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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

8 January 1962

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MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: Cuba as a Military Threat to the United States and to Other American States

1. There are a number of ways in which Cuba might become a source of military danger to the US and other American states:

- a) The Soviets might give the Cubans weapons capable of posing a serious threat to the continental US itself -- long-range missiles, bomber aircraft, nuclear weapons.
- b) The Soviets might establish bases in Cuba from which to operate cimilar strategic weapons themselves.
- c) The Soviets might build up Cuban armed forces on a scale and with the kinds of weapons which could permit the Castro regime to undertake overt military aggression against other Latin American states.

We believe, for the reasons given in the following paragraphs, that none of these courses of action is likely to be undertaken by the USSR.

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Soviet Advanced Weapons in Cuban Hands

2. Even in the unlikely event that the practical and security problems involved in training the Cubans to use advanced weapons could be handled to Soviet satisfaction, we believe it out of the question that the Soviets would give the Cuban regime the power to threaten the US on its own initiative. This they have done for no other ally, and it would run counter to their consistent policy of retaining in their own hands control over all decisions involving any serious degree of risk.

Soviet-Controlled Advanced Weapons on Cuban Territory

3. There are some reasons why the possession of missile bases on Cuban territory might appeal to the Soviet leaders. They would regard it as a dramatic demonstration of the shift in the balance of power which they constantly proclaim, and from which they expect early and favorable consequences for Communism's world-wide struggle. They would regard such bases as an additional means of military and political pressure on the US, which could be used in the whole range of disputes between the two powers, including those related to the presence of US bases around the Bloc. And they would regard bases in Cuba as a still firmer guarantee against a US attempt to overthrow the Castro regime by military means.

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4. Nevertheless, we think that the Soviets will not undertake to put missile bases in Cuba, for reasons which will appeal to them as even more persuasive. To do so would in their view heighten the risk of war, either by provoking US action to prevent the building of such bases or, once established, to eliminate a threat so close to US shores and so vulnerable to US attack. Missiles in Cuba would add little to the Soviet strategic threat against the US which exists already, and would involve serious security and control problems. Above all, such bases would give Soviet policy, in Latin America and elsewhere, the appearance of harboring aggressive military intentions, which is entirely incompatible with the image of their policy they wish to project. They would believe that the appearance of the USSR in the Latin America in such a military role would actually check the growth of the native revolutionary forces upon which they rely for the eventual triumph of Communism in Latin America.

5. It is possible, though we think unlikely for substantially the same reasons as those advanced against the stationing of Soviet missiles in Cuba, that the Soviets will seek to use Cuban facilities in a supporting role to augment their strategic capabilities against the US. Facilities in Cuba for refueling and supplying submarines would enable them to extend the time on station in the Western Atlantic and Caribbean waters of their missile-firing submarine fleet.

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In addition, with little recognizable preparatory activity, Cuban airfields could be made ready for emergency landings by Soviet bombers employed in attacks on the continental US. Although we believe that the extensive developments of submarine and air facilities for Soviet use is unlikely, we rate the chances higher that they will be built than that Soviet missile bases will be built because they are not in themselves Soviet weapons of war but only a potential augmentation of Soviet strategic capabilities. There is no evidence at present of any Soviet intention to prepare submarine or air bases for these purposes.

Cuban Forces as an Instrument of Aggression

6. A buildup of Cuban forces on a scale and with the kinds of weapons which would permit the Castro regime to export its revolution to other Latin American states by military means would have little appeal for the Soviet or Cuban Communists. They would know that in such attempts they would be opposed by the vastly superior forces of the other American states, including those of the US. Castroism would be completely discredited throughout Latin America and the end result might well be the fall of the Castro regime itself.

7. Soviet arms deliveries to Cuba during 1960 and 1961 have in fact consisted of weapons suited to defense and internal security

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needs rather than to the development of an offensive capability. (See Annex.) Items supplied have included fighter aircraft, armored vehicles, artillery, small arms, and trucks and jeeps. No missiles, bombers, surface warships, submarines, or other weapons primarily suited to an offensive role have been included. It is noteworthy that Cuba's airlift and sea transport capability has not been significantly increased. The 12 IL-14 transports which have been delivered are being integrated into the Cubana airlines and do not appear to have been procured primarily for military use. The fact that Cubana has been selling Viscounts and some of its other Western aircraft seems to indicate that the Soviet transports are replacements and not intended as a net addition to Cuba's airlift capacity. On the whole, Cuba's military buildup is what would be expected in view of its fears of infiltration and invasion, and there is no evidence that missile, air, or submarine bases are being constructed in Cuba for offensive warfare.

The Real Soviet Policy in Cuba

8. The Soviets will continue to prize Cuba as a symbol of a spontaneous and successful popular revolution in Latin America to which they are giving disinterested support and they will seek to exploit its appeal to reformist and revolutionary groups throughout the area. They will support Castro's propaganda and subversive

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activities to the utmost and will assist him in using Cuba as a base for the training of Communist leaders and of agents of subversion and clandestine activity. They will make use of Cuban territory as a depot for the supply of leftist and Communist revolutionary groups throughout Latin America, including the supply of arms when appropriate. It is on this whole array of subversive tactics, which can be so effectively developed from the Cuban base, on which the Soviets and the Castroists rely to achieve their aims in Latin America. Their aim is not military conquest nor even the mounting of a military threat, but revolution -- a revolution which they confidently believe can feed successfully on the inflammable materials present in abundance in Latin America.

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