

31 October 1963

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Soviet MRBMs in Cuba

1. On August 10th at a meeting in Secretary Rusk's Conference Room attended by Rusk, Johnson, McNamara, Gilpatric, Bundy, Gen. Taylor and a number of others for the purpose of discussing General Lansdale's Phase II activities, McCone reported on the sudden importation of materiel -- at that time the characteristic of which was unidentified -- and Soviet personnel, and at that meeting speculated that this could be electronic equipment for use against Canavarel and/or military equipment including medium range ballistic missiles.

2. On August 21st at a meeting in Secretary Rusk's office attended by the same group, McCone again reviewed the situation as it developed since August 10th, reported definite information on surface to air missiles and again speculated on the probability of medium range ballistic missiles.

3. On August 22nd McCone gave the same information to the President, adding certain details concerning the number of Soviet and Chinese personnel who had recently entered Cuba

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4. On August 23rd in a meeting with the President, Rusk, McNamara, Gilpatric, General Taylor, Bundy and others, McCone again reviewed the situation and questioned the need for the extensive SAM installations unless they were to make possible the concealment of MRBMs. This meeting resulted in the issuance of a Presidential directive to department heads concerned to make contingency plans against the possibility of the introduction of offensive weapons.

5. The same reasoning was applied in discussions with Senator Russell's Subcommittees, Chairman Vinson's Subcommittee and in private talk with Chairman Cannon from time to time prior to McCone's departure on August 23rd.

6. On Saturday, August 25th, McCone urged General Carter, Acting DCI, to propose low level R 101 flights over certain Soviet-Cuban installations in order to obtain detailed technical information.

7. On September 7th, McCone wired General Carter as follows:

"Urge frequent repeat missions of recent reconnaissance operations which Gilpatric advises informative. Also I support use of R 101 if necessary. My hunch is we might face prospect of Soviet shortrange surface-to-surface missiles of portable type in Cuba which could command important targets of southeast United States and possibly Latin American Caribbean areas. You might suggest to Rusk that we develop joint policies for action in Cuba with selected Caribbean, South American states as an alternative to seeking unanimous OAS action which most certainly will be an ineffective compromise solution if past history is any indicator."

8. On September 10th McCone wired Carter from Nice as follows:

"Difficult for me to rationalize extensive costly defenses being established in Cuba as such extreme costly measures to accomplish security and secrecy not consistent with other policies such as refugees, legal travel, etc. Appears to me quite possible measures now being taken are for purpose of insuring secrecy of some offensive capability such as MRBMs to be installed by Soviets after present phase completed and country secured from overflights. Suggest BNE study motives behind these defensive measures which even seem to exceed those provided most satellites."

9. On September 13th McCone received communication from Carter stating that the BNE continued to feel that the installation of SA 2s is most reasonably explained by other than a desire to hide MRBM build-up. To this McCone responded on September 13th as follows:

"Also I continue to be concerned that the establishment of defensive equipment and installations is merely a prelude to the location of an offensive weapon capability and once this is done the implementation of

our policy as reported in the press might be extremely difficult and involve unacceptable dangers. I would like to talk with you on KY-9 from Norstad's headquarters to the White House or Pentagon situation room tonight (13 Sept.) between 1700 and 1800 your time. Unless I hear to the contrary from you by twelve noon today your time I will proceed Paris this evening and make arrangements for this call."

10. On September 16th McCone cabled Carter as follows:

"Also believe we must carefully study the prospect of secret importation and placement of several Soviet MRBMs which could not be detected by us if Cuban defenses deny overflight. In reflecting on my observations of Thor installation in Britain and Jupiters in Italy I can envisage a Soviet plan to package missile, control and operating equipment in such a way that a unit could be made operational a few hours after a site cleared and a modest concrete pad poured. Do not wish to be overly alarming this matter but believe CIA and community must keep government informed of danger of a surprise and also that detection of preparatory steps possibly beyond our capability once Cuban defense system operative. Thrust of press reports reaching me is that there exists a clear demarcation between defensive and offensive preparations and I question if we can be sure of this. I recognize Cuban policy decisions most delicate and beyond Agency or my competence. However believe we must give those making decision our best estimate of possible developments and alternative situations which might evolve and unexpectedly confront us.

11. On 19 September Carter communicated the summary of the conclusions of Cuban SNIE of that date, paragraph D stating that in the opinion of the BNE, establishment of MRBMs in Cuba would be

incompatible with Soviet policy -- and indicate a greater willingness to increase risk in US/Soviet relations than the Soviet Union has displayed so far--.

12. On September 20th McCone responded as follows:

"Ref DIR 37228: Suggest most careful consideration to conclusion last sentence paragraph d. As an alternative I can see that an offensive Soviet Cuban base will provide Soviets with most important and effective trading position in connection with all other critical areas and hence they might take an unexpected risk in order to establish such a position."

*Review of Central Intelligence*

13. It is reported that during McCone's absence, Acting DCI, at a meeting held in Mr. Bundy's office on 10 September, proposed an overflight which would cover the entire north and south perimeter of Cuba east of Havana and out to the eastern tip of Oriente Province except for an area in the immediate vicinity of Santa Clara where four SAM sites were known to exist and had been photographed. The purpose of this flight was to make a final determination as to how many SAM sites existed or were under construction. It is reported that because of Rusk's concern for the safety of the U-2 in view of the Sakhalin violation on 30 August and the [ ] loss on 8 September, and the Secretary's understandable recognition of the consequences resulting from a "U-2 incident" over denied territory, which seemed to him a possibility because of the existence of SAMs in Cuba, it was the sense of the meeting (particularly that of Secretary Rusk) that CIA be permitted to make 4 flights against Cuba, two peripheral and two overflights of limited penetration, including the Isle of Pines. These flights were executed between 26 September and 7 October.

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14. On the 14th of September the meeting of the Special Group, JCS representative outlined capabilities for low level coverage. Secretary of Defense indicated he did not wish this operation considered until the results were obtained from CIA reconnaissance as approved on September 10th.

*September 14th at an interdepartmental meeting*

15. On October 4th McCone noted in an interdepartmental meeting that there had been no coverage of the center of Cuba and more particularly the entire western end of the Island for over a month, and all flights since 5 September had been either peripheral or

limited and therefore CIA did not know, nor could advise, whether an offensive capability was being created. <sup>McCone</sup> ~~McCone~~ objected strenuously to the limitations which had been placed on overflights and there arose a considerable discussion (with some heat) as to whether limitations had or had not been placed on CIA by the Special Group. The National Reconnaissance Organization, CIA and Colonel Steakley (for JCS) were requested to prepare a comprehensive plan for aerial survey of Cuba and to submit the plan at a meeting scheduled for Tuesday, October 9th.

16. On 9 October the report was made to the interdepartmental group. They reviewed NRO and JCS proposals and it was agreed that a U-2 flight flying from south to north across the western part of Cuba where at least two SAM sites were known to exist should be undertaken promptly and that a number of similar sorties might be mounted if this flight did not activate ground-air fire. (Higher authority approved this one mission and left consideration of further missions until the results of the approved mission were determined.)

17. This mission was flown on October 14th. It was successful and encountered no resistance. On October 15th at a Special Meeting (and prior to receipt of the results of the October 14th flight), two additional U-2 missions to cover all of Cuba were approved and this was concurred in by higher authority.

JOHN A. McCone  
Director