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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

24 March 1966

SPECIAL MEMORANDUM NO. 4-66

SUBJECT: Castro, Model 1966

SUMMARY

Things have not been going well for Fidel or for the "revolutionary camp" with which he identifies in world affairs. In particular, he has been shaken by the overthrow of several heads of revolutionary government elsewhere and by the recently-uncovered assassination plot against him in Cuba. We think that his attitude in the face of these developments, together with his frustration over Cuba's continuing economic difficulties, is causing him to lose a measure of his rapport with the Cuban populace. This does not mean that his hold on power is imminently threatened, but it probably does mean that he will become gradually more vulnerable over a considerable period. There will, at the same time, be a somewhat greater chance that he might undertake risky or belligerent actions abroad.

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1. In seven years of power Castro has changed a good deal. He has tended more and more to exaggerate his own importance and that of the Cuban revolutionary example in world affairs. He has, at the same time, been losing part of his charisma within Cuba, for the revolution he commands has aged but not prospered. He clearly finds himself under unusual pressures at the present time; his reactions to these are likely to move him further out of rapport with the Cuban populace.

2. Frustrations are not new for Fidel; his flamboyant career has been full of them. But the talents that brought victory in his revolt against Batista have not proved well-suited to the day-to-day business of political administration and economic decision-making. His regime has, for instance, been set back by its tendency to apply all sorts of theoretical principles in dogmatic, impractical fashion. As we pointed out some time ago, the leaders of the regime have failed all along to put enough Latin flavor into their "Marxism cha-cha-cha."* This has had a particularly strong limiting effect on Cuban economic progress as the regime has initiated, and then failed with, one

* See NIE 85-64: Situation and Prospects in Cuba, dated 5 August 1964.

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fine-sounding scheme after another. Cases in point are the original crash program of industrialization, the expropriation of land from many of the country's most productive farmers, an ineffectual schedule of work norms, and the reliance until a year ago on moral, rather than material incentives to stimulate worker productivity.

3. Of course many other things -- a large proportion of them outside his control -- have combined to hold Fidel's fortunes at relatively low ebb. The US economic denial program continues to exacerbate the regime's internal economic difficulties; low sugar prices hurt Cuba badly last year; bad weather has reduced the size of this year's crop. Communist China's refusal to supply promised quantities of rice this year is a further major irritant. Perhaps most serious of all as an impediment to Cuba's progress has been the continuing exodus or defection of many of the country's most talented and best trained people.

4. Prospects for parallel revolution elsewhere in Latin America are dim, at least for the short-run; Castroism as a political force in the area is virtually moribund. Try as Castro will to breathe fire and spirit into prospective

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revolutionaries of other Latin American countries, he finds that the number actually willing to go to the barricades remains disappointingly small. And even while he declares his determination to aid and abet those who dare to take up arms, the Soviets warn him to keep risks low and the Chinese call him chicken for not doing enough.

5. To an increasing extent, Castro has come to picture the world as divided into two important parts. One is the revolutionary camp led by Cuba, the USSR and the other Communist countries; it also includes most newly-independent and in-between nations. The other is the counter-revolutionary camp led by the United States and including the other "imperialist" countries. Long and sincerely distressed by the Chinese-Soviet split, Fidel has felt that this hampers the progress of the revolutionary camp as a whole; prior to the time when the Chinese turned their wrath on him too, he had made a number of clumsy and unsuccessful offers to try to bring the two big Communist powers back into harmony.

6. While he continues to expound about the inevitable forward movement of the revolutionary camp, Fidel is obviously aware of the beatings taken recently by a number of his fellow

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revolutionary-campers. For Castro, Ben Bella was friend as well as fellow revolutionary figure. Nkrumah was a leader with whom he had more than a little in common. The displacement of Sukarno in Indonesia, along with the mop-up of Communists there, came to Fidel as a nasty shock. He has expressed outrage, moreover, at the introduction of US military power to oppose the Communist advances in Vietnam; in recent months, he has repeatedly proclaimed that he would be willing to supply military equipment and volunteers from Cuba to aid Hanoi and the Viet Cong.

7. So far, however, Fidel has stopped short of any actions that might bring him into armed conflict with the US. He has not attempted to interfere with US U-2 overflights of Cuba. Moreover, his adherence to caution was notably evident in the case of the fighting in the Dominican Republic last year; with a classic opportunity to provide assistance to a leftist insurrection, Castro chose instead to avoid any risk of provoking US military response. We think the chances are that he will continue to exercise this same kind of prudence. However, in view of his growing discouragement over the reverses suffered by the revolutionary camp and his perturbation

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about the number of its leaders displaced by counter-revolutionaries, there will be a somewhat greater chance that Castro might resort to a risky or belligerent move. Such a move could take the form of a campaign to stop US overflights of Cuba or a renewal of pressures on the US naval base at Guantanamo; it might, on the other hand, involve direct provision of weapons or men from Cuba to assist an active insurgency -- perhaps in Vietnam, perhaps closer to home.

8. The recent assassination plot against Castro has obviously added to his worries. This conspiracy showed at least a modicum of sophistication and apparently stood an appreciable chance of success. Moreover, investigation by Castro's security officials has indicated that certain of Fidel's old military comrades, if not directly involved in the plot, appeared at least to be susceptible to the same kind of subversion. The regime's reaction has not, however, stopped with a thorough roll-up of the plotters and of suspect individuals on the fringes; it has gone on to set new standards of behavior, applicable to all Cuban officials. Unfortunately for Castro, however, purging Cubans for conspiring with imperialists, for lack of revolutionary militancy, or for flagrant corruption is

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one thing; purging them for telling dirty stories or for civilized intercourse with pretty girls is quite another.

9. This moralistic attitude on Fidel's part is not entirely new, though it clearly is becoming more extreme. From the beginning his revolutionary credo has had a certain puritanical note out of tune with the general Cuban habit and temperament. Until now, however, most Cubans were able to forgive him his moral preachings because they knew Fidel was willing to rise above those occasionally in his personal life. A new moral rearmament approach, especially if long sustained, might antagonize considerable numbers of people who have so far remained backers of the regime. Indeed, Fidel could become so upright as to cause his eventual downfall.

FOR THE BOARD OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES



SHERMAN KENT
Chairman

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