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[] COMMENT ON CASTRO'S REACTION TO DEATH OF KENNEDY

27 Nov -63

44USC2107(5)(g)(2)(D)
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Late Friday afternoon and through the night a large movement of troops began here. They were sent to take up positions and reinforce strategic positions around Havana and the northern coast of the island because of the assassination of President KENNEDY. Saturday evening FIDEL CASTRO appeared on television and spoke about the death of KENNEDY and tried to refute charges which had already appeared in the United States that the assassin was a Marxist and a Communist Castroite. Although it was only the third time that I had witnessed a speech by FIDEL, I got the immediate impression that on this occasion he was frightened, if not terrified. Other chiefs of mission, however, confirmed that impression and indicated surprise at this hasty jump into the arena to denounce insinuations which were merely from news and nongovernmental agencies. In fact, it is the general opinion in diplomatic circles that CASTRO feared that the assassination would be the spring which would unleash passions and violent and blind hysteria of the American people against Cuba and Russia and provide the excuse which up to now was lacking to justify internationally an invasion of Cuba. There is talk again about the coincidence of rumors concerning a crisis at the end of the year (my letter []).

FIDEL, emotional and uneasy, tried through the same telegrams of the American news agencies to refute the accusations which were then appearing and to twist them so that the assassination would appear as the work of the Ultra Reaction, of the extreme racists of the Pentagon, who are fanatical supporters of war against Cuba and the Soviet Union.

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THIS DOCUMENT CONTAINS 2 PAGE(S)

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He (B. val sketched) the life of LEE OSWALD and showed with these telegrams that after his trip to Russia OSWALD seemed to be supported by forces of the Right and that even counterrevolutionary circles suspected that he was an agent of the CIA or the FBI. This caused CASTRO to wonder whether the assassin was not the mere instrument of a monstrous plot of American militarists who, by eliminating KENNEDY, would put JOHNSON in a position from which there would be only one way out: to drain off anti-Cuba hysteria by an action of declared war.

Be that as it may, CASTRO tried to bring forward any possible formal accusations against Cuba, clamoring that all people should demand that the death of KENNEDY should be clarified and harping on the theme that KENNEDY was being ferociously attacked because of his weak policy against Cuba and Russia and therefore, his death could not be the work of Leftists, since it would only benefit the intentions of the Ultra Reaction and the Rightists.

44USC2107(5)(g)(2)(D)
b(iii)

I must inform you that the assassination did not cause a great deal of consternation in counterrevolutionary circles in the interior, disillusioned as they were with the "weakness" of KENNEDY, especially after his speech in Miami, from which they expected measures or decisions to intervene in Cuba which would presage the forthcoming end of the Communist regime of FIDEL CASTRO.

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-2-

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