

# Who Killed Che? - The CIA's Death Machine at Work

Tuesday 28 February 2012, by [LÖWY Michael](#) (Date first published: 1 January 2012).

**Review. *Who Killed Che? How the CIA got away with murder.* By Michael Ratner and Michael Steven Smith. New York: Or Books, 2011, 200 pages, \$16 paperback.**

IN COMPELLING DETAIL, two leading civil rights attorneys — both leaders of the Center for Constitutional Rights (New York) — recount the extraordinary life and deliberate killing of the world's most popular revolutionary, Ernesto Che Guevara. Using internal U.S. governmental documentation, only recently released, the authors use their forensic skills to analyze the evidence of the CIA's involvement in the execution of a war prisoner captured alive.

After a brief summary of Guevara's life and struggles, they examine the U.S. documents that bear witness to CIA involvement in the tracking down of the Cuban/Argentinian fighter.

Foreign Minister Aleksey Kosygin went to Havana at the end of June 1967, and, in his meeting with Castro, complained that the guerrilla in Bolivia was "playing into the hands of imperialism." In his answer, the Cuban leader "accused the USSR of having turned its back upon its own revolutionary tradition and of having moved to a point where it would refuse to support any revolutionary movement unless the actions of the latter contributed to the achievement of Soviet objectives, as contrasted to international Communist objectives." It could almost be a Trotskyist critique of Stalinism...

The central argument of the book is that "it is commonly believed that the Bolivian military dictatorship had Che Guevara killed. Documents which have been recently been obtained from the U.S. government lead to a different conclusion: that the U.S. government, particularly its Central Intelligence Agency, had Che murdered, having secured the participation of its Bolivian client state." (25)

In fact, the argument leads to a more cautious conclusion: General Obando, Chief of Staff of the Bolivian Army, may have ordered Che murdered, "but it is unlikely he did so without instructions from, or an agreement with US officials."

Most of the internal CIA or government papers document the U.S. involvement in the Bolivian military dictatorship — 20 of the 23 top Bolivian military brass running the country in 1967 having been trained at the sinister US-sponsored "School of the Americas" — and in hunting down the guerrilla fighters.

In a memorandum to President Johnson from October 11, 1967, his Special Assistant for National Security Affairs, Walt Whitman Rostow boasts, only two days after Che Guevara's murder: "It was the Bolivian 2<sup>nd</sup> Ranger battalion, trained by our Green Berets from June-September of this year, that cornered him and got him." (68)

However, the truth of the matter is that U.S. documents provide only indirect evidence on the issue

of “Who killed Che?” As the authors acknowledge, paradoxically, the most damaging evidence for the CIA role in the crime is an interview of Gustavo Villoldo, a Cuban counter-revolutionary who was head of the CIA mission in Bolivia, with Mexican journalist and politician Jorge Castañeda in November 25, 1995.

According to Castañeda — who has little sympathy for Che’s revolutionary ideas, but who wrote a well-documented biography — Villoldo told him that he met President Barrientos, the head of the military regime, around July 1967, and insisted with him that if Guevara was captured he should be executed.

Barrientos replied, “If he is alive, he will be summarily judged and condemned to death. You have my word as the President of the Republic.” (28) The brazen confessions of the CIA agent bring us nearer to the truth than the “secret” memoranda of the various U.S. governmental agencies.

One of the most interesting — although not directly related to the main issue of the book — is a CIA intelligence information cable from October 17, 1967, a few days after Che’s murder, that recounts the history of the discussions between Fidel Castro and the Soviet leadership on Che Guevara and Bolivia.

In any case, this valuable book not only documents Washington’s involvement in the assassination of Che Guevara, but also the fear, anxiety and outrage of the U.S. imperialist authorities towards this dangerous “romantic revolutionary” (Rostow’s term).

Concluding their work, the authors suggest a measure of historical justice when they quote Evo Morales, the first indigenous president of Bolivia: “I like Che because he fought for equality, for justice. He did not just care for ordinary people; he made their struggle his own.”

**Michael Löwy**

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