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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE
DIRECTOR OF INTELLIGENCE AND RESEARCH

*Research
Memorandum*

RSE-39, May 9, 1969

To : The Secretary
Through: S/S
From : INR - Thomas L. Hughes *Thomas L. Hughes*
Subject: The Soviet View of Cuba

This paper analyzes the USSR's general approach to its erratic communist colleague in Cuba. It makes particular reference to the interconnections in US-Cuban, US-Soviet, and Cuban-Soviet relations, and to the probable Soviet attitude toward accommodation between Washington and Havana.

ABSTRACT

Although recognized by the Soviet Union as a socialist state, Castro's Cuba wears its Marxism-Leninism with a difference. It departs from Soviet-approved norms in unabashedly following in substance, if not in form, the "cult of the personality"; in owing no debt to the USSR for the success of its revolution; in considering Latin America its exclusive preserve; and in espousing a revolutionary doctrine which stands Soviet ideologues on their collective head. Moreover, Cuba differs signally from the European communist countries in that it is neither important to Soviet security nor defensible by conventional Soviet power.

Castro's vagaries caused the Soviets to react slowly and cautiously to the opportunities his revolution presented them. Now that they have accepted Cuba in the socialist camp, however,

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their main objective has been to keep it there. No country, except Hungary in 1919, has ever turned away from communism once that system was established. The Soviets would consider it a major setback if the communist system in Cuba, for whatever reason, disappeared.

A second -- and secondary -- Soviet objective is to use Cuba to damage American prestige and influence in Latin America. The importance of this goal for the Soviets has been diminished by Castro's unwillingness to be a Soviet proxy in the hemisphere and by Moscow's current efforts to increase its own presence there. Nevertheless, Castro is still useful to Soviet Latin American policy, mainly because he can stir up a certain amount of trouble without involving the USSR too deeply, and can thus assist the Soviets in exploiting a tide in Latin America which they probably feel is beginning to run against the United States.

Moscow-Havana relations are likely to be characterized by continued Soviet support for Cuba as a socialist state and an impediment to US policies. Still, within the context of its basic objectives, Moscow could be expected to seek ways to reduce its expenditures in Cuba (now over \$1 million a day) and to moderate Castro's revolutionary activity, which diverts him from his problems at home, conflicts with the current Soviet assessment of Latin American conditions, embarrasses the cause of socialism by

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its failures, and generates competition with Moscow for the allegiance of the Latin American left. For all those reasons Moscow is likely to encourage Cuban receptivity to an accommodation with the United States.

Historically, Castro's receptivity to a modus vivendi with the US has increased at times of warmer Soviet-Cuban relations (when Cuba's economic needs seem to give Moscow greater leverage over Castro) and warmer Soviet-US relations (which tend to increase the Cuban leader's fears that the Soviets will abandon him to the Yankee wolves). The years 1961 and 1964 were such periods, and they produced Cuban peace overtures. The current period, dating from the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, has similar characteristics. There has been a perceptible Cuban-Soviet thaw at a time of dire economic conditions in Cuba; in addition, the US and the Soviets appear to have agreed not to let their differences in some areas interfere with cooperation in others. This concurrent improvement in both Soviet-Cuban and Soviet-US relations does not mean per se that Castro may be receptive at this time to accommodation with the US. His 1961 and 1964 peace overtures may, after all, have been insincere; in any case, there may be current factors, about which we know nothing, that might make him hesitate.

Why would the Soviets favor a US-Cuban accommodation? Probably because it would be likely to (1) ease the Soviet aid burden,

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(2) result in a moderation of Castro's bellicosity, (3) make it marginally easier for the Soviets to pursue their own ideas for cooperation with the US, and -- probably most important -- (4) put the US, and ultimately the Latin American, seal of approval on the Cuban revolution and on Cuba's socialist system.

Ingredients in a US-Cuban accommodation which the Soviets would probably consider in their own interest include the following: (1) some sort of overt recognition by the US of the "legitimacy" of the Cuban socialist regime; (2) an end to the policy of economic denial, which could get the Soviets at least partly off the economic hook; and (3) a strengthening of any elements tending to moderate Cuban revolutionary extremism, which conflicts with Soviet doctrine and policy in ways noted above. The Soviets would probably not be averse to renewed -- but sharply reduced -- US diplomatic presence and activity in Cuba.

Moscow would certainly oppose a Cuban-US modus vivendi which blossomed -- or threatened to blossom -- into a full-fledged rapprochement, complete with a burgeoning of US popularity and influence in Cuba. Not only would this be antithetical to Soviet interests; it would probably mark the ruin of Soviet policy in Cuba. To prevent this Moscow would probably favor an accommodation which is both partial (to preserve some US-Cuban tensions for the Soviets to exploit) and phased (to keep things from getting out of

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hand). In short, the Soviets would want an arrangement which alleviates some of their outstanding problems with Cuba but still preserves the Soviet presence and the socialist system on the island.

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