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Current Support Brief

SOVIET-FINANCED FISHING PORT IN CUBA

CIA HISTORICAL REVIEW PROGRAM
RELEASE AS SANITIZED
1999



CIA/RR CB 63-30

21 March 1963

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

Office of Research and Reports

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16-210177

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SOVIET-FINANCED FISHING PORT IN CUBA

On 17 January 1963 the Cuban government announced that plans for the construction of a Soviet-financed fishing port in the Bay of Havana were complete and that work would begin in February. 1/ Although the exact location of the port was not announced, intelligence indicates that it may be built in the area of Cayo Cruz. Cuba has highlighted this project as an example of Soviet aid for the development and diversification of the Cuban economy. The expanded port facilities not only would help Cuba to increase its fish catch but also would provide a base (1) for the expansion of Soviet fishing operations in the Western Hemisphere and (2) for Soviet military and scientific intelligence-gathering activities.

1. Construction

The Cubans have announced that the port is scheduled for completion this year and that on completion it will be able to serve approximately 130 ships of the Soviet fishing fleet, as well as the 24 to 30 ships of the Cuban fishing fleet. The port reportedly will be able to accommodate about 12 to 15 ships at a time. In addition, the port is to have a freezer plant with a capacity to store 10,000 metric tons (mt) of fish, a plant for processing fish meal, an ice plant, a floating repair dock capable of serving ships of up to 2,500 gross register tons (GRT), a repair shop, a radio transmitter, and fueling facilities. 2/ It has been stated that the port will be able to handle 180,000 mt of fish a year.

The Cuban government stated at the time that the project was first announced in September 1962 that the total cost of the port would be approximately US \$12 million. Financing is to be arranged by the USSR and includes a credit of \$12 million. Half of this credit will be used for equipment and materials and the remainder for food to be used as payment to Cuban labor. 3/ In spite of the full financial obligation of the USSR, Cuba has emphasized that the operation of the port when completed will be a Cuban venture and that a 10-year commitment to provide

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services to the Soviet trawlers in North Atlantic waters will enable Cuba to generate the means for the repayment of this loan.

Although the Cuban press of 17 January 1963 indicated that the actual construction of the port was not scheduled to begin until February,

observed that a bulkhead for new port facilities in the area of Cayo Cruz was already in the process of construction. The bulkhead was tentatively identified as a part of the new Soviet fishing base. Aerial photography moreover, shows three trawlers docked at the ice plant quay adjacent to the newly completed bulkhead and three docked at the northeast tip of Cayo Cruz. Although it cannot be positively established that Cayo Cruz is the location of the Soviet-financed facilities, it appears to be the most likely site in the Bay of Havana.

2. Objectives

An announced goal of the USSR in financing construction of this port undoubtedly is a desire to improve the food situation in Cuba and to make Cuba less dependent on imports of fish. Per capita consumption of fish in Cuba is about 10 to 12 kilograms a year, with about 70 percent of the fish consumed being imported. 4/ The average amount of processed fish, mostly dried or salted cod, imported annually since 1958 has amounted to 17,000 mt, equivalent to 64,000 mt of landed weight, at a cost of \$7 million to \$8 million. 5/ The planned commitment of the USSR to supply Cuba with 15,000 mt of fish in 1963, presumably processed fish, suggests that part of the food supplied under the proposed credit arrangements will be in the form of fish or fish products.

In addition to credit for building the new port, the USSR is supplying Cuba with Soviet-manned trawlers for training Cuban fishing crews. About 20 of these trawlers now are operating out of Cuban ports, and some of them are expected to be turned over to Cuban control in the near future. Poland previously supplied Cuba with two 150-GRT fishing boats,

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and Japan recently delivered five 450-GRT tuna fishing boats. The latter are manned by mixed Japanese and Cuban crews. With this equipment the Cuban fishing industry should show a substantial increase in the total fish catch in 1963.

The Cuban fishing port also will provide a base for expanding Soviet fishing operations in the Western Hemisphere. The development of the Soviet fishing industry in the postwar period has been based entirely on the expansion of deep sea fishing in international waters. A shipbuilding program launched by the USSR in the late forties, moreover, has provided the USSR with the largest and most modern fishing fleet in the world, currently estimated at approximately 3,000 trawlers. Fishing operations now are being carried out by the USSR in almost all of the more important fishing areas of the world. Approximately 80 percent of the total Soviet catch in 1962 was obtained from international waters. Soviet fishing operations in recent years have been so successful that in 1963 the goal for the fish catch in 1965 was increased from the previous level of 4.6 million mt to 5.0 million mt, a goal that should be attained if the present trend continues.

The USSR, moreover, is interested in expanding its fishing operations in the tropical waters of the world and has designed a class of ship especially for this purpose. The Tropik, the first ship of this new class to be constructed, is about 80 meters long, has a weight of about 2,430 GRT, and reportedly has an operating range of 17,000 nautical miles. Serial production of the Tropik class of ship began in 1962, and the USSR has contracted with East Germany to build more than 60 ships of this class, which are to be completed during the East German Seven Year Plan (1959-65). 6/

The Tropik-class trawler is suitable for tuna fishing. The USSR has indicated an interest in expanding its tuna fishing activities and may be planning to fish for tuna from the Havana port. Soviet ships reportedly also have been surveying the Caribbean and tropical waters of the South Atlantic for new fishing grounds. There are tuna fishing grounds approximately 28 miles off the coast of the northeast region of Brazil. This area

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is fished under joint Japanese-Brazilian fishing enterprises operating out of Recife, Brazil. The best known tuna fishing grounds, however, are located in the Pacific Ocean in the vicinity of the Galapagos Islands, which lie northwest of Peru. Soviet and Cuban fishing vessels could have easy access to the Pacific area by using the Panama Canal. The distance from the port of Havana to this rich fishing ground is shorter than to the distant fishing areas off the coast of Brazil, as shown on the map, Figure 3.

The USSR also has considered the possibility of increasing its catch of menhaden, a fish used primarily for processing into meal. Menhaden are concentrated along the Atlantic coast south of Virginia and extending into the Gulf of Mexico. The interest in menhaden may account for the planned development of a plant for processing fish meal as part of the complement to the new port facilities.

The new port in Cuba also will provide the USSR with a base that could considerably extend the effective range of operations of trawler types of vessels for military and space surveillance tasks along the Atlantic coast of the US and in the Caribbean. Trawlers subordinated to the Soviet Navy have been assigned intelligence roles in the Atlantic. These ships, although resembling fishing trawlers, are fitted with considerable electronic equipment and serve as intelligence collection units. The USSR has used trawlers as tracking stations for its own and for US space vehicles. Available evidence, however, does not indicate that Cuban-based trawlers have engaged in such activity thus far.

The auxiliary port facilities -- radio transmitter, repair shop, and fuel station -- also have possible military uses. These facilities could be used to give logistical and communications support to Soviet submarines or surface military vessels operating in the Atlantic. Again, however, there is no evidence that the proposed facilities are oriented in this direction.

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Analyst:

Coord:

Sources:

1. FBIS, Daily Report (Latin America), 18 Jan 63. OFF USE.
2. FBIS, Daily Report (Latin America), 26 Sep 62. OFF USE.
3. Ibid.
4. -----
5. Ibid.
6. Fisheries Yearbook and Directory, London, 1962, p. 41. U.

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CORRECTION

, should be corrected as follows:

page 1, paragraph 1, line 10, for 1962 read 1963.

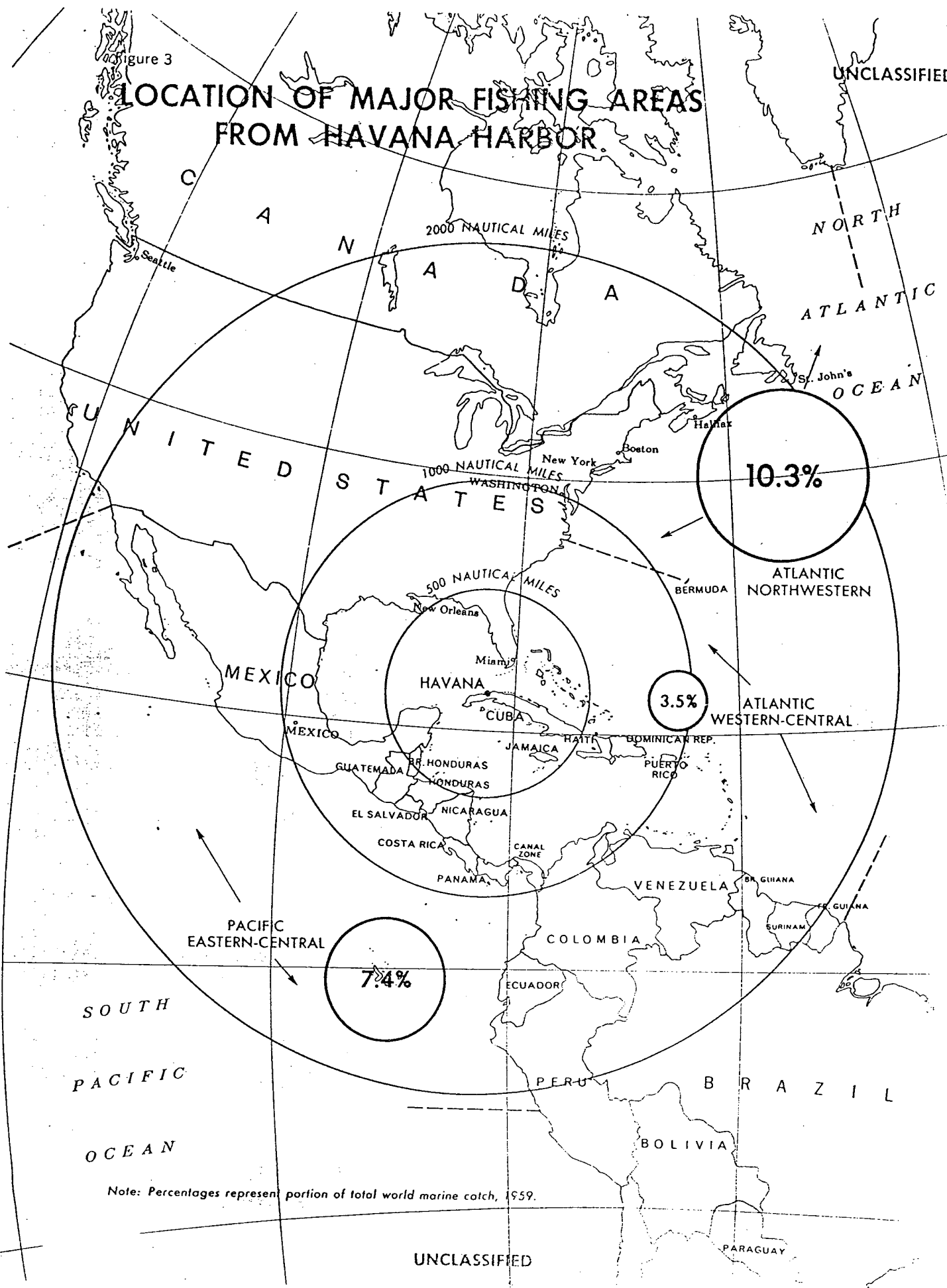
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Figure 3

LOCATION OF MAJOR FISHING AREAS FROM HAVANA HARBOR

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Note: Percentages represent portion of total world marine catch, 1959.

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