

25. Memorandum of Conversation¹

Washington, December 2, 1977

PARTICIPANTS

William P. Stedman, ARA
Wayne S. Smith, ARA/CCA
Ramon Sanchez-Parodi, Chief of Cuban Interests Section

SUBJECT

U.S.-Cuban Relations

Ambassador Stedman opened the conversation by asking Mr. Sanchez-Parodi if he had seen press reports that morning of the remarks on Cuban troops in Africa attributed to President Carter and Secretary Vance by two U.S. Congressmen.²

When Sanchez-Parodi said he had not, Mr. Smith gave him a Reuter report to read. Having done so, Sanchez-Parodi said he thought Carlos Rafael Rodriguez had already clarified Cuba's position in his conversation with the Chief of the U.S. Interests Section in Havana.³ The recent "dramatic build-up of Cuban troops in Africa" referred to by U.S. intelligence reports simply did not exist. Additional troops had been sent to Angola in the spring of 1977 because of the threat of counter-invasion from Zaire by Moroccan troops, but there had been no troop increases since at least June or July; hence, it was difficult to fathom what the U.S. was complaining of. Cuba had sent additional technicians to Angola, to be sure, and would be sending more, as had been publicly announced. But troop levels were static.

Cuba had also sent some military advisors to Ethiopia, Sanchez-Parodi said, but added that the number was relatively small and that there were no combat units.

¹ Source: Carter Library, National Security Affairs, Staff Material, North/South, Pastor, Country, Box 11, Cuba, 10-12/77. Confidential. Drafted by Smith on December 6; cleared by Stedman. The meeting was held in the Tiberio Restaurant in Washington.

² Congressmen Frederick Richmond (D-NY) and Richard Nolan (D-MN) visited Cuba from December 1 to December 5 and met with Fidel Castro. "The message we're supposed to take," Nolan stated when they left Washington, "is that we're eager and ready to begin high-level, official negotiations with a presidential appointee, step-by-step, but that must include a step-by-step withdrawal from Africa." ("U.S. to Cuba: Quit Africa," *The Chicago Tribune*, December 2, p. 2) A summary of their meeting with Castro and their activities during the visit is in telegram 781 from Havana, December 6. (National Archives, RG 59, Central Foreign Policy File, D770397-0478)

³ A summary of this November 18 meeting was transmitted in telegram 643 from Havana, November 19. (National Archives, RG 59, Central Foreign Policy File, D770430-0556)

Mr. Smith replied that even granting that Sanchez-Parodi's information was accurate, that still meant there were more Cubans in Angola now than a few months ago, whether troops or not, and more Cuban military advisors in Ethiopia. The relative increase might not be large, but the U.S. Government had to be concerned as to what the increases might imply in terms of Cuban intentions. The Ford Administration had started secret talks with Cuba only to see Cuba intervene militarily in Angola.⁴ The present Administration obviously would have reservations about going ahead with the process of normalization in the face of any build-up in Angola and perhaps a repetition in Ethiopia of the Angola pattern.

Sanchez-Parodi said this was not the case. Cuba has no wish to repeat its experience in Angola in any other African state. Further, Angola is in a difficult situation economically and without trained personnel to run things; hence, Cuban technicians are needed. In that sense, Cuba will probably be involved in Angola for several years. But once the military situation permits, she would like to resume the reduction of troops which had begun in 1976.

Ambassador Stedman asked if there were any possibility of a reduction soon in the overall number of Cuban troops in Africa.

Sanchez-Parodi replied that with the exception of Angola and Ethiopia the number of Cuban military personnel in any given African country was insignificant. And as he had said, reductions in Angola would depend upon the situation there. Further, he said, if the U.S. side wants to talk about Cuban troop reductions in Africa, Cuba would wish to raise the matter of U.S. troops at Guantanamo.

Mr. Smith said that while there might appear to be some logical progression from talking about Cuban troops in Africa to American forces at Guantanamo, in fact the two situations were different and there was nothing practical to be gained from attempting to tie discussion of the one to the other.

Sanchez-Parodi disagreed, saying the one was as valid a subject for discussion as the other.

Ambassador Stedman asked if Sanchez-Parodi had any comment or thoughts on press reports of remarks attributed to the Secretary by the two U.S. Congressmen that Cuba should begin discussing the withdrawal of its troops from Africa.

Sanchez-Parodi reiterated earlier statements that Cuba's relations with Angola—and with Ethiopia and the other states—were bilateral affairs and not subject to negotiation. Discussions to clarify Cuba's

⁴ See *Foreign Relations, 1969–1976*, vol. E–11, Documents on Mexico; Central America; and the Caribbean, 1973–1976, Documents 299, 302, and 305.

position were something else again, but even there, he wondered if there was really anything to be gained, since Carlos Rafael Rodriguez had already stated Cuba's position clearly.

¹ Source: Source: Carter Library, National Security Affairs, Staff Material, North/South, Pastor, Country, Box 11, Cuba, 10–12/77. Secret; Not Releasable to Foreign Nationals; Not Releasable to Contractors or Contractor/Consultants.