

S-E-C-R-E-T

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

7 October 1963

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: The Soviet-Cuban Relationship

SUMMARY

The Soviet-Cuban relationship is under strain. This results partly from Castro's frustration over his own domestic troubles -- serious economic difficulties, loss of political impetus, the step-up in exile raids against him -- and from his failure to spark revolution abroad. He and the Soviets remain in disagreement over tactics to pursue in fostering revolution in the rest of Latin America. He almost certainly feels that the atmosphere of détente between the USSR and the US prejudices his regime.

The world political situation and the Soviet and Cuban economic situations all restrict the Soviets' freedom of action toward Castro while increasing his toward them. Castro knows that he cannot survive without Soviet support, but he also knows that the Soviets cannot afford to lose the Communist foothold which he controls. He is therefore freer to flout their interests, for example by failing to sign the test-ban treaty and in other ways, than they are to withhold economic support. Castro's recent conspicuous display of independence, as in the speech of 28 September, shows that for all their wooing the Soviets have not effectively subordinated him to their will; his character and personality make it doubtful that they will ever do so, more than temporarily.

GROUP 1

S-E-C-R-E-T

Excluded from automatic  
downgrading and  
declassification

MORI/CDF pp. 1-11

S-E-C-R-E-T

Their stake in Cuba, as against both the US and the Chinese Communists, will require them to keep on supporting Castro until they can find a more tractable replacement for him. But we believe that the Soviets will follow a cautious line towards Latin America for some time to come and will try to persuade Castro to do the same. If tensions begin to rise, the USSR will probably try to contain any crisis at an early stage.

\* \* \* \* \*

1. The final paragraph of NIE 85-63, "Situation and Prospects in Cuba," dated 14 June 1963, foresaw "varying degrees of friction in Soviet-Cuban relations, particularly over the long run. Castro wants all the benefits of Soviet economic and military aid but insists upon a unique position in the Bloc without submitting to the discipline and control imposed on Soviet Satellites. Despite the harmonious tone of the joint communique (23 May 1963), the partners probably have not reached a fundamental reconciliation of their appraisals of the situation in Latin America. As time passes and new conditions develop, they will probably again find themselves in disagreement over the proper course of action to follow ..."

2. From Castro's point of view events over the past few months have been generally unfavorable. Depressed living conditions persist in Cuba and prospects for improvement are bleak,

- 2 -

S-E-C-R-E-T

S-E-C-R-E-T

at least over the next few years. Castro's efforts to incite revolution abroad have met with little or no success, and his hopes of making Cuba and the Fidelistas the vanguard of a continental revolution are at best remote. Meanwhile counter-revolutionary pressure in the form of exile raids has increased and probably seems to him at least potentially dangerous to his regime.

3. We do not believe that conditions within Cuba have deteriorated to such an extent that Castro's power position is in peril. But the regime has lost impetus. It has been extremely inept in direction and administration of the economy, as shown by serious errors in long-range planning, wasteful use of manpower, and recurring failures in the distribution system. Western observers have noted a change in atmosphere in recent months and a "flat feeling" now apparent in the general attitude. An increasing proportion of the population seems apathetic and there may have been an increase in the number, as well as an improvement in the morale, of those actively opposed to Castro.

4. Continuing friction is evident between Castro and some of the old-line Communists in the government. Castro almost

- 3 -

S-E-C-R-E-T

S-E-C-R-E-T

certainly realizes that they will try to acquire control of the apparatus of his new party, the United Party of the Socialist Revolution (PURS), and through it of him. We believe this to be one of the reasons that the massive reorganization and reconstitution of the party is moving ahead so slowly. We are inclined to attach some credence to reports of serious wrangling between Castro and certain of his top officials, in view of the acuteness of the regime's internal problems.

5. With regard to Cuba's external relations, Castro must feel that he is being squeezed into a corner, and in danger of becoming increasingly isolated. Not only has he made no headway in fostering revolution in Latin America, but in our view he has regained none of the ground lost a year ago when the evidence of his conniving in the introduction of strategic missiles cost him most of his remaining support in Latin America. His tentative overtures to the US for discussions on normalization of relations have been ignored. US-sponsored quarantine measures are having a serious cumulative impact on the Cuban economy. More important, the Soviets have apparently given him to understand that their economic aid program has limits. In his speech of 28 September, Castro again stressed the necessity for a "maximum effort" to wipe out Cuba's large trade imbalance with the

- 4 -

S-E-C-R-E-T

S-E-C-R-E-T

Soviet Union. Worst of all, he must have growing doubts about how much Soviet political and military support he can count on if a new crisis develops.

6. Castro's speech of 28 September dismissed the relaxation of East-West tensions as far less important than "the strong blockade established against us, as a small country, attacked, blockaded, against which a policy of undeclared war is being followed, a policy of piratical attacks, infiltration of saboteurs, introduction of arms and explosives, establishment of bases to attack and kill." By inference he accused the Soviets of turning "a beatific smile toward those imperialist enemies" who are also enemies of Cuba. He almost certainly fears that the atmosphere of détente prejudices his regime: not that the Soviet Union will deliberately sell him out in bilateral negotiation with the US, or that the US will invade, but that the Soviets will stand by while US economic and other measures erode his own position past recovery. When the Soviets decided months ago to reduce their military strength in Cuba, they seem to have intended to leave enough for a trip-wire effect to deter drastic US action against the island; under the changed circumstances of today Castro may be wondering whether whatever Soviet presence remains in Cuba will be of any real use to him.

- 5 -

S-E-C-R-E-T

S-E-C-R-E-T

7. A recurring cause of difficulty in Soviet-Cuban relations is the disagreement between the two governments on methods and tactics -- and the amount of risk regarded as acceptable -- for support of revolution in Latin America. The Soviets appear to favor a minimum-risk policy emphasizing the use of legal political action by the old-line Communist parties. The Cuban leaders believe, on the contrary, that the only revolutionary action in Latin America that offers much prospect of success is guerrilla warfare, on the Cuban model. Castro and his revolutionary theoretician Che Guevara admit that there is a slim possibility that revolutionary elements in one country or another could gain power through elections but doubt whether they could hang onto it against probable counter-action by reactionary military officers. Above all, Castro and Guevara seem to feel that the gradualist tactics advocated by the Soviets are out of phase with the Cuban regime's pressing need for a parallel revolutionary success elsewhere in Latin America.

8. The attitude of the Cuban leaders is, of course, much closer to the Communist Chinese formula on the necessity for violent revolution than it is to the Soviet position, and Castro has evidently become irritated by Soviet urgings that he exercise restraint in promoting his revolutionary plans. Such counsel is

- 6 -

S-E-C-R-E-T

~~S-E-C-R-E-T~~

probably particularly galling to Fidel since the exile groups have intensified raiding activities against Cuba and begun to establish new bases in Central America.

9. Such are the broad issues, but the Soviets cannot reach any decisions affecting Cuba (or even some which do not) without constantly assessing the character and personality of Castro. After the missile crisis Mikoyan dined attendance upon him for a month without persuading him to conceal his resentment over its outcome. In May they wooed him with more flattering attention, week after week, than they have ever shown any other visitor to the Soviet Union. In June he reciprocated with a long television speech in Havana which was remarkable for its adulation of everything Soviet and of Khrushchev personally. But by July he was returning to his old truculence, and by September was saying, "Naturally, we will not calmly accept a situation in which tensions decrease elsewhere while they increase for us...This situation will determine our policy in the international arena, in the United Nations, and everywhere. It will determine our stand on the nuclear pact, and toward the proposals on denuclearization." Castro knows that he cannot survive without Soviet support, but he also knows that the Soviets cannot afford to lose the Communist

- 7 -

S-E-C-R-E-T

S-E-C-R-E-T

foothold which he controls. The Soviets for their part must be convinced that they cannot count on him for loyal consistency to their political interests. His egomania, his confident drive, and the ease with which he shifts course all operate against them; a canny instinct for survival is his one trait which can offer them hope that prudence will govern his actions. To the oscillations which have already occurred Castro may of course add another, back toward the Soviets, for example on the occasion of a visit from Khrushchev. This would be only temporary comfort, since they would have to expect him to keep on oscillating.

10. The Soviets learned nearly a year ago that they could not control Castro, when he vetoed their offer of on-site verification of the removal of the missiles. It must be even more troublesome now, after their conspicuous courtship throughout his visit, for him to demonstrate that he is freer to flout their interests than they are to curb him by withholding aid. Cuba can remain the only country in the Western Hemisphere not to sign the test-ban treaty; Castro can with impunity denigrate the Communist parties of Latin America and exclude the old-line Cuban Communists from any dominant role in the government or even in his new party. On their side the Soviets find their principal sanction against

- 8 -

S-E-C-R-E-T



S-E-C-R-E-T

him, economic aid, being forced into a gradually narrower range of maneuver, with upper limits imposed by growing competition for their resources and lower limits imposed by the necessity to keep Cuba afloat. In the fundamental conflict with the Chinese, in which Cuba has been a central issue, dependence upon Soviet economic aid has been strong enough to prevent Castro from joining the Chinese outright, but not strong enough to keep him from expressing a kind of coy neutralism, laced with arrogant offers to mediate, which must please the Chinese and infuriate the Soviets. So far the USSR has been able to use its economic sanction only to the extent of convincing Castro that he must revert to an economy based upon maximum production of sugar rather than the rapid industrialization to which he had been committed. In sum, for the present, the world political situation and the Soviet and Cuban economic situations all restrict the Soviets' freedom of maneuver toward Castro while increasing his toward them.

11. Meanwhile the USSR must hang on and try to make Cuba viable, as an example to other small nations and as a project to which their prestige is committed in the face of both the US and Communist China. For all their troubles with him, Castro's regime

- 9 -

S-E-C-R-E-T

S-E-C-R-E-T

represents the best victory for the Communist camp in the last several years, and is of special importance as a foothold in this part of the world, where they believe long-term political and economic trends seem almost certain to produce conditions conducive to expansion of Communist influence. Against these possible advantages stands the necessity of preventing Castro from undertaking provocations against US interests, triggering counteractions which would force the USSR into precisely the situation it is eager to avoid. We doubt that it has yet hit upon a formula for achieving this objective.

12. The USSR is continuing with preparations to turn over a surface-to-air (SAM) defense system to the Cubans. The decision to do this was reached some months ago, probably no later than May. It appears likely that what has been agreed to is complete transfer of operation and control from the Soviets to the Cubans. If this is the case, the Soviets have probably warned Castro that he should not count on them to back up militarily any ill-considered use he might make of the system; they are aware of his militant attitude toward US high-altitude reconnaissance flights over Cuba. They might, under these circumstances, let the US Government know in advance that, with the turnover of the SAM system to Cuba,

- 10 -

S-E-C-R-E-T

S-E-C-R-E-T

the USSR's restraining influence on its use will end. They would hope in this case to create a situation and atmosphere in which any incidents arising from Cuban control of the air defense system could be contained. There is also a possibility, however, that the Soviets will view the risk involved in complete transfer as being so serious that they will maintain some measure of control indefinitely despite the new difficulties this would probably cause in their relationship with Castro.

13. In general, we feel that the Soviets will probably pursue a cautious line for some time to come with respect to Cuba and Latin America. They will not be enthusiastic about dealing with Fidel; if party regulars in Cuba had a clear opportunity to replace him and a good chance to hold onto power after they did, we believe Moscow would give the signal in an instant. Lacking this alternative, we think the Soviets are prepared to accept uncertainty and face some risks to help maintain Castro in power. We expect that they will continue to urge him to exercise restraint, however, and that they will act early to try to contain any crisis while it is still in the developing stages.

FOR THE BOARD OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES:



*for*  
SHERMAN KENT  
Chairman

25X1

- 11 -

S-E-C-R-E-T

UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

~~SECRET~~

# Memorandum

*Also to the  
White House*

TO : The Director

DATE: 7 October 1963

FROM : The AD/NE *per AAS*

SUBJECT: Attached Memorandum re Soviet Cuban Relationship

The attached memorandum was undertaken initially at the request of SAS/DDP (Desmond Fitzgerald's group). It is in part a relook at the main estimative judgments of the last NIE on Cuba (NIE 85-63, "Situation and Prospects in Cuba," dated 14 June 1963.) It also assesses certain developments since that estimate.

25X1

CONCUR:



~~SECRET~~

*Recommended circulation  
to VTS/B for info.*

GROUP 1  
Excluded from automatic  
downgrading and  
declassification

MEMORANDUM FOR: Sherman Kent/*ONE*

DCI approves distribution to USIB for  
info and the White House, too.

W. Elder

*Sent Out*

9 Oct 63

                      
(DATE)

FORM NO. 101 REPLACES FORM 10-101  
1 AUG 54 WHICH MAY BE USED.

(47)