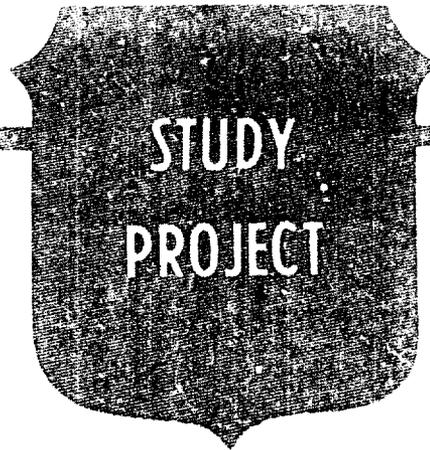


AD-A263 614



The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department of Defense or any of its agencies. This document may not be released for open publication until it has been cleared by the appropriate military service or government agency.

LESSONS LEARNED BY VENEZUELA FIGHTING IN LOW INTENSITY CONFLICT

BY

COLONEL FREDY PRESUTTO
Venezuelan Army

DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT A:
Approved for public release.
Distribution is unlimited.

DTIC
ELECTE
MAY 06 1993
S E D

USAWC CLASS OF 1993



U.S. ARMY WAR COLLEGE, CARLISLE BARRACKS, PA 17013-5052

93-09845



2687

05 05 12 3

REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

Form Approved
OMB No. 0704-0188

| | | | |
|---|--|--|---|
| 1a. REPORT SECURITY CLASSIFICATION UNCLASSIFIED | | 1b. RESTRICTIVE MARKINGS | |
| 2a. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION AUTHORITY | | 3. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY OF REPORT <i>Distribution Statement A: Approved for public release. Distribution is unlimited.</i> | |
| 2b. DECLASSIFICATION / DOWNGRADING SCHEDULE | | 4. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER(S) | |
| 6a. NAME OF PERFORMING ORGANIZATION U.S. ARMY WAR COLLEGE | | 6b. OFFICE SYMBOL (if applicable) | 7a. NAME OF MONITORING ORGANIZATION |
| 6c. ADDRESS (City, State, and ZIP Code) ROOT HALL, BUILDING 122 CARLISLE, PA 17013-5050 | | 7b. ADDRESS (City, State, and ZIP Code) | |
| 8a. NAME OF FUNDING / SPONSORING ORGANIZATION | | 8b. OFFICE SYMBOL (if applicable) | 9. PROCUREMENT INSTRUMENT IDENTIFICATION NUMBER |
| 8c. ADDRESS (City, State, and ZIP Code) | | 10. SOURCE OF FUNDING NUMBERS | |
| | | PROGRAM ELEMENT NO. | PROJECT NO. |
| | | TASK NO. | WORK UNIT ACCESSION NO. |
| 11. TITLE (Include Security Classification) LESSONS LEARNED BY VENEZUELA FIGHTING IN LOW INTENSITY CONFLICT | | | |
| 12. PERSONAL AUTHOR(S) COL FREDY PRESUTTO, VENEZUELAN ARMY | | | |
| 13a. TYPE OF REPORT STUDY PROJECT | 13b. TIME COVERED FROM _____ TO _____ | 14. DATE OF REPORT (Year, Month, Day) 5 MARCH 1993 | 15. PAGE COUNT 26 |
| 16. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTATION | | | |
| 17. COSATI CODES | | 18. SUBJECT TERMS (Continue on reverse if necessary and identify by block number) | |
| FIELD | GROUP | SUB-GROUP | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| 19. ABSTRACT (Continue on reverse if necessary and identify by block number) (SEE REVERSE SIDE) | | | |
| 20. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY OF ABSTRACT <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNCLASSIFIED/UNLIMITED <input type="checkbox"/> SAME AS RPT. <input type="checkbox"/> DTIC USERS | | 21. ABSTRACT SECURITY CLASSIFICATION UNCLASSIFIED | |
| 22a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE INDIVIDUAL DR GABRIEL MARCELLA | | 22b. TELEPHONE (Include Area Code) 717/245-3207 | 22c. OFFICE SYMBOL AWCAB |

ABSTRACT

AUTHOR: Fredy Presutto, COL, Venezuelan Army

TITLE: Lessons Learned by Venezuela Fighting in Low Intensity Conflict

FORMAT: Individual Study Project

DATE: 5 March 1993 PAGES: 26 CLASSIFICATION: Unclassified

During ten critical years the Venezuelan democracy made a strong stand against communism, and struggled bravely for its survival. Thanks to the resolve of the administration in charge and the decisive action of the Venezuelan armed forces, the scourge of subversion could finally be defeated both politically and militarily.

The 1960s were a decade of agitation and violence for Venezuela, a period of its contemporary history from which many lessons can be drawn. Although the ghost of communism has vanished, these lessons are still applicable, and failure to heed them may lead to yet another regrettable replay of history.

This paper examines the Venezuelan strategy developed to confront the Castro-Communist insurgency of the 1960s and the lessons learned by democracy during that struggle.

USAWC MILITARY STUDIES PROGRAM PAPER

The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department of Defense or any of its agencies. This document may not be released for open publication until it has been cleared by the appropriate military service or government agency.

LESSONS LEARNED BY VENEZUELA FIGHTING IN LOW INTENSITY CONFLICT

AN INDIVIDUAL STUDY PROJECT

by

Colonel Fredy Presutto
Venezuelan Army

Dr. Gabriel Marcella
Project Adviser

DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT A: Approved for public release; distribution is unlimited.

U.S. Army War College
Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania 17013-5050

ABSTRACT

AUTHOR: Fredy Presutto, COL, Venezuelan Army

TITLE: Lessons Learned by Venezuela Fighting in Low Intensity Conflict

FORMAT: Individual Study Project

DATE: 5 March 1993 PAGES: 26 CLASSIFICATION: Unclassified

During ten critical years the Venezuelan democracy made a strong stand against communism, and struggled bravely for its survival. Thanks to the resolve of the administration in charge and the decisive action of the Venezuelan armed forces, the scourge of subversion could finally be defeated both politically and militarily.

The 1960s were a decade of agitation and violence for Venezuela, a period of its contemporary history from which many lessons can be drawn. Although the ghost of communism has vanished, these lessons are still applicable, and failure to heed them may lead to yet another regrettable replay of history.

This paper examines the Venezuelan strategy developed to confront the Castro-Communist insurgency of the 1960s and the lessons learned by democracy during that struggle.

| | |
|---------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Accession For | |
| NTIS CRA&I | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| DTIC TAB | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Unannounced | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Justification | |
| By | |
| Distribution / | |
| Availability Codes | |
| Dist | Avail and/or Special |
| A-1 | |

INTRODUCTION

By the late 1950s the Venezuelan people and its armed forces, yearning freedom and democracy, were able to topple the military dictator General Marcos Perez Jimenez. Working underground, the two parties that carried a decisive action in this struggle were the Accion Democratica (AD) and the Communist Party of Venezuela (CPV). They created the Junta Patriotica which was able to unify and coordinate the civil resistance against the dictatorship, garnering the representation of all political parties and sectors of national life.¹

After toppling the dictatorship, however, the members of this Patriotic Junta began to struggle among themselves, following their divergent ideologies and interests. Three possible alternatives thus emerged for the political future of Venezuela: A representative democracy, sought by the parties on the right (AD, COPEI, and URD); communism, sought by the Communist Party of Venezuela (CPV); and a return to military dictatorship, sought by a small group of Army officers,² with each group setting new and different political strategies.

From that moment on a number of events took place, promoted by the different currents pursuing their objectives in the attainment of power. Fortunately the people leaned toward a democratic government, by electing Romulo Betancourt as president in the elections of December 1958. The Communist Party of Venezuela, however, attempted to seize power at all costs and did so by means of armed struggle, taking advantage of the economic, social, and political instability at the time. Its violent actions took place in the decade of the 1960s, when the weak new democracy had to confront the biggest challenge since its inception.

This paper analyzes the strategy followed by the Venezuelan government and its armed forces in fighting the armed insurgency of the 1960s, and draws the lessons learned by democracy during that struggle.

THE PROCESS OF ARMED STRUGGLE IN VENEZUELA

On 23 January 1958 a military uprising took place in Venezuela, supported by the civilian population, to end the decade of dictatorship of General Marcos Perez Jimenez. The uprising was successful, creating a national jubilation and awakening in the Venezuelan population enormous hopes and expectations for a better future. All existing political ideologies and currents joined the military in a common cause.

A temporary government was appointed, representing different sectors and interests. The Communist Party of Venezuela, trying to avoid a return to military dictatorship, decided to support this outpour of unity in order to establish and assert democracy.³ The foremost objective of toppling the dictatorship had been attained, but immediately thereafter each group started chipping at their own objectives. Accion Democratica (AD) sought to regain power⁴ by allying itself with the two parties on the right, the Union Republicana Democratica (URD) and the Social Christian Party (COPEI), excluding the Communist Party, whose leaders saw this as an unfair discrimination in view of the role they had played in toppling the dictatorship.

Romulo Betancourt became the presidential candidate, and in spite of the impasse with Accion Democratica the Communist Party of Venezuela decided to remain in the spirit of unity while it reorganized itself.⁵ Presidential elections took place on 7 December 1958 and Betancourt won with about 49

percent of the votes. During his campaign the communists opposed Betancourt, who decided to ignore them in appointing his cabinet, stating that although they could continue to operate as a party its members would not be called to administrative positions. Betancourt's stand was well known in Venezuela as being based on the fact that communist philosophy did not jibe with the democratic structure of the country.⁶

After taking office Betancourt went on strongly to implement his democratic project, knowing that he had to confront both the left represented by the CPV and the extreme right of the military who sought power again. The government undertook a strategy to control the military right and defeat the left at the same time as it struggled to overcome an economic crisis.⁷

The armed struggle or subversion proper began as a political response to the actions of Betancourt: The excuses made by the left were many, but the main factors were political instability amplified by the success of the Cuban revolution at the time, and the economic crisis engulfing the country.

Failing to notice any significant change in the political situation after the democratic government had taken office, the opposition by the left and by the military right continued with ever more violent reactions. The triumph of the Cuban revolution in January of 1959 led the Venezuelan communists to think that armed struggle in the country could be successful, perhaps due to the apparent similarity of conditions in which both countries found themselves at the time. At the end of that same month Fidel Castro visited Venezuela and got a fairly substantial popular welcome. He was given the opportunity to address the people and he took advantage of it to recount the Cuban revolution and make comparisons with the situation in Venezuela. This clearly had a big influence on the members of the CPV, who saw their chance in a climate of

political instability and the critical state of the economy--a drop of oil revenues, increased unemployment, rural exodus toward the cities and the burden of debts incurred during the dictatorship--getting the notion that they could replicate Castro's enterprise with a high probability of success.

The first attempt to unseat Betancourt came in November of 1960 in the wake of a national strike called by the communists. Although the strike itself didn't amount too much, the students used it to unleash a wave of violence, in the face of which the government felt compelled to suspend constitutional guarantees for four days. The failure to topple the government with these attacks let the communists to formulate a subversive action divided into phases: Phase I would expand and intensify urban insurgency, Phase II would implement a rural insurgency, and Phase III would be a period of active revolutionary warfare with the execution of conventional military operations, with both urban and rural guerrillas converging to bring down the Betancourt government before the next presidential elections scheduled for December 1963.⁸

This strategy of the communists was developed starting from the premise that Venezuela was ripe for a revolutionary transformation, and that the Communist Party therefore had to design a political and military instrument to struggle against the government. The means to defeat Betancourt and to insure the transformation of the country resided in setting up a revolutionary army that would wage war for national liberation by setting up an opposition front on the left.⁹

The evolution of this armed struggle went through several stages until it became almost completely extinguished in the 1970s.

A critical year was 1960, with a number of street clashes, with conspiracy plans discovered on the right, with the economy in crisis, and an increasing opposition to the government, leading among other things to the expulsion of the Youth Branch of the Accion Democratica Party because of a falling out with their leadership, who then decided to create a new leftist party called Revolutionary Movement of the Left (RML).

The President submitted to Congress his plan which contemplated, among other important things, land reform--one of the great aspirations of the peasantry--and a promotion of the industrial sector. On 24 June 1960 there is an attempt on the life of Betancourt but he escapes unharmed, which is officially blamed on members of the right favoring the deposed dictator Perez Jimenez, with the involvement of Rafael Leonidas Trujillo, then president of the Dominican Republic. In August of the same year, during the meeting of ministers of foreign affairs in Costa Rica (OAS), Venezuela casts its vote siding with the imposition of sanctions against Cuba, which immediately triggered violent reactions by the leftist within the country and increased tensions with Fidel Castro.

The surge in leftist violence compels the government to use police repression and to suspend constitutional guarantees indefinitely. This situation prompted several groups, especially students and slum dwellers, to organize themselves against the repression, with the campus of the Central University of Venezuela in Caracas becoming a sanctuary, as well as a number of secondary schools. By the end of 1960 the armed struggle had taken its first steps, although not yet in a unified fashion.

The increased tension between the government and the opposition, as well as the absence of improvement in the economic and social situation in the

country, radicalized the left and reaffirmed its intent to seize power by force. The CPV began a campaign to infiltrate the armed forces of the nation and set up cadres to lead this armed struggle with the support of communist countries (Cuba and USSR). Popular frustration with unmet expectations became fodder for the left.

As the situation evolved between 1961 and early 1962, some early discrepancies became apparent among the members of the CPV about the desirability of following the armed way to seize power, and on the overall strategy in the pursuit of this struggle, which began to crack their unity. During this state the elements favoring armed struggle within the CPV organized and activated their armed groups, creating both urban guerrillas and rural cells operating in different areas of the country--Falcon, Apure, Merida, Yaracuy, and Portuguesa. Most of them, however, were promptly controlled and destroyed by the armed forces.

Within the armed forces, on the other hand, a group of nationalistic military continued to seek the restoration of a military dictatorship. Frustrated by their attempts since 1958, they confronted directly the legal government, and in doing so some of the more radical military made contact and developed relations with the left. But on the whole, the democratically-leaning military supported the government without reservations, adding their efforts to the continental struggle against communist expansion.

In 1962 several military uprisings took place in different cities of Venezuela, which were immediately quashed by loyal troops. These military rebellions were led by small groups of military connected with the CPV, who had planned joint armed actions by rural and urban guerrillas; but the effort failed because of poor coordination and "the low level of development achieved

by the military left and the revolutionary movement."¹⁰ There was no active civilian participation in these military insurrections, from which it could be surmised that the people were unwilling to continue with the violence, perhaps out of fear of government retaliation. But because there was involvement by the left, the CPV and RML parties were declared politically suspended by executive order.

Operating underground from then on, and with the experience gained, the CPV organized the National Liberation Front (NLF) as well as the Armed Forces of National Liberation (AFNL), which assumed the mission of leading the people through the armed struggle to the establishment of a truly democratic and patriotic government. The country was divided (in their scheme of things) into Urban and Rural Districts under the direction of a single command, conducted by urban commandos in the cities--mainly Caracas--and by guerrilla detachments in the rural areas. These actions continued until the end of 1963 and early 1964, when the government was able to arrest the top leaders of the CPV and the RML, shattering their political-military organization. This defeat compelled them to suspend their operations briefly, while both parties reorganized their cadres by appointing to the top echelons people who had been in subordinate positions before.

By mid-1964 they resumed armed actions in urban areas, but are again neutralized by the effective intervention of police forces. As a result, a progressive weakening of revolutionary forces becomes apparent, mainly in urban areas, demoralizing their membership. The defeat in the cities leads the CPV to channel its efforts toward rural guerrilla warfare, adopting the Chinese and Vietnamese model of a protracted guerrilla warfare.¹¹ In that phase they are able to achieve some success in fighting with regular forces,

mainly in areas of the states of Falcon and Lara. In order to confront this threat, the government activates the Center for Joint Operations (CJO) and the Theaters of Operations (TO), under the control of the armed forces. Several specialized units are activated within the Army, trained in counter-guerrilla operations. The organization and the systematic and coherent employment of these agencies yielded excellent results, defeating the guerrillas and annihilating the clandestine structure of the CPV and the RML.

By 1965, without accepting its military defeat, the CPV reoriented its actions toward what they called "democratic peace," in an attempt to gain popular support and break the isolation of the left. With its armed apparatus virtually destroyed, and political organization in disarray, it was able to keep up some activity in the areas of Falcon and Portuguesa, despite most of its leaders being dead or imprisoned.

The decision to adopt the strategy of "democratic peace" led to the split between the CPV and the RML: So much so that in November 1965 the imprisoned leadership of the CPV issued a statement demanding that the defeat of the armed struggle be recognized, which is promptly rejected by some of the guerrilla factions by means of a "Manifest of Iracara." Douglas Bravo, the top guerrilla leader until then, is removed from the Politbureau of the VCP, and by May 1966, along with another group of important guerrilla leaders, they proclaim the continuation of armed struggle under the aegis of NLF-AFNL. The Cuban communist party decides to provide them some immediate support, and a landing of guerrillas takes place in Machurucuto (state of Miranda), openly supported by the Cuban regime. The Venezuelan government lodges a vigorous protest before the Organization of American States for this flagrant Cuban intervention in Venezuela.

The guerrillas find themselves ever more isolated from the political process. They try to implement the theory of the "Foco,"¹² whereby every armed rural guerrilla becomes a center of revolutionary action, in the hope that a string of military successes would lead them to expand their political influence, create a political-military crisis of national scope, and thus eventually seize power.

In February 1967, the leaders of the CPV are able to break out of their prison and resume the leadership of their party underground, adopting a "military retrenchment" in an attempt to preserve their forces, conceding the failure of armed struggle in Venezuela and initiating a non-armed political action.

In 1968 they decide to resume contact with the popular masses by participating in the presidential elections through a front party called "Union to Advance" (UPA). The election is won by Dr. Rafael Caldera of COPEI, who upon taking office decrees a policy of pacification, a skillful gesture which brings peace and relief to the civilian population. The CPV and one wing of the RML accept the pacification proposal and are rehabilitated as lawful political parties in March 1969, after almost ten years of clandestine operation. The fraction of RML that refuses pacification splits in turn into two groups: The Revolutionary Organization (RO) and Red Flag (RF), but their subversive actions shrink to a minimum and they find themselves severed from the political development in Venezuela, no longer posing a threat to democracy.

VENEZUELAN STRATEGY TO CONFRONT INSURGENCY

From the preceding chapter it can be seen that the armed struggle in Venezuela went through several stages, with some clearly delineated features.

Undoubtedly these stages were the result, on the one hand, of government actions with its armed forces that were able to counteract insurgency, and on the other hand, they reflected the domestic situation which the country was experiencing during these years.

Since the fall of dictator Perez Jimenez in January 1958 until the end of 1959, the preconditions for armed struggle become apparent. Three important factors play in this process--the confrontation between Romulo Betancourt and the left, in order to eliminate its opposition to implement his democratic project; the influence of the Cuban revolution on the Venezuelan communists, giving them ideas about a similar undertaking; and the continuing deterioration of living standards in Venezuela due to the economic crisis.

The year 1960 marks the onset of armed struggle as a political response to the repression by the government. This stage is characterized by street violence and the reaffirmation by the left of its intent to seize the government by force. The leftist party RML is created.

The period between 1961 and early 1964 is characterized by the extension of armed struggle through rural guerrillas which spring up in different areas of the country; a split is noticed in the thinking of the CPV leaders about the desirability of armed struggle and the way it is to be conducted. Several military insurrections take place, led by radicalized military joining the left. The NLF-AFNL is created in an attempt to organize for struggle, and finally the top leaders of the CPV and the RML are captured, shattering their political-military apparatus.

Between mid-1964 and late 1966, the urban guerrilla is defeated and the whole effort shifts to rural areas, adopting the protracted guerrilla warfare model, which is subsequently also defeated. A change in the leadership of the

struggle takes place, by shifting its emphasis on the achievement of "democratic peace," with the objective of gaining popular support and breaking the isolation of the left. Because of differing opinions regarding this strategy, the CPV and the RML split ranks.

The Cuban intervention takes place, Venezuela lodges its protest and denounces Cuba before the OAS, which causes further isolation of the left. The "Foco" theory is implemented.

From 1967 to the early 1970s, the left finally concedes defeat in its armed struggle in Venezuela and initiates a non-armed political action. They participate in the presidential elections of 1968, accept the pacification policy offered by the government, and are finally rehabilitated and reintegrated into the national political life.

The Venezuelan government adopted from the very beginning the position that a democracy could only be defended with the means prescribed in Venezuelan laws against the revolutionary left and its intents to seize power by force. This position was publicly stated by President Betancourt and conveyed in a letter to President John F. Kennedy.¹³ This of course created an asymmetry between the actions of the insurgents and those of the government: On the one hand, the military and the police could only act within the bounds of the law and thus found themselves restricted in their means and measures, while on the other hand the insurgents were free to act as violently as they pleased by recourse to assassination, sabotage, terrorism, etc.¹⁴ The incidents of street violence compelled the government on several occasions to lift constitutional guarantees as a means to restore law and order and give a bit more leeway to the forces of public order, but always applying the principles of humanitarian treatment. The security forces were

specifically instructed how to treat prisoners and how to refrain from firing at the citizenry. Over time this effort gave positive results, as the government began to earn popular support while the left was losing it because of its violent and indiscriminate actions.

The police forces had serious operational deficiencies which prevented them from acting in a totally effective manner. The poor reputation earned under the dictatorship affected the police rapport with the civilian population, despite the fact that the old police was deactivated and replaced by three new forces: The security police (DIGEPOL), the criminal investigation police (PTJ) and traffic police. There were discrepancies among these three forces, possibly due to professional rivalries, which made coordination and cooperation difficult. Their equipment was poor and they lacked adequate communications facilities.¹⁵

Aware of the situation, the government began to overcome these problems by modernizing and reequipping the forces between 1962 and 1964.

To this end it received support from the United States and from Chile through police missions that set out to improve urban and rural counter-insurgency capabilities as well as police-citizenry relations in order to earn the support of the people, which was accomplished, among other things, by conducting a variety of civic actions in the poorer sectors of Caracas that were normally used as hiding places for the terrorists.

At that time, the armed forces--and the Army in particular--did not have a specific doctrine or training to confront an urban or rural armed insurgency. The situations that were being experienced were totally new, and there was no precedent on which to build: Everything appeared as an enormous challenge. In 1960 the Army was called upon to counter massive violence instigated by the

left--street manifestations, acts of sabotage, arson, assaults, assassinations, sniper fire--with the police already overwhelmed by such incidents. Although the army acted in general in a fairly effective manner, it was nonetheless subject to a great deal of uncertainty and tactical misgivings, since any mistaken procedure could have caused loss of life and property by innocent bystanders. The armed forces simply were not prepared for this type of struggle.

But as the units gained experience, they drew on the lessons learned to increase their effectiveness. Also, a greater cooperation was achieved between the military and the police in conducting operations.

But government efforts to bring peace to the country were not limited to using force to curb violence. Living up to his electoral promises, President Betancourt also invested large amounts of money from the national budget to implement the land reform, to provide credits for a variety of industries in different cities, and in building educational facilities, water works and health centers--mostly in the smaller cities and towns across the country.¹⁶ He also and always motivated the military, who from the beginning had no intention to allow a communist regime to become established in Venezuela, and were determined to struggle to the end to defeat the armed insurgency. Hence a number of steps were implemented to raise the military's technical skills and living conditions.

The armed forces began acting in the counter-guerrilla struggle in 1961.¹⁷ At the beginning there were joint detachments made up by Army and National Guard units that were used to conduct operations.¹⁸ But Army units went along with their standard doctrine and organization geared for conventional war: Thus infantry operated with all its personnel and

equipment, which made it difficult to move around in the field; and artillery attempted to provide support fire for the operations.¹⁹ The whole training and educational system of the Army was geared for conventional warfare; yet in spite of this basic deficiency, the Army was able to achieve success at the tactical level thanks to the resolve and initiative of its officers and troops.

The first major counter-guerrilla operation was conducted in early 1963 in the area of the state of Falcon, involving some 3,000 soldiers. At first the local population was fearful of mistreatment, but the troops slowly eased this concern from their minds with good behavior and a limited but effective use of psychological operations.²⁰ In order to win the hearts and minds of the residents of small towns and hamlets where the guerrillas were operating, the Army began aggressive programs of civic action along with other agencies of the government, aiming to improve local living standards with better housing, literacy, farming techniques, medical, and dental care, building of roads and bridges, rural water supply works and similar efforts.²¹

By late 1963, in response to a request from President Betancourt, the United States sent a military team to Venezuela, in line with its policy of supporting democratic governments in the Americas through the "Alliance for Progress," in order to advise the Venezuela military in counter-guerrilla warfare. After reviewing the organization and doctrine of the Venezuela armed forces in confronting subversion, this team concluded that the biggest deficiency was the lack of a concept of joint operations and inadequate training of troops for this kind of warfare. Based on the team's evaluation and advice, the Venezuelan Ministry of Defense went on to create and activate a Center for Joint Operations (CJO), making it responsible for leading the war

against subversion, with the specific mission of planning, coordinating, implementing and supervising joint operations requiring the immediate deployment of the armed forces of the nation.²² At the same time a group of Army officers and military cadets were sent for training in counter-guerrilla tactics, both within Venezuela itself as well as in the Canal Zone in Panama and in Colombia.

In October 1963 the Army commissioned the first battalion specialized in counter-guerrilla operations, and by 1964 it engaged in some highly successful operations. Its organization was mimicking the tactics used by the guerrillas themselves--scant personnel, light equipment, aggressive training.²³

With the training acquired by officers and then relayed to other officers and troops, with the commissioning of the first special battalion and the Joint Center of Operations in charge, the whole counter-guerrilla war began to show some excellent results.

In order to delineate the political-military jurisdiction where the operations were to be conducted, the government--acting on the recommendations of the Joint Center of Operations and the Ministry of Defense--divided the national territory into Theaters of Operations (TO), assuming the responsibility over areas in which the guerrillas were active. Since July 1964 a total of six TO's were activated, all of them subordinate to the Joint Center for Operations, which allowed the armed forces to design the kind of organization particularly suited to attain unity of efforts in combatting subversion (see Appendices I and II).

The tactical success achieved by the special battalion led the Army to initiate a program which culminated with the creation of 13 such battalions by 1967 (with about 4,000 men). They were stationed in the different regions of

the country under the operational control of the Joint Center, ready to act in the TO's as required by the situation; and that is how armed subversion was finally defeated.

In early 1969, the newly elected President Dr. Rafael Caldera decreed amnesty for the guerrillas under a "Policy of Pacification," which offered the guerrilla groups the chance to surrender their weapons and return to legality, guaranteeing their life and reintegration into the life of the nation.²⁴ Once the desired effect was achieved, the next step was the political rehabilitation of the CPV and the RML parties.

With armed activity having come to an almost complete halt, the government decided to gradually deactivate the TO's and transform some of the special counter-guerrilla units into regular army components of artillery and paratroopers.

The pacification achieved the political defeat of subversion, since the justification for armed struggle had ceased to exist. This can be appreciated from President Caldera's statement during a press interview:

Pacification has achieved its ends, and the country has become aware of it, because all ideological currents, including those originally bent at seizing power by violence, have now been legalized and are acting within the legal political process. This has led to an exemplary form of legal, nonviolent political struggle in our cities and rural areas.²⁵

Venezuela thus closes a chapter that entailed ten years of violence, with democracy finally reasserted as the legitimate form of government. It should be pointed out that, in addition to the actions taken by the government to confront subversion--which effectively and undoubtedly led to its defeat--there were also other domestic factors which contributed to that defeat.

The lack of a dominant leader figure like Fidel Castro, around whom the Venezuelan rebels could unite and gain followers, obviously prevented the

consolidation of armed struggle in Venezuela. At the very moments when unified decisions were needed, the rebels engaged in profound splits motivated by the divergent thinking of their leaders, thus weakening their position and diluting their efforts.²⁶

The guerrillas were unable to earn the trust and support of the rural population, because most of them were university students from the cities, ignorant of the customs and idiosyncrasies of the peasants, with whom they failed to identify.²⁷ This again prevented them from developing a foothold in the local society and posed serious problems for the guerrillas. Their supplies had to come from the cities and were easily disrupted by the controls and checkpoints adopted by the armed forces.²⁸

LESSONS LEARNED BY DEMOCRACY

In Venezuela, the transition from dictatorship to democracy was accomplished violently. The ensuing political instability and economic crisis provided an opportunity for insurgency to flourish; if democracy was to be saved, insurgency had to be fought from the beginning. President Romulo Betancourt played a historical role in this process, since his clear position and resolve to defend democratic values enabled him to confront subversion openly and decisively.

Nobody was actually prepared for this struggle, and the effort had to start from scratch. As more experience was gained, new and different actions could be undertaken, greater successes could be scored, and in the end the reasons and circumstances that fed the insurgency evaporated.

This was a task and an effort performed by all. Many lessons could be drawn from this experience at all levels, with some of them being as follows:

o A democratic government must strive to invest in national development, seeking at all times to help the population achieve acceptable standards of living, by providing housing, health, education, security, and employment.

This effort must be its highest priority;

o For a democracy to survive internal warfare, it must wage that war as a democracy--which means by observing the constitution and the laws. This may impose limitations on the use of force and in the freedom of action by government agencies in charge of fighting subversion, but it will make the government legitimate in the eyes of the people, and will earn its support;

o In addition to providing a military response to insurgency, the government must always have a political way out of it, which in the case of Venezuela was the effective and successful implementation of the "pacification" program;

o The police forces must be well-organized, equipped, and imbued with the spirit of service to the community; they must not be geared toward serving particular individuals or interests, but the country as a whole;

o The armed forces must continually seek the support and sympathy of the people through well-designed campaigns;

o Cooperation and coordination in the area of intelligence and operations must be constantly promoted between the armed forces and other security agencies of the state;

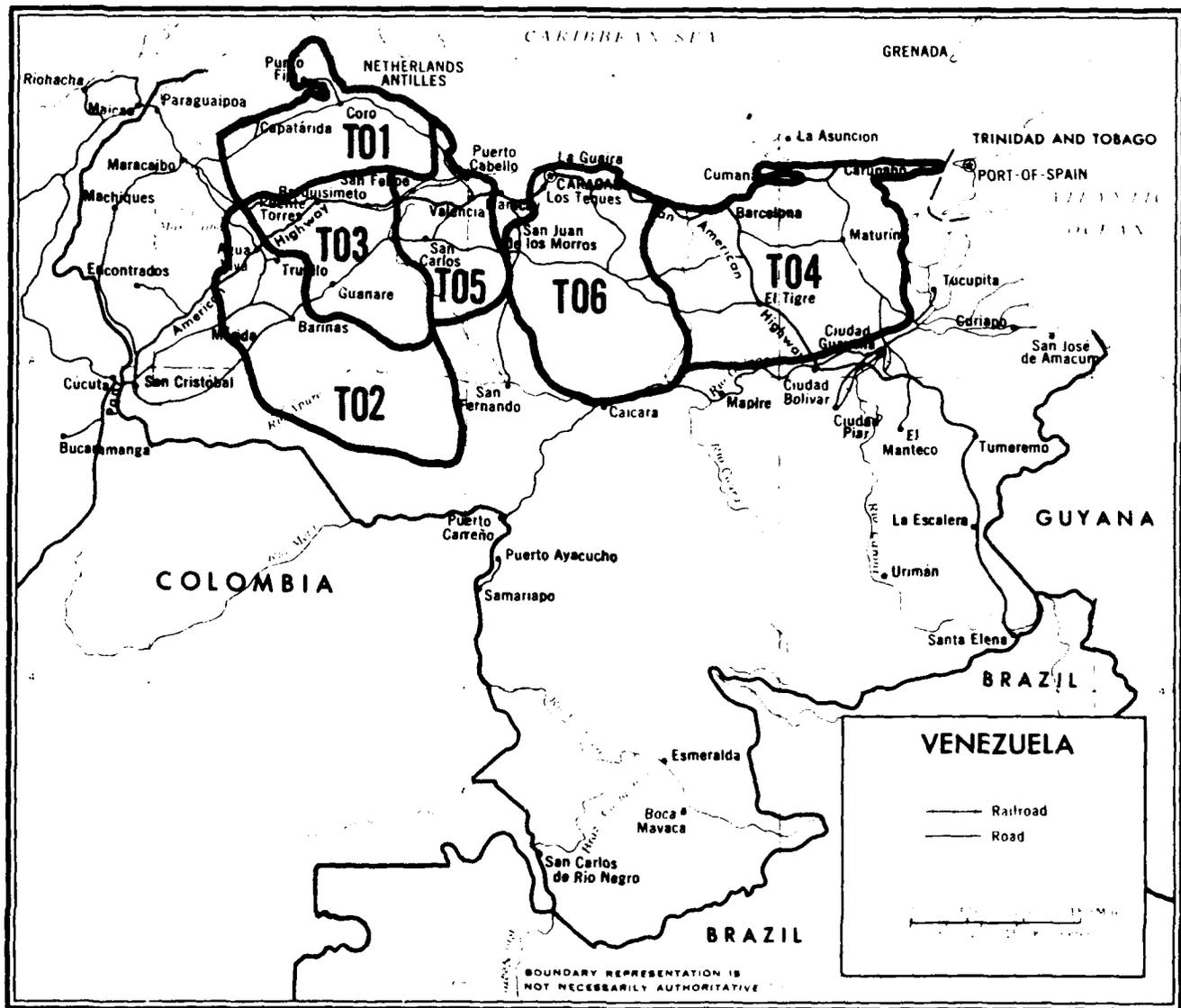
o Cooperation and exchange must be promoted with the military of other countries, sharing experiences gained in the fight against subversion, as well as maintaining within the Army a number of specialized anti-guerrilla units, with a high degree of training and preparedness; and

o Finally, there must be unity of effort in the struggle against insurgency, with a flexible organization firmly geared to the situation it must confront.

All the past efforts and all the blood shed in the defense of democracy against insurgency will be in vain if we fail to learn from this experience-- and more than learn, make use of these lessons. The people in government have the responsibility to care for the interests of the nation and its people; neglecting this sacred mission will inevitably lead us to repeat the mistakes of the past. The deeds and sacrifices of our predecessors will be for naught.

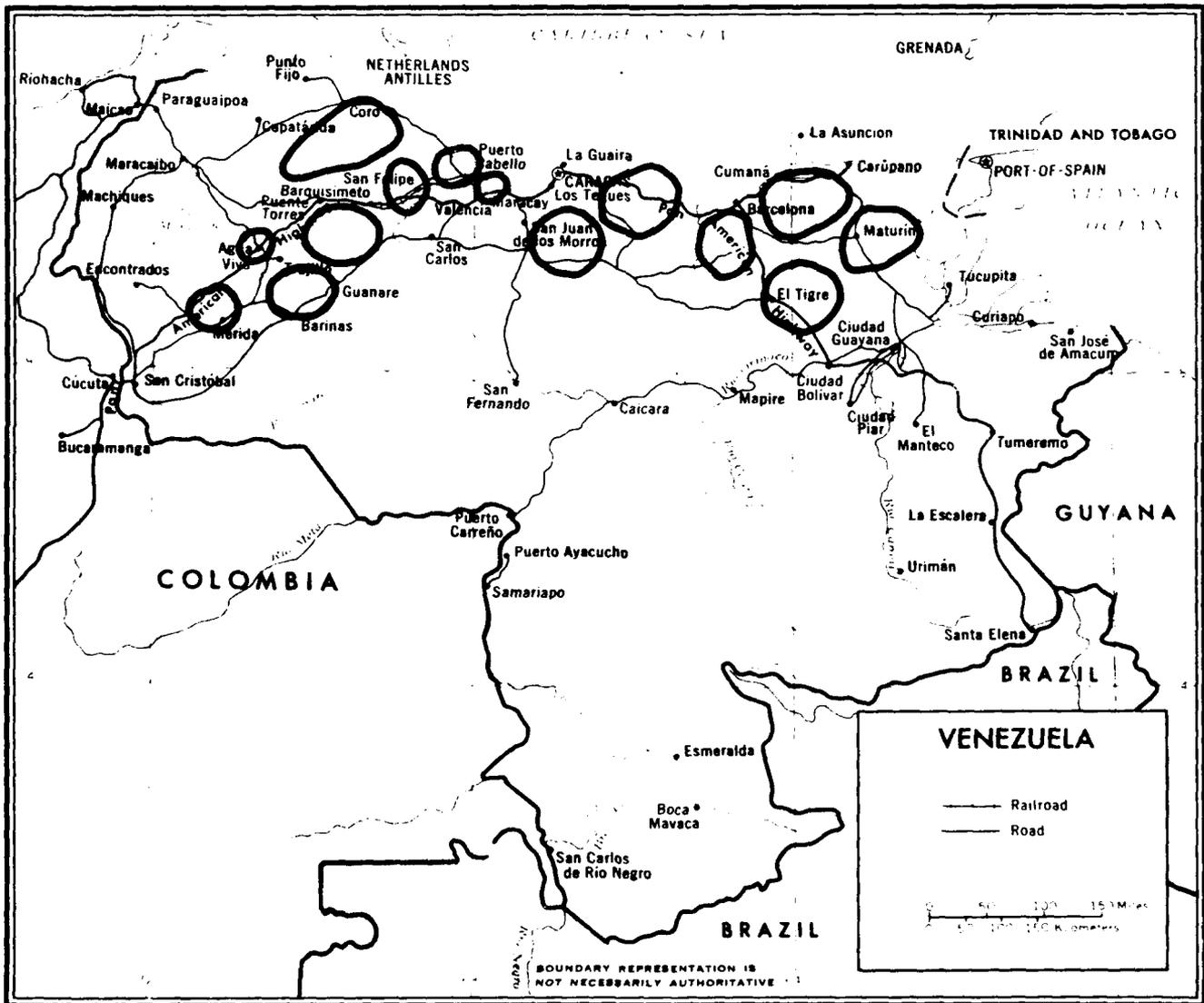
APPENDIX I

POLITICAL-MILITARY JURISDICTION OF THE DIFFERENT TO'S



APPENDIX II

GUERRILLA AREAS IN VENEZUELA, 1960-1970



ENDNOTES

¹Curso de Formacion Socio-Politica, Historia de la Lucha Armada en Venezuela, 1960-1969, 3.

²Colonel Venancio Ortega B., Insurgency in Venezuela, (Carlisle Barracks: U.S. Army War College, An Individual Study Project, 4 April 1991), 1.

³Curso de Formacion Socio-Politica, 4.

⁴President Romulo Gallegos was ousted from office in 1948.

⁵Curso de Formacion Socio-Politica, 7.

⁶Venezuelan Central Office of Information, Six Years of Aggression, Caracas, 8.

⁷Curso de Formacion Socio-Politica, 8.

⁸Low Intensity Conflict, Venezuela Case Study (Fort Leavenworth: U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 1983), LP7-12.

⁹Curso de Formacion Socio-Politica, 11.

¹⁰Ibid., 17.

¹¹Ibid., 23.

¹²Theory developed by Regis Debray in his book Revolucion en la Revolucion.

¹³Georgetown Research Project, Castro-Communist Insurgency in Venezuela (Alexandria, VA: Atlantic Research Corporation, 31 December 1964), 147.

¹⁴Ibid., 148.

¹⁵Ibid., 151.

¹⁶President Romulo Betancourt's speech delivered to Congress, 29 April 1960.

¹⁷Colonel Juan Biaggini Gutierrez et al., Los Cinco de Linea (Caracas: Direccion de Educaion del Ejercito, 4 August 1980), 102.

¹⁸Paramilitary Component of the Venezuelan Armed Forces.

¹⁹Colonel Arturo J. Castillo Machez, Mas Alla del Deber (Caracas: Ministerio de la Defensa, November 1989), 85.

²⁰Low Intensity Conflict, Venezuela Case Study, LP7-2-32.

²¹Ibid., LP7-2-46.

²²Lieutenant Colonel Reinaldo Diaz Diaz, Experiencias del Ejercito Venezolano en la Lucha Anti-Subversiva (Caracas: Escuela Superior del Ejercito, November 1979), 56.

²³Colonel Arturo J. Castillo Machez, Mas Alla del Deber, 104.

²⁴Diaz, Experiencias del Ejercito Venezolano en la Lucha Anti-Subversiva, 41.

²⁵Rafael Caldera, Habla el Presidente (Caracas: Presidencia de la Republica, 1974), 476.

²⁶Richard Weitz, "Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in Latin America, 1960-1980," Political Science Quarterly 101, no. 3 (1986): 400.

²⁷Luigi Valsalice, La Guerrilla Castrista en Venezuela y Sus Protagonistas (Caracas: Ediciones Centauro, 1979), 189.

²⁸Agustin Blanco Munoz, La Lucha Armada (Caracas: Universidad Central de Venezuela, 1982), 131.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Biaggini Gutierrez, Juan, Colonel, et al. Los Cinco de Linea. Caracas: Direccion de Educacion del Ejercito, 4 August 1980.
- Blanco Munoz, Agustin. La Lucha Armada. Caracas: Universidad Central de Venezuela, 1982.
- Caldera, Rafael. Habla el Presidente. Presidencia de la Republica, 1974.
- Castillo Machez, Arturo, Colonel. Mas Alla del Deber. Caracas: Ministerio de la Defensa, November 1989.
- Curso de Formacion Socio-Politica. Historia de la Lucha Armada en Venezuela, 1960-1969.
- Diaz Diaz, Reinaldo, Lieutenant Colonel. Experiencias del Ejercito Venezolano en la Lucha Anti-Subversiva. Caracas: Escuela Superior del Ejercito, November 1979.
- D'Jesus R., Domingo, Lieutenant Colonel. Ensenanzas Derivadas de los Encuentros Armados Durante la Lucha Anti-Guerrillera en la Decada del 60. Caracas: Escuela Superior del Ejercito, 15 October 1984.
- Georgetown Research Project. Castro-Communist Insurgency in Venezuela. Alexandria, VA: Atlantic Research Corporation, 31 December 1964.
- Gorriti, Gustavo. "Latin America's Internal Wars." Selected Readings, Course 2. Carlisle Barracks, PA: U.S. Army War College, 3 August 1992.
- Low Intensity Conflict. Venezuela Case Study. Fort Leavenworth, KS: U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 1983.
- Ortega Baptista, Venancio, Colonel. Insurgency in Venezuela. Carlisle Barracks, PA: U.S. Army War College, An Individual Study Project, 4 April 1991.
- Perez Arcay, Jacinto, Lieutenant Colonel, et al. Analisis del Problema Subversivo Venezolano. Caracas: Escuela Superior del Ejercito.
- Ramirez S., Fortunato, et al. La Subversion en Venezuela. Caracas: Escuela Superior del Ejercito, May 1971.
- Valsalice, Luigi. La Guerrilla Castrista en Venezuela y sus Protagonistas. Caracas: Ediciones Centauro, 1979.
- Venezuelan Central Office of Information. Six Years of Aggression. Caracas.
- Weitz, Richard. "Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in Latin America, 1969-1980." Political Science Quarterly 101, no. 3 (1986).