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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

28 April 1961

STAFF MEMORANDUM NO. 23-61 (Internal ONE Working Paper - CIA  
Distribution Only)

SUBJECT: Consequences for the US of the Abortive Rebellion in  
Castro's Cuba: Some Preliminary Thoughts

NOTE TO THE BOARD

This memorandum is in response to the DDI's request about  
a week ago for a round-up on the subject. Our assessment is  
necessarily incomplete and tentative. We will ask the Board to  
determine with whom, if anyone, we should share it.

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Summary

1. The Cuban affair has obviously entered a new phase. Its nature will be greatly influenced by the policy which the US now sets for itself. Until this policy is clearly established, no definitive estimate can be made of the future courses of events or indeed of the consequences of recent developments. Nevertheless, some indications exist and some generalizations are possible.

2. Castro is stronger than ever in Cuba, although more isolated in Latin America as a whole. Most of the rest of the world sees the US on the defensive. The Communist bloc will almost certainly try to keep the US on the defensive, but to avoid a direct confrontation in so doing. The nationalist-neutralist countries at the very least see this as no time for

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closer understanding with the US. US allies in the underdeveloped world are generally more fearful for their own security and share with our Western European allies increased concern over what they consider the naivete and rashness of the US leadership.

General Reaction

3. General world reaction to the recent unsuccessful move against Castro has been along predictable lines with no new or significant theme having emerged as yet from the heavy volume of comment. The Communist bloc is making a maximum propaganda effort to emphasize the imperialist nature of the US and the inevitable failure of capitalist intervention. Most officials and the press in Western Europe are sympathetic with what they consider the embarrassment of the US but there is widespread concern at the damage to Western prestige consequent to the failure of the invasion.

4. Reaction in the underdeveloped world is generally divided along the lines of previous political orientation. Governments friendly to the US remain anti-Castro, although there is considerable criticism of the concept and technique of the effort to unseat him. The nationalist-neutralist countries

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are for the most part pro-Castro and to a slightly lesser degree anti-US. There are certain exceptions. Anti-US feeling has been expressed quite strongly in Jordan and Saudi Arabia while more understanding than might have been expected is evident in Ceylon and India. Most of the governments and the bulk of informed public opinion in Latin America are hostile to Castro, although a number of well-organized minority groups support him. Castro himself is exultant.

5. One thing is clear. World opinion generally agrees that: (1) the US was responsible for the intervention in Cuba; (2) the intervention, whatever its purpose, failed miserably. In the background is a widespread conception of confusion and contradiction in US policy and action and some fears of irresponsibility on the part of CIA. Much of this is drawn from the rich and juicy crop of comment in the US press. It is within this framework that most of the countries of the world are presently determining their policies -- policies which will reflect their ideas of how best to serve their own national interests.

#### Implications

6. On the whole, reaction to date is of relatively little help in trying to assess the implications for the US of the

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abortive revolt in Cuba. For one thing, the Cuban affair is not yet in full context. World opinion has already been influenced -- generally favorably -- by President Kennedy's reply to Khrushchev's note and the President's speech to the newspaper editors. It will be further affected as more information on what actually happened in Cuba comes out. Most important of all, it will be affected by future US and Cuban policies and actions. Under these circumstances, consideration of the consequences for the US must be tentative and speculative.

7. Cuba. In Cuba itself, Castro's position is stronger than before the invasion attempt. The opposition has lost some of its strongest forces; its factionalism is greater, and its confidence in the US for less. Castro's armed forces and militia were effective in defeating the invasion. Increased police repression and terror has almost certainly badly weakened existing opposition forces. Castro's hard-core supporters are more heavily armed and more enthusiastic in his behalf, and the widespread support which he has received abroad has probably increased his stature among many other Cubans. The abortive effort to unseat him will probably provide him with a useful excuse to justify further economic austerity, as well as a lever for additional Soviet aid. In general, unless Castro makes some

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major mistake (e.g. direct armed attack on some other Latin American country or prolongation of an extreme reign of terror) or the US scores some brilliant coup de main, Castro will probably be able to benefit from the fruits of his victory for some time to come.

8. Latin America. The Cuban affair has sharpened and dramatized the conflict between the US and Castro. As a result, it almost certainly has had the effect of further isolating the Castro regime from most of the rest of the governments of Latin America. A few may be more willing to move against him on their own or in cooperation with the US. In the latter case, they will probably insist on a fair share in direction of the enterprise. Others -- probably the majority -- will probably be more eager than ever to try to stand aside from what they fear may become a major imbroglio with far-reaching consequences. At the moment, all are probably concerned lest Castro's victory give radical elements in their own country increased strength.

9. The Rest of the Under Developed World. To most of the nationalist-neutralist countries, US involvement in the Cuban invasion constituted illicit interference in the internal affairs of a neighbor. In some places (e.g. Cambodia, Burma, the UAR)

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there will be a reopening of old wounds stemming from other clandestine operations. Generally, there will be at least temporary disillusion with the new US leadership and a wider conviction that the US will act in the same manner as the European imperialist powers when it considers its own vital interests to be at stake. The more radical countries will identify their own causes (Suez, West Irian, etc.) with Castro's. At the very least, all will see the present time as unfavorable for cooperation with the US. — This may be especially important in regard to Nehru who has been moving toward closer ties in the past year or so.

10. Uppermost in the minds of friendly governments in the area (e.g. Turkey, Iran, Pakistan, Nationalist China, Vietnam, Thailand) will be the question of US strength and prestige. Few of them are likely to question seriously the basic US intention and ability to protect them against direct Communist intervention. However, they will probably be more concerned about developing their own capability to ward off clandestine Soviet efforts. Whether these thoughts lead them to seek increased aid and security guarantees or to move toward disengagement and neutralism will be determined by their individual leaders and circumstances and, most importantly, by future US actions.

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11. Western Europe. In Western Europe, the most important immediate consequence of the abortive invasion is the increased concern it will produce in the minds of many government and public leaders as to US naivete and the foolhardiness of US intelligence. This of itself is unlikely to have any significant effect on the Western alliance, although it will probably encourage general European desires for a greater share in a more collective leadership of the West.

12. US involvement in Cuba will probably be used by colonial powers, Holland, Belgium, Portugal, and to a lesser degree the UK and France, to demand additional US sympathy for their problems with their overseas territories. Pacifist and many liberal groups will find the affair useful to promote their own objectives. With the exception of the more radical of these, however, Western Europe as a whole will probably remain content to leave the problem of Castro to the US.

13. The Sino-Soviet Bloc. To the Bloc, the most important result of the Cuban affair is the opportunity it has provided to put the US on the defensive all over the world. Moscow will try to maintain this situation as long as possible and, at the same time, to use the US "justification" of its Cuban

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policy as a basis for threats and alarms directed to US allies on its own periphery. More important, the Soviets are trying to make as costly as possible another attempt against Castro, which they almost certainly expect the US to launch. In the meantime, the USSR will probably provide increased economic and military assistance to Cuba but seek to avoid any more binding commitment of its own prestige to Castro's survival; in contrast to Suez, Moscow has not gone very far in claiming that its own rocket threats paralyzed the aggressor and saved the victim.

14. To the extent that Khrushchev judges that he has put the US on the defensive, he may feel that he can press harder at other points of East-West confrontation. Certainly he must be tempted to maintain the momentum of recent weeks by following Gagarin's feat and Castro's success with a further blow against American prestige in the Laotian affair. In addition, the Chinese Communists probably judge that, with this new confirmation of their thesis that imperialism is incorrigible, now is a good time to renew their pressures on Moscow for a generally harder Bloc course.

15. We believe, however, that the sum of these factors is not very great. There is probably nothing in the Cuban affair

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which has caused Bloc leaders to modify their basic views on American intentions or capabilities. While they would like to turn the Cuban victory to good account in some other area, they may also fear that this is a dangerous time in which to push the US too far. This factor is likely to be weighty, not in Laos, where they probably regard the risks of general war as low, but in Berlin, where we continue to believe that the USSR hopes to make advances in a relatively low-keyed fashion. Thus, while the atmosphere of East-West relations has been made more difficult and unpleasant, the Cuban affair at its present stage is not likely to cause any substantial change in Bloc policies.

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