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POLICY REVIEW COMMITTEE MEETING

White House Situation Room

Wednesday, August 3, 1977 - 2:30-3:50 p.m.

Subject: Cuba

Participants:

State

Acting Secretary Christopher
Terence A. Todman
Anthony Lake

Defense

Charles Duncan
Captain James L. May

Joint Chiefs of Staff

Lt. General William Y. Smith

Attorney General

Lawrence Gibson

Commerce

Secretary Juanita Kreps
Frank Weil

CIA

Director Stansfield Turner
Robert Hopkins

Treasury

Secretary W. Michael Blumenthal
Fred Bergsten

NSC

Zbigniew Brzezinski
Robert A. Pastor (Notetaker)

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

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Introduction

Reviewing the progress of the negotiations with Cuba since the last PRC meeting, Acting Secretary Warren Christopher said that the negotiations had gone unexpectedly well. Whatever Cuba's conduct elsewhere, the Cubans had conducted the talks with us in a very businesslike manner. And they have given us high priority in helping to establish the Interest Sections, which will be opened on September 1, and will give us a place to hold discussions with them.

Christopher reviewed the three options in the paper. Option I would continue the step-by-step approach in an unstructured way. Option II is the intermediate option, to negotiate for limited package arrangements. Variant A would involve a trade-off of various steps by Cuba in the human rights area in exchange for a partial lifting of the embargo by the U.S. Christopher said that State recommended amending that option to include Cuba's agreement in principle to negotiate compensation for U.S. nationalized property. Variant B would involve a complete lifting of the embargo for more steps by Cuba. Option III is to move toward a more comprehensive settlement.

Agency Preferences

Secretary Blumenthal thought the first option too timid, and prefers Option II(A). Dr. Brzezinski agreed that Option I is too timid, and Option III, premature. Option II, however, was not adequate since it did not go far enough in the human rights area and did not address the issue of Cuban involvement in Africa at all. He was not suggesting that we needed to get Cuba's agreement to completely withdraw from Angola; rather what was needed was to disaggregate these three issues into smaller steps and trade part of the embargo for progress on human rights and Cuba's external activities.

The embargo was our biggest bargaining chip, and we should not "puncture" it without getting some commitment to international restraint. We should not lift it entirely until we see some concrete progress in this area. In the human rights area, Brzezinski thought the items listed under Option II(A) were good, but we should expect them to release more Cuban political prisoners.

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Assistant Secretary Todman said that he thought the three human rights steps we expected from Cuba in exchange for a partial lifting of the embargo represented quite a significant gesture on the part of Cuba, and that we were not likely to get even that much since Castro had already said he did not consider a partial lifting of the embargo as that important.

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[REDACTED] State preferred Option II (A) for the same reasons as Treasury, because it introduced structure into the discussions.

General Smith said that we should seek some restraint on the increase in the number of Cubans fighting in Angola. He also expressed concern about Cuban harassment of our P-3 flights and their seizure of U.S. shipping boats. Deputy Secretary of Defense Charles Duncan agreed that such military considerations should be taken into account. He thought the Interest Sections would be a better place to negotiate than at the UN. Duncan agreed with Brzezinski that we should only begin to lift the embargo when we get substantive changes by the Cubans.

Restraint in Africa

All the participants agreed with Dr. Brzezinski that Cuba's activities in Africa should be put on the agenda of the next round of discussions and that we should reiterate our strong concern for their restraint. There was a division of opinion on whether we should condition any further steps on our part with concrete steps by Cuba in restraining and reducing its activities in Africa. Treasury, State, and Commerce agreed that at the very beginning of discussions, we should state that we assume that the Cubans will show restraint in their military activities abroad, and that over time there would be a reduction of such activities. If there is not, that would create an obstacle to further progress toward normalization. We should leave that assumption on the table unless the Cubans escalate their activities. Thus, this point would constitute an assumption upon which tacit agreement was reached, rather than an item for negotiations. The approach would be to adopt Option I for the first month and wait for proposals from Cuba; if the Cubans do not offer any proposals, then we would move to Option II (A) in November.

NSC, DOD and JCS agreed to the scenario outlined above, with the amendment being the need to see some tangible, concrete improvement in Cuba's activities in Africa as a precondition to our puncturing the embargo.

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Secretary Blumenthal suggested that the Cubans might respond to the proposal suggested by NSC and DOD by saying that they will only be willing to negotiate with us on their activities in Africa if we negotiate our military activities and bases abroad. The exchange is not likely to be very productive. Blumenthal believed normalization of diplomatic relations with all countries, including Cuba was an important goal in itself. With respect to Cuba, it was of added benefit because it would increase our status in the hemisphere by indicating that we were willing to put the past behind us and accept other political philosophies. These are important points which are necessary to a new approach in the hemisphere. So if we get to the crunch, where Cuba says it will not commit itself to changing its Africa policies to suit us, Blumenthal suggested it would be better to restate our concern and then to negotiate hard on the issues of human rights, compensation, and trade, then to drop all negotiations. Secretary Kreps agreed with this formulation.

Brzezinski disagreed, saying that Cuba's international activities were so important to us that we cannot permit the normalization process to go forward without some commitment by Cuba to halt such activities.

Congress

On the question of which of the two alternatives would be most acceptable to Congress, all agreed on the need to take additional soundings first. Some thought that we should delay movement in this area until the picture is clearer on how it will affect the way Congress deals with such issues as the Canal Treaty, SALT, and China.

Cuba's Activities in Africa

CIA estimated there were 15,500 Cuban troops in Angola -- half of these are military advisers -- and 4,500 civilians. In addition to the 20,000 in Angola (500 of whom, the DIA believes have arrived since last March), there are approximately 2,000 Cubans in Africa outside of Angola. The Cubans are paying for their own soldiers and have not had to recruit new soldiers, but the Soviets appear to be paying for all of the equipment which the Cubans are using.

Terrorism

Larry Gibson of the Justice Department said that Justice has undertaken a comprehensive review of its activities to combat terrorism, and it remains very conscious of the September 1 date for the opening of the Interest Sections.

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