

8 July 1971

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

SUBJECT: Minutes of the Meeting of the 40 Committee, 6 July 1971

PRESENT: Mr. Mitchell (Acting Chairman), Mr. Johnson, Admiral Moorer, and General Cushman. Mr. Kissinger and Mr. Packard were unable to attend. Colonel Richard Kennedy represented Mr. Kissinger.

Messrs. Charles A. Meyer, Wymberley Coerr, Arnold Nachmanoff, Thomas Karamessines, and William Broe were also present.

[Omitted here is material unrelated to Bolivia.]

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2. Bolivia

The White House request that CIA come up with a political action program to arrest the leftward trend of the Torres regime in volatile Bolivia was discussed in depth.

The crux of the argument was essentially: Do you stand by in a spectator role as the Bolivians thrash about in their underdeveloped political agony or do you move to solidify the opposition despite its apparent lack of leadership?

The State Department reserved its position until the country team had made its reply to a cabled version of the proposal. Ambassador Siracusa had earlier opposed covert action in this theatre.

Mr. Broe's exposition traced the existing forces, principally the MNR and some of the personalities involved such as former President Paz Estenssoro (now in exile in Peru) and various military types both on active duty and retired who might pull together to avoid the leftward drift. Among the leading dangers is the People's Popular Assembly, established 19 January 1971 and accepted by President Torres as a sort of organized leftist pressure group.

Mr. Meyer noted, however, that the final results of the Popular Assembly seemed to be better than expected, with the mineworkers showing some responsible leadership.

Mr. Broe pointed out that the MNR had no money; it needs seed funds to organize and germinate propaganda. It is admittedly a high risk operation. La Paz is a welter of rumors and accusations.

[REDACTED]

The Bolivian Communist Party undoubtedly has Soviet support; lack of political action on our part certainly leaves a vacuum.

Mr. Mitchell noted that the paper suggested a coup is inevitable and asked if the proposal was not just an attempt to structure what was going to happen anyway.

Mr. Broe noted that the MNR probably forestalled a coup on 22 June, and it would be better to control or direct these elements. Several precipitous coups in the past had disastrous effects.

Mr. Johnson: Given the history of such problems, what we are actually organizing is a coup in itself, isn't it?

Mr. Mitchell suggested we could be heading off an extremist coup. He inquired about the chances of a take-over by the far left.

[REDACTED]

General Cushman said at least 50/50.

Mr. Broe felt that the Soviets were currently more active throughout Latin America. He cited Mexico and Ecuador's very recent expulsion of two Soviet diplomats. He noted that the tempo of Soviet activity in Bolivia was higher than elsewhere.

Mr. Johnson inquired if we had ever carried out political action programs in Bolivia in the past. Mr. Broe indicated that we had supported Barrientos.

Mr. Meyer stated that we had leadership then; that what we have now is an automobile plummeting downhill; we are looking for a driver.

Mr. Johnson noted that we have just approved giving the military an aid program in the amount of \$1,000,000 (although the regime has not yet been advised). He doubted if we had a horse to bet on.

Mr. Broe noted the military aid will strengthen the Army institutionally but not necessarily lead to political action.

Mr. Mitchell asked about the competence of those we deal with.

Mr. Broe thought that (in a Bolivian context) there was some competence.

Mr. Karamessines asked if Paz Estenssoro would come back in, and Mr. Broe said only as a winner.

Mr. Meyer reminded those present that the country team had earlier vetoed covert action. He felt the opposition we hope to organize was leaderless and ineffective; it is difficult, if not impossible, to be clandestine in this area and he hoped we could wait until Ambassador Siracusa has digested the proposal.

Mr. Mitchell asked how long this would take.

Mr. Meyer said the reply is expected 7 or 8 July.

Mr. Johnson said State would formulate its position when the reply was in.

Mr. Meyer mused that in seeking a popular base maybe the mineworkers under Lechin would make the most sense.

Mr. Mitchell noted how often we had waited and waited and then frantically pumped money in at the last minute.

Mr. Meyer indicated that he did not have confidence in the people we would be dealing with. Mr. Mitchell asked what is our alternative?

General Cushman felt there was no alternative to organizing the opposition. A covert effort could complement the overt aid.

-4-

Mr. Meyer repeated his desire to get the read-back from the country team first.

Mr. Johnson indicated he was uneasy.

Mr. Mitchell said the alternative was to sit by and watch it all go down the drain.

Mr. Johnson remained skeptical of good results with marginal assets.

General Cushman said there is nothing to count on without starting to move.

Mr. Broe: We have a chance to get the MNR to pull together for the first time.

Mr. Karamessines: U.S. Government backing could stimulate some unification of MNR and military.

Admiral Moorer observed that Torres was not entrenched. He was unstable and near a breakdown; we might force a favorable outcome.

It was pointed out that Bolivia had 114 governments in 146 years.

Mr. Mitchell asked what the reply of the U.S. Embassy La Paz would most likely be.

Mr. Johnson said we will have to wait for the Syracuse reply. The country team assessment of 18 June did not see room for covert action. It saw the MNR as disorganized and felt secrecy was almost impossible in La Paz...The Bolivians might accomplish desired results by themselves...Torres was not the worst leader imaginable; what follows could be worse...A civil war was possible...

Mr. Mitchell: I see us frequently waiting until the ball game is over.

Mr. Meyer: If our hand is detected I foresee a worse fall-out in Bolivia itself, rather than in the rest of Latin America.

Mr. Johnson: [REDACTED]

Mr. Karamessines: [REDACTED]

Mr. Mitchell asked about the bordering neighbours' attitudes.

Mr. Meyer said he had assessed the Argentines as very concerned but powerless; the Paraguayans ready to intervene in the Santa Cruz salient; and Brazil as too big and too preoccupied to worry over their small neighbour.

Mr. Mitchell: What about the timing?

Mr. Broe: We should get started; we lose something every week.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

General Cushman: We support our own proposal.

Mr. Johnson: I am reserving State's position.

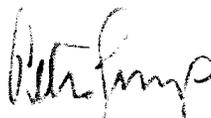
Mr. Mitchell: When will you have a position?

Mr. Johnson: Very soon, we should hear from Siracusa tonight or tomorrow.

Admiral Mocerer: It seems to me we do this or we do nothing.

Mr. Jessup: Well, then, as I see it, the minutes will summarize the discussion; the State Department will produce its position and a memorandum outlining the positions of the principals will be prepared for higher authority for forwarding to San Clemente as soon as possible. Mr. Mitchell agreed. He asked that Ambassador Siracusa's reply be circulated to the members.

Mr. Packard, who was unavoidably detained on the Hill, previously gave his affirmative vote to both the Chile and Bolivia papers; Admiral Mocerer said he would apprise him of the meeting.


Peter Jessup

Distribution.

Mr. Mitchell
Mr. Packard
Mr. Johnson
Admiral Moore
Mr. Helms