

TOP SECRET

TS# 142225

13

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

27 January 1961

D R A F T  
INTERNAL O/NE ONLY

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: Probable International Reactions to Certain  
Possible US Courses of Action against the Castro  
Regime

Introduction

1. The purpose of this memorandum is to assess the international risks involved in various types of action the US might take to weaken or overthrow the Castro government -- especially the nature and magnitude of possible Bloc countermoves and the possibility of serious adverse reactions on the part of Latin American countries or others in the Free World. We must emphasize that actual international reactions might be greatly influenced by circumstantial factors which cannot be accurately foreseen -- by the precise nature of the US action, by the manner, speed, and success with which it was carried out, by new developments in the situation which might affect international opinion

TOP SECRET

MORI/CDF (doc ID 134244)

TOP SECRET

regarding the justification of the US action or (in the case of the Bloc) the possibilities for countering it without undue risk. Nevertheless, we believe some valid generalizations can be made, on the basis of the situation as it has developed so far, regarding certain broad lines of action open to the US. Various steps have already been taken by the US against the Castro regime: the sugar quota has been eliminated; virtually all other US economic trade with Cuba has been placed under embargo; political and diplomatic moves have been taken to isolate and condemn Cuba in the American community; and, most recently, diplomatic relations have been broken. Thus, for purposes of this memorandum, we consider that any US effort to greatly increase the pressures on Castro would probably involve moves, unilaterally or with the support of other Latin American countries, to (a) establish a naval and air blockade of Cuba; (b) provide active support, of varying degrees of magnitude and overtness, to an attempt by Cuban opposition elements, internal and in exile, to overthrow Castro; or (c) undertake an overt military invasion of Cuba.

- 2 -

TOP SECRET

TOP SECRET

Sino-Soviet Bloc Reactions

2. Bloc interests and prestige are by now deeply involved in Cuba. Bloc leaders from the start have recognized the value of a revolutionary, pro-Communist Cuba as a source of irritation and embarrassment to the US, as an example for revolutionary movements elsewhere in the hemisphere, and as a center for Communist as well as Cuban agitation and propaganda throughout Latin America. Indeed, the Cuban example has assumed increasing prominence in Soviet and (even more so) Chinese Communist assessments of the world situation. Cuba is being depicted as a prime example of the Communist thesis that colonial regimes are inevitably toppling under the impact of revolutionary nationalism, and that Bloc strength can prevent the imperialists from re-intervening to reverse this process. Further, in the Bloc's view the Castro regime is farther along toward the next stage -- the advent of Communist power -- than any other Free World country. The Bloc has provided Castro with extensive political, economic, and military support, including tanks and artillery as well as extensive quantities of small arms. While carefully avoiding firm commitments, Khrushchev has further involved Bloc prestige in several statements designed to create the impression that the Cuban revolution is under the protection of Soviet missiles.

- 3 -

TOP SECRET

TOP SECRET

3. For these reasons, the Bloc would regard Castro's downfall as a substantial political defeat and would respond vigorously to any major US move -- overt or covert and whether or not supported by others -- to bring it about. Such reaction might include the dispatch of additional military supplies to Castro, if need be by submarine or aircraft. In the event of an unresolved military struggle between Castro and US-backed opposition forces, it is conceivable, though we believe unlikely, that the Bloc might even seek to introduce a few "volunteers" to handle specialized equipment. In any event, the Bloc would probably issue generalized warnings of the possibility of wider hostilities, perhaps accompanied by naval redeployments and other military demonstrations.

4. However, we believe that such Bloc military moves as were undertaken would be primarily political acts designed to heighten the crisis so as to play on worldwide fears of general war and that the Bloc would carefully avoid a direct military confrontation with US forces. The Communist leaders almost certainly recognize that Cuba's geographical location sharply limits their ability to counter US military moves there and that US sensitivity regarding Cuba would make the risks of general

- 4 -

TOP SECRET

TOP SECRET

war particularly great. Thus Bloc efforts would probably be primarily directed at heading off the American threat to Cuba by political means, exploiting in the process all opportunities to exploit political reactions against the US. Its campaign would probably stress emergency action by the UN to curb and censure the US. Given certain circumstances, it might seek to establish some sort of international control mechanism for Cuba.

5. If the US succeeded in bringing Castro down, the Bloc leaders, and particularly the Chinese Communists, would feel themselves under pressure to offset this defeat (and impress the US with their displeasure) by initiatives elsewhere. At least the Soviet leaders, however, probably believe that they could prevent Castro's downfall from becoming a dead loss by exploiting it as an example of imperialist repression of Cuban nationalism. Moreover, the US action might impell Bloc leaders to revise their assessment of US willingness to take military risks. In any event, a Soviet or Chinese decision to make trouble elsewhere would depend on the extent to which local circumstances were favorable. We know of no such local situation which is not already being exploited by the Bloc.

- 5 -

TOP SECRET

TOP SECRET

Latin American and other Free World Reactions

6. Castro's stature in Latin America has markedly declined over the last year. His dictatorial methods, his political meddling in other countries, and his close collaboration with world communism have progressively alienated moderates who initially felt that Castro, with all his crudeness, was bringing a long needed social revolution to Cuba. Official opinion, at least privately, has generally crystallized against Castro, and the earlier tendency of many to secretly applaud his Yankee-baiting has subsided. The majority of Latin American governments apparently felt that the US economic embargo was justified and virtually all have at least privately sympathized with the US decision to break diplomatic relations. Peru and five lesser countries have also broken or suspended diplomatic ties with Cuba, and six others have withdrawn their Ambassadors from Havana.

7. Nevertheless, most Latin American leaders remain reluctant to stir up the vociferous and sometimes strategically placed minority of pro-Communists and other leftists who look to Castro as a symbol of revolution, and these leaders themselves continue to be influenced by traditional fears of US domination

- 6 -

TOP SECRET

TOP SECRET

of the hemisphere. We see little likelihood as matters now stand that the OAS can be induced to participate in or officially sanction anti-Castro measures of the drastic nature considered in this memorandum.

8. Despite the likelihood of outcries from the far left, unobtrusive US support for an opposition move against Castro which promised to win broad popular support would probably be at least privately supported by most Latin American governments. Some, indeed, would probably be willing to provide covert assistance of their own for such a move, particularly if they felt that the US would also support moves to overthrow the Trujillo dictatorship in the Dominican Republic.

9. Especially if they had been consulted by the US in advance, the other Latin American governments might be willing to acquiesce in a fairly sizable amount of unacknowledged US support for such an operation. However, willingness to go along would be greatly weakened if US participation reached such proportions as to suggest that the US was imposing a new regime rather than assisting the Cubans themselves to settle their own destinies. Except possibly on invitation from a new regime which was widely considered to represent the true feelings of the Cuban people, direct participation of US combat forces in action

TOP SECRET

TOP SECRET

against Castro within Cuba itself would probably cause a violent and bitter reaction throughout the hemisphere, reflected in strong opposition in the OAS and UN. These reactions would be especially deep and lasting if it appeared that the US was attempting to install another reactionary Batista-type regime in Cuba.

10. The Latin American reaction would probably also be adverse, though less intense than in the case of US combat operations within Cuba, if the US established a blockade of Cuba in international waters. At least in the absence of new and persuasive Cuban provocations, most Latin American countries would find it difficult to oppose efforts to condemn such action in the UN and would probably feel impelled to take similar action in the OAS.

11. Other Free World nations are for the most part not deeply involved with the Cuban issue, regarding it as one for Cuba and the US to work out. Thus their reactions to strong US actions would depend mainly on the extent to which these actions appeared to threaten their own national interests, to materially increase the risks of global war, or to represent (particularly for the Afro-Asian Bloc) great power disregard for the rights of

- 8 -

TOP SECRET



TOP SECRET

smaller nations. Actual US military intervention in Cuba would almost certainly evoke widespread and vehement opposition and, even if carried out so rapidly as to present the world with a fait accompli, would probably create a lasting bad impression throughout the Afro-Asian world as well as in Latin America. Imposition of a US blockade would probably stimulate widespread UN opposition, particularly since Canada and a number of nations otherwise not particularly sympathetic with Castro still maintain trading relations with Castro. Unobtrusive US support for an opposition attempt against Castro would produce a good deal of cynicism throughout the world about the extent of the US role but if quickly successful little other lasting reaction. However, an operation in which US participation was marked, or one which resulted in prolonged and inconclusive fighting, would probably generate widespread pressure for moves to internationalize and control the situation. Unilateral US military intervention against Cuban territory would probably confront the US with a situation in many respects comparable to that of the British and French at the time of Suez, with even many of our NATO allies likely to take the position the US did at that time.

- 9 -

TOP SECRET