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SUBJECTS :
ANTI-CASTRO ACTIVITIES
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LBJ LIBRARY
NATIONAL SECURITY PAPERS
TOUCHING ON ASSASSINATION AND
COVERT ACTION IN CUBA

A SUMMARY WITH KEY DOCUMENTS

COPY 1 OF 5

21 July 1975

21 July 1975

MEMORANDUM FOR SENIOR STAFF

SUBJECT: Summary of Significant Documents Retrieved from the Lyndon
Baines Johnson Library, Austin, Texas

FROM: Loch Johnson

I have just returned from a trip to the LBJ Library where I inspected the National Security Files. I was allowed to examine the files dealing with U.S. policy toward Cuba, the Johnson Vice Presidential Security files, and NSC minutes. The Library staff sifted through the Bundy papers for me, extracting anything relevant to Cuba for my inspection.

I was not permitted to examine either the Bundy papers or the Rostow papers myself, since the Library has not yet cleared them. Similarly, I was unable to examine the Vietnam country files or the Laos country files because we have not been given authority to do so yet.

Though these roadblocks were frustrating, I found I had my hands filled for the moment simply working my way through the papers which were available. I selected 44 documents to bring home, totaling 208 pages. These documents range from a verification of information we already know to some useful new information (see Items 21 and 22, e.g.) to some startling new leads in the area of covert action (see Item 28). What follows is a capsule summary of each document presented in chronological order. High priority items have tabs marked in red.

SUMMARY OF JOHNSON LIBRARY DOCUMENTS

1. NSC Minutes, 5 May 1961 and NSC Record of Actions, 16 May 1961.

At the 5 May NSC meeting, Rusk suggested that the U. S. must take all measures to precipitate Castro's downfall or face the possibility that all South America will come under Communist influence.

On the subject of Trujillo, the President said (25 days before the dictator was murdered) that the U. S. should draw the line on becoming involved in the affairs of another country, such as active participation in the overthrow of Trujillo. Instead, the United States should determine appropriate courses of action in case Trujillo falls.

The 16 May Record of Actions emphasizes it was the President's view that the U. S. should not initiate the overthrow of Trujillo before we knew what government would succeed him. This same document outlines U. S. policy toward Cuba; it was agreed that U. S. policy toward Cuba should aim at the downfall of Castro, though specific mention of assassination is not to be found among the many options outlined.

2. Letter from Lodge to Rusk, 13 September (1963?).

In an obviously anti-Diem letter, Lodge asks Rusk to send General Lansdale to South Vietnam Nam to take charge of all U. S. relationships with a change of government. Why Lodge so confidentially expected a change of government is an interesting question.

3. A note from Bromley Smith to George Christian (undated, but presumably early in the Johnson Administration, perhaps December, 1963).

A good example of the establishment of plausible deniability for the President, at the suggestion of the CIA.

4. Memo from Chase dated 2 December 1963 and probably for Bundy.

Among other things, Chase recommends "a vigorous, tough, and nasty policy" against Cuba, including strengthening the covert action program and continuing to explore "every avenue in order to make life as difficult for Castro and as expensive and unpleasant for the USSR as possible." Moreover, "We should be prepared to meet any event which might offer the opportunity of a sudden overthrow of Castro (e.g., the shooting down of a U-2)."

5. Memo from Chase to Bundy, 4 December 1963.

Plans for a meeting regarding Cuban policy. John Crimmins will present several options for discussion, including unleashing of Cuban exiles and the intensification of the covert program.

6. Memo, Chase to Bundy, 2 December 1963.

This memo is mainly important because it reveals who in the Administration was dealing with Cuban policy. The list of people to attend the meeting on Cuba held this day included: Lyndon B. Johnson, Rusk, Ed Martin, McNamara, McCone, Helms or Des Fitzgerald, Don Wilson, Bundy, and Chase.

7. Memo, Bundy to Lyndon B. Johnson, 12 December 1963.

For a press conference, Bundy recommends the following language regarding Cuba: "...say...that you expect to take every available means to stop and turn back the spread of Communism in this hemisphere."

8. CIA Summary of Costs for Cuban Operations, FY 1960-1964, dated 15 December 1963.

This table reveals that the CIA spent \$106,155,774 on Cuban Operations, almost 50 percent of which was spent on paramilitary action (\$47,815,122). The total covert action budget (psychological and paramilitary warfare) was approximately \$81,000,000 in this four-year period.

9. Chase minutes on meeting with Lyndon B. Johnson, 27 December 1963.

The meeting appears to be the first major briefing for the new President on Cuba. Desmond Fitzgerald did most of the briefing, which included a detailed description of CIA assets in Cuba, proposed sabotage plans, and attempts by the CIA to stimulate an internal coup which would dislodge Castro. The CIA was aiding two exile groups in particular: one led by Manuel Artime, the other by Manolo Ray. Bundy recommends that Lyndon B. Johnson take "a more vigorous line toward Cuba than we have in the past."

10. Memo, Bundy to Lyndon B. Johnson, 9 January 1964.

Bundy recommends a Cabinet-level review of the whole principle of covert sabotage against Cuba. He notes that Rusk and McNamara do not support the program of sabotage, while "McCone and the CIA are for it, and so are most of the middle-level officers dealings with the Castro problem." Bundy concludes: "...in your position, I would stop sabotage attacks on the ground that they are illegal, ineffective, and damaging to our broader policy."

11. A second copy of the above memo.
12. Memo and attachment on Cuban policy from John W. Ford, FSO, to Bundy, dated 18 February 1964.

The lengthy attachment appears to be a working paper on Cuba prepared for Bundy by Rostow's staff in State. The authors (Ford and Bob Johnson) write: "If we are to be realistic about our intent to get rid of the cancerous potential of Castroism, is an attack on the symptoms enough? Is it not essential to get at the disease itself?" (10). And, later, "...if we were publicly to acknowledge /the extinction of the Castro regime/ as our aim, would not a sudden blow seem a more logical way of proceeding than the application of measured pressures?" (14). The paper discusses the need for a plausible causus for action against Castro, asking the question: "would not a better bet be to provoke one?" (16). They suggest that "something like the assassination of a prominent Latin American leader" (17a) would be sufficient provocation, if blamed on Castro, to permit U.S. action.

13. Memo, Chase to Bundy, with various attachments, no date, but probably early March, 1964. Subject: Cuba, Covert Program.

Of special interest here is the attached letter from Desmond Fitzgerald to Bundy, dated 6 March 1964. "Des" implies that CIA efforts to get rid of Castro were carried out "only in response to what we understand to be policy requirements...." (1). He makes the point that CIA-sponsored sabotage raids were to serve as "a sort of firing pin for internal unrest and to create the conditions for a coup." However, only five low-key raids were carried out (from August to December, 1963), followed by a three-month hiatus. Des concludes that "a covert program at this time designed to overthrow Castro is not realistic" (2). He does recommend, however, continuation of certain covert actions, each as "carefully concealed contamination of lubricants" shipped into Cuba and "similar actions" (4).

A second attachment is a "Status Report on Autonomous Cuban Exile Groups", dated 30 March 1964, which underscores how truly autonomous these groups really were; the CIA had lost control over them by this time.

The third attachment is a CIA "Review of Current Program of Covert Action Against Cuba," dated "about 1/25/64." The ultimate goal of the CIA program was "to stimulate dissident elements within the regime, particularly in the armed forces, to carry out a coup" (7). The time frame for the program was "about eighteen months from June 1963" (7). The report notes that the CIA has "continued to improve our own infiltration techniques and are still able to penetrate Cuba's defenses with good regularity" (13-14). The five sabotage raids on Cuba run by CIA are listed at Annex I.

The final attachment is an unsigned report on "Spectrum of Courses of Action with Respect to Cuba," dated 21 February 1964, and probably a CIA document. It begins by citing the AG to the effect that "there is no point in discussing courses of action with respect to Cuba until the fundamental decision is made as to whether or not it is possible for the United States to live with Cuba." Without answering this question, the report sets out a series of options or courses of action under two headings: (1) "Can and Can't Live with Castro." Under the latter, the options range from covert sabotage to invasion, but do not mention assassination of Castro.

14. Memo, Chase to Bundy, 23 March 1964, with attachments. Subject: U.S. Policy Towards Cuba, April to November, 1964.

Chase still recommends "the tough, nasty, but no military intervention/blockade policy...." (7). The policy will include "a modest covert program" (11). CIA sabotage efforts will be terminated, though the Agency will continue trying to identify, seek out, and establish contact with potential dissident non-Communist elements in the power centers of the Castro regime. The possibilities of talking with Castro are viewed positively (12). Chase suggests that the realities of domestic political considerations "reinforce our national security decision to keep a reasonable amount of pressure on Cuba...." (15).

15. Memo, Chase to Bundy, 7 April 1964.

Crimmins warns Chase that infiltration/exfiltration problems may create noise regarding U.S. covert programs against Cuba.

16. Memo, Chase to Bundy, 10 April 1964, with attachment.

More discussions on the possibility of opening talks with Castro. The attachment emphasizes the true autonomy from the CIA of the autonomous exile groups.

17. Memo, Bundy to LBJ, 17 April 1964, with attachment (Memo, Taylor to LBJ, 21 March 1964).

The Taylor memo notes that LBJ asked the JCS on 4 March 1964 to think of new ways to (1) gain OAS support for the overthrow of Castro and (2) bring additional pressure upon Castro. Taylor concludes that the JCS "have difficulty identifying promising actions against Castro which have not been previously considered, and in some cases tried. It is a hard fact," Taylor continues, "that little remains which offers promise of real effectiveness in removing Castro short of a blockade or an ascending scale of military

action up to or including invasion."

18. Memo, Chase to Bundy, 21 April 1964.

Notes that Alexis Johnson is in charge of contingency planning for a coup in Cuba.

19. Memo, Chase to Bundy, 14 May 1964.

This memo suggests that a primary goal of the Johnson Administration was "to keep the lid on Cuba" until after the November Presidential elections. Thus, the continued exile raids were viewed negatively since they increased the noise level. The memo makes it clear that the exile raids were becoming completely beyond U.S. control despite CIA financial support to the groups.

20. Memo, Chase to Bundy, 2 June 1964.

Chase notes that Castro has executed three anti-Castro Cubans and jailed two others as CIA agents. CIA admits having a connection with the executed Cubans "but that it is completely deniable."

21. Memo, Helms, DDP, to DCI, 10 June 1964. Subject: "Plans of Cuban Exiles to Assassinate Selected Cuban Government Leaders"

The CIA was made aware of certain plans to kill Castro. The Agency told the sources, according to Helms, that "the United States Government would not, under any circumstances, condone the planned actions." Apparently on 2 March 1964 a wealthy Cuban exile was approached with a Cosa Nostra offer to assassinate Castro for \$150,000. The wealthy exile turned down the offer. Similar offers were made to other Cuban exiles in early March. A leading figure in the negotiations was Byron Cameron, a shipping-businessman from Ft. Lauderdale. An agreement was finally made to pay the Cameron group \$100,000 for killing Castro, plus \$2,500 for expenses. Julio Lobo Olavarria, a wealthy Cuban exile in New York was to pay much of the money, and did pay the \$2,500 on 25 April. Though Cameron's group remained anonymous, it was clear the Mafia was involved. Cameron revealed that his contact was a police officer in the St. Louis (Mo.) Vice Squad.

22. Memo, Chase to Bundy, 15 June 1964. Subject: "Assassination of Castro."

Referring to the above memo from DDP to DCI, Chase notes that John Crimmins feels the matter should be discussed at a Special Group meeting.

"John's own inclination is that the U.S. Government cannot knowingly permit any criminal American involvement in this sort of thing," notes Chase, "and should go all out to stop the plot." In marginal notations, Bundy agrees with John and with the need to forward the matter to the Special Group.

23. Memo, Chase to Bundy, 16 June 1964, with attachment (Des Fitzgerald's "A Reappraisal of Autonomous Operations").

Fitzgerald makes a defense of the autonomous operations. Tom Mann and Chase disapprove of the operations, though for different reasons.

24. Memo, Chase to Bundy, 18 June 1964.

Chase warns that further U.S. support of the autonomous groups is more likely to lead to a U-2 shootdown and a Caribbean crisis than the overthrow of the Castro regime. Chase continues to be worried about noise levels and the November election. This memo is very much like his 14 May memo (see Item 19).

25. Memo for the Record, Peter Jessup, 22 June 1964.

In a reference to Helm's memo on assassination (see Item 21), it was pointed out in a 303 Committee meeting of 18 June that "these reports, in effect, put the United States Government on notice that failure to take preventive action could be construed as condonation." The AG said Justice would look into the matter.

26. Memo, McCone to Bundy, 19 August 1964.

McCone summarizes the FBI investigation of Cuban exile plots against Castro as outlined in Helm's memo of 19 June (See Item 21). The Bureau interviewed many people allegedly involved, most of whom denied the existence of such a plan (The Bureau did not interview Cameron, since he was out of the country). The most interesting finding was that Lobo had in fact discussed the matter with CIA.

27. Memo, Chase to Bundy, 10 November 1964.

The election past, Chase et al. agreed that "we can usefully do some

basic review work on Cuba." FitzGerald pushes for re-institution of CIA-directed covert program.

②8 Memo, R.C. Bowman to Bundy, 12 November 1964, with JCS attachment dated 30 October 1964. Subject: SQUARE DANCE.

A contemptable proposal initiated by the Army to use germ warfare against Cuban sugar and livestock. Bowman and Bundy agree that the White House should "remain aloof from formal consideration of 'Square Dance' at this stage." I believe this plan for covert action is even more shocking and unacceptable than plans for assassination.

29. Memo, Chase to Bundy, 12 November 1964, and attachment (apparently a Bundy memo for a meeting with LBJ on 7 April 1964).

The Bundy memo suggests that LBJ approved various options "short of war to get rid of the Castro regime," including the possible contamination of sensitive Cuban imports (not food). The Chase memo indicates that a Fitzgerald operation was underway in November 1964 to ship contaminating elements into Cuba.

30. Memo, Chase to Bundy, 30 December 1964.

The Arttime group is out of control, though State, Defense and CIA (as well as Bundy) all agree that it would be unwise to try to interfere with him at this stage.

31. Memo, Chase to Bundy, 5 January 1965.

Chase reports a plan told to Crimmins and the CIA about an Arttime plot to stage a "palace coup" during which Castro and other top leaders would be "neutralized." D-Day was to be March 13. This matter was to be discussed at an upcoming Special Group meeting on whether or not "to cut off Arttime's water." Chase notes: "CIA at this point is loath to make a hard evaluation of the Arttime/Cubela plot."

32. Memo to 303 Committee, unsigned, 18 January 1965, presumably a CIA document.

Discusses the virtues of continuing Underwater Demolition Teams against ships in Cuban harbors. If such activities are disallowed, the CIA should be authorized to reduce its commitment in the paramilitary field.

33. Memo, Chase to Bundy, 8 February 1965.

This memo indicates that not even Arttime had his group in control. The memo also discusses CIA covert activities in British Guiana, such as penetrating the PPP and propping up the democratic trade unionism.

34. Memo, Murat Williams (INR) to Peter Jessup, White House staff, 23 February 1965.

Recommends immediate termination of Arttime support.

35. Memo, Chase to Bundy, 2 March 1965

Discussion of who is for maintaining a covert capability against Cuba (presently on the shelf) and who is opposed. Chase guessed that CIA would be opposed ("fish or cut bait"); State would not. Rusk's general attitude toward Cuba at this time was to keep the temperature low while sorting out the Vietnam problem.

36. Memo, Chase to Bundy, 4 March 1965.

Chase recommends phasing out support to Arttime. The CIA is considering diluting pesticides sent to Cuba; this is similar to the kinds of tactics mentioned in Items 28 and 29 above and are a manifestation of the moral bankruptcy of U.S. policy. Also some talk here of backing a new exile group, RECE, though not much enthusiasm for the idea from anyone apparently. Oddly, CIA wishes to drop its paramilitary capability, while DoD and State want the capability maintained.

37. Memo, Grant Hilliker (State) to Bundy, 18 June 1965.

This is a summary of U.S. policy toward Cuba. The ultimate objective is still to replace the Castro regime. The memo notes that "the paramilitary program involving CIA-controlled actions was set aside even before it really started."

38. Memo, Bundy to LBJ, 26 June 1965.

Adm. Raborn recommends reactivation of a paramilitary effort against Cuba. Bundy, Tommy Thompson, Rusk, McNamara, and Cy Vance are against this chiefly because of the concomitant international noise level. "Most of us," Bundy writes, "do not recommend visible violent actions against Cuba." Raborn's recommendations said nothing about assassination.

39. Memo, Rostow to LBJ, 30 May 1966.

Rostow notifies the President that a CIA exfiltration mission ran into ambush and the agents were captured. The President could expect "the noise level of Castro's charges of 'threatened Yankee aggression' may go up."

40. Memo, Karamessines, DDP, to Rostow, 7 August 1967.

This memo is important because it lists the names of two or three Cubans who worked on CIA missions. If they are in the U.S., it may be worthwhile talking to them about their activities.

41. Memo, W.G. Bowdler to Rostow, 18 December 1967.

The new CIA emphasis is on developing contacts within Castro's inner circle. Dave Phillips was to be in charge of the new CIA Cuba program. Bowdler advises that "we be alert to indications that Castro is looking for accommodation or his disillusioned lieutenants want to know where we stand if they move to dump him."

④2 Memo, Helms to LBJ, 12 June 1968.

Carlos Prio, former President of Cuba, is sponsoring a plan to assassinate Castro. Two Cubans have infiltrated Cuba from Miami to implement the assassination. "CIA has nothing whatever to do with these attempts," writes Helms, "and learns of them only through penetration of Cuban exile groups."

④3 Memo, Rostow to LBJ, 20 June 1968.

"CIA, Defense, and State agreed that, should an assassination or an assassination attempt take place, the U.S. skirts should be clean," writes Rostow. Therefore, State warned Cuban authorities via the Swiss that reports had been received on a Castro assassination attempt. So by 1968 we were warning Castro of attempts on his life!

44. CIA Intelligence Report, 18 November 1968.

"...there is little chance...that a plot against the (Castro) regime could succeed in the foreseeable future." (14).

COPY NO. 2

RECORD OF ACTIONS
by the
NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL
at its
FOUR HUNDRED AND EIGHTY-THIRD MEETING
held on
May 5, 1961

(Approved by the President on May 16, 1961)

The President presided at this meeting. The Acting Secretary of the Treasury and the Director, Bureau of the Budget, participated in the actions below. The Attorney General; the Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare; the Acting Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff; the Director of Central Intelligence; the Director, U. S. Information Agency; the Under Secretary of State; the Deputy Secretary of Defense; the Deputy Under Secretary of State; Theodore C. Achilles, Special Assistant to the Secretary of State; Stephen E. Smith, Assistant to Mr. Achilles; the Special Counsel to the President; the Special Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs; Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., Special Assistant to the President; the Assistant to the Special Counsel to the President; the Assistant to the Vice President; the Assistant Secretary of Defense (ISA); the Adviser to the President for Para-Military Affairs; the Military Aide to the President; the Deputy Director (Plans), Central Intelligence Agency; the Acting Executive Secretary, NSC; and Bromley Smith, NSC Staff, attended the meeting.

ACTION
NUMBER

SUBJECT

2420. U. S. POLICY TOWARD IRAN

Agreed that a Task Force should be established under the Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs to prepare and circulate a report on the subject by May 15 for discussion by the Council on May 19.

2421. U. S. POLICY TOWARD KOREA

Agreed that a Task Force under the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs should be established to prepare and circulate a report on the subject by May 15 for discussion by the Council on May 19.

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ACTION
NUMBERSUBJECT

2422.

U. S. POLICY TOWARD CUBA

(NSC Action No. 2413-c; Memo for NSC, same subject, dated May 4, 1961)

- a. Agreed that U. S. policy toward Cuba should aim at the downfall of Castro, and that since the measures agreed below are not likely to achieve this end, the matter should be reviewed at intervals with a view to further action.
- b. Agreed that the United States should not undertake military intervention in Cuba now, but should do nothing that would foreclose the possibility of military intervention in the future.
- c. Agreed that the United States should not impose a naval blockade or attempt an air war against Cuba; it was noted that neither course had the support of the Department of Defense or the Joint Chiefs of Staff.
- d. Noted the importance the President attaches to obtaining timely and adequate intelligence as to Cuban military capabilities, especially the enhancement of such capabilities by Sino-Soviet Bloc military assistance, so that U. S. capabilities for possible intervention may be maintained at an adequate level.
- e. Noted the importance the President attaches to publication in the Free World press of the terroristic actions of the Castro regime, and to possible political action to end the current terror.
- f. Noted the President's direction that the Central Intelligence Agency, with other departments, should make a detailed study of possible weaknesses and vulnerabilities in the elements which exert control in Cuba today.
- g. Agreed that relations with the Revolutionary Council should be improved and made more open, and while it cannot be recognized as a government-in-exile, support should be given to it insofar as it continues to represent substantial Cuban sentiment.

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ACTION
NUMBER

SUBJECT

2422. U. S. POLICY TOWARD CUBA (Continued)

- h. Agreed that no separate Cuban military force should be organized in the United States, but that Cuban nationals would be encouraged to enlist in the U. S. armed forces under plans to be developed by the Secretary of Defense.
- i. Agreed that Cuban nationals now holding U. S. visitors' visas will be given refugee status and assisted, under a program to be developed and directed by the Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare, in carrying on their former occupations. Refugees now in Miami will be encouraged to locate in other areas. Cuban nationals entering the United States will be given refugee status. All refugees will be eligible to apply for travel privileges, and it was understood that they would also be eligible for citizenship.
- j. Agreed not to impose an immediate trade embargo on Cuba. The Secretary of State agreed to send to the President an analysis of the effects of a U. S. embargo on trade with Cuba in relation to the Battle Act. It was agreed that when an embargo is imposed, it should be as complete as possible, with certain exceptions for Canada and with Red Cross distribution of drugs.
- k. Agreed that the United States should at once initiate negotiation to enlarge the willingness of other American states to join in bilateral, multilateral and OAS arrangements against Castro, such as (1) breaking diplomatic relations with Cuba; (2) controlling subversive activities of Cuban agents; (3) preventing arms shipments to Castro; (4) limiting economic relations with Cuba; (5) creating a Caribbean security force; (6) initiating a naval patrol to prevent Cuban invasion of other states in the Caribbean; and (7) denunciation of Castro as an agent of international communism by all nations of this hemisphere.

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ACTION
NUMBERSUBJECT2422. U. S. POLICY TOWARD CUBA (Continued)

- l. Agreed that the Alliance For Progress should be strengthened by such measures as (1) rapid implementation of selected social development projects; (2) acceleration of the implementation of other Latin American aid; and (3) provision of additional resources for Latin American economic and social development, including consideration of a supplemental appropriation for development loans of the order of \$200-\$400 million.
- m. Agreed that the U. S. Information Agency would expand its existing program in Latin America, but not initiate electronic warfare against the Castro regime; means of propaganda should be made available to non-U. S. groups.
- n. Agreed that U. S. military officers, under general guidance to be prepared by the Department of State, would discuss the Castro threat to all Latin America with Latin American officers.
- o. Agreed that the Secretary of State should prepare a report on a possible new juridical basis for effective anti-communist action.
- p. Agreed that pending appoint of an Assistant Secretary of State for Latin American Affairs, the Task Force on Cuba should be continued under the chairmanship of Richard N. Goodwin, Assistant to the Special Counsel to the President.

2423. U. S. POLICY TOWARD THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC AND HAITI

Agreed that the Task Force on Cuba would prepare promptly both emergency and long-range plans for anti-communist intervention in the event of crises in Haiti or the Dominican Republic. Noted the President's view that the United States should not initiate the overthrow of Trujillo before we knew what government would succeed him, and that any action against Trujillo should be multilateral.

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ACTION
NUMBERSUBJECT2424. U. S. POLICY TOWARD BRITISH GULANA

Agreed that the Task Force on Cuba would consider what can be done in cooperation with the British to forestall a communist take-over in that country.

2425. U. S. POLICY IN MAINLAND SOUTHEAST ASIA

- a. Noted that efforts should be made to reassure Sarit and Diem that we are not abandoning Southeast Asia.
- b. Noted the President's view that Sarit could be told that we are considering inclusion of U. S. troops in SEATO forces to be stationed in Thailand, the timing to be dependent on developments during or after the forthcoming 14-nation Geneva Conference.
- c. Noted that the Secretaries of State and Defense would be sending recommendations to the President promptly on U. S. training troops in Viet Nam.

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TOP SECRET

NOTES

Meeting of National Security Council, 5 May 1961

The President directed the establishment of a task force to study the Iranian problem and suggested that Mr. Talbot head the group. Mr. Rusk pointed out that General Bakhtiar visited the United States comparatively recently and that a coup involving him would possibly embarrass the United States. The President discounted the possibility.

The President directed that a group study the Korean problem and report its findings within two weeks. Mr. McConaughy will head the group of Defense, CIA, State and Treasury representatives. Mr. McNamara appointed Mr. William Bundy to represent Defense.

The President asked Mr. Nitze for a report on the Cuban situation. Nitze replied that the Navy could blockade the island but results would not be immediate but rather long-range, and in the course thereof unfavorable world reaction would probably accrue. Admiral Burke pointed out that only complete interception of all ships approaching Cuba would achieve eventual success, and the job could be done with 24 ships. Mr. Rusk interrupted Admiral Burke to point out that such action would be an act of war and was wholly impracticable.

The President asked about a reported letter from Senator Goldwater in which the statement is made that the Air Force could resolve the Cuban situation. Admiral Burke replied that there had in fact been an Air Force proposal with which other services had disagreed, especially the Marines. In any case, the Air Force had made the suggestion that the Cuban problem be resolved through rather heavy and perhaps indiscriminate bombardment. The President immediately rejected such an idea, and added further that there would be no Navy blockade. He emphasized the importance of more effective watch committee action on Cuba. He also asked Mr. Dulles what new information was available on foreign equipment going into Cuba. Mr. Dulles replied that we know practically everything about the equipment, but offered no specifics. The President directed that close surveillance be continued including overflight with an American pilot. The President approved flights of a frequency of every two or three days, but suggested extreme caution.

The President suggested that all Americans be urged to leave Cuba and asked Secretary Johnson to study ways and means of exit and transit visas.

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Mr. Murrow assessed world-wide reactions to the U.S. position with regard to Cuba. He felt that the departure of the clergy, the reign of terror, and such incidents as the imprisonment in the theater will result in favorable reactions toward the U.S. and tend to considerably offset the unfavorable ones. He felt that world-wide impressions of the United States were improving generally. The President suggested that the Iranian issue might be interpreted abroad as a possible result of the failure of the U.S. to act in Laos. He suggested action by USIA to discount this possible impression. Secretary Rusk suggested the overriding theme of U.S. rejection of Castro and went on to say that the U.S. must take all measures to precipitate his downfall or face the possibility that all South America will come under Communist influence.

The President asked what specific courses of action we should take to prevent the crippling influence of the Cuban fiasco, assuming that no military action by the U.S. will be taken. At the same time the President asked what circumstances would have to exist before the United States could move unilaterally against Cuba. Rusk stated that action could be taken under Article 51 of the Rio Treaty. In this connection the President asked if the U.S. could recognize the Cuban Government in Exile and what might be expected of this group. Rusk replied that such recognition was not possible because of the absence of certain essential elements of a governmental organization, identity and territory. The question then arose as to the status of the Cubans in the United States and Robert Kennedy replied that they should be designated refugees and stated that legislation exists to handle them under this designation. The Department of HEW will begin registering the refugees with the assistance of CIA. The President stated that the United States will invoke the Trading With the Enemy Act across the board as far as Cuba is concerned at such time as some overt act or incident occurs in Cuba. The President gave as an example the shooting of a United States citizen. The President would exempt from the restrictions of the Act some \$30 million for food and drugs. At the suggestion of Mr. Fowler, Under Secretary of the Treasury, the drugs should be donated to the Cuban people through the Red Cross. The President suggested the acceptance of the policy to encourage all Latin American states to sever relations with Cuba and to establish a complete economic boycott. The United States however should draw the line on becoming involved in the affairs of another country, such as active participation in the overthrow of Trujillo. Instead, the United States should determine appropriate courses of action in case Trujillo falls. The common danger in Haiti should be included in these considerations.

2

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Saigon, September 13

Dear Dean:

I ask that you show this letter to the President personally, as it is vital that it not get into the governmental paper mill. For maximum security I am typing it myself and am sending it to you by messenger.

What I ask is that General Lansdale be sent over here at once to take charge, under my supervision, of all U.S. relationships with a change of government here. To function efficiently he must have a staff and I therefore ask that he be put in charge of the CAS station in the Embassy, relieving the present incumbent, Mr. John Richardson.

This is said without casting any reflection on Mr. Richardson. Indeed I think of him as a devoted, intelligent and patriotic American. If his loyal support in the past of the U.S. policy of winning the war with Diem has made it difficult for him to carry out a different policy now, he has never said so or showed it. If, as I am inclined to think, Vietnamese have naturally suspected him of being pro-Diem, it has not been his fault.

My request to put General Lansdale in his place is not because I have anything but praise of Mr. Richardson, but because of my belief that we need a new face and that General Lansdale has outstanding qualifications.

But I hope John McCone will be told my high regard for Mr. Richardson.

CAS telegram FVS-9617, September 11, is the most encouraging report I have seen since arriving in Vietnam. And it is confirmed by a wholly independent source in whom I have great confidence.

No written answer to this letter is necessary. General Lansdale's arrival will be a more than adequate response.

I hope you will tell the President how much I value his message contained in Deptel 396.

With warm regards

As ever yours


Henry Cabot Lodge

Hon. Dean Rusk
Secretary of State

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