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March 17, 1969

TO : ARA/LA/BR - Mr. Samuel W. Lewis

FROM : ARA - George Lister

SUBJECT: Suggested Changes in NSSM 15 - Working Group One
Paper on "U.S. Policy and Political Development
in Latin America"

As I said earlier, I think your draft is very good and I am in basic agreement with most of it. My only major disagreement is over the key questions of: 1) how our policy developed and changed during 1961-68; and 2) how much the U.S. can (and should) help the democratization of Latin America.

I fear that our current frustration over past failures and our disgust with hypocritical U.S. and Latin American speeches about "democracy" and "progress" in Latin America have soured us so much that we may over-react and underestimate the amount we can and should try to do in assisting Latin American democratic development. I agree that there was superficiality and excessive optimism in the original U.S. approach to the Alliance. But I am also convinced that we could have achieved much better results with more effort, more skillful tactics, better judgment, and a more sincere and consistent commitment throughout 1961-68. One decisive factor was that our policies changed in early 1964, perhaps partly due to experience and disillusionment but mainly because of the long-held viewpoints of the new ARA leadership. And the period 1961-63 was pitifully brief compared with the size and complexity of the tasks we tried to grapple with.

This does not mean that there was not much to be improved in our performance and approach during the earlier period. There certainly was. But I do vote strongly in favor of a draft which presents strategy A as an option which has much to recommend it, but which will require, among other things, the ability and willingness of top leadership to inspire and guide the country to make the necessary sustained long term effort. I feel this would be the most meaningful and useful

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way to pose this option to the new administration. Of course, nobody can say precisely how much could have been accomplished by more and better effort on our part, or how much could be done in the future. But as it stands now, I believe the draft is too heavily weighted in favor of the argument that the only logical conclusion to draw from the fact that more was not achieved in the past is that more could not have been achieved.

The following relatively few changes in the draft are suggested with the foregoing in mind:

Page 19. By 1964, however, failures of democratic regimes in Brazil, Argentina, Peru, Guatemala and Honduras had resulted in some U.S. disenchantment with the capability of the "democratic left". The withholding of diplomatic recognition and of aid had not produced reversion to democracy when constitutional regimes were overthrown. Much more important, the new leadership which assumed charge of our Latin American policy in early 1964 was less favorably disposed towards the democratic left*, and espoused a more "pragmatic" approach to our relations with Latin America. Aid criteria shifted to emphasize economic and self-help performance with much less stress on the political character of a government. In 1965, we reasserted our right to intervene unilaterally in the Caribbean to blunt a perceived Communist threat in the Dominican Republic. Although we subsequently sought OAS support for the intervention, many Latin Americans interpreted the Dominican Republic crisis as the end of the "good neighbor" era.

*One result of this shift in our attitude was that our relations with the PRD (the party of Juan Bosch) had become much less friendly by the time of our 1965 Dominican intervention. On the other hand, our relations with the Chilean Christian Democrats, another party of the democratic left, became closer.

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The 1967 meeting of the American Presidents at Punta del Este reaffirmed our long-term commitment to assist Latin development efforts. However, at that conference-- and after it--we and the other governments stressed economic and social goals for the Alliance, tacitly recognizing the difficulty of attaining the democratic political goals originally framed in the Alliance Charter. With some slight variations, this viewpoint prevailed in ARA until mid-1967, when our policy started to shift back somewhat towards the 1961-63 approach.

Page 25.

Add the following sentence to the first paragraph:

"As mentioned above, this aspect of our policy was de-emphasized in early 1964, after less than two years of very experimental attempts at implementation".

Then change the following paragraphs to read as follows:

"A key question now facing us is to what extent we can and should try to assist the democratization of Latin America, and what methods and tactics are likely to prove most effective to that end. We still adhere to the conviction that over the long-run democratic governments in the Hemisphere will prove more desirable from the viewpoint of U.S. interests than civilian or military dictatorships. But building democratic institutions in Latin America must be done almost entirely by Latins, in Latin style, and at a Latin pace. It is still uncertain how much of our own experience and advice is valid outside our own culture for this end. The trend of events in Latin America during the next decade may well run in the opposite direction. Our experience in promoting democracy with such tools as the withholding of economic and military aid does not encourage one to believe that they can be relied upon to further our own ends. Even at best these policy tools are very blunt instruments".

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"One could argue that our lack of success in promoting representative democracy results from vacillating application of the policy. We have, for example, suspended diplomatic recognition of military regimes until they committed themselves to hold elections, and in one or two cases obtained such commitments. But the U.S. Government, subjected to conflicting pressures from Congress, business interests, and security concerns has been unable in the 1960's--and would be unable in the 1970's--to apply such pressures over a very long period of time to any Latin country in which the U.S. has major political or economic interests. If only because of our history of backing and filling on this issue during the 1960's, we cannot rely on these tactics, by themselves, to prove of much use in the 1970's for our purposes."

I would recommend contracting the next several paragraphs on recognition, from page 27 to 30, and then insert the following as the first complete paragraphs on page 30:

Page 30.

"It is also essential to add that there are other means and methods [besides withholding recognition and aid] of assisting the democratization of Latin America, such as through the development of democratic self-help institutions at the grass roots level (Title 9) or through more effective cooperation with democratic or potentially democratic political elements in Latin America. We have wasted some opportunities and not fully exploited others. For example, the dialogue with Latin America, and particularly with the democratic and non-democratic left, has often been badly neglected."

"Moreover, it would be a fundamental mistake to interpret our experience of 1961-1968 as "proving" that we can do very little to assist the democratization of Latin America.

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As indicated above, the original spirit of the Alliance was discarded in early 1964. There is no assurance that a really major economic-financial effort, skillfully coordinated with sophisticated and imaginative political tactics and methods, might not yield considerably more beneficial results than have been obtained thus far. It is impossible to guarantee results, of course, but there can be little doubt that the future of Latin America is important enough to us to warrant our at least considering the desirability and feasibility of making such an effort".

"The key question probably is whether, in the last analysis, the U.S. Government and public would be ready to make the long-term, sustained effort required for that purpose. Judging from the current climate of opinion, the answer must be a resounding negative. And it is very unlikely such opinion will change much without inspired, articulate and far-sighted leadership from the top. With such leadership and effort, our performance and impact in Latin America could be improved at least significantly. Otherwise, realism counsels us to pursue less ambitious courses of action which are within our grasp. To some extent, this means postponing facing up to dangerous problems which may well become even more dangerous in the future. But at least it will reduce the embarrassing discrepancies between what we have been saying and what we have been doing."

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