

## Chapter 1

# "TIES OF CIVILIZED SOCIETY"

## Inter-American Security and Stability

Chronic wrongdoing, or an impotence which results in a general loosening of the ties of civilized society, . . . may force the United States, however reluctantly, in flagrant cases of such wrongdoing or impotence, to the exercise of an international police power.

THEODORE ROOSEVELT (1904)

The United States has historically pursued security in the Western Hemisphere with singular purpose. For more than a century, policymakers have worked to construct a sphere of influence in the region through which U.S. officials could enforce internal political stability and preempt external meddling by European powers, actions designed to advance the nation's security interests. The United States has done so through the accumulation and projection of overwhelming economic, military, and political power—hegemony—relative to individual states in the region. To be sure, ideology, domestic politics, and the actions of Latin American governments have all influenced and shaped U.S. policies and outcomes—in certain cases decisively so. Yet the only consistently reliable guide to understanding the contours of inter-American state-to-state relations remains security. As political scientist Lars Schoultz argues: “If one wants to understand the core of United States policy toward Latin America, one studies security.”<sup>1</sup>

In this chapter, I explore the salience of that factor, focusing in particular on the Cold War and the attendant pursuit of it in Paraguay. For reasons rooted in that nation's history, however, officials in Washington feared that the attainment of security would founder in the face of chronic political instability in Asunción. But with the rise to power of Alfredo Stroessner in 1954, those fears were quelled by the appearance of an authoritarian leader who was uniquely positioned to maintain political order and stability in Paraguay, and hence protect U.S. security interests.

## THE UNITED STATES AND THE SEARCH FOR HEMISPHERIC SECURITY

Since the Latin American wars for independence (1808–1826), generations of diplomats and policymakers in the United States have defined Latin America as a region of supreme strategic interest, a seemingly natural extension of their nation's sphere of influence. In a broad sense the Cold War project to prevent the spread of Soviet-inspired communist movements in Latin America was rooted in the 1823 Monroe Doctrine, which stipulated that the newly independent states to the south were to remain free from outside interference. Although an empty gesture at the time, given the relative naval superiority of the British throughout the nineteenth century, that document nevertheless became of a kind of urtext for U.S. officials: it provided the foundational explanation and justification for their nation's drive to hegemony across the continent and into the hemisphere. From major wars against Mexico in 1846 and Spain in 1898, to a sustained period of military interventions and occupations of sovereign Caribbean nations in the early twentieth century, and, finally, to the rising threat of Nazi German encroachment in South America during the 1930s, U.S. policymakers have single-mindedly pursued a maximalist definition of security.<sup>2</sup> "The United States, who seem destined by Providence to plague America with torments in the name of freedom," lamented Simón Bolívar, who played a decisive role in liberating South America from Spanish colonialism.<sup>3</sup> To many observers, Bolívar's words in 1829 have served as a prophecy. For U.S. officials, however, they have since served to justify the assertion of their nation's singular role in Latin America.

If security is fundamental to the long history of inter-American relations, it is of exceptional importance to understanding those relations after World War II. Amid the devastation and wreckage of that global struggle, U.S. policymakers developed a grand strategy of employing the United States' preponderant economic, geopolitical, and technological advantage to both contain the spread of Soviet communism in Europe and create more broadly "a world environment hospitable to U.S. interests and values."<sup>4</sup> The Truman Doctrine (1947), the Marshall Plan (1948), the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (1949), and NSC-68 (1950) provided the necessary political, economic, and military means by which policymakers pursued this containment strategy. The latter in particular provided a hard-edged ideological cast to that effort throughout much of the Cold War. NSC-68 ("U.S. Objectives and Programs for National Security") provided U.S. officials with a comprehensive worldview that posited a Manichean struggle across the globe between the forces of slavery (the Soviet Union) and freedom (the United States). As Paul Nitze, the State Department policy analyst responsible for drafting that document, argued: "The Soviet Union, unlike previous as-

pirants to hegemony, is animated by a new fanatic faith, antithetical to our own, and seeks to impose its absolute authority over the rest of the world." In the face of such implacable threats, Nitze counseled: "We must make ourselves strong, both in the way in which we affirm our values in the conduct of our national life, and in the development of our military and economic strength."<sup>5</sup> Taken together, these measures adopted by the Truman administration cohered into an expansive "national security discourse," in the words of historian Michael Hogan, which served to valorize anticommunism as the driver of U.S. policies and actions in Latin America.<sup>6</sup>

To that end, Truman officials constructed an interlocking regional security framework that linked the internal stability and external security of Latin American nations directly to the United States. In 1947 and 1948 U.S. officials brokered two major agreements that gave shape to their quest for hemispheric security. The first, the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance (Rio Pact), was a collective security agreement that provided for the "maintenance of peace and security of the Continent" through coordinated military actions by member states when facing external threats. As with the later NATO agreement in Europe, the Rio Pact stipulated that an attack on one member state was an attack against all. The second agreement, the charter of the Organization of American States (OAS), provided for the political and institutional means by which the collective security provisions of the Rio Pact could be effected within a centralized and legalistic decision-making framework. These agreements formalized an Inter-American System that U.S. policymakers used thereafter as the basis for waging the Cold War against communism in Latin America.<sup>7</sup> "It is like cancer," said Allen Dulles, analogizing communism as a deadly disease to be extirpated from the hemisphere as quickly as possible. "The longer one waits the more drastic must be the medicine," the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) director insisted.<sup>8</sup>

Fundamental to administering that medicine from the perspective of Washington were anticommunist regimes that possessed the capacity to impose authoritarian, top-down control of potentially destabilizing domestic political elements adverse to U.S. interests.<sup>9</sup> Such regimes, however, were in short supply in Latin America at that time. In the immediate aftermath of World War II, a wave of popular, progressive-oriented social and political movements ushered in democratic civilian governments, in the process deposing a number of military juntas and dictatorships. Although there were significant differences in the domestic political dynamics within each country, these reform movements shared several important characteristics that had been strengthened during the war. The embrace of socioeconomic reforms by political parties attuned to urban working- and middle-class interests, an increase in the size and strength of communist groups that served as the vanguard of the anti-fascist Left in the region,

the successful mobilization and political integration of organized labor groups, and a shared ideological assumption concerning the superiority of democracy over fascism, as evidenced by the triumph of the Allies—after 1945 all of these factors converged to create or strengthen existing democratic regimes in Argentina, Chile, Costa Rica, Colombia, Cuba, Ecuador, Peru, and Venezuela.<sup>10</sup>

But with the concurrent hardening of the Cold War by the late 1940s, that democratic wave quickly receded. Significantly, many of these new governments—especially that of Argentina's Juan Perón—were committed to a form of revolutionary nationalism that attempted to sever, or at least attenuate, the economic hegemony of the United States. As such, they—not communist agitators—were the "true menace" in Latin America from the perspective of U.S. officials.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, Truman officials frequently invoked Cold War rhetoric to justify facilitating the return of authoritarian governments in the region. Beginning in 1947 the administration resumed arms sales to the Trujillo regime in the Dominican Republic and eventually re-embraced the Somoza regime in Nicaragua, two brutal dictators who just two years earlier had faced intense pressure by the same administration to implement democratic reforms. As Spruille Braden, the influential diplomat and foremost advocate behind this reversal of policy explained: "It was to Somoza's credit that he had been consistently anti-communist through the years."<sup>12</sup>

In 1948 the White House further provided diplomatic recognition to military juntas that had toppled democratically elected governments in Peru and Venezuela. By 1954 only four states in the region could be broadly classified as democratic: Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, and Uruguay.<sup>13</sup> The search for hemispheric security against communism by U.S. officials seemingly necessitated forging alliances with friendly tyrants, an act that nevertheless undercut the lofty claims of having just made the world safe for democracy. But squarely addressing the underlying contradiction of that dictator dilemma would have to wait another day. "We must concede," counseled George Kennan, "that harsh governmental measures of repression may be the only answer; that these measures may have to proceed from regimes whose origins and methods would not stand the test of American concepts of democratic procedure; and that such regimes and such methods may be preferable alternatives, and indeed the only alternatives, to further communist successes."<sup>14</sup>

For policymakers adducing the ability of Paraguay to contribute to that security framework, the lessons from history were not encouraging. Although formal diplomatic ties were established between both states in 1854, U.S. interests in the country were deemed insufficient to justify establishing a permanent consul in Asunción, Paraguay's capital, until three decades later, in 1888.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, the United States did not appoint a career diplomat to Asunción until Post

Wheeler arrived in 1929. Growing hostilities between Paraguay and neighboring Bolivia prompted a concerted but failed attempt by U.S. diplomats to encourage suasion instead of arms to decide the underlying dispute over territorial claims, resulting in the bloody Chaco War (1932–1935). More successful were efforts by the United States as part of a multinational delegation to broker a peace protocol that brought that war to an end three years later.<sup>16</sup>

Despite this lackluster record, the coming of World War II was a turning point in solidifying U.S.-Paraguayan relations on the basis of security. In 1938 policymakers within the Franklin D. Roosevelt administration began to court Paraguay as part of a systematic “diplomatic counteroffensive” against Nazi German encroachment into South America.<sup>17</sup> Once the war began, fears of a potential “fifth column” of a million German immigrants living in Latin America prompted sustained attention to Paraguay by Washington.<sup>18</sup> The means by which officials secured and hoped to maintain Paraguayan alignment were foreign economic and military assistance, administered through both bilateral and multilateral agencies. Here they could rely on an already established practice of utilizing foreign aid as a diplomatic tool that predated the Cold War. In May 1939 the United States granted the Paraguayan government \$3 million in Eximbank credits and a \$500,000 credit to the Paraguayan National Bank in an ultimately successful effort to maintain the country’s allegiance to the Allies. Immediately after the war, the United States sought to strengthen its hegemonic influence in the country. To this end Truman and Eisenhower officials extended \$5.2 million in direct bilateral economic assistance to Paraguay from 1946 to 1953.<sup>19</sup>

The U.S. ambassador to Paraguay George P. Shaw (1952–1953) explained in a January 1953 dispatch to the State Department that this assistance was vital to the national security interest of the United States: “The purpose of our [foreign economic] programs,” he wrote, “is to achieve a stable and developing economy so that a vacuum does not arise which would have unfortunate economic as well as political repercussions on our long and short term interests in the River Plate area endangering the security of the hemisphere, and at the same time to combat any Communist penetration or extension of influence.” Shaw further emphasized that Paraguay appeared to be a willing partner in that effort to combat communism. “Paraguay has definitely aligned herself on the side of the democratic nations and avows every intention and desire to cooperate with us in achieving the objectives of a free world.”<sup>20</sup>

## PARAGUAY AND THE STRUGGLE FOR STABILITY

Following the assertion of independence in 1811 against imperial Spain, Paraguay’s own search for security and stability profoundly shaped the direction of

its national development. A landlocked nation in the "southern cone" of South America, Paraguay has a total landmass roughly the size of California. It is divided by the Paraguay River; the western half is dominated by the semiarid and sparsely populated Chaco region, while the eastern half is semitropical and contains fertile grasslands that sustain agricultural production and subsistence farming. Culturally, Paraguay is the only bilingual country in the Americas. The Guaraní language, spoken by the majority of the population, owes to the influence of the indigenous, seminomadic native peoples who encountered the Spanish when they arrived in 1537 to found Asunción. Today, Paraguay is a growing country of nearly seven million whose commodity-based export economy, especially soybeans and beef, is increasingly tied to global markets.

By one set of metrics and national indicators, Paraguayans are among the "happiest" in the world.<sup>21</sup> It is no longer permissible, if it ever was, to characterize the country as a Time-Life book did in 1965: a "reference to Paraguay evokes much the same response as a reference to Timbuktu; it conjures up a vision of all this [as] remote, foreign, backward and unknown."<sup>22</sup>

Yet it is undeniable that Paraguay's early history was marked by a profound sense of isolation and insecurity amid its larger, more powerful neighbors—Argentina and Brazil. In the decades following independence, the nascent country's political order was forged by a succession of three regimes that imposed a top-down, authoritarian system. The first, José Gaspar Rodríguez de Francia (r. 1814–1840), initiated the autarkic consolidation of the fledgling nation through a series of severe, paternalistic policies: nearly all foreign trade was cut off, males of Spanish descent were allowed only to marry indigenous women, and titles to property owned by both the Catholic Church and private individuals were expropriated by the government, which then rented out the land to peasants for farming. If Francia provided the country with self-sufficiency, his successor, Carlos Antonio López (1841–1862), was instrumental in bringing the nation out of its hermetic isolation, where it emerged as an important regional power replete with modern railways, telegraph lines, shipyards, and an iron foundry. López also created a new constitution in 1844, which invested much power and authority in the hands of the executive branch.<sup>23</sup>

Francisco Solano López (1862–1870), who followed his father as president, promoted an expansive pride in *la patria* by modernizing Paraguay's military. But that effort was purchased at a terrible cost. Much as the Civil War in the United States (1861–1865) cleaves its own history, the War of the Triple Alliance (1864–1870) marks the major turning point in Paraguayan history.<sup>24</sup>

The origins of that conflict stemmed from López's desire to protect Paraguay's sovereignty by promoting a balance of power in the Río de la Plata. Fundamental to that foreign policy was protecting the sovereignty of Uruguay from

the predations of Argentina and Brazil. If Uruguay faltered, López calculated, there would be nothing to prevent them from simply annexing Paraguay next.<sup>25</sup> In September 1854, when Brazil sent its armed forces to remove the ruling Blanco Party government in Uruguay, López pounced. After Argentina refused to allow Paraguayan troops to enter its country en route to assist the beleaguered Uruguayans, the López government declared war on both Argentina and Brazil, and subsequently invaded Mato Grosso, a long-disputed province on Paraguay's northern border with Brazil. In response, Argentina, Brazil, and the new Uruguayan government signed a secret pact in May 1865—the Treaty of the Triple Alliance—that aimed at toppling Francisco Solano López.<sup>26</sup>

The Paraguayan military fought bravely, but in a “total war” such as this, the Triple Alliance was able to marshal an overwhelming advantage in resources. Out of sheer desperation, the López government in March 1867 ordered the conscription of slaves, criminals, and children between the ages of thirteen and sixteen.<sup>27</sup> The final blow came on March 1, 1870, when López shouted at the Brazilian soldiers who had inflicted the fatal wound upon him: “¡Muero con mi patria!” (I die with my country!)<sup>28</sup> The results were staggering: Paraguay was forced to cede one-quarter of its prewar territory while its infrastructure, including the railways and foundry, lay in ruin. Most consequential of all was the impact on the people. Reliable estimates are that slightly more than 60 percent of the 450,000 prewar population perished during the fighting, including some 90 percent of all adult males.<sup>29</sup> Paraguay was so ravaged that *la hecatombe* (carnage) is commonly used to refer to the war.<sup>30</sup>

Following that upheaval, Paraguay's search for sheer survival led to a period of sustained political conflict. Argentine-Brazilian rivalry for hegemony in Paraguay after the war led to the creation of two antagonistic political parties. Competition for power between the Partido Liberal (Liberal Party) and the Partido Colorado (Colorado Party) led to chronic instability as the government changed hands in rapid succession: only five of the thirty-seven Paraguayan presidents between 1870 and 1940 completed their term in office; none relinquished power due to a democratic election.<sup>31</sup>

In the midst of that instability, another regional war loomed. The Chaco War (1932–1935) was fought against neighboring Bolivia over control of that disputed region. After three years of intensive fighting, the Paraguayan forces had prevailed. Following a short-lived military coup against the Liberal government in February 1936, the nationalist dictator General Higinio Morínigo (1940–1948) presided over what proved to be a decisive moment in Paraguayan politics—the return to power of the Colorados.<sup>32</sup> The catalyst for this transition was the Revolución de 47, a civil war that raged from March to August 1947 and consumed the lives of some fifty thousand Paraguayans. The immediate background to that

crisis was the formation in July 1946 of a loose coalition united in their opposition to Morínigo: Liberals and Colorados, together with members of the Partido Comunista Paraguayo (PCP; Paraguayan Communist Party) and the Partido Revolucionario Febrerista (PRF), a heterogeneous collection of both right- and left-leaning nationalists who drew inspiration from the February Revolution of 1936, all agitated to topple the Paraguayan president.

That fragile unity held until militants of the small but influential Febreristas within that coalition demanded a majority of cabinet posts in the prospective government. This prompted the Colorados to join forces with the beleaguered Morínigo, who was in desperate need of securing a new political power base. The political crisis deepened in early March when a group of Febrerista rebels assaulted the police station in Asunción. This action sparked an intense, all-out struggle against the Colorados and Morínigo. As the rebellion reached Asunción, the Colorados pinned their hopes on a young lieutenant colonel—Alfredo Stroessner—who commanded an artillery regiment in the capital city. With the assistance of the Colorados' peasant militias (*pynandí*), Stroessner defeated the insurgents and thereby secured a prominent voice among the new political elite. In short order, Morínigo and the Colorados purged the government of all other power contenders, thus bringing Paraguay firmly under Colorado rule for the first time since 1904.<sup>33</sup>

The Colorados' victory, however, ushered in a sustained period of intraparty factionalization and intrigue from 1948 to 1954. In the violent repression that followed the party's consolidation of power, approximately one-third of Paraguay's entire population fled into exile.<sup>34</sup> This postwar period further witnessed the rise and fall of five Colorado presidents, including Morínigo, who was toppled by a group of military officers (including Stroessner) in June 1948. Yet perhaps because of that factionalization, Stroessner steadily rose to positions of increasing rank and privilege. Within the military he was promoted to brigadier general, commander of the artillery forces, and commander of all the strategically important bases in and around Asunción; finally, in October 1951 he was appointed commander in chief of the army by successive Paraguayan presidents who rewarded Stroessner for his assistance in toppling their predecessors. At nearly every step during this fractious postwar period, Stroessner was in the right place at the right time.<sup>35</sup>

Nowhere was this more evident than in May 1954, when Stroessner fomented a military coup against Morínigo's successor, Federico Chaves (1949–1954). The proximate cause of that event was, once again, intraparty conflict. The moderate *democrático* faction, led by Chaves, attempted to consolidate its hegemony within the party. This action moved the right-wing *guionistas* to revolt. Correctly intuiting which faction would ultimately prevail—a majority of military officers



supported the guionistas—Stroessner led the charge. After nearly a week of military clashes that lasted from May 3 to May 8 and resulted in Chaves's removal, the young head of the national army emerged as the unexpected leader of Paraguayan politics.<sup>36</sup>

### OUR "SOB" IN ASUNCIÓN: THE RISE OF ALFREDO STROESSNER

Given his personal background, Stroessner's rapid upward trajectory should not have been so surprising; his formative experiences came exclusively from within military circles. He was born on November 3, 1912, in the southeastern city of Encarnación. Son of a German immigrant from Bavaria, Hugo, and a native Paraguayan woman, Heriberta Mattiauda, Stroessner entered the national military academy as a cadet at age sixteen. While Stroessner was "no intellectual," according to the Paraguayan historian Bernardo Neri Farina, he nevertheless relied on his intuition and pragmatism to climb ever upward.<sup>37</sup> After serving as an artillery officer within the Paraguayan Army during the Chaco War, Stroessner rose to the rank of colonel following his support for the Colorado Party faction amid the 1947 civil war.

Given the tumultuous nature of events in Asunción surrounding the May 1954 coup, Eisenhower administration policymakers warily surveyed the scene. On May 11, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles sent President Eisenhower a memorandum noting that the State Department "does not foresee that the new government will differ substantially from its predecessor." From Dulles's perspective, the coup stemmed from chronic political "rivalries" that did not augur well for the longevity of Chaves's successor. (A Colorado Party elder, Tomás Romero Pereira, headed a provisional government until the July national elections.) For the time being at least, the new government was presumed to be "firmly in control of the country." Accordingly, Dulles asked the president to agree to diplomatic recognition of the nascent regime. Eisenhower responded to his secretary of state's request with a simple handwritten "OK." Just a day prior to celebrating the "Revolution of May 14th," marking Paraguayan independence from Spain in 1811, the United States opened formal diplomatic relations with the interim government.<sup>38</sup>

Stroessner wasted no time. In less than two months he positioned himself as the sole presidential candidate in the July 1954 elections; no other Colorado faction could mount a viable challenger. In part, this was due to his aforementioned control of the armed forces and skillful jockeying among various Colorado splinter groups. But that was not all. On May 25 Stroessner addressed a Colorado assembly in which he seemed to connect with Paraguayans eager for a respite

from the internecine political warfare of the previous decade. In what qualified for the normally reticent Stroessner as an impassioned speech, he declared that if elected, "politics will become another way of educating the people, where noble passion for the public good will be nurtured by elevating the best men, in hopes of restoring order and public peace."<sup>39</sup> Such politicking appeared to have worked, as Stroessner was duly chosen as the Colorado nominee—thus the only candidate—for president on June 14. In what the U.S. Embassy characterized as a "quiet" election on July 11, Stroessner garnered an astonishing 98 percent of the total popular vote and was inaugurated as president in August. The election results proved, as one U.S. official sarcastically remarked, that Stroessner was "definitely popular with many Paraguayans."<sup>40</sup>

But those intraparty rivalries that Dulles had warned against soon threatened Stroessner's grip on power. An erstwhile ally in the effort to topple Chaves, Epifanio Méndez Fleitas, presented the first critical test of Stroessner's rule. In many respects, his career offered a civilian parallel to Stroessner's rise through the military ranks. As editor of a Colorado newspaper, then as the Asunción chief of police, and finally as president of the Paraguayan Central Bank, Méndez Fleitas proved just as astute as Stroessner in choosing the right Colorado patron at each propitious moment. According to one scholar, he was recognized by many of his peers as "an all-purpose troubleshooter" and "future leader."<sup>41</sup>

But Méndez Fleitas had earned a reputation as a populist, left-leaning adherent of Juan Perón, the president of neighboring Argentina. This association fed the suspicions of nationalist, conservative elements within the Colorados and armed forces. That reputation further influenced the judgment of key policymakers in the United States; the U.S. ambassador even sided with Stroessner in his effort to remove Méndez Fleitas as a rival power contender. As indicated in the following paragraphs, the question of who would best protect U.S. security interests was paramount. For his part, Stroessner quickly grasped that his own political fortunes could best be protected, even enhanced, by making common cause with the United States in the Cold War struggle against communism.

After purging the government and military ranks of Méndez Fleitas supporters—*epifanistas*—in December 1955, Stroessner forced him into exile to Uruguay in January 1956. An embassy communication indicates that this action had the tacit approval of U.S. officials in Asunción. The ambassador, Arthur A. Ageton, a retired navy rear admiral who served as Eisenhower's representative to Paraguay from 1954 to 1957, identified Méndez Fleitas as a Soviet stooge. Ageton speculated that the former director of the Central Bank, while in that capacity, "deliberate[ly] attempt[ed] to wreck the economy and create economic chaos." As to motive, Ageton suspected the worst. "Whether or not Méndez is a Communist or was working together with them or seeking their support in order to

forward his own political ambition to be President, or whether he was guided by them due to political naiveté, the record will show that he was accomplishing one of the primary Communist aims in any country which the Communist Party wishes to take over," Ageton wrote. He added that, thanks to Stroessner's purge, the United States need not worry about the advent of a "Méndez regime," which would have been "anti-U.S. and leftist oriented."<sup>42</sup>

In the aftermath of the purge, U.S. diplomats in Asunción calculated that Stroessner enjoyed "preponderant" and "enthusiastic" backing from the military and Colorados at large. In all, according to embassy officials, "the outlook appears to be one of continued stability of the Stroessner regime as long as the present balance between the military and Colorado Party is maintained."<sup>43</sup> The implication in this analysis was clear: Stroessner was synonymous with the anti-communist security and political stability desperately sought by U.S. officials in the Cold War.

### **BUILDING THE *STRONATO*: AUTHORITARIANISM AND ANTICOMMUNISM**

Alfredo Stroessner enforced that stability through a combination of co-opting potential threats to his authority from within the armed forces, institutionalizing official corruption and dispensing patronage to loyal Colorado Party members, and brutally repressing dissident political opponents and indigenous social movements.<sup>44</sup> Facilitated by force and fear, this interlocking tripartite system of presidential, military, and political power allowed Stroessner to forge a degree of stability in Paraguay unmatched since the nineteenth century. In this he shared many of the traits of the *caudillo*. Possessed of charismatic personalities who used military force to gain and hold political power for personal ends, these "strong men" established the pattern of authoritarian, centralized rule that prevailed throughout Latin America following independence from Spain. Yet unlike that traditional figure, Stroessner could hardly be described as charismatic. Reserved and diffident, Stroessner rarely gave public speeches and avoided physical contact in public.<sup>45</sup> Nevertheless, he frequently traveled the country and cultivated ties with local officials. His name and image were ubiquitous adornments throughout the country; posters and signs on public buildings frequently announced the regime's central political message: *Paz y Progreso* ("Peace and Progress"). In this respect, as novelist Graham Greene suggested, Stroessner exhibited the traits of an "astute owner of a beer cellar who knows his customers well and can manage them."<sup>46</sup>

Those traits were put to the test in the first years of the *stronato*. During what political scientist Paul Lewis characterizes as the "most repressive" period

of Stroessner's rule (1954–1963), the dictator was confronted by myriad dissident groups.<sup>47</sup> To begin, not all Colorados were *stronistas*; supporters of both Chaves and Méndez Fleitas agitated against Stroessner from within the party until 1959, when Stroessner forced them into exile. The political organization that they subsequently formed, the Movimiento Popular Colorado (MOPOCO; Popular Colorado Movement), represented a virtual government-in-waiting in neighboring Argentina, but outwardly it rejected the notion of directly taking up arms against Stroessner.<sup>48</sup>

Other movements were rather more desirous of doing just that. Noteworthy in this regard were several factions of outlawed political groups, especially the Liberal Party and to a lesser extent the Febreristas. Operating outside of these regular party channels, furthermore, were two guerrilla groups that adhered to the insurrectionist thesis of using direct violence to topple Stroessner. The first, the Movimiento 14 de Mayo (M-14; 14th of May Movement), was led by Liberal dissidents. It was this group that launched several failed incursions from 1958 until 1960 when its leaders were captured and executed by the Paraguayan Army. A smaller group, the Vanguardia Febrerista, was composed of Febrerista adherents who frequently partnered with the 14th of May Movement. Finally, the Paraguayan Communist Party sought the overthrow of Stroessner through sponsorship of the Frente Unido de Liberación Nacional (FULNA; United National Liberation Front), which was explicitly communist-oriented. The PCP enthusiastically welcomed advisors and financial support from the revolutionary Cuban government. A document later discovered in the archives of the Paraguayan Armed Forces identified forty Paraguayans who reportedly received training in guerrilla combat operations in Cuba.<sup>49</sup> A study conducted in 1955 by the U.S. Embassy placed the number of PCP members at between 1,500 and 2,000. Despite these myriad threats to Stroessner's grip on power, embassy officials surmised that the Stroessner regime "could cripple" these oppositionist groups with relative ease.<sup>50</sup>

The key to understanding the confidence behind that assertion lay in the new symbiotic relationship between the armed forces and the Colorado Party. Under this "strategic union," forged largely by Stroessner himself, virtually no part of the country could remain free of its control.<sup>51</sup> The intermingling of party politics and military affairs was recognized by U.S. officials as a defining feature of the government. According to a January 1962 embassy report: "The Paraguayan Army has not only the richest historical tradition but is far and away the most powerful of the three military services. It has become institutionalized to such an extent that practiced politicians are willing to regard it as a fourth branch of government. All political planning, whether of the constitutional or extra-constitutional variety, must take the Army into account and give it pre-

dominant weight in any calculations. The Army is as much a fact of political life in Paraguay as the Congress is a fact of political life in the United States."<sup>52</sup> Within the Paraguayan military itself—particularly the army—Stroessner built up a firm base of support by lavishing government spending on the armed forces, overseeing nearly all promotions, and rewarding loyalty through patronage and the fruits of official corruption. Moreover, those rewards were tied to compulsory membership in the Colorado Party and loyalty oaths to Stroessner. In this manner the Colorados functioned as a “counterweight” to any potential source of opposition to Stroessner from within the military.<sup>53</sup>

An illustration of Stroessner’s personal cultivation of political ties within the Paraguayan Armed Forces was demonstrated in June 1955, when he attended a barbeque given in his honor at a Colorado Party member’s ranch in the western Chaco region. The guests, who accompanied Stroessner onboard a military transport plane, consisted mostly of Paraguayan Army captains and lieutenants. According to an embassy source who attended the event, Stroessner’s “relaxations” consisted of the following:

The amusements indulged in by the party were somewhat striking. Immediately upon arriving at the ranch the guests pulled out pistols and began to fire at all targets at hand, particularly birds, fence posts, tin cans and bottles. The President shot well. After a great deal of such noisy entertainment, the group settled down and the President and one of the officers began a game of chess which engaged them for some time. While playing chess they drank steadily, as did the other members of the party. After the game was over, the President joined the Army officers and spent an hour or two exchanging dirty stories.<sup>54</sup>

Although there was no indication that dancing was part of the entertainment, any musical accompaniment at that time would have included the *Presidente Stroessner Polka*, described by an earlier embassy report as “a lively tune with words which eulogize the President as a Chaco War hero who in peacetime is patriotically rebuilding the country with tractors. The President asked that the polka be broadcast by the government radio station.”<sup>55</sup> In this thicket of personal and political connections could be found the essence of Stroessner’s longevity.

In the civilian sector, meanwhile, the influence of the Colorados was both broad and deep. Organized in a top-down, verticalist fashion, the Colorado Party functioned as the dominant control mechanism used by the Stroessner regime to maintain stability: the vast expansion of *seccionales* (local political branches organized by the party), popular demonstrations and parades, and several news organs that disseminated pro-government propaganda all ensured loyalty to Stroessner.<sup>56</sup> Moreover, he frequently used the “state of siege” provision of the

1940 Paraguayan Constitution to justify repression against political opponents. Through this legal device, basic civil rights were routinely suspended in the name of threats to national security. With few exceptions, this provision was enforced continuously from 1954 to 1987. Stroessner was further abetted in repressing dissidents through Ley 294 ("Law in Defense of Democracy"), a 1955 measure aimed at preventing the propagation of communism. The practical effect, however, was that this legislation endowed Stroessner with the ability to place strict limits on freedom of speech, assembly, and public expression by nearly all political opponents. Likewise, his distorted use of the communist epithet, which he wielded as a cudgel against all opposition groups, particularly university students, effectively prohibited what on paper was a constitutional right and guarantee of free expression.<sup>57</sup> Through these measures, the Stroessner dictatorship erected a democratic facade that effectively concealed to the outside world the unmistakably authoritarian nature of the regime.<sup>58</sup>

In these ways Alfredo Stroessner used the Colorado Party, the armed forces, and government institutions to wield a degree of control over Paraguayan society that, while short of totalitarian, was irrefutably total; his personalist, mass-based support within the party meshed with the military to produce an effective machinery of dictatorship that virtually guaranteed stability at the top. "Loyalty to Stroessner," according to political scientist Paul Sondrol, "was not based on any comprehensive and intellectually elaborate ideology or charisma, but rather on a mixture of fear and rewards threatened and offered to his collaborators."<sup>59</sup> Indeed, as one scholar has estimated, this tripartite power structure enabled the Stroessner regime to effectively govern the country by directly controlling only three-tenths of 1 percent of the entire population, or 5,100 out of 1.7 million citizens.<sup>60</sup> Enforcing that stability was a cross section of government officials in Asunción. One of the first scholarly efforts to identify those responsible for meting out torture and repression there listed the names of 165 individuals who were personally culpable: two long-serving directors of the Interior Ministry, several directors and numerous lower-ranking officers within the notorious criminal investigation unit of the Paraguayan police (DIPC), scores of army generals and their lieutenants, and a range of deputy mayors and other local government officials, among others. At the top of the list was Stroessner himself, who witnessed and directed the torture of numerous victims.<sup>61</sup>

From its inception the stronato was characterized by a degree of stability that was consonant with the top-down control of Paraguayan society forged in the aftermath of its independence the previous century; one of Stroessner's popular nicknames, *El Segundo Reconstructor* (the "second re-builder"), clearly denotes that link to the past. It is this historical context that ultimately gives meaning to Stroessner as a political force redolent of Paraguay's golden age of stability. And

it is that history that provides the context crucial to understanding the priority of officials in the United States in patronizing an anticommunist ally who could deliver order and security at a perilous moment in world affairs. During the next three decades both nations pursued complementary, mutually opportunistic, and ultimately antagonistic foreign policy goals.