



OFFICE OF THE HISTORIAN

FOREIGN RELATIONS, 1977–1980, VOLUME XXIII, MEXICO, CUBA, AND THE CARIBBEAN

124. Situation Room Checklist¹

Washington, September 13, 1980

1. *Tarnoff's Meetings with Castro*: The first meeting lasted six hours which Castro described as one of the “most positive” of several he had with Tarnoff. He was very favorably impressed with Secretary Muskie’s public statement and the President’s message expressing condolences over the murder of Garcia-Rodriguez.² Castro stressed that he wanted to take some unilateral steps in coming weeks to meet our concerns but that it should not involve public bilateral discussions that could damage the President’s re-election chances. After discussing the proposals with the politburo, Castro informed Tarnoff in their second meeting what measures Cuba will take. First, on September 16 Cuba will announce that anyone responsible for future hijackings of U.S. aircraft to Cuba will either be sentenced to death in Cuba or returned by Cuba to the U.S. for trial. Most hijackers will be deported. Those responsible for the recent hijackings will be tried and sentenced but the new harsher measures will not be applied retroactively. Second, Cuba will grant unconditional amnesty to the 33 imprisoned Americans in Cuba. They will be free to remain in Cuba or emigrate to the U.S. or another foreign country. Third, Cuba will “suspend” all departures from Mariel starting September 25. Castro would only guarantee that Mariel would remain closed until November 4, after which he would review the situation. Castro stressed that this did not signify resolution of the refugee problem which is subject to future negotiations. Castro was unprepared to agree to the return of refugees who want to return to Cuba. Fourth, he would allow chartered U.S. flights to take out all those who had sought refuge in the U.S. Interests Section. Fifth, he said he would not limit his efforts to being helpful in bilateral matters, but would urge moderation in dealing with the U.S. to third world and communist leaders. He will also accelerate pressure on Iran to release the hostages. Castro concluded by asking that the President be told that he was taking these steps as part of a gradual, [Page 269] deliberate process to reduce tensions. These measures were unilateral and unconditional. Castro did not expect any direct reciprocity or firm commitment from the U.S. He regards U.S. willingness to discuss issues of bilateral and wider concern as a statement of good faith by the President. The U.S. should not conclude, however, that it has contracted any obligation. Castro reiterated his preference to delay formal negotiations until November at the earliest. (Havana 6492 and 6495,³ LDX, NODIS CHEROKEE) (S)

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1. Source: Carter Library, National Security Affairs, Brzezinski Material, Country File, Box 15, Cuba, 9–10/80. Secret; Sensitive. Carter initialed the checklist indicating that he saw it. An enclosure that contains Tarnoff’s talking points, including Carter’s revisions, is attached but not printed.↵
 2. On September 11, Cuban diplomat Felix Garcia-Rodriguez was murdered in New York by a group of militant exiles. In telegram 242705 to Havana, September 12, the Department forwarded Carter’s message of condolence to Castro, in which the President stated, “I wish to express deepest regret over this cowardly and reprehensible deed. I assure you that we will

spare no effort to find those responsible and bring them to justice.” (National Archives, RG 59, Central Foreign Policy File, D800424–0312) Secretary Muskie’s statement, quoted in telegram 242727 to Havana, September 12, used similar language. (National Archives, RG 59, Central Foreign Policy File, P910096–1770)↵

3. Telegram 6492 from Havana, September 12, and telegram 6495 from Havana, September 13, contain longer summaries of Tarnoff’s September 12 conversations with Castro. (Carter Library, National Security Affairs, Brzezinski Material, Country File, Box 15, Cuba, 9–10/80)↵