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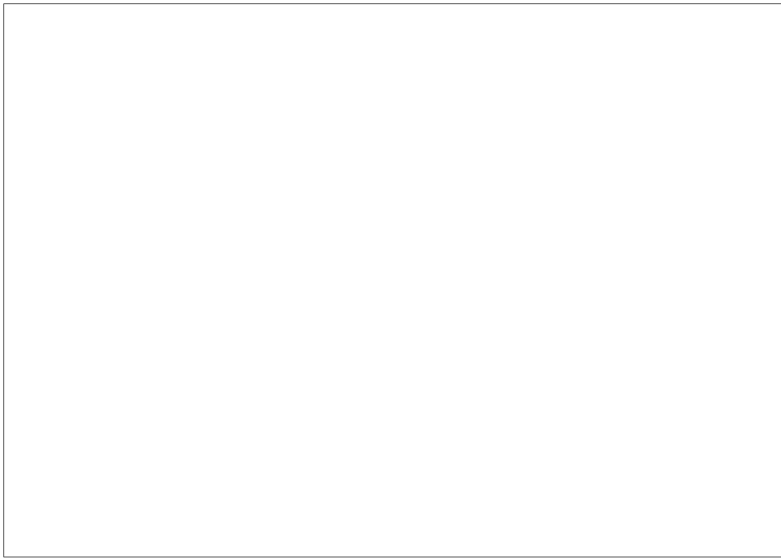
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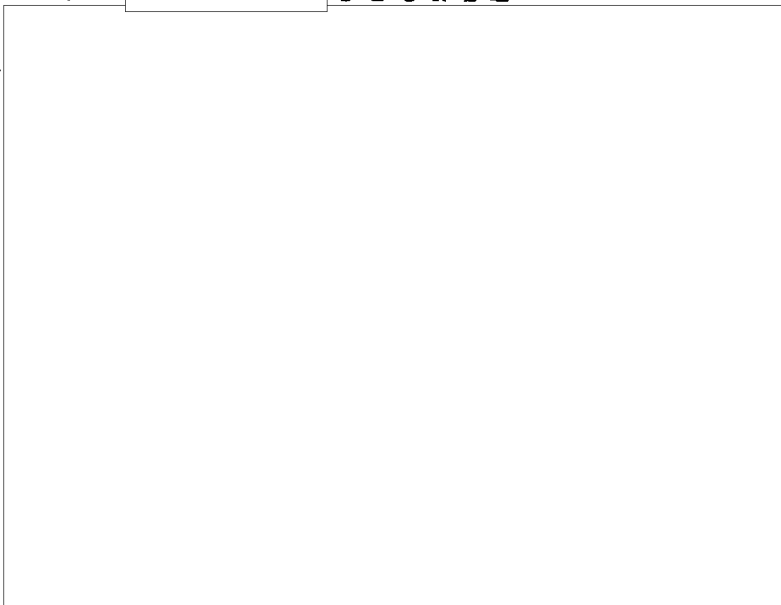
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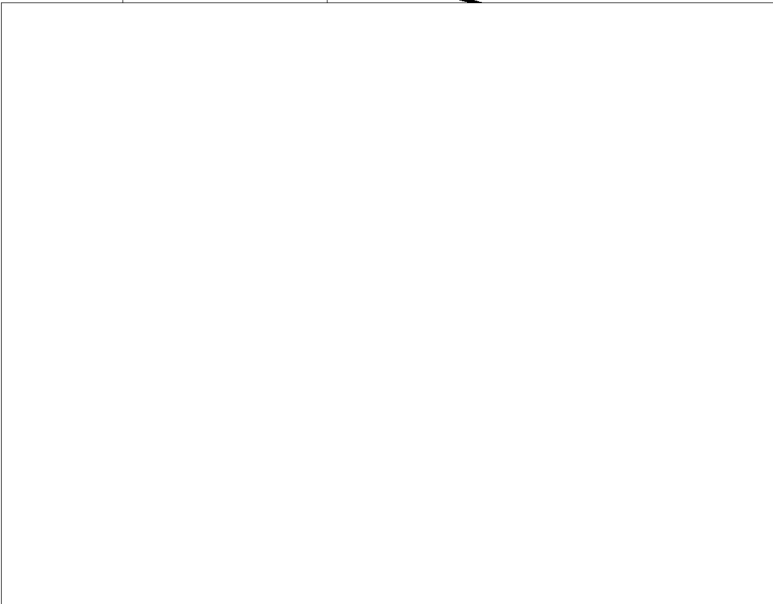
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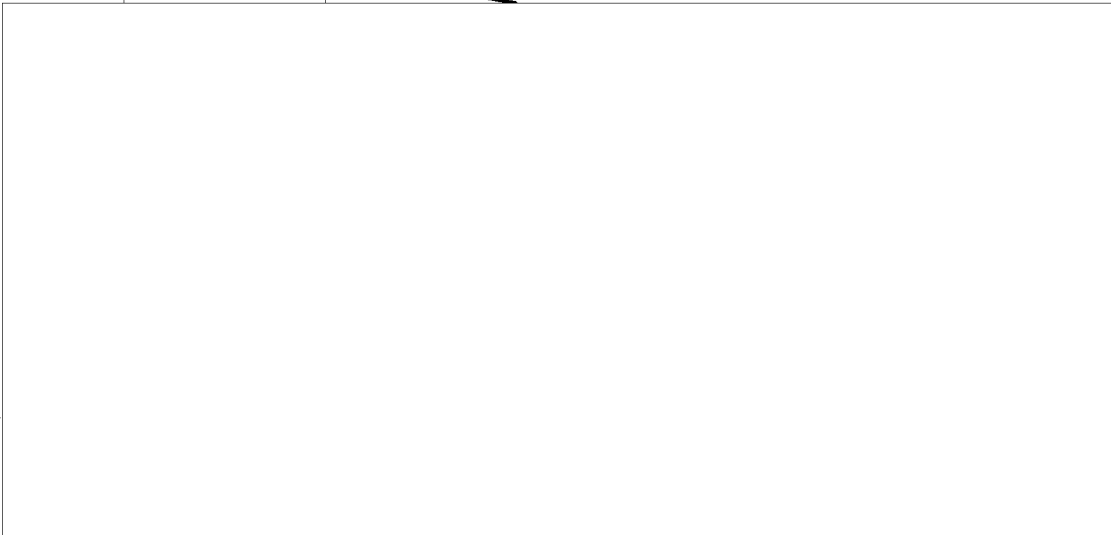


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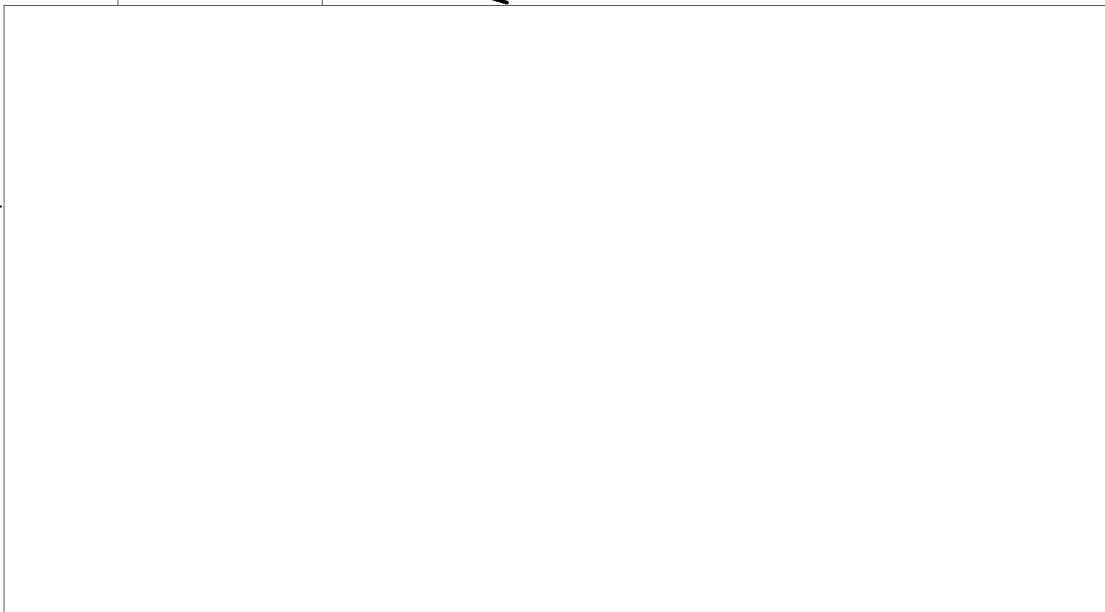
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SUBJECT: H/W SUPPORT CABLE FOR OCPAS LAB 96/051 FOR 02 MARCH 1996

HAVANA APPEARS TO HAVE MISCALCULATED THE INTERNATIONAL REACTION AND ACTED LARGELY OUT OF FRUSTRATION WITH REPEATED INCURSIONS BY BROTHERS TO THE RESCUE WHEN IT ORDERED THE DESTRUCTION OF THE TWO US-REGISTERED CIVILIAN AIRCRAFT LAST SATURDAY.

-- LAST JULY, PRESIDENT CASTRO DESCRIBED THE GROUP'S FIRST LEAFLET DROP OVER HAVANA AS AN "EXTRAORDINARY PROVOCATION," ADDING THAT CUBA'S PATIENCE COULD WELL BE EXHAUSTED. THE FOREIGN MINISTRY ISSUED A WARNING THAT, IF ADDITIONAL TERRITORIAL VIOLATIONS OCCURRED, INTRUDING BOATS COULD BE SUNK AND AIRCRAFT SHOT DOWN.

-- ANOTHER LEAFLET DROP OVER HAVANA IN MID-JANUARY ANGERED AND EMBARRASSED THE MILITARY, WHICH APPARENTLY WAS CAUGHT OFFGUARD. [REDACTED]

PAGE 8 [REDACTED] ~~SECRET~~

CASTRO MAY HAVE GIVEN THE MILITARY A GREEN LIGHT AFTER CONCLUDING THAT US STEPS TO RESTRAIN THE CUBAN AMERICAN GROUP WERE INSUFFICIENT TO PREVENT FURTHER TERRITORIAL VIOLATIONS. [REDACTED]

WEIGHING THE RISKS [REDACTED]

THE DECISION TO DESTROY--RATHER THAN TRY TO TURN BACK OR FORCE DOWN--THE AIRCRAFT REMAINS PUZZLING AND COMES AT A TIME WHEN CONDITIONS AT HOME AND ABROAD HAVE BEEN IMPROVING FOR THE CASTRO GOVERNMENT.

-- IN THE INTERNATIONAL ARENA, HAVANA HAS MADE SIGNIFICANT STRIDES IN INCREASING ITS LEGITIMACY.

-- AT HOME, THE ECONOMY IS BEGINNING TO RECOVER FROM AN ECONOMIC CONTRACTION OF 35 PERCENT FOLLOWING THE CUTOFF OF SOVIET AID IN 1989.

-- CASTRO HAS LITTLE TO FEAR FROM HIS MOST VISIBLE OPPONENTS, THE

PAGE 9 [REDACTED] ~~SECRET~~

SMALL AND DIVIDED DISSIDENT COMMUNITY. AS IT DEMONSTRATED LAST WEEK IN CRACKING DOWN ON THE UMBRELLA GROUP CUBAN COUNCIL, THE GOVERNMENT HAS KEPT DISSIDENTS MARGINALIZED AND OFF-BALANCE THROUGH INFILTRATION, HARASSMENT, AND IMPRISONMENT. [REDACTED]

THE CASTRO GOVERNMENT DOUBTLESS ANTICIPATED A NEGATIVE US REACTION TO THE SHOOTDOWN, BUT IT SEEMS TO HAVE BEEN TAKEN ABACK BY THE VEHEMENCE OF WASHINGTON'S RESPONSE AND THE WIDESPREAD INTERNATIONAL CONDEMNATION OF CUBA'S BEHAVIOR.

-- NATIONAL ASSEMBLY PRESIDENT ALARCON AND FOREIGN MINISTER ROBAINA WERE UNCHARACTERISTICALLY UNPREPARED WHILE PRESENTING THEIR CASES--AN INDICATION THE GOVERNMENT IS SCRAMBLING TO MANAGE THE CONTROVERSY RATHER THAN WORKING FROM A WELL-PLANNED STRATEGY. [REDACTED]

LIMITING THE DAMAGE [REDACTED]

AT THIS POINT, HAVANA IS TRYING TO FORESTALL ANY INTERNATIONAL SANCTIONS AND TO DO WHAT IT CAN TO PUT THE INCIDENT BEHIND IT.

PAGE 10 [REDACTED] ~~SECRET~~

-- BY PAINTING BROTHERS TO THE RESCUE AS A ROGUE ORGANIZATION, THE CASTRO GOVERNMENT IS TRYING TO IMPROVE ITS INTERNATIONAL IMAGE AND PRESS THE US TO IMPOSE STRONGER RESTRAINTS ON THE GROUP'S ACTIVITIES.