



Key to a Crisis

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On 24 April 1965 Santo Domingo in the Dominican Republic was a deceptively peaceful scene—inert, parched from an extended drought, torpid from the tropical heat that emptied life from the dusty streets.

Then, like a galvanic shock, came the call to revolution. “Citizens, to arms! Citizens, for the Constitution, for the people!” Long-smoldering discontents sent mobs surging into the streets.

From a beginning typical of the Latin-American pattern of revolution, a new and uglier design began to emerge. On the second day, a large minority of the armed forces joined the revolution and threw open the arsenals to arm the populace. This indiscriminate issue of weapons quickly brought new turmoil to the already disorderly scene. Armed mobs were out of control. Chaos and anarchy resulted. Horrified at the

monster they had created, many of the troops defect- ed back to the loyalists.

As uncontrolled firing, murder, and looting plunged the city into a furious reign of terror, only one group retained organization—the Communists. It was these scavengers of chaos, and not the original revolutionists, who began their thrust to power.

Intervention was deemed necessary to restore order and save innocent people, to protect the lives and prop- erty of Americans and other aliens, and to forestall a second Cuba within the Western Hemisphere.

Inform the People

President Lyndon B. Johnson ordered Marines and airborne troops into the beleaguered area. But getting

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troops ashore was not the only problem. There was also the need to explain this action to the people—to let them know the aims of US policy, the US desire to assist them, the need for order, and the need to ensure a government that represented the people's will.

But how are such actions explained to the people of a country when mass communications have failed? In Santo Domingo the normal life of the city was dead. Most of the radio stations, news- papers, and printing facilities were in the rebel zone. No normal channel for communi- cation with the people was left open.

This was the picture facing the psychological oper- ators charged by the

President with explaining our national policy in the Dominican Republic.

Hewson A. Ryan, Associate Director of the United States Information Agency (USIA), was directed to take control of all psychological operations in the country. Backing him was a team of Latin-American information specialists who were skilled in radio and printed media operations. But this team was not enough. They could prepare the material, but lacked the capability to reproduce and disseminate it. Only the Army had the ability to transmit the message.

First Elements Dispatched

On the afternoon of 1 May, in response to Mr. Ryan's request, the 1st Psychological Warfare Battalion at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, was directed to dispatch the first elements of the Army's psychological warfare effort in support of the operation directed by the US Information Service (USIS).

Operational elements of the 1st Psychological Warfare Company (Field Army)—reinforced with radio broadcast and light, mobile audiovisual teams, as well as language experts—were readied for a midnight departure. A liaison officer was dispatched to join Mr. Ryan with the mission of coordinating military support and assisting the over-all operation in any way possi- ble. The battalion's van-mounted radio broadcast was prepared to follow shortly by heavy airlift.

Almost before the roar of their aircraft had left their ears, the radio teams with Ray Aylor, Voice of America radio engineer, were rehabilitating a 1,000- watt transmitter to begin relaying Voice of America transmissions from Greenville, North Carolina. Production of leaflets by mimeograph began even be- fore arrival of the light, mobile presses. Loudspeakers took position along the Ozama River to bring the voice of the United States to the people.

Operating initially from a command post in the bullet-pocked US Embassy, psychological operations rapidly took form as an interdepartmental effort with USIA, Army, Department of State, and other agency personnel operating together in a single, cohesive effort. Each agency, realizing its own shortcomings in the task, as well as the necessity for fast-moving response, con- tributed its resources to the fullest to meet the national requirement. Equipment, talent, logistic resources, and personnel were pooled in the overriding drive to get the



A wide variety of leaflet appeals supported the aims of the US and the Organization of American States, and informed the populace of the true situation they faced.

job done. Administration was minimized and operational channels kept short and flexible.

With the arrival of light, mobile printing equipment on 3 May, production of leaflets took a great stride forward. The Air Commandos provided two C-47 aircraft in support of the operation; within two hours, they were orbiting the stricken city, showering it with leaflets and broadcasting messages to the populace

through powerful loudspeakers. Meanwhile, operation of loudspeaker trucks, which also distributed printed matter along the corridor, had begun.

Mobile Broadcasting Station

By the afternoon of 5 May, the 1st Psychological Warfare Battalion’s mobile broadcasting came on the air—a record-breaking 60 hours after the decision to



Crowds seeking information collected rapidly at each stop of the loudspeaker and leaflet trucks.

Using the antenna of a destroyed transmitter, the Army mobile radio broadcast station came on the air only 60 hours following the decision to move from Fort Bragg to the Dominican Republic.



To meet a critical need, a dispensary was organized by the radio teams of the psychological warfare battalion. It immunized over 6,000 Dominicans and cared for over 2,000 outpatients.

commit it—with a 5,000-watt signal capable of reaching deep into the country's interior. It was the first locally programed radio—"The Voice of the Security Zone." Later, the network was augmented by two additional mobile Army transmitters and a fixed station assembled on the spot.

Meanwhile, mobile radio and radio-teletype receivers had been flown in from Fort Bragg. These gave the propagandists a capability of monitoring the output of the rebel radio, which began broadcasting on 5 May, and of receiving radioteletype from the USIA in Washington. With the arrival of heavy, mobile printing equipment, the volume and quality of production were greatly enhanced. Under the direction of Conrad Manley of the USIS in Miami, Florida, a newspaper was begun—the first to publish since the revolt began. Produced at a rate of 75,000 copies per issue, it soon gained wide readership both in the city and in the interior.

The backup for the Army's printing was provided by the USIS facilities in Mexico City which produced posters and pamphlets that were beyond the capabilities of the mobile plant.

Although initially the majority of propaganda development was done by USIA area and language experts with wide experience in Latin America, the military propagandists soon began to function in this area. Intelligence teams monitored military sources and conducted interrogation of detainees. Research and analysis teams worked to sift the effects of the propaganda and to locate usable vulnerabilities while the creators worked to achieve a meaningful product.

Crisis Eases

Indications of success were not long in appearing. Posters created discussion along the corridor; loudspeaker trucks drew crowds of hundreds seeking the latest information; and leaflets, when distribution points ran short, were sold on the streets by enterprising youngsters who hawked them for a nickel a copy.

A radio program for passing family news to distant relatives drew thousands of requests. The crisis had begun to ease.

Cooperation had been won, not only by the staunch efforts of the American troops to restore order, feed the hungry, aid the wounded, reactivate vital utilities, and restore normal life, but by the psychological units whose role was intermingled with both the political and military tasks of the operation. By explaining, informing, and coaxing, they had brought the American message to the people, and the message was understood.

Military psychological operators produced and distributed over two and a half million printed propaganda items, conducted 600 hours of loudspeaker operations, broadcast over 900 hours of locally produced programs, and relayed Voice of America transmissions continuously for 35 days.

Among the many lessons learned was the effectiveness of psychological operations in gaining the cooperation of the people and reducing the confusion and bloodshed. These operations played a major part in restoring order, bringing essential services back to life, and enabling a more rapid return to normal. They reduced the impact of our actions not only upon the Dominican populace, but upon other sensitive audiences as well. They were a primary tool of national policy.

The responsive interplay between military and civilian organizations in this field opened new possibilities for future effectiveness in stability and counterinsurgency operations. It demonstrated that agencies in this field have the flexibility to merge into a single, coordinated operation under centralized control, each contributing essential elements to the task.

The pattern has been set. The agencies which functioned together in an *ad hoc* structure in the Dominican Republic have begun to reappraise their roles, to plan together rather than alone, and to view their role in a crisis in the light of joint capabilities rather than their own limitations. Santo Domingo has driven home the lesson of coordinated psychological operations—the key to a crisis.

To view "Key to a Crisis" as it was originally published in February 1966, visit <https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Portals/7/military-review/Archives/English/JF-22/Original/Moulis-Brown.pdf>.