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THE WHITE HOUSE OFFICEB. The Soviet Operation Begins

4. During the last two weeks of July, Soviet ships carrying equipment and personnel for the build-up made their first voyages to Cuban ports, the first arriving in the period 26-29 July.

Knowledge of some of these movements reached CIA through routine intelligence coverage of Soviet shipping before the ships reached Cuba. No particular significance is normally attached to such voyages. However, evidence gradually accumulated that the "behavior pattern" of these ships was similar to that of Soviet ships carrying arms to other countries, that even greater security measures than usual were in effect, that a number of the ships were coming from Baltic rather than Black Sea ports, that some of these were passenger ships, and finally that there was a general movement of Bloc shipping toward Cuba: on an unprecedented scale.

5. Apparently, the first recognition of unusual activity in any intelligence publication was a note in a daily review of economic intelligence for CIA internal use.

Commenting on an NSA report that certain Soviet ships were en route to Cuba which had declared for other destinations, this paper stated on 1 August that "at least some, if not all, of the ships involved probably are carrying additional military equipment to Cuba." This statement was in direct contradiction to NSA's comment on the same information, i.e., that it tended to corroborate a report by the Brazilian Ambassador in Havana (earlier intercepted by NSA) that Raul Castro had asked the USSR to take back excess war materiel.

6. CIA was also in disagreement with DIA over interpretation of intelligence on the movement of shipping to Cuba throughout the month of August. The resulting difficulties in coordination of the Central Intelligence Bulletin held up publication from 3 August to 9 August of the first item on the Cuban build-up in that publication. As late as 29 August, DIA in its own daily Intelligence Summary said that "The high volume of shipping probably reflects planned increases in trade between the USSR and Cuba..." There were further difficulties resulting from CIA-DIA differences in the interpretation of photography of aircraft crates deck-loaded on Soviet ships; the record shows that CIA was

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right. Finally, it should be noted that there is a long history of CIA efforts to obtain better photography on deck cargoes and faster service in returning these pictures to Washington.

7. The Checklist reported the accumulating information fully to the President. On 4 August, it stated that "Eleven Soviet ships are on their way to Havana and we strongly suspect they are carrying arms. Such a delivery would not be far short of the total amount of arms delivered in the first half of 1962." On 9 August, it said "Soviet shipments to Cuba have been arriving on an unprecedented scale since mid-July. Some 32 vessels are involved; at least half of these we believe to be carrying arms. Five passenger ships with a total capacity of about 3,000 persons have already arrived. Some of the personnel are said to be Soviet technicians, and we have no reason to doubt this. We do not believe there are any combat troops among them."

8. The DCI on 8 August briefed the Republican Policy Committee, emphasizing the arrival of Soviet military equipment and technicians. Two days later, at a MONGOOSE meeting, he again stressed the importance of this intelligence and raised questions as to what purpose was behind the sudden movement of men and materiel. He said that the United States must face the possibility of the USSR locating MRBMs in Cuba as a step that it could justify because of US missile bases in places like Italy and Turkey.

9. Soviet operations in August involved primarily the establishment of surface-to-air missile and coast defense missile positions. By the middle of August CIA was receiving a large volume of agent and refugee reporting which, while understandably garbled and fragmentary, enabled analysts to pinpoint areas of construction and identify some of the equipment coming in. On 18 August, the Checklist reported "There are grounds for thinking that the large influx of Soviet military equipment and technicians into Cuba lately could be connected with the beginning of construction of surface-to-air missile sites. What we know so far is that the shipments have included quantities of electronic, transportation and construction equipment, some of it similar to Soviet equipment which showed up in Indonesia for the building of SAM installations, and that many of the arriving Soviets are construction personnel..." There were further Checklist items along the same line on 23 and 28 August.

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Presumably Mr. Hilsman was also acting in response to NSAM 181. In any case, the paper he requested and the Board memorandum already requested by the DD/I were combined. Successive drafts of such a paper, prepared by the ONE staff, were quickly overtaken by the photography which became available after 29 August. At the USIB meeting of 7 September, further attempts to write it were deferred until the new information could be digested. This estimate, SNIE 85-3-62, was in fact passed by USIB on 19 September. Its substance will be discussed later. (See Paras. 26-29)

17. Also at the 29 August USIB meeting, two other pertinent subjects were discussed. First, General Carter and Mr. Cline raised the question of more rapid delivery from Turkey and Denmark of Navy photography of outbound Soviet ships (see para. 6). Second, General Carter informed the Board that he had two days earlier asked General Lemnitzer about the possibility of low-level photography using RF-101 or F8U aircraft and that Lemnitzer had replied that something "could be dug up." The conversation with Lemnitzer was the result of an instruction telephoned from out of town by the DCI, who was concerned over the long delay of the 29 August mission by weather. (The DCI departed Washington on leave on 23 August, went first to the West Coast, left the country on 30 August for the Riviera, and returned to Washington on 23 September.) On 30 August Lemnitzer told the Special Group of this discussion with General Carter. The Group agreed to take cognizance of the matter and reopen it "when specific targets and information needs could be identified."

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23. One additional item was picked up by the 5 September mission, the presence of an assembled MIG-21 at Santa Clara airfield, along with several others still in crates. This was not reported by CIA in the Checklist, but was reported in the Central Intelligence Bulletin of 8 September. Actually, these MIG-21 crates (readily identifiable from photographs) had arrived in Cuba about 1 September aboard a Soviet ship which had been photographed en route, but the photographs were not received in Washington for several weeks. Upon the arrival of these and photographs of other ships carrying MIG-21 crates, an item was published in the Central Intelligence Bulletin of 27 September--with DIA withholding concurrence (see para. 6)--that between 22 and 30 MIG-21s had been delivered to Cuba. This information was also reported in the Checklist of 27 September.

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Group, adding that "we cannot put a stop to collection in Cuba; otherwise the President would never know when the point of decision was reached." The Special Group at its next meeting approved consideration of the use of **FIREFLY** and COMOR forwarded to USIB on 27 September a program for its use. **(No FIREFLY missions have yet been attempted.)**

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33. Another attempt during this period to get additional coverage was the programming of KEYHOLE Mission 9045 (29 September - 2 October) to photograph Cuba. The results were unsatisfactory, largely because of cloud cover.

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I. CIA Reporting during September

34. The progressive uncovering of the Soviet program in Cuba was reported in detail by CIA current intelligence. Pertinent samples from the Checklist are:

a. "The number of confirmed SAM sites remains at 12, but the likelihood that others are under construction grows, with the latest evidence pointing to the Isle of Pines as one of the additional locations." (14 September)

b. "A message intercepted yesterday on a net serving Soviet forces in Germany called for 'volunteers for the protection of Cuba.' We are not sure of the weight to be placed on this and another intercept referring to the isolation of 'volunteers.' If valid, they would suggest that the influx of Soviet military personnel to Cuba is not finished. We are investigating further." (15 September)

c. "We have spotted two more Soviet passenger vessels en route to Cuba. Their arrival will raise our estimate of technicians on the scene to about 4,200. We are beginning to see some tenuous evidence foreshadowing the appearance of SAM sites in Camaguey Province." (18 September)

d. "The interception on 15 September of a signal from a missile-associated radar, probably coming from the surface-to-air missile site at Mariel, suggests that the site is or soon will be operational. "The message asking for volunteers for service in Cuba, which we reported Saturday, has now cropped up on enough Soviet military radio nets to reveal that a fairly general recruiting campaign is going on. There is no indication yet of the numbers involved." (19 September)

e. "Evidence is still coming in on Moscow's canvass of its military forces for volunteers to serve in Cuba. This activity is puzzling; we have never seen anything like it before.

"The move may be purely administrative: to replace personnel who had been suddenly ordered there with others prepared to stay for some time. On the other hand, it could mean another sizable increment to Soviet personnel in Cuba or a belief in Moscow that its people are likely to be engaged in combat. We are trying to get a better answer." (21 September)

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THE WHITE HOUSEK. The Targeting of San Cristobal

40. Although the sites themselves were closed to ground observation, the movement of equipment to them from the ports was in fact seen by CIA agents and by a number of individuals who later fled to the US. The agents reported this information as soon as they were able, but in most cases had to depend on secret writing for communication. Hence, there was a lag of several days at least before their information became available. Refugee reports were delayed considerably longer for other, and uncontrollable, reasons--the time of the individual's decision to leave Cuba, his discovery of means for doing so, and his delivery to an interrogation center. Many of the reports so received dealt with unidentifiable construction activity. Many of them, because of the time-lags noted above, did not arrive in Washington until after 14 October, and some are still coming in.

41. Nevertheless, by about 1 October, the San Cristobal area had been pinpointed as a suspect MRBM site and photographic confirmation had been requested. This represents a considerable technical achievement. To understand why, it is again necessary to back-track in time. Since the moment of Castro's triumphal march into Havana, the Intelligence Community had been flooded with reports of Soviet weapons shipments and missile installations in Cuba. There were several hundred such reports, claiming the presence of everything from small arms to ICBMs, before August 1960, i.e., before the USSR had supplied Cuba with any weapons at all. More specifically, CIA's files contain 211 intelligence reports (this does not include press items) on missile and missile-associated activity in Cuba before 1 Jan 1962. All of these were either totally false or misinterpretations by the observer of other kinds of activity. CIA analysts had naturally come to view all such reports with a high degree of suspicion.

42. On 15 February 1962 an interagency interrogation center was established by CIA at Opa Locka, near Miami, to handle Cuban refugees and improve the quality of intelligence collected from them. It was manned by trained bilingual interrogators from the armed services and CIA. The establishment of Opa Locka coincided with a sharp drop in reports of missile activity received in Washington. When the defensive phase of the Soviet buildup began, the volume of Opa Locka reporting rose very rapidly, and provided good information on the types of equipment coming in, on the use of Soviet personnel and on the security precautions imposed by the Soviets on this operation. (Such reports were the basis for the Checklist item cited in para 9).

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proportion of these dealt with the deployment of defensive missiles and related activities. Knowledge on the part of the analysts that such a deployment was in fact going on, plus the normal difficulties encountered by untrained observers in telling an offensive missile from a defensive one, tended to throw a sort of smoke-screen around the Soviet offensive deployment when it finally began. The CIA analytic apparatus, however, recognized and correlated the first authentic reports of MRBM equipment ever to be received in Washington, and took action upon them. It targeted the San Cristobal area, not as another location where alleged missile activity should be negated by photography, but as a suspect SS-4 site.

47. This process took about three weeks, from the date when the first observation was made on the ground in Cuba to the preparation of the target card. The two reports from Opa Locka which triggered it were:

a. An observation in Havana on 12 September of a convoy carrying long canvas-covered objects which the source identified under interrogation as resembling SS-4s. This report, which was disseminated by CIA on 21 September, contained sufficient accurate detail to alert intelligence analysts.

b. An observation on 17 September of a convoy moving toward the San Cristobal area. This information, received on 27 September, dovetailed in many respects with the earlier report.

48. The arrival of the second report led CIA analysts to a tentative conclusion that the two observers had in fact seen the same convoy, and that there was a possibility of the SS-4 identification being genuine. A day or so earlier, a target card on San Cristobal had been prepared on the basis of a vague report of "Russians building a rocket base." Now this card was removed and, with the two reports cited above and other less specific information on activity in this area which was beginning to trickle in, a new card was prepared between 1 and 3 October which was in effect a priority requirement for photographic coverage. This card was used in the targeting of the 14 October flight (see para 63). It read as follows: "Collateral reports indicate the existence of a restricted area in Pinar del Rio Province which is suspected of including an SSM site under construction, particularly SS-4 Shyster. The area is bounded by a line connecting the following four town: Consolacion del Norte (8332N/2244W); San Diego del Los Banos (8325N/2235W); San Cristobal (8301N/2243W); and Las Pozos (8317N/2250W). Requirement: Search the area delineated for possible surface missile construction, with particular attention to SS-4 Shyster."

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L. Limitations on Publications

50. At some point, probably just after 27 September, an item on the subject of possible strategic weapons in Cuba might have been written for CIA current intelligence publications. It could not be written because there was an injunction not to do so. By the time that hard information began to come in early in September, the USIB principals had become acutely conscious of the distinction publicly made by the President between offensive and defensive weapons in Cuba. Aware that they were dealing with an explosive political issue and aware also that "leakage" of intelligence on offensive weapons, true or false, would seriously limit the President's freedom of action in dealing with what might become a major international crisis, they had evolved a system for limiting dissemination of such information. Analysis would continue and senior policy officials would be briefed, but no material would appear in formal intelligence publications without the approval of the USIB principals. These instructions were first issued orally, and later (on 11 October) formalized by USIB in the **"PSALM" system (X-Ray Funnel for SIGINT)**. The key passages in USIB's order were: "Such information or intelligence will be disseminated outside each USIB intelligence component only to specific individuals on an EYES ONLY basis who by virtue of their responsibilities as advisers to the President have a need to know," and "There is no intent hereby, however, to inhibit the essential analytic process."

51. It should also be noted that the order not to publish anything on missile sites without NPIC corroboration (Para 44) had never been rescinded. The effect this would have had on reporting in late September and October if the other ban had not been in effect is difficult to determine.

52. These restrictions did not apply to the Checklist, but the Checklist writers drew for their Cuban information largely on the Cuban Daily Summary, a compendium of reporting on Cuba published by CIA. Since the Summary was affected by the restrictions, this practice, imposed by the sheer volume of raw material coming in on Cuba, had the effect of cutting the Checklist off from information on offensive weapons.

53. Moreover, neither the Checklist group, nor any other current intelligence officers, knew that the possibility that a Soviet strategic missile base might be established in Cuba had been raised by the DCI and seriously discussed by the President and his advisors more than a month earlier (See Para 13). In other words the thrust of NSAM 181 had been so watered down by

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N. The Special Group Decision of 9 OctoberPROPERTY OF  
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61. By late September the delays in accomplishing the four-flight program, coupled with a mass of evidence that the Soviet build-up was continuing, had generated a greatly increased sense of urgency in Washington. It should again be noted, however, that high-level consideration of the possibility that MRBMs might be deployed to Cuba had always been in terms of Soviet action after the SA-2 defense was fully operational. There is no documentary evidence of action directed toward the overflight of SAM-defended areas until the Special Group (Augmented) meeting of 4 October. At this meeting the DCI pointed out that U-2 flights were now (before the last two missions of the 10 September program) restricted by the presence of SAM sites to the southeastern quadrant of Cuba. According to the minutes of this meeting "it was questioned by the DCI whether this was a reasonable restriction at this time, particularly since the SAMs were almost certainly not operational." The Group then ordered the NRO to prepare an overall program for reconnaissance of Cuba for presentation at the Group's meeting of 9 October.

62. On 6 October, COMOR provided to the NRO a memorandum entitled "Intelligence Justification and Requirements for Overflight of Cuba" for use in this presentation. Para A1. of this paper stated that "there is now a pressing and continuing need for up-to-date intelligence on the progress of the Soviet arms build-up in Cuba. The very highest levels of the government are dependent upon this intelligence to assist in making policy decisions of immediate and vital concern to the nation." Para A2., commenting on the absence of coverage of western Cuba since 29 August, included the statement that "Ground observers have, in several recent instances, reported sightings of what they believe to be Soviet MRBMs in Cuba. These reports must be confirmed or denied by photo coverage." Attached to the memorandum were a number of target lists, on which the area previously targeted around San Cristobal appears, together with recommendations for attack of particular targets by satellite, U-2, oblique, FIREFLY, or FSU-1P/RF-101 photography. (USIB, considering this paper on 6 October, recommended to the Special Group full coverage of two of these lists which did not specifically include San Cristobal, but which by its nature would have covered that area and the other ballistic missile sites as well.)

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63. At the Special Group meeting on 9 October, NRO's first recommendation was "A U-2 probe over the suspect MRBM site as soon as weather permits." This referred to the area targeted by COMOR near San Cristobal (see Para 48). The operation, which was to be supported by ELINT collection aircraft off the coast, also was designed to pass over one of the SA-2 sites which was thought to be most nearly operational. Thus the secondary objective was to determine the status of SA-2 defenses in order to measure the risk involved in getting complete U-2 coverage of Cuba as rapidly as possible. NRO's second recommendation was therefore conditional: "If there is no SA-2 reaction to the initial U-2 sortie, maximum coverage of the western end of the island by multiple U-2s simultaneously, as soon as weather permits." (There were also certain other recommendations for low level, oblique, and FIREFLY missions.)

64. The Group gave first priority to the San Cristobal mission and recommended to the President that he approve it. The President gave his approval--presumably learning of the San Cristobal reports at this time--and the mission was immediately mounted. It was delayed by weather, however, from 10 through 12 October. On that date operational control was transferred to SAC. There is no reason to believe that the transfer in any way delayed launching the mission, which SAC flew on 14 October. The pilot did not fly the prescribed track, but took a course at an angle to it. Fortunately the planned and actual paths crossed over San Cristobal, and the primary mission was accomplished.

65. After this mission had been approved, but before it had been flown, CIA received on 10 October Navy photographs taken two weeks earlier of the Soviet ship Kasimov off Cuba. These photographs showed clearly identifiable IL-28 crates, which later showed up in U-2 photography of 17 October--along with a number of others which must have come in on unphotographed ships--at San Julian airfield in the western tip of the island. The information appeared in the Checklist of 11 October.

66. During this interim period, the DCI briefed the CIA Subcommittee of House Appropriations on 10 October on the build-up, including the IL-28s. He also commented on MRBMs essentially along the lines of his cables from Nice (para 30), adding that there were many experts who did not believe the Soviets would make such a move, but that he differed with them. He told the Subcommittee that he had authority for an overflight in the next day or so. General

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