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TO : MR. CALIFANO

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SUBJECTS :

BRITISH GUIANA
CUBAN ARMS SHIPMENTS
VENEZUELA

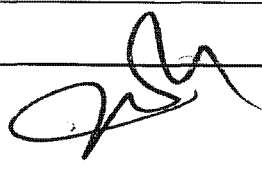
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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Office of Current Intelligence
16 February 1963

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CURRENT INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Alleged Cuban Arms Shipments to Venezuela
via British Guiana

1. There is no confirmation of reported Cuban arms shipments into British Guiana either for local use or for Venezuelan revolutionaries. However, Cuban ships periodically call at British Guiana to pick up rice and could offload weapons without detection along the unguarded coast before reaching port. Once in Georgetown harbor, all Cuban vessels are searched by Guianese under nominal British supervision. Reports of these searches are made available through [redacted] to US authorities; all such reports to date have been negative although there are several ways by which this inspection can be evaded.

2. Two Cuban seamen who defected in Canada on 6 February have alleged that the Cuban merchant ship BAHIA DE TANAMO has been smuggling Czech guns into British Guiana destined ultimately for revolutionaries in Venezuela. The BAHIA DE TANAMO did visit Georgetown on 6-7 January and the BAHIA DE NIPE--rumored to be smuggling arms in 1962--was there on 15-22 January. Both of these ships--the only two Cuban vessels to go to British Guiana in January--are engaged in a regular trade between the two countries. Since 1961 British Guiana has been selling rice to Cuba, and recently added timber; Cuba sells cement to British Guiana. Travellers have also used these ships occasionally to enter the colony from Cuba and the ships have picked up students for Cuba and onward transit to the Soviet bloc.

3. These ships could have carried weapons when they left Cuba and it would be possible for them to evade port inspection by first offloading any clandestine arms into small boats somewhere along the

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unguarded Guianese coast. The area on both sides of the Venezuela - British Guiana border is almost unpopulated and is cut by many small creeks. This would appear to be the most likely of many possible ways for Cuba to ship arms into Venezuela without detection. One unconfirmed report of last November mentioned a discussion between Mikoyan and Castro about an "economic treaty" between Cuba and British Guiana that would provide for sending Cuban arms and sabotage experts to Venezuela via British Guiana.

4. It is generally believed that Cuban policy is to avoid the actual shipment of arms to subversive groups abroad on the theory that such groups should be self-sustaining. Should Cuba feel the Venezuelan situation ripe for an overthrow of Betancourt, however, an exception might be made. No arms which can be traced back to Castro provenance have been detected in Venezuela, however.

5. Neither the Venezuelans nor the British patrol the coast. The British maintain no ships in the area; the Venezuelans have suitable patrol craft but not in adequate numbers. As British Guiana now has full internal self-government, inspections in the Georgetown area are actually made by local personnel; the commissioner of police, however, is a British national. Inspection in the countryside for possible smuggled arms caches is not feasible because both the local police and the 600 British troops in the country are concentrated in the Georgetown area. However, [redacted] have been cooperating closely with their US counterparts and state they have no evidence in support of press allegations that Cuban arms are being sent into British Guiana.

6. An untested source in a position to know stated that in November Jagan's party decided to acquire arms--presumably from Cuba--and to start its youth on a military training program. These plans, as reported, involved military training in the party's downtown headquarters. No such activity has yet been noted, however.