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The Status of Cuban Subversion in Latin America

SUMMARY

Cuban efforts to promote revolution in Latin America remain at a low ebb, reflecting Havana's desire to gain respectability in the hemisphere and its recognition of the absence of revolutionary conditions in countries whose governments Castro opposes.

To promote normal government-to-government relations with the countries that supported the lifting of sanctions last November, Havana is loosening ties with the few illegal and guerrilla groups it still assists. It is unlikely that for the sake of any marginal subversive group, Castro will compromise the formal ties he has worked so persistently to acquire or endanger prospective ties with other potentially friendly Latin American governments.

Even in countries hostile to the Castro regime, Havana no longer sponsors insurgent groups. Eschewing subversion in these countries is a tactical decision, however, and the Cuban leadership reserves the option in the future to support well organized armed groups that demonstrate an ability to attract broad popular support. This attitude stems from a belief that in the long run governments ideologically compatible with the Castro regime can carry out the broad social changes necessary to fulfill Castro's definition of revolution only by violent means. In the meantime, Cuban representatives in Latin America will provide unobtrusive assistance to leftist groups in order to promote mass organizations that might persuade existing governments to move further to the left.

*This memorandum was prepared by the Office of Current Intelligence and has been coordinated with Directorate of Operations.*

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DISCUSSION

1. After sponsoring revolution in Latin America for nine years, Castro began in 1968 to reappraise his methods and objectives. Successive and costly failures by revolutionary groups and their poor prospects for the future, increasing Soviet pressure to promote the policy of detente, rapidly changing conditions in the hemisphere, and domestic problems gradually persuaded him to eschew violent methods. Subsequent efforts to extend Cuban influence through more conventional means succeeded dramatically, and a significant change in Castro's view of his role in the region became apparent. For a time he continued to assert that he would establish formal ties only with "revolutionary" governments, but by the early 1970s he had broadened his definition of the term to include "patriotic" regimes "independent of the US."

2. The Castro regime's heightened interest in pursuing conventional diplomacy has been greatly influenced by the current mood in Latin America. The increasing readiness of many Latin American governments to cooperate with other Third World governments especially on economic issues, the diminished sense of mutual interest between Latin America and the US, and the growing respectability of Castro himself in the hemisphere have made government-to-government ties seem more profitable than the subversive approach. Castro has used his improving ties with the leaders of friendly countries to press for Latin unity on issues which affect US interests. Even with those governments with which the Cuban leadership does not share a world view--such as Argentina and even Brazil--Havana has found a pragmatic approach to be advantageous.

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Cuba's Advocates at Quito

4. Since the meeting of OAS foreign ministers in Quito last November, Cuba has even further broadened the range of governments with which it is willing to conduct relations through accepted and orthodox means. Late last November Castro stated that "the Cuban revolution must take into consideration the governments that voted against the blockade...and if any of these governments decides to reestablish relations with Cuba, we will have no objection."\*

5. Havana maintains good relations with the governments of Panama, Mexico, and Venezuela and will take pains to keep relations at this level. There is no evidence of recent Cuban support to subversives in any of these countries. In the case of Mexico, for example, Castro feels a mutuality of interest with the Echeverria government. In fact, Castro apparently played a role in planting the idea of the Economic System of Latin America (SELA) with the Mexican president. Venezuela's President Carlos Andres Perez is another leader of Third World causes and thus shares some of Castro's interests. Castro's speeches indicate that he looks upon Venezuela as a supplier of oil that could enable Cuba to escape its heavy dependence on the Soviet Union and also as a potential source of large-scale financial assistance for national development. He therefore undoubtedly feels that there is much more to gain from government-to-government relations than from supporting Venezuelan subversive groups that, in any event, are weak and disunited. In the case of Panama, while having no illusions about Torrijos' conviction as a "revolutionary," Castro has found the present government a useful ally because of its strongly nationalistic posture, particularly on the canal issue.

*\*Twelve governments--members of the Rio Pact--voted to lift the OAS sanctions at Quito; these included seven with which Havana now has relations--Argentina, Colombia, Mexico, Panama, Peru, Trinidad and Tobago, and Venezuela--as well as five others--Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Honduras, and the Dominican Republic. Barbados, Jamaica, Guyana and the Bahamas were not present at Quito because they are not signatories of the Rio Pact, but Havana has relations with all four, and government-to-government relations have been so profitable that the Castro regime would have little motive for supporting subversives.*

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7. There is no evidence that Cuba has financed or armed Colombian guerrilla groups since the mid-1960s. The impending opening of a Cuban embassy in Bogota may raise the expectations of the pro-Havana ELN or even the pro-Moscow FARC for assistance, but the Castro regime is not likely to provide anything more than token financial support--even to a unified guerrilla movement--in order not to endanger newly established relations with the Lopez government.

8. In the case of the Dominican Republic, Cuba continues to provide a safehaven for a small number of revolutionaries and apparently is providing some financial assistance to a small left-wing terrorist group that Castro reportedly admires. There is no evidence, however, that Cuba is sponsoring insurgent or terrorist activities in the Dominican Republic, and the Castro regime would be unlikely to promote subversion in light of its willingness to restore relations with the Balaguer government. Balaguer apparently sees restoration of ties with Cuba as a way of getting the Castro regime to be even more careful of its links with Dominican leftist extremists.

9. Relations with Peru seem to fall into a special category. In order to ensure the continuation of the Peruvian revolution, the Castro regime apparently is willing to support armed para-military organizations. Havana considers the Velasco government its closest ally in Latin America, but fears that when the ailing Velasco leaves office his successor may attempt to slow down the revolution.

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Governments Hostile to the Castro Regime

11. The Castro government, although antagonistic toward Brazil, is aware that armed subversion has virtually no chance of succeeding there. Castro reportedly now sees the most likely impetus for change in Brazil as coming from within the military, rather than from any guerrilla movement. Havana has cooperated with the Brazilians on some economic issues, and is apparently hopeful that Brazil eventually will loosen its ties with the US.

12. Uruguayan Foreign Minister Blanco's repeated charges that Cuba has not ceased its efforts to foment revolution in Uruguay have yet to be substantiated. The Castro government provides a safehaven for an unknown number of former Tupamaro guerrillas and may also provide training and technical assistance. Raul Roa is reported to have stated recently that the Tupamaros have almost disappeared as a movement, and the Cuban leadership apparently has little hope that they will again become a threat to the government. There is no evidence of Cuban support for subversives in Paraguay or Bolivia and so long as there are no viable leftist opposition groups in those countries, Havana is not likely to get involved.

13. Castro maintains the strongest enmity for the Chilean military government, but with the destruction of leftist organizations there he has apparently become resigned to the realities of a situation he has little ability to influence. Havana

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continues to invest small amounts of money to aid Chilean extremist groups and has encouraged the disorganized Chilean exile organizations to unify and form a common front. Castro remains committed to the need for the revolutionary overthrow of the Pinochet government, nonetheless, and if a viable insurgent force were put together, the Cubans would probably provide them with significant support. At present, Havana sees external military intervention--a war between Peru and Chile for example--as the only possible, though somewhat unrealistic, way of unseating Chile's military government.

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14. The successful terrorist attack last December by the Frente Sandinista de Liberacion Nacional (FSLN) has aroused Havana's interest in events in Nicaragua. The perpetrators of the act were subsequently granted asylum in Cuba where they joined other Nicaraguan revolutionaries. The overthrow of the Somoza regime is a long-term personal ambition of Castro's. However, stepped-up Cuban support--beyond token training and funding--will likely be contingent upon the FSLN's ability to demonstrate that it is a viable force with mass appeal.

15. Despite the high level of Cuban interest in Guatemala, Castro apparently is not optimistic about the short-run prospects for revolution. The rebel movement is so disorganized and disunited as to endanger continued Cuban support.

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Guatemala will remain high on Castro's list of priorities, but Cuba's support of revolutionaries will probably continue at a very low level until there is a change in the political situation which either obviates the need for armed struggle or creates better conditions for its success.

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Conclusions and Outlook

16. Castro is unlikely, for the sake of any marginal subversive groups, to compromise the formal ties he has worked so persistently to acquire in Latin America or endanger prospective ties with governments that may soon restore relations with Havana. He will be increasingly mindful of Cuba's improving image throughout the region and anxious to capitalize on it. Even when his intrinsic revolutionary sensitivities

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are strained by governments he is contemptuous of, he will remember the deleterious effects that proof of Cuban subversion would have on his entire foreign policy.

17. Nevertheless, the Cuban leadership--deeply influenced by the overthrow of Salvador Allende--continues to believe that in the long run "national liberation" in Latin America can be achieved only through the use of violence. Several top Cuban leaders including Raul Roa, Blas Roca, and reportedly Castro himself have expressed the view that there is no peaceful road to socialism. Furthermore, a Cuban official who presumably spoke for the leadership stated last October that "it is impossible to implant a revolution from above via an established government no matter how good its intentions."

18. The draft constitution released in early April reflects Havana's intention of keeping open the option to return to "exporting the revolution." It specifically acknowledges the "right of peoples to reject imperialist violence with revolutionary violence" and "recognizes the legitimacy of wars of national liberation as well as armed resistance to aggression and conquest, and considers its right and its internationalist duty to aid the besieged and the peoples who fight for their liberation."

19. It is clear, however, that the Cuban leadership now recognizes that there are no quick solutions to complex political conditions. Castro realizes that Cuban efforts can no longer be the catalyst of revolution in Latin America in the absence of local revolutionary conditions and local cadres capable of exploiting them.

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Castro will hold open the option of supporting insurgents in countries such as Chile, Guatemala, or Nicaragua if their prospects dramatically improve, but he apparently feels that even in these areas revolutionary conditions are not sufficiently advanced to warrant significant support.

20. Until conditions are more favorable for leftist armed insurgents, the Castro regime will probably concentrate on expanding and maintaining normal diplomatic and economic ties with governments friendly to Havana. Where possible the Cubans may try to assist left-leaning governments--such as that of Forbes Burnham of Guyana--to develop

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a broad base of mass support. Cuba can provide expertise in creating or further developing mass organizations--such as student, labor, and peasant groups. The Cubans could be expected to use whatever influence they have with the leadership of these mass organizations to strengthen the leftward inclination of the government.

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