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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

5 January 1962

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MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

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

1. 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. To do so would run counter to the whole tenor of Soviet policy. The Soviets might calculate that the advantages to be gained from setting up missile bases with nuclear weapons capable of striking targets in the interior of the US were worth the risks involved, but, on balance, we think that they will be moved by the dangers involved in committing military strength so far from their base of power and by the various political disadvantages of such an action. There are certain other uses which the Soviets will probably make of Cuba, however, which will constitute a threat to the US and to other American states, such as the establishment of submarine and air facilities and of bases for subversive and paramilitary activity throughout Latin America.

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The Buildup of Soviet Arms to Cuba

2. Soviet arms deliveries to Cuba during 1960 and 1961 have consisted of weapons suited to defense and internal security 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 have 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. Furthermore, there is no evidence that missile, air, or submarine bases are being constructed in Cuba for offensive warfare.

3. We believe the evidence of observed and estimated Soviet arms deliveries to Cuba does not indicate that Cuba is now being built up as a Soviet base or staging area, or that the Cubans are

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being equipped for offensive warfare against other Latin American states. Quantities of arms supplied are not so great as to indicate plans for large transfers outside of Cuba, although they are sufficient to enable the Cubans to provide small arms -- either from new stocks or from the American arms which they have replaced -- to any dissident Latin American group to which they can transport them. The fact that the military potentialities of Cuba have not yet been developed by the Soviets does not mean, however, that they may not be in the future.

Cuba as a Base for Soviet-Controlled Nuclear Weapons

4. We believe that the Soviets will decide against giving the Cubans the capability for threatening the US, but we are less certain that they will decide against establishing missile bases under their own control. They will probably conclude that the US could detect preparations for the establishment of missile bases before the missiles became operational and in time to take preventive action. We do not believe that they will be able to conclude with certainty whether the US will take such action. They will probably decide that there is a considerable risk that the US would intervene and could do so successfully. They will not wish to run any considerable risk of nuclear war over Cuba, but they may consider

- 3 -

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that they will be in a position to make the decision as to whether US intervention in Cuba will lead to general war. They also might conclude that the losses they would sustain as a consequence of US intervention in Cuba could be cut by heaping opprobrium upon the US as an aggressor. They might, therefore, decide to accept the risk of such losses if they believed there were substantial advantages to be gained from establishing nuclear weapons bases in Cuba.

5. The Soviets might calculate that they would gain the following political advantages from the establishment of missile bases in Cuba: (a) added prestige for the Castro regime; (b) an impressive display of Communist might for the Latin American audience; (c) tangible evidence of the Soviet presence in the Caribbean; (d) intimidation of the US; and (e) a pawn which might be used to bargain for the withdrawal of American bases in states on the Soviet and Chinese borders.

6. On the other hand there would be important disadvantages to be evaluated by the Soviets before making a decision to establish missile bases in Cuba: (a) the dangers involved in committing advanced weapons in so vulnerable a location; (b) the likelihood that missile bases in Cuba would not significantly supplement the overall Soviet military strategy vis-a-vis the US; (c) the

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difficulty of sustaining Soviet claims that its interest in Latin America is not aggressive but stimulated only by its interest in supporting spontaneous popular reform and revolution; (d) the weakening of Soviet arguments against America's foreign bases; and (e) a considerable exacerbation of Soviet-American relation.

Other Threats From Cuba

7. On balance, we believe it likely that the Soviets will decide that the disadvantages of locating long-range missiles with nuclear warheads in Cuba, even under their control, are great enough as to make assumption of the risk of preventive action by the US unwise. The Soviets will, however, probably decide that they could establish facilities for refueling and supplying submarines without undue danger. They would hope that such facilities would enable them to extend the time on station in western Atlantic and Caribbean waters of their missile-firing submarine fleet. In addition, with little recognizable preparatory activity, Cuban airfields could be made ready for emergency landings by Soviet bombers in the event of general war between the US and the USSR. There is no evidence at present that submarine or air bases are being prepared for these purposes. Cuban territory could be used in peacetime as a base for

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radar or communications intelligence operations against the US; there is some evidence that Soviet ships operating from Cuban ports have engaged in such activities.

8. The Soviets are likely to 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 to seek to exploit its appeal to reformist and revolutionary groups throughout the area. They will support its regime's progaganda and subversive activities to the utmost and will encourage it to make Cuba a base for the training of Communist leaders and of agents of subversion and clandestine activity. They will encourage the regime and make use of its territory as a depot for the supply of leftist and Communist revolutionary groups throughout Latin America as opportunities present themselves. They will not wish to supply Cuba with offensive arms and means of transport which will enable the regime to engage prematurely in dangerous filibustering expeditions. If and when opportunities arise for intervention in other Latin American countries with a prospect of giving aid to other revolutionary groups, they will consider each case on its merits and suit their support to the occasion.

- 6 -

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9. With the arms now in their possession the Cuban armed forces could strike a heavy blow at the US base at Guantanamo. We believe such an attack unlikely, however, because the Cubans are aware that the US could quickly bring overwhelming force to bear. There have been many indications that the Cuban regime believes the US is eager to find an excuse for turning its military forces against it and they probably believe that the US would regard an attack on the Guantanamo base as ample justification for an attack and that the US would be unlikely to confine its action to the Guantanamo area alone.

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