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To : The Secretary
Through: S/S
From : INR - Thomas L. Hughes Thomas L. Hughes

Subject: General Sejna Reports Czechoslovak and Soviet Unhappiness with the Cuban Imbroglio

Attaching for weekend reading WWR

ABSTRACT

Jan Sejna, the Czechoslovak general who defected to the United States in February, has reported interesting details of the extent of Czechoslovak and Soviet disenchantment with the regime of Fidel Castro in Cuba. Sejna's report reveals an increasingly pessimistic assessment of the Cuban situation and a sharper, almost visceral, attitude toward Cuba on the part of the Czechoslovaks and Soviets, but also that the Soviets and their allies have evolved no satisfactory remedy for the present state of affairs. Cuba may indeed be dependent on the USSR and its East European allies for its economic survival, but it is Castro who acts as if he holds all the high cards.

Before his defection Sejna was a brigadier general and Chief of the Communist Party Committee of the Czechoslovak Ministry of National Defense; as such he was one of the two chief political officers in the Defense Ministry. He was a supporter of former President and Party First Secretary Antonin Novotny, and his connections in the upper levels of the Novotny regime were excellent.

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Most of his comments refer to Czechoslovakia's relations with Cuba, but he gives some information on Soviet attitudes as well.

While Sejna's observations cover only the Novotny era, they are probably accurate as indicators of Soviet policy toward Cuba, since the Novotny regime followed the Soviet line on international affairs quite closely. Whether the same policy will be continued indefinitely by the new Dubcek regime is at this point an open question. Moreover, for a military man, Sejna had a good grasp of political matters and his wide acquaintances in the Czechoslovak Party and government gave him access to information outside his own area of responsibility. His description of Soviet and East European views of Latin America accords with other reliable reporting on the subject, most notably that of the Hungarian defector Janos Radvanyi.

Sejna depicts an increasing unhappiness on the part of the Novotny regime and the Soviets at the way affairs have developed in Cuba in recent years. Economic mismanagement, coupled with adventurism in the international arena and Castro's constant harping on the danger of a US invasion of Cuba -- of which the Soviets and East Europeans are skeptical -- have combined to fray the nerves of the men in Prague who have had to allocate important resources to the task of keeping Castro going. Sejna reports that

neither the Czechoslovaks nor the Soviets have been enthusiastic about continuing to support Castro economically at the level to which he has become accustomed, but that they see no feasible alternative to Castro that would preserve communism in Cuba. As a result the USSR and most of its East European allies can be expected to continue supporting Cuba, as long as the latter does not push Moscow beyond the bounds of tolerance.

Sejna also points out that the Czechoslovaks have attached great importance to improving their relations with the governments of Latin America. One of their reasons for giving up the support of guerrilla activities in the area was the fear that this activity might jeopardize their relations with these governments. Yet it is clear that Novotny's Czechoslovakia saw no inconsistency in carrying on clandestine intelligence activities in countries where it was also cultivating better official relations. The exigencies of maintaining support and influence in the Latin American left require that the Soviets and East Europeans carry out such activities.

Familiar Complaints More Strongly Expressed

The complaints of the Czechoslovak and Soviet regimes against Cuba which Sejna reports have become familiar by now: they have been expressed often enough by Soviet and East European sources publicly or privately, directly or indirectly. The nub of Soviet and East European dissatisfaction with Cuba is Castro's maverick foreign policy, particularly his efforts to foment guerilla warfare in Latin America, coupled with his continued demands for economic assistance. What is new is a much more tangible sense of the frustration of Soviet and East European leaders with Cuba, which led to stronger language and vague thoughts of a Cuba somehow without Castro at the top, but no real blueprint for bringing this about.

The Guerrilla Problem

Sejna states, without elaboration, that the USSR, Czechoslovakia, and East Germany all supported the ill-fated guerrilla operation of "Che" Guevara in Bolivia, but that since then Czechoslovakia at least has given up backing gurerilla activities in Latin America. There is little evidence to suggest that the Soviets and East Europeans ever gave anything more than token support to the Bolivian guerrillas, if that. Sejna reports that in 1961, at the time of increasing Czechoslovak involvement in Cuba, Czechoslovakia and Cuba concluded an agreement by which Czechoslovak intelligence officers in Latin America were to collect information which would be useful to Cuban guerrilla operations, but it is not clear whether this agreement was still in force in 1967.

The overwhelming weight of other information indicates that Moscow and its allies see no immediate prospect for success by guerrilla action in most of Latin America and that they are encouraging the local communist parties to carry out "peaceful agitation" and organizational work to broaden their mass base and improve their political position. Sejna notes in the case of Czechoslovakia that its officials were not opposed to the overthrow of Latin American governments, but rather that this "should be carried out without armed force and without external overt support."

Yet it appears that in an indirect way the Cubans do have Czechoslovakia over a barrel on the question of guerrilla support. Sejna recalls a Defense Ministry meeting in 1967 at which the then minister, Bohumir Lomsky, stated that Czechoslovakia would refuse to deliver new weapons to Cuba unless the Cubans would say what they planned to do with them. This fitted in with the Czechoslovak decision to stop supporting guerrillas in Latin America, since nobody could be certain that Castro would not pass Czechoslovak arms along to guerrilla bands. According to Sejna, the leadership feared that if Czechoslovak weapons were captured from guerrillas and identified as of Czechoslovak make, the governments of Latin America, which had been strenuously cultivated, "would take diplomatic steps against Czechoslovakia."

The upshot of this affair was that Castro refused to reveal the destination of the new weapons, saying that for Prague to demand such an explanation was an interference in Cuba's internal affairs. The decision on arms deliveries to Cuba hung fire for several months until, in Sejna's words, the Czechoslovaks "discovered" that they were obliged to deliver the weapons under the provisions of existing trade agreements with Cuba. The arms were furnished, but with a strong request that they not be used outside of Cuba.

The Economic Problem

This bickering over arms deliveries is symptomatic of the larger problem of economic and military assistance which affects the Soviet Union and its East European allies. None of these countries is happy about having to drain off resources to keep the Cuban economy afloat, but it appears to be an operative assumption among the leaders of the USSR and Eastern Europe that without such assistance the Castro regime, and with it communism in Cuba, would collapse. In addition, the Soviets and their East European friends have committed themselves to supply Cuba with a considerable amount of military equipment to strengthen its defense against the supposed threat of invasion from the US, a threat whose existence, according to Sejna, they have come increasingly to doubt.

Concerning the actual arrangements of the aid to Cuba, Sejna states that until about 1963 special funding agreements for Cuba existed which were determined by the Warsaw Pact Political Consultative Committee. By the terms of these agreements most of the

military equipment was provided free of charge, and most of it was supplied by the USSR, Czechoslovakia, and East Germany. Sometime during 1963, as Castro became increasingly difficult to deal with as a result of the missile crisis, the Warsaw Pact countries revised their agreements on military assistance. Thenceforth, provisions for weapons deliveries were included in the regular bilateral trade treaties which were concluded between Warsaw Pact countries and Cuba. However, since most of these treaties have called for long-term credits to Cuba, and given the present sad state of the Cuban economy, there is small prospect of the credits being repaid.

It is worth noting here that the East European countries generally have tended to be more unhappy with foreign aid commitments which they have had to undertake as members of the socialist camp than has the USSR. The economic losses which aid to Cuba, the Arab states, Vietnam, and other countries entail are not matched by compensating political advantages, for the small East European states tend to be skeptical of the benefits of revolutionary solidarity on a worldwide scale. Thus, if the East Europeans have not been able to avoid honoring their aid commitments, they at least have few illusions about them, and as a result they are privately more critical of aid recipients than the Soviets are. This explains why Novotny's Czechoslovakia, which yielded to no state in its loyalty to foreign policy as conceived by the USSR, could still produce criticisms of Cuba which were more extreme than those uttered in the Kremlin.

Indeed, none of the countries involved in aiding Cuba is sorer about it than Czechoslovakia. That country has serious economic problems of its own, to the extent that even the conservative Novotny regime recognized, in principle at least, the need for far-reaching reform. Nor surprisingly therefore, the leaders of Czechoslovakia have become increasingly incensed at having to divert needed resources to Cuba to subsidize Castro's erratic manipulations of the Cuban economy. And Sejna's report indicates that Czechoslovak criticisms of Castro had become much stronger in recent years.

Castro a "Mad Anarchist" and a "Traitor to Communism"

Sejna cites Novotny and his son, Antonin Jr., as saying that Castro is an abnormal personality, an anarchist who destroyed the "real" Cuban Communist Party, probably a reference to Castro's

downgrading of Cuba's "old" communist element, as well as the purge of the pro-Soviet Escalante faction. According to Sejna, Czechoslovak leaders were extremely bitter over the Escalante purge: it was this act that persuaded many of those who were not convinced already that Castro is not really a communist but a "mad anarchist." Castro's preoccupation with an American invasion of Cuba they consider to be a megalomaniacal fixation which he uses to extort further military aid from Eastern Europe. Sejna reports that the Czechoslovaks "generally believe this is no longer a threat" and they see Castro as "maintaining pressure on Eastern Europe through continuous invasion alerts which could ensure the continuation of aid to Cuba."

No Feasible Alternative to Castro

Sejma's report adds significant detail to the picture of Soviet and East European dissatisfaction with Castro, and it indicates that important officials in the USSR and Eastern Europe have reached the point where they at least consider the possibility of a Cuba without its present flamboyant leader. This is a point which has not appeared in previous intelligence reporting on Cuba, and is worth noting. Yet Sejna also makes clear that the Soviets and East Europeans are at a loss to find an alternative to Castro which would ensure the survival of communism in Cuba. At one point Sejna cites the view of a senior general in the Chief Political Directorate of the Soviet armed forces (as told to him by a Czechoslovak general) that if a revolt against Castro broke out, without overt American assistance, the USSR would not intervene militarily, "but would support him diplomatically in order to appease China." Whether this Soviet general's statement accurately reflected the thinking of the Soviet Politburo is uncertain. But it is clear that Castro's fall, however it might come about, would not be welcomed by Moscow: he has bound the communist regime so inextricably with his person that his fall would mean the demise of communism as well.

The only alternative to Castro which would be reliable from the Soviet point of view would be the surviving element of the old pre-Castro communist party, but since the Escalante purge the shattered remnants of the old party are probably in no shape to assume leadership in Cuba, if they ever had the capacity to do so. Sejna points out that, as far as the Novotny regime was concerned, the purge "destroyed" the old communists as potential powerholders.

Clandestine Operations in Latin America

Most of Sejna's report deals with the subject of Czechoslovak and Soviet relations with Cuba, but there is enough material in it on the rest of Latin America to indicate that the Novotny government saw great possibilities for activity in the area. At one point Sejna states that Prague viewed Latin America as being "under the Czechoslovak sphere of influence," which may simply have been a mistaken usage of the term or possibly a Freudian slip. It at least indicates that the Novotny regime set great store on improving relations with the Latin American governments. The striking point about this is that Czechoslovakia, while trying to improve relations on the official level, seemed to see nothing inconsistent about continuing to conduct clandestine intelligence operations in the area.

Superficially, there is a contradiction between cultivating friendly relations with a government while at the same time clandestinely supporting elements which call for its overthrow. It is well and reliably known that this is precisely what the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia, as well as other Eastern European countries, have been doing for a number of years in Latin America, and that they remain committed to both endeavors. After all in Latin America, apart from Cuba, the Soviets and East European are appealing to two essentially different constituencies, the governments on the one hand and the left wing, especially the pro-Soviet communist parties, on the other. And it can scarcely be denied that Moscow would like to increase its influence within the Latin American left and build the strength of its left-wing allies, the communist parties. In this respect the intrusion of the competitive Castroite ideology onto the Latin American scene has made it only that much more imperative for the Soviets and their allies to cultivate the Latin American left.

The problem from the Soviet point of view is that the very nature of the status of the parties of the left in Latin America requires that Soviet dealings with them be conducted under a blanket. In most countries communists are outlaws and those few parties which enjoy legal status are in no position to welcome publicity on their intercourse with the Soviet comrades. So if Moscow and its allies wish to support local communist parties with funds, propaganda material, or advice, if they want to bring young leftists to the USSR or an East European country for training or indoctrination, they have to conduct these activities in secret or with as much secrecy as possible, or they will not conduct them

at all. A final point, which does not need much stressing, is that even in friendly countries the Soviets, as well as other powers, have been known to conduct intelligence activities in order to gain information or to broaden contacts with local political elements.

Czechoslovak Operations Against Cuba

Sejna was unable to give any firm information on the subject of clandestine Czechoslovak activities in Cuba. He reports that both the secret police and military intelligence were planning to contact and develop certain Cubans who were studying in Czechoslovakia, presumably to send them home as agents. He also knew of one case where a secret police official went to Cuba incognito on an unspecified mission in January of 1964.

Equilibrium

It appears implicit in Sejna's report, and this is reflected in other evidence, that equilibrium of a sort has been reached between the Warsaw Pact countries and Cuba. Relations between the two sides are not good, but the disagreements which exist between them are perceived as not susceptible to easy resolution, and there accordingly seems to be tacit understanding that radical remedies might be ruinous for all concerned. As a result both sides appear to be pursuing their own policies, conflicting though they may be, while avoiding actions which might lead to an open breach of relations. Moscow, despite Castro's sniping, has re-established relations with Colombia, and it will do the same with Venezuela as soon as the latter is agreeable to this step. At the same time, Castro has continued to support guerrilla activities in Latin America (most notably perhaps in Venezuela), although his deteriorating economic situation has constrained him to do less in this field than he would like to.

How long this balance will last is difficult to predict. It is likely, however, that the USSR would feel compelled to continue supporting Cuba economically and to a degree politically, as long as Castro does not push it beyond the point of forbearance, as the Chinese have done. Likewise, although some exceptions may conceivably develop among the East European countries in time, possibly Dubcek's Czechoslovakia, it is more probable that they also

will not wish to break with Cuba completely. Most of the East European states will find it convenient to follow the Soviet lead in an area of little direct concern to them, while for others, such as Romania, cooperation with Cuba on the issue of independence from Moscow might be advantageous, even though in other respects foreign policies might be quite dissimilar.

In the short run, Moscow can be expected to be particularly constrained from punitive action, because of the approach of the world communist conference to be held in Moscow in November and the desire to focus the opprobrium of fomenting disunity on Peking. If the Soviets were to force the issue with Cuba, it would tarnish their image as fraternal comrades and seekers of socialist unity. Yet Moscow has shown a desire in its current approach to the Moscow conclave to emphasize cooperation with the loyal or relatively loyal parties and to press less hard for the return of such prodigals as the North Koreans, North Vietnamese, and Cubans to the bosom of a unified movement. In practice this probably portends somewhat less concern on Moscow's part for Cuban sensibilities.