The Politics of Complicity: The CIA and the Death of Che Guevara

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Abstract

This article analyzes the United States role in Bolivia's 1967 operation to capture and execute Ernesto 'Che' Guevara. Existing literature is marked by three interpretations. One dismisses claims of CIA involvement as sensationalist and unfounded. Another, based on Bolivian military accounts, frames the operation as domestic and sovereign. A third perspective argues for US complicity, ranging from claims that the CIA 'got away with murder' to shadow involvement by American officials who 'washed their hands' of the affair. Drawing on newly available sources, we offer a fine-grained analysis of US intervention in the manhunt and execution.

Keywords: intelligence, covert action, Cold War, Bolivia, Cuba, Latin America, CIA

From March to October 1967, with limited but growing support from the United States military and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), the Bolivian army tracked down and captured Argentine-Cuban guerrilla leader Ernesto 'Che' Guevara. Aside from providing weapons and training, the US administration of Lyndon Johnson helped in the expansion of the Bolivian military intelligence capabilities used to disarticulate Che's group and its urban network. While some military strategists have suggested that the hunt was a blueprint for future operations, including in the 'war on terror,'[1] the episode remains understudied, and it has attracted little recent attention.[2] A flurry of biographies in the 1990s naturally covered Che's

expedition and his demise.[3] Other studies have focused more narrowly on his capture and execution.[4]

Within this literature, three positions emerge. Some have argued that those pointing at the CIA are missing the mark. 'Sensationalist claims about "how the CIA got Che,"' Richard Harris wrote, 'have no factual foundation at all.'[5] Those who take the perspective of Bolivian army veterans agree, presenting the manhunt and execution as based on 'sovereign decision' by the Bolivian government.[6] At the opposite extreme, attorneys Michael Ratner and Michael Steven Smith have extrapolated from US government documents that the CIA got away with murder.[7] Taking a moderate position, Henry Butterfield Ryan concluded US government actors played an important role but ultimately washed their hands of the affair.[8]

Our goal is threefold. First, it aims at revamping interest in the hunt of Che Guevara as an important episode for elucidating how the United States works with intelligence allies in the Global South and the intricacies of these relationships.[9] Here, the article highlights two dimensions of US involvement. In part, the Johnson administration's approach was driven by a touch of paternalism, something that has long characterized US attitudes toward the region. Officials underestimated their Bolivian counterparts, sometimes treated them in a patronizing manner, and often discounted their assessment of the situation.[10] Bolivian officials were able to take advantage of US agencies' concerns with plausible deniability, and the latter were not always able to distance themselves politically and morally from the conduct of operations. As with recent literature on covert action, proxies, and remote warfare, the Guevara episode represents an illuminating case study of indirect, or hidden, intervention, in which an overt approach (military training) was complemented by covert operations by the CIA.[11]

Second, the article combines US and Bolivian sources to provide a more comprehensive picture of the hunt for Che Guevara. Here, we analyse tensions engendered between US officials and their Bolivian counterparts and among different branches of the Johnson administration. Government agencies had different degrees of awareness of what was going on, as well as different degrees of sympathy with the Bolivian point of view.

Finally, the article employs these newly-available sources to provide a fine-grained analysis of Che's capture and execution. We provide clarity as to how this unfolded and – looking beyond the self-aggrandizing narratives of some of the characters involved – an assessment of who was responsible for the execution. While we agree with Ryan's 'handwashing' thesis, new evidence points to a more concrete US government role. Namely, CIA procedures contributed, intentionally or not, to muddying the informational waters and paving the way for a Bolivian government decision to execute Che. Furthermore. the main actors, from Bolivians to US officials and contractors, had a shared interest in implicating one another in a decision as momentous as the summary execution of a prisoner of war. By analysing these tense relationships, this article is relevant to scholars of intelligence studies, foreign relations, and more broadly to historians of the Cold War in the Global South.

Che's South American Project

Unbeknownst to anyone but his wife and the inner circle of Cuban intelligence, Che Guevara departed Havana on 23 October 1966, disguised as a bald, aging diplomat by the name of *Luis Hernández*. Accompanied by Cuban agent and confidant Alberto Fernández, Che passed through Moscow and Prague, where he switched passports and took a train to Vienna as *Ramón Benítez*, a Uruguayan cover identity he previously used when crossing the Iron Curtain. Once in

Austria, Che again switched passports and flew with Fernández to São Paulo as *Adolfo Mena*, a Uruguayan OAS contractor on his way to conduct business in La Paz. After processing their Bolivian visas, the two arrived in La Paz on Thursday 3 November and checked into the Hotel Copacabana.[12]

There is extensive debate around the origins of the project. Scholars, biographers, and former participants disagree as to whether Bolivia's socio-political conditions were conducive to a rural-based guerrilla insurgency.[13] Che's biographers have concluded that he was aware of Bolivia's chronic instability, as well as the nature of over a decade of intervention by the United States.[14] For example, Bolivia became a priority for the Kennedy administration's 'Special Group – Counter-Insurgency,' created in 1962 to coordinate political operations in the region. Through the Internal Defense and Development program, the US government worked on re-directing the armed forces in Latin America from external threats to domestic repression and counterinsurgency. During this same time, the Agency for International Development instructed local police forces in counter-subversive activities.[15] Concerns over Soviet and later Cuban pressure injected an ideological component into US military involvement.[16] Reflecting a shift toward counterinsurgency (COIN), the Bolivian army's Special Warfare Training Centre – *Centro de Instrucción de Tropas Especiales* – was inaugurated during a 1963 visit by top COIN guru, US General Edward Lansdale.[17] The US government also built, armed, and trained two highland army units for deployment in the rebellion, pro-Cuba mining region.[18]

Insurgent pressures had increased since the installation of a military dictatorship in 1964 – constitutionalized in 1966 – a process guided by a series of US financial, military, and covert interventions. On the covert side, the Kennedy and Johnson administrations provided millions of dollars in secret funding to influence the *campesino* movement, student groups, and the labour

movement.[19] In 1965, the Johnson administration authorized Ambassador Douglas Henderson to commit millions more to help the Bolivian army repress mine and factory workers.[20] The following year, hundreds of thousands of dollars were allocated to coordinate a constitutional presidential bid by junta leader General Rene Barrientos, who had taken power in the military coup.[21] Che's mission, then, was dispatched to a country that was already a Cold War battlefield experiencing a high degree of instability and US intervention.

The debate over Bolivia's revolutionary conditions is interconnected with controversies surrounding the very nature of Havana's Che-led operation. Some suggest that Bolivia was to be the first *foco* of a region wide insurrection. Others interpret Bolivia's role as merely a training mission, transit point, or rearguard nucleus to support forward combat operations in Peru and Argentina.[22] To be sure, the project's goals evolved, provoking tension between Che (and more broadly the Cuban government) and his closest collaborator in Bolivia, local Communist Party leader Mario Monje, whose May 1966 agreement with the Cuban government envisaged only Che's transit to Argentina.[23]

After confirming his agreement with Cuban leader Fidel Castro in December 1966, Monje returned to Bolivia to discuss details with Che. The two men knew each other well but had not met in over two years. Their 31 December re-encounter went poorly. Most importantly, they could not come to an agreement on the chain-of-command, with Monje insisting that a Bolivian exercise political control over the development and timing of military operations on Bolivian soil. Che refused this condition, believing in the overarching importance of the continental revolution.[24]

In February 1967, a new agreement was struck between Fidel Castro and the Bolivian Communists' incoming leader, Jorge Kolle, who obtained party authorization in March to

dispatch a follow-up mission to the guerrilla zone. Unfortunately for Che, Kolle's mission failed to reach the guerrilla zone before combat broke out on 23 March.[25] As some authors have described, the break between Che and the local Communist Party, albeit temporary, delayed the rebels' hopes of developing a strong urban support network.[26] Yet Che initially responded without much worry; in fact, he expressed relief to be free of obligations to Bolivian political parties.[27]

Rumours of a guerrilla group did not emerge until Che and his Cuban comrades had been operating in Bolivia for months. In early March 1967, local military units received reports of suspicious bearded explorers along the remote Río Grande. This was Che and two-dozen others on their seven-week training march. At this time, half of the tiny guerrilla band were Bolivians, all from Monje's Communist Party. While they were away, a dozen new Bolivian recruits arrived, mostly unaffiliated and untrained Maoist workers. The Maoists were not being tracked, as one author had claimed, but two of them almost immediately deserted camp and were arrested on 11 March.[28] Through interrogation, Bolivian authorities learned that reports of the armed, bearded men pointed to guerrillas led by 'Castroite Cubans.'[29] The two defectors also revealed that Che Guevara was in charge of the group but that they had not yet seen him.[30]

Having received circumstantial evidence of foreign leadership of the guerrillas, President Barrientos requested and was denied US support with communications equipment to better enable Bolivian authorities to track the guerrillas.[31] This would have been useless, as it turns out, since Che never cranked up his long-distance transmitter and left it behind in a tunnelled-out 'radio cave,' along with its 'rather heavy generator.'[32] Contrary to theories advanced in previous studies, Che's lack of interest in outgoing long-distance communication was planned, and he previously informed Castro that he and his men would intentionally go incommunicado. Calling

it ‘hard but beautiful,’ Che resolved to march out with only incoming communications via a small, battery-powered receiver. Che did not even request a pair of medium-range, 40km field-to-field transmitters until it was too late, after the training march and just before the outbreak of combat.[33]

With Che and his training group still away on 17 March, a joint Bolivian army-police patrol was greeted by a minor ambush at the roadside farmhouse of Che’s camp.[34] Che arrived back six days later, at which point his men greeted a larger roving army unit with a major ambush. Che’s group did not suffer a single casualty. Seven army officers were killed and fourteen were taken prisoner. Once released, the prisoners – some of whom expressed sympathy for the guerrillas – went onto exaggerate the size of the guerrilla group they had encountered, putting it as high as 500.[35] This initial defeat at the hands of the guerrillas sent President Barrientos into crisis mode. Panicked over what seemed like a well-trained and well-armed guerrilla group, he called upon his indigenous peasant supporters to form national defence militias. Only with some effort from the armed forces commander, General Alfredo Ovando, did Barrientos reluctantly agree to rely exclusively on the regular army.[36]

For their part, US officials doubted the veracity of the reported threat, in part because Che’s disappearance two years earlier had given rise to many wild rumours. In dealings with Bolivian authorities, US Ambassador Douglas Henderson maintained a patronizing tone.[37] In meetings on 24 and 27 March, Barrientos gave Henderson a laundry list of requested weapons and materiel, to which Henderson expressed irritation at the apparent attempt to blackmail the United States.[38] Denied by Washington, the Bolivian government dispatched a military aid mission to neighbouring countries. Brazil’s dictatorship was advised by the Johnson administration to rebuff the Bolivians without an official initiative from either Barrientos or the

Organization of American States.[39] The more activist Argentine dictator, General Carlos Onganía, agreed to provide 250 FAL rifles, a million rounds of ammunition, and – much to the chagrin of Washington – 150 napalm bombs.[40]

Along with fearing an internationalization of the conflict and the creation of another Vietnam, the Johnson administration's overriding priority remained US deniability. This meant publicly keeping the Bolivian government at arm's length while ensuring no foreign troops entered the combat zone. Secretary of State Dean Rusk, for example, worried about the 'political liabilities involved' if exposure of a major US role provoked further rebellious sentiment.[41] The country team shared an obsession with keeping any US intervention minimal, especially given sensitivities regarding the traditionally outsized US role in Bolivian political and military affairs. Ambassador Henderson thus welcomed Rusk's instructions that US intervention be limited to military training far from combat zones.[42]

Aside from the dozen Bolivian Maoists, three foreign visitors had arrived at basecamp while Che was away on the training march. They were French journalist Regis Debray, Argentine journalist Ciro Bustos, and German-Argentine agent for Cuba Tamara Bunke, better known by her *nom de guerre, Tania*. Wild theories exist as to *Tania*'s second trip to basecamp, where two months earlier she had received instructions from Che to reactivate the Argentine guerrilla network.[43] It is clear, however, that it was her job to escort Bustos and Debray in early March. In the words of Che's righthand man, 'we were supposed to be there.' Unfortunately for *Tania*, who frequently left her jeep in a private Camiri parking lot while going back and forth from La Paz to basecamp, Che returned three weeks late, at which point hostilities commenced and there was no way out. A few weeks later, Bolivian authorities identified her abandoned jeep, obtaining

documentation linking Bustos and Debray to the guerrillas, and locating *Tania*'s apartment in La Paz.[44]

Unlike *Tania*, who welcomed guerrilla life, Bustos and Debray had support work to do in Argentina and Western Europe, respectively. Sensing they were restless to leave, Che left behind a twelve-person rearguard of mostly sick and expelled guerrillas on the Iquira river, while he led the rest of his men uphill toward the village of Muyupampa to leave Debray and Bustos. On 19 April, a local peasant boy caught up with them, escorting a man presenting himself as George Andrew Roth, an Anglo-Chilean photojournalist. Upon searching Roth's belongings, Che and his men noticed a few things that made them "suspicious" – his passport profession of 'student' was crossed out and replaced with 'journalist,' and his papers included a United States visa for visiting Puerto Rico and some kind of 'organizer's card' indicating he had been in Buenos Aires. Learning that Roth had entered the guerrilla zone with permission from the Bolivian army, Che suspected him of being a Trojan horse, or a 'Greek gift' in his words. Debray, on the other hand, saw a silver lining in Roth's arrival. He and Bustos could leave the guerrilla together with Roth, pretending to be three journalists searching for the guerrilla group. Not long after they left, the three were captured and arrested by Bolivian authorities.[45]

Barrientos immediately reported the capture of the supposed journalists to Henderson. As the ambassador recalled, the Bolivian president did not know who Debray was but intended to execute him. Hoping to save Debray's life, Henderson exercised pressure on Barrientos, while the State Department did the same with Bolivian embassy in Washington.[46] The UK Foreign Office followed closely Debray's ordeal.[47] The French government and Debray's family also intervened. Barrientos eventually relented and put him on trial. As historian Henry Butterfield Ryan wrote:

> The Debray affair, obviously had put the president in a very difficult position. Either he had to turn down a strong request by the United States, a patron upon which so much depended, or he had to risk antagonizing his military.[48]

Leading foreign newspapers from *The New York Times*, to the *Times*, and *Le Figaro* closely followed Debray's trial, often portraying Bolivia as a backward country. This contributed to Barrientos' decision that, moving forward, there would be no more trials for captured guerrillas.[49]

Even before the capture of Debray and Bustos, the United States was exploring ways to support the Bolivians without overly Americanizing the counterguerrilla effort. About a week after Che's second straight battlefield success, the Pentagon dispatched head of air force operations for US Southern Command, General William Tope. Arriving on the morning of Tuesday 18 April, Tope went to the home of President Barrientos, a fellow airman. Much to Tope's chagrin, the latter seemed intent on securing a fleet of new helicopters and a machine gun for every conscript in the guerrilla war. Stressing that the army's young conscripts faced 'a well-organized, highly-trained, and well-supplied' band of rebels, Barrientos was convinced that if they were 'equipped with modern automatic weapons,' it would 'enhance the morale and confidence of the soldiers and show the country that positive steps were being taken.' Tope was unimpressed, writing that 'all of their quick fixes are unsound, would waste precious resources, and probably would get them in worse trouble than they already have.' Citing Barrientos's quest for 'some kind of quick success,' Tope quipped that 'the motions that accompanied the term "automatic weapons" indicated that the concept was to fill the air with lead.' Preparing Washington for the reality that 'before we are finished [we] may require some very firm

approaches,' Tope predicted that the US and Bolivian governments were 'going to have great difficulty in getting together on even how to approach it, much less find a solution.'[50]

Reading Tope's report back in Washington, National Security Advisor Walt Rostow characterized it as 'a grim report on the counterinsurgency capabilities of the Bolivian government.' Recommending strict conditions on further military aid to Bolivia, the White House approved several measures that were already in the pipeline: provision of limited supplies and the dispatch of a counterinsurgency mobile training team to commence work on a long-planned lowland Ranger battalion.[51] A few days later, an agreement was reached between the US and Bolivian armies. The US Military Advisory Group would send a training team of Green Berets 'to produce a rapid reaction force,' namely the 2nd Rangers, who would be 'skilled to the degree that four months of intensive training can be absorbed.' The operation was initially solely one of training. While Ratner and Smith considered this a key piece of US intervention,[52] the agreement explicitly prohibited US personnel from participating in combat operations either directly or as observers and advisors.[53]

Based on interrogations of Debray and Bustos from May to July, the CIA eventually accepted that Che was leading the guerrilla movement.[54] Rostow forwarded these report to President Johnson, noting only that they contradicted the Agency's established view that Che had probably died a year or two earlier.[55] During this time, the CIA also expressed concern that the Bolivian government demonstrated a 'total inability' to cope with the well-led guerrillas. The Bolivian army was not professionalized in the art of lowland rural warfare, having historically faced off on the populous, highland Altiplano with urban insurrectionists and striking mine workers. Training standards and communication were also poor. Intelligence on the guerrilla was

scarce since, according to US officials, non-commissioned Bolivian officers often hid or distorted information to cover their lack of decisive action or even guerrilla sympathies.[56]

Slow Escalation

In charge of the Green Berets Mobile Training team was Major Ralph 'Pappy' Shelton. Classes combined lessons on military operations, intelligence gathering, and civic action. According to Shelton's recollection, he travelled weekly with a medical team to local schools and offered free treatment. Shelton recalled socialising with ranchers and young people in the local communities. Alongside Shelton, the US government temporarily dispatched US Air Force General William Skaer, chief of intelligence at the US Southern Command, and the CIA's Arthur Maloney. Travelling with them was Cuban-born CIA agent, Julio Gabriel García, who remained in Bolivia as security advisor to the Ministry of Government (Interior), contributing to the interrogation of Debray and others.[57] The CIA had two years earlier recruited the ministry's head, Antonio Arguedas, in a liaison capacity.[58]

US reporting on the guerrillas was increasingly pessimistic. Amid growing labour mobilizations, Rostow provided his first comprehensive report of the Bolivian situation to President Lyndon Johnson on Friday 23 June. In it, Rostow estimated that Che's group included 60-100 men, about twice as many as it actually did. He correctly added that the guerrillas had been discovered and 'flushed out' before completing their training but had still 'clearly outclassed Bolivian security services.' Behind the scenes, the CIA had 'increased its operations' under Bolivian government cover, but indirect intervention had limits. Alluding to Washington's desire to avoid over-Americanizing the counterguerrilla effort, Rostow warned Johnson that 'we are helping about as fast as the Bolivians are able to absorb our assistance.' In the meantime, the

guerrillas could win simply by staying on the run, while rebel movements might 'open new fronts in the near future, as now rumored.' Admitting the possibility that in the coming weeks 'the thin Bolivian armed forces would be hard-pressed and the fragile political situation would be threatened,' Rostow wished to prepare Johnson for the possibility of more visible US intervention in Bolivia, including in the financial arena where 'diversion of scarce resources to the armed forces could lead to budgetary problems.'[59] The State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research shared Rostow's concern, adding that the elusive guerrillas would likely catalyse a wider rebellion should Barrientos engage in excessive repression.[60]

Hours later, a bloody episode in the mining camps seemed to confirm Washington's fears of a worst-case scenario: new fronts in Bolivia's guerrilla war. Bolivia's mine workers had been protesting for weeks. Thanks to the work of Bolivians who had trained in the Soviet Union and Cuba, these communities were also showing an increased awareness of and support for the guerrillas. In the early morning hours of Saturday 24 June, as the workers and their families engaged in the final throes of the raucous St. John's Day festival, police and military units trained and supplied by the United States entered the mining camps. In a confusing series of events still unsolved to this day, shooting began, leading to the deaths of around 20 civilians and one police officer. Such violence, soon coined the 'St. John's Day Massacre,' shocked the country and served as a rallying cry for those demanding that either the parliament or the army depose President Barrientos.[61]

A few days later, William Bowdler of the NSC met with Bolivian Ambassador Julio Sanjines, who asked the US to establish what he called a 'hunter-killer team.' Bowdler replied that the idea 'might have merit' but required further examination.[62] In a memorandum to Rostow, Bowdler reported that both the State and Defense Departments opposed creation of a 'special

strike force for Bolivia,' one in which the Pentagon's role would be hard to hide. In fact, US military planners had concluded more broadly that any kind of new military assistance to Bolivia 'would not now seem advisable,' given limited 'Bolivian absorption capacity' and the danger of creating another Vietnam.[63] Instead, Rostow's NSC decided to concentrate all US efforts on the 2nd Ranger battalion, which was set to go into operation within a couple of months. Specifically, on 5 July the White House authorized the CIA to build a small, discreet 'intelligence unit to be part of the battalion.'[64]

A day later, Che's guerrilla group showed it still had the strength to shock. Late on 6 July, his men temporarily captured the town of Samaipata in a commando incursion. Combined with the recent St. John's Day massacre, the Samaipata raid embarrassed the Barrientos government and stoked persisting intrigue among Bolivia's chattering classes. In contemporary diary accounts, Che's men recorded feelings of great enthusiasm, characterizing the raid as a 'political-military success.'[65] Che himself wrote that month it was 'a shame not to have 100 more men,' especially with the 'government disintegrating rapidly' and the 'legend of the guerrilla force acquiring continental dimensions.'[66]

Following these alarming events, CIA Director Richard Helms sent Johnson a worried August report on the status of Bolivia's guerrilla. According to Helms, the elusiveness of the Che Guevara rebels could even provoke domestic unrest in the United States. At the time, Havana was hosting the inaugural conference of the *Organización Latinoamericana de Solidaridad* (OLAS; Latin American Solidarity Organization), a rallying cry for revolution in the region. From there, Stokely Carmichael – one of the leaders of the US civil rights and Pan-African movement - was calling for Cuban-inspired guerrilla movements in US cities. Helms admitted that much of Che's success was due to the political weakness of the Bolivian government and the

unwillingness of its armed forces to defend President Barrientos. His report thus concluded that 'nothing on the horizon would indicate that the guerrilla problem will ease soon.'[67]

Two August developments gave the Bolivian and US governments a hint of optimism. Bolivian forces had recently captured Hugo '*Chingolo*' Choque, an expelled, sixteen-year-old Maoist fleeing the guerrillas' isolated rearguard after three months of captivity on the Iquira river. Partly embittered by the treatment he had received, first by Che and later by rearguard commander Juan Vitalio Acuña (aka *Joaquín*), Choque agreed to give his military captors a tour of buried storage facilities on the original guerrilla basecamp. The army recovered passports, photos, and other guerrilla documents, all of which provided irrefutable evidence of Cuban involvement and Che's leadership.[68] The information collected also led investigators to arrest Communist Party member Loyola Guzman, one of the guerrilla's leading operatives in La Paz, in addition to another 11 suspected members of Che's disoriented albeit numerous network of supporters in the urban underground. Despite these arrests, key nodes in the dozens-strong urban network remained intact.[69]

Meanwhile, prompted by the White House's July authorization, the CIA reinforced its intelligence network in the country. Larry Sternfield, formerly a Bolivia-based officer now high up in the CIA's Western Hemisphere division, tapped Gustavo Villoldo (aka *Eduardo Gonzalez*) and Felix Rodriguez (aka *Felix Ramos*) for the special mission of donning Bolivian army uniforms and joining the 2nd Ranger Battalion.[70] The two were Cuban exiles based on Miami and longtime veterans of CIA operations against the Castro government in Havana. Upon their deployment to Bolivia, they were greeted by a case officer and taken to meetings with President Barrientos and armed forces commander General Alfredo Ovando. They received written credentials from the High Command with orders that the army provide them any collaboration

required.[71] Contrary to popular legend regarding the role of Rodríguez, in part fostered by his own memoir, 'Gustavo Villoldo was the major Cuban in the "Che" operation,' in Sternfield's words.[72]

Once in Santa Cruz, Villoldo went to work with the then still training 2nd Ranger Battalion at the La Esperanza sugar mill. Rodriguez travelled to 8th army division headquarters, where he worked with Bolivian military officials to improve intelligence gathering and communication between military units. He brought with him a powerful, portable radio that could be used by the Air Force to communicate with troops on the ground, thus permitting more rapid response. He would often commute to La Esperanza where Villoldo was participating in Shelton in Ranger training mission.[73] These CIA agents helped the army improve interrogation strategies and local intelligence collection while building on a growing network of peasants, shopkeepers, and locals.[74]

This network was central to the Bolivian army's first battlefield victory. Earlier that year, the guerrillas had encountered a local peasant patriarch named Honorato Rojas. He sympathized with them and offered to help.[75] Despite having kept his secret, even while befriending a local battalion of army engineers in April and May, Rojas was eventually called in for questioning based on captured guerrilla testimony that they had received help from a well-to-do peasant whose estate lay at the confluence of the Masicurí and the Río Grande. After confessing under duress, Rojas agreed to collaborate with the army should the guerrillas return.[76] One author claims the CIA participated in Rojas's interrogation, but the evidence is thin.[77]

In late August, Che's isolated, ten-person rearguard, led by *Joaquin*, arrived at Rojas's farm, months after having been left behind to care for sick stragglers on the Iquira river. On hand were two undercover military couriers, disguised as rural peons. Upon learning of the visitors,

one of the army spies snuck out to warn his commanding officer, Captain Mario Vargas, whose post was almost five hours' hike north and upstream along the Masicurí. While Vargas mobilized three dozen soldiers for an overnight hike back down the riverside road, the guerrillas convinced Rojas to lead them the following day to a remote campsite with access to water. Hoping to extricate himself from his predicament, in the middle of the night Rojas packed his bags and fled toward town with his wife and children. Unfortunately for him, he was detained on the roadside by Captain Vargas and his men, who forced Rojas to return home and play Judas to the unsuspecting guerrillas. Bidding his wife and children farewell, Rojas escorted Vargas and his men to a wooded area overlooking a river crossing on the Río Grande. While Rojas went home to prepare food for the guerrillas, Vargas constructed a set-piece ambush on both sides of the river. Eight hours later, led by Rojas like lambs to slaughter, eight of the ten guerrillas were killed.[78]

Bolivian and US authorities were elated. Rostow wrote to the president a few days later that the army had scored its first victory and that it was a 'big one.' Che's rearguard had been wiped out with only one soldier killed.[79] Beyond the loss of forces, the episode was important for a second reason. Two members of the group survived: Communist Party member Freddy Maymura and unaffiliated, expelled guerrilla José Castillo. The former was executed after a short, unsuccessful interrogation, while the latter had his life spared when he expressed a willingness to talk. Under interrogation with the help of Rodríguez, Castillo revealed that the rearguard had been out of contact with Che's main group for almost five months.[80]

Despite these celebratory moments, the CIA remained pessimistic about the situation in Bolivia.[81] In an alarming National Intelligence Estimate in September, the Agency concluded

that the larger core group of guerrillas would be able to survive for many more months and that Bolivia's government was imperilled as a result.[82]

When his rearguard was liquidated, Che resolved to commence a retreat out of the Río Grande basin and toward combat zones further north. Moving north-northwest, Che and his men arrived at the tiny hamlets of Alto Seco, Pujio, and Abra del Picacho, whose inhabitants offered varying levels of hospitality while listening to socialist revolutionary lectures with 'a well-seasoned mixture of fear and curiosity.'[83] In Che's words, 'everything changed' on September 26, when they reached La Higuera and noticed that 'the men had disappeared and only a few women were there.' Sensing a trap, Che ordered his men to march out, only to fall into an ambush by Bolivia's 8th army division. It was a devastating defeat, the first one suffered by Che's main column, which lost three of its best members: Cuban revolutionary war veteran and vanguard commander Manuel Hernández (aka *Miguel*) and two respected Cuban-trained Bolivian Communists, Roberto '*Coco*' Peredo and Mario Gutiérrez. That day also saw the campaign's only defections from Che's main column, as Bolivian Communists Antonio Dominguez and Orlando Jiménez separately decided it was time to take Che up on his unrealized vow to eventually let them leave and return to their families. Taking stock of what he called these 'imponderable' losses, Che ordered their mules released southward in a vain attempt to 'confuse' the Bolivian army. Meanwhile, realizing it was 'impossible to advance,' Che and his remaining sixteen men burrowed deep in a system of ravines adjacent to La Higuera.[84]

News of these events mobilized Bolivia's 8th army division back in Vallegrande, where Colonel Joaquín Zenteno Anaya had established a forward command post. Years later, CIA agent Félix Rodríguez took credit for convincing Colonel Zenteno to dispatch the newly graduated 2nd Ranger Battalion to La Higuera. 'Colonel,' he recalled pleading, 'if we don't move the troops

now, all the training in the world won't help them.' In Rodríguez's recollection, some Bolivian commanders were content to let the guerrilla war drag on.[85] While it is possible some plotting officers recognized benefits to letting Che's group again escape, the decision to mobilize was a Bolivian one. Training was complete and the young, commissioned officers were keen to enter the fray. The three-company battalion was routed toward La Higuera, where the Rangers almost immediately captured the two fleeing guerrillas, Orlando Jiménez and Antonio Domínguez.[86]

Che's Capture and Execution

After ten days staking out the ravines around La Higuera, Bolivian 's 2nd Ranger officers began to worry that Che's elusive column had again gotten away. Finally, in the early morning of Sunday 8 October, local farmer Pedro Peña approached a company commander, advising him that he had spotted over a dozen guerrillas the evening before, close to his potato crop deep in the Churo gorge. Three Ranger companies mobilized to sweep the ravines from northeast to southwest, one tasked with hammering down the Churo, another with doing the same down the adjacent Tusca, and a third dispatched with heavy mortars to establish an anvil down where the two unite. Ten members of Che's column found themselves outside the cordon and able to escape. Che and his five-man core group were, however, caught in the vice. A bullet hit Che in his right leg while another damaged his M-1 carbine beyond repair. Despite taking shelter and suddenly finding himself just outside the army cordon, Che was spotted by an army quartermaster as he hobbled out of the ravine with help of Bolivian mine worker Simeón Cuba. Captured, the two men were taken to the village schoolhouse as prisoners.[87]

Putting together a report on the Churo battle and its casualties, local officers cabled Colonel Zenteno, who responded that night with an order to 'keep *Fernando* [Che] alive until my

arrival by helicopter first thing in the morning.' During the twelve-hour interlude, Che was drawn into a couple of long conversations with Captain Gary Prado, the company commander whose men had captured Che and Simeón Cuba. Pressed on why he had chosen Bolivia for his guerrilla war, Che responded, 'Didn't the South American war for independence start in Bolivia? Aren't you proud of being the first?' Then assuming a more conciliatory tone, Che added, 'Perhaps it was an error to choose Bolivia, I don't know. But at the end of the day, it wasn't my decision alone.' Asked by Prado if he meant Fidel Castro had made the decision, Che corrected him: 'Other colleagues at other levels; the most enthusiastic were the Bolivians.' Returning a few hours later, Prado assured Che that he would be treated well, that he would probably be tried in Santa Cruz, and that 8th Division commander Zenteno was 'a good and decent man, don't worry.'[88]

Little did Captain Prado know, but an execution order had already been approved in La Paz and likely transmitted to Zenteno in Vallegrande. Taking public responsibility for the decision would be President Barrientos. According to internal military legend, the recommendation originated among conservative nationalists atop the Bolivian army, at which point Barrientos adopted the execution order as his own. According to two reliable sources, General Alfredo Ovando forewarned Colonel Zenteno of the presidential order at 11:30pm on Sunday night, at which point the divisional commander was gaily celebrating Che's capture with 8th division intelligence chief, Major Arnaldo Saucedo, and their division's Cuban-born CIA contract agent, Félix Rodriguez.[89]

Upon learning of Che's detention, Rodríguez eagerly asked to go to La Higuera.[90] Zenteno and Saucedo both agreed while declining to divulge the execution order and intimating to Rodriguez that Che's fate would be decided by the High Command in the morning.[91]

Rodríguez retired to his room and prepared a predawn report for his CIA handlers, 'suggesting to the Chief of Station…in La Paz that if the Agency wanted to keep Che alive…he should intercede quickly with the Bolivians.'[92] According to the CIA, Rodríguez's message proposing the CIA take positive action 'to spare Che's life' was received at 10:30am that morning, almost three hours after Rodríguez arrived in La Higuera and personally confirmed that Che was alive and well in custody.[93]

The CIA processed Rodríguez's field report and produced a typed analysis for the White House. Prior to sending it at 12:37pm, however, someone at Agency headquarters in Langley, Virginia, perhaps Western Hemisphere Division Chief William Broe, made two post-production edits. First, in the phrase reporting the 'capture of Ernesto "Che" Guevara,' the CIA editor added '^possible^' in superscript typeface. Second, where the document initially stated unequivocally that 'one of those captured is Ernesto "Che" Guevara,' the same person whited out 'is' and replaced it with '^may be^.' No effort was made to resolve the fresh contradiction with the document's claim a few lines down – an ultimately false one but perhaps what the CIA had been told – that the high-profile guerrilla was unquestionably in custody but 'seriously wounded or very ill and may die.'[94] Months earlier, US officials had noted that Bolivian government claims that a prisoner was seriously injured or ill was sometimes cover for an 'unwritten directive that any prisoner captured shall be interrogated and then eliminated.'[95]

Aside from Rodríguez's 12-hour delay in notifying his CIA handlers, which can be chalked up to logistics and caution, seeds of doubt raised by the Agency's even more cautious Monday morning edits undercut any sense of urgency on the part of the Johnson administration. A nonchalant tone suffused communication between the White House and the CIA during the crucial moments. Even hours after Che had been executed, the White House evaded

responsibility with the excuse that 'CIA still has no firm reading on whether Che Guevara was among the casualties,' adding that the Agency 'wants to check out fingerprints before saying.'[96]

Even more in the dark was Ambassador Henderson in La Paz, who complained later that they 'wiped me out of the picture completely.' This was no mistake. Ever since Henderson had intervened six months earlier to frustrate the planned execution of French guerrilla detainee Regis Debray, the ambassador was widely resented by Bolivian military authorities and even by some of their CIA interlocuters. An earlier State Department record even refers to 'our repeated efforts to point out the value of keeping prisoners alive.' Knowing parties were probably right to believe Henderson would have pressured them even more to spare Che. Henderson himself admitted years later, 'I would have liked to have known Guevara…an interesting person…[who] had some good ideas and some bad ones, as we all do.' Pegged as soft-liner, Henderson was sidestepped during the crucial hours, and his dispatches contained little more than transcripts of press reporting and official Bolivian government statements.[97]

One knowing party was CIA Station Chief John Tilton, whose superiors in Langley included hardliners who sympathized with the Bolivian army's impulse to execute Che Guevara. In the words of one Agency officer based at headquarters at the time, it would have been 'hopeless to debrief' such a 'committed, dedicated' revolutionary. Keeping Che alive would have resulted in 'horrendous' pressures on the Bolivian government and would have become 'a rallying cry for the left everywhere.' When asked if this represented a 'Pontius Pilate' attitude on the part of the CIA, Tilton did not disagree.[98] The only other knowing US citizens were probably Washington's military personnel, Colonel Ernest Nance in La Paz and Major Robert Shelton in Santa Cruz, both of whom were even less likely to betray the confidence of their Bolivian sources to a meddlesome ambassador.[99]

Adding to the controversary, Tilton's most important agent in Bolivia – Government Minister Antonio Arguedas – long claimed that the station chief personally attended the Sunday night meeting of President Barrientos and his top generals, the one at which Che's fate was sealed. Arguedas was not present at the meeting but speculated that Tilton remained silent. 'The gringos don't normally express an opinion,' Arguedas said years later, adding that 'they know that their opinion could be interpreted as an order.' If Tilton indeed attended the historic meeting, as Arguedas claimed, the CIA official would have been careful to 'say nothing in favour or against' the execution proposal, so that 'later no one could say that under US orders they had executed him, or had not executed him.'[100]

Bolivian officers also appear to have engaged in a degree of dissimulation. According to CIA agent Rodríguez, when he and Colonel Zenteno arrived in La Higuera on Monday morning, Zenteno departed the village on foot, 'with all the other Bolivian officers.' This is confirmed by Bolivian military records, which describe Zenteno's request to tour the site where Che was captured in the Churo gorge. Zenteno's departure with the entire commissioned officer corps left Rodríguez, undercover as 'Captain Félix Ramos,' as the highest-ranking 'Bolivian' officer present. Sometime around 10am, while Rodríguez was shuttling between the schoolhouse and the local telegraph office, the official execution order came across the radio from Vallegrande. Rodríguez was taken aback, under the mistaken impression that he was the first to hear about it. He later told the CIA inspector general that while 'he could not recognize the voice,' it 'could have been that of Major [Arnaldo] Saucedo,' divisional intelligence chief for Colonel Zenteno.[101]

An hour later, Zenteno returned from the Churo gorge and was approached by Rodríguez with news of the execution order. The divisional commander was not surprised, accepting the order as 'authentic' and making 'no effort to have it confirmed.' Instead, Zenteno merely

expressed 'sympathy' when Rodríguez reiterated Washington's boilerplate opposition to summary execution. Unloading a heavy share of responsibility, Zenteno asked Rodríguez 'as a friend' to oversee the order's implementation. As he was taking his leave of La Higuera via helicopter, Zenteno advised Rodríguez that the chopper would return to fetch Che's corpse at 2pm.[102] Just before departing, according to Bolivian military testimony, Zenteno also passed along the execution order to company sergeants, netting no shortage of volunteers.[103]

While Rodríguez finished photographing guerrilla diaries and other materials, the first of three executions took place. It was around 11:30am. Simeón Cuba was dead. Rodríguez heard the barrage of machine gun and rushed over to the schoolhouse, where a sergeant reported 'almost apologetically' to his superior, '*Captain Ramos* [Rodríguez],' that the prisoner had 'tried to escape.' Going next door, Rodríguez told Che that he was sorry and that he had 'done everything in my power.' In his recollection, Che 'turned as white as writing paper' before composing himself and uttering, 'It is better like this…I should never have been captured alive.'[104] For the next hour, Rodríguez explored politics with the Argentine-Cuban revolutionary, who categorically defended Cuba's socialist revolution and its leading light Fidel Castro, who he said 'had not been a Communist prior to the success of the Cuban revolution.' Regarding accusations of mass executions during and after the revolution, Che defended his record by saying 'there had been only about 1,500 individuals killed, exclusive of armed encounters.'[105]

An hour into their conversation, a single shot rang out from next door, marking the execution of another guerrilla detainee, mining camp Communist Party member Aniceto Reinaga.[106] Time was running out. Che uttered his final words to Rodríguez: 'Tell Fidel that he will soon see a triumphant revolution in [the] America[s]…And tell my wife to get remarried and try to be happy.' Leaving the room, the CIA Cuban lamented what was happening while

comforting himself that 'it's a Bolivian decision, not a US one.' Outside he crossed paths with a Sergeant Mario Terán, on his way to carry out the execution. Rodríguez asked Terán 'not to shoot Che in the face, but from the neck down,' a recommendation having as much to do with identification as for shoring up the army's *pro forma* lie that the valuable prisoner of war died of combat wounds. Ten minutes later, Che Guevara was dead.[107]

Conclusion

Three days after Che's death, CIA Director Richard Helms wrote to Secretary of State Rusk and other US officials. Contradicting what was then the Bolivian army version of events, Helms stated that Che had been captured alive and well, with a leg wound but 'otherwise in fair conditions.'[108] In a cover memorandum to President Johnson, National Security Advisor Rostow called this 'stupid but understandable from a Bolivian stand point, given the problems which the sparing of French Communist and Castro courier Regis Debray has caused them.' Reflecting more broadly on the implications of Che's death, Rostow highlighted that Che's demise represented the passing of 'another of the aggressive, romantic, revolutionaries like Sukarno, Nkrumah, Ben Bella' and that it likely reflected the 'soundness' of the US government 'preventive medicine' approach: providing assistance to countries facing incipient insurgencies. As Rostow concluded, 'it was the Bolivian 2nd ranger battalion, trained by our Green Berets…that cornered him and got him.'[109]

These cables and their display of satisfaction at Che's death are the main exhibits provided by Ratner and Smith in their assessment that the CIA got away with murder.[110] Certainly, the US government and the CIA played a large role in Bolivian affairs. In fact, the US role predated Che's appearance by years, with widespread overt and covert intervention in the

country dating back to the Eisenhower era. Moreover, the presence of guerrillas catalysed a steady escalation of the US government's commitment, with three decisions shaping the US role.

First, the Johnson administration agreed in April 1967 to build the 2nd Ranger Battalion. Second, the CIA provided early support with interrogation and intelligence gathering, a tactic escalated with the August arrival of Cuban exiles Villoldo and Rodriguez. Third, concerned with maintaining a distance from combat operations and avoiding direct use of US forces, the Johnson administration made clear from the start that no US citizen should get near the guerrilla zone. As in many contemporary 'remote' interventions, the Pentagon role was one of training, while overall US intervention relied on a deniable combination of military, financial, and covert support. The Johnson administration even opposed intervention by Bolivia's eager neighbors, Brazil and Argentina. Meanwhile, the CIA understood that the use of Cuban exiles permitted the US government to play a direct role while also washing its hands.

As our analysis establishes, the picture is more complex than the CIA 'getting away with murder.' Nor did their Bolivian allies go rogue. Placing into context the self-aggrandizing of key participants, the capture and execution of Che Guevara reflected efforts by the US-backed Bolivian army. The rocky relationship between the US government and its local allies complicated the picture at every turn. Having reached a decision to execute all foreign and foreign-trained guerrillas, including Che Guevara, Bolivian officials were selective in the timing and substance of information they provided to US officials. For example, the decision to freeze out Ambassador Henderson while bringing in CIA agent Rodríguez succeeded in making the CIA appear complicit in the execution. The Agency in turn muddied the informational waters, perhaps out of abundance of caution, injecting doubt in its reports to the White House.[111] In this sense, while the CIA did not murder Che Guevara, it was directly involved in the manhunt and

execution, the latter at the initiative of the Bolivians themselves. Moreover, whether intentionally or unintentionally, CIA officers and agents created favourable conditions and failed to take positive steps to inform US officials who could interfere with the execution.

Declaration of Funding

Thomas C. Field Jr. reports that this work was supported by travel and sabbatical funding from the Faculty Research Development Program and from the College of Arts and Sciences, respectively, at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University. Luca Trenta reports that no funding was received.

Conflicts of Interest Statement

The authors report no conflicts of interest.

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[1] Macias, 'Counter Guerrilla;' US Army Special Operations Command, 'Special Edition:,' Runkle, 'Hunting Che' and Weiss and Maurer, *Hunting Che*.

[2] Exceptions include Brincat, ed., *Che Lives!*; and Prados and Jimenez-Bacardi, 'Che Guevara.'

[3] Castañeda, *Compañero*; Anderson, *Che*; Taibo II, *Guevara*.

[4] Ryan, *The Fall of Che Guevara*; Harris, *Death of a Revolutionary*; Cupull and González, *The CIA Against Che*; Ratner and Smith, *Who Killed Che?*; and Noël, *La dernière guérilla*.

[5] Harris, *Death of a Revolutionary*, 222.

[6] Instituto de Investigación Histórica Militar, *Jaque Mate*, 225-81, especially 273. See also Prado Salmón, *La guerrilla inmolada*; and Noël, *La dernière guérilla*.

[7] Ratner and Smith, *Who Killed Che?*

[8] Ryan, *The Fall of Che Guevara*.

[9] Davies and Gustafson, eds., *Intelligence Elsewhere*.

[10] Loveman, *No Higher Law*; Schoutz, *Beneath the United States*; and Grandin, *America, América*.

[11] Moghadam, et al., eds, *Routledge Handbook of Proxy Wars*; Biegon and Watts, 'Remote Warfare;' and Long, et al., eds., *Covert Action*.

[12] Gómez Abad, *Como el Che burló a la CIA*, 354-58; and Harry Villegas, 4 and 5 November 1966, 'El Verdadero Diario de *Pombo*,' in Soria Galvarro, *El Che en Bolivia, Tomo 2*, 41.

[13] See Castañeda, *Compañero:* Anderson, *Che*; Siekmeier, *The Bolivian Revolution*; Field Jr., *From Development to Dictatorship*; and Thomas C. Field Jr., 'The Bolivia Project: Washington, Havana, and the Origins of the Che Guevara Rebellion,' book manuscript under review.

[14] Anderson, *Che*, 679; Ryan, *The Fall of Che Guevara*, 40-42; and Briscat, ed. *Che Lives!*

[15] Zanchetta, 'Between Cold War Imperatives,' 1088; Ryan, *The Fall of Che Guevara*, 24-25 and 41; and Field Jr., 'Ideology as Strategy.'

[16] Field Jr., 'Ideology as Strategy.'

[17] Field Jr., *From Development to Dictatorship*, 84-86; and McClintock*, Instruments of Statecraft*, chapter 8.

[18] Thomas Mann to Special Group (CI), 23 April 1964, 'Third Progress Report on Bolivian Internal Defense Plan,' NSF Country Files (NSF-CO), 'Bolivia, Vol. I, Memos, 12/63-7/64,' box 7, Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library (LBJL).

[19] Field Jr., *From Development to Dictatorship*, 76-77, 87-109, and 137.

[20] Editorial Note 155, *FRUS 1964-1968, Volume XXXI*; and chapter 3 of Field Jr., 'The Bolivia Project,' book manuscript under review.

[21] CIA Historical Staff, 'Western Hemisphere Division, 1946-1965,' December 1973, 279, JFK Assassination Records, document 104-10301-10001, 279; Briscat, ed., *Che Lives!*; and chapter 4 of Field Jr., 'The Bolivia Project,' book manuscript under review.

[22] See Gott, *Guerrilla Movements*, 394-95; Dosal, *Comandante Che*, 254-55; Castañeda, *Compañero*, 335-37; Briscant, ed., *Che Lives!*; and chapter 5 of Field Jr., "The Bolivia Project," book manuscript under review.

[23] Mario Monje Molina, 'Carta al Comité Central del Partido Comunista de Bolivia (CC-PCB),' 25 July 1968, in Soria Galvarro, *El Che en Bolivia, Tomo 4*, 90-93; and chapter 6 of Field Jr., "The Bolivia Project," book manuscript under review.

[24] Castro to Guevara, 14 December 1966, in *Útima Hora* (La Paz), 31 October 1967, reprinted in Soria Galvarro, ed., *El Che en Bolivia, Tomo 2*, 255-56; Monje Molina, 25 July 1968, 'Carta al CC-PCB,' 83-93; Guevara de la Serna, 20 and 31 December 1966 and 1 January 1967, *Diario del Che*, 89, 93-97.

[25] Unsigned Havana #29 and #30 to Guevara, 21 January 1967 and n.d. [February 1967], in Guevara de la Serna, *Diario del Che*, 276-79; and Partido Comunista de Bolivia, *Documentos*, 288-89.

[26] Castañeda, *Compañero*, 356; Gott, *Guerrilla Movements*, 394-95; and Brincat, ed., *Che Lives!*, 50, 122, 163-64.

[27] Guevara de la Serna, Analysis of the Month [December] and 1 January 1967, *Diario del Che*, 94-95. See also chapter 6 of Field Jr., 'The Bolivia Project,' book manuscript under review.

[28] Castañeda, *Compañero*, 357; and Antonio Arguedas interviews, published in Cuevas Ramírez, *Arguedas*, 189, 199, and Antonio Arguedas interviews, in Cuevas Ramírez, *Arguedas*, 189, 199; Martínez Estévez, *La campaña militar*, 97; and Vázquez Viaña, *Dogmas y herejías*, 101-08.

[29] Embassy to State, 16 March 1967, in Editorial Note to document 163, *FRUS 1964-1968, Volume XXXI*.

[30] Vicente Rocabado and Pastor Barrera testimony, in Prado Salmón, *La guerrilla inmolada*, 97-100.

[31] Editorial Note 163, *FRUS 1964-1968, Volume XXXI*.

[32] Author (Field Jr.) interviews with Harry Villegas, Havana, 13 and 16 June 2016.

[33] Guevara de la Serna, 21-22 and 25 December 1966, 4 January 1967, and 20 March 1967, *Diario del Che*, 90-91 98, and 135-36. Regarding the theory that lack of communication was a result of rain damage, see Harris, *Death of a Revolutionary*, 103.

[34] Alberto Fernández Montes de Oca, 'Diario de *Pacho*,' 20 January and 13-17 March 1967, in Prado Salmón, *La guerrilla inmolada*, digital annex.

[35] Instituto de Investigación Militar, *Jaque Mate*, 80-84; and Eliseo Reyes Rodríguez, 23 March 1967, '*Rolando*'s Diary,' in James, ed., *The Complete Bolivian Diaries*, 242; Guevara de la Serna, 23-24 March 1967, *Diario del Che*, 138; Octavio de la Concepción, 24 March 1967, 'Diario de *Morogoro*,' in Soria Galvarro, *El Che en Bolivia*, Tomo 2, 178. See also Castañeda, *Compañero*, 359.

[36] Prado Salmón, *La guerrilla inmolada*, 106-07 and 116-17.

[37] Embassy to State, 16 March 1967, in Editorial Note to document 163, *FRUS 1964-1968, Volume XXXI*; and Patrick Morris, Oral History interview, The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project, 1990.

[38] Embassy to State, 24 and 27 March 1967; and CIA Memorandum, 29 March 1967, in Editorial Note to document 163, *FRUS 1964-1968, Volume XXXI*.

[39] Brazilian Embassy (La Paz) to Foreign Ministry, No. 104, 28 March 1967; Brazilian Embassy (Buenos Aires) to Foreign Ministry, No. 236, 4 April 1967; and Foreign Ministry to Brazilian Embassy (La Paz), AA 600, 601, 4 May 1967, 'La Paz, Oficios, 1967-70,' Itamaraty Historical Archive, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Brasilia, Brazil.

[40] USDAO Buenos Aires to RUEKDA/DIA Wash DC, 0284, 1 April 1967, 'POL 23-9 BOL,' box 1895, State Department Central Files (SDCF), Record Group (RG) 59, NARA; Divisão de Segurança e Informações do Ministério das Relações Exteriores (Brazil), 'Guerrilhas na Bolívia,' 19 April 1967, REX.IPE.475, 200/228, DSI/MRE, National Archive of Brazil, Ministry of Justice. US opposition to napalm is in Sayre to US embassies (Buenos Aires, Rio de Janeiro, Lima, Asunción, La Paz), 178946, 20 April 1967, 'DEF BOL,' box 1523, SDCF, RG59, NARA.

[41] State to Embassy, 1 April 1967, 'POL 23-9,' box 1895, SDCF, NARA.

[42] Embassy to State, 5 April 1967 and State to Embassy, 7 April 1967, 'POL 23-9,' box 1895, SDCF, NARA.

[43] See Toomey, 'Haydée Tamara Bunke Bider;' Castañeda, *Compañero*, 361, and Ryan, *The Fall of Che Guevara*, 70-71.

[44] Quote from Harry Villegas interview, in Garcés, *Conversaciones*, 44-47. See also Estrada Lescaille, *Tania*, 111; Salazar, *Che*, 225; and Bustos, *Che Wants to See You*, 253.

[45] Guevara de la Serna, 19 April 1967, *Diario del Che*, 155-56.

[46] Henderson interview by Henry B. Ryan, 23 September 1990, The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project.

[47] UK FCO 7/952: Bolivia: Guerrilla Activities: Arrest of British Journalist, George Andrew Roth and Frenchman Regis Debray and Death of Che Guevara, Popular Culture in Britain and America, 1950-1975, https://www.rockandroll.amdigital.co.uk/documents/detail/1320676.

[48] Ryan, *The Fall of Che Guevara*, 75.

[49] Brown, *Cuba's Revolutionary World*, 428.

[50] Tope via Henderson to Rusk, Embtel 2697, 22 April 1967, 'Bolivia, Vol. IV, Memos, 1/66-12/68,' box 8, NSF-CO, LBJL.

[51] Bowdler to Rostow, April 25, 1967, in Prados and Jimenez-Bacardi, 'Che Guevara.'

[52] Ratner and Smith, *Who Killed Che*, 55.

[53] Tope via Henderson to Rusk, Embtel 2697, 22 April 1967, 'Bolivia, Vol. IV, Memos, 1/66-12/68,' box 8, NSF-CO, LBJL; Memorandum de Entendimiento, April 1967, 'DEF 19,' box 8, SDLF, RG59, NARA.

[54] For full statements by Bustos and Debray, see Saucedo Parada, *No disparen*, 9-13 and 53-81. For CIA summaries of their statements, see CIA, Intelligence Information Cable, 10 May 1967, in Prados and Jimenez-Bacardi, 'Che Guevara;' and CIA, Intelligence Information Cable, 28 July 1967, 'Bolivia, Volume IV, Cables 1/66-12/68,' box 8, NSF-CO, JFKL.

[55] Rostow to Johnson, 11 May 1967, in Prados and Jimenez-Bacardi, 'Che Guevara;' and Bowdler to Rostow, n.d. [July 1967], 'Bolivia, Volume IV, Cables 1/66-12/68,' box 8, NSF-CO, LBJL.

[56] CIA, 'Cuban-Inspired Guerrilla Activity in Bolivia,' 14 June 1967, in Prados and Jimenez-Bacardi, 'Che Guevara.'

[57] Ryan, *The Fall of Che Guevara*, 94-96 and 149.

[58] Arguedas interview, in Cuevas, *Arguedas*, 151-52; author (Field Jr.) interviews with CIA officer Larry Sternfield, Ormond Beach, FL, 27 June 2011 and 3 January 2012; and Henderson Oral History, JFKL, 139-41.

[59] Rostow to Johnson, 23 June 1967, document 164, *FRUS 1964-1968, Volume XXXI*; and Rostow to Johnson, 24 June 1967, 'Guerrilla Problem in Latin America,' box 2, NSF-Intelligence File, LBJL. See also an unsigned, undated intelligence report, 'Guerrilla Problem in Latin America,' in the same box.

[60] Denney to Acting Secretary of State, Intelligence Note 521, 23 June 1967, 'Guerrilla Problem in Latin America,' box 2, NSF-Intelligence File, LBJL.

[61] Saldaña, *Fertile Ground*, 71-78.

[62] Memorandum of Conversation, 29 June 1967, 'Bolivia, Volume 4, 1/66-12/68,' box 8, NSF-Countries, LBJL.

[63] Bowdler to Rostow, 5 July 1967, 'Guerrilla Problem in Latin America,' box 2, NSF-Intelligence File, LBJL.

[64] Memorandum of Conversation, 5 July 1967, in Editorial Note, document 166, *FRUS 1966-68, Volume XXXI.*

[65] Octavio de la Concepción, 'Diario de Morogoro,' 7 July 1967, in Soria Galvarro, ed., *El Che en Bolivia, Tomo 2*, 191.

[66] Guevara de la Serna, 14 and 30 July 1967, and Analysis of the Month [July 1967], *Diario del* Che, 199, 205-08.

[67] CIA, Intelligence Memorandum, 8 August 1967, 'The Bolivian Guerrilla Movement: An Interim Assessment,' 'Bolivia, Vol. IV, Memos, 1/66-12/68,' box 8, NSF-CO, LBJL, 1, 3-4, 8, 10.

[68] Choque testimony, in Angulo Torné, *Chingolo*, 79-88. See also Prado Salmón, *La guerrilla inmolada*, 188-91.

[69] Che and his men kept lists of more than a hundred real and potential collaborators in the urban underground. Most were activists of the Communist Party of Bolivia. See army transcripts in Martínez Estévez, *La campaña militar*, 447-82; and photocopies of these documents, which the author (Field Jr.) has in his possession thanks to an anonymous source in Bolivia. See also Vázquez Viaña, *Dogmas y herejías*, 185-92.

[70] US State Department, 'Paper for Consideration at IRG/ARA,' 11 July 1967, 'POL 23-4,' box 3, SDLF, RG59, NARA; CIA, Memorandum for Acting Chief of the Western Hemisphere Division, 22 August 1967, document 166, *FRUS 1964-1968, Volume XXXI*; Villoldo, *Che Guevara*, 61, 71-76; and Rodríguez and Weisman, *Shadow Warrior*, 127-31.

[71] Villoldo, *Che Guevara*, 74-79; and Rodríguez and Weisman, *Shadow Warrior*, 137-43.

[72] Author (Field Jr.) interview with Sternfield.

[73] Rodríguez and Weisman, *Shadow Warrior*, 140-42.

[74] Bowdler to Rostow, n.d. [late July 1967]; and CIA, Intelligence Information Cable, 28 July 1967, 'Bolivia, Volume IV, Cables 1/66-12/68,' box 8, NSF-CO, JFKL.

[75] Guevara de la Serna, 10 February 1967, *Diario del Che*, 118; and Villegas, 9-10 February, 'El Verdadero Diario de *Pombo*,' 48-49. Due to a transcription error ('able [*capaz*]' replaced with 'unable [*incapaz*]'), Cuban translations of the Guevara diary incorrectly read: 'unable [*sic*-able] to help us, but also incapable of seeing the harm he can cause us.' See for example, Guevara, *The Bolivian Diary*, 83.

[76] Vargas Salinas, *El 'Che,'* 69-71.

[77] Ryan, *The Fall of Che Guevara*, 119.

[78] Prado Salmón, *La guerrilla inmolada*, 197-202; and CIA, Intelligence Information Cables 44964 and 44994, 5 September 1967, 'Bolivia, Vol. IV, Cables, 1/66-12/68,' box 8, NSF-CO, LBJL.

[79] Rostow to Johnson, 5 September 1967, in Prados and Jimenez-Bacardi, 'Che Guevara.'

[80] Prado Salmón, *La guerrilla inmolada,* 176-177; and Rodríguez and Weisman, *Shadow Warrior*, 143-156. For summaries of Castillo's testimony, see CIA, Intelligence Information Cables 44964 and 44994, 5 September 1967, 'Bolivia, Vol. IV, Cables, 1/66-12/68,' box 8, NSF-CO, LBJL.

[81] Bowdler to Rostow, 6 September 1967, in Prados and Jimenez-Bacardi, 'Che Guevara.'

[82] CIA, National Intelligence Estimate 92-67, 'The Situation in Bolivia,' 14 September 1967, document 169, *FRUS 1964-1968, Volume XXXI*.

[83] Guevara de la Serna, 22 and 25 September 1967, *Diario del Che*, 235-38.

[84] Guevara de la Serna, 26 September 1967, *Diario del Che*, 238-39.

[85] Rodriguez and Weisman, *Shadow Warrior*, 156.

[86] Prado Salmón, *La guerrilla inmolada*, 216-20.

[87] Prado Salmón, *La guerrilla inmolada*, 221-33; and Instituto de Investigación Histórica Militar, *Jaque Mate*, 225-81.

[88] Prado Salmón, *La guerrilla inmolada*, 202-204 and 307-28.

[89] Arana Serrudo, *Che Guevara*, 94; and Saucedo Parada, *No disparen*, 130-31.

[90] Rodríguez and Weisman, *Shadow Warrior*, 159.

[91] Based on a State Department Historical Office summary of a still-classified CIA telegram, described in footnote 3 to document 171, *FRUS, Volume XXXI*.

[92] Rodríguez and Weisman, *Shadow Warrior*, 160.

[93] CIA, Memorandum for the Deputy Inspector General, 3 January 1975, Assassination Records Review Board Release, NARA.

[94] CIA, Intelligence Information Cable, 9 October 1967, 'Bolivia, Volume 4,' box 8, NSF-CO, LBJL. The cable is stamped as having been received at the White House at 1537 Zulu time (GMT), which during early October 1967 would have been 12:37pm Eastern Daylight Savings time.

[95] Embassy to State, 29 July 1967, 'POL BOL 2-1,' box 1892, SDCF, NARA.

[96] Bowdler to Rostow, 9 and 10 October 1967; and Rostow to Johnson, 9 and 11 October 1967, 'Bolivia, Volume 4,' box 8, NSF-CO, LBJL.

[97] Henderson interviewed by Sheldon Stern, 30 August 1978, John F. Kennedy Library, JFKOH-DH-01, 137-138; and Embassy to State, 29 July 1967, 'POL BOL 2-1,' box 1892, GRSDCF, NARA.

[98] Tilton and anonymous CIA officer quoted in Ryan, *The Fall of Che Guevara*, 132.

[99] Nance quoted in Ryan, *The Fall of Che Guevara*, 130-31; and Shelton quoted in Ray, 'In Cold Blood,' 33.

[100] Arguedas interviews, in Cuevas Ramírez, *Arguedas*, 196. See also Arguedas interview in *Prensa Latina*, 1970, in Soria Galvarro, *El Che en Bolivia: Tomo 3*, 82.

[101] CIA, Memorandum for the Deputy Inspector General, 3 January 1975, Assassination Records Review Board Release, NARA; and Colonel Joaquín Zenteno Anaya to General David La Fuente Soto, 10 July 1968. The author (Field Jr.) found the latter in two separate private collections in Bolivia and retains copies.

[102] CIA, Memorandum for the Deputy Inspector General, 3 January 1975, JFK Assassination Records, NARA; and DCI Helms to Rusk, et al., 11 and 13 October 1967, 'Bolivia, Vol. IV, Memos, 1/66-12/68,' box 8, NSF-CO, LBJL.

[103] Instituto de Investigación Histórica Militar, *Jaque Mate*, 267-68, 276-77. See also Noël, *La dernière guérilla*, 127-31.

[104] Rodríguez and Weisman, *Shadow Warrior*, 165 and 169. Rodríguez told a similar story to the CIA at the time. See Helms to Rostow, et al., 13 October 1967, 'Bolivia, Volume 4,' box 8, NSF-CO, LBJL.

[105] Helms to Rostow, et al., 13 October 1967, 'Bolivia, Volume 4,' box 8, NSF-CO, LBJL.

[106] Rodríguez and Weisman, *Shadow Warrior*, 165-68; Helms to Rusk, et al., 13 October 1967, 'Bolivia, Vol. IV, Memos, 1/66-12/68,' box 8, NSF-CO, LBJL; and CIA, Memorandum for the Deputy Inspector General, 3 January

1975, JFK Assassination Records, NARA. Regarding Reinaga's identity as the second guerrilla executed that morning, see Soria Galvarro, "Aniceto Reinaga: otro caso para la Comisión," *Todo sobre el Che en Bolivia*, 16 July 2017; and Gustavo Rodríguez Ostria, "Lea un fragmento del inédito libro sobre el tercer hombre que murió junto con el Che," *Oxígen*, 9 October 2017.

[107] Rodríguez and Weisman, *Shadow Warrior*, 164 and 169.

[108] DCI Helms to Rusk, et al., 11 October 1967, 'Bolivia, Vol. IV, Memos, 1/66-12/68,' box 8, NSF-CO, LBJL.

[109] Rostow to Johnson, 11 October 1967, 'Bolivia, Volume 4,' box 8, NSF-CO, LBJL.

[110] Ratner and Smith, *Who killed Che?*, 70-72.

[111] Something witnessed in other similar episodes. Trenta, *President's*.

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