

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

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ACTION

MEMORANDUM FOR: THE PRESIDENT

THROUGH: EDMUND S. MUSKIE  
ZBIGNIEW BRZEZINSKI

FROM: PETER TARNOFF  
ROBERT PASTOR

SUBJECT: Cuban Discussions, June 17, 1980 --  
Summary and Next Steps (TS)

After informing Castro that our principal interest in having this round of recent talks was to prepare the way for a negotiation of the immigration and USINT issue, we met for seven hours in Havana with three senior Cuban officials. However, we found them reluctant to discuss these two issues unless we expressed a readiness to negotiate a removal of the embargo, abandoning our base at Guantanamo, and ceasing the overflights. In addition, the Cuban side was unusually polemical, retracing 20 years of alleged American hostility to Cuba and raising trivial complaints. It became clear to us that although these confidential talks have proven useful in helping us to understand Cuba's views on a wide range of issues, we have clearly reached a dead-end in terms of resolving problems. We need to decide on next steps to ensure that a number of problems on the horizon are managed effectively. (TS)

During previous discussions, but with greatest clarity and force on June 17, the Cubans argued that our continued presence in Guantanamo, the embargo, and the overflights are unjust and a violation of international law, and if we were serious about wanting a relationship based on mutual respect, we would have to change our positions on these issues. They reject our argument that we can only change our positions on these issues if they are responsive to our concerns with regard to Cuban activities in Africa, the Caribbean and Central America, and Puerto Rico; they refuse to equate the bilateral "GEO" issues (Guantanamo, Embargo, Overflights) with issues involving their foreign policies. (TS)

In our conversations with the Cubans, we had held out the prospect of improved relations with us -- including moves toward lifting the embargo -- if Cuba moderated its behavior in several specific areas of foreign policy interest to the US. Castro has now indicated unequivocally that he will not accept such linkage. On

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the assumption that negotiated agreements with us are not now possible, the Cubans indicated that they now intend to take their bilateral demands to the court of international opinion as a way to try to pressure us to change. They will do this not only because they see it as the only way to persuade us to change, but because Castro wants to use the "GEO" issues to divert his people's attention from the most serious economic and political problems his nation has faced in at least a decade. Because of the present impasse in our bilateral relations and the conditions that are drawing Cuba into a more confrontational position, we have several decisions to make on policies toward Cuba in the coming months. (TS)

We believe that our principal objective should remain to moderate Cuba's international behavior. The US has always believed that the embargo, and the possibility of lifting it, gives us some leverage over Cuba's international posture, but this assumption is increasingly open to question. On June 17, the Cuban side was quite candid in explaining how the embargo had hurt the Cuban economy, but they were equally clear that they would not modify Cuba's role to get us to lift it -- for probably three reasons: (1) Castro is unwilling to compromise with us the activist world role that he covets; (2) the Soviets not only foot the bill, but they also help the Cubans in everything, largely because of this international role; and (3) Cuba wants the embargo lifted more for the legitimacy and dignity it will confer on the revolution than for its economic benefits, and they will not do something they view as undignified in order to resume trade. (TS)

Although even a partial lifting of the embargo is out of the question for now, we should recognize the effect that it might have over time, not on Castro's attitudes but on the fabric of Cuban society. The return this past year of 100,000 Cuban-Americans for short visits exposed Cuba to the economic and cultural magnetism of the US, and probably had a greater impact on opening up Cuba than anything the USG has previously done; to lift the embargo and open Cuba to US business and contact could not but affect Castro's regime. Nevertheless, the principal argument against lifting the embargo remains one of credibility; for three years, we said we needed some progress by Cuba on a number of international issues before we took such a step. To take the step in the absence of any positive sign from Cuba would be to show the world that the US has no staying power. The fundamental issue of the embargo need not be addressed soon, but we have to deal now with the immediate issues of USINT and immigration and with the prospect that Cuba intends to launch a major international campaign to force us to lift the embargo. (TS)

#### Recommendation

Here is what we recommend on these matters:

1. USINT. The Cubans were unequivocal in their demand that we hand over to them the 361 Cubans in our Interest Section.

These people may now be in for a long wait and the Cubans could well bring pressure on US officials in Havana to show their displeasure. While the morale of the people at USINT is high now, that might not last, and we could face a serious security problem when it breaks. We propose three courses of action:

(a) President Lopez Portillo is going to Cuba in late July. We propose Bill Bowdler and Bob Pastor brief him on these recent talks with the Cubans and ask his intercession with Castro to obtain the release of the 361 in our Interest Section. (TS)

(b) We should take our case to the World Court or the Inter-American Human Rights Court. (TS)

(c) We should ask the European Community to lobby the Cubans on this issue, and you might want to raise it at the Summit. We should seek to maximize international pressure on Castro to release the 361, comparing the Cuban attitude to that of the Iranian authorities who are prolonging a hostage situation because of a political dispute between governments. This should be highlighted. (TS)

2. Criminals and Mental Patients. We asked the Cubans whether Cuba would assume responsibility and accept repatriation if recognized international representatives were to confirm that the people are in fact criminals and mental patients. The Cubans dodged the question, having already said that they did not force such persons to emigrate. We propose that this issue be on the agenda for all three discussions described above -- briefing Lopez Portillo; raising it at World Court; and maximizing international pressure. (TS)

3. Immigration. The Cubans claimed that there can be no progress on a "partial problem" like immigration without dealing with its fundamental cause -- the embargo, US hostility. We can expect that they will not be cooperative; indeed, they may try to start up Mariel again or some variation of it, e.g., an airlift to points in Florida. (TS)

(a) We propose that Jack Watson chair an interagency meeting to develop a full strategy to prevent a second Mariel. This would mean prosecuting the boat owners who have gone to Mariel and perhaps requesting new legislation. It might also require a tightening of the embargo (to prevent the flow of money to Cuban-Americans who were forced to pay through a Miami intermediary exorbitant fees to the Cuban Government). (TS)

(b) We should press for a second conference at San Jose to discuss the Cuban immigration problem and to agree on a strategy for raising it in the OAS or at the UN in the context of the "Mass Exodus Resolution." We should pursue all international paths to encourage Cuba to respect the immigration laws of the US and other countries and to develop an orderly immigration program. (TS)

(c) The Attorney General will be recommending to you soon that we enforce strong measures to prohibit boat hijacking. We support that recommendation as a further way to prevent the illegal flow. (TS)

4. International Campaign. The Cubans gave us some indication that they might delay the initiation of an international campaign until after the November elections (since they are aware it could have a counterproductive effect). Nevertheless, it is quite possible that Castro might launch such a campaign as a reaction to our international efforts on the immigration and USINT issues. Since their arguments against the embargo, Guantanamo, and overflights are likely to have an appeal in the Third World, we need to be prepared to brief world-wide on our positions in a way which will erode the force of their campaign. Pastor and Tarnoff will draft such a briefing cable. (TS)

That you approve the steps described above. (U)

Approve \_\_\_\_\_

Disapprove \_\_\_\_\_