

Approved in S 3/14/69

~~SECRET - SIDS~~

~~TOP SECRET~~
DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Memorandum of Conversation

3407

3/11/69
DATE: March 11, 1969
Time: 2:45 p.m.
Place: Secretary's Office

SUBJECT: CUBA: Signals from Castro Indicating
Desire for Dialogue with U.S.

PARTICIPANTS: Foreign
Alfred Fischli, Swiss Ambassador to Cuba
Felix Schnyder, Swiss Ambassador to the U.S.

United States
Secretary Rogers
Viron P. Vaky, Acting Assistant Secretary, ARA
Wells Stabler, Country Director, EUR/AIS
John F. Fitzgerald, Coordinator of Cuban Affairs, ARA/CCA

COPIES TO: S/S WH DOD L
INR/OD CIA ARA Amembassy BERN - (CUREP)

After opening courtesies, Ambassador Fischli sketched the main problems involved in Swiss representation of U.S. interests in Cuba-- the refugee airlift, repatriation of U.S. citizens, U.S. prisoners and hijacking. The Secretary then asked the Ambassador to tell him about his recent conversation with Fidel Castro.

fol
Cuba - 215

Ambassador Fischli began by explaining that Castro rarely receives Ambassadors. On earlier occasions when Fischli told the Cubans he would be visiting the U.S., he asked whether there was any message they wanted to transmit; always the answer was negative. Early this year senior officials hinted the time might be ripe for a change in the U.S.-Cuban relationship. On February 1 the Ambassador was summoned to see Foreign Minister Roa to receive the GOC's answers to our demarches on hijacking; afterward he was taken to Castro who spent some 40 minutes with Fischli and discussed the same points made in the GOC's note on hijacking.

Castro referred to "foreign interference" in Latin America and said the U.S. should cease such intervention. When the Ambassador alluded to guerrilla activities, with the obvious implication

ARA/CCA: JFF Fitzgerald

(Drafting Office and Officer)

FORM DS-1254
2-65

~~SECRET - SIDS~~

GROUP 1

Excluded from automatic downgrading and declassification.

DECLASSIFIED

Authority NND 969000
By SC NARA Date 10/11/03

RG 59 CENTRAL FILES 1967-1969
STACK 150 Row 65 Box 2021

~~SECRET~~

- 2 -

of Cuban intervention, Castro said "we should all stop interfering", adding that the situation was such that only the people of the countries themselves could determine the question of revolution.

Castro said Cuban exiles in the U.S. were plotting to spread hoof-and-mouth disease viruses in Cuba to ruin the cattle industry and sounded out the Ambassador on U.S. willingness to cooperate in foiling such a plot. He offered to provide proof obtained through the confession of a captured infiltrator. (Fischli reported this conversation at the time and we asked the Ambassador to tell the Cubans we knew of no such plot, would be opposed to anything of this type and expressed willingness to examine the documentation offered. This has not yet been provided.)

Castro emphasized that Cubans who escaped into the U.S. Naval Base at Guantanamo were welcomed as refugees. Questioning brought out that Castro was convinced that the U.S. did not connive in such escapes or encourage them but he said the mere fact that the escapees were given refuge encouraged further escapes. (He was talking only about Guantanamo and made no point at all about escapes directly to Florida in small boats.) Castro said that he did not want to build a "Berlin wall" around the Base or even to deploy a division or two of troops to seal the border. He did not expect the United States to build its own Berlin wall but implied, the Ambassador thought, that he hoped the U.S. could find a way to discourage escapes through Guantanamo.

Ambassador Fischli said that Castro had asked him to convey a message that he was interested in establishing a discussion of such issues, presumably with a view to edging toward a detente. Another official subsequently told Fischli that as far as he knew the Russians did not know of this initiative and that this was one reason why the Cubans preferred to use the Swiss as a go-between rather than the Czechs, who represent Cuba in the U.S.

In response to questions by the Secretary, Ambassador Fischli then briefly discussed the Cuban internal situation. The economic situation was getting worse all the time and with it the scarcity of foodstuffs, consumer items and medicines. However, Castro was firmly in the saddle, without rivals, and, in the Ambassador's opinion, most of the revolution was irreversible. He said that the

~~SECRET~~

DECLASSIFIED

Authority AND 969000
By SA NARA Date 10/21/03

RG 59 CENTRAL FILES 1967-1969
STACK 150 Row 65 BOX 2021

~~SECRET~~ ~~ENDIC~~

- 3 -

most telling effect of the U.S. economic denial policy was Cuba's inability to get U.S. spare parts and industrial capital equipment and therefore it would be his recommendation that these be the last restrictions to be lifted. He considered, on the other hand, that the inclusion in the embargo of certain other items--particularly pharmaceuticals--enabled Castro to blame shortages on the U.S., whereas in reality Cuba would not buy these things even if restrictions were lifted, citing the fact that Cuba was only buying \$31,000 worth of drugs this year from the big Swiss firm, CIBA.

Ambassador Fischli said that he was not asked to transmit any specific proposals from the Cubans but merely to convey the general sounding outlined above. The Secretary commented that what the Ambassador had to say was very interesting, we would consider this further and would later communicate our response to the Ambassador. The Ambassador asked whether he could be authorized to tell the Cubans anything, if questioned upon his return. The Secretary agreed that the Ambassador could tell the Cubans that we found interesting what he had reported, that we would thoroughly examine this and that a message might be conveyed through him in due course. Ambassador Fischli said that meanwhile he would continue negotiations on problems on a practical level with the Cubans. It was his suggestion, if the U.S. should decide to work toward a detente, that a series of practical steps be quietly taken by each side without any formal agreement at this stage. The Secretary commented that certainly the climate of U.S. public opinion might be more receptive to the possibility of a change in our posture if the Cubans did something which ended the hijacking problem.

~~SECRET~~ ~~ENDIC~~

DECLASSIFIED

Authority AWD 969000
By SM NARA Date 10/21/03

RG 59 CENTRAL FILES 1967-1969
STACK 150 Row 65 Box 2021