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U.S. Officials Doubt New Cuban Exile Push Perils Castro Regime

Strong Military Forces Await
Raiders; Eventual Success
May Hinge on Split in Army

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WASHINGTON—If the sudden outburst of Cuban exile activity against Fidel Castro has you on the edge of your seat, the sobering word from U.S. authorities is: Sit back.

The exiles' war against Castro may be warming up a bit. A daring refugee leader is headed, with much advance fanfare, for a clandestine landing in Communist-controlled Cuba—if he's not already on the island. In Havana Fidel Castro yesterday proclaimed a full military alert. Liberation fever grips Cuban exile groups in Miami, as reports swirl of "something big" afoot.

But the consensus among analysts here is that the exile effort will have to warm up considerably more before it poses much of a problem for the Castro government.

If the story of the decline and fall of the Castro government is ever written, its beginnings might possibly be traced back to the spring of 1964, and even conceivably to this week's expected bold foray into Cuba by exile leader Manuel Ray. But the real origins would be more likely to lie in Castro's growing economic troubles or his widening split with other Latin lands, or in an upheaval from within Cuba. And even in the latter event, historians might be hard put to find more than casual connection between the current spate of hit-and-run raids or infiltration efforts and anything that may befall the Cuban strongman in the months or years ahead.

"More Excitement Than Action"

At least that's the consensus here. "There's a lot more excitement than action in all this current exile effort," says one old Cuba hand. His view, shared by most other specialists in the subject, is that the most skillful effort to undermine the Castro regime would require a matter of several years—barring "something big" that nobody could reasonably hope to detect or predict. Mr. Castro, of course, could suddenly be shot. A major revolt by the Cuban army, for another example, would have to escape Castro's advance notice to succeed; so, to start with, it would probably escape outside detection as well.

"To the extent that there's any optimism about overthrowing Castro any time soon," says one high U.S. official, "it rests on the fact that there's an awful lot we don't and can't know. But everybody agrees it's a long shot in any case."

A certain amount of conjecture lies behind this bleak judgment, but there are also some hard facts about Castro's strengths, the exiles' weaknesses and the role the U.S. is currently willing to play in helping bring the Havana regime down. Open U.S. military intervention is out, barring gross provocation—an attack by the Cubans on this country's Guantanamo base or the felling of U.S. reconnaissance planes by Cuban missiles—and this Premier Castro is thought unlikely to provide. A repeat of anything resembling the Bay of Pigs fiasco of 1961, with the U.S. lending an ill-concealed hand to a Cuban invasion force, is even more firmly ruled out.

This leaves only the option of a drawn-out subversion effort, with the U.S. in a position to covertly support those anti-Castro activities it favors, such as the infiltration of Cubans willing to stay and help build an underground, while discouraging activities it does not favor, such as splashy hit-and-run raids. The harassment of Castro's military forces achieved by these pin pricks, most U.S. tacticians argue, is more than outweighed by the opportunity they provide the Cuban government to clamp down all the harder within Cuba while branding the U.S. as "aggressor" in the United Nations and elsewhere.

A Cuban Affair

Just how far the U.S. may go in helping the exiles, is, of course, a dark secret. But the official line is that any successful anti-Castro effort must be largely a Cuban affair, and there is sound basis for believing that any such effort faces imposing odds.

Look at Castro's military power. His economy may be stagnant, and the pathetic trickle of refugees, putting to sea in everything from small boats to bathtubs, hardly suggests a contented populace. But in place of the six propeller-driven planes which demolished the Bay of Pigs invasion, Castro has an estimated 100 Russian MIG jets, plus as many helicopters. His 100,000-man regular army is far better equipped than it was three years ago; so is his naval patrol fleet.

Two special counter-insurgency groups, one for land action (the "fight against bandits" force) and the other for coastal patrol (the "fight against pirates" force), bolster invasion defenses.

The estimate of most analysts is that landings by groups, much larger than a dozen men are probably impossible. And with landings of this size, it's reckoned it would take many months to build a guerrilla force capable of even holding up in the mountains and standing off Castro's troops.

The best hope, shared by Mr. Ray and other exiles, as well by U.S. strategists, would there-

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