

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM FOR: THE PRESIDENT

FROM: ZBIGNIEW BRZEZINSKI

SUBJECT: Conversations in Havana (TS)

As you will recall, Peter Tarnoff and Bob Pastor went to Havana December 2-4 at the Cuban government's invitation. They had 5½ hours of discussion on Saturday, December 2 with Vice President Carlos Rafael Rodriguez and Raul Valdez Vivo, Secretary of Foreign Relations in the Central Committee. President Castro received them for five full hours of discussions, 10 P.M. Sunday until 3 A.M., Monday, December 4. The transcripts of their conversations are attached. We have underlined the more important sections so as to facilitate your skimming them. (TS)

Let me recommend that you start with the Rodriguez meeting. On foreign policy and on all matters affecting Cuban relations with the U.S., Rodriguez is the second most influential person in Cuba. He is an intellectual, is reasonably comfortable in English (his library has, among hundreds of volumes, the Kalbs' book on Kissinger; Schlesinger on The Imperial Presidency), and he has been a leader of the Cuban Communist Party all his life. The tone of the conversation was diplomatic and correct, but the ideological differences between the positions of Cuba and the U.S., particularly in Africa were clearer in Rodriguez's statement than in any others, including Castro's (pp 15-17). (TS)

Castro clearly picked up from where the conversation with Rodriguez had left off. Obviously, Castro had been fully briefed. He completely understood the message which Tarnoff and Pastor had brought and he didn't like it. The transcript picks up the precision of his arguments and the importance he gives to details, but it fails to convey the passion or the force which Castro, who surprisingly speaks quite softly, brought to his arguments. Castro was clearly speaking directly to you, and he decided that this was the time for him to vent twenty years of rage which had been bottled up inside of him. (TS)

~~TOP SECRET~~ - EYES ONLY

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More than perhaps any other leader, including DeGaulle, Castro speaks of his nation's "dignity" as if he were Cuba. He has ruled Cuba for twenty years, and at 52, he expects to be around for a long time more. But the sense that history is on his side is belied by an evident sense of impatience. (TS)

We recommend that you focus, in particular, on two sections: his introductory statement (pp 2-5) and his statement about the SR-71 overflight (bottom of p 12-13). (TS)

Conclusions

The purpose of this trip was to try to draw Cuba's leaders out, and to see whether there was any way we would be able to secure the release of the U.S. prisoners. Obviously, there was no problem drawing out Castro since he had a lot he wanted to get off his chest. On U.S. prisoners, Castro said that he could not release them at this time, but he didn't close the door to a future release. (TS)

As in the past, much of the conversation was devoted to Africa. We reiterated our position that the embargo was related to their military activities in Africa, and they completely and unequivocally rejected that. They said they don't negotiate our troops abroad, and we shouldn't negotiate there's; they don't have an embargo on us, why should we maintain our's; they don't intend to let the "fascists" of Rhodesia and South Africa prevail. But Castro did say that Cuban troops might be reduced in Ethiopia soon, and that he would pull them out immediately if asked to do so by Neto or Mengistu. Not only did the Cubans firmly reject the idea of committing themselves to not intervene anywhere else in Africa, they hinted that their support of liberation movements might draw them in before too long. We should have no illusions about their intentions in Africa. They will not be helpful; they do not view developments in Africa as we do; they probably define their interests in Africa differently than we do. They want to play an important role in Africa, and if that means they will have to live with the embargo, they are reconciled to it. (TS)

On the prisoners, Castro was pleased that he had taken the initiative, and was almost smug in the way he portrayed our seeming reluctance to accept the prisoners. In asking our position on reunification of families - an important issue to the Cuban-American community -- Castro hinted that he would turn the human rights argument against us if we weren't more responsive. (TS)

In summary, we are stuck in Africa. On human rights, he has indeed grasped the importance of the issue, and turned it against us. On Puerto Rico, they are committed to the principle of independence but they gave the impression that their behavior will be modulated according to the tone of our relationship at the time. (TS)