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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

23 April 1962

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: Consequences of a Blockade of Cuba

THE PROBLEM

To estimate the consequences of and general reactions to a blockade of Cuba and the likelihood that it would bring about the downfall of the Castro/Communist regime.

NOTE

A blockade could be imposed upon Cuba by a variety of means, ranging from the use of all necessary US air and naval forces to a token blockade consisting largely of announcements and warnings issued by a Cuban government in exile. To be effective, however, any kind of blockade would require such a degree of support from the US as to make it virtually indistinguishable from an openly announced and acknowledged US Government action.

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### Reactions in the Non-Communist World

1. The general attitude of world opinion toward the US-Cuba dispute is that the Castro regime does not pose a substantial threat to US security, or indeed to any important US interest. A blockade of Cuba by US forces would be regarded as an act of war. Hence, the reactions to a determined US effort to overthrow Castro would range from lack of sympathy or support to expressions and acts of opposition.
  
2. In Latin America in particular public opinion would be strongly opposed to a US blockade of Cuba. Attitudes toward the US would be sharpened by the belief that its action in trying to bring down the Castro regime would also impose suffering upon the Cuban people as a whole. Many leaders of Latin American countries would like to see Castro disposed of, but would be moved by the pressure of public opinion to withhold any approval, let alone support, of the US action. Moreover, some of these leaders would genuinely fear a recrudescence of "Yankee imperialism." There is virtually no chance that the OAS would approve the blockade.
  
3. Outside Latin America, popular feeling would range from distaste to revulsion. Some people and governments would consider

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that the methods adopted by the US were out of all proportion to the stature and importance of the intended victim. Among these elements, US judgment and sense of balance would be called in question. Moreover, the action would undermine the US posture as a sincere advocate of decolonialization.

4. In the underdeveloped countries, opinion would be especially unfavorable, and the blockade would be looked upon as bullying, at best. Misgivings would be reinforced about US good will and the genuineness of US claims to support the principle of self-determination. The US would be rendered less able to influence these countries on a wide range of issues; e.g., Palestine, Kashmir, West New Guinea.

5. Many countries, particularly in Latin America and in Africa and Asia, would vigorously support UN action to put a stop to the US blockade -- a situation which the Soviets would find easy to exploit.

### Soviet Reaction

6. The Soviet leaders would regard a US blockade of Cuba with great seriousness. They would do all in their power, short of assuming grave risk of general war, to save the Castro

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regime and to defeat the US purpose in Cuba and humiliate it before the world. We do not believe, however, that they would resort to military action themselves. They are likely to believe that they could obtain their objectives more effectively by means entailing less risk.

7. In addition to the usual outcry against US "imperialism" and suggestions that US actions had evoked the danger of general war, there would probably be worldwide drives to raise money and organize measures of relief for the starving Cuban people, perhaps under UN auspices. Soviet actions would probably be primarily political and focused in the UN. They would seek a resolution condemning the US, and they might sponsor a UN commission of inquiry and conciliation. They would probably seek to impose legal and other sanctions upon the US through the UN, the International Court of Justice, and other international bodies. In all these efforts they would be likely to find widespread support.

8. One of the most promising lines of activity from the Soviet point of view would be attempts to send cargoes through the blockade. The value of such efforts would lie in the fact that if they succeeded the problems of the Castro regime would be in some degree alleviated, and if they failed would create

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incidents which could be exploited against the US. Ships, including some flying non-Bloc flags and manned by non-Bloc crews, would probably be sent to run the blockade carrying food-stuffs and medicines paid for by popular subscription contributed to by individuals from many parts of the world. Chartered non-Bloc aircraft carrying relief supplies could probably be sent to Cuba with crews which would be willing to accept the risks involved in defying the efforts of US military aircraft to turn them back. To contend with these maneuvers, the US would be obliged to interfere with the ships and aircraft of many countries and risk taking the lives of their nationals.

Effect of the Blockade in Cuba

9. A total blockade of Cuba -- which the US could impose if it were willing to accept the heavy cost to its standing, prestige, and alliances -- would present the Castro government with formidable problems. The more than \$500 million worth of equipment, supplies, and food now coming into the country annually would be cut off and Cuba would be thrown back on its own resources. A blockade would quickly bring the economy to a virtual standstill. Food shortages are already marked. Petroleum supplies could be stretched out to meet priority needs for only a

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few months. Many manufactured items, like most medicines, would quickly become unavailable. Most industrial and manufacturing activities would have to be sharply curtailed or stopped. A total blockade would cut off food imports which now account for about one-third of present caloric intake, though sugar, citrus fruits, and other foodstuffs presently exported would make up part of the loss. Strict rationing and careful reallocation of available nutrition would be necessary, but the country probably would not starve. The regime would count on worldwide opinion and the actions in the UN and elsewhere described above to force the US to abandon its blockade before the internal situation became desperate.

10. Within Cuba the political consequences of a blockade would be mixed. The proportion of pro-and anti-Castro reaction in the mixture would depend upon a wide variety of factors. Anti-Castro Cubans would take heart from the blockade because they would conclude that it meant the US was about to dispose of him and the Communists. Unrest and resistance might increase, but if a blockade were not soon followed by intervention, most of these hopes would be dashed and disillusionment would grow with deprivation.

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11. The number of Castro's supporters would probably not for some time be decreased by the fact of a US blockade or its consequences. Their numbers would probably be augmented by persons antagonized by the blockade. Castro's security forces would probably be able to contain efforts at rebellion from inside, even if the rebels were to be supplied by the US. We believe it likely that the Castro regime could maintain itself in power for some time even in the face of an effective blockade. However, if such a blockade did bring about the downfall of the Castro regime, this would occur in circumstances in which it would be difficult to establish a successor regime genuinely friendly to the US.

12. Another possibility is a blockade which would permit ample quantities of foodstuffs to enter Cuba but prevent all other goods from entering or leaving. Such a blockade would not significantly reduce the emotional content and intensity of the world public reaction. Most Cubans would probably blame the US rather than Castro for the many inconveniences and deprivations consequent on the blockade. We believe that in these circumstances also it is unlikely that enough Cubans would take the risks involved in rebellion to overthrow Castro, except in the presence of an invading force deemed likely to defeat him.

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13. In general, we conclude that reactions outside of Cuba to a blockade would be as adverse as those to an actual military intervention. Inside Cuba, a blockade would be less likely than intervention to result in replacement of the Castro regime by one friendly to the US.

FOR THE BOARD OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES:



*for*

SHERMAN KENT  
Chairman

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