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CIA Helped Fund Castro In '50s, Author Contends

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Associated Press

The Central Intelligence Agency, which allegedly sponsored numerous attempts to assassinate Cuban President Fidel Castro, secretly provided financial support to Castro's movement before his triumph in 1959, according to a new book.

Tad Szulc, in "Fidel, A Critical Portrait," said the CIA's apparent goal was to purchase goodwill for the United States in the event that the rebels succeeded.

Following Castro's rise to power, the CIA sponsored an attempted invasion by exiles in 1961. The agency later sought on eight occasions to assassinate Castro, according to a 1975 report by the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence. Castro has said there have been 25 such attempts on his life.

Szulc said the CIA had a far more benign view of Castro's 26th of July Movement as it was gathering strength in the fall of 1957, about a year before it ousted dictator Fulgencio Batista.

"Uncle Sam was engaged in a number of actions in Cuba that were both contradictory and mysterious," Szulc wrote. "On the one hand, the United States continued to supply the Batista regime with weapons to fight the rebels, while on the other hand, it secretly channeled funds to the 26th of July Movement through the CIA."

He said it was unclear whether the funding was formally authorized by the Eisenhower administration or undertaken by the agency on its own. Nor was it clear, he said, whether Castro knew of it.

"A new reconstruction of this United States involvement with Castro shows that between October or November of 1957 and the middle of 1958, the CIA delivered no less than $50,000 to a half-dozen or more key members of the 26th of July Movement in Santiago," Szulc wrote.

Szulc said, "it is a sound assumption that the CIA wished to hedge its bets in Cuba and purchase goodwill among some members of the movement, if not Castro's goodwill, for future contingencies."

He added that the United States pursued two-track policies elsewhere in similar circumstances.

Asked about Szulc's account, CIA spokeswoman Kathy Pherson said Friday night that it would take several days to determine whether the agency would be able to comment, since the report deals with events of almost 30 years ago.

The Polish-born Szulc was a longtime correspondent for The New York Times, and has written several books on Latin America and the Caribbean. He lived in Cuba in 1984 and 1985 to research the book.

In the book, Szulc claimed that Castro was a confirmed Marxist upon taking power in 1959.

"Castro set out from his first day in power to destroy every vestige of the old social order in Cuba," Szulc wrote. "He accomplished it through the extraordinary procedure of operating for well over a year a 'parallel' government in Havana, concealed from his own cabinet ministers, to say nothing of his fellow Cubans."

While secretly planning a Marxist future for Cuba during the early stages of the revolution, the author said, Castro "savagely rejected domestic and foreign accusations that communism was creeping into his 'humanist' revolution."

"By the end of 1960," Szulc wrote, "his police and political controls were strong enough to cope with domestic opposition, and his relations with the United States had deteriorated to such a point that he no longer had to take the American factor into account when formulating his defiant policies."

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