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THE UNDER SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

22 SEP 1981 16 36



POLICY

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

Office of the Secretary of Defense
Chief, RDD, ESD, WHS
Date: 09 AUG 2019 Authority: EO 13526
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MDR: 18-M-2213

22 SEP 1981

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MEMORANDUM FOR THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

SUBJECT: Central America and Cuba: The Need to Act --
INFORMATION MEMORANDUM (U)

(S) It is essential, I believe, that we now move ahead more vigorously on the problems of Central America and Cuba.

(U) If current trends in Central America continue, the extreme left could win in El Salvador. Nicaragua --which is well on the way to becoming the strongest local military power in Central America--would become the "North Vietnam" of the region, both militarily and politically. That would make it highly likely that Costa Rica, Honduras, and Guatemala will fall to the attacks of the extreme left, thus setting the stage for the use of Central American assets and territories to create a revolutionary condition in Mexico.

(U) In line with long-standing--and successful--Communist tactics, the real, social and economic problems in the Caribbean region are both exploited and aggravated by Communist propaganda and the acts of violence of the totalitarian left. Our policy, therefore, must be comprehensive, covering military assistance, intelligence support, political action, information programs, and economic aid.

(S) The interagency effort has produced a range of suggestions and programs. But the follow-through is somewhat spotty, handicapped by what appear to be two philosophies contending between State and Defense.

(S) As you know, Al Haig is most anxious to step up our efforts. He, however, emphasizes the idea of putting pressure on Castro, with the goal of making him throttle his support to Nicaragua and the insurgents in El Salvador. Our view here (which, I believe, is shared in CIA) is that we should not expect much from a deal with Castro, but should focus directly on the Central American problems, particularly Nicaragua.

Central America
DSD Reading CV

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330-83-0104, bx1, Central America (May - 23 Oct)

(S) These different philosophies as to how we ought to approach the problem need not hold us up. Between DoD, State, CIA and NSC, I think we can all converge on a program to move forward more rapidly. Yet, the actions needed are many, are diverse in nature and subject to different timing and external constraints. And, in particular, the responsibility for these actions is inevitably scattered among several agencies.

(S) Hence, we need a more formalized method for coordinating what has to be done. Under an agreed overall concept for the Administration's policy, approved by the President, we need an action plan, covering each measure and assigning responsibility to specific agencies with milestones and deadlines. A procedure must be established to monitor the completion of each task (or to alert the principals if it cannot be completed and substitute actions are needed).

(S) I have asked ISA to develop a first draft for such an action plan, with the idea that we would further refine it in follow-up discussions with State and CIA. This draft is attached for your information. Please keep in mind that some very important types of actions are only alluded to, for reasons of sensitivity.

(S) The following, in my view, ought to be the key elements of our policy:

- El Salvador: building up the military capability to protect economic recovery, through
 - out of country training (including civic action),
 - intelligence improvements,
 - better interdiction (with help of Honduras).

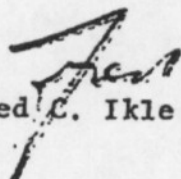
- Nicaragua: We must recognize Nicaragua as the fulcrum of our conflict with the Communist forces in Central America. We should not regard the Sandinista regime as necessarily viable; internal opposition and economic difficulties suggest a reversible situation. A reversal in Nicaragua would greatly set back Castro and probably put an end to the insurgency in El Salvador.

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-- Cuba: Our long-term national security is threatened by the Soviet military presence in Cuba. We must not cut a deal with Castro, by which he would exchange a temporary cutback in his intervention in Central America for a "detente" with the US. Since Cuba, as a Soviet ally, is a threat to us regardless of the Cuban role in Central America, we must redouble the pressures on Castro. Castro's vulnerabilities are many: Angola, Ethiopia, his domestic opinion (we are, at last, getting Radio Free Cuba underway), and economic difficulties.

(U) We will try to get interagency coordination on a program of action (along the lines of the attached draft) and schedule a breakfast discussion with Haig for review, modification and your joint recommendation to the President.


Fred C. Ikle

Attachment

cc: Mr. West

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