

Central Intelligence Agency



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DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

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CUBA: THE MOOD AFTER GRENADA

Summary

Cuba's "loss" of Grenada last October accentuated the toll the revolution has taken on life in Cuba today. In our view, it has profoundly affected the leadership, the military establishment, and the citizenry. A particularly humiliating experience for the Cubans, the Grenada affair has had unique repercussions likely to have lasting influence in several key areas of both domestic and external affairs. [redacted]

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Although there is convincing evidence of significant dissatisfaction with the regime--Castro himself admitted privately in 1981 that 5 percent of the population would emigrate if given the chance--we see no corresponding sign that this discontent has crystallized into a political force or represents any threat to Castro's grip on power. Nevertheless, Havana's unstinting effort over more than two years to discourage US mediumwave broadcasts to Cuba is a clear indication that the Cuban leadership, with its complex apparatus for monitoring popular opinion, worries that the level of disenchantment is dangerously high. [redacted]

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This memorandum was requested by Ambassador Gerald Helman at the State Department. It was prepared by [redacted] Office of African and Latin American. This memo was coordinated with the National Intelligence Officer for Latin America, Office of Soviet Analysis, and Directorate of Operations. Comments and queries are welcome and should be addressed to Chief, Cuba-Caribbean Branch, Middle America-Caribbean Division [redacted]

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The regime almost certainly does not believe--nor do we--that its position is under immediate threat. It is probably mainly concerned that the US broadcasts could spark protest demonstrations that would embarrass Havana internationally. With the recent Grenada experience in mind, the leadership is probably particularly fearful that Cubans will not passively accept accurate accounts of about the cost in blood of Cuba's military operations overseas. [redacted]

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Fidel Castro's revolution, now in its 26th year, is tired. Years of austerity, regimentation, dashed hopes, and--perhaps most important--dim prospects for the future are sapping the Cuban population's revolutionary ardor. Castro, recognizing that the level of disenchantment is growing, has tried to insulate the Cuban people from the truth about his Grenadian misadventure, appease the frustrated military, and smoulder quietly about Moscow's feeble response. Much could be done to ease the conditions undermining the revolution's vitality but the leadership--primarily Castro himself--adheres to rigid ideological rules of behavior and refuses to make the policy changes that could provide relief. [redacted]

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Disillusionment, while widespread, poses no direct threat to the regime, whose efficient security services and biased judicial system insure against the development of organized opposition. The few desperate enough to commit some act of defiance invariably are working alone or in small, isolated groups. While many Cubans probably would emigrate if given the chance, the majority remain strongly nationalistic, especially in their attitudes toward the United States. Castro is no longer exempt--as he was in the early years--from blame for Cuba's ills, but he is far from discredited. Ample evidence shows he is still highly respected and accepted as the country's "maximum leader". [redacted]

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The fallout from Grenada has put Castro on the defensive in his contest with Washington. We believe he will continue his diplomatic and propaganda activities against the United States, but his fears of Washington's low tolerance for Cuban misbehavior will temper his actions at least until the outcome of the US elections is clear. [redacted]

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The USSR

The Grenada crisis almost surely heightened Cuba's sense of vulnerability by adding friction to its relations with the USSR. Grenada was a jolting validation of the spheres of [redacted]

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influence thesis--a concept Cubans understandably reject. Moscow clearly did not think Maurice Bishop's revolution--no matter what its worth to Cuba--was of sufficient value to risk a confrontation with the United States. While none in the Cuban leadership expected the Soviets to act militarily, many probably judged Moscow's response inadequate and saw it as a preview of the Soviet attitude in the event of a US assault on Nicaragua or even Cuba itself. [redacted]

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Moreover, the Soviet role in Bishop's demise showed that Moscow and Havana at best had failed to synchronize their activities in promoting the Grenadian revolution, and at worst were working at cross-purposes. During a visit to Moscow in January, a top Cuban official pointedly called for greater ideological cooperation with the Soviets, while President Castro's recent speeches indicate clearly his misgivings about the Soviet relationship with Bernard Coard, Bishop's deputy and chief antagonist. In a speech on 15 November, Raul Castro likened the Coard-Bishop struggle to an incident in Cuba in 1962 when a Moscow-backed clique of orthodox Cuban communists tried to undercut Fidel's grip on power. [redacted]

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The irritation of the Cuban leadership notwithstanding, the prevailing trend toward ever closer Cuban-Soviet cooperation is likely to continue. No matter what his personal attitude toward the USSR, Castro realizes he has no alternative source for the massive aid that Moscow provides to keep the Cuban economy from collapsing. Moreover, the Cuban military establishment depends almost entirely on Soviet supplies of weapons and equipment--all provided free of charge--and any interruption in that supply would damage a major element of the Cuban power structure. Castro in his pique may slight the Soviets from time to time but, as he has done before, will eventually come to heel. On the other hand, popular attitudes toward the Soviets, never very warm, have almost certainly worsened. [redacted]

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The Cuban Military

The Grenada affair seems to have badly stained the reputation of the Cuban military establishment. During interrogation, some of the Cuban civilian construction workers captured by US forces complained bitterly about the failure of their supervisors and the military advisers to organize the workers to defend themselves. Some of the laborers believed they were abandoned by the Cuban military when the fighting became intense. Although welcomed home as heroes, these construction workers were kept together as a unit presumably to prevent them from spreading their disenchantment among the population. [redacted]

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Havana, apparently recognizing this blot on the armed forces, has tried to bolster military morale and improve the image of the officer corps. In an unusual gesture, two top military officers were belatedly awarded medals on New Year's Day for their service years ago in Angola and Ethiopia.* The medals were probably also intended to heal some bruised egos and distract attention from the Grenada loss.

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[redacted] Cuban military leaders saw Castro's first reaction to the Grenada invasion--his insistence on fighting to the last man--as unrealistic, emotional and an affront to the Cuban military. In addition, these officers [redacted] are seriously disturbed over Soviet influence on Cuban military operations abroad, attributing the Grenada fiasco to Moscow's insistence that Cuba not keep a large military presence there. [redacted] they believe that--judging from the Grenada experience--Cuban regular troops would fight well against trained US forces. [redacted]

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It seems clear that the Grenada disaster stung the pride of Cuba's military professionals, who probably are anxious for an opportunity to redeem themselves. As a start, [redacted] they would like to inflict a significant defeat on South African troops in Angola. Their ire almost certainly is directed not toward Castro but toward the United States and other adversaries. [redacted]

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**This contrasts with the failure to award a decoration to Colonel Pedro Tortolo, head of Cuba's military mission in Grenada who sought refuge with most of his men in the Soviet Embassy. Although welcomed home warmly by Fidel and given a choice new assignment, he is [redacted] the butt of popular jokes about his uninspiring performance during the fighting, and has become a symbol of cowardice. [redacted]*

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The Cuban People

Several signs suggest that Castro's management of the Grenada debacle, especially in its early hours, displeased many Cubans or at least left them confused and uneasy. [redacted]

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[redacted] some faulted him for ordering a fight to the finish against what clearly were overwhelming odds, and few seemed to understand his contention that any blood shed in Grenada would help discourage US intervention in Central America. [redacted]

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inaccurate news early in the fighting led many Cubans to the conclusion that all of the more than 700 Cubans in Grenada had been killed obeying Castro's fatalistic order; this caused considerable grief for their relatives, friends, and sympathizers until the casualty situation was clarified. This draining emotional experience appears to have left many Cubans more critical of their own leadership than of the United States. [redacted]

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one small group in Havana tried to hold a demonstration to get the government to bring Cubans home from Grenada and Nicaragua but was quickly dispersed by police. [redacted]

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Much of the Cuban public is probably aware of the dismissal of the Interior Ministry's foreign intelligence chief as a result of Cuba's "intelligence failure" in Grenada; the official's top aides almost certainly were sacked with him. [redacted]

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[redacted] These punitive actions are likely to have had a sobering effect on intelligence officers, diplomats, and the bureaucracy in general, and probably helped to increase popular uncertainty, confusion, and lack of confidence in the leadership. [redacted]

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This loss of confidence seems to have been most acute in eastern Cuba, which apparently has generously supplied the government with "volunteers" for overseas duty. [redacted]

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[redacted] Probably to improve morale in the area, Castro on 1 January declared Santiago de Cuba--eastern Cuba's largest city--a "hero of the Republic of Cuba" and awarded the

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city a medal.* Subsequently, 350 "internationalist fighters" in the city were decorated individually. [redacted]

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Presumably to explain the government's actions to the general population, boost morale, and direct popular hostility toward the US, the regime in December released a documentary film entitled "Grenada, the Take-off of a Dream" and in late January placed on sale in all provincial capitals a book, Grenada, the World Against the Crime, purporting to "make known the truth of what happened in Grenada. . . ." Moreover, the government made an effort in December to ease temporarily some of the standard restrictions on consumer goods. Our Interests Section in Havana noted, for example, that apples were offered for sale for the first time in 10 years, unrationed pork and chicken were made available, and toys were much more prevalent than in the same period in previous years. [redacted]

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Conclusions

Despite the doubts raised in the military, as well as in the population in general, about the wisdom of Casto's decisions, any direct US effort to challenge Castro's leadership would almost certainly generate enough nationalist fervor to make Cubans rally to his defense. His efficient propaganda apparatus along with his own lingering charisma have spared him the blame for his many disastrous decisions. He has had great success in finding scapegoats and in limiting the public's access to information that would reveal the true import of his mistakes. [redacted]

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Since Grenada, however, is perceived by many Cubans to be a serious blunder, Castro appears vulnerable to a long-term, low-key campaign of criticism. We believe a well-informed Cuban public would be less willing to accept some of Castro's more adventurous policies. While some Cubans would completely discount US broadcasts as baseless propaganda, we believe many are anxious--in the wake of Grenada--to have an external source of objective, dispassionate news about events affecting Cuba. [redacted]

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As for the military, the leadership appears anxious to redeem itself and to rekindle the euphoria that accompanied its resounding victory over Somalia in the Ogaden campaign in 1978.

*Such awards were given in the Soviet Union during World War II to cities whose populations took part, and suffered particularly heavy losses, in combat. [redacted]

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A dramatic rout of the anti-Sandinista guerrillas in Nicaragua, for example, or of South African forces in southern Angola could fully restore the military's own morale as well as that of the public. Another costly defeat, in contrast, would further undermine Castro's credibility and the people's confidence in his regime. [redacted]

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Castro probably feels outrage toward the United States over Cuba's helplessness to prevent the reversal of Grenada's revolution and appears apprehensive about signals that Cuban tactics of the past are proving less effective. We believe he will continue his diplomatic and propaganda efforts to mobilize world opinion against the United States, but his recent speeches indicate a fear that Washington is willing to ignore public opinion and, even worse, has US public opinion behind it on its tough policy toward Cuba. [redacted]

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We believe that Castro, uncomfortably on the defensive, realizes he has lost the initiative in his continuing battle with Washington and seems uncertain what to do next. Understanding that Washington's tolerance for Cuba's misbehavior has been lowered dramatically, he likely does not want to engage in activity that could justify US retaliation. Yet, he is wary of negotiations as a way out of his dilemma, viewing concessions to the US as surrender to his main ideological enemy. [redacted]

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If the United States made the first move, we believe that Castro would probably enter into talks but, with this an election year in the US, he would not be very forthcoming. The signs so far suggest that without an immediate military threat to Cuba itself, he is prepared to buy time in hopes of seeing a change in administration in Washington. Only after the outcome of the United States elections is clear and there was no change in administration in Washington would he be likely to negotiate in earnest. [redacted]

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