OPERATION CONDOR'S DOPPELGÄNGER: THE *JUNTA DE COORDINACIÓN REVOLUCIONARIA* AND THE OUTBREAK OF POLITICAL VIOLENCE IN THE SOUTHERN CONE

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the *Junta de Coordinación Revolucionaria* (JCR) and its impact on the outbreak of political violence in the Southern Cone. Given the JCR's short existence and the barbarity of Operation Condor, most schoalras have overlooked this organization or treated as convenient excuse for the military regimes to justify their heinous crimes. This article attempts to transcend the one-dimensional view that has predominated studies on the JCR by exploring its revolutionary project and contextualizing it within the international and domestic context in which it developed. Through the analysis of archival material and secondary sources I argue that the JCR represented a historic union for the region's armed left that merits greater recognition by scholars of Latin America's Cold War.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

"It is the road of Vietnam; it is the road that should be followed by the people; it is the road that America will follow, with the advantage that armed groups could create Coordinating Juntas to embarrass the repressive forces of Yankee imperialism and accelerate the revolutionary triumph."
- Ernesto Guevara. "Message Organization of Solidarity with the People of Asia, Africa and Latin America (OSPAAL)" - April 16, 1967

The aforementioned quote extracted from Ernesto "Che" Guevara's speech to the OSPAAL coincided with the beginning of a new chapter in the history of the Cold War and Latin America. Numerous international and domestic factors conspired to "shift the center of gravity of revolutionary warfare from north to south, from the Caribbean region (Guatemala, Venezuela, Santo Domingo, Colombia) to the Southern Cone (Chile, Argentina, Uruguay)."[1] The concomitant consequence of this revolutionary transfer was the formation of multilateral contacts among this region's armed left. Galvanized by socialist developments throughout the global south, these groups sought to establish new bonds of comradeship that often transcended national borders.

The ultimate manifestation of these fraternizations was the formation of the *Junta de Coordinación Revolucionaria* (Revolutionary Coordinating Junta) (JCR) among Chile's Revolutionary Left Movement (MIR), Argentina's Workers' Revolutionary Party – People's Revolutionary Army (PRT-ERP), Bolivia's National Liberation Army (ELN) and Uruguay's Tupamaros National Liberation Movement (MLNT). Despite the ideological differences and the multiple reverses these

[1] Regis Debray, *La crítica de las armas* (Mexico D.F.: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1975), 13.

organizations had experienced, the JCR brought together the region's revolutionary vanguard in an attempt to fulfill Guevara's vision of defeating imperialism through the creation of "two, three or many Vietnams."[2] Nevertheless, the armed left was not the only segment affected by the growing polarization of the late 1960's and early 1970's.

The inspiration that stimulated the formation of the JCR also galvanized the armed forces of the Southern Cone to establish their own ties of solidarity. As the region gradually came under the control of reactionary military dictatorships, these regimes initiated coordinated counterrevolutionary campaigns against their ideological enemies. Although evidence of these joint operations date back to at least 1974, these ties were officially formalized in November 1975 when Chile's General Augusto Pinochet invited military representatives of Uruguay, Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Bolivia to participate in a regional defense initiative called Operation Condor. This program created an intelligence structure that facilitated the persecution of political dissidents throughout Latin America, Europe, and the United States.

There currently exists a rich historiography on the role that revolutionary organizations had on the political polarization and the outbreak of military dictatorships in their respective countries.[3] Nevertheless, with few exceptions, the

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[2] Ernesto Guevara, "Message to the Tricontinental" April 16, 1967, http://www.marxists.org/archive/guevara/1967/04/16.htm.

[3] For more information on the political polarization in Argentina see for example: Pilar Calveiro, *Política y/o violencia: una aproximación a la guerrilla de los años 70* (Buenos Aires: Norma, 2005), Luis Mattini, *Hombres y mujeres del PRT-ERP: la pasión militante* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Contrapunto, 1990), María José Moyano, *Argentina's Lost Patrol: Armed Struggle, 1969-1979* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), and Antonius C.G.M. Robben, *Political Violence and Trauma in Argentina* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005). For Chile see for example: Daniel

literature on this period has overlooked the JCR and its impact on the development of Operation Condor.[4] The overarching sentiment by scholars writing on this subject is that the military regimes used this revolutionary challenge to justify their heinous crimes. While this article does not reject this argument, it transcends the one-dimensional view that has predominated studies on this period by exploring the transnational operations of the armed left. I argue that although this organization never represented a significant threat to the military regimes of the Southern Cone, the JCR's operations and its revolutionary project made it more than a chimerical challenge to the architects of Operation Condor.

The transnational nature of this subject makes any study of the JCR a complicated endeavor for a thesis of this scope. Moreover, multiple interests have

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Avendaño and Mauricio Palma, *El rebelde de la burguesía: la historia de Miguel Enríquez* (Santiago: Ediciones CESOC, 2001), Mauricio Ahumada, Mario Garcés, and Pedro Naranjo, *Miguel Enríquez y el proyecto revolucionario en Chile: discursos y documentos del movimiento de izquierda revolucionaria* (Santiago: CEME, 2004), and Carlos Sandoval, *M.I.R (una historia)* (Santiago: Sociedad Editorial Trabajadores, 1990). For Bolivia see for example: Gustavo Rodríguez Ostria, *Sin tiempo para las palabras: Teoponte, la otra guerrilla Guevarista en Bolivia* (Cochabamba: Grupo Editorial Kipus, 2006), and James Siekmeier, *The Bolivian Revolution and the United States, 1952 to the Present* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2011). For Uruguay see for example: Clara Aldrighi, *La izquierda armada: ideología, ética e identidad en el MLN-Tupamaros* (Montevideo: Ediciones Trilce, 2001), Alfonso Lessa, *La revolución imposible: los Tupamaros y el fracaso de la vía armada en el Uruguay del siglo XX* (Montevideo: Editorial Fin de Siglo, 2002), and Hebert Gatto, *El cielo por asalto: el Movimiento de Liberación Nacional (Tupamaros) y la izquierda Uruguaya (1963-1972)* (Montevideo: Taurus, 2004).

[4] Some of the most important studies on Operation Condor that allude to the topic of the JCR are: Samuel Blixen, *El Vientre del Cóndor: del Archivo del Terror al Caso Berríos* (Montevideo: Brecha, 1994). John Dinges, *The Condor Years: How Pinochet and His Allies Brought Terrorism to Three Continents* (New York: New Press, 2004). Peter Kornbluh, *The Pinochet File: A Declassified Dossier on Atrocity and Accountability* (New York: New Press, 2003). Patrice McSherry. *Predatory States: Operation Condor and Covert War in Latin America*. (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005). Latin American scholars have studied the JCR in greater depth. However, only a few of these studies have conducted extensive archival research to explore the nexus between the JCR and Operation Condor. See for example: Aldo Marchesi, "*Geografías de la protesta armada, guerra fría, nueva izquierda y activismo transnacional en el Cono Sur, el ejemplo de la Junta de Coordinación Revolucionaria (1972-1977),*" paper presented at the II Jornada Académica Partidos Armados en la Argentina de los Setenta. Revisiones, interrogantes y problemas (CEHP-UNSAM), April 25, 2008, and Anibal Garzón, "*La junta de Coordinación Revolucionaria y la Operación Condor: Dialéctica de la cooperación Cono Sur,*" 2007.

conspired to withhold information from the general public. Nevertheless, comparing military sources of the period and information collected by Southern Cone and U.S. security agencies with internal documentation, publications and testimonials of former revolutionaries provides a balanced understanding of this organization. Prior to undertaking a detailed analysis of the JCR, its evolution must be situated within international and domestic context.

CHAPTER 2

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Scholars focusing on political violence during the Cold War have not been immune to the revisionist spirit that has characterized the recent historiography on this period. This is especially the case of Third World historians such as Odd Arne Westad who argue that the "most important aspects of the Cold War were neither military nor strategic, nor Europe-centered, but connected to the political and social developments in the Third World."[5] One of the most important contributions to this recent literature comes from Greg Grandin's application of Arno Mayer's comparative treatment of violence and terror in the French and Russian Revolution to Latin America. Grandin argues that political violence took place on a national and international level.[6] Although some scholars disagree, most evidence suggests that these are two overlapping and interdependent fields of political and social power that fed off each other.[7] Therefore, to understand to origins of the JCR it is important to examine the inter-state and domestic context in which this organization developed.

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[5] Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of our Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 396.

[6] Greg Grandin*, The Last Colonial Massacre: Latin America in the Cold War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 174.

[7] A few historians such as Hal Brands argue that local factors were more influential in determining how the Cold War played out in Latin America. See for example: Hal Brands, *Latin America's Cold War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010). Nevertheless, this book has been criticized for ignoring the importance of certain international variables that shaped political developments such as U.S. covert activities, military assistance and counterinsurgency training to armed forces in the region. For more information on the interplay of domestic and international variables in Latin America's Cold War see for example: Gilbert Joseph and Daniela Spenser, *In From the Cold: Latin America's New Encounter with the Cold War* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), and Greg Grandin and Gilbert Joseph, *A Century of Revolution: Insurgent and Counterinsurgent Violence During Latin America's Long Cold War* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

International Context

The political conflicts that lambasted the Southern Cone during the 1960s and 1970s rarely escaped the powerful undertow of international struggles. Although these antecedents are too vast to list, they relate to three important interrelated themes. the revolutionary and decolonization movements of the global south during the 1960s and 1970s, the dominance of Guevara inspired militarism and internationalism to the neglect of political work in revolutionary oppositional movements, and the emergence of U.S. sponsored national-security states in Latin America.

The 1959 Cuban Revolution marked a watershed moment in the history of the Cold War. The victory of Fidel Castro's M-26-7 movement and the ensuing implementation of socialism in an island ninety miles from the U.S. shattered numerous assumptions regarding political alternatives in the region. To the Latin American left this paradigm shift signaled that there existed an alternative to the reformist and legalist policies proposed by traditional communist and socialist parties. Many organizations including the JCR came to regard Cuba as "the light house that shone the road that Latin Americans must follow in their struggle for the second independence."[8] Cuba's leadership embraced this newfound leadership, directly supporting revolutionary movements throughout the continent.

The period leading to the formation of the JCR was also characterized by the growth of decolonization movements in other regions of the developing world. The leaders of these movements often adhered to communist ideals. Others embedded

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[8] JCR, "Declaración de la Junta de Coordinación Revolucionaria Sobre el Primero de Mayo," 1974, Archivo de la Lucha Armada David Cámpora, Caja JCR, Carpeta 1, Montevideo, Uruguay.

their struggles along Marxist lines in order to secure military assistance from the socialist bloc. The members of the JCR also associated their objectives with decolonization. They argued that although political independence was secured in the nineteenth century, "this political independence did not transcend into economic and social liberation, thus, removing the original content."[9] Furthermore, the challenges faced by the Western bloc in Vietnam, Angola and other areas of the global south supported the JCR's vision that capitalism and imperialism were in crisis. Although "the defeat suffered by imperialism in Southeast Asia and Africa have led it [the U.S.] to reinforce its dominion over its colonial background," the success of liberation movements convinced the members of the JCR that victory was still feasible.[10]

The revolutionary and decolonization movements of the 1960s and 1970s also coincided with the global development of the new left. During this period, youth organizations and marginalized groups throughout the world vociferously vocalized their discontent with their existing political alternatives. Although this was a global and highly heterogeneous movement it generally consisted of groups that "sought social transformations through new forms of action and mobilization."[11] In Latin America, the new left was closely associated with the Cuban Revolution. To many groups disillusioned with the dogmatic nature of traditional communist and socialist parties, Cuba rehabilitated violence as an instrument for accelerating

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[9] JCR, "Lucha Revolucionaria de los Pueblos Latinoamericanos," 1975, Archivo de la Lucha Armada David Cámpora, Caja JCR, Carpeta 2, Montevideo, Uruguay, 8.
[10] JCR, "Manifesto de la JCR," 1975, Archivo de la Lucha Armada David Cámpora, Caja JCR, Carpeta 2, Montevideo, Uruguay, 5.
[11] Eduardo Rey Tristán, *A la vuelta de la esquina: la izquierda revolucionaria Uruguaya, 1955-1973* (Montevideo: Editorial Fin de Siglo, 2006), 57.

progress. Moreover, Cuba provided a coherent doctrine to organizations such as the JCR that believed that the "victory of the masses is possible, that imperialism can be defeated in its own colonial background, that with weapons in our hands, that utilizing all forms of struggle, and uniting the people behind revolutionary banners, it is possible to defeat imperialism."[12] Critical to this militancy was the leadership of Guevara.

The revolutionary example of Ernesto Guevara greatly influenced the JCR and most members of the new left. His revolutionary commitment, rhetoric, and image had an important propagandistic impact. Diverse groups throughout the world became enchanted with Guevara's utopian vision of society based on moral incentives.[13] Moreover, Guevara's faith on *foquismo* shaped the strategy of most Southern Cone insurgencies.[14] His participation in campaigns in Africa and Latin America also helped popularize the notion that revolutions transcend national borders. This internationalism was embedded in the framework of most revolutionary groups of the 1960's and 1970's, facilitating the formation of the JCR.

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[12] JCR, "Por la Revolución Socialista," 1975, Archivo de la Lucha Armada David Cámpora, Caja JCR, Carpeta 2, Montevideo, Uruguay. For more information on the new left in Latin America see Jorge G. Castañeda, *Utopia Unarmed: the Latin American Left after the Cold War* (New York: Knopf, 1993).

[13] A fundamental pillar of Ernesto Guevara's political thinking was the idea of the new man. Guevara's new man was the product of a socialist system in which the absence of capitalist exploitation would lead to greater unity between the individual and the masses. The new man's main incentive was moral good rather than economic gain. See Jon Lee Anderson, *Che Guevara: A Revolutionary Life* (New York: Grove Press, 1997).

[14] Che's military experience in Cuba inspired a strategy that was later named *foco* theory by Régis Debray. Its central premise is that vanguardism by cadres of small, fast moving armed groups can provide a focus for popular discontent against an unpopular government, leading to general insurrection. Matt D. Childs cogently argues that *foquismo* was not a static strategy. Between 1960 and 1967 *foco* theory changed in relation to the national and international challenges Cuba faced. The economic blockade by the U.S. and the expulsion of Cuba from the OAS drove Guevara to promote a more rigid form of *foquismo.* He recommended revolutionary vanguards throughout the continent to adopt guerrilla warfare, even in countries with stable democratic traditions. For more information see for example: Matt D. Childs, "A Historical Critique of the Emergence and Evolution of Ernesto Che Guevara's Foco Theory," *Journal of Latin American Studies,* 27.3 (Oct 1995): 593-624.

Guevara's presence in Bolivia also helped accelerate fraternizations in the Southern Cone as demonstrated by the participation of many Chileans, Argentineans and Uruguayans in his campaign.

The revolutionary precedent established by Guevara and the decolonization struggles of the 1960s influenced the creation of the 1967 Latin American Organization of Solidarity (OLAS) conference in Havana.[15] Comprising this founding meeting were 164 representatives of the twenty-seven countries in Latin America committed to discussing regional affairs and strategies for defeating imperialism. The conference provided valuable networking opportunity for leaders of the new left. Although the four parties forming the JCR were not officially represented in this meeting, three of the four founding figures of this organization were present in Cuba during this period.[16] The OLAS reaffirmed the belief that armed action was the only alternative for Latin America. The fifth and sixth clause of the official OLAS declaration stated "that armed revolutionary struggle constitutes the fundamental course of the Revolution in Latin America" and that "all other forms of struggle must serve to advance and not to retard the development of this fundamental course."[17] Soon after the OLAS, all JCR parties adopted this posture.[18]

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[15] This Conference was a continuation of the 1967 Organization of Solidarity with the People of Asia, Africa and Latin America (OSPAAL) with a more regional focus.
[16] A Aldo Marchesi, "*Geografías de la protesta armada, guerra fría, nueva izquierda y activismo transnacional en el Cono Sur, el ejemplo de la Junta de Coordinación Revolucionaria (1972-1977),*" paper presented at the II Jornada Académica Partidos Armados en la Argentina de los Setenta. Revisiones, interrogantes y problemas (CEHP-UNSAM), April 25, 2008, 6.
[17] OLAS, "General Declaration" November-December 1967, http://www.marxists.org/history/etol/newspape/isr/vol28/no06/olas.htm.
[18] See for example" the MIR's Third Congress in 1967 and the 1968 PRT-ERP's document *El Único Camino Hasta el Poder Obrero y el Socialismo*.

Another international factor that influenced the policies of reactionary and revolutionary elements within Latin America was the establishment of national-security states and the direct support these dictatorships received from the United States.[19] The democratic awakening that swept Latin America in the years following World War Two created significant pressures from below that preoccupied U.S. policymakers. As a result, many of these leaders came to regard military institutions in Latin America as the most reliable safeguard against communism. By supporting national-security states, reactionary interests could "depoliticize and demobilize politically active groups and movements of workers, students, peasants and intellectuals which were identified as internal enemies."[20] Starting with the 1954 coup against Jacobo Árbenz (1951-1954) in Guatemala, U.S. policymakers indirectly and directly supported military movements that toppled democratically elected progressive leaders. This foreign intervention further galvanized groups such as the JCR to support violence over peaceful political work.

Following the victory of the M-26 movement and the Bay of Pigs fiasco, President John F. Kennedy (1961-1963) attempted to change his country's relationship with Latin America. The Cuban experience demonstrated that economic and social inequality in the region made this zone fertile ground for communism,

[19] National-security state is defined a state in which nearly all aspects of political, economic, intellectual, and social life are dominated by considerations of national defense and the drive to maintain a defense establishment capable of protecting the state against all comers. *The Oxford Essential Dictionary of the U.S. Military*, s.v. "national-security state," accessed April 11, 2012, http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1O63-nationalsecuritystate.html.
[20] Patrice J. McSherry, *Predatory States: Operation Condor and Covert War in Latin America* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005), 4.

thus, making it "the most dangerous area in the world."[21] Kennedy launched an unprecedented aid campaign known as the Alliance for Progress, which promised the distribution of $20 billion dollars in public and private assistance over the next decade.[22]

Despite Kennedy's emphasis on economic development, military assistance continued to represent a critical element of the U.S.'s foreign policy towards this region. This aid included police and military training centers such as the School of the Americas in which Latin American soldiers received lessons in counterinsurgency, interrogation tactics and psychological warfare. Noteworthy alumni of this academy included Roberto Viola (Argentina), Manuel Noriega (Panama), Julio Alpirez (Guatemala), Luis Alonso Discua (Honduras) and Domingo Monterrosa (El Salvador).[23] The Alliance's inability to redress social and economic inequality led Kennedy's successors to prioritize working with anticommunist military regimes.[24] The aggregate effect of the influence of the national-security state and the other international factors aforementioned accelerated the polarization of an increasingly estranged Latin American right and left.

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[21] Memorandum of conversation between Kennedy and Prime Minister Harold Macmillan, 30 June 1963, *FRUS*, 1961-1963 12: American Republics (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1966: 607-09).
[22] Stephen G. Rabe, *The Most Dangerous Area in the World* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 2.
[23] Lesley Gill, *The School of the Americas: Military Training and Political Violence in the Americas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 6.
[24] One of the reasons why the Alliance of Progress failed to reach its goals is that the U.S. insisted on reproducing a Marshal Plan like policy to Latin American. However, unlike Western Europe this continent lacked the financial and technical expertise, familiarity with industrial forms of organization, institutionalized political parties, strong national identities, and a robust democratic tradition. U.S. policy planners also failed to take into account factors such as population growth. For more information on the Alliance for Progress see for example: Stephan G. Rabe, *The Killing Zone: The United States Wages Cold War in Latin America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

Domestic Context

In November 1966 Guevara arrived in Bolivia intending to fulfill his revolutionary dream of liberating Latin America. Numerous factors influenced his decision to initiate his operations in this country. Geographically, Bolivia is located in the heart of Latin America, thus, providing an ideal platform for continental operations. More importantly, from 1825 up to 1971 this country experienced 157 military coups, making Bolivia one of the weakest democracies in the region.[25] This political instability stems primarily from this country's social inequality. Approximately 86 percent of Bolivia's population is composed of indigenous and mixed blood groups which share little in common except a legacy of economic exploitation and political exclusion.[26] This inequality had provided Bolivia a rich revolutionary heritage that Guevara hoped to rekindle.

Economic exploitation and indigenous discrimination had led to numerous rebellions throughout Bolivia's history. Of these uprisings the 1952 Revolution marked a watershed moment in the political development of this country. For the first time in Bolivia's history, this country's civil society managed to prevent the military coup against Victor Paz Estenssoro, the democratic elected candidate of the Revolutionary Nationalist Movement (MNR). As a political representative of the center left, Paz Estenssoro pursued a political agenda that sought to minimize the socioeconomic gap. His reforms included ambitious land redistributions and the expropriation of foreign capital. Nevertheless, the impact of these policies created

[25] JCR, "Testimonio ELN," 1974, Archivo de la Lucha Armada David Cámpora, Caja JCR, Carpeta 1, Montevideo, Uruguay, 2.
[26] James F. Siekmeier, *The Bolivian Revolution and the United States, 1952 to the Present* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2011), 27.

schisms within the MNR allowing the more conservative militants to take control of the party. As a result, the more radical reforms were minimized. However, these political divisions in conjunction with economic problems further polarized Bolivia leading to the military coup of René Barrientos (1964-1969).[27]

Guevara arrived in Bolivia in November 1966 amidst this political chaos. As one of the leaders of the 1960s revolutionary *zeitgeist,* Che hoped his presence would revitalize the spirit of 1952. With the assistance of Cubans and other South Americans he formed the *Ejercito de LIberación Nacional* (ELN) and launched a guerrilla insurgency in the Cordillera Province. Like the M-26-7 rebels, the ELN temporarily discarded the option of building a proletariat party since "the actual necessities dispense of the need for the methods of traditional parties and require a political organization with a fundamentally military structure."[28] A former ELN militant confessed that this led to the situation in which "some of us babbled about Marxism or we though to know about Marxism, but in reality we had only glanced at a few texts and we did not really understand much about it."[29]

Despite Guevara's faith in *foquismo* reactionary forces had adapted to the challenges of guerrilla warfare. Within a year his campaign was defeated for reasons well documented by numerous scholars including the inability to establish ties with Bolivia's rural population and conflicts with Mario Monge, the leader of Bolivia's

[27] For more information on the 1952 Revolution see ibid., chapter 2.
[28] Gustavo Rodriguez Ostria, *Sin tiempo para las palabras: Teoponte, la otra guerrilla Guevarista en Bolivia* (Cochabamba: Grupo Editorial Kipus, 2006), 173.
[29] Ibid., 176.

Communist Party (PCB).[30] More importantly, Che was captured and executed by the Bolivian military in October 9, 1967. Despite the death of their leader, the ELN survived and continued to commit to Guevara's revolutionary dream.

Paradoxically, Che's death reinforced the conviction of the armed left to continue fighting. Following his defeat the surviving members of the ELN sought refuge in neighboring countries. A few members settled in Chile where they conducted a post mortem on the past campaign. They concluded that "the blame of our defeat was caused exclusively by our deficiencies," as well as the PCB and the CIA.[31] At no moment were the means and ends promoted by Guevara ever questioned. As a result, before the appearances of the JCR, the ELN participated in two other campaigns under the leadership of Osvaldo "Chato" Peredo. In 1970 a group of sixty-seven men attempted a second rural guerrilla operation in the region of Teoponte.[32] Once again poor preparations and the underestimation of the enemy led to their rapid defeat. Following Hugo Banzer's coup (1971-1978), the ELN reemerged in an attempt to fight the nascent dictatorship. Osvaldo Peredo extols "their impressive resurgence. In little time the ELN had five columns in La Paz, each composed of three platoons."[33] Their resistance included tactics of urban guerrilla

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[30] For more information on Guevara's campaign in Bolivia see for example: Jon Lee Anderson, *Che Guevara: A Revolutionary Life* (New York: Grove Press, 1997). Jorge G. Castañeda, *Compañero: the Life and Death of Che Guevara* (New York: Knopf, 1997). Paco Ignacio Taibo, *Guevara, also known as Che* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997).
[31] Ostria, *Sin tiempo para las palabras,* 557.
[32] For more information on the Teoponte see for example: Osvaldo Peredo, *Volvimos a las montañas* (Santa Cruz: [s.n.], 2003). Gustavo Rodriguez Ostria, *Sin tiempo para las palabras: Teoponte, la otra guerrilla Guevarista en Bolivia* (Cochabamba: Grupo Editorial Kipus, 2006).
[33] Peredo, *Volvimos a las montañas*, 99.

warfare, which suggests contacts with the MLNT.[34] However, this was not enough to challenge the Bolivian military. Within days Banzer initiated a fierce campaign of repression that drove most ELN militants out of Bolivia. By the time the ELN joined the JCR it was a battered organization. Nevertheless, it carried the symbolic value of being Guevara's army and Che's conviction that "in revolutionary war every mistake teaches you more than a million volumes of books."[35]

To many observers, Uruguay was an unlikely place to experience revolutionary violence. The 1904 Battle of Masoller, concluding this country's Civil War, marked the end of "violence as a model for conflict resolution and the beginning of the development of modern Uruguay."[36] The ensuing decades were marked by peace and prosperity, earning this country a reputation as the Switzerland of South America. Even Guevara dismissed the idea of reproducing the Cuban revolution in Uruguay. When visiting Montevideo he gave a speech to students at the *Universidad de la República* in which he stated that "armed struggle… under the current conditions, is not feasible in a country like Uruguay."[37] Although this opinion might have changed with the ideological hardening of the Cuban Revolution, this speech attests that during the early 1960s Che respected the democratic tradition and social harmony in this country. Nevertheless, there was a strong youth movement that disagreed with Guevara.

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[34] "Tupamaros reported in Bolivia: 11/22/1971", NARA, RG 59, Bolivia, Box 2125, as found in Marchesi, "Geografías de la protesta armada," 8.
[35] Childs, *A Historical Critique*, 609
[36] Rey Tristán, *A la vuelta de la esquina,* 314.
[37] Ernesto Guevara, "Discurso de el Che en la Universidad de la República." August 17, 1961. http://www.quehacer.com.uy/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&catid=42%253Aernesto-che-guevara&id=67%253Ael-che-en-uruguay-&Itemid=62.

During the 1960s, economic instability had driven many Uruguayan's to question the existing political model. The economy had experienced a sharp downturn highlighted by the 13 percent drop in GDP between 1955 and 1966.[38] Furthermore, traditional parties experienced factionalism and the absence of leadership. The discovery of corruption also created much resentment within Uruguay. The concomitant effect of these problems was unemployment and disenchantment.

Out of this discontent emerged multiple Maoist, anarchist and communist groups. Alarmed by the violent rhetoric of these parties, the Uruguayan government arrested many militants. As a result, in 1962 these organization formed a coordinated self-defense intitiative. By 1965 this enterprise evolved into the MLNT. Although this group consisted of an amalgamation of different interests, the revolutionary spirit of the 1960s and the belief that political violence could accelerate progress solidified ties. Nevertheless, there was never a clear notion of what path needed to be followed. However, the leaders of the MLNT bypassed this problem by popularizing the maxim that although "our words separate us, the facts unite us."[39]

As Uruguay is a small country without mountains or jungles and with a small rural population, the MLNT had to readapt *foquismo* to an alien environment. This led to the outbreak of urban guerrilla warfare. The Tupamaros proved skilled practitioners of this method, creating novel organizational methods and daring

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[38] Hebert Gatto, *El cielo por asalto: el Movimiento de Liberación Nacional (Tupamaros) y la izquierda Uruguaya (1963-1972)* (Montevideo: Taurus, 2004), 58 and 59.
[39] Rey Tristán, *A la vuelta de la esquina,* 106.

operations that won them admiration throughout the world. Nevertheless, keeping true to Uruguay's peaceful traditions, their early operations took on more of a propagandistic nature. The Tupamaros were known in their early years "for spectacular prison escapes, propaganda feats, bank robberies, and exposure of corruption in high places, all which gave them a Robin Hood image and generated considerable sympathy among Uruguayans."[40] However, as the movement grew the Uruguayan government became increasingly repressive leading to the acceleration of violence.

In 1968 President Jorge Pacheco (1967-1972) intensified the persecution of Tupamaros by declaring a state of emergency. The suspension of civil liberties was further intensified in 1972 following the assassination of Dan Mitrione, an undercover CIA agent teaching counterinsurgency techniques which included torture to the Uruguayan military. According to the *Actas Tupamaras,* a guerrilla manual published in 1971, reprisal killings help "punish the police, the army, the governors, the oligarchy and all the representatives of imperialism, for every prisoner they take and for every revolutionary they kill."[41] Although the presence of undercover U.S. agents confirmed numerous of the MLNT grievances with the state, militants such as Luis Alemañy argue that this assassination marked "a break between the MLN[T] and the people. Not because who [Dan Mitrione] was, but because of the characteristics of Uruguay. That day I felt the rejection of the

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[40] McSherry, *Predatory States,* 168n22.
[41] MLNT, *Actas Tupamaras* (Buenos Aires: Schapire, 1971), 15.

population."[42] With violence escalating, President Juan María Brodaberry (1972-1976) asked the military to replace the police in the persecution of Tupamaros, further entrenching the national-security state. By 1972, a sustained policy of torture and forced "disappearances" drove most MLNT militants into exile. Between 1500 and 3000 Uruguayans fled to Chile.[43]

Chile's historical stability shares many parallels to Uruguay. Although there existed marked discrepancies between the right and left, for most of the twentieth century this country enjoyed a stable electoral system and a rich political party tradition. Nevertheless, deep structural problems lurked behind this apparent tranquility. Chile's society presented one of the largest inequality gaps in the Southern Cone. Moreover, this country's economy depended disproportionately on copper, a capital-intensive industry that requires extensive foreign investment. For instance, between 1945 and 1970 the extraction of copper by Kenneth and Anaconda Mining, the two largest multinational corporations operating in Chile at the time, ranged between 50 to 80 percent of this country's GNP.[44] To offset this disparity President Kennedy made this country a priority for the Alliance for Progress. Chile became the largest recipient of aid per capita in the western

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[42] Clara Aldrighi, *Memorias de insurgencia: historias de vida y militancia en el MLN-Tupamaros 1965-1975* (Montevideo: Ediciones de la Banda Oriental, 2009), 319. For more information on the assassination of Dan Mitrione and the conundrum this represented to the MLNT see for example: *État de Siège,* dir. by Costa-Gavras (Paris: Cinema 5 Distributing, 1972), http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CDj4ZXoIHf0.

[43] Clara Aldrighi and Guillermo Waksman, "Chile, la gran ilusión," in *El Uruguay del exilio, gente, circunstancias, escenarios*, ed. Silvia Dutrenit Bielous (Montevideo: Trilce Ediciones, 2006), 39.

[44] Mark Falcoff, *Modern Chile 1970-1989* (New Brunswick: Translation Publishers, 1989), 161.

hemisphere with over a billion dollars donated between 1962 and 1969.[45] However, Kennedy's plan failed to fix the structural problems within this country.

The Cuban Revolution brought much momentum to leftist organizations in Chile. This was especially the case among university students at the University of Concepción, a city with a proud revolutionary heritage. At the medical faculty of this university, Miguel Enríquez gradually made a name for himself as a representative of the socialist youth. His zealous activism brought him to join the Marxist Revolutionary Vanguard (VRM), a broad organization including supporters of various leftist movements. This exposure allowed him to participate in numerous continental conferences and to visit China and Cuba. These experiences helped Enríquez further define his political views. In 1965, Enríquez and a group of young radicals separated themselves from the VRM and created the MIR.

The MIR had a more defined ideological position than the MLNT and the ELN. It distanced itself for "*foquista* positions that questioned the role of the party that predominated in most Latin American revolutionary groups."[46] As a result, the MIR drew its inspiration from Trotskyism. The MIR was also convinced that "the use of violence is not one of the alternatives, but the only option to defeat our semi colonial regime."[47] Nevertheless, it refrained from using force since militants of the MIR such as Edgardo Enríquez understood that in Chile "the use of violence for political ends requires a high level of public justification. If not attained it causes popular rejection

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[45] U.S. Senate, Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities. *Covert Action in Chile 1963-1973* (Washington: GPO, 1975), 4.
[46] Mauricio Ahumada, Mario Garcés, and Pedro Naranjo, *Miguel Enríquez y el proyecto revolucionario en Chile: discursos y documentos del Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria* (Santiago: CEME, 2004), 44.
[47] Carlos Sandoval, *M.I.R. (una historia)* (Santiago: Sociedad Editorial Trabajadores, 1990), 37.

towards the perpetrators and commiseration for the victims."[48] Therefore, the MIR spent its early years trying to promote its political program throughout the country.

On September 4, 1970 Salvador Allende, the socialist candidate of the *Unidad Popular* (UP)*,* won the presidential election with only 36.2 percent of the ballot. This result gave important impetus to those parties that promoted a peaceful transition towards socialism. His political agenda included several policies that worried conservative interests in Chile such as land reforms and the expropriation of foreign capital. Nevertheless, the MIR did not buy into the UP's program. Although it recognized Allende's election as a victory for the workers, it considered the confrontation with imperialists interests inevitable as demonstrated by the outbreak of reactionary dictatorships throughout Latin America. The MIR refused to align itself with the UP claiming that its "support and opposition to the UP does not imply an opportunistic deviation by our behalf since we clearly understand our objectives and the path we need to follow."[49] During Allende's presidential tenure, the MIR pursued its own agenda, often at the political expense of the UP. For instance, it participated in the illegal expropriation of factories and terrains, a policy that caused much resentment throughout Chile and ultimately helped accelerate the process of polarization. Furthermore, it took advantage of Chile's status as a safe haven for Latin American revolutionaries to establish ties with other regional insurgencies. By 1972 the MIR was one of the strongest revolutionary vanguards in the region.

[48] Ahumada et al., *Miguel Enríquez,* 61n66.
[49] MIR, "El MIR y el resultado electoral y las implicaciones para la izquierda revolucionaria". Secretariado Nacional, September 28, 1970, found in www.archivochile.com.

Argentina's experience leading up to the outbreak of revolutionary violence is "the story of a country of great natural wealth and economic promise torn asunder by violence and trauma."[50] During most of the twentieth century, economic and social inequality had created salient political tensions. Many Argentineans hailed the election of Juan Perón (1946-1955) as the catalyst that would lead to the creation of a more just society. His political program attempted to create a third position between communism and capitalism. This agenda proved popular among labor unions and youth groups, many of which later formed a Peronsit guerrilla group known as the Montoneros.[51] Nevertheless, he proved more of a populist leader, promoting unsustainable reforms that polarized Argentina. In 1955 economic difficulties and political opposition led to a coup that forced Perón into exile and initiated a tumultuous period characterized by chronic military coups, fraudulent elections and the beginning of revolutionary and counterrevolutionary violence.

Perón's labor reforms gave strong impetus to Argentina's labor movement. Further galvanized by the Cuban Revolution and the influence of Che Guevara, certain labor organization conceived new alternatives for Argentina that proved more radical than what Peronism envisioned. In 1965, in the midst of this country

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[50] Antonius C. G. M. Robben, *Political Violence and Trauma in Argentina* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), ix.

[51] The Montoneros were important political actor during this period that adhered to a more radical form of Peronism. They also launched a rural and urban guerrilla campaign, which at its peak reached around 1000 to 2000 combatants. Although they were independent from the PRT-ERP, both groups had at times operated together. Both organizations played a crucial role in the polarization and political violence that lambasted Argentina during the 1970s. For more information see: Richard Gillespie, *Soldiers of Perón, Argentina's Montoneros* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), and Luis Mattini, *Los Perros: Memorias de un Combatiente Revolucionario* (Buenos Aires: Peña Lillo Ediciones Continente, 2006).

political chaos, diverse labor unions united creating the PRT. The objective was to "conquer political power and thus terminate this country's political dependency and exploitation by man, and to open the path for a socialist Argentina."[52]

Like the MIR, the PRT was heavily influenced by Trotskyism and relied on the leadership of its charismatic leader Mario Roberto Santucho. Nevertheless, the PRT was divided as to how to oppose Juan Carlos Onganía's dictatorship (1966-1970). In 1968 proponents of the long-term popular insurrection strategy abandoned the PRT because they opposed Santucho's insistence on guerrilla insurgency.[53] This division gave the PRT the freedom to support the armed action of Peronist groups. During the 1970 Fifth Party Congress, ideological differences with these groups drove the PRT to vote in favor of creating its own armed wing named the ERP. The PRT-ERP envisioned the use of urban and rural guerrilla warfare to achieve its ultimate objective.

Between 1970 and 1973 the ERP launched many operations. As a nascent organization most of these activities had propagandistic objectives. The anthropologist Antonius Robben calculates that more than half of the approximately five hundred ERP operations that occurred during this period consisted of campaigns intended to benefit the popular masses.[54] However, the Argentinean

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[52] PRT-ERP, "Se constituyo el partido unificado de la revolución" February 16, 1965, http://lahaine.org/amauta/b2-img/santis_vencer.pdf.

[53] Argentina's experience with guerrilla warfare dates back to the 1950s. In 1955 the Utroncos attempted to launch a campaign in the province of Catamarca with the intention of bringing Perón back to power. In 1963 and 1964 a group of Argentineans and Cubans formed the Ejército Guerrillero del Pueblo in Salta. Lastly, in 1968 supporters of Perón launched the Fuerzas Armadas Peronistas in Tucumán. These three attempts were quickly defeated by the Argentine military within months of being formed. For more information see: Antonius C. G. M. Robben, *Political Violence and Trauma in Argentina*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005).

[54] Robben, *Political Violence,* 117.

police and army were also targets of attacks. This violence was primarily intended as a pedagogic tool for stimulating the revolutionary consciousness of the people. Nevertheless, the Onganía dictatorship established an effective counterinsurgency campaign that forced many of the PRT-ERP leaders into exile.

CHAPTER 3

JCR ORIGINS AND FORMATION

Despite the ideological idiosyncrasies and different contexts in which these groups developed the four organizations shared characteristics that facilitated their integration and made them threats to the regimes of the region. None of these vanguards believed that democracy was a viable alternative for the implementation of socialism in their respective countries. Their political views convinced them that reactionary and imperialist forces would use violence to impede any reforms than ran against their interests. The outbreak of U.S. sponsored national-security states throughout the region provided them tangible evidence to support this position. As a result, they refused to support progressive leaders such as former Bolivian president Juan José Torres (1970-1971). CIA covert operations and the military coup against Allende's *via pacífica*, the peaceful road to socialism, further reinforced this conviction. Undeterred by their setbacks or the failure of *foquismo* in Bolivia they continued to advocate that only revolutionary vanguards could advance the cause of the people.

Like many other decolonization and new left movements of the 1960s the JCR parties also considered their struggle to transcend national borders. For militants such as Celeste Zerpa of the MLNT homeland "is Latin America. I considered that our struggle was to eradicate poverty in the entire continent."[55] This regionalist affinity helped establish solidarity relationships among the armed left long before the formation of the JCR as demonstrated by Che's campaign in Bolivia.

[55] Aldrighi, *Memorias de insurgencia,* 306.

Moreover, the shared experience of regional exile and the increased levels of coordinated continental repression by the military governments of the Southern Cone helped promote the circulation of militants and ideas throughout the region. Since at least 1968 the members of the JCR had established bilateral contacts and begun to refer to each other as sister organizations.[56] Although the nature of these earlier meetings is unknown, their revolutionary commitment is undeniable. For instance, the ELN received $21 - $22 thousand dollars from the MLNT following the Tupamaros $300,000 dollar robbery from the Mailhos tobacco barons.[57] The prospect of these contacts evolving into the creation of a transnational insurgency caused great concern among the reactionary interests of the Southern Cone.

The military regimes of the region were also concerned about the violent rhetoric and actions of these organizations. Influenced by numerous international factors previously mentioned, these vanguards believed that "the destiny of Latin America will be decided by the irreconcilable confrontation between the imperialist and reactionary bloc, led by the monopolistic financial bourgeoisie and the revolutionary and democratic bloc, conducted by the proletariat movement."[58] In the years preceding the formation of the JCR, groups such as the ELN and the PRT-ERP had already demonstrated their willingness to attack members of the armed

[56] One of the JCR documents claims that since 1968 "bilateral contacts [were] established between the ELN, the MIR, the MLN and the PRT-ERP. We recall the meeting between a director of the PRT and the ELN in 1969 in La Paz, a series of meeting between a delegate of the MLNT and Chato Peredo in 1970 in La Paz, various contacts between militants of the MLNT and the PRT-ERP in Buenos Aires and Montevideo in 1971 and 1972, and various meetings between the MIR and the PRT in Santiago from July 1971 onward." JCR, "*Estrategia Para la Revolución Latinoamericana,*" 1975, Archivo de la Lucha Armada David Cámpora, Caja JCR, Carpeta 2, Montevideo, Uruguay, 2.
[57] Alfonso Lessa, *La revolución imposible: los Tupamaros y el fracaso de la vía armada en el Uruguay del siglo XX* (Montevideo: Editorial Fin de Siglo, 2002), 309.
[58] JCR, "Declaración de la Junta de Coordinación Revolucionaria Sobre el Primero de Mayo."

forces. Evidence of a counterrevolutionary initiative to fight "the revolutionaries, the working class and the people of Latin America" further impelled these organizations to unite and to resort to violence.[59] As a result, many military officers believed that Latin America had become the battleground for "the Third World War, a final confrontation between Christianity and communism."[60]

The origins of the JCR date to 1972. The safe haven offered by Allende provided key leaders of the MLNT, the PRT-ERP and the MIR the opportunity to further consolidate their relationship. In November of this year these organizations launched a series of meetings in which they discussed the possibility of creating an intraregional organization referred to by Enríquez as a "small Zimmerwald."[61] Their ideological similarities, regionalist affinities and commitment to armed action made the prospect of forming a coalition a natural symbiosis. Moreover, the successful experience of communist cooperation in South East Asia convinced these leaders that transnational collaboration would be crucial towards overcoming the inevitable counterrevolutionary and imperialist backlash.

During these early discussions the three organizations advanced a series of resolutions including the "preparation of a joint declaration project, the preparation of a political magazine, and the organization of ideological training camps."[62] During early 1973 these vanguards further consolidated their relationship and flirted with

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[59] JCR, "Por la Revolución Socialista," 4-5.
[60] Robben, *Political Violence,* 180.
[61] JCR, "Che Guevara, *Revista de la Junta de Coordinación Revolucionaria* no. 2," 1975, Archivo de la Lucha Armada David Cámpora, Caja JCR, Carpeta 2, Montevideo, Uruguay, 3. Enríquez alludes to the Zimmerwald Conference held in Zimmerwald, Switzerland in September 1915. This conference brought together some of the most influential socialist figures in Europe with the intention of adopting a unified position towards the First World War.
[62] Ibid.

the idea of inviting the ELN. Although there are few testimonies and documents covering the nascent phase of the JCR, journalist John Dinges discovered that during this period a training camp was established at the Cajón del Maipo, Chile in which each organization could send cadres for ideological and military training.[63]

In June 1973 a second meeting was held in Rosario, Argentina. Two salient factors explain the decision to transfer operation to this country. To begin with, the political climate in Chile had changed. Allende's policies in conjunction with sabotage campaigns by the U.S. and reactionary interests within this country had created significant economic problems and social grievances. Few observers envisioned a democratic solution to this crisis. Moreover, in March 11, 1973, Héctor Cámpora won Argentina's first democratic presidential election in eight years. Soon after his victory he fulfilled his promise of declaring amnesty to all political prisoners. To the dismay of Argentina's military community, this initiative brought hundred of revolutionaries back to the streets. In addition, Cámpora legalized the Peronist party and announced that he was going to call a new presidential election. This allowed Perón to return to power on September 23, 1973.

A former revolutionary claimed that the meeting in Rosario lasted several days and helped to consolidate ties among all groups.[64] Furthermore, the ELN was officially incorporated. More importantly, this meeting instituted important frameworks that determined the structure of this budding organization. One of the first rules established was that no country's revolutionary movement would be

[63] John Dinges, *The Condor Years: How Pinochet and His Allies Brought Terrorism to Three Continents* (New York: New Press, 2004), 51.
[64] Marchesi, *Geografías de la protesta armada,* 16.

subordinate to another's. Each group could establish its own guidelines on when and how to take up arms. The ultimate objective of the JCR was to create an "an international apparatus to provide mutual logistical, financial and military support" when each organization needed assistance.[65]

The JCR also intended to provide a forum for the exchange of ideas and experiences among the different members. Given the relative strength of the PRT-ERP and the MIR compared to the other members, the ideological framework of the JCR was heavily influenced by Trotskyism. Nevertheless, the JCR welcomed all groups in the continent who believed that the strategy for revolutionary success depended on a "prolonged mass struggle, under the guise of a continental popular war, led by the revolutionary party of the proletariat and guided by the people's army."[66] Although the JCR never established specific parameters on membership, greater participation favored their strategy. As a result, during its existence the JCR reached out to other regional and international revolutionary groups in an attempt to expand its presence.

Despite the revolutionary rhetoric of its founding members, the JCR agreed that it should support the use of all forms of struggle. This included working with bourgeois groups that opposed the military dictatorships. Nevertheless, this was only meant to be a temporary alliance since the four organizations zealously believed that "reformist and nationalist currents that do not represent the authentic

[65] Dinges, *The Condor Years,* 51.
[66] JCR, "Por la revolución socialista," 9.

interests of the proletariat numb the revolutionary spirit of the people and with their vacillations lead the popular movement towards defeat."[67]

By 1974 the JCR developed an institutional organization independent from its four founding members. It had developed a governing structure that stipulated that at all levels each group was entitled to equal representation. The most important political decisions were made during the JCR's annual conference. Between conferences, it worked through an elected executive secretary and military commission that would meet regularly to discuss strategic issues. The JCR also developed regional secretariats for Latin America, Europe and Africa headquartered in Mexico, France and Algeria. These secretariats had the dual responsibilities of centralizing the activities of representatives working throughout these continents and establishing a solidarity network with other international revolutionary movements and governments.[68]

By early 1974 the four groups had established a dynamic transnational organization. This alliance represented a historic moment for the armed left in Latin America that imbued revolutionaries with optimism. This confidence led to the public launching of this organization through a declaration published in several languages in Argentina, France, the U.S., Sweden and West Germany. [69] Although numerous militants questioned the JCR's decision to go public, its founding members considered that this organization was ready to pursue the objectives of the region's revolutionary vanguard. Toward this end propaganda, political,

[67] JCR, "Declaración de la Junta de Coordinación Revolucionaria Sobre el Primero de Mayo."
[68] For more detailed information on the structure of the JCR refer to the: JCR, "Estatus Provisorio," 1975, Archivo de la Lucha Armada David Cámpora, Caja JCR, Carpeta 2, Montevideo, Uruguay, 3-5.
[69] JCR, "Che Guevara, *Revista de la Junta de Coordinación Revolucionaria* no. 2," 4.

financial, solidarity and military operations were designed to challenge the dictatorships of the Southern Cone.

CHAPTER 4

JCR OPERATIONS

Propaganda

The founders of the JCR envisioned that this organization could assist them with the creation of propaganda campaigns. These operations intended to help legitimize their struggle at home and abroad. Although counterrevolutionary violence prevented these campaigns from fully developing, the JCR created important propaganda strategies that preoccupied the military regimes of the Southern Cone.

The international voice of the JCR was a magazine called *Che Guevara, Junta de Coordinación Revolucionaria.* Although only three issues were published (November 1974, February 1975, and October 1977) they were released in several languages and distributed throughout Latin America and Europe. In addition, the JCR created a press agency called *Agencia de Prensa America Latina* (APAL) and it attempted to create a cinema group.[70] The main objective of all these initiatives was to denounce the abuses committed by the military regimes as well as to portray their objectives as the democratic will of most Latin Americans.

Most of the JCR's publications alluded to the atrocities committed by the military regimes of the Southern Cone. This propaganda included providing alternative narratives to those given by the state controlled media in Latin America. For instance, the first issue of *Che Guevara* denounced the situation in "Chile were

[70] Throughout my research I was not able to find much information on the JCR's cinema project. This is probably due to the fact that the decision to explore cinema propaganda was adopted in 1977, the same year the JCR was dissolved.

more than 20,000 working class men and women have been assassinated."[71] Although this sort of news clearly exaggerated the situation in the Southern Cone, it complemented the efforts of a few international organizations denouncing the heinous atrocities occurring throughout the continent.[72] The JCR also attempted to raise awareness of imperialist abuses in other parts of the world such the invasion of South African troops in Angola or the presence of U.S. military academies in Panama.

Denunciations of state repression went hand in hand with attempts to glorify the JCR and the nature of their struggle. These sources meticulously described recent events in the region and explained how the interest of a privileged minority violently disrupted the democratic rights of the majority. Moreover, their publications highlighted the heroic military struggle of their founding parties such as the PRT-ERP's Tucumán guerrilla operation that "will lead the national and socialist revolution of our motherland opening a splendid socialist future, the end of exploitation and suffering, and the beginning of an era of justice and happiness for the twenty five million Argentines."[73] The last issue of *Che Guevara* also glorified the budding Sandinista movement in Nicaragua and calls for the unity of the Latin American left to support this struggle. Furthermore, most publications by the JCR reminded readers that "the successful experience of the international proletariat

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[71] JCR, "Che Guevara, Revista de la Junta de Coordinación Revolucionaria no. 1," 1974, Archivo de la Lucha Armada David Cámpora, Caja JCR, Carpeta 1, Montevideo, Uruguay.
[72] The 1991 National Commission for Truth and Reconciliation Report estimates that 2,279 people were assassinated for political reasons. Most scholars have accepted this number.
[73] JCR, "Che Guevara, Revista de la Junta de Coordinación Revolucionaria no. 2," 23.

movement demonstrates that revolutionary war can lead us to the socialist triumph as in the USSR, China, Cuba, Vietnam and others."[74]

Assessing the effectiveness of these propaganda campaigns and the threat it posed to the military regimes of the Southern Cone is a complicated task because there are no clear indicators of the audience or the critical reception these publications received. However, a document from the JCR's mission in Portugal provides some insight.[75] Militants in this country claimed that 6,000 copies of *Che Guevara* were produced and that it had 1500 copies deposited.[76] Although it is challenging to assess the impact of this literature, JCR members declared that these publications helped popularize this organization in Portugal's African colonies. Conversely, this document also provides insight on the challenges faced by the JCR propaganda campaign in Europe. The author complains about the "delays in the reception of material, which has hurt the impact and diffusion of one of our best tools." Moreover, the lack of experience hindered the efficiency of distribution. Lastly, the author claims that the Portuguese government was concerned about the presence and operations of JCR exiles in their country.

Although the experience of exiled JCR cells varied from country to country, it is safe to assume that the challenges of organizing effective propaganda operations in Portugal were similar throughout Europe and Latin America. Given the initial complacent reaction of the international community to the events in the Southern

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[74] Ibid., 2.

[75] The document referred to is: JCR, "Politica desarollada en Portugal," 1976, Archivo de la Lucha Armada David Cámpora, Caja JCR, Carpeta 3, Montevideo, Uruguay.

[76] The document does not specify weather they refer to the first, second or both publications. Given the time frame I am assuming they refer to *Che Guevara* number 2.

Cone, it is difficult to believe that the JCR propaganda operations had a decisive impact overseas. However, these publications helped raise awareness and drew sympathy among likeminded readers. Ultimately, the propaganda operations of the armed left were overshadowed by the global condemnation that followed the internationalization of Operation Condor.

Politics

The JCR also provided its members the opportunity to discuss the ideological framework of their respective organizations and the best political strategies for achieving their revolutionary`y objectives. This platform created a potential threat to the military regimes of the Southern Cone; since it could help these vanguards share the most effective tactics for advancing their cause, and it could create greater cohesiveness. Nevertheless, the power differential among the founding organizations led to an asymmetrical ideological exchange in which the PRT-ERP and the MIR dictated their model to the other two groups. This relationship ultimately weakened the JCR by creating changes the hurt the MLNT and the ELN.

Prior to its exile experience, the MLNT had but a vague ideological definition.[77] It was only after their defeat in Uruguay and their experience in Chile that it developed a more rigid theoretical framework. According to the former Tupamaro Efraín Martínez Platero, this decision was motivated by the PRT-ERP and

[77] The MLNT's political program is manifested in the 1971 *Programa de gobierno del MLN Tupamaro*. This document promotes broad social and economic reforms intended to help marginalized groups without analyzing the sustainability of implementing such policies in a country like Uruguay. For more information see for example: Lessa, *La revolución imposible,* 66-67.

the MIR that “pressured not only the MLN but all other weaker organizations.”[78] Other militants argue that the gravitational pull toward the Trotskyite camp was motivated by the need to find a theoretical explanation for the defeat.[79] Regardless of the motivation, in 1973 the MLNT held a meeting in Viña del Mar, Chile in which it decided to “create a political committee like the PRT and a military committee like the ERP.”[80]

The decision of the leaders of the MLNT to organize along the lines of the MIR and the PRT-ERP had important consequences among their rank and file. This new line demanded a greater *peludización* or proletarianization of its militants.[81] This policy alienated numerous MLNT’s militants that came from a middle class background. As a result members such as Ana Casamayou concluded after the meeting in Viña del Mar that the Tupamaros “were no longer the organization I had entered.”[82] Similarly, other militants that fled to Cuba, such as Luis Alemañy, came to the conclusion that an armed revolution “was not the path for Uruguay. Following the Cuban path would only lead to an involution, not a revolution.”[83] As a result, in 1974 the MLNT fragmented between the *Tendencia Proletaria*, favoring a proletariat revolution, and the *Nuevo Tiempo*, seeking social transformations through democratic means.

The ELN also experienced similar pressures from the PRT-ERP and MIR to reform their revolutionary approach. In 1975 this lobbying influenced the ELN to

[78] Aldrighi, *Memorias de insurgencia,* 363.
[79] Ibid., 352.
[80] Ibid., 346.
[81] *Peludos* is a term assigned to sugar cane workers in the north of Uruguay.
[82] Aldrighi, *Memorias de insurgencia*, 293.
[83] Ibid., 330.

decide that "our people, who have exceptional revolutionary experience, immediately require for the achievement of our revolutionary ideals, a vanguard, and that this vanguard can only be a proletariat party."[84] Although the other JCR parties supported the creation of the PRTB, traditional leaders of the ELN disapproved of it. According to Peredo, the PRTB was "a bad copy of the Argentine model" and unsustainable in Bolivia's repressive environment.[85] Many militants separated themselves from the ELN, forming new organizations such as the Popular Movement for National Liberation. Peredo's assessment proved accurate because the visibility of the PRTB made them easy targets to Banzer's secret police.

Despite the ideological cohesiveness between the MIR and the PRT-ERP, there existed political tensions that complicated mutual coordination. Both groups ultimately envisioned the creation of the proletariat dictatorship. Nevertheless, many Argentine militants questioned the degree of proletarianization of the Chileans. This prejudice stemmed from the fact that many of the leaders of the MIR came from upper class backgrounds, while the PRT-ERP originated from domestic labor movements. As a result, the Argentines made certain political decisions that hindered the efficiency of the JCR. For instance, when Edgardo Enríquez came to Argentina as the representative of the MIR to this organization he was deliberately assigned to a prefabricated house in the shantytowns of Greater Buenos Aires. Although this was supposed to help further proletarize Enríquez, it complicated his

[84] JCR, "Nace el PRT en Bolivia," 1976, Archivo de la Lucha Armada David Cámpora, Caja JCR, Carpeta 3, Montevideo, Uruguay.
[85] Peredo, *Volvimos a las montañas,* 134.

ability to travel throughout Argentina's capital and caused resentment.[86] Similarly, Jorge Masetti, a former militant of the PRT-ERP, indicates that his organization was not used the internal liberalism within the MIR "with their women with clear feminists views and a more European influence than the red brigades we were."[87]

Although the JCR provided an ideal opportunity to develop joint political projects and to hone strategies to challenge the military regimes of the Southern Cone, problems within each group and among them hindered the operational effectiveness of this organization. For instance, divisions in the MLNT complicated the work of the JCR in Europe. The Executive Committee in France attempted to bypass this conflict "by inviting both sectors of the MLNT to participate… however, due to the impossibility of counting with the presence of both, the E.C. decided to not invite any of the both sectors of the MLNT to not privilege one side over another."[88] On another occasion, the representative of the ELN in Europe left the junta "because of internal problems with his organization and discrepancies with the work proposed by the JCR in Europe."[89] Conflicts also occurred between the PRTB and the MIR over potential ocean rights for Bolivia.[90] Since any important decision needed to be approved by all member organizations the inability to reach consensus significantly limited the potential of the JCR.

[86] Luis Mattini, *Los perros: memorias de un combatiente revolucionario* (Buenos Aires: Peña Lillo Ediciones Continente, 2006), 116-125, quoted in Marchesi, *Geografías de la protesta armada*, 24.
[87] Lessa, *La revolución imposible,* 134.
[88] JCR, "A los compañeros del MLNT," 1977, Archivo de la Lucha Armada David Cámpora, Caja JCR, Carpeta 4, Montevideo, Uruguay.
[89] JCR, "Introdución Boletin del Secretariado Europeo," 1976, Archivo de la Lucha Armada David Cámpora, Caja JCR, Carpeta 3, Montevideo, Uruguay.
[90] Ibid.

Finance

The revolutionary vanguards of the Southern Cone also expected the JCR to assist with the coordination of economic matters. This required financing its own operations overseas as well as collecting funds for projects in Latin America. For the former, the original framework envisioned a system in which every organization would contribute a fixed quota determined by the annual conference. However, the JCR was also expected to "develop its own financial work through different activities and campaigns."[91] In Europe, this was achieved through different initiatives such as book fairs and other propaganda projects mentioned in the previous section.[92] Nevertheless, the most important source of income came from joint operations by the founding members of the JCR.

The JCR and its members financed most of its operations from a series of kidnappings in Argentina during 1973. Over twenty-two million U.S. dollars were collected through the ransoming of six important business executives including the general manager of the Argentine branch of Exxon Corporation, Victor Samuelson.[93] Although scholars such as Antonius Robben attribute this work to the PRT-ERP, a former MLNT militant that participated in these operations confirmed that his organization played an important role.[94] In his memoirs, Peredo also claims that the ELN participated in these kidnappings.[95] The MIR on the other hand did not participate as it was preparing itself for the military coup in Chile. Nevertheless,

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[91] JCR, "Estatus Provisorio," 5.
[92] JCR, "Introdución Boletin del Secretariado Europeo."
[93] Robben, *Political Violence,* 132.
[94] See interview to "Domingo" in Aldrighi, *Memorias de insurgencia,* 343-361.
[95] Peredo, *Volvimos a las montañas,* 120.

"[Samuelson's kidnapping] was signed as the JCR not the PRT-ERP and MLNT."[96] More importantly, the money was divided among all organizations regardless of their participation.[97]

These funds proved valuable to financing some of the operations of the JCR and the necessities of the region's revolutionary vanguards. For instance, given security restrictions throughout the Southern Cone, the money from these ransoms helped purchase homes and rent places that served as safety havens in major cities. For example, in 1975 the Argentine police found two houses in Buenos Aires used by Uruguayan and Chilean JCR militants.[98] Similarly, these funds helped purchase technology such as printing presses to facilitate the publication of propaganda and the creation of false documentation. These funds also helped acquire transportation vehicles such as boats.

Ultimately the JCR's financial program failed to meet the expectations of the revolutionary vanguards of the Southern Cone. The total amount collected between ransoms and other campaigns did not fulfill the costs of funding an intraregional organization and the needs of four groups facing a financially and militarily superior enemy. Furthermore, kidnappings proved an unsustainable policy. Unlike contemporary insurgencies such as the Colombian FARC that rely on the narcotics trade, kidnapping usually occurred in an urban environment that could more easily be controlled in a national-security state. However, these funds did provide a

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[96] Aldrighi, *Memorias de insurgencia,* 349.
[97] Centro Militar y Centro de Oficiales Retirados de las FF.AA, *Nuestra verdad: 1960-1980, la lucha contra el terrorismo* (Montevideo: Artemisa Editores, 2007), 131.
[98] DIPBA, "Procedimiento contrasubversivo, vinculado a la junta coordinadora revolucionaria." Legajo N. 1453, mesa Delincuente Subversivo. Archivo DIPBA. Comisión Provincial por la Memoria. La Plata, Argentina. 1975, as found in Marchesi, "Geografías de la Protesta Armada"*,* 17.

temporary lifeline. More importantly, the fact that the four vanguards distributed these resources demonstrates that this transnational organization represented an important element in the strategy of the armed left. To meet their other economic needs and to attempt to establish itself as a legitimate political alternative the JCR sought international solidarity.

Solidarity

The founding members of the JCR also expected this organization to help foster solidarity links among the global armed left. This decision was driven by the need for political legitimacy and aid from international socialist movements as well as the comradeship of other revolutionary vanguards in Latin America. Although the potential result of these contacts could have led to the creation of a fierce revolutionary network, the JCR's solidarity work faced numerous challenges that prevented it from consolidating itself as a genuine multinational threat to the military regimes of the Southern Cone.

In 1973 the Tupamaro Efraín Martínez Platero traveled around the world representing the JCR in the search of political and economic assistance. As a MLNT militant, he represented an ideal candidate for this task since "the Tupamaros had become a household word in Europe, and were universally respected in leftists circles as nonsectarian, Robin Hood revolutionaries."[99] A 1974 document by the JCR confirms that Martínez prioritized establishing solidarity ties "with some countries

[99] Dinges, *The Condor Years,* 56.

(Cuba, Algeria, etc) and liberation movements or parties (MPLA, Palestine, other movements in Africa, the Korean Communist Party, etc)."[100]

The main solidarity priority for the JCR was establishing relations with Cuba. This country was considered the revolutionary paragon for the global south and a "key reference for relations with the Latin American left."[101] As a result, from its very beginning the JCR had stipulated the need to "assist and defend, uncompromisingly and until the last consequences, the Cuban Revolution from foreign aggression."[102] Although CIA agents reported that the Cuban embassy in Argentina was providing funds to the JCR, most evidence suggests that Castro failed to reciprocate this revolutionary solidarity.[103]

Fidel Castro was reluctant to assist the JCR for numerous reasons. To begin with, economic problems had made Cuba increasingly dependent on the Soviet Union. Since the Kremlin sought to improve relations with its hegemonic counterpart, Cuba's revolutionary assistance became "far more discriminating and discreet than it had been in the 1960s."[104] Ideological difference also separated Cuba from the JCR. Castro's response to Martínez's solidarity plea was "I am with the [MLNT] until death. Your organization has a future. But forget that we are going to help something where the people of the PRT are involved. Why? Because they are

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[100] JCR, "Relaciones," 1974, Archivo de la Lucha Armada David Cámpora, Caja JCR, Carpeta 1, Montevideo, Uruguay, 1.
[101] JCR, "Introdución Boletin del Secretariado Europeo."
[102] JCR, "Estatus Provisorio," 3.
[103] CIA, Latin American Trends, Staff Notes – Argentina-Cuba: Castro Support for Local Subversion? September 22, 1976.
[104] Piero Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington, and Africa, 1959-1976* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press. 2002), 221.

Trotskyites."[105] Castro suggested to the Tupamaros that their natural ally in the "region was the Montoneros and their nationalist progressive revolutionary path."[106] The historian Aldo Marchesi hypothesizes that Castro was also reluctant to support an organization that could dispute his revolutionary leadership in the Western Hemisphere. Jorge Masetti refutes this argument by stating that although Castro refused to provide economic and military aid, he approved of the idea of establishing a coordinating junta as long as it remained private. By making it public "they gave the enemy an argument to conduct coordinated repression. Today Plan Condor is justified with the declarations of the *Junta de Coordinación Revolucionaria*."[107]

The JCR's foreign relations team also hoped to establish ties with the revolutionary left in the Arab world. Nevertheless, it faced a similar response as that of Cuba. The Algerian government told Martínez that "it did no believe it was convenient to support the JCR, although it had high regards towards the Tupamaros."[108] The JCR only received 20,000 francs, which helped establish its mission in Sweden.[109] The MLNT reciprocated by sending a group of doctors to work in that country.[110] With the Libyan government, the JCR worked on some agreements to establish military courses. However, these never materialized. Despite the importance of the Arab world to the JCR's solidarity program, it never managed to develop any sustainable agreements.

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[105] Aldrighi, *Memorias de insurgencia,* 369.
[106] Ibid., *Memorias de insurgencia.*
[107] Lessa, *La revolución imposible,* 135.
[108] Aldrighi, *Memorias de insurgencia,* 371.
[109] Ibid. *Memorias de insurgencia.*
[110] Ibid., *Memorias de insurgencia,* 372.

The JCR was more successful in establishing an international network in Europe, with offices and support organizations in Paris, Lisbon, Rome, Bonn, and Stockholm. It even managed to hold meetings with European social democratic parties. However, these groups "flatly rejected the JCR's request for support of their guerrilla warfare strategy."[111] Europeans proved more willing to support humanitarian programs such as the assistance to refugees, political exiles and other victims of human rights abuses.

Despite Europe's marginal support, the JCR reciprocated as best as it could. The Portuguese office claimed that it established "a solid link with different solidarity organizations, especially the African ones and the ones associated with Portugal's support for Cuba."[112] Dinges also claims that it provided $150,000 dollars to a leftist group getting organized in Portugal taking advantage of that country's brief military-sponsored revolution.[113] However, it seems that it did not provide extensive military or economic assistance to Europe's armed left.

Fomenting regional solidarity ties also played a fundamental role in the JCR's strategy. The coordinated outbreak of revolutionary violence in the rest of the continent was deemed vital for the defeat of imperialism. According to the JCR, this vision was "shared by many sister organizations in Peru, Venezuela, Guatemala, Brazil, Paraguay, Mexico, Colombia, Santo Domingo, and El Salvador with which we have established relations with the objective of uniting."[114] If the JCR indeed

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[111] Dinges, *The Condor Years,* 86. Dinges evidence comes from a series of interviews to Luis Mattini, a former leader of the PRT-ERP. Given Mattini's leadership within this organization and his numerous publications on the subject I consider this claim reliable.
[112] JCR, "Politica desarollada en Portugal."
[113] Ibid.
[114] JCR, "Estrategia Para la Revolución Latinoamericana," 3.

established such a wide network, the relationship must have been superficial since there is no evidence of significant contacts between such groups. The only evidence of solidarity initiatives with other regional organizations occurred with groups in Colombia and Peru. Dinges reports that, Jaime Bateman, the leader of Colombia's M-19 movement, the most active leftist military force outside the Southern Cone, sent a representative to Buenos Aires in 1974 to plan a regional strategy and to discuss the possibility of joining as a formal member of the JCR.[115] Furthermore, two JCR members were arrested in Paraguay carrying documents confirming meetings with the Popular Army of Peru (later renamed the Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement) and the Colombian FARC. They also carried a $5,000 dollar cash donation to the former.[116]

The potential further internationalization of the JCR indeed proved a scary prospect for the military regimes of the Southern Cone. Nevertheless, this threat never had the opportunity to develop into a significant alliance. Although a remarkable effort was made to establish ties with other socialist movements, exogenous and endogenous variables prevented these bonds from consolidating. Regional representatives of the armed left proved more open to joining the JCR. However, none of the revolutionary vanguards within Latin America had the economic or military strength to significantly alter the political struggles occurring throughout the Southern Cone. The JCR proved more effective in organizing solidarity campaigns between each of the founding organizations. When confronting exile, these groups were often the only contact young revolutionaries had in a new

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115 Dinges, *The Condor Years,* 86.
116 JCR, "Por la Revolución Socialista," 9.

country. Moreover, the four organizations could build on the experiences of each other to improve their military strategy.

Military

The most important indicator of the JCR's ability to challenge the dictatorships of the Southern Cone was their military capacity. None of the members of the JCR had the strength to threaten the armed forces of the region in the short-term. Nevertheless, the experience in Cuba, Vietnam, and other socialist countries convinced the JCR that a "prolonged mass struggle, under the shape of a popular and continental war, directed by the revolutionary party of the proletariat and guided by the revolutionary people's army" could lead to victory.[117] Moreover, the JCR considered that it had an advantage over their opponents because it was facing an enemy that was tactically strong but strategically weak. Tactically, the enemy had "concentrated their political and military superiority towards the extermination of democrats and revolutionaries" and enjoyed a special "relationship with imperialist North America."[118] Strategically, "these regimes are weak because they depend directly on their bayonets… and they can not develop a solid and loyal social base of support."[119]

The JCR had a specific commission in charge of military studies, integrated by one member of each organization.[120] The initial approach of this delegation was that in the face of counterrevolutionary violence, each party should "adopt tactics that

[117] JCR, "Por la Revolución Socialista," 9.
[118] JCR, "Manifesto de la JCR," 6 and JCR. "Por la Revolución Socialista," 9.
[119] JCR, "Manifesto de la JCR," 6.
[120] JCR, "Estatus Provisorio," 4.

combine retreat with that maintenance of initiatives through agitation techniques, propaganda, military actions, and national and international initiatives."[121] However, the organizational capacity of this commission was severely limited by the fact that any coordinating initiative depended on the synergy that these vanguards could generate.

By the time the JCR was formed, its founding members could only garner a limited military force. Although the ELN and the MLNT had transferred what was left of their army to Argentina, they were recovering from their previous defeat. Many of their militants integrated the PRT's political front and the columns of the ERP.[122] The MIR also suffered crippling setbacks after Miguel Enríquez's courageous, yet disastrous, decision to fight the military. He convinced his supporters that "if the MIR seeks exile it has deserted."[123] Nevertheless, despite the numerous omens foreshadowing Pinochet's coup, the MIR was caught unprepared. By 1975, 90 percent of the original members of the central committee had fallen.[124] Most of those left fled to Argentina.

The PRT-ERP had the most developed military force of the revolutionary vanguards of the Southern Cone. Taking advantage of the 1973 democratic opening, this organization initiated an aggressive grassroots program to increase its rank and file. Although their revolutionary zeal led Perón to illegalize the PRT-ERP, it

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[121] JCR, "Por la Revolución Socialista," 19.
[122] Ostria, *Sin tiempo para las palabras,* 587.
[123] Miguel Enríquez, "Respuesta a un documento emitido por un grupo de compañeros de la colonia Valparaíso." Comisión Polítca del MIR. July 1974.
[124] MIR, "Balance de la historia del MIR chileno", document used for the IV Congress, March 1987, as found in Julio Pinto Vallejos, "¿Y la historia les dio la razón? El MIR en dictadura, 1973-1981" in *Su revolución contra nuestra revolución: izquierdas y derechas en el Chile de Pinochet (1973 – 1981),* ed. Valdivia Ortiz de Zárate, Verónica, Rolando Alvarez Vallejos, and Julio Pinto Vallejos. (Santiago: Lom Ediciónes, 2006), 177.

remained an important political protagonist. Their number of supporters and combatants varies greatly depending on the source. The most consistent figure states that at their apex circa 1975 it had approximate 6,000 members and 30,000 sympathizers. The number of combatants ranges from 450 to 3,000.[125] Santucho used his military training in Cuba to organize the ERP into a genuine revolutionary army with divisions, battalions, companies, platoons, and squads, and with a hierarchical command structure of officers.[126] Despite the PRT-ERP's military superiority over its regional counterparts, the other JCR parties provided them crucial support.

The JCR provided valuable logistical support to the military efforts of its founding members. Acquiring and stockpiling armament was a difficult task in the years prior to large-scale narcotics trafficking. The MIR helped bypass this problem by creating its own weapons factory. The greatest achievement of these arms engineers was the creation of the JCR 1, a copied version of the Swedish submachine gun, the Carl Gustav. Capable of automatic fire, it used relatively easy to obtain nine-millimeter bullets in a thirty-shot magazine.[127] This weapon represented a truly revolutionary accomplishment since it implied "the first steps towards the formation of the industry of war."[128]

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[125] For more information see: Daniel De Santis, *Entre tupas y perros: un debate con Eleuterio Fernández Huidobro y Luis Mattini sobre Tupamaros y el PRT-ERP* (Buenos Aires: Nuestra América, 2005), Pablo Pozzi, *El PRT-ERP: la guerrilla marxista* (Buenos Aires: Imago Mundi, 2004), and Antonius C.G.M. Robben, *Political Violence and Trauma in Argentina*.
[126] Robben, *Political Violence,* 133.
[127] Dinges, *The Condor Years,* 55.
[128] JCR, "Desarmemos a JCR," 1975, Archivo de la Lucha Armada David Cámpora, Caja JCR, Carpeta 2, Montevideo, Uruguay.

Estimating the actual dimension of the JCR's arsenal has challenged scholars writing on this subject. Both the revolutionary vanguards and the military regimes of the Southern Cone participated in a campaign of misinformation to misrepresent the actual size of their combat capabilities. The most reliable sources to work with are police reports detailing information on the confiscation of weapons in Argentina prior to the military coup of 1976. For instance, in 1974 the police discovered more than 500 weapons and ammo in a house belonging to the MLNT.[129] A former Tupamaro also mentioned a four million dollar arms shipment that never arrived.[130] Unfortunately for our purpose, these sources do not specify where these weapons came from. Although these are isolated cases, they provide some information on the JCR's military capacity.

The JCR also provided useful training facilities. In Bolivia, the funds distributed from the kidnapping of Samuelson helped establish training schools for rural guerrilla warfare.[131] In addition, certain members of the JCR received military training in Cuba, which it could share with its colleagues. Hugo Wilkins of the MLNT claims that approximately 450 Uruguayans had fled to Cuba after the military coup in Chile, many of which received training on different elements of rural and urban guerrilla warfare.[132] The members of the JCR also exchanged militants as a way to share military training, foment fraternization and gain combat experience.

[129] Andres Cutelli, *La revolución necesaria, contribución a la autocritica del MLNTupamaros* (Buenos Aires: Colihue, 2006), 121.
[130] Aldrighi, *Memorias de insurgencia,* 356.
[131] Peredo, *Volvimos a las montañas,* 121.
[132] Aldrighi, *Memorias de insurgencia,* 266.

Weapons and training allowed the members of the JCR to develop urban and rural guerrilla initiatives. As previously mentioned, the MLNT had developed innovative techniques in urban guerrilla warfare that it shared with its revolutionary peers. These contributions included structural designs to help bridge the gap between the organization and the masses, including party cells, front cells and sympathizer cells. These divisions limited the amount of information a militant could leak under torture. Other techniques taught were the creation of false documentation and safety caches.

Urban attacks proved valuable to the members of the JCR since it helped strike fear in the heart of the enemy. By targeting police stations or military bases, revolutionaries acquired much-needed weapons and demonstrate the vulnerability of the armed forces. Furthermore, urban attacks had a retributive element since they were used to target individuals associated with repression. Such attacks were often conducted overseas to create a greater sense of insecurity among enemies of the revolution. For example, the Uruguayan Colonel Ramón Trabal and the Bolivian General Joaquín Zenteno were assassinated in Paris. Although the JCR did not claim responsibility for these murders, CIA agents claim that the similarity between both attacks made this organization a likely culprit.[133] The drawback of such attacks was the accidental killing of innocent bystanders. This was the case of Captain Humberto Viola's three-year-old daughter in 1974. Her death caused great condemnation throughout Argentina.[134] Although urban guerrilla warfare could not win a

[133] CIA, "National Intelligence Daily Cable: Bolivia." May 17, 1976.
[134] Robben, *Political Violence,* 147.

revolutionary war, Che's failure in Bolivia proved that rural insurgencies needed assistance from metropolitan centers to mount an effective campaign.

Most Southern Cone revolutionary groups of the 1960's and 1970's considered rural guerrilla warfare vital to defeating imperialist and bourgeoisie interests in the region. The democratic opening in Argentina provided the PRT-ERP an ideal opportunity to create its mountain company. Nevertheless, the decision was greatly influenced by the JCR. During this period the other revolutionary vanguards were coordinating their own offensives in order to maximize mutual support. While the ERP initiated its operations in 1974 in the province of Tucumán, the ELN and MIR were organizing "supporting offensives across nearby borders – Chile in the south around Neuquén and Temuco, and Bolivia in Tajira Province to the north. Tupamaros, following the directives of their leaders imprisoned in Uruguay, were to strike with a counteroffensive planned for May Day 1974."[135] The possibility of facing multiple fronts was a scary prospect for the military regimes of the period. However, the disastrous outcome of these guerrilla campaigns demonstrates that despite the cross regional revolutionary support, the JCR was not prepared to challenge an overwhelmingly superior enemy.

The socialist victory in the Southern Cone was expected to begin in Tucumán. This region was endowed with dense jungles and high mountains, which reminded many observers of Cuba's Sierra Maestra. Moreover, this region had a significant percentage of unemployed youths that the ERP hoped to recruit. Santucho arrived in

[135] Dinges, *The Condor Years,* 54.

1974 with forty men. By 1975 his forces escalated to 90 men and 10 women.[136] Ten militants of the MIR and an unknown number Tupamaros also fought with in the ERP as representatives of the JCR.[137] Although this number might seem small, it allowed the ERP to establish a strong presence in almost one third of the province. Nevertheless, the true combative spirit of this group was tested on May 1974, when federal police detected the presence of guerrilla forces in the province.

Soon after the presence of the ERP was detected, the army formulated plans to extinguish this threat. A series of confrontations broke out between both groups in which the revolutionaries kept loyal to a hit and run strategy. Although for most of 1974 and 1975 the ERP held their ground, the 1976 military coup changed their fortune. The army was given full powers to combat the ERP, launching Operation Independence. The suspension of democratic liberties allowed the military to wantonly use their logistical, numerical, and weapon superiority, as well as to exploit fully the lessons on counterinsurgency taught by US military specialists, to vanquish the ERP. The revolutionaries found themselves on the run for most of 1976. When Santucho was killed in July 1976 the Mountain Campaign was terminated. The grand balance for the ERP was 80 combatants killed versus 24 members of the armed forces.[138]

The regional revolutionary war that the Tucumán campaign hoped to kindle failed to ignite. Luis Alemañy, the Tupamaro military chief at the time, predicted that "Argentina would not be the only battle front, that there would also be armed action

[136] Robben, *Political Violence,* 151.
[137] Dinges, *The Condor Years,* 83 and Aldrighi, *Memorias de insurgencia,* 374.
[138] Robben, *Political Violence,* 153.

in Chile and in Uruguay, even in Bolivia."[139] Nevertheless, the May 1974 offensive, envisioning the return of 400 Cuban trained Tupamaros, was frustrated by the military's discovery of this plan.[140] By the end of 1974, this setback in conjunction with internal divisions caused the MLNT to cease being an effective military force. Meanwhile, the ELN was too battered to muster a new rural insurgency. Their only military contribution to the JCR was to transfer what was left of their military apparatus to Argentina to assist the PRT-ERP. Lastly, during the Tucumán campaign, the MIR was trying to reorganize its military structure. In 1980, a few years after the PRT-ERP was defeated, it managed to launch its own insurgency in Neltume and Nahuelbuta.[141] Both campaigns were poorly planned and quickly defeated.

The revolutionary vanguards of the Southern Cone had envisioned the JCR as an institution that could help them with their military enterprises. This organization had the unique ability to contribute with the distribution of much-needed weapons, resources and soldiers throughout the region. Although the JCR assisted the region's armed left with such objectives, the overbearing strength of the armed forces prevented this organization from making a long-term impact. Nevertheless, the revolutionary vanguards bear greater responsibility for failing to take advantage of the JCR. Their decision to prematurely muster a guerrilla front demonstrated a serious underestimation of the enemies combat capabilities. Furthermore, although

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[139] Dinges, *The Condor Years,* 84.
[140] Lessa, *La revolución imposible,* 133.
[141] Valdivia et al., *Su revolución contra nuestra revolución,* 191. For more information on these campaigns see for example: Comité Memoria Neltume, *Guerrilla en Neltume: una historia de lucha y resistencia en el sur chileno* (Santiago: LOM Ediciones, 2003).

some of these groups attracted public sympathy, the vanguards failed to appreciate that the quality of their support was of uneven depth and quality.

CHAPTER 5

THE REVOLUTIONARY CYCLE ENDS

The 1976 military coup in Argentina marked the beginning of the end for the JCR. Although Operation Condor had made its presence felt since at least 1974, the interruption of democratic liberties in Argentina deprived the insurgents of any safe haven in the Southern Cone. With the entire region consolidated under military rule, the armed forces in the region implemented what the political scientist Patrice McSherry calls "industrial repression – planned, methodical, prolonged, and deadly campaigns of massive disappearance, torture and murder."[142] The military's commitment to eradicating communism from the region even led reactionary interests to accept that "the scalpel had to cut through healthy social tissue to be certain."[143] Under these conditions the founding members of the JCR were forced to continue their operations overseas.

By 1977 most of the Southern Cone revolutionary vanguards were spread throughout Europe and Mexico. Although some militants tried to use the recent debacle to rekindle the spirit of the JCR, the organizations experienced internal divisions and conflicts among themselves as mentioned in the previous sections. Moreover, most representatives of the armed left had resigned themselves to the fact the revolution had failed in the Southern Cone.[144] These militants came to accept that although a significant percentage of the population opposed the military

[142] Patrice McSherry, ""Industrial repression" and Operation Condor in Latin America," in *State Violence and Genocide in Latin America: the Cold War Years,* ed. Marcia Esparza, Henry R. Huttenbach, and Daniel Feierstein (London: Routledge, 2010), 109.
[143] Robben, *Political Violence,* 188.
[144] See for example: JCR, "Sesiones ordinarias," 1976, Archivo de la Lucha Armada David Cámpora, Caja JCR, Carpeta 3, Montevideo, Uruguay.

regimes, they did not support the objectives of the revolutionary vanguards and their reliance on violent means to achieve those goals. Although some intelligence reports subsequently make sporadic references of the JCR, it seems to have seized to exist as an autonomous institutional organization after 1977. By the end of this decade the center of gravity of revolutionary warfare returned to the Caribbean region.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION: THE JCR AND REPRESSION IN THE SOUTHERN CONE

The violence that the military regimes unleashed on its own citizens left most observers in awe. Although the revolutionary vanguards expected a reactionary backlash, militants such as Luis Alemañy "never thought it would reach those limits."[145] For instance, the estimated toll of Argentina's dirty war ranges from 9,000 to 30,000 killed depending on the study. Furthermore, torture, the abduction of children and other heinous human rights abuses were committed at a mass scale.

The industrial repression that lambasted the Southern Cone has led numerous analysts such as Patrice McSherry to conclude that "revolutionaries and guerrillas sometimes served as convenient pretext for massive military intervention."[146] On the other side of the spectrum, scholars such as Jorge Castañeda argue that Latin American militaries were provoked by the bad decisions taken by a handful of romantic revolutionaries.[147] Despite the differences between these outlooks, both positions agree that counterrevolutionary violence was unnecessarily overwhelming. This view is understandable considering that the revolutionary vanguards in the region were never able to pose a significant military threat. More importantly, the wrath of Operation Condor went beyond the persecution of the armed left. Thousands of Latin Americans suffered from political violence, including high profile political figures with impeccable democratic

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145 Aldrighi, *Memorias de insurgencia,* 323.
146 McSherry, *Predatory States,* 27.
147 See Jorge G. Castañeda, *Utopia Unarmed: The Latin American Left After The Cold War* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994).

convictions.[148] Nevertheless, contextualization helps understand these nefarious episodes of violence.

When analyzing revolutionary and counterrevolutionary violence in Latin America during the twentieth century, the historian Greg Grandin recommends scholars to historicize political violence. Doing so must include:

> how actions taken during moments of extreme volatility are interpreted through ideology and sentiment; how this interpretation both propels and hardens polarization; and how this propulsion multiplies through overlapping fields of power, ranging from local land, labor and family conflicts, to national and international efforts to establish legitimacy and control dissent.[149]

Although from a distance it is easy to dismiss the prospect of a revolutionary victory in the Southern Cone, these issues were interpreted differently by the protagonists of this period.

This article demonstrated that although the JCR was just developing and the revolutionary vanguards were primarily on the defensive, it is inaccurate to simplify this organization as a failed product of self-deceptive idealists or a convenient excuse for the military to unleash a counterrevolutionary backlash. Revolutionary violence and decolonization struggles conditioned the way in which developments in the region were interpreted. Events in Cuba, Vietnam and other areas of the

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[148] Some of the high profile figures assassinated by Operation Condor include former Bolivian President Juan José Torres, the Chilean General Carlos Prats, and the former Uruguayan MP's Zelmar Michelini and Héctor Gutiérrez Ruiz. Nevertheless, the most notorious case was the assassination of Orlando Letelier, the former Chilean Ambassador to the U.S. during Salvador Allende's presidency. After the coup he conducted an international lobbying campaign to denounce the human rights abuses occurring in Chile. In September 21, 1976 he was killed by a car bomb in the heart of Washington DC. This was the most important case of international terrorism in the U.S. until the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Samuel Blixen, *El vientre del cóndor: del archivo del terror al Caso Berríos* (Montevideo: Brecha, 1994), 128.

[149] Greg Grandin, "Living in Revolutionary Time: Coming to Terms with the Violence of Latin America's Long Cold War," in *A Century of Revolution: Insurgent and Counterinsurgent Violence during Latin America's Long Cold War* ed. Greg Grandin and Gilbert Joseph (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 19.

global south galvanized the region's armed left into believing that such victories were reproducible in the Southern Cone and that an intraregional coordinating agency would facilitate this objective. Similarly, the successful cooperation of revolutionary vanguards in certain areas of the Third World influenced the armed forces of Latin America to not underestimate the threat of communist insurgencies, regardless of their military inferiority.

At a domestic level, economic, political and social conflicts accelerated the polarization of a historically estranged right and left. Any new development deemed threatening by either faction increasingly propelled and hardened polarization. This context helps understand the extreme decisions taken by the military regimes in the Southern Cone. In the words of René Valenzuela, the chief operative of the JCR in Europe, "[W]hen we announced the JCR it was like a *campanazo* – like ringing a big bell. They [the military governments] thought it was much bigger than it actually was, and they reacted very rapidly, with devastating force."[150]

Although former militants such as Jorge Masetti retroactively argue that the JCR was merely a propaganda strategy, since it "never managed to become a real coordinating organization because the MLN[T], the ELN and even the MIR were too beat up," the primary evidence examined in this article demonstrates that this organization was more than the manifestation of a desperate political minority trying to avert disaster.[151] The JCR parties were far from defeated by the time this coalition was consolidated in 1973. The PRT-ERP was gaining momentum in a country that seemed to possess revolutionary potential. Despite the setbacks

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[150] Dinges, *The Condor Years,* 54.
[151] Lessa, *La revolución imposible,* 133.

suffered by the Chilean, Bolivian, and Uruguayan vanguards, these groups had valuable experience and revolutionary expertise to share with each other. Moreover, the decision to supply much needed resources to the JCR amidst the reactionary backlash confirms that this transnational organization represented an important element in the strategy of the armed left.

A careful analysis of the JCR's records also demonstrates that contemporary scholars and even external observers from the period such as CIA were wrong to conclude that this organization simply "generated more smoke than fire."[152] The armed left managed to create a complex multinational institution with ambitious political, propaganda, financial, solidarity and military projects. While some of these operations worked better than others, it is incorrect to dismiss this transnational call to arms as merely overblown rhetoric. Indeed, the military regimes of the Southern Cone refused to take any chances. The armed forces of the region put aside historical animosities to form Operation Condor with the objective of defeating a common enemy. Sustained state violence ultimately prevented the JCR from consolidating itself into a more effective revolutionary coordinating institution. Nevertheless, the efficiency of Operation Condor should not relegate the JCR as a historical footnote within the history of Latin America's Cold War. Although this organization never got the opportunity to truly challenge the military regimes of the Southern Cone, its revolutionary project deserves greater recognition by scholars focusing on political violence in Latin America.

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[152] CIA, "International and Transnational Terrorism: Diagnosis and Prognosis" April 1976, 14.

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