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JFK ASSASSINATION SYSTEM  
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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

3 November 1961

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: The Situation and Prospects in Cuba

Summary

1. The Castro regime has sufficient popular support and repressive capabilities to cope with any internal threat likely to develop within the foreseeable future. The regime faces serious, but not insurmountable, economic difficulties. The contrast between its roseate promises and the grim actuality is producing disillusionment and apathy. Some specially motivated elements have recently dared to demonstrate their disapproval. The bulk of the population, however still accepts the Castro regime, or is at least resigned to it, and substantial numbers still support it with enthusiasm. At the same time, the regime's capabilities for repression are increasing more rapidly than are the potentialities for active resistance.

SECRET

SECRET

The Economic Situation and Prospects

2. The Cuban economy is now feeling the impact of three revolutionary changes: (a) the loss of most of its experienced middle and upper level managerial talent; (b) the imposition of elaborate state controls; and (c) a drastic shift in the trading pattern, from primary dependence on the US to primary dependence on the Soviet Bloc. The US embargo has produced some economic difficulties through the denial of spare parts for previously acquired equipment, almost all of which was of US origin. Nevertheless, the production of sugar, the principal export crop, has been increased, and the production of tobacco and tropical fruit, the other leading exports, has been maintained. Although Cuba's free world trade and foreign exchange reserves have declined sharply, the Bloc is taking enough exports and returning enough consumer goods and machinery to keep the economy going.

3. The domestic production of foodstuffs and other consumer goods, and the imports obtained from the Bloc and elsewhere, are together not sufficient to compensate for the loss of former imports from the US. Personal consumption has declined, especially in the cities, and most drastically in the case of the upper and middle classes. In some rural areas, however, especially in

SECRET

centers of sugar production, living conditions have been substantially improved, particularly in terms of housing and sanitation. These examples of the tangible benefits received by some keep alive the hopes of many others.

4. In addition to trade, the Bloc has extended to Cuba some \$357 million in credits for industrial development. However, only a few of these development projects are yet underway, nor is much likely to be accomplished for another year or more.

5. In general, the Cuban economy is characterized by major shortages and a high degree of disorganization. This state of affairs will continue for some time to come, and may indeed get somewhat worse. In view of the availability of Bloc assistance, however, we do not believe that the economy will deteriorate so far as to bring about Castro's overthrow, or force him to make basic changes in his policy. On the contrary, the situation will probably begin to improve within a year or so, as the new Communist-type organization takes hold, managerial experience increases, and foreign trade is adjusted to new channels.

Popular Acceptance of the Regime

6. Initially, almost all Cubans hailed the triumph of the Revolution with enthusiasm. Disillusionment, however, came quickly

to the urban middle class, urban organized labor, and the landed gentry. It has since spread to small peasant proprietors and even to humbler folk, who are beginning to appear in significant numbers in the flow of refugees from Cuba.

7. The severe internal repression which accompanied the defeat of the April invasion stilled, for a time, all manifestations of opposition within the country. By September, however, this effect had worn off sufficiently for Catholic crowds in Havana and other cities to dare to defy the regime's prohibition of certain public religious observances. This was the first occasion on which the regime had been forced to use gunfire to disperse hostile public demonstrations. It was therefore indicative of a significant change in the psychological situation.

8. There have also been some increase in small-scale guerrilla and sabotage activity and a considerable increase in such passive forms of resistance as absenteeism. However, most disaffected Cubans now think primarily in terms of escape. In mid-September, some 15,000 had completed legal arrangements to leave the country which were then cancelled by the government, and some 500 were in asylum in the several Latin American embassies in Havana. Illegal departures occur almost daily.

SECRET

9. Despite these manifestations of disaffection, the great bulk of the population still accepts the regime and substantial numbers still support it with enthusiasm. The sprawling revolutionary bureaucracy now embodies a new class with a very definite personal stake in the regime.

Castroist Political Organization

10. The regime is now in the process of a complete reorganization of the form of government in Cuba, and of the organization of a new totalitarian political party to operate and control it. The Communist model is apparent in both instances.

11. The traditional provincial and municipal governments are being replaced by juntas (soviets) for "coordination, execution, and inspection" (JUCEI). Already established in each province of Cuba, the JUCEI's consists of a "provincial congress," representative of all major economic entities in the territory, which meets occasionally; a "plenum" of the congress, which meets every few months; and several smaller bodies which meet frequently and actually direct the provincial administration. The primary function of all JUCEI is the local implementation of plans received from higher authority.

SECRET

12. The new totalitarian political machine is to be the United Party of the Cuban Socialist Revolution, a merger of the amorphous 26 of July Movement (or what is left of it) with the well organized Communist Party. Although Castro is of course to be the supreme head of this party, the man who is pushing the project is Blas Roca, the Communist Secretary General. Party membership is to be limited to the elite of the revolutionary struggle and prerequisite to appointment to any important political or economic position.

13. A significant arm of the Castroist political organization is the paramilitary Association of Rebel Youth (AJR), derived from the previous Communist youth organization. These teenagers, of the type that would be found in juvenile gangs, are a terror to their parents, their schoolmates, and the general public. They have charge of indoctrination in the schools and have been active in the formation of the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (see paragraph <sup>22</sup>~~20~~). Active participation in the AJR is to be prerequisite to educational and eventually political advancement.

The Castroist Security Apparatus

14. The forces now available to the regime to suppress insurrection or repel invasion are:



SECRET

- a. The Rebel Army (32,000)
- b. The Rural Police (9,600)
- c. The Rebel Air Force (2,000)
- d. The Navy (2,000)
- e. The Militia (250,000, including 83,000 women)
- f. The Rebel Youth (150,000, including 10,000 girls)
- g. The National Police (9,000)
- h. The Maritime Police

15. The administrative and command structure of these forces is extremely loose; the improvisation of ad hoc commands including disparate elements is the common practice. Confusion and lack of coordination are therefore likely in any emergency situation.

16. The army has been strengthened by the receipt of Bloc arms and is being instructed in their use by Bloc personnel. However, it has had little or no combined arms or field training. It displayed great tactical ineptitude at the time of the April landing.

17. About a fifth of the army are veterans of Castro's guerrilla struggle against Batista. The remainder are early adherents. In time, however, Castro came to doubt, with reason, their loyalty to the course the Revolution had taken on achieving

SECRET

power. The militia were therefore established as an alternative armed support for the regime. The original units were composed of Castro's most ardent followers. In time, however, the militia was so greatly expanded by recruitment under pressure that its revolutionary zeal was considerably diluted. Castro has therefore transferred his favor and reliance to the newly organized Rebel Youth, who are now his most fanatical followers.

18. In general, the militia and the Rebel Youth, both part-time forces, have only light arms which are issued to them only on occasion. They are not capable of sustained combat, but are effective for controlling and coercing the general public. In addition, some selected units of the militia and the Rebel Youth are specially armed and trained and are, in effect, army units specially dedicated to Fidel Castro.

19. The capabilities of the air force have been greatly enhanced by the acquisition of MIG aircraft and the return of personnel from training in the Bloc. There are now about 35 MIG-15's and MIG-19's operational in Cuba.

20. The navy is unreliable and distrusted; most of its personnel were taken into custody at the time of the April

SECRET

landing. Mutinies, defections, and purges have left it few professionally trained and technically qualified men.

21. Recently, the professional security agencies of the government -- Army G-2 (the Secret police), the National Police, and the Maritime Police -- were transferred from the Ministry of the Armed Forces to a newly created Ministry of the Interior. This change is likely to enhance their effectiveness. It does not indicate a reduction of Raul Castro's power, since Ramiro Valdes, the new Minister of the Interior, is one of his close associates. Valdes is a Communist, formerly head of Army G-2.

22. A network of Committees for the Defense of the Revolution is being established to provide an additional agency for political surveillance and control. What these committees lack in professional competence, they make up for in pervasiveness and zeal. The Rebel Youth have been particularly active in promoting their formation. The announced goal is 100,000 committees with over a million members covering every community in Cuba.

If Castro Were to Die

23. Fidel Castro's personal prestige and popularity were indispensable to the regime in the earlier stages of its development.

SECRET


None of his lieutenants could have inherited the personal authority which he then exercised. His loss now, by assassination or by natural causes, would certainly have an unsettling effect, but would probably not prove fatal. The Revolution is by now well institutionalized; the regime has firm control of the country; its principal surviving leaders would probably rally together in the face of a common danger. Indeed, a dead Castro, incapable of impulsive personal interventions in the orderly administration of affairs, might be more valuable to them as a martyr than he is now.

24. The fact remains that Castro has had to control tensions, jealousies, and conflicts of interest and purpose among his principal lieutenants: Raul Castro, the head of the armed forces; "Che" Guevara, the director of industrial development; Nunez Jimenez, the director of agrarian reform. There could be a falling out among them at Castro's funeral. There would almost certainly be a struggle for power among them afterward, which might break into the open.

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25. A coordinated estimate of the Cuban situation and prospects, NIE 85-62, "The Situation in Cuba," is scheduled for USIB consideration in January.

FOR THE BOARD OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES:

  
SHERMAN KENT  
Chairman

- 11 -

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