

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

Monday, Sept. 18, 1967
5:00 p.m.

MR. PRESIDENT:

This report on Castro's soon permitting the return of Americans from Cuba -- and his alleged reasons for delay (p. 3) -- may interest you.

W.W.R.
W. W. R.

~~SECRET~~ EYES ONLY attachment

DEPARTMENT OF STATE
ADMINISTRATOR
Bureau of Security and Consular Affairs

W id
m Roston

September 15, 1967

59a

~~SECRET~~
EYES ONLY
LIMIT DISTRIBUTION

MEMORANDUM TO: The Secretary
The Under Secretary
O - Mr. Idar Rimestad

- 5/15 BWR

FROM: SCA - Barbara M. Watson

SUBJECT: Repatriation of American Citizens
now being held in Cuba INFORMATION
MEMORANDUM

1.5
(d)

I have received word on a very confidential basis from [redacted] that those American citizens who have been held in Cuba can in the near future be expected to receive Castro's permission to return to the United States via Mexico.

1.5
(d)

Last March when [redacted] was in the Department briefing us regarding his Hanoi trip and asking validation of his passport for travel to Cuba on another assignment [redacted] I outlined to him the difficulties we were encountering in effecting the repatriation of U.S. citizens who desire to leave Cuba. [redacted] was surprised to hear this for when he was last in Cuba he had discussed this matter with Castro and had been given to understand that no impediment had been interposed preventing the departure from Cuba of U.S. citizens. He was not aware that since last December when we were successful in securing the exit of 169 U.S. nationals and their Cuban family members through the mediation of the Mexicans, our efforts to repatriate the remaining

SANITIZED

E.O. 12958, Sec. 3.6

NLJ 95-362

By ijg, NARA Date 8-31-96

~~SECRET~~

Automatic
declassification
authority

U.S. nationals and their relatives, numbering approximately 3,000, have been singularly unsuccessful. The unresponsiveness of the Cuban Government has even given rise to speculation that Castro might have in mind holding them as hostages.

I appealed to [redacted] knowing his close and friendly relationship with Castro--to attempt to find out just why our efforts to return those U.S. citizens still residing in Cuba have been so unavailing. [redacted] agreed to carry out the request, feeling that to do so was his duty as an American citizen even though, as he noted, he strives to maintain a neutrality in such matters so that his effectiveness as an independent, objective reporter may not be jeopardized.

1.5
(d)

[redacted] has now returned from Cuba and has informed me that he did talk with Castro about this problem and that Castro stated that all American citizens will be permitted to depart Cuba. (My conversation with [redacted] took place by telephone but, because of our mutual understanding of the persons and the problems involved, we agreed to carry on this conversation in indirect terms; names of persons and places were not mentioned.)

1.5
(d)

According to [redacted] Castro stated that he had agreed to the principle of the evacuation of the U.S. citizens via Mexico. It was Castro's expectation last December that the two planeloads of American citizens and their Cuban relatives which were then permitted to leave Cuba would be only the first of many which would leave on a regular and more or less routine basis until all U.S. nationals, who so desired, were evacuated. Castro, in giving [redacted] the reasons why the Cuban Government has not been responsive to Mexican and Swiss efforts to repatriate American citizens, referred to several incidents and circumstances which combined to provoke the Cuban Government so as to bring about the cessation of the evacuation.

1.5
(d)

One was the harassment of Cuban athletes participating in the Olympic games held in Puerto Rico last summer. The athletes were not permitted to remain overnight ashore, were forced to sleep on the boats and were harassed in other ways; all of which enraged the Cubans. For another, it appears that Swiss efforts to bring about the return to the United States of U.S. nationals and their Cuban relatives were, if anything, counterproductive. Castro told [redacted] that former Swiss Ambassador Stadelhofer made a number of mistakes and, seemingly, his biggest was his trying to enhance his own reputation by seeking credit for resolving this problem of repatriating U.S. citizens. Castro, reportedly, refused to deal with Stadelhofer or even his successor on this subject.

1.5
(d)

Castro indicated to [redacted] however, that the character and conduct of [redacted]

[redacted] whom he referred to as a "bad sort," was probably the primary reason for the stoppage of the air-lifts of U.S. nationals. [redacted] was, reportedly, found to be selling departure permits and was also said to be indulging in black-marketeering. When Castro learned of this, he refused to have anything to do with [redacted] as a result, his effectiveness on behalf of his own government and ours was terminated. The Cubans, reportedly, pressured the Mexican Government into replacing him and, as we now know, he has been replaced by Ambassador [redacted]

1.5
(d)

[redacted] said that Castro is impressed with the new Ambassador, considers him to be an intelligent and honest man. It is [redacted] strong impression that Castro not only has no desire to keep American citizens in Cuba but is actually anxious to see them leave. Castro told him that he expects that through the good offices of the new Mexican Ambassador repatriation of all American citizens who wish to leave Cuba will be accomplished.

[redacted] indicated he had additional information which may be of interest to us but which he preferred not to discuss on the telephone. I plan to see him in New York next week.

1.5
(d)

Copy to: ARA - Mr. Oliver

SCA:BMWatson:jm