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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

20 May 1969

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: Castro's Cuba: Signs of Change

A growing body of evidence suggests that Castro, mostly out of a sense of frustration, may be searching for new ways to relieve some of the pressures on his regime -- and that he may wish to alter his relationship with the US as part of such a tack.

* * * * *

Why Would Castro Change?

1. During the early years, the Castro regime brought about a revolutionary transformation of Cuba, to the benefit of the Island's poor. For the most part, however, Castro has since been frustrated in his major efforts both at home and abroad. His hopes for combatting US "imperialism" by exporting revolution to Latin America so far have been thwarted. He

This paper was discussed in detail with representatives of the DDI and of the Clandestine Service, but we have not sought formal coordination.

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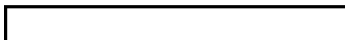


has failed to achieve Cuba's economic diversification or development and has only transferred the Island's dependence to another colossus. Indeed, over the past couple of years the living conditions of most Cubans have declined, hard work and austerity have come to characterize the regime's programs, and disaffection and dissidence -- though not organized opposition -- have become widespread.

2. Nor does the immediate future appear to promise sufficient relief. In 1969, the economy probably will only partially recover from the dismal performance of 1968. This year's sugar production will probably be less than last year's (5.2 million metric tons) and below the annual average for the past 20 years. Castro may realize by now that his effort to produce 10 million tons of sugar in 1970 is an unattainable goal -- but he continues to stake the "honor of the Revolution" upon its achievement. While Cuba may achieve one of its best sugar crops (over 7 million tons), it is likely that 1970 will be just one more year of continued dependence on foreign assistance and domestic shortages of goods. It may be that his apparent interest in new policies and new options comes in part from such frustrations.

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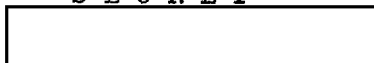
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3. Castro's domestic problems cannot be viewed in strictly economic terms, however. While no group can presently threaten the regime, or is likely to try to, there is growing dissidence in Cuba.* This takes many forms, but one of the most difficult for Fidel to comprehend is disaffection and delinquency among the youth. During the past year or so Castro has complained in some of his speeches about wayward young people who do not work hard enough or who are active delinquents. The problem is complex for, like many other Latin American countries, Cuba has not yet developed a means to absorb educated youths into the economy and society in positions they find commensurate with their training. This is particularly critical in Cuba because, while the young have been promised that they will be the wave of the future, they are in many cases directed, for the present, to work as agricultural laborers.

* By now perhaps as many as one-half million Cubans have expressed their dissent by leaving Cuba, and perhaps 200,000 more are on the list to leave via the US-sponsored airlift. In addition, illegal emigration (fencejumping via Guantanamo, fleeing via small boats) has increased appreciably over the past two years.

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4. After leaving their highly favored status as students, the real world of Cuban life -- drab and Spartan -- comes as a blow rather than a challenge to some young people. To Castro, their behavior sometimes seems hedonistic, and thereby marginally counter-revolutionary. Moreover, the process of education, which has been a hallmark of the regime, has equipped Cuba's youth to recognize the Revolution's shortcomings. Just as anywhere else, the establishment in Cuba cannot always understand how the status quo could be questioned, let alone how to respond. All this is probably disquieting to the leader who was going to create the "new man."*

5. After 10 years, Castro's panacea for Cuba's problems is a demand for harder work, and a society once light-hearted now has a solemn cast, with little chance for good times. Castro did not intend to change Cuba in this way, and the pleasure of the Revolution may have diminished for him. At the same time, his

* The generalizations in this paragraph may pertain more specifically to urban than to rural youth. Their numbers are more concentrated, they are nearer the power centers and therefore their behavior may affect the regime more. The conversion to agricultural labor may be more startling to them. Furthermore, we suspect that reporting about youth and students in Cuba is extrapolated from the sources' experience mainly in urban areas.

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confidence may also be somewhat down. At age 41 Castro may be taking personal stock, asking himself what he has done and what he has to show for it. Confronted with the fact of minimum achievement, he may have growing doubts. If not Castro himself, his entourage seems to be increasingly concerned about his personal safety; indeed, during the past year elaborate security precautions have surrounded his public appearances. Although he is still able to captivate a crowd, he makes fewer speeches than in the past, he seeks to involve his audiences less, and he seems to have less physical contact with the people.

6. Change seems also to have occurred in Castro's conception of the potential for revolution in Latin America. Because of the dramatic failure to export revolution to Bolivia, the dismal fortunes and prospects of Cuban-supported revolutionary movements elsewhere, and because of concurrently increasing tension over the spotty domestic performance of the regime, Castro has apparently undertaken a reassessment of his entire revolutionary policy. Even though he continues to train foreign revolutionaries, some sources have said he now believes that conditions which could support a Cuban-style takeover do not exist in most of Latin America.

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Others report that the Cubans will continue to look for revolutionary opportunities abroad, but that assistance to any movement will be based upon its ability to sustain itself (money and personnel) and to pose at least some threat to the established government. We also have good evidence which suggests a new Cuban desire to re-open ties to other Latin American governments -- among which is the generally less hostile attitude of the Cubans toward other Latin American delegations at the recent meetings of the UN's Economic Council for Latin America, and the apparent cessation of regularly scheduled Radio Havana attacks on the Frei regime in Chile shortly after a member of Frei's party visited Cuba. In any case, Castro seems to be giving lower priority to his effort to transplant his cause. As a consequence, at least for a while he is likely to spend more time on Cuba's own problems, and to be considerably less irritating to the US and to the rest of Latin America.

7. Castro's discomfort under Soviet pressure for support on the issue of Czechoslovakia may also have been a factor contributing to his search for new alternatives. For some time he had been trying to sustain an independent posture in foreign

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affairs while remaining under the Soviet umbrella. The Czech case apparently proved that he was not free to act according to his views. Castro's initial ambivalence on this issue probably reflected his own identification with the underdog. Although he felt Cuba had been mistreated by the Czechs, he believed that, in their struggle for national identity, they represented Cuba's search for independence. When the Czechs succumbed, it was probably quite clear that Cuba's fate could be similar. In the end, Fidel responded to what we now believe was heavy pressure from the USSR, and as a result Cuban-Soviet relations have improved significantly, at least on the surface.

8. Because he has not been able to overcome his economic difficulties, Castro appears to have had no choice but to hew closer to the Soviets -- at least for now. He needs Soviet economic support, and it appears that at least until after the 1970 sugar harvest the warming trend in Cuban-Soviet relations will continue. It is reliably reported that Cuba has agreed not to attack the old guard, pro-Soviet communist parties in Latin America -- parties once denounced by Castro for their lack of zeal. In view of his prominent failures in supporting violent revolutions elsewhere, and the current lack of promising causes

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to sponsor, it costs him little to compromise with the Soviets on the peaceful vs. the violent path to power in Latin America. But Castro doesn't like playing the role of a subordinate, and some of his effort to find new options may reflect his desire to find room to maneuver between the two colossi.

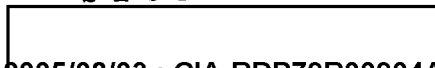
Some Signals for the US

9. Along with the other evidence of change in Castro's attitudes, there have been both direct and indirect indications that he may have new thoughts on Cuba's relationship to the US. For example, the number of virulent Cuban propaganda attacks on the US has been substantially reduced for some time. Of notable significance in this regard is the fact that the regular occasion for an anti-US broadside, the 19 April anniversary of the Bay of Pigs, passed in Cuba without a Castro speech or other noteworthy observance. Furthermore, the Nixon Administration has come in for far less criticism than its predecessors, and then mainly on the issues of Vietnam, Korea, and Peru.

10. The evidence that Castro's attitude toward the US is changing, or is open to change, also includes explicit signals through diplomatic and other channels. One of the Western

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diplomats in Havana has brought the message that Castro would like to discuss with the US the subject of aircraft highjackings and "other issues." This diplomat also remarked that he was impressed by the suggestions of senior Cubans that this might be the time for change in US-Cuban relations. Indeed, through indirect contact the US and Cuba have already concluded a quite limited agreement about aircraft highjackings, and throughout the negotiations the Cubans were careful not to be abrasive.

11. Of additional interest in terms of signalling and probing by Cuba has been the recent reporting that Castro hopes to use Cyrus Eaton as a personal link to the US. In fact, a Cuban mentioned as Eaton's prospective contact with the Castro regime has been assigned to Cuba's UN delegation. Finally, a reliable Cuban source on the policies of the regime has indicated that there is a growing Cuban interest in re-opening commercial ties with the US.

12. It is not clear how much improvement in relations Castro may hope for, or what he would expect to gain from a detente with the US at this time. He would undoubtedly like

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to be less dependent upon the Soviet Union, and probably wishes to be more free to deal with all countries. He may think that the appearance of seeking better relations would be of value to him, especially at home among younger members of the regime who may be growing impatient with slow progress. An acknowledged less tense relationship with the US would probably please many in the Cuban population. Fidel may expect that it would also stimulate more Western European and Japanese interest in trade with Cuba. It may even be that Fidel's reading of the US indicates that the new Administration is ready to change. The willingness of the US to engage in the Paris negotiations, and a belief that the US population does not back the war effort -- and may not hold to a hard line on Cuba -- may have encouraged this line of thought.

What Does It Mean?

13. Castro's policies and his attitude toward the US may be changing, but it is likely that Fidel has not yet thought the matter through. He must wonder, for instance, what measures he would have to adopt to maintain control of the course of the

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Revolution if he allowed an increase in contact with the capitalist countries and their goods and agents. Particularly nettlesome must be his recognition that Americans and their culture retain an excellent reputation with many Cubans. He must realize, moreover, that if US-Cuban relations warmed, allegations about US hostile actions would no longer be a plausible rationale for the regime's failures. We think Fidel will move slowly in his effort to extend his room for maneuver, and that he will be highly sensitive to indications of animosity from the US and other non-communist countries. Furthermore, Castro has always been easily diverted, and a variety of tangential events could disturb the current trend. He might, for instance, become enamored of the prospects of some as yet unpromising or unknown revolutionary movement, and reassume the role of the strident revolutionary. Finally, he probably does not know how far the Soviets will let him go, and in the end he may not have the temperament to maximize his independence without inspiring some form of Soviet reprisal.

14. What all this means for the US may depend heavily upon US actions in a variety of areas. Castro has shown great

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concern with the US role in Vietnam, and he would not wish to have normalized relations with the US as long as we remain heavily engaged there. Even though he may find the Paris talks increasingly hopeful, he undoubtedly assumes that the US Congress will continue its animosity toward Cuba. He probably assumes also that true detente might take several years to accomplish, and may realize that movement in itself might do him no immediate good. Nonetheless, as Western diplomats point out, there are "straws in the wind." He may be looking for a sign, and at the very least, he probably now sees that an adversary relationship with the US need not continue to be expedient.*

15. It is also possible that, though real, Castro's own motives for playing down conflict may not be paramount. It seems to us that in an effort to minimize general East-West tension, the Soviets may have told Fidel to cool his anti-US line at this

* In the past Fidel has believed that both the US and the Soviets might one day turn on him. And although we have no current indications to this effect, he is known to have believed that after the US disengages from Vietnam it may try to throw him out.

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point in time. If this is the case, low level diplomatic talks between the US and Cuba might represent an appealing reassurance to the Soviets of US interest in pursuing other East-West talks. At the same time, Fidel's attitudes over the next year or so, although likely to remain somewhat ambivalent, may furnish an opening for the US to re-establish contact with the Cuban people and leadership on a regular basis.

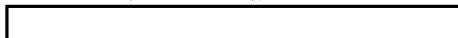
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ABBOT SMITH
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MEMORANDUM FOR: The Director

A self-explanatory memorandum, which may be
timely.



ABBOT SMITH
Director
National Estimates

Attachment:
Memo to the Director
"Castro's Cuba: Signs of Change"

cc: DDCI
DDI
D/OCI
Mr. Broe

21 May 1969

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