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# Hope Denied: The US Defeat of the 1965 Revolt in the Dominican Republic

By Piero Gleijeses, November 2014



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## **Hope Denied: The US Defeat of the 1965 Revolt in the Dominican Republic**

Piero Gleijeses

On 24 April 1965, young military officers rose in revolt in the Dominican Republic. It was an unusual coup, different from those that plagued Latin America. The rebels did not seek power for themselves; they wanted to reinstate the president, Juan Bosch, who had been elected in December 1962 and overthrown nine months later. Bosch's brief administration had been characterized by probity, political freedom, and the promise of social reform.

On 28 April 1965 – four days after the revolt began – US troops invaded the Dominican Republic. It was the first US military intervention in Latin America in more than three decades. A four month stalemate ensued. The rebels held downtown Santo Domingo, while the rest of the country was occupied by US troops and those of the government Washington had created. In September 1965, US officials were able to bring about a provisional government, and elections followed in June 1966. Observers and scholars have disagreed on key points: Was there the danger of a Communist takeover when Johnson sent the troops? Was the provisional government a fair compromise brokered by Washington's patient diplomacy or was it forced by Washington on the besieged rebels? Were the June 1966 elections free?

Most studies of US policy during the crisis were written in the decade that followed it. They can be roughly divided in two groups: a liberal interpretation critical of the decision to invade, arguing that it was based on an overestimation of the Communist danger; and a conservative interpretation supportive of the invasion, arguing that the danger of a Communist takeover was real. These studies suffered from two weaknesses: a poor knowledge of the Dominican side of the story, and the dearth of the US documents, which were still classified.<sup>1</sup>

Over the last two decades the US government has declassified a mass of documents that illuminate the US response to the revolt. But except for Eric Chester and Peter Felten, scholars have only scratched the surface of these new documents, and none – including Chester and Felten – has attempted to integrate an analysis of US policy toward the revolt with a serious

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<sup>1</sup> See Piero Gleijeses, "The United States Invasion of the Dominican Republic, 1961-1966," in Ben Winson, ed., *Oxford Bibliographies on Line in Latin American Studies*, Oxford University Press, 2011, [www.oxfordbibliographies.com](http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com)



examination of what was happening in the Dominican Republic.<sup>2</sup>

A nuanced grasp of events on the ground in the Dominican Republic combined with an analysis of the recently declassified US documents helps clarify the Johnson administration's policy during the crisis. A deeper understanding of the Dominican revolt sheds light on whether there was indeed a communist threat, and the study of the US documents helps us understand what led to Washington's overestimation of the threat. Furthermore, by combining the two sides of the story – the Dominican and the US – we can better assess Johnson's policy in the months that followed the arrival of the US troops, and we can see that the settlement brought about by the United States in September 1965 was not a compromise but a *diktat* and that the elections the following June were fundamentally unfree.

This essay, which is based on my recent book, *La Esperanza Desgarrada*, relies both on the declassified US documents and Dominican primary sources, as well as interviews with Dominican and American protagonists. Documents from the British, French and Canadian archives enrich the analysis.<sup>3</sup>

### **“A Sick, Destroyed Nation”**

The 1965 revolt brought to center stage a small Caribbean republic where, until 1916, civil war and dictatorship had been the rule, democracy and honest government the exception. In 1916, the United States invaded the country. The eight-year occupation paved the way for the dictatorship of Rafael Trujillo, who ruled the country with an iron fist from 1930 until his

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<sup>2</sup> Eric Chester, *Rag-Tags, Scum, Riff-Raff, and Commies: The U.S. Intervention in the Dominican Republic, 1965-66*, New York, 2001; Peter Felten, “The 1965-1966 United States Intervention in the Dominican Republic,” Ph.D. Diss., University of Texas at Austin, 1995; Peter Felten, “Yankee, Go Home and Take Me with You: Lyndon Johnson and the Dominican Republic,” in H.W. Brands, *The Foreign Policies of Lyndon Johnson: Beyond Vietnam*, College Station, 1999, pp. 98-144; Peter Felten, “Electing Balaguer: Dominican Politics and the U.S. Military Intervention, 1965-1966,” paper presented at LASA, Sept. 2001. See also Alan McPherson, “Misled by Himself: What the Johnson Tapes Reveal about the Dominican Intervention of 1965,” *Latin American Research Review*, 38: 2 (June 2003): 127-46; Alan McPherson, *Yankee No! Anti-Americanism in U.S. - Latin American Relations*, Cambridge, Mass., 2003, pp. 117-62; Victor Grimaldi, *La invasión norteamericana*, Santo Domingo, 2005; LeeAnna Keith, “The Imperial Mind and U.S. Intervention in the Dominican Republic, 1961-1966,” Ph.D. Diss., University of Connecticut, 1999.

<sup>3</sup> *La Esperanza Desgarrada. La rebelión dominicana de 1965 y la invasión norteamericana*, Santo Domingo, 2012, is a thoroughly revised edition of my *The Dominican Crisis: The 1965 Constitutionalist Revolt and American Intervention*, Baltimore, 1978.

assassination in May 1961. In 1960 the United States, which had long embraced Trujillo, turned against him. His regime was tottering, increasingly challenged at home and abroad. In Cuba, Fidel Castro was defying the United States, and the fear of a second Cuba haunted Washington. A continuation of Trujillo's rule, US officials feared, might lead to a popular explosion and a Dominican Castro. Eisenhower would have preferred that Trujillo's departure be voluntary, but the dictator refused to oblige; therefore, the CIA and a group of Dominican plotters planned his assassination. At the last moment, in April 1961, the fledgling Kennedy administration drew back, but it was too late: the Dominican plotters acted. On 30 May 1961, Trujillo was killed.<sup>4</sup>

John Martin, Kennedy's special envoy to the Dominican Republic, wrote a few months later, "This is a sick, destroyed nation. Trujillo was not an old-fashioned Latin caudillo. His was a true totalitarian state. It lasted 31 years. A whole generation has known nothing else. Trujillo destroyed a *people*. ... This should be viewed as a nation ravaged by a 30-years war, to be occupied and reconstituted."<sup>5</sup>

Following Trujillo's assassination, there were "only three possibilities," President Kennedy said: "a decent democratic regime, a continuation of the Trujillo regime [led by the dictator's son], or a Castro regime. We ought to aim at the first, but we really can't renounce the second until we are sure that we can avoid the third."<sup>6</sup> By January 1962, it seemed that Kennedy had got what he wanted: the Trujillos had left, Trujillo's puppet president, Joaquín Balaguer, had been forced to step down, and a Council of State had taken over to lead the country to free elections. The members of the Council belonged to the Dominican upper class, a group that sought to reclaim what it considered its rightful place – ruling the country, under the protection of the United States. Their servility toward the United States worried even US officials. The Council, US Consul General John Hill reported, was "over-friendly to and dependent on US in this age of nationalism."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> The best account of the conspiracy is Juan Daniel Balcácer, *Trujillo: El tiranicidio de 1961*, Santo Domingo, 2008.

<sup>5</sup> "Dominican Republic - Martin Report," p. 89, President's Office Files (hereafter POF), box 115a, John F. Kennedy Library, Boston, Mass. (hereafter JFKL). Emphasis in the original.

<sup>6</sup> Kennedy, quoted by Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., *A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House*, Boston, 1965, p. 769.

<sup>7</sup> Hill to Department of State (hereafter DOS), 4 March 1962, Central Files, 611.39/3-462, Record Group (hereafter

The Council sought US support to purge the military: “it intended to proceed with the trials of several military men accused of killing civilians under Trujillo and since,” writes Martin, whom Kennedy had appointed US ambassador to the Dominican Republic.<sup>8</sup> But Washington refused to help.

The searing impact of Castro’s successful defiance caused the Kennedy administration to magnify the threat of a second Cuba in Latin America.<sup>9</sup> To anxious US officials, the Dominican Republic seemed particularly vulnerable. The country had been ravaged by Trujillo, it was close to Cuba, and the Council of State, Martin reported, was “a tottering, unpopular, do-nothing government.” The Kennedy administration believed that the Dominican armed forces were the shield that would protect the country from the Castro-Communist menace. “We decided I should tell [Council] President [Rafael] Bonnelly that while we were in complete sympathy with his desire to purge the armed forces of Trujillistas,” Martin wrote, “he could not count on United States help at this time on this matter.” The Council understood. A senior US intelligence officer noted in 1963 that “the military and police machine built by Trujillo is still largely intact.”<sup>10</sup>

Washington demanded action, however, against the Dominican Far Left: the Castroite 14 of June (1J4) and two minuscule Communist parties, one pro-Soviet, the other pro-Chinese. Martin writes that he urged the Council of State to use:

[M]ethods once used by the police in Chicago. There, if a policeman saw an ex-convict or a known hoodlum on the street, he picked him up “on suspicion,” took him to the station, held him the legal limit, then released him – only to raid his flat that night, rout him out of bed, and start all over; time after time harassing him; hoping finally to drive him out of town. It was illegal detention, and often worse – prisoners were sometimes beaten. It is one of the gravest abuses of a citizen’s constitutional rights...

Now, trying to support a faltering Caribbean government that the

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RG) 59, National Archives, United States (hereafter NA-USA).

<sup>8</sup> John Martin, *Overtaken by Events: The Dominican Crisis from the Fall of Trujillo to the Civil War*, Garden City, NY, 1966, p. 114.

<sup>9</sup> The best study of Kennedy’s policy toward Latin America is Stephen Rabe, *The Most Dangerous Area in the World*, Chapel Hill, 1999.

<sup>10</sup> Martin, *Overtaken*, pp. 94, 115; Hughes to SecState, 30 Oct. 1963, National Security Council Country File (NSFCF), box 67, JFKL.

Castro/Communists sought to overthrow, I favored such methods. The alternative simply seemed unacceptable – a leftist takeover, a military takeover in reaction, or slaughter in the streets. Just the same, I knew that bad means tend to corrupt good ends. And I remembered Adlai Stevenson’s denouncing Senator McCarthy’s methods of attacking communism: “We begin to resemble the thing we hate.”<sup>11</sup>

Martin’s words reflected the paranoia of the Kennedy administration: the Dominican Far Left was very weak; there was not the least possibility that it could seize power. Even more, Martin’s words reflected the administration’s warped view of “democracy” for the countries of Latin America: the Communists must be persecuted because of their ideas, even if they didn’t violate the law.

### **The Presidency of Juan Bosch**

In December 1962, Juan Bosch won the country’s first free elections in thirty-eight years. He rejected Martin’s insistent demands that he employ the methods used “by the police in Chicago” against the Dominican Far Left. Under Bosch no Dominican was deported, none was arrested for his or her political beliefs, Dominicans could travel abroad freely – even to Cuba! – and the police behaved with unprecedented restraint. Bosch sincerely believed that “a democratic government cannot be democratic for some and dictatorial for others.”<sup>12</sup>

US officials were wary. “There is no evidence that Bosch is himself a Communist,” the CIA said.<sup>13</sup> But how to explain, then, his refusal to move against the Dominican Communists? “I believe,” Martin wrote, “that during the campaign, before he was sure of victory, Bosch had reached an understanding with certain Communists...; that, as President, he overestimated their strength and so feared then unreasonably; and that, possibly, he lived quite literally in terror that one or another of the Castro/Communists would kill him if he double-crossed them.”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Martin, *Overtaken*, p. 100.

<sup>12</sup> Bosch, quoted by Theodore Draper, “Bosch and Communism,” *New Leader*, 14 Oct. 1963, p. 10.

<sup>13</sup> CIA, “President Bosch and Internal Security in the Dominican Republic,” 7 June 1963, NSFCF, box 66, JFKL.

<sup>14</sup> Martin, *Overtaken*, p. 465. Also Martin to DOS, “Bosch’s First Two Months,” 23 Apr. 1963, in Martin to Dungan, 26 Apr. 1963, NSFCF, box 66, JFKL; Martin to DOS, “Juan Bosch’s Hundred Days Have Ended,” 11 June 1963, *ibid.*; Martin to DOS, “Six Months in Quandry,” 22 Sept. 1963, POF, box 115a, JFKL.

The director of the Bureau of Intelligence and Research of the State Department (INR), Thomas Hughes, agreed with Martin that Bosch “steadfastly and stubbornly refused to take a strong stand against communists and extremists.” Whereas Martin saw only opportunism and fear, Hughes believed that Bosch “acted partly on the basis of democratic principle, partly from fear of the left, and partly from his belief that the Communists could be more effectively handled if they were operative [sic] in the open.” But the bottom line was the same: Bosch was soft on Communism.<sup>15</sup>

The CIA, the White House and the State Department agreed: Bosch was “remarkably tolerant” of the Castro-Communists and this represented a grave threat. “The Communist danger in the Dominican Republic is not immediate but potential. It is none the less serious,” the CIA warned, and with Bosch it would grow.<sup>16</sup>

The irony was that the Dominican Far Left was deeply hostile to Bosch, whom it considered “a pawn of Yankee imperialism.”<sup>17</sup> The only party of the Far Left that had some strength, the Castroite 1J4, was planning to start armed warfare to overthrow Bosch.<sup>18</sup>

In his presidential campaign Bosch had pledged to stamp out corruption and institute social reforms. Even Ambassador Martin, not a friend of Bosch, conceded: “The indisputable fact [is] that his brief Administration may have been the most honest in Dominican history, if not in Latin America.”<sup>19</sup> In August 1963, Bosch began implementing the agrarian reform that he had promised, but he was overthrown the following month – on 25 September – by the armed forces, with the enthusiastic approval of the Dominican upper class. Bosch’s war on corruption had threatened what they held most dear: their wealth.

There is no doubt that at the time of his ouster Bosch’s popularity was declining. The population was disappointed. They had expected a dramatic and immediate change in their living standards. But it was not they who overthrew Bosch. Bosch did not fall because his reforms were too timid or too slow; he fell because the military leaders and the upper class feared that he was

<sup>15</sup> Hughes to SecState, 30 Oct. 1963, NSFCF, box 67, JFKL.

<sup>16</sup> CIA, “President Bosch and Internal Security in the Dominican Republic,” 7 June 1963, *ibid.*, box 66; CIA, “President Bosch and Internal Security in the Dominican Republic,” 14 June 1963, *ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> Interview with Fafa Taveras, a member of the 1J4 leadership.

<sup>18</sup> See Gleijeses, *La Esperanza*, pp. 180-85.

<sup>19</sup> Martin, *Overtaken*, p. 716.

fulfilling his promises.<sup>20</sup> The decision that the Kennedy administration had taken a year earlier – that the Council of State could not purge the military because doing so would weaken the country’s shield against Communism – meant that Bosch had two choices. He could break his promises, implement no reforms, and perhaps maintain his hold on power. Or he could implement reforms and be ousted by the military which would never countenance them. This was the tragedy.

### **The Triumvirate**

The reaction of the Kennedy administration to the coup was ambivalent. US officials had no regrets about the overthrow of Bosch; but they worried that it could have dangerous consequences in the hemisphere, encouraging “the establishment of military regimes in numerous other countries,” like Venezuela and Honduras. They feared that “this would ultimately benefit only one group – the Communists and Fidel Castro,” the French ambassador reported from Washington.”<sup>21</sup> US officials were also concerned that the *golpistas*, who had established a civilian government, the Triumvirate, had “given cabinet jobs to a good many discredited, repudiated politicians, ... [including] despicable and dangerous adventurers and thieves.” Washington worried that if the new government was exceedingly corrupt and inept, it would cause unrest which would be crushed with “increasingly repressive” tactics.<sup>22</sup> This would lead more recruits to the Castroites’ ranks.

“‘I take it we don’t want Bosch back,’ Kennedy told Martin. “‘No, Mr. President.’ ‘Why not?’ Kennedy asked. ‘Because he isn’t a President,’” Martin replied.<sup>23</sup> Bosch had rejected the methods of the Chicago police and had refused to repress the Communists. Therefore, Kennedy

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<sup>20</sup> For contrasting assessments of the Bosch presidency, see Howard Wiarda, “The Aftermath of the Trujillo Dictatorship: The Emergence of a Pluralist Political System in the Dominican Republic,” Ph.D. Diss., University of Florida, 1965 and Gleijeses, *La Esperanza*.

<sup>21</sup> Quotations from Hughes to Acting SecState, 25 Sept. 1963, NSFCF, box 67, JFKL and Alphand to Quai d’Orsay, 30 Sept. 1963, Amérique 1952-63, République Dominicaine, box 26, Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, La Courneuve (hereafter MAE followed by box number).

<sup>22</sup> US embassy Santo Domingo to SecState, 27 Sept. 1963, in Dungan to Kennedy, 28 Sept. 1963, POF, box 115a, JFKL

<sup>23</sup> Martin, *Overtaken*, p. 601.

approved Martin's suggestion: "The easiest course to follow here is recognition after considerable delay and hard bargaining."<sup>24</sup> The *golpistas* would have to pledge to allow Bosch's Partido Revolucionario Dominicano (PRD) to participate in the government – without Bosch, of course.

In late November 1963 the Castroite 1J4 launched armed struggle against the Triumvirate. Its attempt was so feeble that it was crushed in less than a month by the weak Dominican armed forces, which took advantage of the opportunity to murder the party's leader, the charismatic Manolo Tavárez, after he had surrendered.<sup>25</sup> This crippled the only substantive party of the Far Left. The Triumvirate felt safe. Its confidence grew when, on 14 December 1963, the United States recognized it. Washington had been frightened by the actions of the 1J4 guerrillas. "The Dominican press kept saying the guerrillas had 'opened a fourth front,' or 'a fifth front,' or 'a sixth front,'" Martin later explained. "'Front' probably meant three or four ragged men in hiding, but it sounded ominous in cables and public communiqués. Who could be sure it wasn't – Castro had started, some say, with eleven men to take Cuba."<sup>26</sup> US officials were encouraged by the military's selection of a new president of the Triumvirate, Donald Reid Cabral, a scion of the Dominican upper class, whom they considered competent and relatively honest. They felt at ease with Reid. "His father's Scottish origins are evident in his physical make up – reddish, sandy hair, very white skin and penetrating blue eyes," the Canadian ambassador reported.<sup>27</sup> Reid's English was excellent, and he was lavish in his praise of the United States.

The Triumvirate reversed Bosch's policies: it was corrupt, authoritarian, and reactionary. "Political cynicism, obstruction to social reform, robbing of the Treasury, falsified budgets, contract-fixing and the securing of large fortunes by barefaced and impertinent dishonesty is, I fear," the British chargé, Stafford Campbell, wrote, "what the Triumvirate regime will be chiefly

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<sup>24</sup> Martin to SecState, 27 Sept. 1963, *ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> See "10o Aniversario de la liquidación de las guerrillas de Tavárez Justo," *Ahora* (Santo Domingo), 524 (26 Nov. 1973): 2-72; Gleijeses, *La Esperanza*, pp. 200-210; Roberto Cassá, "Manuel Aurelio Tavárez Justo. Los frentes guerrilleros de 1963," *Clio, Revista Dominicana de la Historia*, no. 186, July-Dec. 2013, pp. 215-26.

<sup>26</sup> Martin, *Overtaken*, p. 631.

<sup>27</sup> Canadian embassy Caracas, 23 Feb. 1965, RG 25, box 10097, Bibliothèque et Archives Canada/Library and Archives Canada (hereafter box number, Canada). See also Gleijeses, *La Esperanza*, pp. 130, 212-14.

remembered for.”<sup>28</sup> While the country descended into an orgy of corruption, a plot was being hatched by officers who wanted to return Bosch to power and restore the 1963 Constitution. They would be known as the Constitutionals.

### The Movimiento Enriquillo

It is difficult to pinpoint the exact moment when the conspiracy began.<sup>29</sup> On 25 September 1963, a few minutes after the coup, Lt. Col. Rafael Fernández Domínguez, the director of the army’s Military Academy, was already plotting against the generals who had overthrown Bosch. But Fernández Domínguez could count only on a handful of officers, most of whom were his subordinates at the academy. The *golpistas* acted swiftly: in mid-October eighteen “*académicos*” – officers serving at the academy or recently graduated from it – were cashiered, and Fernández Domínguez was dispatched to Spain as military attaché.<sup>30</sup>

Even abroad, Fernández Domínguez continued to plot. He used every possible means to keep in touch with his men, exhorting them to action. In Santo Domingo, the “Gas Station Group” was formed, made up of the *académicos* who had been cashiered in October; they convened at a gas station run by one of them. It was to be the crucible of the military conspiracy, at every stage the movement’s purest, most resolute element.

With the passing of the months the *Movimiento Enriquillo* (this was the name of the conspiracy) gained adherents and a leader emerged who would be the representative of Fernández Domínguez in the Dominican Republic, Lt. Col. Miguel Angel Hernando Ramírez, a

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<sup>28</sup> Campbell to Stewart, “The April Coup and the Ensuing Civil War,” 18 May 1965, FO 71/179337, National Archives, United Kingdom (hereafter NA-UK).

<sup>29</sup> My sources on the conspiracy are interviews with PRD leaders Juan Bosch, José Francisco Peña Gómez, Rafael Molina Ureña, Antonio Martínez Francisco, Máximo Lovatón Pittaluga, Manuel Ledesma Pérez; with the Constitutionalist military Lt.Col Hernando Ramírez, Major Manuel Núñez Noguerras, Lt. Manuel García Germán, Lt. Lorenzo Sención Silverio, Lt. Ernesto González y González, Sergeant Polonio Pierret. See also Secretaría de Estado de las Fuerzas Armadas, *Guerra de Abril: Inevitabilidad de la historia*, Santo Domingo, 2005, esp. pp. 51-67; Arlette Fernández, ed., *Coronel Rafael Fernández Domínguez, fundador del movimiento constitucionalista*, Santo Domingo, 1981; Héctor Lachapelle, ed., *Ideario del Coronel Fernández Domínguez 1934-1965*, Santo Domingo, 2002; Jesús de la Rosa, *La Revolución de Abril de 1965*, Santo Domingo, 2011, pp. 67-75; Nelson Méndez Batista et al., *La actuación de los sargentos en la Jefatura de Abril, 1965*, Santo Domingo, 2012; Hamlet Hermann, *Caamaño: biografía de una época*, Santo Domingo, 2013, pp. 70-101.

<sup>30</sup> *Listín Diario* (Santo Domingo), 18 Oct. 1963, p. 5.



respected officer. It was he who maintained contact with the representatives of Bosch in the Dominican Republic, the former president of the Chamber of Deputies Rafael Molina Ureña, and José Francisco Peña Gómez, secretary of press and propaganda of Bosch's party, the PRD.

While Hernando Ramírez and his friends plotted, the country's military leaders looted the national treasury and "fought amongst themselves like tigers"<sup>31</sup> for the spoils. The strongest of them was General Elías Wessin, head of the Armed Forces Training Center (CEFA). Based at San Isidro, ten miles east of the capital, the CEFA had 2,000 soldiers, all three dozen of the country's tanks and its best heavy weapons. It was a Pretorian Guard and the main support of Reid Cabral.

In early 1965, Reid Cabral purged many senior officers who had clashed with Wessin. From then on, Wessin was the strongman and his power extended beyond the CEFA. The Nineteen of November Air Base, by far the most powerful of the country's three air bases, was also at San Isidro, a few hundred yards from the CEFA; it included a group of officers who looked at Wessin as their leader. For General Juan de los Santos Céspedes, chief of staff of the Air Force and commander of the Nineteen of November, Wessin was a dangerous neighbor.

Meanwhile, Reid Cabral was preparing to win the presidential elections, scheduled for September 1965. "His following is practically non-existent," British chargé Campbell reported,<sup>32</sup> but this did not matter because the elections would not be free. Bosch, who was in exile in Puerto Rico, would not be allowed to participate. Nor would Balaguer, the last puppet president of Trujillo. Balaguer was also in exile, but he was the country's most popular politician after Bosch, and he led, from New York, the Partido Reformista, the country's strongest political party after the PRD. Reid lacked popular support, but he had an exceptional champion: General Wessin.

The military purge that strengthened Wessin won new converts to the *Movimiento Enriquillo*. There was now wide agreement within the officer corps that only force could stop the general. Henceforth many officers who previously had been reluctant would accept the Constitutionals' advances. The seemingly intractable economic crisis that afflicted the country,

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<sup>31</sup> Campbell to Stewart, "The Revolt in Retrospect," 13 Sept. 1965, FO 371/179342, NA-UK. (Hereafter Campbell, "Revolt")

<sup>32</sup> Campbell to Slater, 7 Apr. 1965, FO 371/179329, NA-UK.

the rising hostility of the urban population to the Triumvirate, and the growing popularity of Bosch also fostered the growth of the movement. The excessive corruption of the senior military leaders irritated many junior officers who were aware that, for the population, every man in uniform was a thief.

But what the movement gained in numbers it lost in cohesion. Many of the latecomers preferred a military junta to the reinstatement of Bosch. The original Constitutionals, centered around Hernando Ramírez, became a minority within the movement they had created. Yet they retained control. Their prestige was great, and they were the heart of the conspiracy.

The plotters' main strength were two of the three elite battalions of the army and the army's artillery unit – 2,300 soldiers in camps a few miles north of the capital. The plotters believed that the third elite battalion of the army, where they had many supporters, would join them once the revolt had begun. The rest of the army – about 9,000 – was scattered throughout the country in small units of 200-300 poorly armed and poorly trained men.

The *Plan Enriquillo* – this was the plan of the conspiracy – was based on several premises: surprise and speed, the opportunism of the military leaders who did not belong to the movement, and the antipathy that many of them felt for Wessin. Hernando Ramírez and his friends knew that Wessin was inept and irresolute. Alone, he would not dare to act. And they were confident that he would be alone: neither the Air Force nor the Navy would want to defend a regime whose main beneficiary, within the armed forces, was Wessin.

The conspirators wanted no popular revolt. The military, not the population, would overthrow Reid Cabral. Yet the people had an important role to play: the PRD would exhort the population to demonstrate in the streets in favor of the return of Bosch to power. Their enthusiasm would sway many officers who were on the fence.

Hernando Ramírez and his officers predicted a rapid victory. A few bursts of gunfire would suffice. A few hours after the outbreak of the revolt a plane would take off from the Dominican Republic and another would land. In the first would be Wessin, in the second Bosch.

US officials had no inkling that military officers were plotting to return Bosch to the presidency. They considered the Dominican officers to be corrupt opportunists with no desire to

return the incorruptible Juan Bosch to power. And without military support the PRD was impotent. “Be realistic,” embassy officials told those few PRD leaders with whom they maintained contact. Reid Cabral enjoyed the support of the United States and of Wessin. “Accept the inevitable,” they urged. “Support the candidacy of Reid Cabral for president of the Republic.” By listening to reason and abandoning Bosch, the party would prosper. Reid Cabral “is enjoying 100 percent support from the Americans,” the British chargé commented.<sup>33</sup>

The United States – and Reid Cabral – knew that officers were plotting, but they were not worried by what they believed were a myriad of small, inconsequential threats. “The golpe was our daily bread,” Reid Cabral later remarked.<sup>34</sup> Without haste or fear, he took some precautionary measures. In the third week of April 1965 a few junior officers linked to the *Movimiento Enriquillo* were cashiered. On 21 April, Hernando Ramírez decided that the insurrection would begin on Monday 26 April, but if the Triumvirate acted against any more members of the conspiracy the revolt would commence “at once.”<sup>35</sup>

### **The Constitutionalist Uprising**

On the morning of 24 April the army chief of staff, General Marcos Antonio Rivera Cuesta, went to Army Headquarters where he had summoned four officers who belonged to the *Movimiento Enriquillo*. He did not know that Army Headquarters was a stronghold of the plotters and that the officer in charge of administrative services at headquarters, Captain Mario Peña Taveras, was one of the staunchest and most enterprising of the Constitutionlists. Rivera Cuesta arrested the four officers. Then he was immediately arrested by Peña Taveras. It was noon, the Constitutionalist revolt had begun.<sup>36</sup>

The *Plan Enriquillo* had posited that at the outbreak of the revolt the rebel troops would enter the capital. But this did not happen. Many hours were needed – until 9:00PM – to

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<sup>33</sup> Quotations from interview with PRD leader Martínez Francisco and from Campbell to Slater, 7 Apr. 1965, FO 371/179329, NA-UK. Also interviews with PRD leaders Peña Gómez, Molina Ureña, Lovatón Pittaluga, Ledesma Pérez and Enriquillo del Rosario.

<sup>34</sup> Interview with Reid Cabral.

<sup>35</sup> Interview with Hernando Ramírez.

<sup>36</sup> Gleijeses, *La Esperanza*, pp. 277-80; Méndez Batista et al., *La actuación de los sargentos*, pp. 127-34.

overcome the objections of those officers who at the moment of truth wanted to draw back.<sup>37</sup>

Meanwhile, at the Nineteen of November Air Base General de los Santos Céspedes met with a group of senior aides. Like the Americans, they could not imagine that Dominican officers would rebel to return Bosch to power – their goal must be a military junta. The prospect was not unwelcome: the fall of Reid would weaken Wessin.<sup>38</sup> Therefore, at 7:00PM, de los Santos phoned Hernando Ramírez, and they agreed that the next morning a representative of the Nineteen of November would go to the rebel camps to seek a mutually acceptable substitute for the Triumvirate. He sent one of his officers, Colonel Pedro Benoit, to inform Wessin that the Air Force was going to negotiate with the rebels about creating a military junta. Wessin responded with irritation but did nothing.<sup>39</sup> At the same time – why burn bridges prematurely? – de los Santos called Reid to assure him that the Air Force was loyal and would attack the rebel camps the following day.<sup>40</sup>

Reid Cabral remained confident. The police controlled the capital. With the exception of the rebel troops, all the country's military units were pledging loyalty. Strangely, Wessin did not inform him of the real stance of the Nineteen of November.<sup>41</sup>

The US embassy was as blind as Reid. The reports of the chargé, William Connett (Ambassador Tapley Bennett was in the United States), exuded confidence. “No material change in situation at midnight,” he concluded at the end of the day. “AIRATT [Air attaché] has twice been assured by Air Force Chief of Staff de los Santos that Air Force [sees] no cause for concern. Embassy source has just called with report that Wessin talking confidently of ability control situation.”<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Interviews with Hernando Ramírez, Núñez Noguerras, and Sención Silverio. Also Gleijeses, *La Esperanza*, pp. 290-96.

<sup>38</sup> Interview with Colonel Pedro Benoit, who was present.

<sup>39</sup> Interviews with Benoit and Wessin.

<sup>40</sup> Interviews with Hernando Ramírez and Reid Cabral,

<sup>41</sup> Interview with Reid Cabral.

<sup>42</sup> Connett to SecState, 25 Apr. 1965, FOIA.

## The Fall of Reid Cabral

In the early hours of April 25 the rebel troops entered the capital without meeting any resistance. Soon the streets were swarming with crowds shouting, exulting, united in their opposition to the Triumvirate and their support for the military coup. They yelled, “We want Juan Bosch!”<sup>43</sup> Reid Cabral finally understood that he was alone. He turned to the US embassy. He wanted the embassy to convince the military leaders to crush the revolt. Connett refused. He told Washington that the embassy believed that it could do nothing for Reid Cabral. Washington agreed.<sup>44</sup>

US officials liked Reid Cabral, but not enough to risk plunging the country into civil war. What for? Like de los Santos, the embassy was convinced that the rebels’ goal was a military junta, and this would not threaten US interests.

Betrayed by his generals, abandoned by the Americans, Reid stepped down. The rebels occupied the Presidential Palace without bloodshed.

It was in the palace that they received Colonel Benoit, sent by de los Santos to discuss the creation of a military junta. The meeting lasted about an hour, with Hernando Ramírez as the rebels’ spokesman. The debate between Benoit and Hernando Ramírez was about nothing less than the future of the Dominican Republic. Benoit argued that the real issue was not whether the overthrow of Bosch had been justified. Perhaps it had been a mistake. But it had happened, and the Air Force had participated in the coup. To demand now that it accept the return of Bosch meant to threaten the interests of the Air Force and seek a rupture within the armed forces. Why? To reestablish a civilian to the presidency? Better to establish a military junta that would lead the country to elections.<sup>45</sup>

Hernando Ramírez countered that it was essential to return Bosch to the presidency because he had been freely elected and illegally removed. If Benoit – and the Nineteen of November Air base he represented – refused to accept the legitimacy of Bosch’s 20 December

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<sup>43</sup> *El Caribe* (Santo Domingo), 26 Apr. 1965, p. 9.

<sup>44</sup> “Chronology of Telephone Conversations on Dominican Republic Coup,” 25 Apr. 1965, National Security File, National Security Council History, Dominican Crisis 1965, box 7 (hereafter NSC with box number), Lyndon B. Johnson Library, Austin, Texas (hereafter LBJL).

<sup>45</sup> Interviews with Hernando Ramírez and Benoit. Their accounts coincide.

1962 election, how could Hernando Ramírez trust they would support free elections at any time?

It was a clash between two visions of Dominican reality: Hernando Ramírez represented a new, constitutional and democratic future; Benoit voiced the traditional view, in which military might triumphed.

It was a dialogue of the deaf. Benoit left the palace. Shortly after his departure, at approximately 2:00PM, the former president of the Chamber of Deputies, Molina Ureña was sworn in as provisional president until Bosch returned to the country, Bosch's return seemed imminent. A journalist who that afternoon visited the former president in his apartment in San Juan, Puerto Rico, wrote that Bosch expected to return to the Dominican Republic "the next day, perhaps even this same night. He was awaiting a military aircraft from the Dominican Republic to carry him back."<sup>46</sup>

The plane never arrived. Instead, at 4:00PM de los Santos' planes strafed the Presidential Palace.

### **The Reaction of the United States**

Washington was stunned by the revolt. A few days after it began, President Lyndon Johnson asked Defense Secretary Robert McNamara: "Preceding the Saturday take over, did anybody ever tell you or did you ever envision that this was a very explosive thing?" McNamara replied, "The answer is definitely no, Mr. President."<sup>47</sup> However, the administration quickly decided that it would be better to risk plunging the country into civil war than to allow Bosch's return to the presidency. At 5 pm on 25 April, the US chargé, Connett, informed Washington that "All members of country team feel strongly it would be against US interests for Bosch return to DomRep and resume power at this time especially in view extremist participation in coup and announced Communist advocacy of Bosch's return as favorable to their long-term interests. ... Everything possible should be done to prevent a communist takeover in this country and to

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<sup>46</sup> Tad Szulc, *Dominican Diary*, New York, 1966, pp. 36-37.

<sup>47</sup> Memo TelCon (Johnson, McNamara), 12 May 1965, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968*: 32, Washington DC, 2005 (hereafter *FRUS*), p. 147.

maintain public order.”<sup>48</sup>

In fact, none of the three parties of the Far Left – the 1J4, the pro-Chinese Movimiento Popular Dominicano (MPD) and the pro-Soviet Partido Socialista Popular (PSP) – wanted Bosch to return to the presidency. They considered him pro-American to the core, eager to become “the gringos’ trump card.”<sup>49</sup>

The military uprising took the leaders of the three leftist parties by surprise, and they dismissed it as a reactionary coup. But on the morning of 25 April, facing the massive popular support for the revolt, they decided that they could not remain on the sidelines: they would try to impart a more radical character to the rebel movement; this would only be possible if the population acquired weapons. Activists of the three parties began distributing leaflets that demanded “Arms for the people.”<sup>50</sup>

Washington was oblivious to the Far Left’s disdain for Bosch. For the Johnson administration, the key point was that Bosch was soft on Communism. Wasn’t this what the Kennedy administration had concluded? Therefore, US officials presumed that the Communists would support Bosch’s return to the presidency. “This Bosch is no good,” Johnson told a close aide, Undersecretary of State Thomas Mann. “He is no good at all,” Mann agreed.<sup>51</sup> “We do not think he is a communist,” Mann added, “but what we are afraid of is that if he gets back in, he will have so many of them around him; and they are so much smarter than he is, that before you know it, they’d begin to take over.” The CIA warned, “On the basis of his past record it seems unlikely Bosch would be capable of curbing his Communist support.”<sup>52</sup>

There was consensus in the administration, from the embassy all the way to the president: the revolt had to be defeated because Bosch should not be allowed to return to the presidency.

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<sup>48</sup> Connett to SecState, 25 Apr. 1965, 5 pm, NSC, box 8, LBJL.

<sup>49</sup> Daniel Ozuna (a member of the 1J4 leadership) to Emilio Cordero Michel, Santo Domingo, 17 Feb. 1965, author’s archive. Also Gleijeses, *La Esperanza*, pp. 241-54, 271-75.

<sup>50</sup> Interviews with the catorcistas Norge Botello, Fidelio Despradel, Jimmy Durán, Fafa Taveras; Baby Mejía, María Elena Muñóz Marte, Evelio Hernández; with the PSPeistas Félix Servio Ducoudray, Narciso Isa Conde, José Israel Cuello, Asdrúbal Domínguez; with the MPDeistas Monchín Pinedo, Cayetano Rodríguez, René Sánchez Cordova.

<sup>51</sup> Memo TelCon (Johnson, Mann), 26 Apr. 1965, 9:35 am, *FRUS*, p. 61.

<sup>52</sup> Memo TelCon (Johnson, Mann), 27 Apr. 1965, 7:17 am, *FRUS*, p. 65; CIA, “Situation in the Dominican Republic,” 26 Apr. 1965, OCI #1203/65, Central Intelligence Agency Records Search Tool, NA-USA (hereafter CREST).

No one questioned this. The decision was all the easier because US officials were confident that with their moral support the generals would fight “to prevent the return of Bosch.”<sup>53</sup> Given their superiority in men and weapons, the generals wouldn’t need any material assistance from the United States. Washington could hide behind a facade of neutrality. This was important, warned chargé Connett, “especially in view degree of popularity Bosch still has here and fact he was constitutional president of country.”<sup>54</sup>

### **The Civil War**

Hernando Ramírez and his officers did not realize, on the evening of 25 April, that civil war had begun.<sup>55</sup> The air force did not attack again and the tanks of Wessin did not try to enter the city. That night Admiral Rivera Caminero appeared at the Presidential Palace to pledge his loyalty to the constitutional government; other Navy officers followed his example. “Navy now on side of rebels,” Connett lamented.<sup>56</sup> Declarations of support from the far flung army units, the air force bases of Santiago and Barahona, and the police arrived at the Presidential Palace. Wessin and de los Santos would not dare to fight, the Constitutionalist leaders believed, they would not attack the capital, where 400,000 people enthusiastically supported the revolt.

Their optimism disappeared the next day. On 26 April, the planes of the Nineteen of November attacked the capital, again and again.<sup>57</sup> The rebel leaders did not know how to react. They were not prepared for the drama of a civil war, they had planned a swift military coup without major clashes. What should they do against the planes that punished the city, against Wessin’s tanks that had appeared on the eastern shore of the Ozama River, marking the eastern limit of Santo Domingo?

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<sup>53</sup> CIA, “Situation in the Dominican Republic,” 26 Apr. 1965, OCI #1203/65, CREST.

<sup>54</sup> Connett to SecState, 25 Apr. 1965, 11:23 pm, NSC, box 8, LBJL.

<sup>55</sup> The discussion of the constitutionalist military in this section is based on interviews with the officers listed in n. 29 above.

<sup>56</sup> Connett to SecState, 26 Apr. 1965, 10:08 am, NSC, box 8, LBJL.

<sup>57</sup> The reports of the embassies of the United States, Britain, France and Canada offer useful information about developments on 26 April. See e.g., Connett to SecState, 26 Apr. 1965, 7:26 am, NSC, box 8, LBJL; Campbell to Foreign Office, 26 Apr. 1965, FO 371/179330, NA-UK; Fouchet to Quai d’Orsay, 26 Apr. 1965, MAE, box 45; Creighton to Gauvin, “The Revolution. Saturday, April 24 - Saturday, May 8,” 20 May 1965, box 8949, Canada.



Desertions began – of officers and of soldiers. The rebel units began to fracture, splitting into small groups that acted on their own.

On the 25<sup>th</sup>, the population of the capital had celebrated the Constitutionalists' victory without violence. The next day, the mood changed, as hundreds died under the blows of the air force. Their anger was directed at the police, hated for its brutality. Groups of civilians attacked police stations; often they were led by noncommissioned officers. They wanted weapons, and revenge. Policemen were killed after they had surrendered.

Throughout the other urban centers of the republic the population was in the streets demanding arms. When a large crowd congregated in front of the army barracks in Santiago, the country's second city, asking for weapons, the commander "responded that he supported the revolt and they, therefore, had nothing to fear. His soldiers, who knew how to use their weapons, were ready to defend the people."<sup>58</sup> When the sun rose on 27 April the people of Santiago were still without arms, and the military chiefs were still "Constitutionalists," while they waited for news from the capital. Only there did the population obtain arms – the weapons seized from the police and those distributed by Constitutionalist officers who understood that they would desperately need the help of an armed people.

### **The Battle of the Bridge**

As the sun rose over the rebel bastion of Santo Domingo on the morning of 27 April, warships of the Dominican Navy filled the harbor. The navy was no longer Constitutionalist. Admiral Rivera Caminero and his officers had reconsidered – with the help of the US embassy. At 3 am on 27 April, Rivera Caminero assured the US naval attaché that the Navy was planning to bombard the capital. "NAVATT convinced of group's determination," the US chargé, Connett, told Washington.<sup>59</sup>

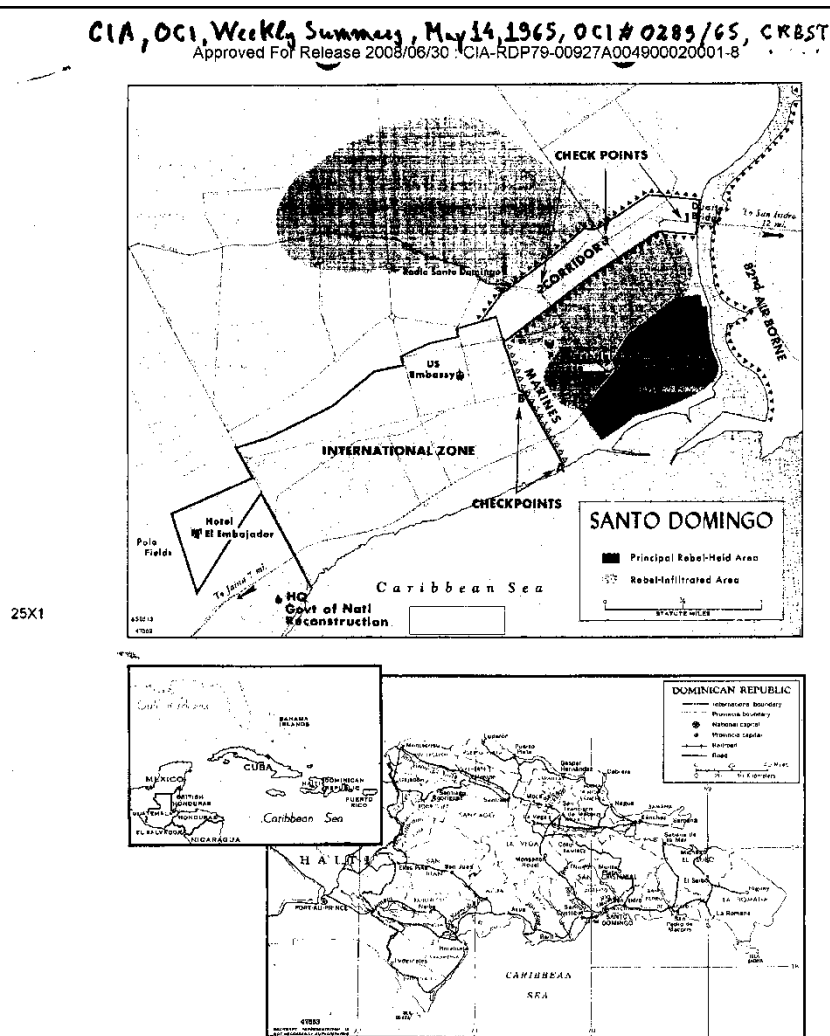
Just before 11:00AM the Navy opened fire, while de los Santos' planes attacked the capital from the sky. "A combined operation of shelling, bombing, and rocket and cannon attack

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<sup>58</sup> Fouchet to Couve de Murville, 27 May 1965, MAE, box 44.

<sup>59</sup> Connett to SecState, 27 Apr. 1965, 6:02 am, NSC, box 8, LBJL.

is now in progress,” the British chargé reported.<sup>60</sup>



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At 1:00PM the tanks and the infantry of Wessin crossed the Duarte Bridge, advancing toward the Avenida Duarte, a broad avenue that led to the heart of the city.<sup>61</sup> Between the bridge and the Avenida Duarte were five streets: Manzana de Oro, Josefa Brea, Dr. Betances, Juana

<sup>60</sup> Campbell to Foreign Office, 27 Apr. 1965, FO 371/179330, NA-UK.

<sup>61</sup> The description of the battle is based on Gleijeses, *La Esperanza*, pp. 381-405.

Saltitopa and José Martí. There were hundreds of bodies in those streets, but even more survivors, armed with machine guns, rifles and Molotov cocktails. Behind every window, at every street corner, on every roof stood soldiers, young officers, civilians, even women and children supporting the revolt. It was a disorderly, disorganized mass, and the great majority had no military training. Wessin's soldiers advanced, occupying Manzana de Oro and Josefa Brea. The advance was arduous, and each foot took a costly toll in lives. "The defenders fought like cornered bulls," recalled a friend of Wessin.<sup>62</sup>

The battle continued, but the leaders of the revolt had abandoned all hope of victory. Although the provisional president, Molina Ureña remained in the Palace, virtually the entire PRD leadership had deserted. To find them, one had to make the rounds of the embassies – beginning with the Mexican embassy where Peña Gómez, the most popular PRD leader after Bosch, had sought refuge.

The defenders at the bridge were holding out, but Hernando Ramírez and the other military leaders of the revolt had lost their nerve. Professional soldiers, they believed that the battle was lost. On one side stood the air force, the navy, the tanks of Wessin – on the other disorganized groups of soldiers and thousands of civilians. What hope could civilians have against the tanks, the airplanes, and the naval guns?

The Constitutionalist military leaders, facing defeat, scurried to the US embassy. The embassy's first secretary, Benjamin Ruyle, reported:

At about [3:00PM] on April 27 Col. F. Caamaño Deñó and Col. [sic] M.A. Hernando Ramírez, accompanied by six other persons in uniform, appeared at the Embassy. They were shown into Ben Ruyle's office. The principal spokesman was Col. Hernando Ramírez, but Col. Caamaño also spoke, and there was no disagreement among the group that they had come to the Embassy to ask it to bring about a cease-fire...Some of those present commented that they were exhausted, completely [sic] worn out and could not carry on. Ruyle asked Hernando Ramírez whether [sic] the cease-fire should be understood to be based on the group's willingness to see the formation of a junta, looking toward the

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<sup>62</sup> Antonio Llano Montes, *Santo Domingo: Barricadas de odio*, Mexico DF, 1966, p. 131.

holding of elections. Hernando's reply was affirmative; there was no demurral from anyone present.<sup>63</sup>

This was surrender. The rebel leaders knew very well that the victorious generals would not allow free elections. They crowded into the US embassy, having come "on their own initiative, behind the back and in disregard of" Molina Ureña, their president, who still refused to surrender.<sup>64</sup> Yet in a last-minute spasm of dignity one of them remarked that "they could not proceed without the agreement of the 'President.'" Ruyle suggested that "if the group could not act without Molina's approval, this approval should be sought urgently before other steps were taken." Ruyle went with them to the Palace. In his report he described the scene he found: "The palace was filled with rubble, broken glass and other debris, and seemed eerily devoid of life. Molina was finally located, surrounded by 8 or 10 persons, both civilian and military, huddled in a tiny corridor deep inside the palace on a ground floor. No other living souls were in evidence in the palace or in the area extending for several blocks around it." Molina refused to abdicate: "In his usual soft-spoken manner, with intense emotion, he avowed his intention to remain in the Palace and die, if necessary, rather than betray the Dominican people and their aspirations for liberty and democracy."<sup>65</sup>

Ruyle returned to the embassy. Less than an hour later, when he was speaking with Ambassador Bennett, who had just returned to the country, "someone interrupted to announce Molina Ureña standing outside the front door of the embassy...Ruyle went to the front door to find Molina Ureña standing quietly at attention, surrounded by the officers who had been at the embassy earlier, together with most of those Ruyle had seen with Molina in the...Palace, a total of about 16 persons. Asked whether he wished to enter, Molina suddenly nodded his head...All of those with Molina accompanied him into the ambassador's office."<sup>66</sup>

Bennett had returned in time to witness the surrender of the revolt. Before him stood the defeated leaders. Ruyle had respected Molina's courage at the palace and he felt compassion for

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<sup>63</sup> Ruyle to DOS, 27 Apr. 1965, FOIA.

<sup>64</sup> Leopoldo Espaillat Nanita, "A Casals Pastoriza," *Listin Diario*, 18 Sept. 1969, p. 6.

<sup>65</sup> Ruyle to DOS, 27 Apr. 1965, FOIA

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

him at the embassy, but Bennett felt only contempt. This was apparent in the report he sent to Washington: “Molina Ureña, nervous and dejected, was trying hard to carry himself as constitutional president and failing miserably.”<sup>67</sup>

The rebel leaders agreed to the establishment of a military junta; they asked only that the embassy mediate between them and San Isidro. Bennett refused, claiming “that accord should be reached by Dominicans talking to Dominicans.” His refusal dashed the last hopes of the Constitutionalist leaders, leaving them little choice: asylum in an embassy or death in the streets. Bennett’s description of the closing moment of the meeting paints his visitors “lingering as though trying to avoid going out again into [the] cruel world.”<sup>68</sup>

Most of them, including Molina Ureña and Hernando Ramirez, found asylum in foreign embassies. Others, including Caamaño, went to the Duarte Bridge.

There, the battle raged. Shortly before 5:00PM Wessin’s soldiers reached José Martí, the last of the five streets between the Duarte Bridge and the Avenida Duarte. One last push – 200 yards – and they would reach the avenida. But they never made it.

Later, many people would speak of the “miracle of the bridge.” The miracle was that, despite the bombs and the machine gun fire, hundreds of soldiers who supported the Constitutionlists and thousands of civilians blocked Wessin’s forces. On one side stood people, civilians and military, who had chosen to defy death; on the other, troops that had never fought before and, unlike the people, had not endured hours of bombing that familiarized them with the specter of death. For them, too, it was baptism by fire. How many would have been there if they had had any choice? Harried by rebel counterattacks, they gave ground.

Coming from the US embassy, Caamaño and a few other officers arrived at the Duarte Bridge shortly after 5:00PM, in time to take part in the final phase of the battle and link their names with the glory of the victory. Their presence gave the defenders the feeling that they were not alone, that all their leaders had not defected. The hundreds of soldiers and young officers who took part in the battle needed leadership. The military gathered around Colonel Caamaño, the highest ranking officer. By 6:00PM, Wessin’s forces retreated in disarray across the bridge.

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<sup>67</sup> Bennett to SecState, 28 Apr. 1965, 12:26 am, NSC, box 8, LBJL.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

The Constitutionalist military was only a minority among the mass of armed civilians. Three days earlier an open, direct collaboration between the people of the capital and Caamaño, a high-ranking officer, would have been unthinkable. It was the PRD that, by its identification with the revolt, had assured the people of the sincerity of those officers who suddenly proclaimed themselves “Constitutionalists.” Now there was no longer a PRD to speak of, even if the PRD masses swarmed in the streets. Bosch was still the leader and symbol of the revolt, but he was in Puerto Rico, and Molina Ureña and Peña Gómez were hiding in embassies.

### **The Decision to Invade**

On the evening of 27 April, Ambassador Bennett was still confident that the Constitutionlists would be defeated. He told the chief of police, General Hernán Despradel Brache: “His and my first duty is restoration public calm [in the capital] ... I went on to say I had just come from Washington and that we were all sure [a] man of his experience and training would know what to do.” The next day, however, Bennett’s optimism had evaporated. He cabled Washington that at San Isidro – where Wessin’s Armed Forces Training Center (CEFA) and the Nineteen of November were located – “a severe test of nerves [was] in process.” In Santo Domingo, Caamaño was reorganizing the rebel movement; at San Isidro there was panic. “It is not an impressive show,” Bennett complained.<sup>69</sup> He urged the squabbling and demoralized men at San Isidro to form a junta that would – nominally – take charge of the country.<sup>70</sup>

A specter haunted San Isidro: the people who had beat them back across the bridge would flood out of Santo Domingo, overwhelming all resistance and smashing everything in their path, a human deluge that would sweep over the CEFA and the Nineteen of November, both a scant ten miles from the capital. The men who days earlier had not hesitated to bomb the defenseless population saw only one means of salvation: the United States armed forces. Therefore, they immediately acceded to the Americans’ demands and promptly formed a military junta, with a figurehead on whom they all could agree, the hapless Colonel Benoit.

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<sup>69</sup> Bennett to SecState, 27 Apr. 1965, 7:22 pm, NSC, box 8, LBJL; Bennett to SecState, 28 Apr. 1965, 3 pm, National Security File, Memos to the President, box 3, LBJL.

<sup>70</sup> Willard Beaulac et al., *Dominican Action - 1965: Intervention of Cooperation?* Washington DC, 1966, p. 32.

One of Benoit's first acts was to request "that the United States government lend us unlimited and immediate military assistance" to crush the revolt "directed by Communists."<sup>71</sup> Initially Bennett demurred, cabling the State Department at 3:00PM on 28 April: "I do not believe situation justifies such action at this time...Logically the junta forces should bring situation under control, but situation not really very logical."<sup>72</sup> Two hours later, Bennett had faced facts:

Regret report situation deteriorating rapidly. San Isidro pilots who have been principal element in junta forces tired and discouraged...Wessin...weary and speaking of need for more men. Rivera Caminero worried and discouraged...

Chief MAAG [Military Assistance and Advisory Group] just returned from San Isidro...Found general atmosphere dejected and emotional, with number of officers weeping. ...Benoit...sent formal request US supply troops, told MAAG chief that without help they would "have to quit" ...Country team unanimously of opinion that...time has come to land the marines...I recommend immediate landing.<sup>73</sup>

When he received the cable, at 5:30PM, Lyndon Johnson was discussing Vietnam with top officials, including Secretary of State Dean Rusk, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, National Security Adviser McGeorge Bundy, and General Earl Wheeler, chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. "All recommend prompt affirmative response to Bennett's request."<sup>74</sup>

There was no dissent among those who attended the meeting, nor much discussion. The landing of the marines flowed from the Johnson administration's decision taken on the 25<sup>th</sup> that the rebellion must be crushed, a decision that at that moment had appeared of modest import, certainly not requiring US military intervention. The Dominican generals would do the job. All the United States had to do was to urge them on, while publically remaining "neutral." For more than two days, Washington's policy seemed successful.

On the morning of 28 April, however, the nightmare began. San Isidro had lost the battle

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<sup>71</sup> Bennett to Director of National Security Agency, 28 Apr. 1965, Central Files 1964-66, POL 23-9 DOM REP, RG 59, NA-USA. (Hereafter CF 23-9)

<sup>72</sup> Bennett to SecState, 28 Apr. 1965, 3 pm, National Security File, Memos to the President, box 3, LBJL.

<sup>73</sup> Bennett to DIRNSA, 28 Apr. 1965, 5:16 pm, *ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> "State Department's Initiatives during Build-up of Dominican Crisis," *ibid.*

of the bridge and was in the grip of panic. In Santo Domingo US officials saw armed mobs and the collapse of the armed forces: ideal conditions for a “Red” takeover.

The Director of Central Intelligence told Johnson, “We have identified 8 hard core Castro-trained guerrillas that are – they came in, they pushed aside the Bosch people and took command of the forces.”<sup>75</sup> But no US official had any evidence that the Communists had taken control of the revolt. McGeorge Bundy told Johnson on 30 April that although the CIA had identified eight Communist-trained rebels, “nobody has yet said that anyone of these communists is actually in command of a column.” Bundy added that he “wasn’t sure that these Communists were that much in control of this messy movement.” McNamara agreed.<sup>76</sup> And yet they fully supported the decision to invade.

How can we explain this gap between the evidence and the decisions of the administration? In Santo Domingo US officials saw chaos: a people in arms, civilians defeating the tanks, the armed forces falling apart. They believed, as the French ambassador explained, that “the Communists are likely to take over because of their discipline, their courage, and their sense of organization.”<sup>77</sup> “Likely” was the operative word. Given the perceived stakes – a second Cuba in the hemisphere – none of the top US policymakers was willing to incur any risk.

There was some truth in the Americans’ analysis: when the PRD leaders scurried to foreign embassies, the leaders of the 1J4 went to the bridge. However the 1J4 was very weak. The Dominican Far Left had no charismatic leaders. The country’s only charismatic leaders were Juan Bosch and, to a lesser degree, Joaquín Balaguer. Almost all the civilians who fought at the bridge were Boschistas. When the battle was over, they turned not to the 1J4 for leadership but to the Constitutionalist officers, and in particular Colonel Caamaño.

The Americans’ paranoia blinded them to this reality. In the words of the CIA, “a modest number of hard-core Communist leaders in Santo Domingo managed by superior training and

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<sup>75</sup> Memo TelCon (Johnson, Raborn), 29 Apr. 1965, 8:47 am, *FRUS*, p. 89.

<sup>76</sup> Memo TelCon (Johnson, Bundy), 30 Apr. 1965, 6:35 pm, *ibid.*, p. 111; Memo TelCon (Johnson, McNamara), 30 Apr. 1965, 5:05 pm, *ibid.*, pp. 109-10. See also Memo TelCon (McNamara, Johnson), 12 May 1965, 11:20 pm, *ibid.*, pp. 147-52.

<sup>77</sup> Fouchet to Couve de Murville, 27 May 1965, MAE, box 44.



tactics to win for themselves a position of considerable influence in the revolt within the first few days. Their influence within the movement grew day by day, and following the collapse of Molina's government on 27 April there appeared to be no organization within the rebel camp capable of denying them full control of the rebellion within a few days."<sup>78</sup>

On the night of 28 April, in a televised address. Johnson told the American people that the administration had been informed by the Dominican military authorities that American lives were in danger. Therefore, at their request, he had instructed the Secretary of Defense to put the necessary US troops ashore in order to evacuate US citizens. He said nothing of a Communist threat.<sup>79</sup>

US officials hoped to avoid a flagrant military intervention that would stir passions in Latin America. "There is a possibility," Undersecretary Mann argued, "that the mere landing of Marines will serve to strengthen the will of the Wessin side."<sup>80</sup> Thus the 536 marines who landed on the evening of 28 April did not join the fighting. They took up position around the US embassy and in the western outskirts of the capital, far from the combat zone. "Obviously we wish to avoid military action as long as there is reasonable chance junta forces will prevail," Mann told Ambassador Bennett.<sup>81</sup> A low-key operation, easily disguised as a humanitarian intervention: this was Johnson's policy. "I want us to feverishly try to cloak this with legitimacy," he insisted, and Mann ordered the US ambassadors in the hemisphere, "In speaking to Latin Americans ... avoid any suggestion that US is supporting or opposing any particular political faction or group. Emphasize that purpose of operation is to evacuate Americans and nationals of other countries wanting to leave and that this action taken only after authorities had stated that lives of US citizens were in danger and that government could not guarantee their safety."<sup>82</sup>

The arrival of the marines, however, did not restore San Isidro's will to fight. Wessin and the other generals were waiting for the Americans to clean up Santo Domingo for them. "The

<sup>78</sup> CIA, "The Communist Role in the Dominican Revolt," 7 May 1965, NSFCF, box 49, LBJL.

<sup>79</sup> Johnson, 28 Apr. 1965, *Department of State Bulletin*, 17 May 1965, p. 738.

<sup>80</sup> Memo TelCon (Johnson, Mann et al.), 28 Apr. 1965, 5:45 pm, *FRUS*, p. 75.

<sup>81</sup> Memo TelCon (Mann, Bennett et al.), 29 Apr. 1965, 10:40 pm, CF 23-9.

<sup>82</sup> MemCon (Johnson, Bundy et al.), 30 Apr. 1965, 8:30 - 10:45 am, *FRUS*, p. 101; Mann to all posts, 28 Apr. 1965, CF 23-9.

whole group,” Bennett said, “was behaving like a crowd of demented monkeys.”<sup>83</sup> On 29 April he told Washington:

Junta ground forces have not moved toward rebels because of... weakness, inefficiency and indecisiveness of local military leadership... Wessin has done little or nothing for last three days but now pleads weariness, mechanical troubles with tanks, many of his people shot up and troops exhausted. Other commanders take same position ... Army Attaché returned short while ago from San Isidro. His report about same as that of Air Attaché who spent last night there and returned early this morning. Army Attaché found everyone there dead on feet and arguing among themselves as to how job should be done... Their troops have flagging morale and attachés do not doubt they will be defecting in some numbers tonight. Inaction and indecision has been characteristic of most military commanders on junta side during this crisis... I frankly think they have some feeling... that they can sit back now and let us do an efficient job for them.<sup>84</sup>

The Constitutionlists seized the initiative. On 30 April, they attacked the Fortaleza Ozama, the most important police garrison in the capital. The police offered almost no resistance and the Fortaleza and its depot of 4,000 arms fell to the Constitutionlists. Caamaño began planning an attack against San Isidro.

It was too late. At 2:16AM on 30 April, 2500 Americans from the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division began landing at San Isidro. It was the beginning of a massive military build-up that within ten days reached a peak of 23,000 US troops on Dominican soil, almost half as many as were then serving in South Vietnam. Also on 30 April Johnson gave the public the first glimpse of the true nature of his “humanitarian” intervention. “There are signs,” he announced, “that people trained outside the Dominican Republic are seeking to gain control.” Two days later, he took up the theme again, much more forcefully: the revolt had been “taken over and really seized and placed into the hands of a band of Communist conspirators.”<sup>85</sup>

On 30 April the paratroopers of the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne pushed out of San Isidro toward the

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<sup>83</sup> Campbell, “Revolt.”

<sup>84</sup> Memo TelCon (Bennett, Mann, et al.), 29 Apr. 1965, CF 23-9

<sup>85</sup> Johnson, 28 Apr. and 2 May 1965, *Department of State Bulletin*, 17 May 1965, pp. 742, 745.

capital. Attacking the Constitutionalists, they captured the Duarte Bridge and secured an area of several blocks on its western approach.<sup>86</sup>

That same day, the marines occupied nine square miles in the western sector of the capital, where they set up an “International Security Zone.” Then, in a surprise attack on the night of 2-3 May, the Americans advanced from the bridgehead on the western end of the Duarte Bridge through the capital to link up with the marines in the International Security Zone. They established a corridor bisecting Santo Domingo. The Constitutionalist forces were thus cut in two, confined to Ciudad Nueva in the southeast and the Barrios Altos in the northeast. To go from one zone to the other they had to pass through several checkpoints manned by US troops. They were searched, at times arrested. No one with arms was allowed through.

### **The Government of National Reconstruction**

The revolt did not collapse. “This morning I was in rebel territory,” the British chargé reported on 2 May. “Morale seemed very good, atmosphere soldierly.” He met Caamaño and other rebel leaders. “All are firm about the constitutionalities [sic] and Bosch... These people seem well organized and ready for long siege.”<sup>87</sup> On 3 May, those members of the Dominican Congress in Ciudad Nueva elected Caamaño president of the republic. “He is an extremely intelligent and able regular army colonel who has captured the imagination of the people around him,” US officials told the British embassy in Washington. “He has been swept along by events and has become thoroughly impassioned about the cause for which he is fighting.”<sup>88</sup>

Washington reacted. John Martin, who had served as Kennedy’s ambassador to the Dominican Republic, was tasked to create a government to replace the discredited Junta led by Benoit. Martin quickly identified a man to be president of this Gobierno de Reconstrucción Nacional (GRN): General Antonio Imbert Barrera, corrupt, ambitious, and eager. Imbert had, in

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<sup>86</sup> On US military operations in the Dominican Republic in 1965, see Lawrence Greenberg, *United States Army Unilateral and Coalition Operations in the 1965 Dominican Republic Intervention*, Washington DC, 1987; Herbert Schoonmaker, *Military Crisis Management: U.S. Intervention in the Dominican Republic, 1965*, New York, 1990; Bruce Palmer, *Intervention in the Caribbean: The Dominican Crisis of 1965*, Lexington, Ky, 1989.

<sup>87</sup> Campbell to Foreign Office, 2 May 1965, FO 371/179331, NA-UK.

<sup>88</sup> Dean (UK embassy Washington) to Foreign Office, 2 May 1965, *ibid*. The only good biography of Caamaño is Hermann, *Caamaño*.

the words of Ambassador Bennett, “a gangster side,”<sup>89</sup> but he was pro-American. Colonel Benoit, who had been ordered by Generals de los Santos and Wessin, to scuttle his junta, was told to join the GRN.<sup>90</sup> But the search for civilian members who could impart a semblance of respectability to the enterprise proved more difficult. “Most of those willing to serve are not qualified,” Bennett complained. “Most of those who are qualified are not willing to serve.”<sup>91</sup> Even those who welcomed the US invasion were reluctant to join a government certain to be reviled by the masses and replaced by the Americans as soon as they came up with a less awkward solution. “The rich...are waiting passively for the Americans to save them,” the French ambassador reported.<sup>92</sup>

Finally, three civilians were persuaded to join and, on 7 May, the GRN was born. It had “no base of public support,” the CIA said.<sup>93</sup>

### **The Organization of American States**

In Washington the foreign ministers of the Organization of American States (OAS) convened to consider the crisis in the Dominican Republic. Even though the US intervention had stirred a wave of resentment in Latin America, the foreign ministers did not condemn it. Their deference, however, did not satisfy the Johnson administration, which demanded that they create an Inter-American Peace Force to give a veneer of multilateralism and legality to the Americans’ unilateral invasion. The idea was so brazen that even the docile Latin American representatives balked. Washington ratcheted up the pressure. Vice-President Hubert Humphrey warned, “the OAS ought to learn how to provide for law and order...lest we have to garrison place after place to uphold law and order and to protect the lives of citizens.”<sup>94</sup>

The OAS capitulated. On 6 May, with one vote shy of the fourteen required to create the

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<sup>89</sup> Bennett to Rusk, 29 May 1965, CF 23-9

<sup>90</sup> Interview with Colonel Benoit.

<sup>91</sup> Bennett to SecState, 5 May 1965, NSC, box 10, LBJL.

<sup>92</sup> Fouchet to Quai d’Orsay, 13 May 1965, MAE, box 45.

<sup>93</sup> CIA, “The Situation in the Interior of the Dominican Republic,” 14 May 1965, NSFCF, Dominican Republic, vol. V, LBJL

<sup>94</sup> Humphrey, 5 May 1965, *Washington Post*, 8 May 1965, p. 8.

peace force, the vote of José Antonio Bonilla Atilas, who had been the Dominican delegate to the OAS under Reid Cabral, was added to the count. That Bonilla Atilas represented a government that no longer existed did not matter. The United States needed his vote. No one objected. No one dared challenge the United States frontally. It was only *after* Bonilla Atilas had cast the decisive vote that the OAS' Credentials Committee recommended that "the Dominican Republic's seat ... be declared vacant."<sup>95</sup>

Six Latin American countries sent contingents to the peace force: Brazil, 1152 men; Honduras, 250; Paraguay, 178; Nicaragua, 159; Costa Rica, 21; and El Salvador, 3. Soldiers from five dictatorships marched side by side in Santo Domingo in defense of Dominican "democracy." It was an "international farce."<sup>96</sup>

### **Washington seeks a way out**

President Johnson was worried. The Constitutionals had survived the psychological trauma of the landing of the Marines on 28 April, and they had weathered the blows inflicted on them by the US troops. On 14 May, the CIA reported: "The calm that has generally prevailed in the Dominican countryside may be misleading. Under the surface there is a good deal of popular support for the Bosch-Caamaño movement... The chances of growing unrest, confusion and rebel gains in the interior are almost certain to increase if the political stalemate is prolonged in Santo Domingo."<sup>97</sup>

In the United States, no one in Congress or in the mainstream press questioned the right of the US government to invade the Dominican Republic to prevent a Communist takeover, but some liberals soon began to think that the administration had exaggerated the Communist threat there. In Latin America, the public relations tours of senior US officials failed to placate the peoples' rising anger aggravated by impotence. Speaking with his key advisers on 16 May,

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<sup>95</sup> Organización de Estados Americanos, Comisión de Credenciales, *Segundo Informe de la Comisión de Credenciales*, 8 May 1965, Ser. F/II.10, Washington DC, 1965, p. 3 quoted; interview with Bonilla Atilas.

<sup>96</sup> Santiago Estrella Veloz, "La Fuerza Interamericana de los dictadores," *Ahora*, 3 Oct. 1965, p. 23.

<sup>97</sup> CIA, "The Situation in the Interior of the Dominican Republic," 14 May 1965, NSFCF, Dominican Republic, vol. V, LBJL.

Johnson “expressed his concern over the ‘beating’ which we are taking in other countries.”<sup>98</sup> And the United Nations seemed ready to meddle for the first time in a region that Washington had long regarded as its preserve. “There is a good deal of feeling around the UN that ‘the Security Council should do something’ about the situation in the Dominican Republic,” US officials lamented.<sup>99</sup> On 14 May the UN Security Council approved a resolution asking Secretary General U Thant to send a representative to the Dominican Republic “for the purpose of reporting to the Security Council on the present situation.” This modest step shocked the Americans. Only ten years earlier, in June 1954, the Council had not even discussed the situation in Guatemala, victim of a thinly disguised US intervention.<sup>100</sup>

Feeling that time was playing against the United States, Washington decided to open negotiations with the Constitutionals. On 12 May, Johnson sent a special emissary, Abe Fortas, to Puerto Rico to speak with Bosch. Fortas carried a big stick: the presence of thousands of US soldiers in the Dominican Republic. He warned Bosch that “his choice was flexibility or responsibility for the death of thousands of people,” clearly hinting that in the absence of an agreement the US troops would wipe out the rebels.<sup>101</sup> By the next day they had agreed on three key points: Bosch would not return to be president of the republic. A government led by Antonio Guzmán, a rich landowner who belonged to the moderate wing of the PRD, would govern until the end of Bosch’s term, that is until February 1967. His government would adopt the measures that Washington considered necessary against the Communist threat.<sup>102</sup>

US officials thought they could trust Antonio Guzmán. According to former Ambassador Martin, “He was no revolutionary, simply a devoted friend of Bosch, with whom he had grown up.” Moreover, he had the essential attribute: “he was friendly to the United States.”<sup>103</sup>

Late on 13 May Lt. Col. Fernández Domínguez, the leader of the *Movimiento Enriquillo*

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<sup>98</sup> MemCon (Johnson, Rusk et al.), 16 May 1965, *FRUS*, p. 184.

<sup>99</sup> Read to Bundy, 12 May 1965, NSFCF, box 290, LBJL.

<sup>100</sup> Resolution 203 (1965), [www.un.org/documents](http://www.un.org/documents). For the Security Council and Guatemala, see Piero Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope: The Guatemalan Revolution and the United States 1944-1954*, Princeton, 1991, pp. 328-32.

<sup>101</sup> Abe Fortas, Notes, “Events of Wed 12 May 1965 - Puerto Rico,” Abe Fortas Papers, MS 858, Series IV, box 154, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University, New Haven, CT.

<sup>102</sup> Richard Helms, Memorandum for the record, 13 May 1965, *FRUS*, pp. 155-58.

<sup>103</sup> Martin, *Overtaken*, p. 367.

who had been desperately trying to find a way back to the Dominican Republic after the outbreak of the revolt, was finally able to return to his country – on a US military plane – to inform Caamaño of the preliminary agreement reached between Bosch and Fortas. On 14 May, McGeorge Bundy reported to Johnson, “The approach to Caamaño had gone a hundred per cent... Caamaño had accepted the proposition conveyed to him by...[Fernández Domínguez] representing Bosch.”<sup>104</sup>

On 15 May Bundy arrived in Puerto Rico. “Nine hours with Bosch...[and] Guzmán [brought from Santo Domingo for the occasion]...leaves us moderately encouraged,” he cabled Johnson.<sup>105</sup> Then Bundy and Guzmán proceeded to Santo Domingo where they would, it was hoped, hammer out the terms of the agreement. With one hand, the US government offered the rebels an olive branch; with the other, it struck hard to ensure that they would make concessions: *Operación Limpieza*, the GRN offensive against the Barrios Altos, had begun.

The Barrios Altos were the capital’s slums. To the south, the US corridor separated them from Ciudad Nueva; to the west was the International Security Zone, occupied by the Americans; to the north the Isabela River, to the east the Ozama River. The Constitutionals were firmly entrenched in Ciudad Nueva, but they had only a rudimentary military organization in the Barrios Altos.

On 14 May, more than 2,000 soldiers of the GRN, reorganized and rearmed by the Americans, launched the attack on the Barrios Altos. As the troops advanced, they perpetrated “atrocities,” the CIA reported.<sup>106</sup> From Ciudad Nueva the Constitutionals looked helplessly at the carnage. The US soldiers prevented them from crossing the corridor with arms – while “truckloads of armed junta [GRN] policemen and soldiers” moved freely along it.<sup>107</sup> The United

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<sup>104</sup> Richard Helms, Memorandum for the record, 14 May 1965, *FRUS*, pp. 162-64.

<sup>105</sup> Mann to Johnson, 16 May 1965, CF 23-9.

<sup>106</sup> CIA, “Situation in the Dominican Republic,” 29 June 1965, OCI #1968/65, CREST. On the dismal human rights records of the GRN -- which contrasted starkly with that of the Caamaño government, see the two reports of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, the only OAS body that performed creditably during the crisis: “Situation Regarding Human Rights in the Dominican Republic: Preliminary Report Presented by the Chairman,” OAS Document OEA/Ser.L/V/II.12, Washington DC, 23 June 1965 and “Report on the Activities of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights in the Dominican Republic: June 1 to August 31, 1965,” OAS Document OEA/Ser. L/V/II.13, Washington DC, 15 Oct. 1965.

<sup>107</sup> *New York Times*, 17 May 1965, p. 15.

States “does not appear to do anything to stop...[the GRN’s] military action,” the Canadian chargé said.<sup>108</sup>

Washington’s direct aid to Imbert’s troops was “discreet,” the French ambassador reported, but the Americans’ claims that they were not assisting the attackers “strained credibility.” The British chargé remarked that “The presence of American officers with Imbert’s heavy units in the fighting...was explained by them as being necessary to stop Imbert firing into the American lines. Troublesome people are asking why Imbert cannot see where the American lines are for himself.”<sup>109</sup>

The GRN forces required the Americans’ aid. The opposition they met was relentless. “The ferocious resistance and the courage of the rebels...have surprised the Americans,” the French ambassador wrote. One of the attackers, Lt. Morilí Holguín, remembered: “The rebels never surrendered, they fought with a courage and determination that we lacked. It was only natural: they were fighting for something; we, only for our pay.”<sup>110</sup>

The assault went on for eight days despite worldwide indignation. It finally ended on 21 May, when the GRN had occupied every inch of the Barrios Altos.

### **The Guzmán Negotiations**

While the offensive against the Barrios Altos was underway, the Guzmán negotiations proceeded.<sup>111</sup> The GRN was excluded from the talks because US officials knew that it would have no choice but to approve whatever they decided, so complete was its dependence on the United States.

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<sup>108</sup> Gavin to External, 16 May 1965, box 9378, Canada.

<sup>109</sup> Fouchet to Couve de Murville, 7 June 1965, MAE, box 44; Fouchet to Quai d’Orsay, 15 May 1965, MAE, box 45; Campbell to Foreign Office, 22 May 1965, FO 371/179337, NA-UK.

<sup>110</sup> Fouchet to Couve de Murville, 27 May 1965, MAE, box 44; interview with Lt. Holguín.

<sup>111</sup> My discussion of the Guzmán negotiations is based on four major groups of sources: 1) US documents from the Johnson Library and the National Archives; 2) the papers of Abe Fortas, box 154 (see above n. 100); 3) notes, memoranda and minutes given to me by Antonio Guzmán; 4) interviews with Antonio Guzmán, Salvador Jorge Blanco (a close aide of Guzmán), Jottin Cury (foreign minister in the constitutionalist government), Hugo Tolentino Dipp (member of Caamaño’s Advisory Committee), Juan Bosch, Peña Gómez, Major Núñez Noguerras (of the constitutionalist military staff); GRN members Julio Postigo and Benoit; US officials Thomas Mann, Dean Rusk, and McGeorge Bundy. See also Salvador Jorge Blanco, *Guerra, Revolución y Paz*, Santo Domingo, 2003, pp. 107-25.



The two most important issues in the Americans' talks with Guzmán were how the new government would treat the Communists and who would occupy its key military posts.

The initial US position was that the Communists were to be identified "promptly by mutual consultation," and they should all face internment or exile.<sup>112</sup> Guzmán categorically refused and Bundy softened his demands. In a secret memorandum Guzmán pledged that:

Persons identified as Communists or Communist sympathizers will be placed under close observation by the Government of National Concord and when detected breaking the law will immediately be detained. Such other measures as may be necessary to contain the threat of Communist subversion will be taken after appropriate consultation with the Government of the United States...

The Government of the United States will make available professional personnel with full competence in the Spanish language to assist the government of National Concord in identifying Communists and Communist sympathizers, and in controlling their activities...

Measures necessary to contain the Communist threat will be the subject of continuing consultation between the 2 governments. The Government of the United States reserves the right to reexamine the terms of the agreement reflected in this memorandum if the measures taken under it prove to be inadequate.<sup>113</sup>

Both sides made concessions on who would fill the key military posts. Bundy and Guzmán agreed that a constitutionalist officer would be the army chief of staff; a "neutral" – an officer who was abroad on 24 April and had not sided with either camp – the air force chief of staff; and a GRN officer, the chief of staff of the Navy. Since they could not agree on who would be the armed forces secretary, they decided not to appoint anyone; as president of the republic Guzmán would be the commander in chief.<sup>114</sup>

Nevertheless, as the negotiations progressed US officials grew wary of Guzmán. His refusal to deport or intern the Communists signaled not his commitment to democracy but his

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<sup>112</sup> "Dictated by Mr. Davidson," 13 May 1965, Papers of Ellsworth Bunker, box 9, NA-USA.

<sup>113</sup> Bundy to DOS, 19 May 1965, CF 23-9.

<sup>114</sup> Guzmán, "Promemoria," [17 May 1965], author's archive; Guzmán to Bundy, [21 or 22 May 1965,] author's archive; "Military names," 4 June 1965, Bunker Papers, box 10.

weakness vis-a-vis extremists. Johnson and his aides – especially Mann and Ambassador Bennett – began wondering whether they were making too many concessions. McGeorge Bundy was the most sanguine, but he too was uneasy.

The Americans' doubts swelled on 18 May, when Guzmán informed Bundy that because of US support for the GRN's onslaught against the Barrios Altos, "I have the obligation to suspend conversations and agreements until there has been a total cease-fire."<sup>115</sup> That evening Bundy cabled Johnson:

I am deeply shaken by this morning's monkey-wrench. It forces reconsideration of question of basic control of a possible Guzmán government ... the stooge's role of Guzmán in this episode is clear ...and my own guess is that [rebel] military command initiated this proposal ....

Since Guzmán obediently telephoned a clearly absurd ultimatum to the Embassy, none of us can responsibly recommend that agreement all but completed yesterday is now safe for the United States. ...

I believe that when negotiations are reopened we should advance new requirements which combine advantage of testing basis of authority and limiting role of present military command in new government.

Bundy proposed that the United States demand that three influential rebel leaders – armed forces secretary Manuel Montes Arache, secretary of the presidency Héctor Aristy and Captain Mario Peña Taveras – leave the country.<sup>116</sup>

What is striking in Bundy's cable is that his outrage appears to be without guile. So ingrained was his conviction that the United States had the right to intervene at will in the internal affairs of sovereign countries that he found Guzmán's protest absurd – and ominous.

Guzmán backtracked, and the negotiations resumed on 19 May. In the days that followed Bundy kept insisting that Montes Arache, Aristy and Peña Taveras leave the country, and Guzmán refused. "I told Guzmán," Bundy cabled Johnson on 22 May, "that this attitude raised in

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<sup>115</sup> Memo TelCon (Johnson, Bundy), 18 May 1965, 11:55 am, *FRUS*, p. 198.

<sup>116</sup> Bundy to Johnson, 18 May 1965, 20:55 pm, CF 23-9.

my mind serious questions since it showed his unwillingness to take any action now to control rebel general staff.”<sup>117</sup>

The Johnson administration upped its demands. On 23 May Secretary Rusk informed Bundy that he must also insist that, once the new government had been installed, “Identified Communists will be promptly taken into custody and deported or interned.”<sup>118</sup> Even this would not have satisfied Johnson. He told Mann: “I have grave doubts about Guzmán and I don’t know what we’re finally going to do if he should accept all our terms. I keep making them a little harder on him.” Mann replied: “I don’t think we ought to become married to this guy Guzmán because I just don’t trust Bosch to fight the Commies. And what I am afraid of is that Bosch is trying to get us to put him in power and to destroy the armies so that there will be nobody to bother him, and then once he takes control I think we might be in deep trouble... That’s why I was arguing strongly the other day for maintaining the armed forces under their present [GRN] leadership.”<sup>119</sup>

Guzmán, a weak man according to US officials, stood firm in defense of his principles. During a two hour meeting with Bundy, on the 24<sup>th</sup>, he refused to order the departure of the three Constitutionalist leaders. He also rejected the internment or exile of the Communists. “I said that our fundamental view now was that we did not think a constitutional government with necessary Dominican and US support was possible without a public and decisive position on Commies,” Bundy informed Johnson. “The only action which we could see that would show this decision plainly was the separation of those known to be tough, trained, and committed Commies, with a public announcement of this decision.” Guzmán replied that “repression by force would simply make more Commies.”<sup>120</sup>

On 26 May Bundy returned to Washington. The Guzmán negotiations had failed.

## Two Governments

Following the battle of the Barrios Altos, the Constitutionalist government held only

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<sup>117</sup> Bundy to Johnson, 22 May, 1965, *FRUS*, p. 216.

<sup>118</sup> Rusk to Bundy and Vance, 23 May 1965, 5:01 pm, *ibid.*, p. 228.

<sup>119</sup> Memo TelCon (Johnson, Mann), 24 May 1965, 11:50 am - noon, *FRUS*, pp. 230-32.

<sup>120</sup> Bundy to Johnson, 24 May 1965, 18:30, CF 23-9.

Ciudad Nueva. This relatively small area, inhabited by lower middle class and middle class families, was the heart of Santo Domingo. It included the banking district, the telephone exchange, and the most important department stores.<sup>121</sup>

Caamaño was the president of the republic. He was flanked by a cabinet and a Congress, composed of the remnants of the one elected in December 1962; however, given the unusual circumstances in which the Constitutionalist found themselves – at war and in control of only a few city blocks – much of the governance was informal and ad hoc. There were five political parties: the PRD, the Partido Revolucionario Social Cristiano (PRSC), and the three parties of the Far Left – the 1J4, the PSP and the MPD. The PSP and the MPD were legal but did not participate in any decision-making body within the Constitutionalist government. They were Communist parties and thus a liability in the negotiations with the United States. The equally tiny Christian-Democratic PRSC, however, was an asset; therefore it was included in key meetings.

The PRD dominated the political life of Ciudad Nueva. It held sway over the negotiations with the United States, and on those few occasions in which the government took a vote, the PRD, in control of the cabinet, the Senate, and the chamber of deputies, had an absolute majority. Caamaño always yielded.

The government's military strength rested on the commando units, armed groups of civilians and military – 6,000 people on paper, but in fact about 3,000 fighters.<sup>122</sup>

The pro-Soviet PSP was influential in the *San Lázaro*, a commando unit that was well disciplined and adequately armed, but had only between 50 and 60 men. The pro-Chinese MPD refused to risk its few cadres in a struggle dominated “by the bourgeoisie.” The Castroite 1J4, on the other hand, included several members who showed great military ability and became leaders of important commando units. But they were operating as almost independent caudillos; they

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<sup>121</sup> This section is based on Gleijeses, *La Esperanza*, pp. 438-47. See also José Moreno, *Barrios in Arms: Revolution in Santo Domingo*, Pittsburgh, 1970; Teresa Espaillat, *Abril en mis recuerdos: Testimonio de una combatiente*, Santo Domingo, 2001; Margarita Cordero, *Mujeres de abril*, Santo Domingo, 1985; Hermann, *Caamaño*.

<sup>122</sup> The 6,000 figure is based on the Constitutionalist government's “Relación de los Comandos Beneficiados con la Ayuda Recibida del Gobierno Constitucional de la República Dominicana,” author's archive. The 3,000 figure on interviews with commando leaders and Constitutionalist officers.

were close to Caamaño but had minimal ties to the IJ4, which was so wracked by bitter schisms that it had almost ceased to function as a political party.

The PRSC lacked military strength. As for the PRD, after the rout of 27-28 April, most of its leaders played only a minor role. The major exception was Peña Gómez who, through self-sacrifice and political acumen, redeemed himself after his serious lapse of 27 April, when he had sought asylum in the Mexican embassy. Most importantly, there was Bosch in Puerto Rico, far from Ciudad Nueva. The distance only partly dimmed his still brilliant prestige. The masses in Ciudad Nueva and the rank and file in the commando units were overwhelmingly Boschistas. But the PRD lacked military chiefs. The vacuum had been filled by Caamaño.

These, then, are the key elements of the Constitutionalist movement: the charisma of Bosch, the political leader; the appeal of Caamaño, the military leader; the weakness of the Far Left.

Unlike the Constitutionalist government, the GRN enjoyed no popular support. It controlled the country through a reign of terror. “The smallest sign of disaffection provoked savage reprisals,” the British chargé reported.<sup>123</sup> But whereas the Constitutionlists, bloodied but fiercely independent, were masters of the few city blocks they controlled, the GRN leaders were kept on a short leash. The Americans were the real masters. Thousands of US soldiers occupied the country; others were aboard ships just off the coast. American planes and American tanks were masters at the Nineteenth of November Air Base, where they left little space for the “natives.” A few hundred yards away stood Wessin’s CEFA, ridiculous against such competition. American money paid the salaries of the GRN and, therefore, of the military.

### **The Bunker negotiations**

On 3 June, a committee of the OAS, led by the US Ambassador to the organization, Ellsworth Bunker, arrived in Santo Domingo to begin negotiations with the Constitutionlists. The Americans’ strategy had changed. Whereas in mid-May, during the Guzmán negotiations, they had wanted to seal a deal quickly and so had been willing to make real concessions, they

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<sup>123</sup> Campbell, “Revolt.”

now saw no reason to rush. Johnson's Dominican policy enjoyed strong support in the United States, the OAS was docile, the United Nations ineffectual.<sup>124</sup> Therefore, they replaced the rapid pace of the Guzmán negotiations with a war of attrition that lasted almost three months and forced the Constitutionalist to abandon their objectives one after another.

On 10 June, during its first meeting with the Bunker committee, the six-member Constitutionalist delegation (the Comisión Negociadora, led by Caamaño) presented its demands: installation of a government led by Guzmán or another "moderate" from Ciudad Nueva. The government would remain in place until 27 February 1967, when Bosch's mandate expired, and it would retain the constitution of 1963.<sup>125</sup> But on 23 June, "in the face of the military superiority of the invaders," the Comisión Negociadora made a vital concession. It accepted the principle of a provisional government with a "neutral" as president. Elections would take place six to nine months after the installation of the provisional government.<sup>126</sup>

Thereafter, the negotiations focused on who would lead the provisional government. The Constitutionalist put forward lists of candidates, all "neutrals." But Ambassador Bunker offered only one name: Héctor García Godoy.

Few Constitutionalist knew the candidate personally, though most knew him by repute. A member of the upper class, Godoy had served as ambassador under Trujillo and minister of foreign affairs in the last weeks of the Bosch government, but he was not a friend of Bosch or a member of the PRD. García Godoy belonged to that breed of men always on top. In 1964 he had

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<sup>124</sup> See René-Jean Dupuys, "Les Etats-Unis, l'OEA et l'ONU à Saint-Domingue, *Annuaire Français de Droit International*, v. II, 1965, pp. 71-110.

<sup>125</sup> Reunión of 10 June 1965, in Comisión Permanente de Efemérides Patrias, *Caamaño frente a la OEA. Actas de las Reuniones del Gobierno Constitucional que presidió el Coronel Francisco Alberto Caamaño Deñó, con la Comisión de la O.E.A. y otros documentos relativos a la guerra patria de abril de 1965*, Santo Domingo, 2007, pp. 27-39 (hereafter Comisión Permanente, *Caamaño*). My analysis of the Bunker negotiations is based on three major groups of sources: 1) US documents from the Johnson Library and the National Archives; 2) the minutes of the meetings of Caamaño's Advisory Committee; 3) interviews with Jottin Cury, Héctor Aristy, Antonio Guzmán, Aníbal Campagna and Salvador Jorge Blanco (all members of the Comisión Negociadora of the Constitutionalist government); Caamaño advisers Hugo Tolentino Dipp and Emilio Rodríguez Demorizi; Juan Bosch and Peña Gómez; catorcista leaders Jimmy Durán and Norge Botello; the Constitutionalist officers Núñez Noguera, Sención Silverio, and García Germán; and the future provisional president, Héctor García Godoy.

<sup>126</sup> "Propuesta del Gobierno Constitucional de la República Dominicana a la Comisión Ad-Hoc de la Organización de Estados Americanos en respuesta a su proposición para la solución del actual problema nacional," Santo Domingo, 23 June 1965, author's archive.

been one of the vice-presidents of Balaguer's Reformist Party, but he had resigned to become vice-president of the Tabacalera, the country's most important cigarette manufacturer.

"Señor Godoy is a man of experience," affirmed Bunker, "with no ties to either of the warring factions... He fully meets the requirement that the new Chief of State be known in the country and above all in diplomatic circles."<sup>127</sup> The Constitutionals, unlike the Americans, did not trust Godoy, but their opposition was futile; the candidates they proposed were rejected. Finally, on 7 July, Bunker announced that "having received the lists of all the available candidates, we have reached the following conclusion: ...Señor Héctor García Godoy [is] the answer to the problem."<sup>128</sup> The Constitutionals faced an ultimatum.

Caamaño convened the leaders of the Constitutionals the following day. If they rejected the Godoy solution, they foresaw the collapse of the negotiations and the possibility of a US assault in force on Ciudad Nueva.<sup>129</sup>

Such an assault seemed likely. Skirmishes between the constitutionalist forces and the US troops occurred every day along the border. On 15 June, the exchange of fire did not subside quickly, as it usually did. Instead, US troops launched an offensive. "Spurning...the most basic humanitarian principles," the French ambassador wrote, "the Americans are bombarding...the center of the city with heavy guns." The attack continued for almost 36 hours. The Constitutionals put up "a fanatical" resistance, the British chargé noted. They showed, the Canadian chargé said, that "they were prepared to die rather than surrender." Hour by hour, however, they were forced to give ground – nearly a quarter of their territory. The Americans' strategy was clear. "I firmly believe," the commander of the US occupation forces, General Bruce Palmer, told Washington, "that as a result, the OAS negotiating position will be greatly strengthened and I so informed Mr. Bunker who indicated his agreement."<sup>130</sup>

The Constitutionals feared another assault. How long would they be able to hold out if the Americans attacked in full strength? "A day or two," admitted Juan B. Mejía, the IJ4

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<sup>127</sup> Reunión, 1 July 1965, in Comisión Permanente, *Caamaño*, p. 50.

<sup>128</sup> Reunión, 7 July 1965, *ibid.*, p. 74.

<sup>129</sup> Reunión, 8 July 1965, *ibid.*, pp. 79-108.

<sup>130</sup> Fouchet to Quai d'Orsay, 16 June 1965, MAE, box 45; Campbell, "Revolt"; Gavin to External, 16 June 1965, box 8990, Canada; Palmer to DOS, 16 June 1965, FOIA

representative at the 8 July meeting. The Constitutionals had world opinion on their side; another US assault on Ciudad Nueva would generate an outcry. Even the UN Security Council might object. But the Constitutionals were realists. “By the time the United Nations gets around to taking action,” argued Peña Gómez, representing the PRD, “we will be lying in our graves... Our people...will have lost a whole generation of revolutionaries.”<sup>131</sup>

Even if the Americans did not attack Ciudad Nueva, they might walk out of the negotiations if the Constitutionals rejected Godoy. Or they might continue them in name only, with infrequent meetings and no real dialogue.

Time favored the Americans. They could wait. The Constitutionals, on the other hand, needed a rapid resolution. In Ciudad Nueva, tens of thousands of people were crowded into a few square miles. A cordon sanitaire cut off this entrenched camp from the rest of the country. The Constitutionals had hoped to spark guerrilla operations in the countryside, sending men and arms from Ciudad Nueva, but their efforts had proved disastrous. The last, in late June, ended in “a real massacre...at least fifty people were killed.”<sup>132</sup>

The problem of provisions had worsened, unemployment was rife, and the sense of helplessness was deepening. It became increasingly hard to impose discipline. Demoralization set in: “The Senate of the Republic has sufficient evidence to affirm here that the morale in which the revolution [was] born is not the morale that now reigns among the commandos and among the people,” said Pablo Casimiro Castro, the president of the senate. “The people are weary and long for a solution,” added Peña Gómez. “I must say here...that the despairing populace seeks relief from its misery and hardship.”<sup>133</sup>

Therefore, the Constitutionalist leaders accepted the candidacy of García Godoy at the 8 July meeting. The talks, however, dragged on for another seven weeks, while the Constitutionals were forced to yield on point after point. The most important – the

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<sup>131</sup> Reunión, 8 July 1965, in Comisión Permanente, *Caamaño*, pp. 93, 105.

<sup>132</sup> Ricardo Hernández, *Las organizaciones barriales en el nordeste de la República Dominicana*, Santo Domingo, 2004, pp. 115-16 quoted; CIA, “Situation in the Dominican Republic,” 26 and 27 June 1965, OCI #1964/65 and #1965/65, CREST.

<sup>133</sup> Reunión, 8 July 1965, in Comisión Permanente, *Caamaño*, pp. 97, 102



appointments to the top military posts – was finally resolved when the Comisión Negociadora agreed that “the Provisional President will handle military questions directly and...will hold the exclusive right to distribute military commands.”<sup>134</sup> This meant that the Americans would control military appointments. The military attachés of the US embassy were guiding and instructing García Godoy in military matters. “I have ceased to be surprised at most things that happen here,” the British chargé wrote. “I was taken aback, however, to learn from Hector [García Godoy] that the meetings between himself and the Imbert [Barrera] military to discuss the future of the armed forces have been held in [US naval attaché Ralph] Heywood’s private house, with Heywood and the other US service attachés taking an active part in the conversations.”<sup>135</sup>

But what of Imbert Barrera, who was the president of the GRN? He did not want to step down. He pleaded with Ambassador Bennett, saying that “he wanted to work with US in every way. Just tell him which people to put in the government and it would be done.”<sup>136</sup> His pleas were disregarded. The Americans dealt directly with the military chiefs of the GRN, who were all the more cooperative because they knew their interests were not threatened.

On the evening of 30 August, Imbert Barrera appeared on television to announce that he was resigning under duress. On 3 September, the provisional government was installed.<sup>137</sup>

The Johnson administration had gotten what it wanted – the defeat of the revolt. True, in the first weeks of the intervention the president had overreacted. Eager to convince even skeptics of the necessity of the intervention, he invented atrocities that the rebels had never committed; and he fabricated evidence to prove that the Communists had gained control of the revolt. The administration became caught in a web of lies and contradictions – even the authors of a semi-official report conceded that “the reasons for the US landing were ineptly explained to the public.”<sup>138</sup> These blunders, however, did not matter to most Americans and their elected representatives, who supported Johnson’s policy to the very end. They did not question that the

<sup>134</sup> Reunión, 27 July 1965, *ibid.*, p. 179.

<sup>135</sup> Campbell to Slater, 29 July 1965, FO 371/179341, NA-UK.

<sup>136</sup> Bennett to DOS, 24 June 1965, CF 23-9.

<sup>137</sup> The best study of the García Godoy government is Hamlet Hermann, *Eslabón perdido: Gobierno provisional 1965–1966*, Santo Domingo, 2009.

<sup>138</sup> Beaulac et al., *Dominican Action*, p. IX.

United States had the right to intervene in its backyard; and they lumped all Dominican leaders together as opportunists. Moreover, the cost of the intervention was low: only 27 US soldiers died in the fighting.<sup>139</sup>

Even liberals who had criticized Johnson's policy applauded the Godoy solution. "Héctor García Godoy," one of them has written with stunning naiveté, "was an independent, progressive democrat, and his mandate was to provide a liberal transitional government that would make it possible to hold genuinely free elections, thus giving the moderate forces within the Constitutionals a real chance to attain their primary objective, the return of Bosch to the presidency."<sup>140</sup> In reality, for Dominicans who cared about democracy the Godoy solution was a cruel farce.

### **The Pax Americana**

The men whom Godoy appointed to the key positions of secretary of the armed forces, chiefs of staff of the army, navy, and air force, and chief of police were the men who had occupied the same positions in the GRN. This was the price García Godoy had agreed to pay to become provisional president. This was one of the two key differences between the Guzmán and the Godoy solutions: the first sought a balance of power within the armed forces, the second gave the GRN military all the power. The other key difference was that, unlike Godoy, Guzmán was not willing to be the Americans' tool.

After the installation of the Godoy government, the Constitutionalist military departed from Ciudad Nueva, only to be herded into an abandoned army camp on the outskirts of the capital. Time after time Godoy promised the Constitutionalist officers that he would reintegrate them and their men into the armed forces, but the weeks passed and the men sat idle in the camp. They remained there throughout the nine months of Godoy's presidency.

These months were marked by violence. A few of the victims belonged to right-wing groups, but most of those killed by "unknown" assassins – or openly by the police and the armed

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<sup>139</sup> Greenberg, *United States*, table #1.

<sup>140</sup> Jerome Slater, *Intervention and Negotiation: The United States and the Dominican Revolution*, New York, 1970, p. 134.

forces – were Boschistas or supporters of the Far Left, as were those who were arrested, beaten and persecuted.

This was the backdrop to the electoral campaign. Two major candidates vied for the presidency: Bosch and Joaquín Balaguer. Balaguer was “an intellectual and a gentleman,” said the Director of the State Department’s Office of Caribbean Affairs after a long conversation with him on 15 May. Throughout the crisis Balaguer had endorsed whatever policy Washington had adopted, and he was, of course, its favored candidate.<sup>141</sup>

Without the US invasion, the Constitutionals, who had defeated Wessin and his cohorts at the “miracle of the bridge,” would have prevailed: Bosch would have returned to the Dominican Republic to complete his term. And the army – those officers who had supported Wessin – would have been purged. Thus, the country Bosch would have governed in 1965 would have been fundamentally different from that he had led before his overthrow when democracy had been impossible since, as a US official said, Trujillo’s military remained “largely intact.”<sup>142</sup> In April 1965, for the first time in their history, the Dominican people could have hoped to have real democracy and social reform. The American invasion crushed this dream.

When the United States invaded, the Constitutionals did not collapse. Stubbornly and bravely, they forced the Americans to engage in months of negotiations. It was heroic, and it was hopeless. The vast imbalance of power between Dominicans and Americans meant that the Constitutionals had to settle for a negotiated surrender.

Technically, the Godoy solution granted the Dominicans the right to choose their next president at the ballot box, but in fact their choice was grim: if they elected Bosch, would the Americans and the Dominican military chiefs allow him to govern or would they drown his victory in blood? The CIA station chief reported from Santo Domingo “that he did not believe that the Dominican military would let Bosch hold office for more than a week.”<sup>143</sup>

To a people who had endured so much and who were still living in an era punctuated by

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<sup>141</sup> Crockett, Memorandum for the Record, 15 May 1965, quoted, Central Files 1964-66, POL 15-1 DOM, RG 59, NA-USA; Bernardo Vega, *Cómo los americanos ayudaron a colocar a Balaguer en el poder en 1966*, Santo Domingo, 2004; Felten, “Electing Balaguer.”

<sup>142</sup> Hughes to SecState, 30 Oct. 1963, NSFCF, box 67, JFKL.

<sup>143</sup> Koren to Hughes, 8 Dec. 1965, quoting the CIA station chief in the Dominican Republic, David Phillips, *FRUS*, p. 349.


violence, Balaguer brought a promise of peace. The all-powerful Americans were his friends, and the Dominican armed forces seemed ready to accept him. He had remained ostensibly neutral during the civil war, refusing to support the GRN, and he spoke of peace and social reform.

The odds, then, were formidably stacked against Bosch, but for the United States this was not certainty enough. “The President [Johnson] wants to win the elections, and he expects the Agency to arrange for this to happen,” the Acting CIA director, Richard Helms, reminded the Deputy Director for Plans. The CIA engaged in a major covert operation to provide financial support, expertise and political guidance to Balaguer. On 7 April 1966 Helms wrote: “I am aware of the dangers a Bosch victory would entail, but every effort is being made to see this does not happen.”<sup>144</sup>

On 1 June, 1966, Joaquín Balaguer was elected president of the republic with 57 percent of the vote to Bosch’s 39 percent. Twelve years of harsh rule followed. Political democracy was trampled, corruption ran rampant, and social reform was denied. Pro-American stability was maintained. Washington called this a victory for democracy.

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<sup>144</sup> Helms to Deputy Director for Plans of the CIA, 29 Dec. 1965, *ibid.*, p. 358; Helms to Deputy Director for Intelligence of the CIA, 7 Apr. 1966, *ibid.*, p. 378.



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