

SECRET

UNIT 85-58

24 November 1958

SECRET

NO 209

SPECIAL
NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE ESTIMATE
NUMBER 85-58

THE SITUATION IN CUBA

Submitted by the

DIRECTOR OF GENERAL INTELLIGENCE

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Concurred in by the

UNITED STATES INTELLIGENCE BOARD

On 24 November 1958, concurring were The Director of Intelligence and Research, Department of State; the Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence, Department of the Army; the Assistant Chief of Naval Operations for Intelligence, Department of the Navy; the Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence, USAF; the Director for Intelligence, The Joint Staff; the Assistant to the Secretary of Defense, Special Operations; and the Director of the National Security Agency. The Atomic Energy Commission is programmatic to the USIA and the Assistant Director, Federal Bureau of Investigation, concurred, the subject being outside of their jurisdiction.

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THE SITUATION IN CUBA¹

THE PROBLEM

To analyze the present situation in Cuba and to estimate probable developments for the next few months.

CONCLUSIONS

1. The 3 November national elections and the prospective inauguration of Rivero Aguero on 24 February have had little effect on the political and military impasse in Cuba. Rebel leader Fidel Castro is continuing his guerrilla warfare campaign, but his movement, in combination with other existing opposition groups, probably cannot overthrow the government in the next few months. On the other hand, the Cuban armed forces cannot suppress the guerrilla movement unless they become better trained, supplied, and equipped, and more strongly motivated, and unless the rebel forces are effectively isolated from external supply sources.

2. The Cuban armed forces remain, however, the most important element capable of breaking the political deadlock, by deposing the regime and establishing a junta. A group within the military would be likely to take such action if there were a sharp increase in popular or labor opposition to the regime. A military-dom-

inated junta almost certainly could not restore peace to Cuba within the period of this estimate unless its membership and actions were such as to convince the revolutionary opposition that it was prepared to accord it a significant influence in the provisional government.²

²The Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence, Department of the Army, and the Assistant Chief of Staff, Intelligence, Department of the Air Force, would have conclusion 2 read:

"The Cuban military remains the most important element capable of breaking the political and military deadlock and restoring order in Cuba. Politically this might require deposing the regime and establishing a junta. A group within the military would be likely to take such action if there were a sharp increase in popular or labor opposition to the regime. Except through military operations, which would require early receipt of extensive military aid and assistance, a military-dominated junta almost certainly could not restore peace to Cuba within the period of this estimate unless its membership and actions were such as to convince the revolutionary opposition that it was prepared to accord it a significant influence in the provisional government."

They would further add a third conclusion to read:

"We are unable to identify any prospective leadership in the Cuban Army competent to overthrow the Batista regime within the period of this estimate."

¹Title of this estimate when used alone should be "For Official Use Only."

DISCUSSION

A. The Strengths and Weaknesses of Fidel Castro's "26 of July Movement"³

3. To date, Fidel Castro has been unable to arouse sufficient popular support to overthrow the Batista regime, but the regime has itself been unable to prevent the expansion of Castro's guerrilla operations. The 26 of July Movement now dominates most of the rural area of the Oriente Province and small groups of rebels also operate in other parts of the island. Since 1956, Castro's armed forces have grown from a handful of Cuban filibusters to their present estimated strength of upwards of 5,000 men. Although still unable to challenge the army in sustained combat in open terrain, they have performed effectively as guerrillas. They have virtually paralyzed land transport within Oriente, including an effective land blockade of Santiago, the second city of Cuba. They have also held small towns in the province for short periods of time. In the neighboring province of Camaguey, the rebels control some rural areas and have interfered with transportation. The activities of the movement are being expanded in the central and extreme western provinces. A rebel underground organization operates in many cities and acts as liaison with other opposition groups, both in and outside of Cuba. The movement has supporting organizations in the US and in several Latin American countries, notably Venezuela and Mexico, from which it has received significant financial and logistical support.

4. In July 1958 there was formed in Caracas the Frente Civico Revolucionario (FCR) composed of representatives of all revolutionary groups opposed to the Batista regime except the Communists, who were deliberately excluded. Its purpose was to unify revolutionary efforts. It has engaged primarily in propaganda and procurement activities outside of Cuba.

³The Movement derives its name from the date of Castro's abortive attack on the military barracks in Santiago in 1953.

5. Castro's lack of clarity about his objectives, beyond the elimination of Batista, has raised doubts about his long-range intentions among many non-26 of July opposition leaders who at the moment support him. Castro's infrequent pronouncements reflect no well-developed program, although they indicate definite concern for agrarian reform and the regulation of public utilities. He has stated that if successful he would initially replace the Batista regime with a provisional civilian government headed by Dr. Manuel Urrutia Lleo and including representatives drawn from most political groups in Cuba.⁴ He speaks of the restoration of democratic government following a transition period. There are no indications of the role Castro would seek to play in a new government, but it is likely that he would expect to occupy a position of major influence.

6. Although Castro has attracted a widely varied following — including some respected Cuban civic, business, and religious groups — he, unlike the revolutionary *Junta Patriotica* in Venezuela, has not been able to gain widespread popular support. Twice his attempts to call a nationwide general strike have failed, largely because of inability to obtain support in the capital city of Havana.

7. Castro has failed to convince the majority of the Cuban people that his personality and program, in preference to Batista's, are worth fighting for. Cuba continues to enjoy relative economic prosperity, and a large part of the population, probably concerned that revolution would jeopardize their well-being, appear to hope that there can be a peaceful transition from authoritarian to constitutional government. The Roman Catholic Church, although apparently becoming increasingly anti-Batista, continues officially to support a peaceful change of government. Organized

⁴Dr. Urrutia Lleo is a respected but little known former magistrate of a Santiago court who is now in exile. He is generally considered to have little political acumen.

labor has not been willing to oppose the Batista regime under which it has received important benefits. In spite of general dislike for Batista, little popular enthusiasm has been engendered for Castro outside of the province of Oriente, at least in part because his operations have been marked by destruction of property and irresponsible acts of violence.

8. In its inception, the 26 of July Movement was not anti-American. Until last summer, it sought to cultivate US good will. Since then, however, rebel propaganda has stressed the supposed US preference for dictatorship in the Caribbean area and has charged that Batista, with the cooperation of some US officials, was scheming to bring about US military intervention against the rebels. This propaganda line exploits widespread Latin American sentiments regarding dictatorship and intervention, and, indeed, is a line Radio Moscow has utilized frequently in its broadcasts calling for support to the anti-Batista forces. Recently, however, Castro's propaganda has again evidenced a desire for US understanding.

B. The Role of the Cuban Communists

9. In contrast to the situation in Venezuela, where the Communist party played an important role in the revolution against the Perez Jimenez dictatorship and thereby gained a privileged political position, the Cuban Communist Party (PSP), as such, has been excluded from both the 26 of July Movement and the Frente Civico Revolucionario (FCR), despite its recent strenuous efforts to get in. In Caracas, the Venezuelan Communist Party has actually hindered FCR activities, in order to compel the FCR to admit the Cuban Communist Party.

10. While we have insufficient evidence to establish the degree of Communist influence in the 26 of July Movement at the present time, the situation lends itself to Communist exploitation. Fidel Castro's control over his far-flung guerrillas is not so firm that he can prevent Communist infiltration even if he should so desire. A few alleged Communist sympathizers hold moderately important posi-

tions in the movement, especially among the troops led by Raul Castro. Some Communists have undoubtedly penetrated its lower levels and its organization in Mexico. Moreover, the nationalistic and anti-dictatorship line of the movement is a horse which the Communists know well how to ride (e.g., Venezuela). If the revolution fails to make headway against the Batista regime, both Castro and the FCR will be under increasing pressure to accept any help they can get.

C. The Role of the Cuban Military

11. The continued support of the Cuban armed forces is the chief factor in the Batista regime's retention of power. The principal military leaders are almost certainly convinced that a Castro victory would adversely affect their military positions and personal fortunes: even the lives of some of them would be in jeopardy. By committing a large portion of their forces in eastern Cuba, they have been able to retain control of the urban areas. However, it has been necessary to retain the most reliable and effective Army units in Havana to protect the regime. The forces committed against the guerrillas in the field have been composed largely of conscripts from urban areas not readily adaptable to the hardships of anti-guerrilla operations. These forces are inadequately led, trained, equipped, and supplied for the operations required to root out the guerrillas. Their chief deficiency, however, is that, compared to the strong motivation of the rebels, they lack the will to fight. Consequently, the Army's combat operations in the field have been ineffective and in Oriente Province there have been some recent defections to Castro's forces. Moreover, the Cuban naval and air forces have been unable to prevent the rebels from receiving supplies from overseas by sea and air.

D. The 3 November National Elections

12. Faced with continued violent disorder promoted by the growing opposition to his regime throughout Cuba, President Batista has suspended constitutional guarantees for most of two years and has resorted increasingly to authoritarian measures. Nevertheless, he de-

cided to go through with national elections on 3 November and has declared that he will install the newly elected president on 24 February 1959.

13. Batista permitted political parties to campaign, but since constitutional guarantees remained suspended, electoral activities were minimal and the public was generally apathetic even in those places where the rebels were unable to interfere with voting. Andres Rivero Aguero, Batista's hand-picked successor, was duly elected, and the government coalition won a large number of congressional seats and other offices. Although Rivero Aguero could probably have won a completely free election because of the strength of the government's political machine and the lack of unity among the weak nonrevolutionary opposition, his election under the present chaotic internal conditions can seem little more than a sham.

E. The Outlook for the Next Few Months

14. We believe that the elections and any subsequent efforts by Batista to withdraw from the limelight probably will have little effect in resolving the political impasse in favor of the government. Even if Batista should leave the country—contrary to his recent statement of intentions—the newly elected government would find it difficult to convince either Castro or the Cuban people that it was no longer controlled by the forces and interests which had kept the dictator in office. Moreover, economic difficulties are soon likely to be added to the government's other problems as a result of the continued disruption of production and transportation in Oriente Province and of heavy military expenditures.

15. Castro will almost certainly continue his guerrilla warfare campaign. While he will probably gain some additional strength, there is little to indicate that important military or labor elements are about to shift their allegiance to him. Similarly, the general public, despite the sham elections, does not appear on the verge of giving active support to Castro. Continued terrorist activities will almost certainly antagonize business interests in Cuba

and elsewhere. It is therefore unlikely that Castro will be able to overthrow the regime prior to the inauguration of Rivero Aguero.

16. A prolongation and further intensification of widespread guerrilla warfare would further reduce the Cuban Government's ability to afford adequate protection for American lives and property. US private investments in Cuba amount to \$850 million, more than in any other Latin American country except Venezuela and Brazil. The rebels' method of exerting pressure by the destruction of and levies against property, regardless of the nationality of ownership, will certainly cause further damage to US interests, since US properties in Cuba are so numerous and widespread.

17. A military solution of the guerrilla problem cannot be achieved without extensive improvements in the military posture of the Cuban armed forces. To overcome the deficiencies described in paragraph 11, there would be required: (a) a steady flow of arms, equipment, and ammunition for sustained combat operations; (b) a rigorous training program to improve the general physical condition of the troops and to instruct them in guerrilla, antiguerrilla, and mountain warfare; and (c) development of the professional competence and standards of performance of the leaders to a degree which would inspire the confidence of their men. Such a transformation could not be accomplished within the period of this estimate. In addition, means would have to be provided to cut off the logistical support which Castro now receives by sea and air from overseas. External military aid on the scale indicated would be popularly regarded in Latin America as foreign military intervention in Cuba, with consequent political repercussions extending far beyond Cuba.⁵

⁵ The Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence, Department of the Army, and the Assistant Chief of Staff, Intelligence, Department of the Air Force, in view of the probability that popular and other reactions under such circumstances are likely to be both favorable and unfavorable, would delete this sentence as being incomplete and inconclusive.

18. The Cuban military remains the most important element capable of breaking the political deadlock by means other than combat operations. Should the military conclude (as in Venezuela) that the effort required to maintain the regime in power is more than that object is worth, they have the power to depose it and to establish a military junta for the purpose of bringing about a political settlement. We are unable to estimate the precise circumstances in which the military might decide upon this customary course of action. The likelihood of their doing so would be increased if there were a sharp upsurge in popular or labor opposition to the regime.⁶

19. After the military, the most important element of support for Batista has been the powerful Cuban Labor Confederation (CTC) which is tightly controlled by leaders who have so far held it in line and have twice refused to heed Castro's calls for a general strike.

⁶The Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence, Department of the Army, and the Assistant Chief of Staff, Intelligence, Department of the Air Force, would insert the following paragraph following paragraph 18:

"Leadership potential within the army to overthrow the regime is of unknown quantity. The principal personalities reported in rumors of possible coups have been Major Generals Diaz-Tamayo, the Army G-3, and Cantillo-Porras, the commander of the government forces in Oriente Province. However, both may be scheduled for early retirement. It is more likely that in any coup attempt the leadership would come from officers in lesser grades; however, we are unable to identify any prospective leadership competent to overthrow the Batista regime within the period of this estimate."

However, the nature of the Cuban labor movement and its notoriously calculating leaders is such that, if the tide appeared to be shifting in favor of the opposition, the CTC might participate in a general strike against the government. Should this happen, the military would be faced with the choice of firing upon mobs in Havana or of calling upon the government to resign. In such a situation, the military would probably choose the latter course.

20. A military junta by itself would not be able to reestablish political stability, particularly if the junta included many of the present top military leaders who are closely associated with Batista. It would not be recognized by Castro or by the majority of the Cuban people as a significant change. However, if, as in Venezuela, a junta were subsequently to purge itself of the more objectionable initial members, replacing them with younger and less venal officers, its chances for breaking the political impasse would substantially be improved. The situation would become even more favorable if such a modified junta were successful in convincing the public of its intentions to restore democratic processes. It is possible that such success by the junta would cause the Castro movement to lose momentum. On the other hand, if the junta desired to end civil strife quickly, it would probably have to open direct negotiations with Castro. The latter's decision to come out of the hills would depend on the junta's ability to convince him that he and his men would be safe from reprisals and that they would be able to take an active role in national political life.