, NSF-CO, LBJL.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

on how best to use our considerable influence” in Bolivia to guard against a leftist takeover. In case there was any doubt that Mann had completely deferred to Henderson, he closed by stressing that “[t]his modifies” his 1:30pm cable.⁹⁰

Late that night, Henderson confirmed receipt of Mann’s cable. He assured Mann that he would closely “control...contacts with political figures personally,” adding that he had “repeatedly urged upon political and military leaders position that recognized constitutional government must be upheld by all forces owing allegiance to it.” With regard to the leftists, Henderson wrote that Bolivian Communists “by themselves now cannot and do not intend to overthrow Paz.” Instead, it appeared the left was maintaining a strategy of discretely supporting the FSB and other rightist opposition parties, through which it was able to “use any relatively strong opposition to Paz as [an] instrument through which [to] create maximum disturbances while themselves as a party remain uncommitted.” Meanwhile, smarting from Paz’s recent diplomatic rupture, Havana issued a communiqué exhorting the students to bring down the Paz Government in this “new center of the struggle against imperialism.”⁹¹

As Thursday’s Liberty March approached, the CIA reported that “both rightist and leftist opposition parties are behind the outbreaks, but they have used their followers in the universities and secondary schools to spearhead the demonstrations.”⁹² The Agency added that the PCB had “issued orders to its militants to participate actively” in the march, asking its members to “arm themselves, prepare Molotov cocktails, and to attack United States government installations in La Paz, including the Embassy and the United States Information

⁹⁰ Mann via Ball to Embassy, 29 October 1964, in idem.

⁹¹ Henderson to Rusk, 29 October 1964, in idem; and Hughes to State, 29 October 1964, “Bolivia, Cables, Volume II, 7/64-11/64,” Box 7, NSF-CO, LBJL.

⁹² CIA, CIWS, 30 October 1964, CREST.

Service.” The CIA reported that “for tactical reasons the Communists have been completely with the FSB in the student field.”⁹³

On Thursday morning, 29 October, “thirty truckloads” of Indian militiamen from the pro-Paz *Altiplanic* stronghold of Achacachi stood ready to defend the Paz regime in the capital.⁹⁴ According to Paz’s Presidency Minister, Jaime Otero, “in order to avoid bloodshed,” Paz ordered his security services to “to cordon opposition forces in the university district” and meanwhile ordered his Indian forces to amass in the confines of the government buildings surrounding La Paz’s central plaza. With their citywide march frustrated, the students proceeded to firebomb buildings surrounding the university, including the Health Ministry, the Municipal Library, and the offices of the official government newspaper, *La Nación*.⁹⁵

As evening set in, students were pushed back into the fourteen-story university building by police and MNR militia units in a firefight that left one student dead and three wounded. During an emergency cabinet meeting at 7:30pm, Paz phoned Monsignor Andrew Kennedy, a well-respected American priest who was Secretary of the Bolivian Bishops Conference. Paz asked Kennedy to enter the complex and convince the students that “they must surrender peacefully and deliver their arms,” promising no reprisals if they did so.⁹⁶ As Otero reports, this was “successfully carried out, as evidenced by the fact that despite an intense firefight (from short distance and with various types of weapons) there was no

⁹³ CIA, Information Cable, 29 October 1964, “Bolivia, Vol. 2, 7/64-11/64,” Box 7, NSF-CO, LBJL.

⁹⁴ Henderson to Rusk, 29 October 1964, “Bolivia, Cables, Volume II, 7/64-11/64,” Box 7, NSF-CO, LBJL.

⁹⁵ Otero, “Dilucidación Histórica,” 1a. See also Henderson to Rusk, 27 and 28 October 1964, “Bolivia, Cables, Volume II, 7/64-11/64,” Box 7, NSF-CO, LBJL.

⁹⁶ Henderson to Rusk, 29 October 1964, “Bolivia, Cables, Volume II, 7/64-11/64,” Box 7, NSF-CO, LBJL. According to one of Kennedy’s colleagues, the Monsignor was also an “honorary colonel” and chaplain in the Bolivian army, and therefore “enjoyed relatively open access in the ecclesiastical and military worlds.” Monsignor Ratermann email to author, 11 August 2010.

destruction of the building, and amongst over than 1,000 individuals in the university, there was only one casualty.” The Falangist leader of the student federation, Guido Strauss, pled to President Paz for clemency. He received none, and was carted away immediately to one of San Román’s tiny cells.⁹⁷

Once the students had surrendered “unconditionally,” the university rector pled with Paz through Henderson that the government show “mercy” on the students. Paz responded by telling Henderson that he was “not r[e]p[ea]t not willing to be compassionate to communists,” a shockingly misleading characterization of the rightist-led movement, and announced that the students would “file out of university building one by one, leaving weapons at door.” At that point, several of his Ministers were would “take charge,” permitting a “special committee of responsible citizens,” *Control Político* agents and MNR militiamen no doubt, to search the main university building “top to bottom.”⁹⁸

By 9pm, Paz’s security services had arrested six hundred students, and Henderson felt confident that the Bolivian regime “require[s] no additional equipment to meet current emergency.” Henderson explained that the police and militias had “500,000 rounds [of] ammunition which together with 125,000 rounds we provided [in the] last two days comprises sufficient ammunition [for] several days [at] present rate of fire.”⁹⁹ Nonetheless, he asked that Washington move forward with additional tear gas shipments, a request Secretary Rusk promptly fulfilled, cabling Henderson the next day to confirm that USAID

⁹⁷ Otero, “Dilucidación Histórica,” 1b.

⁹⁸ Henderson to Rusk, 29 October 1964, “Bolivia, Cables, Volume II, 7/64-11/64,” Box 7, NSF-CO, LBJL.

⁹⁹ Henderson to Rusk, 29 October 1964, POL 23-9 Rebellions and Coups BOL, SDANF.

was “[a]ssembling shipment 4,000 CS tear gas projectiles,” from the Dover Air Force Base.¹⁰⁰

With La Paz brought under control, the nation’s attention focused on the military’s ongoing battle with miners near Oruro, who were “mounting [a] major effort to take the city.” Paz addressed the nation late Thursday night, announcing that the “subversive effort [in] La Paz [was] overcome” and promising that his government “would soon restore order throughout the country.” Barrientos remained conspicuously absent, however,¹⁰¹ and Paz soon found himself pleading with his generals to “take charge of the serious situation” in Oruro.¹⁰²

Reeling from Thursday’s upheavals, the State Department took stock of the situation. Expressing confidence that the Bolivian military had “begun its campaign to take over extremist-controlled mining centers,” State believed this demonstrated the armed forces “are willing to support the government when it is threatened by the miners.” The Department noted, however, that the military would be “far less willing to take action against other elements of society, such as students or peasants.” With Indian militias working closely with the police to quell student-led disturbances, it therefore seemed that Paz had “overcome the worst of the present crisis,” especially if military operations against the miners “proceed satisfactorily.” Barrientos remained the wildcard, according to US analysts, since his “ambitions could still lead to serious division of loyalties in military and militia ranks if, with or without the approval of his high-ranking Armed Forces colleagues, he were to challenge

¹⁰⁰ Rusk to Embassy, 30 October 1964, POL 23-8 Demonstrations, Riots BOL, Box 1923, SDANF. The original requests are in Henderson to Rusk, 29 October 1964, POL 23-9 Rebellions, Coups BOL, SDANF.

¹⁰¹ Henderson to Rusk (2), 30 October 1964, in *idem*.

¹⁰² Otero, “Dilucidación Histórica,” 1b.

the authority of Paz.”¹⁰³ The following day, Friday 30 October, National Security Adviser Bundy notified President Johnson’s top aide, Jack Valenti, that the US embassy was doing its best to

exert its influence with the Commander-in-Chief of the Army [General Ovando] and all other key Bolivian figures who are accessible to it to urge them to continue to support the Paz government...while avoiding public identification of the US with any excesses which partisans of Paz may commit.¹⁰⁴

Washington had numerous chances to turn its back on the authoritarian development paradigm it had followed since early 1961. Paz was one of Latin America’s most unstinting supporters of the Alliance for Progress, however, and the Johnson administration shared its predecessor’s view that Paz represented development-oriented stability in Bolivia. President Paz had gone a long way toward implementing the anticommunist labor reforms required by Alliance programs, and US liberals never wavered in their belief that the Bolivian president was a model Alliance supporter. With a fresh shipment of US weaponry, President Paz set about re-equipping his MNR and Indian militias, who faced off with rebellious students and miners throughout the country. It appeared that Paz had once again survived. The military High Command continued to demonstrate loyalty, and military units were moving – albeit slowly – to bring leftist miners to heel in Oruro. US support for Paz was therefore vindicated as Bolivia entered a period of relative calm coinciding with weekend celebrations of All Saints Day and All Souls Day. Vice President Barrientos’s absence was disturbing, and his noisy demands that Paz order the release of the hundreds of student prisoners was annoying.¹⁰⁵ But Barrientos was not yet leading a revolt. A plot was underway, however,

¹⁰³ Hughes to State, 29 October 1964, “Bolivia, Cables, Volume II, 7/64-11/64,” Box 7, NSF-CO, LBJL.

¹⁰⁴ Bundy to Valenti, 30 October 1964, “Bolivia, Cables, Volume II, 7/64-11/64,” Box 7, NSF-CO, LBJL.

¹⁰⁵ Henderson to Rusk, 31 October and 3 November 1964, in *idem*.

and as soon as the holiday weekend concluded, a new uprising began. This time, it would be headed by the armed forces themselves.

The Fall of Víctor Paz

Since early 1961, US liberals had viewed the Paz government as Washington's best hope for political stability and anticommunist development. The Kennedy and Johnson administrations never abandoned their ally, and Paz survived against strong odds largely thanks to US support. Washington rejected numerous coup entreaties by Bolivia's High Command, and was even willing to arm pro-Paz Indian militias to keep the military in line. US power is not without limitations. On Tuesday 3 November, junior officers led their units to mutiny, one-by-one. Barrientos soon joined the revolt, and by the early hours of the 4th, the rest of the High Command convinced President Paz to abdicate rather than wage a civil war between his Indian militias and a military institution that refused to divide.

Despite Secretary Rusk's assurance to President Johnson on Friday 30 October that Paz appeared "now to be ready to stay in office and carry on,"¹⁰⁶ the CIA continued to report unrest in the Bolivian military. On Friday night, 30 October, Barrientos met with Ovando and Army Commanding General Hugo Suárez, and "all agreed that action must be taken to save the country from Víctor Paz Estenssoro." They were hesitant to move, however, because they were "unwilling to join forces" with the FSB, the PCB, or Lechín. According to Agency sources, they were considering "fomenting a revolution," but "they want it to be free of these elements in order that they may form a government more to their liking." During the meeting, Ovando repeatedly complained that "Paz had ordered him to send troops into the Huanuni mining area to pacify the miners." Conceding that he "had not refused," Ovando

¹⁰⁶ Recording of Telephone Conversation, 30 October 1964, WH6410.16, PNO 4, LBJL.

explained to his fellow generals that he was “stalling for time because he does not want to alienate the people towards the army,” adding that “army action against [the miners] would be unpatriotic.”¹⁰⁷

In its quest for a calmer environment in which to launch a coup, the High Command was graced with the All Saints Day and All Souls Day weekend, Sunday and Monday, 1-2 November. Paz’s Indian militias demobilized and returned to their homes in the *Altiplano*, leaving the capital defenseless. On the eve of the holiday, Saturday 31 October, Paz once again complained to Ovando that military units were ignoring his direct order that they march on the mining camps. Paz told Henderson on Monday morning that regiments were continuing to throw up a “certain resistance” to his repeated demands that they “take control of key, enemy-controlled mines.” As he lost faith in his military, Paz revealed that once the holiday concluded, he would increase the size of his Indian militias, putting them under the command of unswervingly loyal pro-Paz generals, many of whom had recently retired. Ever confident in the Paz’s abilities, Henderson believed that his meeting with Paz demonstrated that the president was preparing to take decisive action, adding that his decision to strengthen the militias “may foreshadow attempts to deal with military leaders who did not demonstrate complete loyalty to him in the crisis.”¹⁰⁸

Late Sunday night Special Group (CI) emissary Dentzer arrived in La Paz. The following morning, All Souls Day, he and Henderson visited Paz at the President’s suburban home. Paz immediately launched into a confident soliloquy regarding “how the agitation had now been conquered, except for the mines near Oruro which were also now quiet.” Dentzer misleadingly claimed that his trip was “related to prior plans to visit my area of responsibility,” and that it “should not be taken [as] any belief on the part of my government

¹⁰⁷ CIA, Information Report, 30 October 1964, “Bolivia, Vol. 2, 7/64-11/64,” Box 7, NSF-CO, LBJL.

¹⁰⁸ Henderson to Rusk (2), 3 November 1964, “Bolivia, Cables, Volume II, 7/64-11/64,” Box 7, NSF-CO, LBJL.

that his government was in great danger.” President Paz responded with “gratitude for this attitude,” and he once again delivered a “confident and lengthy description” of what had happened, falsely claiming that the “prime cause of the agitation [was] communist-led organization of student activists against a background of uncertainty created by Barrientos’s public challenges to his actions.” According to Dentzer, the “remainder of the conversation was devoted largely to the second major point I had in mind for the conversation – emphasizing the need for substantial progress on the GOB side of our joint development effort in Bolivia.” Dentzer concluded his report by confidently declaring that “Paz has suppressed the recent disturbances in due course, without drawing upon his reserve strength, and appears willing and able to do so for the foreseeable future.”¹⁰⁹

Dentzer and Henderson, “with Paz’s approval,” then visited the High Command. The meeting began with US officials praising “the efforts of the Bolivian armed forces in the development of the country,” before moving on to an expression of Washington’s “opposition to the overthrow of the present government.”¹¹⁰ General Ovando and his men did not beat around the bush. On the contrary, they directly “tested us on idea of coup and found us completely unsympathetic.” Henderson reported that he and Dentzer “repeatedly impressed upon military High Command [the] negative consequences of *golpismo* [coup waging],” but warned that some of the officers, “with characteristic Latin self-delusion, refuse to accept strong probability that once in power they could not remain.”¹¹¹

As Henderson and Dentzer held their amicable and supremely confident meeting with Paz, young, pro-Barrientos officers began to act. Several, including the organizers of the February 1964 staged attack, Arguedas and Quiroga Terán, visited Colonel Fox. They were

¹⁰⁹ Dentzer via Henderson to Rusk, 2 November 1964, POL 23-9 Rebellions and Coups BOL, SDANF.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Henderson to Rusk, 3 November 1964, “Bolivia, Cables, Volume II, 7/64-11/64,” Box 7, NSF-CO, LBJL.

going to move in the morning. Fox answered as he always had: “I might be in favor of it, but my government is not, and I have to adhere to what my government says.” Fox then added, “assuming it was [in favor], what is it you want?...Why do you come to us talking of a coup? If you are so strong and so sure that you have popular backing, why don’t you do what you have to do?”¹¹² As CIA Station Chief Sternfield explained

Ed Fox’s friendship with Barrientos was an indicator that the US would not *oppose* a Barrientos government. And their friendship would help ameliorate any potential difficulties with the new regime. It was such common knowledge in Bolivia at the time that the Air Attaché was a major player in the politics of the country. If Fox had not been Barrientos’s friend, it would have been bloody. Because everyone thought, or feared, that the US had been behind the coup. That’s what kept resistance down. There is no doubt that Fox was a major instigator – *not manipulator* – of Paz’s fall by being so close to Barrientos. He didn’t have to do anything else. That was enough.¹¹³

The young officers who were leading the conspiracy apparently felt the same way, because that night, 2 November, they told Ovando they were ready to move. Ovando responded, “in his typical style, expressing his doubts,” according to Arguedas. He finally looked around at the decisive junior officers and asked, “Is everything ready?” The adventurous group responded in unison, “Yes, sir, General!” Ovando then began to ask for specific details. It appeared to the them that he was stalling. As the clock approached midnight, Quiroga said, “General, sir. There is no time. In ten minutes the radio will be turned off for the night, and if you don’t send the telegram ordering the uprising, I’m out. I will not participate.” With that Ovando gave the order, and Quiroga smiled, “Your order will be carried out.” Ovando closed the meeting by stating sheepishly, “Everyone to your posts.” It appeared to Arguedas that “he didn’t do it with much conviction.” Arguedas, a

¹¹² Arguedas, in Cuevas, *Arguedas*, 157. Confirmed in interviews with Fox.

¹¹³ Interviews with Sternfield.

Communist Party member, set off for the Milluni mining camp to mobilize its militia to La Paz to support any military units that went through with the mutiny.¹¹⁴

Late that night, Paz received reports from Oruro that miners had “assaulted and sacked” a radio station belonging to government loyalists, prompting him to order additional military units to the city. Two hours later, the army had not made a move, and the Bolivian president furiously demanded an explanation for the delay. General Ovando embarrassingly replied that his regiments had been “arguing about plans and preparations,” and not until 2am on the morning of Tuesday 3 November did the military timidly approach Oruro, showing no signs of engaging with the miners.¹¹⁵

Five hours later, at 7am on Tuesday 3 November, both regiments in the General Staff Headquarters – under Quiroga and Major René Mattos Bustillos – announced they were in revolt. At Ovando’s request, they declared they were holding him and Army Commanding General Suárez hostage. After receiving an 8am phone call from a very worried President Paz, Henderson speculated that the High Command’s captivity was a ruse that would buy them time to convince their junior officers to abandon their adventure, without appearing to condone the mutiny.¹¹⁶ Paz’s Minister Otero writes that “the imprisonment of both officers was immediately attributed to the government and the armed militias, and the news was sent out over military radio stations throughout the country.” At that point, all military regiments in Cochabamba revolted, under pro-Barrientos junior officers Majors Samuel Gallardo and Simón Sejas.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ Arguedas, in Cuevas, *Arguedas*, 126-7.

¹¹⁵ Otero, “Dilucidación Histórica,” 1b.

¹¹⁶ Henderson to Rusk, 3 November 1964, “Bolivia, Cables, Volume II, 7/64-11/64,” Box 7, NSF-CO, LBJL.

¹¹⁷ Otero, “Dilucidación Histórica,” 1b-2a; and interviews with Sejas.

At 9:40am, Ovando returned “smiling to the Presidential Palace, where [he] was received with a strong, effusive embrace” by Paz. Ovando asked Paz to consider granting diplomatic asylum to the mutinous junior officers, a solution to which Paz was immediately receptive.¹¹⁸ Meanwhile, Paz’s presidential guard, the Waldo Ballivián Regiment, teamed up with police forces to set up roadblocks throughout the president’s suburban neighborhood, and President Paz told Henderson that he was sending a parliamentary delegation to Cochabamba to “mediate the situation” with Barrientos, who was apparently “attempting to subvert Cochabamba military units.” Paz assured Henderson that he was “confident this episode [was] now rapidly being resolved.”¹¹⁹

Twenty minutes later, however, news arrived that the Cochabamba units had arrested the prefect and taken complete control of the city.¹²⁰ Claiming that the Paz government desired to “destroy [the] armed forces” because they “refused [to] employ force against civilians,” the Cochabamba garrison declared that it “no longer recognizes Paz government and will fight on [the] side of [the] people.”¹²¹ Barrientos cabled Paz shortly afterward, accusing him using militias to disarm the General Staff Headquarters in La Paz. “The environment is becoming more somber by the minute, and could unravel into a period of pain and mourning,” Barrientos wrote, adding that “the Armed Forces will react in defense of the military institution, and this means nothing against the Revolution.” Barrientos closed his cable by recommending that he and Paz both resign to hand over the government to a military

¹¹⁸ Otero, “Dilucidación Histórica,” 1b-2a; and CIA, Information Cable, 3 November 1964, “Bolivia, Vol. 2, 7/64-11/64,” Box 7, NSF-CO, LBJL.

¹¹⁹ Henderson to Rusk (2), 3 November 1964, “Bolivia, Cables, Volume II, 7/64-11/64,” Box 7, NSF-CO, LBJL.

¹²⁰ Ibid.; and CIA, Information Cable, 3 November 1964, “Bolivia, Vol. 2, 7/64-11/64,” Box 7, NSF-CO, LBJL. One a Cochabamba officer later explained proudly that “we were the first group to rise up! We took to the streets, and used our control plans to control each section.” Interviews with Sejas.

¹²¹ Ibid.; and CIA, Information Report, 3 November 1964, 3 November 1964, “Bolivia, Vol. 2, 7/64-11/64,” Box 7, NSF-CO, LBJL.

junta led by General Ovando. “This is my patriotic and revolutionary proposal, whose aim is to save the Bolivian National Revolution.”¹²²

The State Department’s INR believed Barrientos’s call for a military junta represented a “more serious challenge to the authority of President Paz” than the previous week’s student and miner disturbances. The situation was “extremely” fluid, INR added, especially since the left had been completely silent on the issue of Barrientos’s revolt. The Department was confident, nonetheless, that Paz would be able to navigate his way through the crisis, as he had so many times before.¹²³

President Paz addressed the nation at 1pm on Tuesday 3 November, calling for the “defense of his revolution and [the] economic development he had brought to the nation.” Paz promised that the armed forces “would defend public order” and that Indian militias would “defend revolutionary conquests,” and he accused Barrientos of “playing [the] communist game.” Barrientos responded in a radio broadcast heard nationwide that he had proposed that both resign in favor of a military junta, vowing that it would include neither Paz nor Barrientos.¹²⁴ He also called on “all miners to join him in the revolutionary movement,” an invitation rapidly accepted by the miners unions throughout the country. The CIA fretted that “the rebellion could take a turn leftward.”¹²⁵

At 5pm, Paz told Henderson that the military High Command was “playing a double game,” leaving him with no choice but to remobilize the Indian militias. Both US-built artillery regiments in Oruro had revolted and there were rumors that Santa Cruz, Potosi, and

¹²² Otero, “Dilucidación Histórica,” 3a.

¹²³ Hughes to State, 3 November 1964, “Bolivia, Cables, Volume II, 7/64-11/64,” Box 7, NSF-CO, LBJL.

¹²⁴ Henderson to Rusk, 3 November 1964, “Bolivia, Cables, Volume II, 7/64-11/64,” Box 7, NSF-CO, LBJL.

¹²⁵ CIA, Information Cable, 3 November 1964, 3 November 1964, “Bolivia, Vol. 2, 7/64-11/64,” Box 7, NSF-CO, LBJL.

Sucre were all in the hands of pro-Barrientos units.¹²⁶ The homes of pro-Paz individuals in Cochabamba were being looted, and “all streets leading to the main plaza are jammed with people,” attacking with impunity police officers who they saw “a symbol of their hatred for Paz.”¹²⁷ Meanwhile, the CIA fretted to the White House that “armed Ucureña Indians are now marching toward Cochabamba.” These were the “most savage fighters in Bolivia,” and deeply loyal to General Barrientos.¹²⁸ Worst of all, Paz told Henderson that it appeared General Staff Headquarters had not surrendered after all, and that it had instead moved to occupy the adjacent medical school with the acquiescence of the institution’s anti-MNR students.¹²⁹

General Ovando called Barrientos from the presidential palace at 7pm, offering a Paz proposal to appoint an exclusively military cabinet headed by President Paz. Barrientos rejected the proposal, and Paz began broadcasting calls throughout the capital for Indian and MNR party militias to mobilize in defense of the revolution.¹³⁰ Paz remained calm, explaining to Henderson that “as many armed militia and peasants as possible have been ordered to La Paz from the Achacachi area as soon as possible.”¹³¹

Meanwhile, Henderson began the “inception of warning phase” of his previously drafted “Escape and Evacuation Plan,” asking that his country team begin “warning all resident Americans of possible danger.”¹³² He then relayed CIA tallies of the armed

¹²⁶ Henderson to Rusk, 3 November 1964, “Bolivia, Cables, Volume II, 7/64-11/64,” Box 7, NSF-CO, LBJL; and CIA, Information Cable, 3 November 1964, “Bolivia, Vol. 2, 7/64-11/64,” Box 7, NSF-CO, LBJL.

¹²⁷ CIA, Information Cables (2), 3 November 1964, “Bolivia, Vol. 2, 7/64-11/64,” Box 7, NSF-CO, LBJL.

¹²⁸ CIA to White House Situation Room and Joint Chiefs, 3 November 1964, in *idem*.

¹²⁹ Henderson to Rusk (2), 3 November 1964, “Bolivia, Cables, Volume II, 7/64-11/64,” Box 7, NSF-CO, LBJL.

¹³⁰ *Ibid*.

¹³¹ CIA, Information Cable, 3 November 1964, “Bolivia, Vol. 2, 7/64-11/64,” Box 7, NSF-CO, LBJL.

¹³² Henderson to Rusk (2), 3 November 1964, “Bolivia, Cables, Volume II, 7/64-11/64,” Box 7, NSF-CO, LBJL.

contingents on each side of the crisis. La Paz, he wrote, remained “quiet with militia on the streets” and Indian reinforcements were en route from Achacachi. Meanwhile, the Air Base remained loyal and was “supported” by 400 MNR militiamen who had taken up positions around the airport. In the capital, the president could count on 3,000 police, 900 members of the Waldo Ballivián presidential guard regiment, and “perhaps 800 others in miscellaneous [MNR militia] units.” On the other hand, Barrientos boasted the support of Viacha’s 750-strong Max Toledo 1st Motorized Battalion, 620 men of the Mendez Arcos Ranger Battalion in Challapata, 250 in the 2nd Division in Oruro, and 800 in various miners’ militias. In Cochabamba, Barrientos counted on the loyalty of 500 soldiers in “various units” in addition to “perhaps 2,000” armed Quechua Indians. Most importantly, La Paz’s 400-strong Ingavi Regiment and the Polytechnic Institute, with 300 young officer cadets, had both joined Barrientos’s revolt.¹³³

With the situation deteriorating, Henderson doubled down. At 10pm, President Paz telephoned to ask the status of an arms shipment that would outfit a “10,000-man [militia] reserve.” Henderson told the Bolivian president that a partial shipment, including one million rounds of .30 Ball ammunition, was on its way. He then stressed to the State Department the importance of providing a full arms shipment as soon as possible, since “[d]enial to Paz now would in fact signal US withdrawal [of] support of present government to both Paz and Barrientos and would be [a] significant factor [in] unbalancing present odds.” Henderson added that Paz’s chances were “still better than even,” since he controlled the Air Base and was supported by “8250 effective armed men in La Paz as against 5900 Barrientos effectives in Cochabamba, Oruro, and elsewhere.” Given these odds, “additional weapons in hands [of]

¹³³ Ibid. The original CIA tallies can be found in CIA, Information Cable, 3 November 1964, “Bolivia, Vol. 2, 7/64-11/64,” Box 7, NSF-CO, LBJL.

even semi-trained personnel which is [the] Paz reserve would increase fire power to degree which could significantly increase odds favoring Paz.”¹³⁴

Henderson reiterated to Washington that Barrientos was surrounded by leftist advisers, and stressed that any post-Paz government would suffer from “inherent instability,” leading to the “likelihood of communist influence in [the] chaotic situation.” The US ambassador expressed that he “would of course prefer [a] position of non-intervention,” but explained that the arms request “comes from [the] head of constitutional government,” and added that Washington would “not on balance gain by pulling back from Paz now, through denying his request.” Finally, Henderson wrote

We wish to reiterate our estimate [that a] Barrientos-led military overthrow [of] Paz government provides communists [with an] opportunity [to] infiltrate successor government with chance [to] eventually take over, especially since Barrientos has repeatedly demonstrated his inability to discern communists and crypto-communists among his advisors.¹³⁵

Just after midnight on 3 November, President Paz retired to his chambers. The CIA reported that he would “probably resign as President on 4 November 1964,” since he “had little confidence in the armed forces and was very pessimistic.”¹³⁶ There were slivers of hope, however. Paz had recently received reports that Indian forces had remobilized in Oruro and Santa Cruz, and his cabinet appeared to be “maintaining firm behind the president without exception.” Around 1am, however, loyalist Generals Rivas, Ronant Monje, and Guillermo Ariñez anxiously sought to locate Paz. First encountering Bedregal and Mining Minister René Zavaleta, they explained that “all is lost” and that Oruro regiments were “marching rapidly toward La Paz, followed by hundreds of miners.” They all went directly to Paz’s chambers, where Rivas explained the situation in Oruro. Bedregal spoke up, urging

¹³⁴ Henderson to Rusk, 3-4 November 1964, “Bolivia, Cables, Volume II, 7/64-11/64,” Box 7, NSF-CO, LBJL.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ CIA, Information Cable, 3 November 1964, “Bolivia, Vol. 2, 7/64-11/64,” Box 7, NSF-CO, LBJL.

Paz to “break the supposed truce and attack General Staff Headquarters with all available forces” of militias. Paz responded that US weapons to rearm the militias would not arrive until 7am, and he refused to send them into battle against overwhelming odds. At that moment, word arrived that the Presidential Guard Regiment had joined the uprising, and Paz learned that the miners’ militia at nearby Milluni was also marching toward La Paz. Paz decided at that moment that there was “no way out,” and ordered the distribution of “the few arms available” to the militias to “avoid a massacre.”¹³⁷

Attempting to convince Washington to abandon its support for Paz, Vice President Barrientos sent a message to the US ambassador at 1am, promising that “elimination of Communists would be [the] first order [of] business [of] his government.” It made no difference. At 6am the High Command confirmed to Paz that it would “not engage armed forces in battle [on] his behalf,” forcing the president to “conclude his resignation [was] in [the] best interest of the nation.” Not waiting for the 2,000 Achacachi Indians to arrive or the US weapons shipment to land, the most powerful Bolivian leader of the 20th Century was on a plane to Lima with his family.¹³⁸

Conclusion

Paz Estenssoro left his last cabinet meeting at 9:30am, after “giving [the] impression that he would return.”¹³⁹ Indeed, he told one of his advisors that he was “going to inspect his defenses.”¹⁴⁰ In fact, he was feeling for his life. Students and miners never scared Víctor Paz. On the contrary, he believed he had the firepower to enforce his developmental vision

¹³⁷ Otero, “Dilucidación Histórica,” 4b-5a.

¹³⁸ Henderson to Rusk (2), 4 November 1964, “Bolivia, Cables, Volume II, 7/64-11/64,” Box 7, NSF-CO, LBJL.

¹³⁹ Henderson to Rusk, 4 November 1964, POL 23-9 Rebellions and Coups BOL, SDANF.

¹⁴⁰ “Paz dejó el palacio diciendo que iba a inspeccionar sus defensas,” *El Diario*, 5 November 1964, 1.

on sections of Bolivian society who were violently opposed. Firmly believing two days earlier that he had successfully repressed rebellious students and miners, President Paz soon faced a more formidable challenge: the Bolivian military. Some officers had been scheming against the MNR for years. Others simply tired of serving as an armed wing of Paz's technocratic party. The High Command had a great deal to lose by launching a coup, however, and junior officers were the key instigators. When these young soldiers risked it all by announcing their units in mutiny on the morning of 3 November, they forced their generals to choose sides. There was no great conspiracy; Paz faced a military uprising from below, one that Ovando deftly converted into a unified coup d'état.

More importantly, Washington was there until the bitter end, doggedly supporting its beleaguered development-oriented ally. When Henderson received the fateful phone call from the presidential palace at 8am on 4 November, his first question was what "about [the weapons] shipments?" Paz's Foreign Minister somberly explained to a stunned Ambassador that the "shipments requested should not now come forward." As Henderson later explained, "I made up my mind right then that he probably was a goner."¹⁴¹

The Johnson administration never vacillated in its support for President Paz, a development-oriented economist, over the young, brash Barrientos, and Washington continued to arm his militias, even in the face of a military revolt. Much to its chagrin, however, the Indians did not arrive in time. Early on 4 November 1964, the highest per capita recipient of US foreign aid since 1953 abdicated the Bolivian presidency in a most unceremonious fashion, and US officials scrambled to come to terms with the bomb shell that had just fallen on its Alliance for Progress in Latin America

¹⁴¹ Henderson to Rusk, 4 November 1964, POL 23-9 Rebellions and Coups BOL, SDANF. Henderson recalls things differently. Rather than Paz refusing the shipments as he was set to flee, Henderson recounts in a 1988 interview that the State Department vetoed the shipment the night before. Henderson's selective memory could have resulted from Washington's fervent attempts after 4 November to hide its previous role arming Paz's security services. See Henderson Oral History Interview, JFKL, 91, 96.

Conclusion

Development and Its Discontents

Was the 1964 coup a revolution or a counterrevolution? As Ambassador Henderson put it, “In Bolivia, they don’t come down so neat.”¹ The immediate result of the military takeover was a popular insurrection. Armed students and workers stormed the national penitentiary and *Control Político* offices, freeing hundreds of rightwing and leftwing political prisoners in barrages of gunfire. At least half a dozen *Control Político* prisoners were killed by Paz’s agents who were determined to go down in a blaze.² Siglo XX union leaders Escóbar and Pimentel saw the light of day for the first time in almost a year, and they returned to the mining camp, where Escóbar led a breakaway Maoist Communist Party, officially dedicated to armed struggle.³ Meanwhile, university students sacked and occupied the home of *Control Político* chief San Román, burning thousands of surveillance records he had been keeping on political dissidents for the previous four years. CIA Station Chief Sternfield also visited a few of San Román’s safe houses. “They were the bloodiest thing I’ve ever seen,” Sternfield recalled, “Skin, blood, arms, legs. Blood on the walls. I was just sick. San Román was anti-military, pro-Nazi.”⁴

¹ Interviews with Henderson.

² For a dramatic account of one shootout at a *Control Político* office, see Crespo, *El rostro minero*, 351-3. Interviews with Crespo and *Control Político* detainees Reyes and Sanjinés.

³ The new head priest of the Siglo XX Oblate mission was considerably less anticommunist than his predecessors. He accompanied several Communist miners to La Paz on Friday 30 October to plead for the liberation of Escóbar and Pimentel. The Paz government told him it was a matter to be discussed with Ambassador Henderson. After the All Saints holiday, Gregorio’s miner friends armed themselves and stormed the penitentiary on the morning of 4 November. See Gregorio, in López Vigil, *Una mina de coraje*, 111-5.

⁴ Interviews with Sternfield.

If Sternfield was right, and 4 November represented the victory of a sort of right-left popular front, what was the new regime to do with its communist allies? The answer came swiftly. After Paz fled, the heterodox anti-MNR coalition split to pieces. Everyone rushed to the presidential palace, assuming their leader would be anointed president. Lechín ascended *Calle Ayacucho* to the central plaza, carried on the shoulders of thousands of urban workers shouting, “Lechín to the Palace!” When they arrived, cadets from the Military Academy had already taken control of the plaza, under the command of Captain Luis Garcia Meza, and soldiers from the Ingavi Regiment had taken positions in the palace. As the mass of workers approached, one of the Ingavi troops shut the door. Enraged, they began firing their old Mauser rifles in the air. Garcia Meza gave the order to fire above their heads. Chaos ensued. Three or four workers may have been wounded or killed. Lechín fled directly to General Staff Headquarters, where he lodged a complaint with Bolivia’s new leaders. They characterized the plaza *fracas* as a mistake. General Ovando hoped to rule with a coalition of civilian parties, including Lechín’s PRIN, but it was clear that the coalition that brought Paz down was rapidly disintegrating.⁵

Ambassador Henderson would have preferred Ovando, his deal with Lechín notwithstanding, over the unpredictable Barrientos with his Cochabamba Communist friends. The following night, however, when Ovando and Barrientos prepared to address the masses as Co-Presidents, Ovando was booed off the balcony. He quickly realized that Barrientos was the popular symbol of the revolt, and he resigned his half of

⁵ This is based on Prado, *Poder*, 151; Lechín, *El pueblo*, 154-7; “Sangrieta refriega por una confusión,” *El Diario*, 5 November 1964, 6; and CIA, Intelligence Cable, 4 November 1964, “Bolivia, Vol. 2, 7/64-11/64,” Box 7, NSF-CO, LBJL. Prado was an eyewitness, and he reports no casualties. Lechín writes that a number of workers were killed. *El Diario* refers to “three casualties,” and the CIA reports “four deaths.”

the presidency, retaining the powerful position of Commander-in-Chief.⁶ Barrientos gave a rousing speech explaining that he wished to restore the revolution. For several weeks, US officials jockeyed with the new president, especially over his Communist advisors. By early December, the Communists had either been fired or resigned,⁷ and Washington finally extended recognition on the 7th. Barrientos proceeded to follow an unwaveringly pro-US line. Until Barrientos's death in 1969, CIA Station Chief Sternfield reports that "nothing happened in Bolivia without our involvement."⁸

Nevertheless, this thesis is not about the results of the Barrientos coup. It is about what James Ferguson calls the "development enterprise." As Ferguson suggests in his work on World Bank activity in Lesotho, Western developmentalism often has little to do with its stated goals. Instead, development programs are adopted time and again because they invariably produce certain political side effects. In short, they fuel the growth of state power.⁹ In some cases, they even justify authoritarianism.¹⁰ In a comparative sense, the Alliance for Progress in Bolivia fits snugly within this rubric. It was adopted for purely geostrategic reasons, it drove the rapid militarization of Bolivian society, and it justified the growth of a repressive government. All this in the name of development.

⁶ Interviews with Claire, who was with Ovando at the time. For more on the events of 5 November, see Antezana, *La contrarrevolución*, 2538-50.

⁷ With one exception. Arguedas refused to go away. He submitted himself to a CIA lie detector test, including truth serum, and became one of Barrientos's Ministers who worked for the Agency. Sternfield recalled, "We went through the works with him, and he was reliable until the Che Guevara thing." Interviews with Sternfield. See also Ryan, *The Fall of Che*, 146-53.

⁸ Interviews with Sternfield; and "US Agrees to Resume Bolivia Ties Suspended on Overthrow of Paz," *Washington Post*, A13.

⁹ Ferguson, *The Anti-Politics Machine*.

¹⁰ Uvin, *Aiding Violence*.

The debate that has driven historiography on Kennedy's foreign policy in Latin America falls into two camps. One group of historians contend that Kennedy policymakers cared about Third World development, and that they were frustrated either by Latin American elites, the failure of their own ideas, or Kennedy's untimely death.¹¹ On the other hand, there are those who argue that the Kennedy administration was nothing new, and that it closely adhered to Washington's perennial drive for political hegemony in the Western Hemisphere, developmentalist rhetoric notwithstanding.¹²

This case study suggests that both are right: in short, many US officials cared about development, and that is precisely why they were useful for Washington's strategic battle. When he resigned from USAID declaring that the development agency had "nothing to do with the economic development of Bolivia," Mel Burke was unequivocally correct.¹³ USAID operates to further Washington's geopolitical interests. If these interests happen to square with Third World progress, fine. If not, *tant pis*.¹⁴

The benefit of the Bolivian case is that it demonstrates how the Alliance operated where local leaders were fully dedicated to it, where the enterprise got off the ground early, and where there was nothing stopping the program from arriving at its logical apogee before Kennedy passed away. The result was decidedly authoritarian. For Bolivia, the Alliance for Progress hemmed neatly to what Ferguson, Uvin, and Scott have found elsewhere¹⁵ – development as a framework within which states exercise

¹¹ For the first, see Levinson, *The Alliance*; for the second, Latham, *Modernization as Ideology*; and for the third, Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House* (New York: Mariner, 1965).

¹² Rabe, *The Most Dangerous Area*; and Taffet, *Foreign Aid*.

¹³ Burke email to author.

¹⁴ Pace Piero Gleijeses, "Afterward," in Nick Cullather, *Secret History: The CIA's Classified Account of its Operations in Guatemala, 1952-1954* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), xxix.

¹⁵ Scott, *Seeing Like a State*.

power, sometimes aggressively. US policymakers never abandoned the ideology with which they initially intervened. As Almaraz writes

The absorption of power by the Americans brought with it a more general and imprecise phenomenon: the Bolivians began to feel uncomfortable with themselves. If a foreigner imposes himself as a permanent intermediary; if plans as diverse as electrification, roads, or schools, all depend on him; if he has to tell us how we have to live and how to think...finally, if everything that is done, or allowed to be done, depends on the interests of a foreign nation, citizens end up segregating themselves...If it is repulsive to see a bourgeoisie kissing up to an ambassador and smiling with servility to obtain a credit or loan, it is painful to see Indians holding bouquets of flowers as testimony to their gratefulness...Poverty facilitates colonization; men in Bolivia have a lower price. At a certain level, poverty destroys dignity; the Americans have discovered this level, and that is where they work. In their view and for their wallets, a Bolivian costs less than an Argentine or a Chilean.

In Almaraz's view, the Alliance for Progress was a major advance in Washington's drive for political hegemony.

Under the inspiration of the short, intelligent Ben Stephansky, the methods evolved significantly...Surviving Rooseveltian, friend of writers and professors...He was the creator of a new style. He liked to fancy himself as an unbiased liberal, and perhaps deep down he was...Between smiles and handshakes, he did more damage than all his boorish predecessors: Texans who smelled like cattle, screwballs who collected lighters, and unimaginative bureaucrats.¹⁶

It would be a mistake, nonetheless, to argue that Stephansky was alone in his authoritarian drive to develop Bolivia, and thus keep it out of communist hands. There are three bodies buried at the Museum of the National Revolution in La Paz, all military generals.¹⁷ In adopting military-led development in Bolivia, the Kennedy administration was merely building on the MNR's tradition of trying to "create out of a

¹⁶ Almaraz, *Requiem*, 27, 32.

¹⁷ In the mausoleum lie ex-Presidents Germán Busch (1937-9), Gualberto Villarroel (1943-6), and Juan José Torres (1970-1).

Bolivia a real Nation.”¹⁸ But nation building is inherently political, for emerging society will bear the image of whoever controls the development process. This thesis suggests that it is precisely the concept of political power that should be considered when analyzing ideology in US foreign policy. Policymakers in Washington salivated over the opportunity to guide the trajectory of revolutionary Bolivia. Meanwhile, Bolivian nationalists hoped to leverage US aid for their own political ends. Behind a smokescreen of technocratic language about economic efficiency, a bloody battle was being waged for the future of the country. As tends to be the case in violent conflict, the better armed faction won.

Still, it is difficult to avoid the sense that Washington’s Alliance for Progress was a spectacular failure in Bolivia. Similar postmortems have been issued for development programs elsewhere. As Ferguson argues, however, the success of “development” is almost always less important than the enterprise’s side effects.¹⁹ This is because the stated goals are rarely the reasons why “development” is adopted. Regardless of the fervor with which certain Kennedy appointees went about carrying out their ideological project, they were pawns in political game transposed upon their visions. If at any point their dogged obsession with development had gone against Washington’s strategic interests, they would have been fired. At the very least, other agencies would have outflanked them, as occurred in Indonesia in 1958, when a development-minded ambassador was blindsided by President Eisenhower’s approval of

¹⁸ Paz Estenssoro, in Ascarrunz, *La palabra de Paz*, 47.

¹⁹ Ferguson, *The Anti-Politics Machine*, 251-77.

a CIA covert action to destabilize the very government the ambassador was supporting.²⁰

In Bolivia, this never occurred. President Paz knew what was necessary to keep the Americans on his side, and despite rumors and innuendos to the contrary, Washington's entire foreign policy apparatus, even the CIA and Pentagon, supported him to the bitter end. Given the Johnson administration's view that "there is little likelihood of something happening in Bolivia which we cannot live with," they decided to go with their "druthers,"²¹ and continued backing the development-oriented authoritarian that had served Washington so willingly since 1961. Democracy was never a goal of the Alliance for Progress in Bolivia. Authoritarian development was. Militarization was a side effect of the project, one that provides the central insight into why it was adopted. This side effect also helps to explain why the Alliance worked in Washington's favor despite its apparent failure in Bolivia on 4 November 1964.

²⁰ Audrey R. and George McT. Kahin, *Subversion as Foreign Policy: The Secret Eisenhower and Dulles Debacle in Indonesia* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997).

²¹ Chase to Bundy, 28 October 1964, "Bolivia, Vol. 2, 7/64-11/64," Box 7, NSF-CO, JFKL.

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