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Trip to Venezuela 1954

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Notes on Venezuela and Structure of the Organiza-
-tion of American States

NOTES ON VENEZUELA

A. General Background

1. From 1908 to 1935, Venezuela was under the dictatorship of General Juan Vicente Gomez. Following the death of General Juan Vicente Gomez on 17 December 1935, the National Congress, in compliance with the constitution then in force, designated General Eleazar Lopez Contreras to take over the presidential term which was to end in April, 1936. Subsequently, toward the end of 1936, the National Congress elected General Eleazar Lopez Contreras as President of the Republic.

2. In 1941 General Isaias Medina Angarita, who represented the government forces, was elected President of Venezuela, but on 18 October 1945, a military uprising overthrew the government of President Medina and established a provisional government composed of young military officers and members of the Democratic Action Party under the leadership of Romulo Betancourt.

3. On 14 February 1948, Romulo Gallegos, President of the Democratic Action Party, elected in December 1947, assumed the functions of the presidency, but on 24 November 1948, a coup d'etat overthrew him from the government.

4. Following the coup d'etat a Military Government Junta was organized under the presidency of Lt. Col. Carlos Delgado Chalbaud.

5. The Military Junta justified the coup d'etat on the basis that President Gallegos had found himself without freedom of action because of the constant intervention of his party, an intervention which, it was said, had emasculated presidential powers. The new government declared that it would respect all the international commitments signed by Venezuela, and announced that it would call general elections in the near future.

6. In Havana, Cuba, where he went following the coup d'etat, former President Gallegos declared that an "Army clique" had been encouraged "to take over the country by oil companies and local capital". He also allegedly referred to the intervention

of an unnamed foreign government, and further declared that the coup d'etat had also had "a Venezuelan flavour" as the Venezuelan Army had "always interfered in matters of government...."

B. General Elections of 30 November 1952
and New Constitution

7. National elections were actually held on 30 November 1952. In the meantime, the Military Junta had to face several difficulties, including the assassination of one of its members (Lt. Col. Chalbaud) in November, 1950 and the menace or actual attempts of internal revolts.

8. Four political parties took part in the elections of 30 November 1952: the Independent Electoral Front (the government party); the COPEI (Confederation of Organizations for Independent Elections, a Christian Socialist party); the Republican Democratic Union; and the Socialist party. The Democratic Action party and the Communist party had been outlawed.

9. Of these parties the most active during the campaign was the Republican Democratic Union under the leadership of Ignacio Luiz Arcaya and Jovito Villalba. The first communiqué on the elections issued by the Supreme Electoral Council had announced that the Republican Democratic Union was leading with 294,593 of the 547,458 votes tabulated.

10. On 2 December 1952, the Venezuelan Army announced that Col. Marcos Perez Jimenez, a member of the Government Junta, was the Provisional President of the country, and that the Junta, of which Dr. German Suarez Flamerich and Col. Llovera Paez were the other members, had resigned. President Perez Jimenez named a new Cabinet, and in a speech to the nation said that "the result of the voting" would have "the absolute respect of the government".

11. On 3 December 1952, the Supreme Electoral Council announced that the Independent Electoral Front was leading in returns from the voting and subsequently it was announced that final results had given the Independent Electoral Front and two allied groups 61 seats in the Constituent Assembly. The opposition, it was reported, had secured 43 seats. Charges of electoral fraud were made by opposition parties.

12. On 17 December 1952, the Venezuelan Minister of the Interior announced that the National Government "had invited" the leaders of the opposition to leave the country "temporarily" and explained that "subversive activities" of these leaders "could contribute eventually to the alteration of public order". He stated, however, that the government would continue to guarantee the free activities of the parties which would abide by the law and of all persons and political groups which were not "involved in subversive maneuvers".

13. On 9 January 1953, seventy-one members (fifty representatives and twenty-one alternates) reportedly attended the opening session of the Constituent Assembly and on the same date, the Assembly confirmed Col. Perez Jimenez as Venezuela's Provisional President to serve "until constitutional government is re-established".⁽¹⁾

14. On 15 April 1953, Provisional President Perez Jimenez put into effect the new Constitution, drafted by the Constituent Assembly, and on 17 April, the Assembly elected him as constitutional president of Venezuela. President Perez Jimenez assumed his new functions on 19 April 1953.

C. Other Internal Developments

15. The government of President Perez Jimenez has been accused of non-democratic activities including expatriation or imprisonment of political enemies and press

(1) The Republican Democratic Union charged that the Government had been unable to gather the required number of representatives. During the discussion of the new draft constitution, the press published several reports of disturbances in Venezuela.

censorship.

16. On 3 December 1953, President Perez Jimenez stated during a press interview that there were about 800 political prisoners in his country, and on 11 December, it was announced that 300 of them had been released. This measure was interpreted as a proof of the strength of the government, which had then completed its first year of administration. Subsequently, on 31 December 1953, the Venezuelan Minister of the Interior announced that the government had released more than 400 political prisoners under a year-end amnesty. The Minister of Interior also said that many political exiles had been permitted to return to Venezuela.

17. The government apparently has the support of the Army and some observers believe that it has been consolidating its position. Factors which allegedly have contributed to this development include, inter alia, the economic situation of the country, the economic and social programs being carried out by the government, the effectiveness of the security police and the lack of leadership of opposition forces.

D. Foreign Affairs

18. In a message to the Constituent Assembly on 29 March 1953, President Perez Jimenez said that in the field of foreign affairs, his government was maintaining "its attitude of harmony, decorum, respect, collaboration and assistance" in accordance with the traditions of Venezuela's international relations.

19. In its inter-American relations, the Venezuelan government has maintained its interest in "strengthening continental unity", and has discarded the advisability of entering into any kind of sub-regional pacts. ⁽¹⁾

20. In January, 1953, Venezuela rejected an invitation to a Conference of Central American and Gran Colombian States in Panama, as proposed by Ecuador, for

(1) Venezuela has withdrawn from the "Flota Mercante Gran Colombiana" following disagreements among the representatives on the Fleet's Board. The Flota had been established in 1946 as a joint operation of Colombia, Ecuador and Venezuela.

the discussion of problems of common interest. The reasons given by the Venezuelan government were that the subjects included on the proposed agenda were of "such interest and importance that they should be discussed at a general meeting of all the American Republics and not at a regional meeting".⁽¹⁾

21. The present administration has shunned nationalization and has specifically stated that nationalization of the Venezuelan oil industry is not adequate for Venezuela. The administration has stated its concern with regard to the adoption in the U.S.A. of whatever legislation restricting the import of Venezuelan petroleum.

22. During the most acute phase of the recent Guiana crisis, which led to the suspension of the Guiana Constitution by the United Kingdom government in October, 1953, the Venezuelan Foreign Office issued a communiqué on 17 October expressing the Venezuelan Government's concern over the situation that had developed in that "friendly country". In the communiqué, the government, after abstaining from pronouncing itself "on the political tendencies" of the Guianese, took a stand against "colonial regimes" defining them as improper in the Western Hemisphere. The communiqué also expressed the hope that the United Kingdom would respect the principles of "self-determination" and offered the moral support of Venezuela to the development of self-government.

23. Among the most recent developments in the field of foreign affairs, affecting Venezuela, are Guatemala's accusations that the Venezuelan government was involved in an alleged conspiracy against the Guatemalan government, (accusations denied by the Venezuelan government), and the announcement of the Costa Rican government that it would not attend the Caracas Conference as an expression of a "current of thought existing in the Americas that is adverse to holding the Conference at Caracas unless there is a change in prevailing conditions in regard to respect for human rights".

(1) The Conference has not been held.

NOTE ON ANTECEDENTS AND STRUCTURE
OF THE ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN
STATES

1. The Inter-American regional system has its origin in the First International Conference of American States, held in Washington, from 2 October 1889 to 19 April 1890 which established "The International Union of the American Republics" and a "Bureau" for the "prompt collection and distribution of commercial information". In the early years of this movement special attention was given to the promotion of peace and commerce, and cultural exchange, and the improvement of inter-American communications. Efforts, however, in this direction carried on a conference level, lacked in practical implementation although some accomplishments were made in the improvement of business conditions and establishment of procedures for the settlement of international disputes. In this initial phase the system had a strictly non-military and largely non-political character.

2. Following the First World War the general objectives of the inter-American movement began receiving a greater attention and with the announcement of the Good Neighbour Policy by the USA this new trend received a great impulse. The decline of the League of Nations and the Axis menace further contributed to strengthen the Inter-American System.

3. From the First Conference of 1889-1890, up to the Second World War, seven other International Conferences of American States were held, respectively, in Mexico, 1901-1902; Rio de Janeiro, 1906; Buenos Aires, 1910; Santiago, 1923; Havana, 1928; Montevideo, 1933; and Lima, 1938. Important special conferences during the period above-mentioned include the International Conference of American States on Conciliation and Arbitration, held in Washington in 1939, and the

(1) The Conference had been postponed as a consequence of the First World War.

Inter-American Conference for the Maintenance of Peace held in Buenos Aires in 1936. Through action by these conferences the inter-American regional machinery underwent a constant evolutionary process through the adoption of a large number of treaties, conventions, declarations and resolutions and through the establishment of agencies, some of them permanent and other ad hoc in character. Measures were taken inter alia with regard to inter-American peace machinery, codification of international law and the principle of consultation in the case of a threat to the security of any American State. The Lima Conference of 1938 also provided for the consultation machinery (Meeting of Foreign Ministers).

4. During the Second World War, and through the procedure of consultation, the American States cooperated in measures adopted for continental security and neutrality first, and following the attack on Pearl Harbor, they cooperated in measures including economic measures for the protection and defence of the Western Hemisphere. Important conferences during this period included three meetings of Foreign Ministers held respectively in Panama in 1939; Havana, in 1940; Rio de Janeiro in 1942.⁽¹⁾

5. In 1945, an important special conference was held in Mexico City (the Inter-American Conference on Problems of War and Peace) to discuss urgent war and post-war problems -- and in particular to consider the manner of intensifying collaboration among the American States and the question of their participation in the projected United Nations. The Conference adopted a provisional regional security arrangement known as the Act of Chapultepec, and established the basis for the reorganization of the Inter-American System, as well as the basis for inter-American participation in the United Nations. Subsequently, the provisional security arrangement was given a permanent character in the Inter-American Treaty

(1) A Fourth Meeting of Consultation was held in Washington in 1950 at the request of the U.S. Government to consider "the world situation" and the "coordination of the common effort required to meet it".

of Reciprocal Assistance adopted at the Inter-American Conference for the Maintenance of Continental Peace and Security, held in Rio de Janeiro in 1947.

6. The present structure of the Inter-American System is the work of the Ninth International Conference of American States held in Bogotá in 1948 during which, inter alia, the Charter of the Organization of American States was adopted as well as the American Treaty of Pacific Settlement. It should be noted that the organization that emerged from Bogotá was not a new creation but a consolidation of regional machinery which had been established and was declared to be a regional arrangement in accordance with the United Nations Charter.

7. The inter-American regional structure consists now principally of the periodic Inter-American Conference (the former International Conference of American States) held every five years, the Meeting of Consultation of Ministers of Foreign Affairs, the Council of the Organization of American States and its subsidiary Councils (Economic and Social, Council of Jurists and Cultural Council) and the Pan American Union, which is the central permanent organ of the Organization of American States and its general Secretariat. The Organization of American States also includes "specialized organizations" which are under the coordinating functions of the O.A.S. Council.