

Message Text

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S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 3 LA PAZ 8491

EXDIS

USUN FOR ASSISTANT SECRETARY VAKY

EO 12065: XDS-1 10/6/99 (BOEKER, PAUL H.) OR-M
TAGS: PINT, BL
SUBJECT: GUEVARA BIDS TO EXTEND HIS TERM, AMID AN ATMOSPHERE
OF MILITARY-CIVILIAN CONFRONTATION

1. (S - ENTIRE TEXT.)

2. SUMMARY: PRESIDENT GUEVARA TOLD ME OCTOBER 4 THAT HE HAD ON
THE PREVIOUS EVENING ASKED HERNAN SILES AND VICTOR PAZ TO SUPPORT
THE EXTENSION OF GUEVARA'S TERM IN OFFICE TO MID 1981, WHEN GENE-
RAL ELECTIONS WOULD BE HELD. GUEVARA TOLD THEM THAT IN HIS VIEW
PAZ' AND SILES' CHOICE WAS ELECTIONS IN 81 OR A RETURN TO MILITARY
GOVERNMENT, SINCE A CALL FOR MAY 1980 ELECTIONS WOULD MAINTAIN THE
CURRENT POLITICAL CLIMATE AT A CONFRONTATIONAL PITCH WHICH WOULD
PROVOKE A MILITARY COUP BEFORE ELECTIONS. GUEVARA CLAIMED THAT
WITH PAZ' AND SILES' SUPPORT FOR A TWO-YEAR TERM, SPECIAL ECONOMIC
POWERS AND REDUCTION OF THE CHARGES AGAINST BANZER, GUEVARA
COULD ASSUAGE
THE MILITARY, STABILIZE THE ECONOMY AND HAND OVER A WORKING
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CIVILIAN DEMOCRACY TO SOMEONE ELSE IN 1981. WITHOUT THIS
SUPPORT, HE FEARED THE WORSE. NEITHER PAZ NOR SILES HAS GIVEN
GUEVARA RESPONSE. THE FAT IS NOW IN THE FIRE AND GUEVARA'S
GOVERNMENT, AND MAYBE CIVILIAN RULE, ARE HEADED FOR A SHOWDOWN
BY EARLY NOVEMBER ON A COMPLEX SET OF QUESTIONS--THE TWO-YEAR
GUEVARA TERM, ECONOMIC STABILIZATION AND CHANGES IN THE MILI-
TARY HIGH COMMAND. END SUMMARY.

3. IN AN OCTOBER 4 MEETING WITH ME, PRESIDENT GUEVARA SAID HE WAS DEEPLY WORRIED BY THE DETERIORATION OF THE POLITICAL CLIMATE THAT HE FOUND ON HIS RETURN FROM PANAMA. THE MILITARY--WITH GOOD REASON--FELT THREATENED BY THE LOOMING INDICTMENT OF GENERAL BANZER AND ASSOCIATES. THE CONGRESS WAS HANDLING THIS BADLY AND EVERYTHING ELSE NOT AT ALL. THE MILITARY, CONGRESS AND LABOR WERE EXCHANGING CHARGES AND THREATS AT A PITCH WHICH BOLIVIA'S FRAGILE DEMOCRACY COULD NOT LONG SURVIVE. GENERAL PADILLA WAS LOSING HIS AUTHORITY WITHIN THE MILITARY AND HOTTER HEADS NOW SENSED AN OPPORTUNITY TO HATCH THEIR OWN POLITICAL PLANS, INCLUDING SOME TO CLOSE DOWN THE CONGRESS. IN THE COURSE OF OUR 90-MINUTE MEETING, GUEVARA ELABORATED ON EACH OF THESE POINTS OF CONCERN.

4. BOTH THE MILITARY AND THE CONGRESS, GUEVARA SAID, WERE AT FAULT IN THE CURRENT CONFRONTATION OVER THE LIKELY INDICTMENT OF HUGO BANZER. THE MILITARY HAD A SHABBY RECORD OF CORRUPT ADMINISTRATION AND SHOULD HAVE ANTICIPATED THAT NO REPRESENTATIVE GOVERNMENT COULD PROTECT THEM FROM AN AIRING OF THIS RECORD. ALSO, THE MILITARY HAD TO RECOGNIZE THAT THE GENERAL STAFF'S VIEWS ON WHAT WAS DESIRABLE FOR BOLIVIA WERE NOW NOT THE LAST WORD BUT ONE OF SEVERAL VOICES IN A COMPLEX PROCESS OF ACCOMMODATION. THE CONGRESS, ON THE OTHER HAND, WAS A "MEDIocre LOT" WHICH HAD LET MARCELO QUIROGA SANTA CRUZ AND HIS TINY PARTY DOMINATE THE AGENDA AND THE TONE OF THE CONGRESS AND TO USE
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THIS POSITION TO GOAD THE MILITARY IN A WAY WHICH WOULD WEAKEN THE MODERATE ELEMENTS AS WELL AS IMPERIL CIVILIAN GOVERNMENT. THE TWO MAJOR COALITIONS, THE MNR ALLIANCE AND THE UDP, SHOULD NEVER HAVE ALLOWED CONSIDERATION OF AN INDICTMENT OF THE UNDEFINED GROUP OF "BANZER AND HIS ASSOCIATES" SINCE A LARGE GROUP OF OFFICERS COULD SEE THEMSELVES AS POTENTIAL ASSOCIATES IN SEVEN YEARS OF MILITARY GOVERNMENT. GUEVARA SAID PAZ AND SILES IN THEIR MEETING WITH HIM ON OCTOBER 3 HAD AGREED TO SEEK AN INDICTMENT RESOLUTION (TO EMERGE FROM COMMITTEE AT THE END OF OCTOBER) WHICH WOULD CHARGE ONLY BANZER AND A FEW NAMED ASSOCIATES WITH SPECIFIC OFFENSES, PARTICULARLY CORRUPTION, BUT THE DAMAGE OF AROUSING THE WHOLE OFFICER CORPS HAD ALREADY BEEN DONE.

5. GUEVARA WAS DISTRESSED THAT THE EXCHANGE OF THREATS BETWEEN THE CONGRESS AND THE MILITARY OVER THE BANZER INDICTMENT HAD NOW BEEN AUGMENTED BY AN EXCHANGE OF ACCUSING COMMUNIQUES BETWEEN THE MILITARY AND THE LABOR UNION FEDERATION (COB) OVER THE MILITARY BUDGET. BEFORE GUEVARA LEFT FOR PANAMA, PADILLA HAD PROMISED THAT NO MORE COMMUNIQUES WOULD BE ISSUED BY THE MILITARY WITHOUT COORDINATION WITH GUEVARA.

6. TO GUEVARA, THE FACT THAT PADILLA FELT COMPELLED TO ISSUE THE ATTACK ON THE COB WAS ONE OF SEVERAL INDICATIONS THAT PADILLA WAS LOSING HIS GRIP ON THE MILITARY. IN HIS RECENT CONSULTATIONS WITH UNIT COMMANDERS, PADILLA WAS APPARENTLY PLAYING WITH THE IDEA OF MILITARY INTERVENTION TO KEEP HIMSELF AT THE FRONT OF THE PACK. GUEVARA FEARED THAT IF PADILLA COULD NOT CONTROL THE MILITRAY SOME HOTHEAD WOULD TRY A COUP AGAINST THE CONGRESS, GUEVARA OR BOTH. THE COB WOULD RESPOND WITH A GENERAL STRIKE AND CIVILIANS AND THE MILITARY WOULD BE IN A CONFRONTATION WITHOUT A PEACEFUL SOLUTION.

7. GUEVARA BELIEVED THAT SEVERAL GROUPS WIN THE MILITARY WERE COOKING POLITICAL PLOTS AND IF ANYONE COULD BRING THEM TOGETHER ON ONE STRATEGY, THERE COULD BE A COUP. HE FELT THAT ARMY CHIEF

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OF STAFF JULIO HERRERA WAS THE ONE HOTHEAD WHO HAD THE WILL AND POSITION TO BRING THE MALCONTENTS TOGETHER. THEREFORE, HE HAD TO MOVE TO REPLACE HERRERA. GUEVARA SAID HE HAD TO CHANGE HIS CABINET SOON IN ANY EVENT, TO REPLACE AT LEAST INEFFECTIVE MINISTERS OF MINES AND HEALTH. HE WANTED TO USE THIS OCCASION TO KICK HERRERA UPSTAIRS TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENSE POSITION AND TO REPLACE HIM WITH GENERAL JORGE TERRAZAS, COMMANDER OF THE SEVENTH DIVISION IN COCHABAMBA. (TERRAZAS WOULD THEN MOVE UP TO ARMY COMMANDER POSITION WHEN GENERAL AZERO RETIRES IN DECEMBER.) GUEVARA SAID HE ALSO PLANNED TO REPLACE THE COMMANDER OF THE MILITARY POLICE BATALLION, CAPTAIN LUIS MONTERO, WHO INSISTS ON BEING GUEVARA'S WATCHDOG. GUEVARA SAID HE WOULD PRESENT THESE CHANGES TO PADILLA THIS WEEKEND.

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8. I TOLD GUEVARA THAT I COLD UNDERSTAND WHY HE WANTED TO MAKE THESE MOVES, BUT HE SHOULD CAREFULLY TEST FIRST WHAT EFFECT THEY WOULD HAVE ON THE AUTHORITY OF PADILLA AND ARMY COMMANDER AZERO. THESE WERE THE MEN WHO WOULD HAVE TO HOLD THE ARMY TOGETHER DURING THE CRITICAL REMAINING WEEKS OF THIS YEAR. AS GUEVARA HIMSELF HAD RECOGNIZED (BELATEDLY), HE COULD NOT MAKE OVER THE ARMY COMMAND IN HIS IMAGE UNTIL THE TURN OF THE YEAR. BEFORE THEN SOME CIRITAL THREATS WOULD HAVE TO BE CONTAINED AND PADILLA AND AZERO WOULD HAVE TO BE THE BULWARKS IN THE MILITARY. MY OWN VIEW WAS THAT IF THEY COULD NOT KEEP THE ARMY TOGETHER, THE SITUATION WOULD COME APART. GUEVARA SAID HE HAD BEEN WORKING ON AZERO AND NOW FELT HE WAS A GOOD SOLDIER WITHOUT PERSONAL AMBITIONS, BUT PADILLA LEFT HIM INCREASINGLY CONFUSED.

9. GUEVARA MUSED AT LENGTH ABOUT THE IMPOSSIBLE SITUATION THAT WOULD EMERGE IF THE MILITARY TRIED TO CLOSE DOWN THE CONGRESS BUT KEEP HIM AS A CIVILIAN PRESIDENT RULING BY DECREE UNTIL ELECTIONS IN 80 OR 81. HE BROADLY DISPARAGED

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THIS "CHEAP SOLUTION" FOR THE MILITARY AND REPEATED THAT HE HAD NO LEGITIMACY WITHOUT THE CONGRESS THAT ELECTED HIM. GUEVARA DID NOT, HOWEVER, AS IN A PREVIOUS TETE-A-TETE, ASSERT THAT HE WOULD REFUSE TO SERVE UNDER SUCH CIRCUMSTANCES.

10. GUEVARA SAID THAT THE CURRENT, TENSE POLITICAL SITUATION WOULD NOT SETTLE DOWN UNTIL BOLIVIA'S IMMEDIATE POLITICAL FUTURE WAS CLARIFIED AND THE MILITARY WAS CONVINCED THAT THE BANZER INDICTMENT WOULD BE HANDLED SO AS NOT TO PUT THE INSTITUION ON TRIAL. THEREFORE, HE HAD PROPOSED TO VICTOR PAZ AND HERNAN SILES THAT THEY NOT ONLY AGREE TO LIMIT THE BANZER INDICTMENT TO TWO OR THREE NAMED ASSOCIATES BUT ALSO SUPPORT, IN LATE OCTOBER, AN EXTENSION OF GUEVARA'S TERM TO MID-1981, WITH ELECTIONS IN MAY OF THAT YEAR, IN WHICH GUEVARA COULD NOT RUN. GUEVARA SAID PAZ AND SILES WRE SYMPATHETIC BUT NO COMMITMENTS HAD BEEN MADE. GUEVARA SAID HE HAD MADE THE CASE THAT PAZ AND SILES REALLY HAD NO CHOICE, SINCE THE POLITICAL DYNAMICS OF AN EARLY ELECTION CAMPAIGN WOULD RAISE THE INTENSITY OF CONTINUAL BAITING OF THE MILITARY TO A POINT THAT WOULD EXHAUST THE

MILITARY'S TOLERANCE. THUS, 1980 ELECTIONS WERE REALLY NOT POSSIBLE. THE PROCESS OF SETTLING DOWN THE MILITARY HAD TO BE COMPLETED WITH ONE MAN (GUEVARA) WHOM THE MILITARY KNEW AND TRUSTED BEFORE STAGE TWO, THE NEXT ELECTION, WAS LAUNCHED.

11. GUEVARA IN HIS CONVERSATION WITH PAZ AND SILES LINKED THE GRNTING OF SPECIAL ECONOMIC POWERS TO THE EXTENSION OF HIS TERM. HE BELIEVED THE TWO SHOULD GO TOGETHER AND BE PASSED BY CONGRESS BEFORE NOVEMBER 6. (THE CONGRESS HAS TO CALL ELECTIONS SIX MONTHS IN ADVACE; THEREFORE, A DECISION TO CALL ELECTIONS FOR MAY 6, 1980 AS INDICATED IN THE ORIGINAL CONGRESSIONAL RESOLUTION WHICH ELECTED GUEVARA, OR TO POSTPONE UNTIL SOME LATER DATE, SHOLD BE

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MADE BEFORE NOVEMBER 6, 1979) GUEVARA SAID IF ALL THIS WORKED OUT, HE WOULD TAKE THE NEEDED ECONOMIC MEASURES IN MID-NOVEMBER--NOT MID-DECEMBER, THE CURRENT WORKING TARGET OF THE IMF AND MINISTER OF PLANNING.

12. DEVALUATION, GUEVARA SAID, WAS A SEPARATE ISSUE. HE WAS NOT GOING TO COMMIT HIMSELF NOW TO DEVALUE THE PESO, ALTHOUGH HE FELT THIS WOULD BE NEEDED AT SOME POINT. IN HIS OWN MIND THIS WAS LINKED MORE TO HIS TERM OF OFFICE THAN THE SPECIAL POWERS ACT OF THE CONGRESS. IF HE WERE GOING TO HEAD THE GOVERNMENT UNTIL MID-1981, HE WOULD CONSIDER LETTING THE PESO FLOAT IN DECEMBER. IF HE WERE TO BE OUT IN MAY 1980 AND, THERFORE, AN ELECTION CAMPAIGN WERE TO START IN THE NEXT MONTH OR SO, HE DID NOT WANT TO START A DIFFICULT MANAGED FLOAT WHICH COULD NOT BE COMPLETED IN AN UNMANAGEABLE ATMOSPHERE. GEVARA SAID HE DID NOT BELIEVE THE IMF TEAM'S LATES TARGETS FOR THE PESO RATE, WITHIN THE ENTIRE FINANCIAL PROGRAM (WHICH GUEVARA CORRECTLY CITED AS 23 TO ONE BY END DECEMBER AND 26 TO ONE BY MID-1980). THE RATE WOULD GO FURTHER, GUEVARA FELT, AND CREATE REAL PROBLEMS. FLOATING, THEREFORE, WAS A MAJOR UNDERTAKING FOR HIS GOVERNMENT.

13. I TOLD GUEVARA THAT WHETHER THE PESO WENT TO 26 OR 36 BY MID-1980 DEPENDED LARGELY ON THE EXTENT OF WAGE INCREASES. ONE WOULD PICK A TARGET FOR THE RATE AND TRY TO IMPOSE THE IMPLIED WAGE RESTRAINT, BUT THE POINT OF FLOATING WAS TO CREATE THE FLEXIBILITY TO ACCOMMODATE LESS THAN COMPLETE SUCCESS ON WAGES. TO FLOAT OR NOT THEREFORE, WAS IN LARGE PART A POLITICAL DECISION ON HOW DRACONIAN THE PRESIDENT COULD BE IN TELLING UNIONS "NO.

14. I TOLD GUEVARA THAT I WAS, UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES, CONCERNED ABOUT THE LINES OF HARDENING CONFRONTATION BETWEEN THE MILITARY AND THE CONGRESS OVER THE BANZER

INDICTMENT WHICH WOULD APPARENTLY EMERGE FROM COMMITTEE

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IN LATE OCTOBER OR EARLY NOVEMBER. NOW, ACCORDING TO GUEVARA'S PLANS, THREE VERY CONTENTIOUS DECISIONS WOULD BE PRESSED AT THE SAME TIME--ON THE TERM OF THE GUEVARA GOVERNMENT, ECONOMIC SPECIAL POWERS, AND THE NEW LEADERSHIP OF THE ARMED FORCES. (MOVING GENERAL TERRAZAS NOW TO CHIEF OF STAFF WOULD CLEARLY BE SEEN AS THE PRELUDE TO HIS ASSUMING THE COMMAND IN DECEMBER.) THIS POTENT COMBINATION OF CRITICAL DECISIONS WOULD PUT INTENSE STRAIN ON THE STRUCTURE OF BOLIVIA'S YOUNG REPRESENTATIVE GOVERNMENT. I SAW SOME ADVANTAGES TO MOVING AHEAD ON ECONOMIC STABILIZATION, IN PART TO BREAK THE NATIONAL FIXATION ON THE CHARGES AGAINST BANZER. BUT I COULD SEE SOME ADVANTAGES TO SEEKING A WAY TO DELAY ONE OR MORE OF THE OTHER DECISIONS.

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15. COMMENT: A LOT OF BRINKSMANSHIP IS NOW BEING TRIED IN BOLIVIA'S UNTESTED STRUCTURE FOR ACCOMMODATION OF CONFLICTING INTERESTS. THE MILITARY IS TRYING TO INTIMATE THE CONGRESS ON THE INDICTMENT AGAINST BANZER AND CO.

BY ITS SEVERAL THREATENING COMMUNIQUES ON THE UNIMPEACHABILITY OF THE ARMED FORCES INSTITUTION. THE EXTREME LEFT IN THE CONGRESS IS SETTING THE TONE ON THIS AND OTHER SELECTED ISSUES (E.G., A PROPOSED HOMAGE TO THE CHE GUEVARA) WITH AN APPARENT INTENT, OR INDIFFERENCE, TOWARD A MILITARY COUP, IN THE BELIEF THAT A CYCLE OF MILITARY COUP, REPRESSION, DISGRACE AND STRIDENT CIVILIAN RESISTANCE WOULD STRENGTHEN THE EXTREME LEFT. THE EXTREME LEFT WILL NOT GET ITS WAY ON THE SUBSTANTIVE VOTES, BUT THE MILITARY SO FAR IS REACTING TO THE TONE OF THE DEBATES AS MUCH AS THE LIKELY OUTCOME. THE LABOR UNION FEDERATION HAS NOW SWITCHED FROM A TACTIC OF MOLLIFYING THE MILITARY TO TRYING TO INTIMIDATE THEM WITH AN IMPLIED THREAT THAT A COUP WILL BE FOLLOWED BY A GENERAL STRIKE AND OTHER RESISTANCE. PADILLA, IN A MEETING AT HIS HOME, HAS INDEED GIVEN THE KEY YOUNG UNIT

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COMMANDERS THE FEELING THAT WHEN A COUP IS CALLED FOR, THEY CAN COUNT ON HIM. THIS IS A VERY DANGEROUS COURSE TO TRY TO MAINTAIN HIS LEADERSHIP. THE COMMANDERS WITH THE HORSEPOWER ARE CONCERNED ABOUT THE MILITARY'S ABILITY TO MAINTAIN ITS PRIVILEGED POSITION. THE INDICTMENT OF BANZER AND CO. THREATENS THIS POSITION. SO DOES THE VERY DELICATE DECISION ABOUT WHO WILL LEAD THE ARMED FORCES WHEN THE CURRENT GENERATION RETIRES AT YEAR'S END (INCLUDING PADILLA, AZERO, CASTILLO AND THE FEARED HERRERA).

16. IT IS VERY DISTURBING THAT GUEVARA HIMSELF IS NOW PLAYING HIS OWN GAME OF BRINKSMANSHIP AND PRESSING THE POLITICAL PARTIES AND THE MILITARY TO FACE TOO MANY FATEFUL DECISIONS AT ONE TIME. WITH LATE OCTOBER/EARLY NOVEMBER NOW APPARENTLY TO BE THE CRUNCH POINT ON THE CONGRESSIONAL VOTE ON A (PARED DOWN) INDICTMENT OF BANZER AND A FEW FRIENDS, THE PICKING OF THE PRESUMPTIVE NEW ARMY LEADERSHIP, SPECIAL ECONOMIC POWERS, AND THE DECISION ON EXTENDING GUEVARA'S TERM, BOLIVIA'S CIVILIAN RULE WILL GO INTO A REAL TRIAL BY FIRE. WHETHER GUEVARA, ALONG WITH THE MILITARY AND THE CONGRESS, CAN WALK OVER ALL THESE GLOWING COALS IS NOT CLEAR. GUEVARA ALONE HAS NOWHERE NEAR THE POWER TO GET THE OUTCOME HE WANTS. HE CAN SKILLFULLY PLAY OUT THE TACTIC THAT SURVIVAL OF GUEVARA IS SYNONOMOUS WITH SURVIVAL OF REPRESENTATIVE CIVILIAN RULE AND MAYBE EVEN DOMESTIC ORDER. BUT ONLY ENLIGHTENED ACCOMMODATION FROM THE MILITARY AND THE MAJOR POLITICAL PARTIES WILL ASSURE THAT THE TRIAL IS PASSED IN A WAY WHICH DOES PRESERVE CIVILIAN RULE.

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