

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE
DIRECTOR OF INTELLIGENCE AND RESEARCH

April 25, 1969

To : The Secretary
Through: S/S
From : INR - Thomas L. Hughes *tlw*

Subject: Dominican Republic: Another Round of Violence Begins
and--Hopefully--Ends

President Joaquin Balaguer has moved to check a threatening new cycle of political violence. After a round of what appeared to be politically-motivated murders and reprisals, and following a brutal police assault on students at a sports event, he replaced the Chief of the National Police and his principal deputy on April 20. Balaguer had been under heavy opposition attack for an alleged failure to control strong-arm elements associated with the police and the military--the so-called "uncontrollable forces." On the other side, hard-line officers were working up to a campaign of violent retaliation against the left for a recent series of attacks on police and military personnel. By shaking up the police command, Balaguer mollified the opposition to some extent and in the process demonstrated that he is by no means a captive of the unregenerate military. He is likely, however, to find the job of keeping the peace between the bitterly divided left and right an increasingly difficult job in the months ahead. Elections are little more than a year away; Balaguer's own pending decision on whether to seek reelection has the country

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*Pol 83-8 Dom Rep
XR Pol 12 Dom Rep*

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Authority *NN 96900*

on edge; and the potential for renewed political violence remains high.

Violence from the left and right. Hit and run attacks in early April on police and military men resulted in at least four dead and three wounded. The Maoist Dominican Popular Movement (MPD) was probably responsible, although it is difficult to be certain of these matters in the Dominican Republic where so many old personal scores are always up for settlement. Key military and police officers promised revenge, a prominent MPD activist was killed in a shoot-out, a number of arrests were made, and corpses began turning up in out of the way places.

It seemed likely that targets among the non-communist left would soon be included. Those who fought the "Constitutionalists" in 1965 are not inclined to draw ideological distinctions between the extremists and Juan Bosch's Dominican Revolutionary Party (PRD). The PRD Secretary General, Jose Francisco Pena Gomez, did not help matters by publicly buying the MPD line that two of the murdered military had been killed by the Armed Forces themselves in order to justify a general campaign of terror against the left. Protesting the failure to control the "uncontrollable" forces, the PRD delegation walked out of Congress on April 15, while the party took the opportunity to urge other political groups to join in a boycott of the 1970 elections. On the right, former President Rafael Bonnelly and ex-General Elias Wessin y Wessin

also denounced the government on the violence issue, tying it to Balaguer's alleged determination to ensure himself another term in office.

The situation became acute on April 18 when the police broke up the first Inter-University games in Santo Domingo with a liberal use of tear gas and night sticks. The Rector of the Autonomous University and the Vice Rector of the Catholic University were beaten ⁱⁿ the melee. The rather lame excuse for the attack was that the students had been passing out subversive literature. In all probability the police, provoked by a long series of demonstrations over financing for the Autonomous University, found the opportunity to get at the students outside university grounds too good to pass up.

Balaguer acts. Balaguer evidently saw his own opportunity in the incident. He described the assault on the students as "not only an error but stupidity" and promptly sacked the Chief of the National Police, Colonel Braulio Alvarez Sanchez, a "Trujillista"-style officer who had been identified in the past as a strong Balaguer supporter. The President also got rid of his Education Minister who had been under attack by the students. He further took the occasion to demonstrate an even-handed approach by denouncing both the right and the left for fomenting violence. The new Chief of Police, Joaquin Mendez Lara, fell in line with a statement that he intended to combat terrorism whatever its source.

Removing Alvarez Sanchez was an act nicely calculated to defuse what had been rapidly taking on the dimensions of a crisis. The Police Chief, a symbol of the hard-line military right which the students and the left generally hate and fear, was just the right kind of political sacrifice for Balaguer to make. The President was also thus able to make it clear that he is by no means a captive of the unregenerate military as his opposition has frequently charged. Reactions to Balaguer's moves have generally been favorable. Some of the tenseness has gone out of the Dominican atmosphere for the moment and, although the PRD has^{not} yet returned to Congress, most of the opposition appears prepared to give Balaguer and his new Police Chief a chance to show their good will.

No permanent solution in sight. As yet, however, there is no promise of lasting solutions to the problems underlying political violence in the Dominican Republic. The right and left are still bitterly divided; the military and the extreme left still look forward to a final settling of accounts. Balaguer has done well these past three years in maneuvering between the contending forces and, particularly, in balancing off factions within the military. Some in the Armed Forces may now realize that they need him at least as much as he needs them; influential officers are reportedly anxious for Balaguer to announce for reelection, having concluded that he is clearly the best choice available from their point of view. Nevertheless, his control over the security forces remains

tenuous and could disappear in a moment of crisis.

The President's ability to keep the peace will surely be tested again in the days and months ahead. A decision on his part to run in 1970 would put a particularly severe strain on the fragile Dominican political structure, intensifying as it would polarization and the general aggressiveness of the opposition. Other factors, including simple disturbances and demonstrations, might set the cycle in motion once more. In any case, the "tranquility" Balaguer and other political leaders have for so long promised to bring to the "Dominican family" seems as far off as ever.