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JFK ASSASSINATION SYSTEM
IDENTIFICATION FORM

AGENCY : NARA
RECORD NUMBER : 176-10038-10035
RECORD SERIES : The Personal Papers of Gordon Chase
AGENCY FILE NUMBER :

ORIGINATOR :
FROM :
TO :
TITLE : Meeting With the President-December 19, 1963
DATE : 12/27/1963
PAGES : 6
SUBJECTS :
DOCUMENT TYPE :
CLASSIFICATION :
RESTRICTIONS :
CURRENT STATUS :
DATE OF LAST REVIEW : 9/10/2000
OPENING CRITERIA :
COMMENTS : Gordon Chase, Box 1: Chronological file 8/63-12/63, Box 1. Box 8.

TOP SECRET - SENSITIVE

December 27, 1963

MEETING WITH THE PRESIDENT - December 19, 1963 - 10:55 A.M.

SUBJECT: Cuba

Others Present: Acting Secretary Ball; Ambassador Thompson; Deputy Under Secretary Johnson; Assistant Secretary Martin; John Crimmins; Acting Secretary Gilpatric; Secretary Vance; General Wheeler; Secretary Dillon; Acting Director General Carter; Richard Helms; Desmond Fitzgerald; Deputy Director Wilson; McGeorge Bundy; William Moyers; George Reedy; Gordon Chase.

The primary purpose of the meeting was to brief the President in depth about some of the basic Cuban issues. Essentially, the discussion described where we have been since January, 1963, where we are now, and where we can go. (An outline which was prepared for the discussion is attached.)

1. A large part of the meeting was devoted to a briefing by Mr. Fitzgerald and a general discussion on CIA's present covert program and on the U. S. Government's economic denial program. Essentially, this part of the discussion covered 6 areas.

(a) Mr. Fitzgerald described covert intelligence activities directed against Castro's regime, including the numbers, characteristics, and geographic spread of CIA assets within Cuba.

(b) Mr. Fitzgerald described CIA-controlled radio programs and other propaganda media directed at Cuba which have been used to encourage low risk, simple sabotage and other forms of active and passive resistance, and to stimulate tension within the regime and between Cuba and the Soviet Bloc. He noted the recent increase of spontaneous anti-regime propaganda inside Cuba.

(c) Mr. Fitzgerald said that CIA has worked with State and other agencies to deny to Cuba commodities from the Free World which are critical to the economy. The results have been mixed. For example, while we have been able to penetrate certain European firms which deal with Cuba, we also know that equipment vitally needed in Cuba, some of U.S. origin, reaches the island via Canada and Great Britain.

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The group agreed that this is not an easy problem; Mr. Ball said that our allies have always been reluctant to interfere with private traders and have always had a different view of Free World/Bloc trade than we have had. Nevertheless, it was also agreed that we should intensify our efforts and that there are still things we can do. First, Mr. Crimmins noted that we could consider ways in which the new amendment to the Foreign Assistance Authorization Act (prevents assistance to any country whose planes or ships carry commodities to Cuba) can be used to reinforce our economic denial program. Second, Mr. Ball said that the question of Canadian trade in sensitive items would be taken up with the Canadian Minister of Economics and Trade on December 20; later, Mr. Ball will talk to other appropriate Free World governments also. Third, the President directed that the agencies prepare a detailed memorandum (including the names of companies and commodities involved in Free World trade with Cuba) which, inter alia, will be useful for his forthcoming talks with Prime Ministers Home and Pearson.

(d) Mr. Fitzgerald spoke about CIA's program to identify, seek out, and establish contact with potentially dissident non-Communist elements in the power centers of the regime with a view to stimulating an internal coup which would dislodge Castro. Our effort is based on the premise that a popular uprising in Cuba is unlikely, primarily because Castro is capable of controlling such an uprising. Instead, we are trying to penetrate the Cuban regime's power structure. In this regard, we have had only limited success. On the one hand, we have been able to make an important penetration in the Cuban army. On the other hand, the dissident elements, while willing to act, are not yet willing to act together. They simply don't trust each other, mainly because Castro has been successful, in the past, in penetrating dissident groups.

The President asked whether there is any significant insurgency within Cuba. Mr. Fitzgerald said there is some but that there is no national movement on which we can build. Mr. Bundy noted that the insurgents generally seem to suffer heavy losses at Castro's hands.

(e) Mr. Fitzgerald said that CIA has directed four small scale, externally mounted sabotage operations for the purpose of stimulating resistance and hurting Cuba economically. The discussion then focussed on a proposed attack on a major target -- the Matanzas power plant. Mr. Fitzgerald noted that this would have a significant favorable impact, psychologically as well as economically; the dissidents would view the attack as evidence that the Johnson Administration is not giving up the fight for Cuba.

But there are a number of disadvantages to the power plant attack. First, the chances of total success (e. g. target destroyed, no one caught) are less than 50-50 while the chances of partial success (target destroyed, people caught) are only somewhat better than 50-50. Second, if the raiders get caught, they will undoubtedly admit their CIA connection. (General Carter believed this point was weak -- we get blamed for everything that happens in Cuba anyway.) Third, such an attack will be highly visible and will have a high noise-level. In this regard, Mr. Bundy said that we might want to lie low for now so that Castro, presently under a strain because of the arms cache discovery, will not be able to shift the accusing finger in our direction. Fourth, Mr. Ball said that it might slow up the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Cuba. Fifth, Ambassador Thompson said that the timing seemed bad -- the Soviets now appeared to be in a situation where they may be thinking of cutting back aid to Cuba. They will draw a lot of conclusions from the first acts of President Johnson. An attack on a big Cuban target could give Castro important leverage in his negotiations for more Soviet aid.

General Wheeler thought that, to improve the chance of success, we might want to try to hit the Matanzas power plant from the air; it should be noted that there have already been some free-lance raids over Cuba. Alexis Johnson pointed out that an air ~~attack~~ might cause retaliation against one of our U-2 flights.

In response to a question, Secretary Vance indicated that he was in favor of an attack on Matanzas.

It was decided that there will be no air or ground attack on the Matanzas power plant at this time, primarily because of its high probability of failure and because of the Soviet dimension. However, it was agreed, in principle, that low-risk sabotage efforts could go forward along with the planning necessary to develop an air strike capability.

(f) Mr. Fitzgerald described CIA's program in aiding two autonomous Cuban exile groups, which will be operating from outside the U. S. One group, which is headed by Manuel Artime, will start operating out of Costa Rica and Nicaragua in February; the other group is headed by Manolo Ray who is somewhat to the left of Artime, but probably has the best following within Cuba. Both of these groups will conduct externally mounted raids on Cuba, and will send teams inside Cuba to conduct internal sabotage and to establish contact with dissidents. Mr. Fitzgerald added that there are some disadvantages in these operations -- the groups aren't trained by CIA and they operate outside of CIA control. But there are advantages too -- they operate from outside United States territory and we will have relatively little trouble denying U. S. association with these groups.

Mr. Bundy noted, and Mr. Fitzgerald agreed, that these groups operate a long distance away from the target; we cannot expect too much effect from their raids.

2. Mr. Bundy gave a very quick briefing on some other aspects of the current Cuban situation. (The group paused to read the attached CIA situation brief.)

(a) With respect to Soviet/Cuban military strength on the island, Mr. Bundy noted that one of our primary objectives is to ensure that there is no reintroduction of offensive missiles. The camera is our best inspector and, so far as we know, there are no offensive missiles now in Cuba. Mr. Bundy added that we are concerned about the transfer of SAM control to the Cubans in about mid-1964, and we will have to watch this development carefully. As for the Soviet troops, the general consensus of the group was that the big withdrawals are over and that, from here on, the withdrawals will proceed more slowly.

(b) Mr. Bundy noted, in passing, our anti-subversion efforts. The key to the problem is to build up the will and capabilities of the Latin American countries to counter the threat. Our efforts in the field of controlling travel between Latin America and Cuba are also important.

(c) Mr. Bundy described briefly the very tenuous, sensitive, and marginal contacts we have established with Castro himself. The initiative is on Castro's part and we are essentially faced with a decision as to whether or not we are prepared to listen to what Castro has to say. Mr. Ball noted that such U.S. / Cuban contacts could have an unsettling effect on Soviet/Cuban relations.

3. Mr. Bundy described several unilateral and bilateral courses of action we can take in the future to make life difficult for Castro.

(a) Air attacks, unleashing of exiles (allowing them to use U.S. territory as a base for attacks on Cuba), and low level flights are aggressive-type acts which have distinct advantages but which are similar in that they ~~will~~ tend to raise the noise-level. Low level flights, for example, would provide us with more intelligence and would irritate and harass Castro. At the same time, they could precipitate the shooting down of a U-2.

(b) Mr. Bundy said that we can take further unilateral shipping measures -- e.g. close ports and deny U.S.-financed commodities to lines engaged in Free World shipping to Cuba. He noted, however, that we have found through past experience that bilateral measures are more effective in reducing Free World shipping to Cuba. At the same time, we should not deceive ourselves.

We should recognize that the Soviets are capable of handling all Cuba's shipping needs even if we are able to eliminate Free World shipping to Cuba.

(c) Mr. Bundy said that the President could make a public statement in the near future, taking a more vigorous line than we have in the past. He noted that in his November 18 speech, President Kennedy made two points about Cuba -- the first was designed to encourage anti-Castro elements within Cuba to revolt, and the second was to indicate that we would not permit another Cuba in the Hemisphere.

(d) Bilaterally there are possibilities of increasing our pressures against Free World trade to Cuba. Spain should be a high priority target.

NOTE: At this point the President left the room and there was a brief discussion about the exiles in Florida. Mr. Crumrine said that resettlement remains our basic policy. It is true that the exiles feel that the pressure for their resettlement is intense. In fact, it is no more intense now than it has been for some time.

5. On the President's return to the room, Mr. Bundy introduced the subject of the discovery in Venezuela of the Cuban arms cache.

(a) Mr. Helms gave a graphic presentation of the link between the arms cache and a plot to upset the elections in Caracas.

(b) Mr. Martin explained the status of the OAS investigation of the arms cache. The evidence is convincing in showing that the arms were from Cuba. The OAS investigating team is still working on its report. Hopefully, it will be able to tie the arms cache into a general plot to subvert Venezuela. The report should be ready by about January 10.

(c) Mr. Bundy described the types of action we can hope to get in the OAS as a result of the discovery of the arms cache. The most interesting is the surveillance action where we have essentially two basic choices -- we may want to push for a system which involves search and seizure of Cuban vessels on the high seas; this implies the possible use of force. Or we can push for a system involving the search and seizure of Cuban vessels in territorial waters; this evades the issue of force. Mr. Bundy added that it is still too early to know how far the Latin Americans will go in support of force against Castro. We have put out feelers.

6. Mr. Bundy brought up the problem of lifting travel restrictions on Americans who wish to go to Cuba. Mr. Ball noted that a great number of students want to

go down to Cuba during the Christmas holidays and that Justice Department recommends that we lift our travel restrictions. If we don't, we will probably be obliged to put many of the students in jail when they return; this will be embarrassing. Mr. Ball added that the State Department is tentatively opposed to lifting the travel restrictions because of the effect it will have on Latin American countries. We have been trying to get the Latin Americans to impose restrictions on travel to Cuba; if we lift our own restrictions, our position will be considerably weakened. Mr. Ball said that he would be meeting with the Attorney General later in the day to talk about the subject.

Tentatively, the President indicated that he favored maintaining the travel restrictions and a policy of selective prosecution.

Gordon Chase