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Summary and Conclusions
NSC/PRC Meeting - Cuba

March 9, 1977

Secretary of Defense Harold Brown said that it was not our aim to change the internal structure of the Government of Cuba, but we should not lift the embargo until the Cubans indicate in their actions -- not just public utterances -- that they will not intervene militarily anywhere.

Secretary Vance agreed with Brown's point on the importance of considering Cuba's external policy as one of the items to be considered in discussions with the Cubans, but he stressed our own great interest in "beginning to move down the road" toward normalization, though on a reciprocal and a gradual basis.

Attorney General Bell agreed that we should proceed, although with great caution. He mentioned the problem of terrorism, and Vance personally asked Bell to vigorously investigate the terrorist activities in the Cuban communities in the U.S., particularly in Miami. Bell replied that the FBI had had some jurisdictional problems before, but because of Vance's request, he would see to it that the investigations were pursued.

Secretary of Commerce Juanita Kreps reported that a large segment of the American business community were strongly in favor of a resumption of trade with Cuba, though she thought that the Cubans had not taken into account MFN or credits, and therefore overestimated the advantages which would accrue to them because of trade.

George Brown, Under Secretary of Treasury Anthony Solomon, and Dr. Brzezinski all agreed that we should approach the early exploratory discussions in a cautious way.

Solomon also said that Cuba's right to export sugar to the U.S. is one of our most important bargaining chips, and we should therefore be careful if and when we lift our (export) embargo on food and medicines that we separately negotiate their right to export to us.

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Vance summarized the consensus that all agreed that the United States Government should begin talks with the Cubans in a measured and careful way, keeping in mind that the chip of eliminating the embargo is the ultimate one, and we should play that one well.

In addition to informing various Latin American and NATO governments, Dr. Brzezinski said that we should also touch base with Canada and Japan. With respect to the approach, Brzezinski said we should be careful not to be drawn into making all the concessions at the beginning without being assured of movement on Cuba's part. He used the example of U.S.-Hungarian relations in the mid-1950s to illustrate the need for face-saving gestures for both sides. He said that progress was most likely if both moved forward with sequential and reciprocal steps. He also suggested that we move from exploratory talks to putting together a more comprehensive package.

Vance agreed and said the discussions will begin on fisheries and move into other issues, including establishing an American Interest Section in the Swiss Embassy and then the anti-hijacking agreement. When the Cubans raise the embargo issue, we would raise Cuba's foreign adventurism and its activities with regard to Puerto Rico. Vance agreed with Solomon that we should also raise the compensation issue then, even though we do not expect its early resolution. Talks would begin in New York City in mid-March with either the Assistant Secretary or the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State leading the U.S. team.

Dr. Brzezinski said that it is essential that if we are going to retain the momentum, that we should differentiate between three sets of issues: (1) those, like fisheries, anti-hijacking, and sports exchanges, which can be done easily and quickly; (2) those, like human rights, the embargo, some aspects of Cuba's foreign policy, and Guantanamo, which are negotiable, and should be done before diplomatic relations are established; and (3) those like compensation and claims, Cuba's withdrawal from Angola, and political prisoners, which may be irreconcilable, but certainly will involve protracted negotiations, and therefore should be handled after relations are established.


On the issue of Guantanamo, Harold and George Brown both said that Defense's major interest was to keep it from being transferred to the Soviets.

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On the question of getting Cuban adherence to the U.S.-USSR agreements of 1962 and 1970 barring strategic weapons in Cuba, Vance and Brzezinski agreed it was not necessary, and we should not use any bargaining chips to try to get the Cubans to do it.

All agreed that the President and Secretary of State would have to involve the public and Congress in a gradual but continual education process, particularly given the Cuban community's unanimous opposition to any change in a hostile U.S. policy.


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Note taker

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