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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

CIA HISTORICAL REVIEW PROGRAM
RELEASE IN FULL 1997

15 November 1960

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: The Estimative Record on Cuba

1. Attached for your information is a chronological listing of estimates and ONE memorandum touching on the Cuban situation over the last eight years and of their principal estimative findings. This estimative record is briefly summarized in the paragraphs below.

2. In the three pertinent estimates produced through 1955, we stressed the growing pressure for political, economic, and social change in the Caribbean and Latin American areas but made only passing reference to Cuba as such. However, we did note (1954) that Batista's regime was generally unpopular and dependent on army support and that the Cuban Communist Party was the largest and most influential in the Caribbean.

3. The growing difficulties of the Batista dictatorship were treated in three estimates and one ONE memorandum to you between April 1957 and December 1958, just before the regime's collapse.

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Castro was from the start identified as Batista's chief antagonist, though up through November 1958 we held that Castro probably could not take over in the immediate future and that Batista was more likely to be replaced by a military junta. Our December 1958 estimate was an extremely gloomy assessment which concluded that: (a) the situation had deteriorated even more rapidly than anticipated; (b) the demoralized armed forces, if they took over, would have to offer a political solution satisfactory to Castro unless they were given the large-scale outside assistance required to suppress him; and (c) failure of high political and military leaders to take drastic action to stem Castro's momentum would lead to widening strife in which the possibility that the military would turn against the government could not be excluded. Both the April 1957 and the November 1958 estimates noted the opportunities for the Communists in the situation, the latter estimate pointing out that the Castro movement's nationalist bias obviously lent itself to Communist exploitation despite the lack of sufficient evidence on the actual degree of Communist penetration.

4. The Castro regime was assessed in five estimates between March 1959 and June 1960.

a. The relatively brief treatment of March 1959, while noting the anti-US bias of some of Castro's advisers and the measurable

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improvement in Communist prospects, depicted Castro as a flamboyant nationalist who might find the US a convenient whipping boy but -- reading between the lines -- would not necessarily become an implacable and pro-Communist foe of the US. However, subsequent estimates laid progressively increasing stress on Castro's dictatorial, pro-Communist and anti-US policies, even though we have never reached the conclusion that Fidel Castro himself was actually a Communist.

b. The June 1959 estimate concluded that the opportunity being provided the Communists was the most dangerous aspect of the situation, noting that while they probably did not control Castro they were certainly in a position to influence the regime.

c. The December 1959 estimate characterized Raul Castro and Che Guevara as pro-Communists if not actual Communists, indicated the likelihood of increased Cuban dependence on Bloc assistance, and concluded that the Communists had little reason to make an open bid for power or formal participation in the government since Castro's attitude and policies favored their aims.

d. A special estimate of March 1959 stressed the parallelism of Castro's views with those of the Communists, his growing propensity to accept Communist advice and support, and the increasing role of Communists in Cuba -- though it concluded that Castro himself was

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still the ultimate arbiter of Cuban policy and that his regime could not be described as demonstrably under the domination or control of the international Communist movement.

e. Our most recent estimate, in June 1960, in effect argued that it was immaterial whether Castro himself was in fact a Communist -- that Cuba had become a base for communism in Latin America, that the Communists were more deeply entrenched than in Guatemala in 1954, and that the increasing power and initiative in the hands of Communists was close to giving them de facto control over the regime. However, the estimate reiterated the view that the Communists would avoid moves which would place Cuba demonstrably under international Communist control within the meaning of the Caracas resolution.

FOR THE BOARD OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES



SHERMAN KENT
Chairman

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ATTACHMENT TO MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR
"The Estimative Record on Cuba"

ESTIMATIVE CHRONOLOGY ON CUBA

1. We have reviewed the National Intelligence Estimates and ONE memoranda having to do with Cuba over the past eight years. The following paragraphs contain the major estimative judgments applying to Cuba -- either specifically or generally.

2. NIE 80-54, "The Caribbean Republics," 24 August 1954:
This paper indicated that the traditional ruling elements of the Caribbean republics were being faced by increasing demands for social, economic, and political change, coming from urban middle class elements with growing popular support. (The disturbance of the traditional order had been referred to also in NIE 70-52, "Conditions and Trends in Latin America Affecting US Security," 12 December 1952) How orderly eventual change would be depended in large measure on whether existing regimes could bring themselves to promote progress or whether, through static repression, they made virtually certain an eventual violent explosion.

3. We stated that the pressure for change had been effective to a considerable degree in Cuba. There the stability of the "generally unpopular" regime of military strong man Batista depended

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upon the continued support of the Army. We also stated that the Communist situation in Cuba was far from satisfactory; the Cuban Communist Party, the largest and most influential Communist Party in the Caribbean, had successfully penetrated other parties including those of the dictatorship, labor unions, and the bureaucracy.

4. NIE 80/90-55, "Conditions and Trends in Latin America,"
6 December 1955: This was a broad brush discussion of the area, whose only specific reference to Cuba stated that the prospects for stability there were not good. We included in our discussion references to the effects of military predominance on Latin America. We felt that military predominance generally tended to have a stabilizing effect, but that over the long-term military leadership did not have the capacity or means to solve national problems in an orderly, progressive fashion. Even though in the short term military leadership precluded leftist regimes based on mass support, this leadership's repressive tendencies in the face of mounting pressure for change rendered more likely the outbreak of revolutionary violence. We believed that in the long run, as social pressures increased and if economic problems remained unsolved, at least temporary reversion to demagoguery and extreme solutions for meeting

national problems was probable in some cases, with consequent strains on the inter-American system and on Latin American co-operation with the US.

5. NIE 80-57, "Political Stability in Central America and the Caribbean through 1958," 23 April 1957: Here we indicated that during the past eighteen months the position of Batista had been considerably weakened by growing unrest, that his regime was in jeopardy, and that Fidel Castro was his chief antagonist. Because we believed that Batista could not fully restore public order or check the emergence of new opposition, we gave him only an even chance of surviving through 1958; we saw a military-dominated junta as his most probable successor. Again, we pointed out that the sizable Cuban Communist Party was having some success and it was likely that its capabilities would increase.

6. Memorandum to the Director, "The Situation in Cuba," 13 June 1957: This paper's main purpose was to express our feeling that Batista's position had further weakened since April and that serious unrest would probably continue. At that time, it seemed unlikely in the event of Batista's downfall that Castro (or ex-President Prío) would achieve a dominant position. We did

indicate then that Castro's supporters had become somewhat bitter toward the US for its lack of support.

7. SNIE 85-58, "The Situation in Cuba," 24 November 1958:

Again we referred to the general dislike of Batista in Cuba and stated that Batista had resorted increasingly to authoritarian measures. We noted that the recent national elections had had little effect on the political and military impasse in Cuba. Moreover, the Cuban armed forces could not suppress the guerrillas without extensive improvements in their military posture. Nevertheless, the Cuban armed forces remained the most important element capable of breaking the political deadlock, by deposing the regime and establishing a junta. Such a junta almost certainly could not restore peace to Cuba in the next few months unless it could convince the revolutionary opposition that it would accord it significant influence.

8. We estimated that Castro probably could not overthrow the government in the next few months. At this point we noted that since mid-1958 rebel propaganda has stressed the supposed US preference for dictatorship and charged that Batista and some US officials were scheming to bring about US military intervention against the rebels. While we had insufficient evidence to establish

the degree of Communist influence in the 26 of July Movement in late 1958, we did say that the situation lent itself to Communist exploitation. Fidel Castro's control was not so firm that he could prevent infiltration even if he so desired. We characterized the nationalistic and anti-dictatorship line of the movement as "a horse which the Communists know well how to ride." Moreover, a few alleged Communist sympathizers held moderately important positions in the rebel movement, especially among Raul Castro's troops, and some Communists were undoubtedly in the lower levels of the rebel organization.

9. SNIE 85/1-58, "Developments in Cuba since mid-November, 16 December 1958: This paper indicated that the position of the dictatorship had deteriorated even more rapidly than was anticipated a month before and that the armed forces were showing increasing signs of demoralization. We believed that a military junta would not by itself restore peace and stability. To accomplish a quick pacification, the junta would have to offer a political solution satisfactory to Castro. To suppress Castro by force, the junta would require large scale outside assistance. We also stated our belief that if high political or military leadership failed to take drastic action to stem the momentum of the

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Castro operation, the civil war would be likely to spread at an ever increasing rate. "In this situation, the possibility cannot be excluded that the army in the field might turn against the government, either piecemeal, by going over the rebels, or in an organized way." We concluded that should demoralization of the army reach such a point that even a military junta would be unable to control the situation, or should Castro eventually win the civil war, a prolonged period of instability and disorder would almost certainly ensue, with consequent peril to American and other lives and property in Cuba.

10. SNIE 100-3-59, "Threats to the Stability of the US Military Facilities Position in the Caribbean Area and Brazil," 10 March 1959: At this time we stated that Castro was a nationalist, that some of his top advisers were antagonistic toward the US, and that these could count on extreme nationalists as well as on the Communist Party, whose overall prospects had measurably improved. It was probable that Castro would display considerable independence and flamboyance in his foreign policy and find the US a convenient whipping boy. While he would probably stop short of seeking cessation or major limitation of US use of the Guantanamo Naval Base,^f it was likely that he would sooner or later ask for major increases in benefits from the base.

11. SNIE 80-59, "The Situation in the Caribbean Through 1959,"

30 June 1959: This estimate stated that Castro was ruling Cuba as a dictator. We considered the most dangerous aspect of the Cuban situation to be the opportunity which it gave to Communists. The Communist Party had succeeded in identifying itself with the Cuban revolution, and was exploiting the situation to penetrate the bureaucracy, the army, organized labor and the agrarian reform institute, in some cases at top levels. "The Communists probably do not now control Castro, but they are in a position to exert influence in his regime and to carry on further organizational work ..." We also said it was unlikely that dissatisfied elements would challenge Castro successfully during 1959. Should Castro believe that the US Government or private interests were exerting pressure to bring about a modification of his policies, he would probably react strongly, possibly threatening the US Naval Base or expropriation of other large US holdings. We also stated our belief that Castro would continue to assist revolutionary exile groups in Cuba to invade their respective homelands.

12. SNIE 80/1-59, "The Situation in the Caribbean Through 1960," 29 December 1959: In this paper we gave Castro at least an even chance of remaining in power through 1960. We considered

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that Raul Castro and Che Guevara were "both pro-Communists if not actual Communists" and that they probably would assume control if Fidel Castro were eliminated. However, it seemed unlikely that they would be able to maintain control for long, and Cuba would almost certainly be in for a period of violent political upheaval.

13. We estimated that Communist influence would almost certainly continue to increase in 1960. Nevertheless, we did not believe that during 1960 the Communists would be able to force Fidel Castro to adopt policies to which he was opposed. On the other hand, we believed that Castro's attitude and policies would further the objectives of the Communists. "In fact he probably will become increasingly dependent on them and he may turn more to the Bloc for assistance."

14. We believed that Castro would almost certainly continue to maintain a strong anti-US position and would probably continue to move away from Cuba's traditional alignment with the West in the UN. Also, he would probably resume diplomatic relations with the USSR and recognize Communist China. He might also enter into wide-ranging agreements with the Communist Bloc.

15. SNIE 85-60, "Communist Influence in Cuba," 22 March 1960:
This SNIE pointed out that Fidel Castro remained the dominant element in the regime and expressed our belief that he was not disposed

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to accept direction from any foreign source. "His susceptibility to Communist influence and suggestion and his willing adoption of Communist patterns of action springs from the parallelism of his revolutionary views with the current Communist line in Latin America, from his conviction that communism offers no threat to his regime, and from his needs for external support..." We stated our feeling that for some time Communist leaders would avoid any challenge to Castro's authority or any claim to formal party participation in the government. Also, that the Cuban regime was in practice following the line set for Latin American Communist parties in Moscow in February 1959 and that it would continue to pursue policies advantageous to the Communists and to accept Communist assistance in carrying them out. We believed that Fidel Castro and his government were not then, nor would they soon be, demonstrably under the domination or control of the international Communist movement, in part because we felt that under the circumstances international communism did not desire this. Finally, we thought that the USSR would not hesitate to write off the Castro regime before involving itself in a direct military confrontation with the US over Cuba, or -- at least during the "present" state of Soviet policy -- in a major diplomatic crisis with the US.

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16. SNIE 85-2-60, "The Situation in Cuba," 14 June 1960:

At this juncture, we felt that Fidel Castro would almost certainly remain in power for the rest of the year. Without Fidel Castro, his brother and Che Guevara would probably seek to carry on, but a crisis probably would develop in a short time. Under such circumstances, there would be a better than even chance that the country would be thrown into a period of widespread disorders and bloodshed.

17. We said that we could not determine whether Castro himself was a Communist, but that "Communists are deeply involved in the remodeling of Cuba -- more so than in Guatemala in 1954 -- and the country has become a base for communism in Latin America..." We again said that Communists and their supporters were in positions of importance throughout the revolutionary government. "Indeed, the outlook is for Castro's increased dependence on Communists and they will continue to be able to make many decisions and take many actions without consulting him. If this trend continues, the Communists will gain de facto control of the Castro regime, and are near this point now." We continued to believe that Communists would avoid moves which would place Cuba demonstrably under the domination or control of the international Communist movement within the meaning of the Caracas resolution. We estimated that recognition of additional Bloc governments,

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including Communist China, was likely, and that Cuba would probably support the seating of that country in the UN. Bloc aid, probably including some military equipment, was likely to grow.

18. We foresaw no significant change in Cuban foreign policy in the next six months or so. It was almost certain that Castro would continue his extensive propaganda and proselytizing activities in Latin America.

19. Memorandum for the Director, "The Cuban Pot Boils Over,"
15 July 1960: US economic sanctions and Khrushchev's blunt warnings against US intervention in Cuba were now a part of the Cuban picture. We believed that these developments had strengthened Castro's hand over the short term. It was clear that the US sanctions had greatly increased Cuba's economic dependence on the Bloc. Moreover, Castro, backed firmly by the Bloc, surrounded by pro-Communist advisors and faced with US reprisals, was almost certainly more inclined to destroy remaining ties with the US than to back down. We believed that harassment of the Guantanamo Naval Base would increase and that there was a good chance of Cuba's demanding US withdrawal from the base.

20. We believed that a majority of Latin American governments was likely to support the US against the Cuban charge in the UN and

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to support consideration of the Cuban problem by the OAS. Much would depend on whether or not the US wholeheartedly supported a strong Venezuelan move in the OAS against Trujillo. Finally, even if a condemnation of Castro in general terms could be obtained, we believed that the US would have difficulty in securing enough OAS votes to cause multilateral sanctions against Castro.

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