

Seeing ‘Reds’ in Colombia: Reconsidering the ‘Bogotazo’, 1948

Procurando “Vermelhos” na Colômbia: reconsiderando o ‘Bogotazo’, 1948

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Resumo: O teatro latino-americano da Guerra Fria foi distinto da luta global entre o capitalismo estadunidense e o comunismo soviético. A União Soviética possuía pouquíssima influência na região antes da declaração de adesão de Fidel Castro ao marxismo-leninismo, em 1960. Apesar disso, a pletora de lutas sociais virtualmente espalhadas em cada república latino-americana tem sido grosso modo agrupada e rotulada como “Guerra Fria” Latino-americana. Este artigo procura determinar as origens dessa paradoxal definição. Nele, é defendido que o conveniente alinhamento de uma crise nacional ao conflito internacional foi utilizado pelo general George C. Marshall, em abril de 1948. A criação da Organização dos Estados Americanos tinha por objetivo o alinhamento político do hemisfério contra o “comunismo”, fosse soviético ou doméstico. Isso confundia muitos líderes latino-americanos como comunistas, quando, de fato, não representavam nenhuma ameaça para as suas nações ou para a região. Desse modo, a “venda” de uma declaração anticomunista que poderia reduzir a soberania dos Estados Nacionais tornou-se muito difícil durante a fase inicial de negociações. Convenientemente, a Colômbia foi trazida à beira da guerra civil em 9 de abril de 1948, seguindo-se ao assassinato de Jorge Eliécer Gaitán. O Departamento de Estado dos EUA sabia que a emergência do Bogotazo não estava relacionado à Guerra Fria global. Eles possuíam informações sobre o assassinato do liberal-populista Gaitán e sobre a violenta resposta ao seu assassinato. Contudo, a oportunidade de internacionalizar a crise foi aproveitada por Marshall. Dessa forma, a Guerra Fria latino-americana emergiu com devastadores consequências para a Colômbia e para a região.

Palavras-chave: Guerra Fria, Propaganda, Organização dos Estados Americanos, Comunismo, Jorge Eliécer Gaitán

Abstract: The Latin American Cold War theatre was distinct from the global struggle between American capitalism and Soviet communism. The Soviet Union had very little influence on the region prior to Fidel Castro's 1960 declaration of Marxism-Leninism. Despite this, a plethora of social struggles spanning virtually every Latin American republic have been broadly grouped together – defined by this Latin American 'Cold War'. This paper seeks to determine the origins of this paradoxical definition. It will argue that the convenient alignment of national and international crises was utilized by US Secretary of State George C Marshall in April 1948. The establishment of the Organization of American States sought to realize the political alignment of the hemisphere against 'Communism', both Soviet and internal. This confounded many Latin American leaders as communism, while evident, did not pose any legitimate threat to their nations or the region. Hence, Marshall's sale of an anti-communist declaration, which would decrease the sovereignty of individual states, was made quite difficult during initial negotiations. Conveniently, On April 9 Colombia was brought to the brink of Civil War following the assassination of Jorge Eliécer Gaitán. The US State Department knew that the ensuing Colombian Bogotazo was not related to the global Cold War. They had intelligence on the populist liberal Gaitán and the violent response to his assassination. Nevertheless, the opportunity to internationalize the crisis was seized by Marshall. In doing so, the Latin American Cold War emerged with devastating national and regional consequences.

Keywords: Cold War, Propaganda, Organization of American States, Communism, Jorge Eliécer Gaitán

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On April 9 1948, the assassination of Jorge Eliécer Gaitán brought Colombia to the brink of Civil War. The ensuing chaos, known as the Bogotazo, coincided with the first meeting of the Organization of American States (OAS), a new forum to govern regional affairs within the context of the global Cold War. Prior to 1948, there was no Cold War in Latin America. Despite the efforts of regional communist parties, since their establishment in the 1920s, they remained peripheral to the social conflict in the hemisphere.¹ Rather, that social struggle was fought between an emerging generation of middle class social reformers who challenged the entrenched power of the oligarchy and the military in their evolving societies. Gaitán was emblematic of this struggle in his native Colombia. Since his emergence in the national consciousness he was seen as the patron of the poor. His ‘left-liberal’ vision set out to drastically increase the standard of living for his predominately impoverished supporters.² Gaitán was a populist and a democrat. He was not a ‘communist’. This was well known by the US agencies responsible for intelligence in the era that preceded the CIA. Hence, the violent reaction to his death was not a communist insurrection. It was a movement of Gaitán’s supporters, known as Gaitánistas, against those perceived responsible for his death; the Conservative oligarchy represented by President Ospina Pérez.³ None of this mattered to the US Secretary of State, George C Marshall, who was in Bogota to convince the Latin Americans to declare a war on regional and international ‘communism’. Returning to Washington with anything less would be seen as a failure for Marshall and his state department. Hence, his April 15 characterization of the Gaitánista riots against the oligarchy as “concrete evidence... of the vitality of hemispheric communism” allowed Marshall to propagate a hemispheric Cold War that dominated regional affairs for the next four decades.⁴ This paper will argue that the early Cold War in Latin America was a fabrication conducted by Marshall to serve US interests in the region.

Gaitán and the Latin American left

The global Cold War did not directly influence Latin America prior to the 1948 Colombian Bogotazo. Latin America was isolated from the Eurasian conflict through its dependence on the US. While significant political and economic connections existed between Latin America and the ‘fascist’ WWII adversaries, Germany and Italy, this was not the case for the USSR.⁵ Joseph Stalin’s priority from 1945 to 1950 was the Eastern Bloc and Asia. Its influence was limited to the few embassies, established during WWII, which remained open.⁶ Indeed by 1948 this was limited to Mexico, Argentina and Uruguay.⁷ Given Anglo-American monopolization of commodity markets, trade between Latin America and the USSR in 1948 was also virtually non-existent.⁸ The Cominform did have obvious links to the Latin American doctrinaire parties and some pro-communist industrial unions. However, a brief survey of

regional communism demonstrates that party membership had increased from 100,000, in 1940, to 400,000 members throughout Latin America in 1948, with the largest parties were that of Brazil, Chile and Cuba.⁹ However, given the regional population of approximately 180 million they represented approximately one fifth of one percent of the population.¹⁰ Additionally, their regional political significance was limited. For example, while much has been made of Guatemalan communist infiltration during this period, the official Communist Party was not organized until 1949, peaking at 4,000 members in 1954.¹¹ The only significant electoral role played by communists prior to the Bogotazo occurred within the 'Popular Front' alliance with Radicals and Socialists in Chile between 1938 and 1948.¹² Within this coalition communists held a significant platform, but never threatened to take power. Popular Fronts failed to emerge elsewhere in Latin America, due to a hard-lined and often elitist view within these official parties. Communists were also ejected from the popular front at the onset of the Cold War. It was actually more common for communists to align with conservative and often authoritarian against the more popular and moderate social democratic and populist movements emerging during this period.¹³

Communism was a peripheral component of regional politics. However, the political climate in Latin America was realigning between 1944 and 1948. The emergence of progressive democratic regimes in Cuba 1944, Guatemala 1945, Venezuela 1945, Peru 1945 and Costa Rica 1948, initiated a vast social revolution in these, and other, Latin American nations. Their leaders espoused a philosophy of social democracy that sought to better redistribute power and privilege to a greater number. Despite the obvious national differences between them, these social democratic political movements held an ideology of "nationalism, anti-Imperialism and socialism".¹⁴ This philosophy was based on the lived experience of the leadership groups in each nation. The leaders of all five movements came to political maturity during an anti-dictatorial struggle. Each of those dictators represented an economic philosophy that put the interests of the domestic oligarchy and international capitalism ahead of their largely impoverished, although increasingly educated, urban working class. This was the case within: Victor Raúl Haya de la Torre's "APRA" movement against Augusto Leguía in the early 1920s;¹⁵ Rómulo Betancourt's student movement against Laureano Gómez in the late 1920s;¹⁶ Ramon Grau's "Autentico Revolution" against Gerrado Machado in the early 1930s;¹⁷ Juan José Arévalo's "democratic action" movement which followed the 1944 October Revolution in Guatemala;¹⁸ and José Figueres' movement of 1948 against oligarchic rule.¹⁹ Hence, their ideology was that of revolution against the standing order. They were broadly anti-American and nationalistic in their policies. This anti-American rhetoric went much further than their actions. Their version of socialism was adopted from the US, rather than the USSR. Betancourt

identified, “the New Deal as a philosophy of state involvement in the economy is consistent with our own plans for Venezuela”.²⁰ The economic policies of the social democrats went no further to the left than Franklin Roosevelt. Many regimes sought to control sovereignty over land and resources through government intervention in the economy. But most policies revolved around social security at the expense of the oligarchic class who had monopolized political and economic power since independence in the early nineteenth century. While these leaders were not communist and were not radical in their global outlook; this was a social revolution that sought redefine power structures in the Americas.

Gaitán was both uniquely Colombian and consistent with this generation of social reformers in neighboring countries. Born into the Mestizo working class, Gaitán asserted himself as one of Colombia’s leading social theorists and reformers by the late 1920s.²¹ His exceptional oration won him the attention of leading politicians at a very young age. He earned a scholarship to conduct postgraduate work in Philosophical Positivism in Rome under Enrico Ferri.²² His thesis revolved around the “social problem” in Colombia. He defined that problem as not inherent between labor and capital but due to the inequities of power in the relationship. In essence, he concluded that if government could rectify that power inequity then there would be no social problem in Colombia.²³ Upon his return, the uncontested conservative rule was becoming tenuous. His vociferous critiques of the Conservative government’s atrocities in the Magdalena massacre saw Gaitán join the new Liberal government in 1930.²⁴ He became the voice of the voiceless in Colombia; adored by both urban and rural workers. Exhibiting much of the appeal of classical populism, Gaitán also held a philosophy that sought to rectify social ills. According to President (1934-1938) Alfonso López, “Gaitán defended the rights of the poor without asking the permission of the rich”.²⁵ Unfortunately for Gaitán, the Liberal Party, including López, were ‘the rich’. This contradiction led Gaitán to attempt to begin his own political movement. His *Unión Nacional Izquierdista Revolucionaria* (UNIR) represented a parallel ideology to the social democrats.²⁶ He claimed that through mobilization the people could redress the inequalities of oligarchic rule and make Colombia a modern developed state. While he was personally popular, this party failed and Gaitán returned to the Liberals in 1936, acting as minister for Labor and Mayor of Bogota.²⁷ His popularity in Bogota was immense as he fought for wages and conditions in the growing industrial districts of the capital. However, Gaitán’s influence extends past Bogota. His biography cites his prestige in rural Colombia, “all the campesinos have a portrait of Gaitán in their homes, and daily tend it with a mystique that approaches adoration”.²⁸ Hence, the Liberals had a candidate and a leader that could bring them success for decades. However, the reality had always been that Gaitán was not a liberal. By 1944, Gaitánism had emerged

into “a pronounced intellectual tradition in Colombia that may be referred as a home grown left”.²⁹ Hence, Gaitán posed an equal threat to the elites of the Liberal and Conservative Parties.

American foreign policy towards these democratic regimes took a sharp turn between 1944 and 1947. There was historical animosity between the US and the Latin American social democrats evidenced through the 1930s. The US Ambassador to Peru, Fred Dearing, described the *Aprista* movement as “the reddest of the red” and “under the influence of Moscow” during the 1931 presidential election.³⁰ In 1933-34 the US Ambassador to Cuba, Sumner Welles, accused the short-lived Grau administration of supporting communist land seizures in rural areas, leading to the overthrow of his government by the tyrant Fulgencio Batista.³¹ While this was a poignant preview to Cold War policies, they were short lived. This animosity was put on hold during World War II, as their common interest of hemispheric defense was threatened by the political right. Spruille Braden’s Latin American policies targeted anti-US authoritarian regimes, such as Argentina, through coercing elections.³² The right were seen as the coercive threat. Gaitán was even seen as a pro-fascist populist by the US Federal Bureau for Investigations (FBI) for a brief period of time.³³ However, as events unfolded in Europe and Asia, the enemy quickly moved from fascism to communism. And these social democratic politicians represented an obstacle to broader US hegemony. While each was unique, these new regimes committed, at least through rhetoric, to: economic reform and development; political and judicial reform; labor reform; and social security policies including education, healthcare and basic pensions.³⁴ While none of these governments were ‘communists’ they posed certain challenges to US trade and investment. Many sought to follow the example of Mexican President Lázaro Cárdenas in expropriating both land and subsoil rights.³⁵ While these leaders were not communist, many followed, what Stephen Niblo has phrased, “the communist line”.³⁶ That is, they promoted a political and economic philosophy that diverged from US interests. Accordingly, the US required propaganda in creating a pretext to assert control over many of these regimes.

This contrast between Gaitánism and the Colombian Liberal Party defined Colombian politics between 1946 and 1948. Gaitán went as far as to suggest that the policies of the Liberals and the Conservatives were indistinguishable.³⁷ The Liberal Party betrayed Gaitán in 1946, by endorsing Gabriel Turbay as a third party presidential candidate.³⁸ The Conservatives, who had not offered a candidate in 16 years promoted Ospina Pérez, who won without a majority of votes.³⁹ It became clear that the Liberal oligarchy preferred coalition with the Conservatives that to promote Gaitánista philosophy. By 1948, it was evident that Gaitán would be president in the 1950 election.⁴⁰ This was made more urgent by Conservative policies in rural Colombia. The change of presidency in 1946 sparked the initial stages of ‘*La Violencia*’ in rural

Colombia. The peasants, who had been given legal temporary residence upon vacant oligarchic land by the Liberal government, were forcibly evicted by paramilitary groups, forcing them into *hacienda* labor on coffee plantations.⁴¹ As conditions worsened, Gaitán's popularity increased. He was the one candidate that offered change and hope. His policies included freedom of speech, freedom of press, more democratically elected positions, separation of politics and capital, wage reform, price controls on basic consumer goods, universal primary education and obligatory social security.⁴² These programs would have limited the mechanisms that ensured permanent class division by promoting social mobility. By 1948 the old divisions of Liberals and Conservatives had been eradicated. Gaitán reframed the conversation as the people vs the elite. This made him dangerous to the entire political establishment.

Latin America and the Grand Area

Latin America was a central part of Washington's 'grand area' following WWII. This meant that attempts at asserting national sovereignty in the region would be detrimental to US interests. While US Secretary of State Cordell Hull foresaw a post-war world order in which, "there will no longer be the need for spheres of influence", Latin America was of special significance to the US.⁴³ Beyond its historical relationship, dating back to the Monroe Doctrine of 1823, Latin American politics and economics had a direct influence upon the US in the immediate post-war world.⁴⁴ During WWII, the Council for Foreign Relations (CFR) designed the post-war global economic structure.⁴⁵ The CFR prophesized a "Grand Area" of US economic influence.⁴⁶ It included all of the Western Hemisphere, the occupied parts of North East Asia, Britain and the former British colonies. Each economy within the "Grand Area" was designated a role. The "tropical economies", which make up most of Latin America, were designated as raw material producers, as they had historically been.⁴⁷ It was logical for the US to extend its WWII economic infiltration of Latin America during a 'Cold War'. US dependence on raw materials, especially minerals and oil, logically defines wartime collaboration between the US and most Latin American states. However, the CFR papers from 1943 did not foresee a long-term Cold War.⁴⁸ Moreover, the "Grand Area" was designated as a long-term policy objective, even in a 'peaceful' political climate. US policy makers, within the CFR, determined that the vast majority of Latin America must stay underdeveloped raw material producers, dependent upon western purchases. A permanent 'wartime' international economy served as justification for this.

George Kennan outlined the significance of Latin America to US global leadership 1950. He asserted that Latin America was significant to America's security, its wartime economy and its moral leadership of the United Nations (UN).⁴⁹ By 1948, the basic structures for hemispheric security were ensured: the US expanded their WWII training of Latin American soldiers by

constructing the Latin American Ground School in the Panama Canal Zone in 1946;⁵⁰ the Latin American states committed to mutual defense through the 1947 “Rio Pact”;⁵¹ and the framework for the Military Assistance Program of 1949 had begun.⁵² The USSR could not feasibly threaten hemispheric security in 1948. The US also had majority control of trade and investment in most Latin American republics due to the relative decline of the British, Italian and German economies after WWII. Even states, such as Juan Perón’s Argentina, that were hostile to US regional leadership were dependent on US trade by the late 1940s. The dislocation of Latin America from European markets during WWII left the majority of Latin American republics dependent on the US. By 1948 the US required one additional facet to safeguard its long-term influence over Latin America. The OAS was conceived as a multilateral community; largely controlled by the US and its conservative allies.⁵³ It laid a framework for controlling the internal politics, economics and security of Latin American states. This safeguarded against both communists, and leaders espousing the “communist Line”.⁵⁴ The US also desired the OAS as a regional voice. In 1945 Latin America made up 20 of the foundational 50 members of the UN,⁵⁵ and the control of those 20 votes was a priority for the US. However, to justify US interference in Latin American sovereignty required the globalization of the European conflict. Hence, propagating a Cold War theatre became essential to US foreign policy in Latin America.

Latin America and the Propaganda War

Communism was an ideal pretext for US policy in Latin America. Anti-communist propaganda promoted fear by highlighting, and often exaggerating, some of the extreme factors of Soviet rule; creating an image of communism as a monolithic and authoritarianism ideology that denied the population of both freedom and wealth.⁵⁶ This was both effective within the US, and in Latin America.⁵⁷ This fear was also vague. While it is obvious that conservative Latin American leaders, and the US, sought to prevent communist revolutions by limiting the freedoms of communist parties, anti-communist paranoia went much further than communists. Propaganda was used to describe social democrats, populists, unions, and agrarian peasants as “communist” in the regional fallout of the Colombian Bogotazo.⁵⁸ Moreover, anti-communism largely ended progressive reform in Latin America, to the advantage of conservative and military elements, between 1948 and 1955. Additionally, anti-communist leaders were invariably pro-US. Therefore, discussions over the morality of right-wing authoritarian regimes, such as the Nicaraguan Somoza dynasty and the Dominican regime of Rafael Trujillo, were relegated by the fear of communism.⁵⁹ Accordingly, the US had unprecedented control over the composition and nature of Latin American governments following its regional anti-communist declaration. Finally, the fear over a global Cold

War continued the wartime economic relationship between the US and Latin America. This relegated conversations over economic diversification and industrial development, which motivated Latin American participation within the OAS beneath Cold War priorities.⁶⁰ Hence, the anti-communist pretext justified the US pursuit of its primary interests in Latin America at the expense of Latin American sovereignty, political freedom and economic development.

Central to this program were the US negotiations for an anti-communist declaration of the OAS prior to the Colombian Bogotazo. On April 8, 1948, William Baulac of the US State Department held preliminary discussions with Colombia's foreign minister Laureano Gómez regarding the potential anti-communist declaration.⁶¹ While Gómez enthusiastically supported Washington's position, he identified a number of reservations held by the Latin American delegations in Bogota.⁶² Gómez identified several progressive governments who would immediately condemn an anti-communist declaration on philosophical grounds. The Guatemalan Juan Arévalo and the Venezuelan Rómulo Betancourt led nations that were experiencing political freedom for the first time.⁶³ A foreign power dictating the eradication of a peripheral movement would not be acceptable. Another reservation identified was economic. Latin America's goals in Bogota were distinct from Washington's. They sought economic assistance in return for far-reaching diplomatic support. Then there was the issue of sovereignty. The Chilean and Uruguayan delegations expressed their reservations against intervention of any kind, including that of the US.⁶⁴ They sought to modify the target of the declaration to the USSR, rather than communism.⁶⁵ However, this was the exact distinction that George Marshall sought to undermine. The USSR was an external enemy with no ability, or intention, to physically invade the Americas. Communism could be interpreted in many ways, which made it the ideal enemy. To allay their reservations, the Latin Americans required visual evidence of the communist threat.

Marshall Blames 'Reds' in Colombia

President Truman appointed Marshall as Secretary of State, in 1947, for his diplomatic experience within the military during, and immediately after, WWII, in addition to his advanced knowledge of European and Asian politics.⁶⁶ Under his leadership, the US State Department initiated the largest aid program in human history. The European recovery program, known as the Marshall Plan, successfully safeguarded Western and Southern Europe from Soviet expansionism and domestic Socialist antagonism.⁶⁷ While Marshall has been lauded as a humanitarian by Time Magazine in 1947, and won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1953, the Marshall Plan was always intended to be a facet of US geostrategic policy that was not to be emulated in other regions.⁶⁸ By containing the Soviet Union in Europe and maintaining a significant presence in North-East Asia, the US, under Marshall, were beginning their path towards

global leadership.⁶⁹ Nevertheless, Marshall generated an image of an honest humanitarian American leader. This made him the ideal salesman of American foreign policy abroad. He was viewed as compassionate, pragmatic and empathetic.⁷⁰ While as an individual, Marshall exhibited these characteristics, when representing the US abroad he was a spokesman of US foreign policy. Marshall did not have advanced knowledge of Latin America as Secretary of State.⁷¹ Like most of his successors, Marshall began viewing Latin American politics through the spectrum of the international Cold War. In this context, he travelled to Bogota in March 1948 in order to establish the OAS.

The US and many Latin American delegations held conflicting visions over what the OAS would constitute. The vague regional organization lacked clarity over its purpose. Marshall, and the NSC, envisaged the OAS as a crucial component of America's Cold War architecture.⁷² The anti-communist OAS would define interaction between Latin American nations and the Soviet Union as a threat to hemispheric security, resulting in multilateral condemnation, political and economic sanctions, and ultimately the downfall of sovereign governments. Inasmuch, the OAS would directly serve US interests. However, several Latin American nations saw the OAS differently. Since their substantial economic commitments to WWII, Latin America had requested economic assistance from the US.⁷³ Given the extraordinary commitments made by Marshall to Western Europe, many Latin Americans anticipated similar assistance in the Western hemisphere. However, Marshall did not travel to Bogota with any new loan approvals. He asserted that there would be "no Marshall Plan for Latin America" in March 1948.⁷⁴ Additionally, Marshall indicated that European recovery was a prerequisite to Latin American development; positing that Latin America was to stay an underdeveloped appendage of the global capitalist economy.⁷⁵ This caused outrage amongst many of the OAS delegations.⁷⁶ To mollify this outrage, Marshall hurriedly gained congressional approval to increase the lending capacity of the Export-Import Bank by US\$500 million.⁷⁷ These conflicting visions on US economic policy, presented by Marshall, prohibited the implementation of America's primary objective; the anti-communist declaration. Marshall could not achieve this objective without an external event to galvanize opposition to hemispheric communism.

On April 9 1948 Juan Roa Sierra shot and mortally wounded Jorge Eliécer Gaitán outside his Bogota office.⁷⁸ Through this event, Marshall could sell anti-communism to Latin America. However, neither men involved were communists. The official story, that initially followed, stated that Sierra was the nephew of a man convicted by Gaitán's law firm.⁷⁹ However, further investigation questions this rather innocuous assumption. After firing the shots Sierra took refuge in a local drugstore. As the masses began to multiply, Sierra spoke to a sole Bogota policeman. In response to the policeman's request

of “tell me who ordered you to kill, for you are going to be lynched by the pueblo”, Sierra replied “Oh Señor...the powerful things I cannot tell you”.⁸⁰ Within an hour of the assault both men were dead and Bogota was left on the brink of civil war. The true motivation for Gaitán’s death remains unresolved. While some have asserted US complicity in Gaitán’s death, Herbert Braun’s analysis of “his death was inevitable” is the most penetrating. Gaitán “was too dangerous and too feared by both parties”.⁸¹ While Gaitán certainly posed a threat to US interests in Colombia, the threat posed to the local oligarchy was far greater. However, the case arguing American previous knowledge of the attack and subsequent protests is compelling. The human rights lawyer Paul Wolf, in attempting to account for the origins of the Colombian civil war, took both the CIA and FBI to court for defiance of the Freedom of Information Act.⁸² While the court ruled in his favor, many documents pertinent to Gaitán were omitted or concealed.⁸³ It is extremely unlikely that the US CIA or FBI killed Gaitán. However, prior knowledge would have given them the opportunity to plan their post-Bogotazo reaction in advance.

The Colombian Bogotazo was a violent protest that cost fourteen hundred Colombian lives.⁸⁴ It was a direct response to Gaitán’s assassination. Those who witnessed Gaitán’s death quickly mobilized the masses by spreading the message “they have killed Gaitán”.⁸⁵ The ambiguity of the word “they” led to uncontrolled violence throughout the city. The mob’s first action was to lynch Sierra within the Bogota drugstore.⁸⁶ This small group of followers dragged Sierra’s mutilated corps and began marching towards the center of Bogota.⁸⁷ As word spread, the crowd grew larger. Within two hours the mob had reached 200,000.⁸⁸ The protesters assumed “they”, who had killed Gaitán, were the Conservative government of Ospina Pérez. Their march then headed to the Presidential palace.⁸⁹ Civil order quickly declined. Liberal politicians unsuccessfully sought to moderate the rage. The military were prepared at the presidential palace. They aggressively broke down the protest, killing those who would not leave.⁹⁰ The following forty-eight hours saw aggressive street battles between Gaitán loyalists and the Colombian military. The Bogotazo was the catalyst for the rapid expansion of the Colombian Civil War ‘La Violencia’. It gave an urban theatre to a rural civil war. La Violencia lasted ten additional years, witnessed 200,000 deaths and resulted in a conservative coalition of oligarchic rule in 1958.⁹¹ There is no evidence that indicates the Bogotazo was a communist conspiracy. It did not serve the interests of communists. While there were young nationalists, including Fidel Castro, in Bogota protesting the formation of the OAS, their role in the Bogotazo was extremely peripheral.⁹² The Bogotazo was a spontaneous reaction to the assassination of Gaitán directed at those perceived as responsible.

US intelligence did not believe that Gaitán or his followers were affiliated with international communism. However, the US Federal Bureau

for Investigations (FBI) and State Department were aware, and cautious, of the effects of Gaitánism on the Colombian political system. The FBI director J Edgar Hoover, who was responsible for regional intelligence during WWII and the early Cold War period, identified the “threat” of Gaitán and his “manifestation” prior to the May 1946 elections.⁹³ While linking Gaitán to European fascists, Hoover argued, “collaboration between the Gaitánistas and the communists has been terminated”.⁹⁴ Further FBI documents reveal that Gaitánistas had persecuted communists in rural Colombia in competition for campesino support. State Department informer Joseph Ray indicated that Gaitán “was the worst enemy of communism”.⁹⁵ The FBI and the State Department both compiled summaries of the political history and policy of Gaitán’s movement.⁹⁶ There was no evidence that Gaitán was a communist or under the influence of communism. In the immediate aftermath of the Colombian Bogotazo, the CIA claimed to not know of Gaitán’s movement or the motivation for civil unrest.⁹⁷

The opportunity provided to Marshall outweighed the information delivered to him. Marshall used the violence of the Bogotazo to initiate the Cold War in Latin America during April 1948. During the violence, Marshall sat solemnly in a Bogota hotel room as many of his fellow delegates sought a panicked evacuation.⁹⁸ Marshall argued that Bogota was “concrete evidence... of the vitality of hemispheric communism and the need to ensure security against it”.⁹⁹ As the violence subsided, on April 14 Marshall ordered the delegates to return to work. When addressing them, Marshall stated:

This situation must not be judged on a local basis, however tragic the immediate results to the Colombian people... It is the same definite pattern to events which provoked strikes in France and Italy... In actions we take here... we must keep clearly in mind that this is a world affair – not merely a Colombian or Latin American.¹⁰⁰

Marshall made direct and intentional reference to the global Cold War, internationalizing the conflict. This demonstrated the violence of ‘communism’ to the region’s oligarchs, which motivated compliance to US anti-communist policies in the region. The Latin American Cold War was also sold to the international community. The New York Times front cover on April 15 1948 read, “Marshall Blames Reds in Colombia; Secretary Tells Conferees That World Communism Set Off Revolt in Country”.¹⁰¹ Marshall intentionally fabricated the relationship between the Bogotazo and the international Cold War to further US interests in Latin America.

The anti-communist declaration of April 1948 successfully integrated Latin America into the global Cold War. The OAS signatories condemned international communism for its ‘role’ in the Colombian Bogotazo.¹⁰² The document entitled ‘the menace of communism’ condemned any organization operating in the Western hemisphere antithetic to US interests.¹⁰³ It began by

regionalizing the doctrine of American exceptionalism over the USSR:

By its anti-democratic nature and its interventionist tendency the political activity of international communism or any other totalitarian doctrine is incompatible with the concept of American freedom, which rests on two undeniable postulates: the dignity of man as an individual and the sovereignty of the nation as a state.¹⁰⁴

The primary goal of the declaration was to outlaw the region's communist parties. While many nations outlawed communism prior to the Colombian Bogotazo for domestic reasons, the full eradication was expected through this document.¹⁰⁵ The OAS also committed to condemn the Soviet Union at international forums. Any government who "suppressed political and civil rights" was to earn the condemnation of the OAS at the UN.¹⁰⁶ Contradictorily, the representatives of Rafael Trujillo and Anastasio Somoza, who had denied all political and civil rights for decades, were present.¹⁰⁷ In order to ensure unanimous support the increase of "standard of living" was set as a goal in the war against communism.¹⁰⁸ However, no practical measures were set. The final commitment imposed upon the OAS members was the "full exchange of information" regarding indigenous communist organizations.¹⁰⁹

The immediate effects of Marshall's deception were witnessed on a national and regional scale. The Conservative Colombian President Ospina Pérez echoed Marshall's anti-communist accusation.¹¹⁰ Events in Bogota had proliferated Colombia's civil war 'La Violencia'. Gaitán's social program promised to drastically improve their livelihood, despite his reluctance to promote permanent land redistribution.¹¹¹ His death proliferated the violence in rural Colombia. Peasants became more active in protesting immediately after Gaitán's death and the Bogotazo.¹¹² This intensified the conflict between landlords and peasants, which was now reframed within the global struggle of the Cold War. Pérez "pointed to popular insurrections in certain towns as incontrovertible evidence of a larger predicted communist plot to seize control of Colombia".¹¹³ Pérez expanded Marshall's claim of urban communism within the Bogotazo, to define all class struggle in Colombia as a communist insurrection. A regional regression towards totalitarianism also occurred in the immediate aftermath of the Colombian Bogotazo. Latin America was transformed by anti-communism between 1948 and 1952. However, evidence of this new struggle came during 1948. On September 3, Chile outlawed the electoral Communist Party under the "Law for the Permanent Defense of Democracy".¹¹⁴ Gabriel Videla replaced communists with pro-US Liberals in his Popular Front government. On October 29, Manuel Odria usurped power from the democratic Bustamante government, which was supported by the social democratic Aprista party.¹¹⁵ On November 24, the Venezuelan military overthrew the Democratic Action (AD) government of Rómulo Gallegos.¹¹⁶ These three regional events were a preview of the Cold War policies that

followed in the coming years and decades.

The Cold War and American Foreign Policy

The Cold War had a dramatic effect on American foreign policy. The US abandoned its preference for democracy in Latin America by providing explicit support to the military coups in Peru in 1948, Venezuela in 1948, Haiti in 1950,¹¹⁷ Cuba in 1952,¹¹⁸ Colombia in 1953,¹¹⁹ Paraguay in 1954,¹²⁰ and Argentina in 1955.¹²¹ Additionally, the US CIA directly overthrew the democratic government of Guatemala in 1954.¹²² These coups were motivated by the change in US foreign policy that followed the Colombian Bogotazo. Policy Planning Staff (PPS) employee, Louis Halle, asserted this change in 1950.¹²³ Halle's "On a Certain Impatience with Latin America", written under the pseudonym 'Y' in *Foreign Affairs Magazine*, claimed:

The ferment of new ideas- ideas of economic and social democracy, ideas emphasizing emancipating from the United States among other sources - contributes to [Latin American] instability, as it also does to their progress.¹²⁴

Halle asserted that stability was more important to US interests than 'democracy' within the context of the Cold War. This sentiment was echoed by his colleague, Francis Truslow, who defined between "a dictatorship such as [Anastasio] Somoza's" and "totalitarianism", "as for example communism".¹²⁵ This evolution of US policy was then solidified through the new Under Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs, George Miller. The 'Miller Doctrine', initiated during 1950, claimed, "we... consider any attempt to extend the communist system" to Latin America: as dangerous to regional peace and safety.¹²⁶ He continued, the US should use "certain protective interventions" to maintain US leadership of the region.¹²⁷ The Cold War anti-communist pretext was in full operation by 1950. Governments who did not support US interests within their domestic political economy could be interpreted as "communist" and face multilateral OAS condemnation.

The OAS committed to preventing the implantation of communism in Latin America. However, the interpretation of 'communism' was offered by the US. As eight democratic governments fell between 1948 and 1955, US control of the OAS was cemented.¹²⁸ The OAS provided the US with several mechanisms to moderate the domestic political economies of member states. The OAS could make multilateral condemnations of member states. An example of this measure came in May 1954, over the actions of the Guatemala.¹²⁹ Those condemnations could lead to strategic sanctions, which allowed the US to ensure that its ammunition sanctions were successful. Broader sanctions were also possible. While some items were sanctioned in the Guatemalan example, a broad long-term OAS sanction was far more successful against Cuba from the 1960s.¹³⁰ Also, members could be omitted from the regional forum, as was the case with Cuba.¹³¹ However, the biggest change in regional

politics, following the Colombian Bogotazo was the evolution of regional intelligence. The OAS committed to a regional intelligence network following the Colombian Bogotazo. Following the Colombian Bogotazo of 1948, the US CIA was criticized for their failure to predict the violent protests.¹³² Congressional hearings demonstrated that the CIA were handicapped by Latin American governments who refused to share information on domestic political issues. Accordingly, the April 1948 anti-communist declaration of the OAS required the “full exchange of information” regarding regional communist organizations.¹³³ Additionally, the CIA was given greater autonomy in Latin America, completely replacing the FBI in the region.¹³⁴ This integration of information allowed the CIA to access the national records of all communist organizations.¹³⁵ It also provided the CIA with information on other political groups including political parties, unions, peasant organizations and academic dissidents.¹³⁶ This information could be, and often was, manipulated by military leaders to justify their actions.¹³⁷ Finally, the clandestine budget of the CIA could fund, with “plausible deniability” the military coups of pro-US groups.¹³⁸ Moreover, US influence within Latin American societies grew as a direct result of the anti-communist paranoia that followed the Colombian Bogotazo.

George Marshall and US National Interest

George Marshall’s actions intentionally deceived the first meeting of the OAS in Bogota. In doing so, Marshall served US interests on several levels. He achieved the broad anti-communist declarations, which grew into an alliance over the following decades. This allowed the US further access to the domestic political landscape of Latin America by blurring the definition between internal and external enemies to hemispheric security. Marshall also stalled any conversation on economic development assistance in Latin America. Marshall and the US State Department effectively demonized all economic philosophies that deviated from free-trade economics.¹³⁹ Those governments who followed the “communist line” were either replaced or moderated in the years following the Bogotazo.¹⁴⁰ Most significantly, the US gained the moral leadership of the hemisphere in its Cold War against the Soviet Union. This maintained a wartime economic alliance, which helped fuel the “military-industrial complex”.¹⁴¹ All of these factors served the US national interest in Latin America as defined by George Kennan in 1950.¹⁴² Given the human cost in Latin America, this is a difficult argument to present. However, Latin America was central to US global leadership in 1948. Accordingly, US actions in Bogota assisted its dominance in the global Cold War. While the ethics can be debated, the success of US policy is evident. Marshall brought the Cold War to Latin America to assist America’s global foreign policy.

This paper has demonstrated that Marshall’s calculated response to the Colombian Bogotazo brought the Cold War to Latin America during

1948. There was no legitimate threat to hemispheric security in 1948. While exhibiting aggression in Europe and Asia, the Soviet Union, under Joseph Stalin, exhibited no desire to influence Latin America.¹⁴³ The numbers and political influence of regional communist parties were also limited. Nevertheless, the US sought to extend the global Cold War to Latin America in order to confront progressive regimes that challenged their economic position in Latin America. These governments were not communists. They were a combination of social democrats and populists that committed to economic development at the cost of US dominated foreign trade and investment. As the NSC retrospectively demonstrated in 1953, they were viewed as a challenge to American foreign policy in the region. While some aspects of America's post-war infrastructure were successfully achieved prior to the Colombian Bogotazo, the centerpiece, the OAS, required a propagated enemy. Marshall's, and the US State Department's, failure to achieve a broad anti-communist alliance, prior to the Bogotazo, demonstrates this point. However, on April 9, 1948, Marshall was granted the opportunity to propagate a conflict in Latin America. His calculated response to the assassination of Gaitán, and the civil disorder that followed, sold the Cold War to many Latin American leaders. This instituted an effective anti-communist pretext that defined Latin American politics from 1948. Moreover, Marshall's response to events in Bogota achieved an anti-communist agenda within the OAS that gave the US a level of influence over domestic Latin American political economy that was not possible prior to the Bogotazo. While it was logical for the US to seek its national interest in Latin America through this calculated deception, the effects on the region were disastrous.

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