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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

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27 October 1962

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MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: Reactions to US Air Strike Against Strategic Missile Bases MIG-21's and IL-28's

Soviet Reaction

1. It seems clear that the Soviet anticipate that the US may soon resort to military action against the missile bases in Cuba, that they wish to avoid having to respond to this move, and are therefore trying hard to bring about negotiations which will forestall it. If the action is nevertheless taken, we believe that, while the Soviets will feel the need to retaliate in some way, they will try to avoid doing so in a manner which sharply or suddenly raises the risks of escalation.

2. We do not exclude that there may be some comprehensive element in the Soviet reaction which could lead them to acts of retaliation without careful calculation of US responses. This

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might be the more true if Soviet casualties sustained in the attacks should be high. In general, we believe that the minimum attack necessary to render the missile sites and aircraft inoperable would have the best chance of reducing the element of irrationality in the Soviet response.

Soviet Reactions to US Air Strike

3. They will probably allow tensions to subside and the US actions to run their course in Cuba before beginning their own retaliatory moves. We believe they would not retaliate immediately either in Berlin or against other US interests.

It seems increasingly likely that the focal point of retaliation will be US bases on the periphery of the Soviet Union.

However, they are likely to provoke a severe political crisis involving Turkey or other US allies as well as neutrals bordering on the USSR, rather than take military measures against them. In short, the Soviet will aim at eliminating US military installations surrounding the USSR, where the Soviets can bring to bear their own local power advantage.

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4. In Berlin, they may pick up once again their campaign of limited moves to weaken the Western position. But they will probably proceed with caution, realizing that they have misjudged the US determination and willingness to confront the USSR directly in any crisis involving vital US interests.

5. There will of course be an extremely sharp political reaction, with the Soviets seeking the widest possible condemnation of the strike and of US policy as a whole.

Cuban Reactions

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6. Our summary estimate of the Cuban reaction is as follows:

a. Castro would probably wish to react strongly and the Soviets would find it extremely difficult to restrain him, even if they wished to do so. He would use air defense forces at his disposal against attacking aircraft. He would also be likely to use aircraft in Cuban hands and the full weight of the artillery with which he has ringed Guantanamo against the US Naval base.

b. If he survived the consequences of an attack on Guantanamo, Castro would have sharply increased problems in maintaining stability. Rifts within the regime and between

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the regime and the people would be widened. Loss of Cuban lives and property would arouse anger against the US, but this would be offset by the impression of Soviet and Castro impotence. However, we believe that in the absence of a US invasion the chances are against a successful uprising.

c. The experience of having been let down by the Soviet Union would weaken Castro's own confidence and seriously undermine his position. This in turn would influence the popular reaction to the regime. Soviet retaliation against the US in other parts of the world would have some effect on Cuban attitudes, but would be less meaningful to Cubans than actions which touch their own island.

Latin American Reaction

7. The substantial support in Latin America for the US approach to the problem of the missile bases in Cuba would be likely to shrink considerably after an air strike. Yet the fact of Soviet missile bases in Cuba has made an important difference in the viewpoint of many Latin Americans toward the Castro regime, and some governments have committed

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themselves to an extent that would make it difficult for them to turn against the US. We expect that in the circumstances likely to develop some Latin American Governments would denounce a US air strike but that a majority are likely to support the US at least tacitly and to refrain from voting against the US in the UN.

Reaction Among US Allies and the Neutralists

8. A US air strike would of course give added impetus to existing fears of general war in many quarters of the free world. Coming on top of Soviet pressures to begin negotiations, it would bring forth a chorus of condemnation in many quarters and would probably be exploited as the occasion for anti-US demonstrations in many areas.

9. We believe, however, that the adverse effects of such a move would to a great extent be offset, and in many important quarters substantially outweighed. This would result from essential sympathy for the US side in this controversy, by the evident widespread measure of respect and even relief at evidences of US determination to prevail, and by a strong current of belief -- particularly among free world officials -- that decisive action,

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with all its risks, is preferable to accepting defeat or stalemate in this crisis.

AS am 10. With very few exceptions, the most significant aspect of Afro-Asian neutralist reaction so far has been the lack of militant opposition to the US stand, and indeed, the evidence of some private sympathy in certain quarters. On the whole, however, while, an air strike would be strongly condemned, both officially and popularly, in many Afro-Asian States, it would not come as a great surprise to most Afro-Asians, and if it did the job without bringing on general war, a substantial number would privately applaud. Nonetheless, the US should be braced for some outbreaks of violence against American personnel and property.

FOR THE BOARD OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES


SHERMAN KENT
Chairman

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