

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

The Counter-Revolution's Patron: Rafael Trujillo versus Venezuela's Acción Democrática Governments, 1945–8

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(Received 10 December 2020; revised 11 August 2021; accepted 3 September 2021)

Abstract

This article uncovers the myriad ways Dominican dictator Rafael Trujillo destabilised Venezuelan politics between 1945 and 1948, the period known as the Trienio Adeco. In contrast to works focused on Trujillo's personal animosity towards Venezuelan President Rómulo Betancourt, this article argues that Trujillo sought to sabotage Venezuela's governments under Acción Democrática as part of his regional foreign policy targeting bastions of Dominican exiles, anti-Trujillo critics and democratic institutions. Trujillo financed an informal network of Venezuelan conspirators who produced propaganda and launched plots undermining the Adeco governments. With the 1948 military coup, Trujillo derailed democracy and gained a reliable ally in Latin America as those he had long backed entered influential posts and remained beholden to their former benefactor.

Keywords: dictators; Dominican Republic; espionage; exiles; Venezuela

Introduction

The literature on Dominican and Venezuelan foreign relations between the 1940s and 1960s has expanded in recent years thanks to the end of the Cold War and the availability of previously closed depositories and classified materials. Works on Dominican dictator Rafael Trujillo's foreign policy are moving beyond the original focus on US–Dominican relations to examine his influence in Haitian, Cuban and Guatemalan affairs, and complement the voluminous literature on his government at home.¹ Studies now consider Venezuela's regional influence during the

¹Mu-Kien Adriana Sang Ben, Walter Cordero and Neici Zeller (eds.), *La política exterior dominicana, 1844–1961*, 3 vols. (Santo Domingo: Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, 2000–2); Bernardo Vega, *Trujillo y Haití, 1946–1950*: vol. 4: *El complot contra Estimé* (Santo Domingo: Fundación Cultural Dominicana, 2009); Allen Wells, *Tropical Zion: General Trujillo, FDR, and the Jews of Sosúa* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009); Jorge Renato Ibarra Guitart, *Las relaciones cubano-dominicanas: Su escenario hemisférico, 1944–1948* (Santo Domingo: Archivo General de la Nación, 2011); Eliades Acosta Matos, *La telaraña cubana de Trujillo*, vol. 2 (Santo Domingo: Archivo General de la Nación, 2012); Aaron Coy

1945–8 Trienio Adecó, the three-year period when two successive governments under Rómulo Betancourt, Rómulo Gallegos and the Acción Democrática (Democratic Action, AD) political party governed Venezuela; the 1948–58 military junta that ousted Gallegos's democratically elected government; and the post-1958 governments of Betancourt and his successors.² New interpretations are even shaping reassessments of British and transnational oil interests related to Venezuela.³ Some questions, though, merit further investigation. Much scholarship focuses on personal animosity or notable moments, such as Trujillo's failed attempt to assassinate Betancourt in 1960, rather than larger political developments in the 1940s or 1950s.⁴ The 1948 Venezuelan military *golpe* remains underexamined due to the limited availability of materials that provide insight into the activities of military officers and government opponents.⁵ As a result, the spotlight remains on US officials' influence upon the military or the country in general.⁶ Despite providing invaluable revelations about local issues, the best scholarship on the Trienio Adecó or Betancourt's government after the 1958 coup against Marcos Pérez Jiménez's military regime still centres upon internal developments and domestic military conspiracies.⁷

Of course, this lack of information is not because of any dearth of effort. There have always existed immense challenges in tracing Latin American right-wing networks, whose members hid their activities, in contrast to centrist and leftist groups

Moulton, 'Counterrevolutionary Friends: Caribbean Basin Dictators and Guatemalan Exiles against the Guatemalan Revolution, 1945–50', *The Americas*, 76: 1 (2019), pp. 107–35.

²Gustavo Salcedo Ávila, *Venezuela, campo de batalla de la Guerra Fría: Los Estados Unidos y la era de Rómulo Betancourt (1958–1964)* (Caracas: Academia Nacional de la Historia, Fundación Bancaribe para la Ciencia y la Cultura, 2017).

³Most recently, Miguel Tinker Salas, *The Enduring Legacy: Oil, Culture, and Society in Venezuela* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009); Mark Seddon, 'British and US Intervention in the Venezuelan Oil Industry: A Case Study of Anglo-US Relations, 1941–1948', PhD Dissertation, University of Sheffield, 2014; Alejandro E. Cáceres, *Londres en Caracas y La Haya en Maracaibo: Retos empresariales de la Royal Dutch Shell en la economía venezolana, 1943–1958* (Caracas: Fundación Bancaribe para la Ciencia y la Cultura, 2019).

⁴Santiago Castro Ventura, *Trujillo vs. Betancourt: ¡Rivalidad perpetua!* (Santo Domingo: Editora Manatí, 2008); Edgardo Mondolfi Gudat, *El día del atentado: El frustrado magnicidio contra Rómulo Betancourt* (Caracas: Editorial Alfa, 2013).

⁵For a representative example, see José Agustín Catalá (ed.), *El golpe militar de 1948 contra el Presidente Gallegos: Artífices y cómplices civiles. Síntesis histórica de la asonada que produjo 10 años de dictadura* (Caracas: Ediciones Centauro, 2008), which republishes his 1961 compilation *El golpe militar contra el Presidente Gallegos: Gestores, animadores, autores, colaboradores, cómplices y opositores* with contemporary newspaper articles, military decrees and public speeches.

⁶Steve Ellner, 'Venezuela', in Leslie Bethell and Ian Roxborough (eds.), *Latin America between the Second World War and the Cold War, 1944–1948* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 147–69; Bethany Aram, 'Exporting Rhetoric, Importing Oil: United States Relations with Venezuela, 1945–1948', *World Affairs*, 154: 3 (1992), pp. 94–106; Margarita López Maya, *EE.UU. en Venezuela: 1945–1948 (Revelaciones de los archivos estadounidenses)* (Caracas: Universidad Central de Venezuela, 1996); Darlene Rivas, *Missionary Capitalist: Nelson Rockefeller in Venezuela* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Steven Schwartzberg, *Democracy and U.S. Policy in Latin America during the Truman Years* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2003).

⁷Rafael Arráiz Lucca, *El 'trienio adecó' (1945–1948) y las conquistas de la ciudadanía* (Caracas: Editorial Alfa, 2011); Edgardo Mondolfi Gudat, *Temporada de golpes: Las insurrecciones militares contra Rómulo Betancourt* (Caracas: Editorial Alfa, 2015).

such as the AD-in-exile.⁸ Many scholars rely on memoirs and interviews of prominent figures such as Pérez Jiménez or his associates who sought to justify the 1948 *golpe* or deny involvement in notable anti-AD conspiracies.⁹ In his account, one conspirator, Leonardo Altuve Carrillo, offered significant insights into an attempt to air-bomb Caracas in early 1948, yet another conspirator, Pedro Estrada, barely noted plots organised from Miami, Nicaragua or Brazil.¹⁰ The best source remains a memorandum from Trujillo's official José Almoina, later expanded and published as *Una satrapía en el Caribe* under the pseudonym 'Gregorio Bustamante', that detailed the dictator's attempts to derail Caribbean democracy in the mid-1940s, but this lone item does not offer any insights into events after mid-1946.¹¹ In a similar vein, Venezuelan judicial authorities during investigations in the late 1960s and early 1970s were able to identify only how Pérez Jiménez's allies engaged in corrupt financial affairs while in power, not their earlier involvement in anti-government schemes.¹² The most suggestive evidence of Trujillo's intervention comes from his relationship with General Eleazar López Contreras during a couple of brief yet abortive conspiracies, but this too relies heavily on rumours and second-hand reports of conversations.¹³ In contrast to works on Dominican exiles linked to Betancourt during his two presidencies, few studies detail how Trujillo backed Venezuelan figures to undermine the AD's years in power.¹⁴

This article reveals how Dominican dictator Trujillo supported Venezuelan conspirators during the 1945–8 Trienio Adecó to sabotage the AD governments. The Caribbean Basin experienced a brief democratic surge during its emergence from the Second World War. Dominican officials, with their foreign policy aim of seeking to remove any democratic government that denounced Trujillo's regime, identified Venezuela as an external threat and chose to destabilise its AD governments.¹⁵ Whereas other works have centred on Betancourt and Trujillo's personal

⁸Charles Ameringer, *The Democratic Left in Exile: The Antidictatorial Struggle in the Caribbean, 1945–1959* (Coral Gables, FL: University of Miami Press, 1974); Aaron Coy Moulton, 'Militant Roots: The Anti-Fascist Left in the Caribbean Basin, 1945–1954', *Estudios Interdisciplinarios de América Latina y el Caribe*, 28: 2 (2017), pp. 14–29.

⁹Laureano Vallenilla Lanz, *Escrito de memoria* (Caracas: Ediciones Garrido, 1967); Agustín Blanco Muñoz, *Habla el general* (Caracas: Editorial José Martí, 1983).

¹⁰Leonardo Altuve Carrillo, *Yo fui embajador de Pérez Jiménez* (Caracas: Ortiz e Hijos, 1973), pp. 185–98; Agustín Blanco Muñoz, *Pedro Estrada habló* (Caracas: Editorial José Martí, 1983), pp. 96–8.

¹¹Gregorio Bustamante, *Una satrapía en el Caribe* (Mexico City: n.p., 1950). US, Mexican, Cuban, Venezuelan and other archives hold copies of the original memorandum; a complete version is published in Salvador E. Morales Pérez's *Almoina, un exiliado gallego contra la dictadura trujillista* (Santo Domingo: Archivo General de la Nación, 2009), pp. 299–352.

¹²Comisión Investigadora contra el Enriquecimiento Ilícito (Venezuela), *Llovera Páez: Procónsul de la dictadura* (Caracas: Ediciones Centauro, 1971).

¹³Federico Landaeta, *Cuando reinaron las sombras: Tres años de luchas contra el 'Romulato' en Venezuela* (Madrid: Gráfica Clemares, 1955); Robert J. Alexander, *Rómulo Betancourt and the Transformation of Venezuela* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1982), pp. 244–7; Edgardo Mondolfi Gudat, *General de armas tomar: La actividad conspirativa de Eleazar López Contreras durante el trienio, 1945–1948* (Caracas: Academia Nacional de la Historia, 2009).

¹⁴See Francis Pou García, 'Movimientos conspirativos y el papel del exilio en la lucha antitrujillista', *Clío*, 78: 177 (2009), pp. 13–72; Juan José Ayuso, *Lucha contra Trujillo, 1930–1961* (Santo Domingo: Editorial Letra Gráfica, 2010).

¹⁵On this democratic moment, see Bethell and Roxborough (eds.), *Latin America*; Greg Grandin, *The Last Colonial Massacre: Latin America in the Cold War* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press,

animosities as the reason for their governments' conflicts, this article identifies the Dominican dictator's opposition to increased anti-Trujillo criticism and Dominican exiles' activities as key to understanding his influence during this era of Venezuelan history. As part of his foreign policy, Trujillo financed a counter-revolutionary network of exiled Venezuelans who produced propaganda, provided intelligence and launched plots targeting the AD governments. Though it is impossible for this article to summarise every plot, it taps into newly available and recently declassified Dominican, British, Cuban and US collections and a handful of Central American items to highlight the dictator's sponsorship of influential conspirators Rafael Simón Urbina, José Vicente Pepper, Estrada, General López Contreras and Altuve Carrillo. To trace the impacts of these interactions, this article offers a brief overview of Trujillo's regime and of its foreign policy, with its attack on Venezuela's democratic opening. From there, the article examines key propagandists, conspiracies and plots that culminated in the 1948 military coup, whose subsequent junta soon brought to power those the dictator had earlier backed.

Most importantly, this article clearly identifies how activities financed by Trujillo undermined the AD governments. Whether with anti-communist propaganda or plots to air-bomb Caracas, Trujillo sought to radicalise Venezuelan politics and increase national tensions in order that the Venezuelan military end its support for the democratic governments and take power. Before the escalation of the Cold War, Trujillo waged his own undeclared war against a government his officials incessantly denounced as an extension of Soviet and international communism. Without the knowledge or endorsement of the US government, the Dominican dictator operated as an independent counter-revolutionary patron within the Caribbean Basin, manipulating regional events in his favour.¹⁶ Trujillo's foreign policy did not merely undermine the AD governments; with the 1948 military

2004), pp. 19–71; Aaron Coy Moulton, 'Building Their Own Cold War in Their Own Backyard: The Transnational, International Conflicts in the Greater Caribbean Basin, 1944–1954', *Cold War History*, 15: 2 (2015), pp. 135–54.

¹⁶On the local dimensions, regional proponents, heightened violence and contested chronology of what is often called Latin America's Cold War, see Gilbert M. Joseph, 'What We Now Know and Should Know: Bringing Latin America More Meaningfully into Cold War Studies', in Gilbert M. Joseph and Daniela Spenser (eds.), *In from the Cold: Latin America's New Encounter with the Cold War* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), pp. 3–46; Greg Grandin, 'Living in Revolutionary Time: Coming to Terms with the Violence of Latin America's Long Cold War', in Greg Grandin and Gilbert M. Joseph (eds.), *A Century of Revolution: Insurgent and Counterinsurgent Violence during Latin America's Long Cold War* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), pp. 1–42; Gilbert M. Joseph, 'Latin America's Long Cold War: A Century of Revolutionary Process and U.S. Power', in Grandin and Joseph (eds.), *A Century of Revolution*, pp. 397–414; Tanya Harmer, *Allende's Chile and the Inter-American Cold War* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2011); Alan McPherson, 'Afterword: The Paradox of Latin American Cold War Studies', in Virginia Garrard-Burnett, Mark Atwood Lawrence and Julio E. Moreno (eds.), *Beyond the Eagle's Shadow: New Histories of Latin America's Cold War* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 2013), pp. 307–20; Andrew J. Kirkendall, 'Cold War Latin America: The State of the Field', *H-Diplo* Essay No. 119 (Nov. 2014), pp. 1–17; Aldo Marchesi, 'Escribiendo la Guerra Fría latinoamericana: Entre el Sur "local" y el Norte "global"', *Estudios Históricos*, 30: 60 (2017), pp. 187–202; Gilbert M. Joseph, 'Border Crossings and the Remaking of Latin American Cold War Studies', *Cold War History*, 19: 1 (2019), pp. 141–70; Marcelo Casals, 'Which Borders Have Not Yet Been Crossed? A Supplement to Gilbert Joseph's Historiographical Balance of the Latin American Cold

coup, he further increased his regional influence, since many of those individuals he had supported during the previous three years entered the new military regime and repaid their former Dominican patron by providing intelligence and strengthening relations with his dictatorship. In effect, this aggressive foreign policy, one that matched Trujillo's domestic agenda to eliminate opponents and remain in power, weakened democratic institutions and contributed to the founding of what would become one of the most notorious military regimes in Latin America in the twentieth century.

Trujillo Targets Venezuela

At the beginning of the Second World War, Trujillo's repression and self-aggrandisement stood out even when set against those of other Latin American dictators. US officials' least damning descriptions of his regime were of 'the most efficient government' the country ever had but 'operating primarily for the personal enrichment of himself, his relatives, and his satellites' with his 'greed result[ing] in the impoverishment of the Dominican people, economically and morally'.¹⁷ British ambassador in Ciudad Trujillo Russell Duncan Macrae succinctly concluded, 'Trujillo feels that he is the State and the interests of the country are his interests'.¹⁸ When he attempted to present himself as a democratic champion, observers found this image 'so divorced from the nature of the Trujillo regime that no one takes [it] seriously'.¹⁹ He even had his newspapers and officials constantly suppress reports of democratic movements and uprisings in Guatemala and elsewhere.²⁰

As well as dominating the Dominican Republic domestically, Trujillo closely monitored external threats. Since taking power in 1930, he had demanded that other governments repress Dominican exiles abroad, suppress any criticism of his regime and recognise his position as an influential Caribbean statesman and anti-communist, a foreign policy Cuban officials described as '*imperialismo dominicano*'.²¹ His strategies ranged from manipulating foreign media outlets to financing uprisings to assassinating opponents; additionally, the dictator supported favourable governments that would be 'obligated' and 'linked to Trujillo'.²² Throughout his dictatorship, he incessantly intervened in Haitian politics.²³ In Cuba, Dominican officials bribed journalists, bought off labour leaders and

War', *Cold War History*, 20: 3 (2020), pp. 367–72; Thomas C. Field Jr, Stella Krepp and Vanni Pettinà (eds.), *Latin America and the Global Cold War* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2020).

¹⁷Ellis O. Briggs, No. 70, Ciudad Trujillo, 5 July 1944, National Archives II, College Park, MD, Record Group 84 (hereafter NARAI), 'Dominican Republic, Strictly Confidential Files, 1929–1945', Box 1.

¹⁸Russell Duncan Macrae, 'Political Situation ...', Ciudad Trujillo, Sept. 1947, National Archives, London (hereafter TNA), FO 371/60919. Trujillo renamed Santo Domingo (the Dominican Republic's capital) 'Ciudad Trujillo' in the 1930s.

¹⁹Cyril F. W. Andrews, 'Abridged Political Review ...', Ciudad Trujillo, 17 March 1944, TNA, FO 371/38261.

²⁰Alexander Paterson, No. 124, Ciudad Trujillo, 5 July 1944, TNA, FO 371/38261.

²¹Acosta Matos's *La telaraña cubana* touches briefly upon '*imperialismo dominicano*'.

²²'Memorandum ...', La Habana, Dec. 1949, Archivo Central del Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, La Habana, File 'Cayo Confites, 1946–1947'.

²³See Vega, *Trujillo y Haití*.

cultivated relationships with military and political figures.²⁴ The Peruvian ambassador to the Dominican Republic echoed this in early 1947, warning that Trujillo did not fund individuals unthinkingly but selectively supported influential figures. Once his clients took power in their respective countries, the dictator was 'in a position to demand a favorable ... attitude toward himself and his Government'.²⁵

Trujillo's '*imperialismo dominicano*' was in stark contrast to the foreign policies of many other governments in the Western hemisphere in the mid-1940s. Latin American nations celebrated new multilateral symbols and institutions, including the Good Neighbor Policy, solidifying the long-held principle of non-intervention, whereby the region's governments were expected to refrain from meddling in others' internal affairs; one of the results of this was the establishment of the Organization of American States (OAS). Trujillo, though, held his own interpretation of non-intervention. To the dictator, anti-Trujillo criticism or activism by any exile, organisation or government was an unacceptable act of interference in Dominican affairs that threatened his regime's image and stability. Therefore, his government had the supposed responsibility to suppress any anti-Trujillo threat by whatever means possible. Furthermore, Trujillo interpreted all opposition to his rule as a 'communist threat' necessitating immediate reprisals.²⁶

At the same time, the mid-1940s witnessed what the literature describes as post-war openings, in which many Latin Americans pursued a more expansive definition of democratic citizenship. Activists incorporated into their rhetoric and projects the various anti-fascist ideals from the Atlantic Charter and the 'Four Freedoms' that outlined and legitimated the global struggle against Germany's Adolf Hitler and Italy's Benito Mussolini during the Second World War.²⁷ Some Caribbean Basin dictators, including Honduras's Tiburcio Carías and Nicaragua's Anastasio Somoza, held on to power, but popular movements and reformist military officials removed long-standing dictatorships in El Salvador and Guatemala. New legislation and programmes to enshrine social welfare and economic rights ranging from social security to improved labour laws took root throughout the region, including during what would become Venezuela's 1945–8 Trienio Adecó.²⁸

Additionally, Venezuelan voices admonished the Dominican dictator. They frequently blended anti-fascist proclamations with their deep antipathy for Trujillo. They cheered Eleanor Roosevelt's 1944 visit to Venezuela as reflective of US President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's 'democratic spirit'.²⁹ That same year, Haitian President Élie Lescot, one-time ally, later foe, of Trujillo, also visited

²⁴See Acosta Matos, *La telaraña cubana*.

²⁵George H. Butler, No. 443, Ciudad Trujillo, 5 Feb. 1947, NARAI, 'Venezuela, U.S. Legation & Embassy, Caracas, Classified General Records, 1935–1961' (hereafter US Embassy Caracas), Box 52, Folder '710: Dominican Republic and Venezuela'.

²⁶George Butler, Ciudad Trujillo, 16 Dec. 1946, NARAI, US Embassy Caracas, Box 44, Folder '800: December 1946'.

²⁷The 'Four Freedoms' originated in Franklin Delano Roosevelt's 6 Jan. 1941 State of the Union Address to Congress; Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill issued the Atlantic Charter that August.

²⁸Bethell and Roxborough (eds.), *Latin America*.

²⁹[Donald St. Clair] Gainer, No. 41, Caracas, 20 March 1944, TNA, FO 371/38808.

Venezuela.³⁰ This visit was followed by that of Haitian diplomat–intellectual Louis-Marie Dantès Bellegarde, whose pronouncements and orations always included ‘a passage in condemnation of nazi [*sic*] totalitarianism’ that Venezuelan audiences connected to Trujillo.³¹

What especially frustrated Trujillo was the seeming omnipresence of Dominican exiles networking with Venezuelan politicians, journalists and organisations. Although the dictator had long complained about this issue, criticising General López Contreras’s 1935–41 government and temporarily suspending relations with that of President Isaías Medina Angarita (1941–5), events in the mid-1940s amplified exiles’ voices. National newspapers throughout 1944 and 1945 provided ample space to Trujillo’s foes, with Dominican exile Buenaventura Sánchez writing in *Últimas Noticias*, for example, and Juan Isidro Jimenes Grullón and members of the Partido Revolucionario Dominicano (Dominican Revolutionary Party) in *El Nacional*.³² Much of this criticism came together in the Comité de Amigos de Santo Domingo (Committee of Friends of Santo Domingo), an organisation of Venezuelan politicians and Dominican exiles whose members delivered speeches and rallied crowds against Trujillo. Notices of meetings, publications of resolutions and dialogues with local politicians were near-ubiquitous in the country.³³ Revealing their political influence, the Comité lobbied the Venezuelan legislature to take a firmer stance against Trujillo’s dictatorship, working with Senator Alfonso Mejía in July 1944 to introduce a congressional resolution asking Roosevelt to denounce the Caribbean ‘dictatorial regime’.³⁴ Referencing the Atlantic Charter, Senator Juan Ignacio Méndez Figueredo compared Trujillo’s support for the 1937 massacre of Haitians to atrocities committed by Europe’s fascist regimes. Senator Jóvito Villalba of the Unión Republicana Democrática (Democratic Republican Union, URD) party placed Trujillo’s ‘black tyranny’ alongside the Honduran and Nicaraguan dictatorships.³⁵

The popular visits to Venezuela by numerous anti-Trujillo voices, the Venezuelan legislature’s pronouncements and the country’s general support for exiles were not just some passing ‘offence’ to Trujillo, as British officials alleged.³⁶ Such anti-Trujillo manifestations countered the dictator’s well-established regional goals; he therefore aimed to reshape Venezuela to suit his interests. Days into the Venezuelan Congress’s anti-Trujillo resolutions and motions, Dominican Secretary of State for Foreign Relations Manuel A. Peña Batlle issued a circular to Trujillo’s diplomatic representatives throughout the globe. Though not diverging

³⁰Cyril F. W. Andrews, No. 11, Ciudad Trujillo, 17 Jan. 1945, TNA, FO 371/44448.

³¹George Ogilvie-Forbes, Caracas, 24 Oct. 1944, TNA, FO 371/38288.

³²Buenaventura Sánchez, ‘Asuntos Dominicanos’, *Últimas Noticias*, 20 July 1944; ‘Revolutionary Movement of Exiles from the Dominican Republic’, with Robert L. Brown, Caracas, 29 Feb. 1944, NARAI, US Embassy Caracas, Box 25, Folder ‘800: Dominican Republic, 1946’.

³³A summary is provided in Joseph Flack, No. 6249, Caracas, 27 July 1944, NARAI, US Embassy Caracas, Box 25, Folder ‘800: Dominican Republic, 1946’.

³⁴Se acordó la constitución ...’, *Ahora* (Caracas), 17 July 1944.

³⁵*Boletín Hebdomadario de Información Confidencial*, No. 18, 24 July 1944, with Manuel A. Peña Batlle to Rafael Trujillo, ‘Asunto: Boletín Hebdomadario’, Ciudad Trujillo, 24 July 1944, Archivo General de la Nación, Santo Domingo (hereafter AGNRD), Fondo Presidencia, Colección Secretaría de Estado de Relaciones Exteriores (hereafter SERREE), Box 2903759, File ‘Boletín, 1944, Código 240’.

³⁶Cyril F. W. Andrews, No. 118, Ciudad Trujillo, 4 Oct. 1944, TNA, FO 371/38298.

significantly from regular directives, the orders demanded they did all in their power to prevent any another nation's legislative body from condemning Trujillo by name. As always, Dominican officials were required to monitor exiles, shape the local press and 'impede similar events [to those in Venezuela] from being produced in the country of your jurisdiction'.³⁷ To enact the dictator's will in Venezuela, Peña Batlle dispatched envoys including Gilberto Sánchez Lustrino from Trujillo's mouthpiece newspaper *La Nación* to lobby Caracas and discourage any negative press. Of course, whenever Venezuelan officials cited the country's freedom of speech and press in response, Dominican agents felt 'lost'.³⁸ *El Heraldo* and *El Universal*, Acción Democrática's *El País*, the country's local councils, Venezuelan journalist associations and student organisations including the Federación de Estudiantes de Venezuela (Venezuelan Student Federation) and the Unión Nacional Estudiantil (National Student Union) responded to these efforts by mocking Sánchez Lustrino and other Dominican lobbyists.³⁹

The AD governments' and Betancourt's rise to power placed additional stress on Dominican officials' efforts. In October 1945, military officers joined the AD to remove President Medina; local elections facilitated by Betancourt, the AD and influential military leaders soon followed which culminated in the 1946 elections and constitutional assembly. Trujillo had long despised Betancourt and his political party, which had supported the congressional denunciations of the dictator, and put forward during its May 1945 convention a resolution comparing him to Spanish fascist Francisco Franco.⁴⁰ While governments from Canada to Chile quickly granted the new government recognition, Trujillo immediately withdrew his representatives.⁴¹ Most domestic and international observers were not surprised, for Betancourt in one of his first public communications spoke of the 'Four Freedoms' of speech and religion, and from fear and want; the international struggle against fascism; and the democratic movement in Guatemala.⁴² Local and international observers understood such language as emblematic not just of the Second World War but also of the country's anti-Trujillo position.

During the Trienio Adecó, Dominican exiles in Venezuela gained a greater voice. Those in Caracas welcomed the coup of 1945, demonstrating and eventually breaking into the Dominican Legation.⁴³ The Dominican exiles' activities also shaped Venezuelan foreign relations. Juan José Arévalo's new democratic government in Guatemala immediately recognised Betancourt's junta and sent a special delegation, but this recognition brought more than diplomatic pleasantries and cordial

³⁷Manuel A. Peña Batlle, Circular No. 21, Ciudad Trujillo, 24 July 1944, AGNRD, SERREE, Box 2903759, File 'Boletín, 1944'.

³⁸Ellis O. Briggs, No. 204, Ciudad Trujillo, 8 Aug. 1944, NARAI, US Embassy Caracas, Box 23, Folder '710: Dominican Republic and Venezuela'.

³⁹Frank P. Corrigan, No. 6871, Caracas, 27 Dec. 1944, NARAI, US Embassy Caracas, Box 23, Folder '710: Dominican Republic and Venezuela'.

⁴⁰George Ogilvie-Forbes, No. 106, Caracas, 30 May 1945, TNA, FO 371/45152.

⁴¹George Ogilvie-Forbes, No. 194, Caracas, 29 Oct. 1945, TNA, FO 371/45154.

⁴²George Ogilvie-Forbes, No. 198, Caracas, 31 Oct. 1945, TNA, FO 371/45154.

⁴³Russell Duncan Macrae, No. 138, Ciudad Trujillo, 15 Nov. 1945, TNA, FO 371/45154.

exchanges.⁴⁴ Juan Bosch, one of the more famous Dominican exiles, played a key role connecting the two countries' popular leaders due to his residence in Caracas, his friendship with the two presidents and all parties' shared hatred of Trujillo. With Bosch mediating and sometimes delivering personal correspondence, Betancourt admitted to Arévalo that Venezuelans were 'giving all our moral support to the democratic opposition' against the Dominican dictator. He even suggested forming a 'block' of governments to stand against Trujillo and other dictatorships.⁴⁵ When Betancourt visited Guatemala, the two democratic leaders repeatedly spoke in public against Trujillo, thoroughly frustrating Dominican officials unable to silence news of such events.⁴⁶

Building an Anti-AD Network: Plots, Propaganda and Spies

Trujillo's interventions in Venezuelan politics began mere weeks into the Trienio Adecó. Anti-government Venezuelans throughout the greater Caribbean sought a benefactor willing to finance their conspiracies, propaganda and time in exile. For Trujillo, backing these individuals would in turn attract prominent military and political actors within Venezuela. Venezuelan officials and US and British diplomatic personnel often failed to investigate or identify such networking due either to Trujillo and his allies' subterfuge or to the general tumult of the Caribbean Basin in the mid-1940s. Numerous officials received vague or unconfirmed reports about Venezuelan conspirators travelling suspiciously around the Caribbean Basin while purchasing military supplies, appearing in not just the Dominican Republic but Colombia and elsewhere. In November 1946, Betancourt's government worked with British officials to investigate claims of Trujillo helping smugglers acquire ships and armaments through Grenada and the Windward Islands.⁴⁷ Venezuelan authorities intercepted a boat loaded with machine guns and hand grenades in Puerto Cumarebo in the west of the country; it had originated from the Dominican Republic.⁴⁸ The next year, British officials worried about an agent who, after first trying to buy 50 planes in the United States for the Dominican Republic, headed to Canada. Authorities initially asked Canada to rebuff any purchases that might be 'used for [a] revolutionary raid on Venezuela' but ultimately approved the sales due to the lack of concrete evidence.⁴⁹ British officials were also perturbed when Venezuelan conspirators used Dominican passports to obtain arms in the Crown colony of Trinidad.⁵⁰

⁴⁴Leake [*sic*], No. 13, Guatemala, 19 Nov. 1945 and George Ogilvie-Forbes, No. 238, Caracas, 8 Dec. 1945, TNA, FO 371/45154; Rómulo Betancourt to Juan José Arévalo, Miraflores, 22 Oct. 1946, GT-CIRMA-AH-045-004-002-006-149, Centro de Investigaciones Regionales de Mesoamérica, Antigua Guatemala, Archivo Histórico, Fondo Archivo Personal de Juan José Arévalo Bermejo (hereafter CIRMA).

⁴⁵Rómulo Betancourt to Juan José Arévalo, Caracas, 18 Feb. 1946, GT-CIRMA-AH-045-004-002-006-105, CIRMA.

⁴⁶Roberto Despradel, No. 226, Guatemala, 5 July 1946; Roberto Despradel, No. 263, Ciudad de Guatemala, 5 Aug. 1946, AGNRD, SERREE, Box 2903348, File 3348.

⁴⁷Russell Duncan Macrae, No. 86, Ciudad Trujillo, 15 Nov. 1946, TNA, FO 371/52231.

⁴⁸Chancery, Caracas, 27 Nov. 1946, TNA, FO 371/52231.

⁴⁹George Ogilvie-Forbes, No. 295, Caracas, 25 Nov. 1947, TNA, FO 371/60919; Foreign Office to D. V. S. Hunt, 29 Nov. 1947, TNA, FO 371/61393.

⁵⁰George Ogilvie-Forbes, No. 296, Caracas, 25 Nov. 1947, TNA, FO 371/60919.

Despite concerns raised, observers frequently brushed off reports of Trujillo's involvement in these activities. When British ambassador Macrae received such notices, he dismissed them. Admitting that 'Trujillo hates Betancourt and would give his verbal support to anything that would harm' the Venezuelan president, Macrae nonetheless insisted that there was little chance of direct involvement. Supposedly, Trujillo was focused on 'absolute tranquillity and his consuming ambition to be recognised as a pillar of respectability against Communist intrigue'. Macrae summarised: 'I believe that Trujillo is most careful just now to avoid any connection with any plot or political subterfuge which might be traced to him in reality, and not merely in prejudiced gossip.'⁵¹ In another report, Macrae remained adamant that Dominican exiles and the US State Department, whose outgoing Assistant Secretary of State Spruille Braden had pushed to limit arms sales and military assistance to the dictator, 'invented' these claims. Trujillo had 'no aggressive plans' and did 'not wish to spoil his chances of recognition as a leader of democracy by a silly attack' against Betancourt.⁵² When confronted with harder evidence of arms getting to Venezuelan conspirators through the Dominican Republic, Macrae insisted that Trujillo 'would certainly keep them [the arms] as he would much prefer to be supplied himself.'⁵³ What Macrae failed to understand was that Trujillo did not share his clear-cut but false understanding of Venezuela as one issue and standing against communism or becoming a regional leader as another. For Trujillo, the two were the same; supporting conspiracies and plots to destabilise Betancourt's government was part of his purported anti-communist foreign policy aimed at removing governments opposed to his regime.

Although many conspirators solicited the dictator's financial support, Rafael Simón Urbina, José Vicente Pepper and Estrada became three of the earliest to receive backing and build the foundation of the loose network that Trujillo supported to undermine the Trienio Adeco. Urbina early on gained an audience with and financial assistance from the Dominican dictator. In December 1945, Urbina travelled to the Dominican Republic. Right away, the Venezuelan insisted that, before his exile, he had been a powerful voice trying to deter any expeditions against Trujillo. To ingratiate himself, he claimed to have witnessed Haitian leaders talking with Bosch and Betancourt, 'form[ing] a plot ... to provoke a revolution in [the Dominican Republic] and install a revolutionary junta similar to the one in Caracas'.⁵⁴ Urbina recognised that the best way to obtain Trujillo's assistance was by positioning himself against the AD government and Dominican exiles.

Urbina's request for financial assistance succeeded. Soon, Trujillo granted Urbina residence in the Dominican Republic and a monthly stipend.⁵⁵ In return, Urbina set up a radio station broadcasting propaganda against the AD and Betancourt into Venezuela.⁵⁶ He also worked with Dominican publishers,

⁵¹Russell Duncan Macrae, No. 59, Ciudad Trujillo, 4 Aug. 1947, TNA, FO 371/60918.

⁵²Macrae, 'Political Situation ...'.

⁵³Russell Duncan Macrae, No. 20, Ciudad Trujillo, 7 Feb. 1947, TNA, FO 371/61390.

⁵⁴Memorandum de conversación ... con el general venezolano Rafael Simón Urbina', AGNRD, SERREE, Box 2903226, File '1945, Memorandum'.

⁵⁵Morales Pérez, *Almoína*, p. 304.

⁵⁶Miguel Montesinos, Report No. R-206-45, 29 Dec. 1945, AGNRD, Colección Bernardo Vega (hereafter CBV), File 064-121.

encouraged by Trujillo's officials, to reprint his early biographical work, *Victoria, dolor y tragedia*.⁵⁷ Of course, Trujillo was not interested in some personal chronicle. The work's value was Urbina's false, sensational insistence that Betancourt was not only a homosexual communist but also a pederast. Most Venezuelans, as well as US and British officials, refuted all three of the allegations. Although Betancourt had been a militant communist and helped organise Costa Rica's Communist party in the early 1930s, he publicly broke with the ideology and stood out as a prominent anti-communist leftist.⁵⁸ Nevertheless, Urbina's accusations, promoted by Trujillo's press, foreign officials and anti-Venezuelan government organisations, circulated throughout the Caribbean Basin into the early 1960s.⁵⁹

Another benefit in supporting Urbina was his array of contacts among notable Venezuelan military officers, such as Colonels José Murillo and Luis Felipe Prato. As early as 1946, moreover, Urbina tried to bring together elites whose wealth the AD governments had confiscated on the basis of their association with previous governments. These were not peripheral figures; they were intimately connected to Venezuela's military, the key domestic institution whose leaders shaped local politics, either allowing a coup to take place, as in 1945, or potentially removing a government themselves.⁶⁰ Urbina helped Colonel Murillo travel between Ciudad Trujillo and Colombia, spreading word of the dictator's possible patronage and drawing more conspirators into the eclectic network.⁶¹ Once aware of Trujillo's financial support, other military figures chose to pursue similar activities; Venezuelan authorities quickly arrested Murillo and his associates for their involvement in new anti-government plots.⁶² Like Murillo, Prato too travelled to Ciudad Trujillo and became implicated in multiple counter-revolutionary plots in Venezuela.⁶³ Trujillo's money and passports were crucial resources allowing Prato and others to travel in the Caribbean Basin, including Miami, Dutch Curaçao and Colombia.⁶⁴ Soon, Prato was involved in an attempt to kill Betancourt during a trip to Colombia, while his allies purchased armaments for

⁵⁷Rafael Simón Urbina, *Victoria, dolor y tragedia: Relación cronológica y autobiográfica* (Ciudad Trujillo: L. Sánchez Andújar, 1946).

⁵⁸For one of the earliest reports to highlight Urbina's slanders, see Emile Lecours, Caracas, 26 Sept. 1946, TNA, FO 371/52209.

⁵⁹Anti-Communist National Movement Publication of Free Venezuela, *Rafael Simón Urbina's Accusation of His Being a Pederast Pursues Rómulo Betancourt: Proof of the Homosexual Activities of the Present President of Venezuela*, 3rd edn (Mexico City: n.p., 1959).

⁶⁰On the Venezuelan military and politics in this period, Edwin Lieuwen, *Arms and Politics in Latin America* (New York: Praeger, 1960); Winfield J. Burggraaf, *The Venezuelan Armed Forces in Politics, 1935–1959* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1972); Alejandro Velasco, *Barrio Rising: Urban Popular Politics and the Making of Modern Venezuela* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2015).

⁶¹Allan Dawson, No. 8263, Caracas, 7 Jan. 1946, NARAI, US Embassy Caracas, Box 43, Folder '800: January, 1946'; Allan Dawson to George F. Scherer, Caracas, 12 Feb. 1946, NARAI, US Embassy Caracas, Box 43, Folder '800: February 1946'.

⁶²Frank P. Corrigan, No. 8750, Caracas, 18 May 1946, NARAI, US Embassy Caracas, Box 43, Folder '800: May 1946'.

⁶³See Joseph F. Santoiana to Frank P. Corrigan, 22 April 1946, NARAI, US Embassy Caracas, Box 43, Folder '800: April, 1946'; Joseph F. Santoiana to Frank P. Corrigan, Caracas, 25 June 1946, NARAI, US Embassy Caracas, Box 43, Folder '800: June 1946'.

⁶⁴Morales Pérez, *Almoína*, p. 306.

an uprising in Táchira (Venezuela).⁶⁵ Though no plot by Urbina or his fellow collaborators came to fruition, they frustrated the AD government and contributed to an atmosphere of uncertainty and anxiety while spreading Trujillo's name and influence among opposition figures.

Trujillo's payroll included not only Venezuelan military officials but also figures in the media. The journalist Pepper became the most prominent propagandist to receive Trujillo's largesse. Like Murillo and Prato, he was introduced to Trujillo by Urbina, who assured Dominican officials that Pepper 'always presented himself as a friend and admirer' of Trujillo who wanted to travel to the Dominican Republic to work on radio propaganda or anything else 'to destroy the Revolutionary Junta in Caracas'.⁶⁶ Before going into exile, Pepper began working for Trujillo through the local press and radio. He first lobbied Dominican officials: 'I will be useful to your Government ... in many countries in the Continent, because fighting for the Government of your illustrious Jefe is to defend the noble cause of American nationalism.' In Caracas during the Trienio Adeco's first months, Pepper issued radio broadcasts and sent articles to multiple Caribbean and Central American newspapers 'in service' of Trujillo's regime. In the spirit of 'anti-communism', Pepper, once in exile in Cuba, continued publishing pro-Trujillo and anti-Betancourt works, while keeping an eye on Bosch's and Betancourt's activities.⁶⁷ Trujillo personally approved Pepper's project, sending US\$2,000 for the journalist's initial work.⁶⁸

From 1946 until the Trienio Adeco's end in 1948, Trujillo backed the journalist's anti-communist writings. During their travels in the Caribbean Basin, Pepper and his wife Graciela Rincón Calcaño de Pepper published a short series of articles in Trujillo's *La Nación* and several voluminous tomes. Some works, including *Fichas del romulato* and *La gran emboscada*, were especially notable anti-Betancourt tracts.⁶⁹ Others, such as *Realidades dominicanas*, were obviously intended to flatter their benefactor's ego.⁷⁰ When Braden attempted to isolate the dictator in the mid-1940s, Pepper jumped to Trujillo's defence, putting out a bilingual rebuttal of the US official, *I Accuse Braden / Yo acuso a Braden*, which Trujillo gladly funded through his favoured presses.⁷¹ Dominican officials tried to use Pepper's writings, including the bilingual pamphlet *Las garras del Soviet en Centro América*,⁷²

⁶⁵Frank P. Corrigan, No. 9022, Caracas, 26 July 1946, NARAI, US Embassy Caracas, Box 43, Folder '800: July 1946'; Allan Dawson, No. 9315, Caracas, 4 Oct. 1946, NARAI, US Embassy Caracas, Box 44, Folder '800: October 1946'.

⁶⁶'Memorandum de conversación' (footnote 54).

⁶⁷José Vicente Pepper to Emilio Zeller, Puerto Príncipe, 4 July 1946, AGNRD, SERREE, Box 2903226, File '1946, Cartas de Emilio Zeller ... Díaz Ordóñez'.

⁶⁸Rafael Paíno Pichardo to Emilio Zeller, Ciudad Trujillo, 8 July 1946 and Rafael Paíno Pichardo to Virgilio Díaz Ordóñez, Ciudad Trujillo, 8 July 1946, AGNRD, SERREE, Box 2903226, File '1946, Cartas de Emilio Zeller'.

⁶⁹José Vicente Pepper, *Fichas del romulato* (Ciudad Trujillo: Editora Montalvo, 1947); José Vicente Pepper, *La gran emboscada* (Ciudad Trujillo: Editora Montalvo, 1948).

⁷⁰José Vicente Pepper and Graciela Rincón Calcaño de Pepper, *Realidades dominicanas* (Ciudad Trujillo: Editora Montalvo, 1947).

⁷¹José Vicente Pepper, *I Accuse Braden / Yo acuso a Braden* (Ciudad Trujillo: Editora Montalvo, 1947).

⁷²José Vicente Pepper, *Las garras del Soviet sobre Centro América / Soviet's Claws on Central America* (Ciudad Trujillo: Papelera Industrial Dominicana, 1948).

to influence US officials but without success.⁷³ Instead, the works circulated throughout the Caribbean Basin as evidence of communist influence in Venezuela. Other regimes, such as Somoza's dictatorship, had their newspapers reprint Pepper's articles.⁷⁴

Like Urbina, Pepper and Estrada, who had also received early backing from Trujillo, were instrumental in expanding his influence and contacts among Venezuelan opposition figures. Pepper helped facilitate multiple invasion plots between 1946 and 1948. In one, he not only used Trujillo's money to acquire two bombers and a transport plane full of weapons and conspirators; he also roped into the plot General José Antonio González, a key Venezuelan military official.⁷⁵ Likewise, Estrada travelled from the Dominican Republic to Curaçao to Trinidad, networking between Dominican officials and Venezuelan conspirators including Elías Casado, who had been a low-level government official before his exile. In February 1947, Estrada associated with several collaborators still in Venezuela to help promote various coup plots.⁷⁶ Despite a stream of rumours about the affair, the Venezuelan, US and British governments never fully verified claims of these conspiracies.⁷⁷ Meanwhile, Trujillo acquired an additional asset, General López Contreras.

Trujillo and General López Contreras's Military Influence

Although he had officially stepped down from the presidency in 1941 and publicly affirmed his apolitical intentions, López Contreras remained an influential voice within Venezuela and its military.⁷⁸ As his name had started to appear in rumours of conspiracies against Medina, democratic activists and reformers feared that he would use his influence to gain unconstitutional preference in any elections, so they sent him into exile and seized much of the wealth he had allegedly accumulated during his time in office.⁷⁹ Right away, claims emerged that he was plotting from the United States, Colombia or other locations he frequented. Venezuelan officials cognizant of his power requested that their US counterparts encourage him to 'exercise his influence toward moderation'.⁸⁰ Because the general consistently denied any plotting, US Ambassador to Caracas Frank Corrigan felt confident that López Contreras was actively discouraging counter-revolutionary attempts and suggested that the AD government was in fact persecuting the former leader.⁸¹

⁷³Luis F. Thomen, No. 533, 11 Feb. 1948, AGNRD, SERREE, Box 2903349.

⁷⁴See Arturo Calventi to Virgilio Díaz Ordóñez, No. 366, Managua, 7 Sept. 1948, AGNRD, SERREE, Box 2903958, File 'Nicaragua'.

⁷⁵José Vicente Pepper, without title, without date, AGNRD, SERREE, Box 2903957, File '1948'.

⁷⁶Federico Fiallo, 'Informe enviado desde Trinidad por el Señor Pedro Estrada', 23 [Feb.] 1947, AGNRD, SERREE, Box 2902655, File '1947'.

⁷⁷See TNA, FO 371/60919, *passim*.

⁷⁸On López Contreras, see Mondolfi Gudat, *General de armas tomar*.

⁷⁹Eleazar López Contreras, 'Manifiesto Issued to the Press of Caracas', 17 Jan. 1944, with [Donald St. Clair] Gainer, No. 15, Caracas, 17 Jan. 1944; Ogilvie-Forbes, No. 145, Caracas, 17 Nov. 1944 and George Ogilvie-Forbes, No. 148, Caracas, 23 Nov. 1944, TNA, FO 371/38793.

⁸⁰Frank P. Corrigan to Spruille Braden, Caracas, 13 July 1946, NARAI, US Embassy Caracas, Box 42, Folder 'Venezuela 1946 Confidential'.

⁸¹Eleazar López Contreras to Frank P. Corrigan, Medellín, 16 July 1946, NARAI, US Embassy Caracas, Box 42, Folder '710: Venezuela-Other Am. Republics, 1946'; John Cooper Wiley, [No.] 496, Caracas, 17 July

Actually, the general was already working with Trujillo. In late March 1946, López Contreras sent his confidant Andrés Bellatini to Ciudad Trujillo, where the dictator promised material support for any uprising against the AD government.⁸² On 25 April, López Contreras sent another friend, former Venezuelan military auditor General Ovidio Pérez, to meet the Dominican consul in Miami, José María Nouel, and gauge Trujillo's interest in supporting Venezuelan conspirators in Miami, Curaçao and Trinidad.⁸³ Though sharing the dictator's enthusiasm for organising a coup, López Contreras discouraged any early movement against the AD government; he was focused on December 1946. By that time, the Venezuelan people supposedly would realise the recent elections were not truly 'free'.⁸⁴ 'Then', López Contreras insisted, 'would be the moment to launch a revolutionary *golpe*'. For now, he wanted to create an informal navy patrolling the southern Caribbean, from Colombia to Curaçao and Trinidad (off the coast of Venezuela). Its vessels could transmit radio propaganda as well as 'link between' Venezuelan conspirators and López Contreras to 'transport armaments' and more.⁸⁵

From April 1946 onward, López Contreras devoted his time to the December 1946 plot.⁸⁶ By August, he was in Colombia corresponding directly with Trujillo.⁸⁷ Nonetheless, he continued assuring US officials and the AD government of his non-involvement.⁸⁸ These assurances worked. Even when Venezuelan officials in Colombia, Curaçao and elsewhere seized ships coming from the Dominican Republic loaded with armaments, Venezuelan Foreign Minister Carlos Morales doubted that the general was working with Trujillo.⁸⁹ It was not just López Contreras's assurances that turned officials' attention away from him; US, British and Venezuelan officials repeatedly noted that any plot against the AD government 'would have no chance of success without the support of important forces in the Army', focusing most of their attention on developments inside the

1946, NARAI, US Embassy Caracas, Box 42, Folder 'Venezuela 1946 Confidential'; Frank P. Corrigan, No. 8498, Caracas, 11 March 1946, NARAI, US Embassy Caracas, Box 43, Folder '800: March 1946'. There were rumours Corrigan provided encouragement to López Contreras's plots, but no evidence has confirmed this.

⁸²Carl G. Wagner, R-61-46, Caracas, 30 March 1946, NARAI, US Embassy Caracas, Box 43, Folder '800: March 1946'.

⁸³José María Nouel to Rafael Trujillo, Miami, 25 April 1946, AGNRD, CBV, File 067-067.

⁸⁴US officials' sources reported at this time that Venezuelans including General González, Alberto Díaz, General Julio Faria, Raimundo Curiel and General León Jurado – at the time in Colombia – were exchanging letters with López Contreras about leading an uprising after the elections, so it is possible that they were López Contreras's associates as he worked with Nouel in Miami: 'Re: Political Activities in Venezuela', 26 Oct. 1946, NARAI, US Embassy Caracas, Box 44, Folder '800: October 1946'.

⁸⁵José María Nouel to Rafael Trujillo, Miami, 26 April 1946, AGNRD, CBV, File 067-067.

⁸⁶British and US officials received reports linking López Contreras to various other plots to which he lent moral support: George Ogilvie-Forbes, No. 247, Caracas, 20 July 1946, TNA, FO 371/52208; Joseph F. Santoiana to Frank P. Corrigan, 'Re: Rumors of Counter-Revolution', 9 July 1946, NARAI, US Embassy Caracas, Box 43, Folder '800: July 1946'.

⁸⁷Rafael Trujillo to Eleazar López Contreras, Ciudad Trujillo, 14 Aug. 1946, AGNRD, CBV, File 067-063.

⁸⁸Eleazar López Contreras to Rómulo Betancourt, Carlos Delgado Chalbaud and Mario R. Vargas, Medellín, 29 July 1946, NARAI, US Embassy Caracas, Box 43, Folder '800: July 1946'.

⁸⁹Allan Dawson, No. 9366, Caracas, 17 Oct. 1946, NARAI, US Embassy Caracas, Box 44, Folder '800: October 1946'.

country rather than upon external figures like López Contreras or Trujillo.⁹⁰ In this respect, US, British and Venezuelan officials failed to comprehend the relationship between the two; the Dominican dictator's policy was to back influential figures such as López Contreras in order to build up distrust and anxiety within the nation. As a result, domestic institutions such as the military would stage a coup.

The December 1946 uprising would have been such an event. Trujillo kept on Nouel as the intelligence contact, and Nouel hired US gunrunner Karl Eisenhardt to handle all purchases, including Catalina seaplanes, a couple of Lockheed P-38 Lightning fighter planes, explosives, guns and other armaments; US mercenaries helped with transportation and López Contreras used a false passport to travel around the Caribbean Basin.⁹¹ The planned invasions, alongside aerial assaults on the Miraflores presidential palace by the general's allies within the Venezuelan military, would have sparked further mutinies and a military coup. However, by this point Urbina, seemingly angered by his marginalisation in the plot, had become an informer for the AD government and turned over correspondence from López Contreras's associates.⁹² Thanks to this betrayal, the AD government requested US officials' assistance to halt the plot.⁹³

Yet, thanks to Trujillo's patronage, López Contreras's influence went beyond the plot's material dimensions. Inside Venezuela, military officers following López Contreras still planned their December uprising. While some understood that the plans had been cancelled, those under Major Carlos Maldonado Peña at the military base in Maracay pressed forward, sending two planes to fire upon their own nation's legislative palace, the Capitolio, in Caracas. Though the only physical damage was caused by one aircraft strafing the palace, since most of the conspiring pilots had already sought asylum in Colombia rather than engage in what had become a futile uprising, the Venezuelan government responded to the coup attempt with a nation-wide week-long suspension of the constitution. This suspension lasted longer in Maracay and other states with large anti-AD populations.⁹⁴ Government agents detained many military officers and civilians suspected of involvement, but their best evidence of the plot was a few letters of support from López Contreras to various allies inside Venezuela. As a result, many were arrested just for receiving the correspondence or having their names mentioned in a letter.⁹⁵

⁹⁰Allan Dawson, No. 9384, Caracas, 22 Oct. 1946, NARAI, US Embassy Caracas, Box 44, Folder '800: October 1946'.

⁹¹Although the FBI interviewed Nouel about these activities, the consul was tipped off in advance by Eisenhardt, allowing him to provide minimum information, thereby protecting the operation. Thus, while the FBI and State Department reports in the NARAI collections cited in this article provide broad overviews of the 1946 plot, details of Nouel's working with López Contreras on Trujillo's orders are found in AGNRD, CBV, Folder 073-009, and SERREE, Box 2903226, File '1947, Memorandum'.

⁹²Allan Dawson, Ciudad Trujillo, [No.] 574, Caracas, 15 Dec. 1946 and Allan Dawson, No. 9561, Caracas, 17 Dec. 1946, NARAI, US Embassy Caracas, Box 44, Folder '800: December 1946'.

⁹³Allan Dawson, No. 587, 20 Dec. 1946 and Allan Dawson, [No.] 584, Caracas, 18 Dec. 1946, NARAI, US Embassy Caracas, Box 44, Folder '800: December 1946'. The FBI arrested Eisenhardt and his partners in April 1947 before they could flee the United States, to the relief of Venezuelan and US officials.

⁹⁴David Francis, No. 272, Caracas, 17 Dec. 1946, TNA, FO 371/61390; Foreign Office, 'The Venezuelan Revolution', 19 Dec. 1946, TNA, FO 371/52208.

⁹⁵George Ogilvie-Forbes, No. 59E, Caracas, 7 April 1947, TNA, FO 371/61391.

The most prominent detainee was Villalba who, as noted above, had once spoken out against Trujillo in 1944.

The government's handling of prisoners created additional political tension, compounding the chaos of the uprising itself. With civilian prisoners handed over to military courts and prisons, opposition parties like the URD called out these heavy-handed responses. Prisoners' relatives claimed 'third degree methods [of physical violence and torture] were applied to civilian prisoners'. Heated debates between the AD, the URD and the Comité de Organización Política Electoral Independiente (Independent Electoral Political Organisation Committee, COPEI) took place in the Venezuelan legislature. Though the URD succeeded in having the legislature appoint an investigative commission, the final report included some 'unsavoury' details about possible violence and torture that would 'have been a cause of embarrassment' had not members of Congress prevented public distribution of the (extremely rushed) report.⁹⁶ Despite those efforts, claims of torture of political prisoners still circulated, weakening the government's reputation, as opponents noted similarities to earlier governments' treatment of critics.⁹⁷

Others lost faith in the government when AD partisans suggested arming militias against future uprisings. Numerous Venezuelans and international observers reported an immediate domestic backlash to the AD government's response to the uprising.⁹⁸ Historically, the Venezuelan military had taken on itself the responsibility – legal and supralegal – to defend the government from internal and external threats. With their requests for civilian militias or partisans to defend their nation from Trujillo-financed plots, the AD inadvertently weakened military officers' support for the government by doubting their loyalty and capability, thereby strengthening anti-AD sentiments.⁹⁹

The December 1946 uprising and other conspiracies supported by Trujillo using López Contreras's name ultimately bled the country of reliable military officials and further damaged the AD governments. Officials linked to López Contreras continued to desert or be implicated in plots. Lieutenant Colonel Pérez Jiménez's brother Juan (also a Lieutenant Colonel), Pepper's brother-in-law Lieutenant Colonel Enrique Rincón Calcaño and these officers' allies had participated in the failed uprising.¹⁰⁰ Importantly, in 1945, most had remained loyal to the military and their country, with Rincón Calcaño starting to express doubts only from late 1946 about the AD's governance and economic policies.¹⁰¹ López Contreras's Trujillo-financed plot gave them the opportunity to act upon those doubts. Another plot involved Colonel Julio César Vargas, Inspector-General of the Armed Forces, responsible for monitoring programmes, personnel and funds throughout the country. Vargas had taken part in meetings with López Contreras

⁹⁶David Francis, No. 282, Caracas, 31 Dec. 1946, TNA, FO 371/61390.

⁹⁷George Ogilvie-Forbes, No. 1, Caracas, 28 Jan. 1947, TNA, FO 371/61390.

⁹⁸George Ogilvie Forbes [*sic*], No. 34, Caracas, 18 Jan. 1947, TNA, FO 371/61390.

⁹⁹*Ibid.* The 'responsibility' to defend the government is a common theme in works on the Venezuelan military: see [footnote 60](#).

¹⁰⁰Henry J. Armstrong, 53-46, Caracas, 20 Dec. 1946, NARAIL, US Embassy Caracas, Box 44, Folder '800: December 1946'.

¹⁰¹'Memorandum to the Ambassador', 7 Dec. 1947, NARAIL, US Embassy Caracas, Box 44, Folder '800: December 1946'.

in Philadelphia in November 1946, on the occasion of an informal ‘*conferencia*’ organised by Estrada and other Venezuelan conspirators. Afterwards, López Contreras wrote to Vargas, denouncing Betancourt as a ‘communist’ and commenting that the AD should be called a ‘Soviet Agency’ for being a ‘totalitarian party’.¹⁰² When the Venezuelan government dismissed Vargas from the lucrative and nationally influential Inspector-General post, he publicly criticised the government, which responded by publishing a letter to him from López Contreras.¹⁰³ This internal strife served Trujillo’s foreign policy well by weakening the military’s solidarity and resolve as officers took sides in domestic politics, with some participating in conspiracies.

Into 1948, Betancourt’s officials could only watch as opposition figures including Maldonado Peña, in exile after sending planes against the government in December 1946 and soon hired by Trujillo as an advisor for the Dominican Air Force, and López Contreras helped other conspirators or were vocal Venezuelans in exile.¹⁰⁴ The AD government now feared that López Contreras was working with Somoza and British oil interests, exacerbating an already tense political environment.¹⁰⁵ Like Trujillo, the Nicaraguan dictator provided material assistance for López Contreras’s activities while denying any involvement.¹⁰⁶ As Venezuelan newspapers could only repeat the government’s claims of foreign intervention without any definitive proof, López Contreras from Miami maintained his public image, denying his involvement and alleging that all plots were really domestic opposition to the AD.¹⁰⁷ In reality, the general worked with Nouel into 1947, with the consul at one point requesting that a promotion to Washington, DC, be delayed because it was a ‘critical moment for this movement’ against Betancourt’s government. In Nouel’s own words, he was ‘the one who [had been] the key’ behind López Contreras’s acquiring ‘planes, machine guns, bombs, dynamite’ for various plots and conspiracies.¹⁰⁸

Observers repeatedly noted the escalating political debates and constant redeployments of the military; these were supposed to prevent further uprisings but instead showed how Trujillo’s patronage was poisoning the political atmosphere.¹⁰⁹ According to US naval intelligence officers, the constant threat of a López Contreras-backed, thereby Trujillo-financed, invasion was a pivotal factor increasing the military’s fears of rising national tensions.¹¹⁰ US officials repeated this in

¹⁰²Eleazar López Contreras to Julio César Vargas, Philadelphia, 14 Nov. 1946, AGNRD, CBV, Folder 067-066.

¹⁰³George Ogilvie-Forbes, No. 61, Caracas, 15 April 1947, TNA, FO 371/61392.

¹⁰⁴‘Memorandum’, with Betancourt to Arévalo, 20 Dec. 1947, GT-CIRMA-AH-045-004-002-006-300, CIRMA.

¹⁰⁵George Ogilvie-Forbes, No. 69, Caracas, 31 Jan. 1947, TNA, FO 371/61390.

¹⁰⁶British Legation to Chancery, Managua, 12 Feb. 1947, TNA, FO 371/61391; Richard H. Post to Walter J. Donnelly, 13 Jan. 1948, NARAI, US Embassy Caracas, Box 65, Freedom of Information Act Request folder.

¹⁰⁷‘Chapita [Trujillo] ayuda a López Contreras’, *Últimas Noticias*, 3 Jan. 1947; ‘Bombas en número ... López Contreras en Santo Domingo’, *El Nacional*, 13 March 1947; George Ogilvie-Forbes, No. 71, Caracas, 1 Feb. 1947, TNA, FO 371/61390.

¹⁰⁸José María Nouel to Rafael Trujillo, Miami, 4 Feb. 1947, AGNRD, CBV, File 073-075.

¹⁰⁹Enclosure, with Frank P. Corrigan, No. 9745, Caracas, 7 Feb. 1947, NARAI, US Embassy Caracas, Box 54, Folder ‘Feb. 1947, Confidential’.

¹¹⁰Louis Miccio, ONI No. 104-300, Caracas, 6 Feb. 1947, NARAI, US Embassy Caracas, Box 54, Folder ‘Feb. 1947, Confidential’.

conversations not just with Betancourt but also with Lieutenant Colonel Carlos Delgado Chalbaud and Major Mario Vargas, two men who frequently tried to ensure the military's loyalty to the AD governments.¹¹¹ Yet the multiple plots, new conspiracies and attempted uprisings especially vexed younger army officers, who felt both the AD and leading military officers had failed to manage domestic affairs.¹¹² From 1946 into 1948, Trujillo's and López Contreras's intrigues not only fomented internal disturbances and constitutional crises but undermined the AD governments' democratic image and its leaders' credentials as competent managers of either domestic or even foreign affairs, increasing national tensions.

Air-Bombing and Oil: Further Weakening the Military's Loyalty

Complaints about the AD governments' capabilities would be heard again in late 1947 and early 1948 with Altuve Carrillo's failed attempt – backed by Trujillo – to air-bomb Caracas and disrupt Venezuela's peaceful transition from Betancourt's government to that of his successor Gallegos.¹¹³ Before being exiled for anti-government activity, Altuve Carrillo had served as a diplomat in Europe and the Vatican. In December 1947, Trujillo gave him US\$100,000 in cash and sent him to Managua. There, Trujillo's ally Somoza had the exile installed in Puerto Cabezas, one of Nicaragua's eastern-most Caribbean ports. Trujillo deployed a C-46 transport plane to fly 30 Venezuelan exiles, machine guns and explosives to the port while US mercenaries hired by Dominican officials delivered P-38 Lightning fighter planes. Working with associates of López Contreras, Altuve Carrillo purchased two B-46 Liberator bombers and two Catalina seaplanes. With this mini-air force, they planned to air-bomb Caracas, launch an invasion and inspire a domestic uprising to prevent Gallegos from taking office, mirroring the logic behind López Contreras's December 1946 plot.¹¹⁴

Though the plot was halted due to the efforts of Guatemalan, Venezuelan and US officials, its effects rippled through Venezuela. The government mobilised the reserves, police and volunteers against the expected invasion. The AD readied its civilian militias not just for a foreign invasion but for a military uprising. To the background of alarming radio announcements, Venezuelans witnessed numerous arrests, searches of cars and the deployment of anti-aircraft guns and search-lights.¹¹⁵ Venezuelan officials abroad were taken by surprise both by how close their home capital had come to being air-bombed and by the resulting diplomatic confusion as Betancourt sought to determine what had happened.¹¹⁶ As with López

¹¹¹Report of Conversation, Caracas, 11 July 1946, NARAI, US Embassy Caracas, Box 54, Folder '800: January, 1947'.

¹¹²Frank P. Corrigan, No. 9842, Caracas, 4 March 1947, NARAI, US Embassy Caracas, Box 55, Folder '800: March, 1947'.

¹¹³For more on this air-bombing plot, Aaron Coy Moulton, 'El cuasi-bombardeo de Caracas en 1948: Dictadores, exiliados y proyectos contrarrevolucionarios propios', *Boletín de la Academia Nacional de la Historia*, 53: 412 (2020), pp. 10–44.

¹¹⁴Altuve Carrillo, *Yo fui embajador de Pérez Jiménez*, pp. 193–8.

¹¹⁵George Ogilvie-Forbes, No. 15, Caracas, 4 Feb. 1948, TNA, FO 371/68302.

¹¹⁶J. V. Rodríguez de Pool to Mario de Diego, 'Memorandum', 4 Feb. 1948, Archivo del Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores de Panamá, Ciudad de Panamá, 'Vol. 5: Embajada de Venezuela en Panamá, 1948–1950', Folder No. 3.

Contreras's plots, Trujillo triumphed as his patronage of opposition figures and their conspiracies further inflamed domestic affairs, caused local crises and destabilised the AD governments.

Trujillo's patronage even shaped Venezuela's global relations. The AD government was inundated with reports of conspirators – largely in the pay of the Dominican dictator – operating out of Trinidad and Curaçao. Simultaneously, Trujillo obtained armaments from Brazil, sending his personal yacht *Ramfis* to pick them up. Venezuelan officials uncovered evidence that opposition figures had purchased a significant portion of the 5,000 rifles and 5,000,000 rounds of ammunition on the *Ramfis*. In a meeting with Betancourt, the Brazilian ambassador in Caracas admitted to British officials that he had 'knowledge of the gun-running but said he could do nothing about it' as it fell outside his purview.¹¹⁷ To put diplomatic pressure upon the Brazilians, Betancourt knew his government could rely upon his fellow heads of state Presidents Arévalo in Guatemala and Ramón Grau San Martín in Cuba, who also feared that Brazilian arms 'in the hands of a furious despot' would be used by conspirators or worse.¹¹⁸ However, the Venezuelan president sought additional diplomatic assistance from outside the Caribbean Basin.

At this juncture, Betancourt decided to use his country's most valuable resource, oil, to exert leverage upon other international actors to pressure the Brazilian government and halt the arms shipments. He informed the British ambassador in Caracas that a union of Venezuelan oil workers was thinking of striking and stopping shipments to Brazil due to the conspirators' presence in Trinidad.¹¹⁹ He offered a similar warning to the US and Dutch governments in the hope of suppressing conspiratorial activities in Curaçao and the rest of Latin America. As a result, representatives of Shell and Standard Oil, British- and US-based oil companies with large Venezuelan interests, notified their respective governments.¹²⁰ At first, Betancourt's manoeuvre worked; British officials contacted Dutch and US colleagues to ascertain what measures could be taken to assuage Betancourt's concerns without losing business or appearing to intervene in regional affairs.¹²¹

Despite his initially successful strategy, Betancourt ultimately failed. First, he could not definitively prove Trujillo's intention to use the purchases to sabotage or undermine the AD government.¹²² Second, US officials feared any involvement in these sensitive matters, preferring 'to let events take their course in the belief or hope that this storm will blow over'.¹²³ Third, Trujillo manipulated the entire affair

¹¹⁷F. J. Stephens to Victor Butler, 'Venezuela', 3 Dec. 1947, TNA, FO 371/61393.

¹¹⁸Rómulo Betancourt to Juan José Arévalo, Miraflores, 24 Nov. 1947, GT-CIRMA-AH-045-004-002-006-290; Rómulo Betancourt to Juan José Arévalo, Miraflores, 20 Dec. 1947, GT-CIRMA-AH-045-004-002-006-300; Juan José Arévalo to Rómulo Betancourt, Guatemala, 26 Dec. 1947, GT-CIRMA-AH-045-004-002-006-302, CIRMA.

¹¹⁹George Ogilvie-Forbes, No. 300, Caracas, 29 Nov. 1947, FO 371/61393.

¹²⁰Foreign Office to Washington, No. 12492, 3 Dec. 1947, TNA, FO 371/61393.

¹²¹F. J. Stephens to Victor Butler, 'Venezuela', 2 Dec. 1947 and Foreign Office to Washington, No. 12570, 5 Dec. 1947, TNA, FO 371/61393.

¹²²Russell Duncan Macrae, No. 10, Ciudad Trujillo, 3 Dec. 1947, TNA, FO 371/61393.

¹²³Archibald Clark Kerr (Lord Inverchapel), No. 6806, Washington, 4 Dec. 1947, TNA, FO 371/61393. Lord Inverchapel was the British ambassador to Washington, DC.

to his own advantage. With the mediation of the British ambassador in Ciudad Trujillo, the Dominican dictator welcomed third-party inspections of their respective governments' relationships with exiles. He offered to expel all Venezuelan opposition figures from his country if Betancourt would similarly expel Dominican exiles 'or alternatively enforce any agreement to suppress political activities of refugees'.¹²⁴ Betancourt had discovered that he had little oil leverage and exhausted his political capital. Furthermore, the Venezuelan president unintentionally exacerbated difficult relations with foreign governments, predominantly that of Great Britain. Already, British officials were upset with the AD government's wage increases, income tax regulations and other moderate social reforms, fearing they would destabilise the economy.¹²⁵ Now, Betancourt's government appeared willing to sacrifice global oil production, economic stability and its own international reputation to seemingly unverified rumours of conspiracies and plots.¹²⁶

As intended, Trujillo's foreign policy succeeded in influencing Venezuela's domestic affairs and encouraging military dissent. By September 1948, two months before launching what would be their infamous 1948 coup, some Venezuelan military officials contacted the Dominican dictator. On 7 September, an unnamed colonel approached Stanley Ross, a journalist with the Dominican newspaper *El Caribe* and well known to be sympathetic to Trujillo.¹²⁷ This colonel provided a memorandum that repeated the same arguments as those put forward by Urbina and Pepper years earlier: the AD governments and Betancourt continued to help Dominican exiles, including Bosch, in their opposition to Trujillo; Venezuela remained a hotbed of anti-Trujillo conspiracies; their nation had become the 'Centre for International Communism'. Supposedly, a massive expedition from Venezuela to invade the Dominican Republic and topple Trujillo's government was in the works. 'This coup' against Trujillo, the colonel assured Ross, 'possibly will not take place because within two weeks – possibly fewer – there will be a coup d'état by the Venezuelan military'. Once in power, the new military regime would quickly 'recognise the democratic work' of Trujillo.¹²⁸

While the identity of Ross's source within the military remains unclear, this colonel's attempt to present a military coup in Venezuela as beneficial to Trujillo was precisely what the Dominican dictator had sought since 1945: a Venezuelan military official, aware of the dictator's interest in Venezuelan matters, was willing to inform Trujillo's agents that an internal uprising was imminent. He may have been less worried about the Dominican dictator and more about López Contreras or others who could take advantage of any chaos to restore the previous regimes, which younger officers had opposed when backing the AD governments. By characterising any resulting regime as pro-Trujillo, Venezuelan military officers would not have to worry about Trujillo-backed collaborators attempting to shape local events. Nevertheless, Ross's interview with the colonel confirmed the success

¹²⁴Russell Duncan Macrae, No. 140, Ciudad Trujillo, 3 Dec. 1947, TNA, FO 371/61393.

¹²⁵See Seddon, 'British and US Intervention in the Venezuelan Oil Industry' and Cáceres, *Londres en Caracas y La Haya en Maracaibo*.

¹²⁶George Ogilvie-Forbes, No. 1, Caracas, 1 Jan. 1948, TNA, FO 371/68302.

¹²⁷Stanley Ross to Rafael Trujillo, Barranquilla, 7 Sept. 1948, AGNRD, SERREE, Box 2903957, File '1948'.

¹²⁸Stanley Ross, 'Memorandum', Barranquilla, 7 Sept. 1948, *ibid*.

of Trujillo's foreign policy. The military was divided, rumours of a serious coup d'état swirled, and the colonel and others wanted to appease the dictator even as they pursued their own goals.

Although it came two months later than the colonel claimed, in November 1948, a military coup did take place, installing a junta spearheaded by Lieutenant Colonels Delgado Chalbaud and Marcos Pérez Jiménez. Some of their support for the coup derived from the stress Trujillo had placed upon the AD governments. Delgado Chalbaud legitimated the coup and the junta criminalised the AD because it 'had not behaved as a democratic party' and had supported 'an armed militia' in the country, presenting AD partisans' possession of armaments not as preparations for military uprisings or coups similar to ones since 1946 but as 'arms and war implements meant for sabotage and other ends'.¹²⁹ Though the AD governments faced ample domestic challenges, Trujillo's financing of various conspiracies placed additional direct and indirect tension on them by undermining their image and stability. Delgado Chalbaud insisted 'that if he and the other top military officers had not taken this step [to launch the coup] the situation would have gotten out of hand and the younger Army officers would have moved'.¹³⁰

It was hard for international observers and many Venezuelans to dispute Delgado Chalbaud's explanation of the coup. Not only had divisions erupted within the military's ranks in response to plots organised by disaffected individuals ranging from López Contreras to Altuve Carrillo, but the AD government had never identified or addressed the source of such discontent. Delgado Chalbaud and fellow officers had spent the past months watching their allies participate in failed coups or flee, and the AD government's call for civilian militias to defend the nation felt like an insult to the military institution's reputation. What these Venezuelan officers and international observers failed to recognise, though, was Trujillo's hand in all these matters. It was Trujillo's foreign policy of supporting opposition figures that contributed to this turbulent political environment, the very reason military officers cited as proof of their need to remove Gallegos and end the Trienio Adeco.

Paying Back their Patron

The expulsion of Betancourt, Gallegos and the AD's leadership following the coup was not the only reward for the Dominican dictator's years-long efforts to topple the AD governments. As Cuban and Peruvian officials had warned, Trujillo expected those he had helped to establish governments amenable to his policies, something to which the new Venezuelan military junta acceded. The two governments agreed to diplomatic relations and even began discussions on economic projects such as Venezuelan assistance for an oil refinery in the Dominican Republic and Dominican exports of sugar to Venezuelan markets, which British officials

¹²⁹Information Research Department, 'Week of December 13–20', Caracas, 3 Jan. 1949, TNA, FO 371/74887; Thomas J. Maleady, No. 814, Buenos Aires, 28 Dec. 1948, NARAI, US Embassy Caracas, Box 66, Folder '800: Venezuela Military Coup Correspondence ...'.

¹³⁰Walter J. Donnelly to Paul C. Daniels, Caracas, 28 Dec. 1948, NARAI, US Embassy Caracas, Box 66, Folder '800: Venezuela Military Coup Correspondence ...'.

feared would simply be an attempt by Trujillo to obtain another monopoly in his country.¹³¹

But the real victory for Trujillo was having those he had long supported, including Pepper, Estrada, Altuve Carrillo and Casado, take up important positions within the military junta while demonstrating their gratitude for his patronage. Dominican officials met with Delgado Chabaud to lobby for Pepper to be part of the Venezuelan foreign policy establishment, the former conspirator's new position seen as evidence of 'assured political collaboration' with the junta on such matters as a mutual opposition to the Guatemalan government.¹³² Using his official post, Pepper frequently provided information to Dominican officials about Betancourt's and the AD-in-exile's activities from Panama to Cuba, something he had done as Trujillo's spy during the Trienio Adecó.¹³³ He even shared intelligence about regional events, militant exiles' activities and anti-Trujillo organisations in Cuba.¹³⁴

Dominican officials worked often with these previously anti-government figures in sharing intelligence on regional affairs and identifying sources of propaganda against their respective regimes. Most valuable was Estrada, who eventually became head of Venezuela's National Security Directorate. He was more than a mere link between Trujillo and the Venezuelan military junta; he became part of a larger web of intelligence-sharing that included Nicaragua's Somoza.¹³⁵ On more than one occasion, Estrada reminded his department that the Dominican Republic and Venezuela had similar enemies in the Dominican and AD exile communities.¹³⁶ Over the next years, Altuve Carrillo networked between the junta, Trujillo and others, appearing during plots in the early 1950s against the Guatemalan government.¹³⁷

It was Casado, former conspirator who became Venezuelan consul in Mexico City, who best summarised the debt he and his colleagues owed Trujillo. One reason for the improved intelligence-sharing between the Venezuelan military junta and Dominican officials was their perceived common national security threats. Both governments denounced AD and Dominican exiles, the Guatemalan government, Cuba's Partido Auténtico (Authentic Party) and José Figueres's government in Costa Rica as supposedly 'communist' dangers to the region.¹³⁸ In his role as a diplomatic representative of the Venezuelan junta, Casado was empowered to share with his Dominican counterparts the latest intelligence on these threats.¹³⁹ He wrote to Trujillo, 'I think, and everyone in my country agrees, that a coup

¹³¹K. J. Collie, 'Memorandum for H. M. Minister', 11 May 1949, TNA, FO 371/74024.

¹³²Emilio Rodríguez Demorizi to Rafael Trujillo, Cable, Caracas, 28 April 1949, AGNRD, SERREE, Box 2903959, File 'Informaciones Confidenciales, Venezuela'.

¹³³José Vicente Pepper, Cable, no date, AGNRD, SERREE, Box 2903959, File 'Informaciones'.

¹³⁴José Vicente Pepper to Rafael Trujillo, Ciudad Trujillo, 12 Nov. 1949, AGNRD, SERREE, Box 2903959, File 'Informaciones'.

¹³⁵Héctor Incháustegui Cabral to Rafael Trujillo, No. 128, México, 28 Jan. 1950, AGNRD, SERREE, Box 2904052, File '1950'; Aaron Coy Moulton, 'The Dictators' Domino Theory: A Caribbean Basin Anti-Communist Network, 1947–1952', *Intelligence and National Security*, 34: 7 (2019), pp. 945–61.

¹³⁶Ramón Brea Messina to Rafael Trujillo, 30 Oct. 1949, AGNRD, SERREE, Box 2903959, File 'Informaciones'.

¹³⁷Altuve Carrillo, *Yo fui embajador de Pérez Jiménez*, pp. 367–70, does not admit to his deeper involvement in plots against Caribbean Basin governments in the 1950s.

¹³⁸Incháustegui Cabral to Trujillo, 28 Jan. 1950 (footnote 135).

¹³⁹Francisco Pérez Leyba, No. 505, 10 Aug. 1949, AGNRD, SERREE, Box 2903959, File 'Informaciones'.

placing the Dominican Republic in the hands of anyone else would create a staging ground threatening the security of my country, and equally a Venezuela in the hands of Betancourt would be a death sentence against your regime.' Still, there was another reason for this intelligence-sharing: Casado and other former conspirators owed Trujillo their 'gratitude'. The Dominican dictator's 'generosity' had helped Casado during those 'uncertain days of exile', and this 'friendship' now continued as Casado served the Venezuelan junta. His work as an intermediary between Venezuelan and Dominican officials was a way 'to give something back' in return for 'the Dominican people's hospitality and [Trujillo's] honourable friendship' between 1945 and 1948.¹⁴⁰ A Venezuelan official was sharing intelligence with Trujillo not only because their regimes had similar national security interests but also to pay back the Dominican dictator, his counter-revolutionary patron during his exile under the Trienio Adeco.

Conclusion

Trujillo's patronage had paid off: a military regime, whose members included those in debt to the dictator, was now in power. Though seemingly lost upon US and British observers, others in the Caribbean Basin recognised that Trujillo had gained immense influence thanks to the coup. Cuban officials were some of the first to connect the dictator's policy of '*imperialismo dominicano*' to how his spies and assassins now had a safe base of operations in Venezuela.¹⁴¹ One Venezuelan described a powerful '*eje Chapita-Pérez* [Trujillo-Pérez Jiménez axis]' whereby the Dominican dictator and Venezuelan military junta relied upon each other to take out opponents, suppress public criticisms, coordinate their foreign affairs and sabotage democratic governments in the Caribbean Basin.¹⁴² Many were surprised by how quickly the regimes gravitated toward one another. For Trujillo, though, this was a triumph for his foreign policy of supporting influential conspirators and encouraging the counter-revolution against the AD governments.

Over the next ten years, Venezuelans endured a repressive military junta that soon consolidated under Pérez Jiménez. Unknown to most of the nation's citizens, that regime owed much to Trujillo's influence. When Pérez Jiménez fled and Betancourt returned to Venezuela in 1958, Trujillo once again sought to bend its political trajectory to his whim. From sponsoring a new group of Venezuelan conspirators-in-exile, who launched coastal invasions of their home country, to the car-bombing attempt on Betancourt's life in 1960, the Dominican dictator's exploits attracted international condemnation from most Latin American nations, the United States and the OAS, which all demanded that Trujillo cease intervening in Venezuelan affairs. The truth, though, is that the Dominican dictator for over a decade had shaped Venezuelan politics and history in his favour, whether by sabotaging the 1945–8 AD governments or having reliable allies in power during the 1948–58 military junta.

¹⁴⁰Eliás Casado to Rafael Trujillo, México, 29 Jan. 1950, AGNRD, SERREE, Box 2904052, File '1950'.

¹⁴¹'Memorandum ...', Dec. 1949 (footnote 22).

¹⁴²Pedro Antonio Díaz, *Por qué yo maté a Delgado Chabaud* (Caracas: Publicaciones Seleven, 1980), p. 186.

Acknowledgements. This investigation would have been impossible without the help of the staff at the Archivo General de la Nación in Santo Domingo, the Archivo del Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores de Panamá, the Archivo Central del Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores in Havana, the National Archives in London, the National Archives II in College Park, and Thelma Porres and Óscar Farfán with the Centro de Investigaciones Regionales de Mesoamérica in Antigua Guatemala. This work was supported by a Phi Alpha Theta John Pine Memorial Scholarship, a Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations Samuel Flagg Bemis Dissertation Research Grant, a Harry S. Truman Presidential Library Truman Library Institute Dissertation Year Fellowship, an American Philosophical Society Franklin Research Grant, a Stephen F. Austin State University Faculty Research Pilot Studies Grant, a Stephen F. Austin State University Department of History Faculty Travel Award and Stephen F. Austin State University College of Liberal and Applied Arts Professional Development Funds. Many thanks to Kyle Burke, Renata Keller, Alan McPherson, Edgardo Mondolfi Gudat, Miguel Tinker Salas, Gustavo Salcedo Ávila, Dustin Walcher and Allen Wells as well as the journal's editors and anonymous reviewers for valuable suggestions on earlier versions. Thanks to Guillermo Guzmán Mirabal and the Historia Contemporánea de los Estados Unidos group of the Universidad Católica Andrés Bello for allowing me to present and receive feedback on this research. Special thanks to Winfield Burggraaff for sharing his personal library on Venezuelan history and Mark Seddon for sharing his latest scholarship.

Spanish abstract

Este artículo devela las múltiples formas en que el dictador dominicano Rafael Trujillo desestabilizó la política venezolana de 1945 a 1958, periodo conocido como el Trienio Adeco. En contraste con trabajos que se centran en la animosidad personal de Trujillo contra el presidente venezolano Rómulo Betancourt, este artículo indica que Trujillo buscó sabotear al gobierno de Venezuela gobernado por Acción Democrática como parte de su política exterior regional dirigida contra bastiones de exiliados dominicanos, críticos anti-Trujillo e instituciones democráticas. Trujillo financió una red informal de conspiradores venezolanos que produjeron propaganda y organizaron complots para minar los gobiernos de Adeco. Con el golpe militar de 1948, Trujillo logró descarrilar a la democracia y obtuvo un aliado confiable en Latinoamérica en la medida en que quienes patrocinó por mucho tiempo consiguieron puestos influyentes y permanecieron en deuda con su antiguo benefactor.

Spanish keywords: dictadores; República Dominicana; espionaje; exiliados; Venezuela

Portuguese abstract

Este artigo revela as inúmeras maneiras como o ditador dominicano Rafael Trujillo desestabilizou a política venezuelana de 1945 a 1948, período conhecido como Triênio Adeco. Em contraste com os trabalhos focados na animosidade pessoal de Trujillo com o presidente venezuelano Rómulo Betancourt, este artigo argumenta que Trujillo procurou sabotar os governos da Venezuela sob comando da Ação Democrática como parte de sua política externa regional visando bastiões de exilados dominicanos, críticos anti-Trujillo e instituições democráticas. Trujillo financiou uma rede informal de conspiradores venezuelanos que produziram propaganda e lançaram conspirações minando os governos da Adeco. Com o golpe militar de 1948, Trujillo descarrilou a democracia e ganhou um

aliado confiável na América Latina, pois aqueles que ele havia patrocinado entraram em cargos influentes e permaneceram em dívida com seu antigo benfeitor.

Portuguese keywords: ditadores; República Dominicana; espionagem; exilados; Venezuela

Cite this article: Moulton AC (2022). The Counter-Revolution's Patron: Rafael Trujillo versus Venezuela's Acción Democrática Governments, 1945–8. *Journal of Latin American Studies* 54, 29–53. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022216X22000013>