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OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
WASHINGTON 25, D.C.

16 March 1962

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MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

By: Brig. Gen. Lansdale

Subject: Meeting with President, 16 March 1962

Present: The President, General Taylor, the Attorney General, McGeorge Bundy, Mr. Gilpatric, General Lemnitzer, Mr. McCone, Alexis Johnson, myself. At the White House, 1600 hours, 16 March 1962.

Prior to the President's arrival, the group met in the Oval room. General Taylor handed out his "Guidelines for Operation Mongoose," dated 14 March. I asked McCone about having Helms and Harvey, who were waiting outside, join us. McCone asked if I had any differences of opinion with them. I said that we were in agreement on operational procedures, as far as the guidelines would permit operations. McCone then said Helms and Harvey should stay outside (which he told the President later, also).

McCone then asked me if I were in agreement with the concept contained in the "Guidelines." I commented that they didn't fit the conditions inside Cuba that were becoming more apparent to the operational people, including CIA operators for whom I had respect; the chance of fracturing the regime and creating a valid revolution is becoming more feasible. I felt that we needed much more freedom to work on the revolutionary possibilities than is possible under the guidelines.

The President then came in.

General Taylor gave a brief report on developments since 30 November, said the Special Group felt that hard intelligence was needed before going ahead, and handed the President a copy of the revised Guidelines.

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(The President glanced at this momentarily and set it down on the table; Taylor had briefed him on the Guidelines the evening before.) The President then turned to me and asked me what was being done.

I gave him a quick summary of the intelligence-collection plan through July, telling him that this was the Special Group's plan, and describing the work so far of CIA and Defense. I told him that we finally were starting to get a really good team together for the operation, after much effort to get the U.S. pointed in the right direction. I noted that agents were to be trained or experienced in guerrilla warfare, that we needed U.S. military participation for support, including air re-supply and maritime actions. He asked for details. Both General Lemnitzer and I told him about "sheep-dipping" U.S. military personnel, "sanitizing" equipment, and use of U.S. bases. I pointed out that PT boat silhouettes required a Navy base as cover, even if we called it "R&E," that air re-supply would be done at night from about 800-feet which entailed some risk which the Air Force was now assessing. He asked about maritime runs of the PT-boats; I explained our problems of "mother" ships, the LSD's and 200-300 man crews, which we are trying to lick.

I remarked that the thesis of creating a revolution inside Cuba looked just as valid as ever, and that CIA professionals were now agreeing more and more that both resistance and the possibility of fracturing the regime pointed to some real opportunities. I noted that we were checking out a number of leads, including relatives of Fidel Castro, to assess the practical opportunities for splitting away some of the regime. If we could get some of the top Cuban leaders, and some units of the Cuban security forces to take to the hills, we would have conditions which would need quick exploitation -- and we would have to be ready for this. I noted that we would have to supply arms and equipment; it is possible that this could be done without U.S. military intervention, but we must be ready to intervene with U.S. forces, if necessary.

The President asked if U.S. military intervention was an issue which the Special Group was posing to him now. Taylor and the Special Group promptly said, "no."

General Lemnitzer commented that the military had contingency plans for U.S. intervention. Also, it had plans for creating plausible pretexts to use force, with the pretexts either attacks on U.S. aircraft or a Cuban action in Latin America for which we would retaliate.

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The President said bluntly that we were not discussing the use of U.S. military force, that General Lemnitzer might find the U.S. so engaged in Berlin or elsewhere that he couldn't use the contemplated 4 divisions in Cuba. So, we cannot say that we are able now to make a decision on the use of U.S. military force.

The President then commented that he hoped something could be done about the press. That the newspapers would start conjecturing on operations just as they did in April 1961. I said that such conjecture was going on all the time, that any solid-looking reports might well be a real blessing, because as talk increases that the U.S. has the intention, somehow, to help the people of Cuba regain their freedom, that the people inside would get some hope. This spiritual factor, of having hope of something better than what they are now saddled with, is vitally important at this time.

The President then asked about immigration. Wouldn't it be better to shut our doors to the people trying to get out, so that they would be forced to stay and take action against the regime? I pointed out that we still were giving them only two choices: either to escape to the U.S. and freedom, or to stay and be slaves. Once we are committed to helping them stage a revolt, provide arms, and are willing to go all the way in being sure that they win, then we might consider closing our doors -- because we then will be helping them gain their freedom at home. Now, with 2,000 people fleeing every week, we would be foolish to remove this symbol of our sympathy and cut off the source of intelligence information and recruits. We must give the Cubans the chance and the help to free themselves.

The Attorney General then mentioned Mary Hemingway, commenting on reports that Castro was drinking heavily in disgruntlement over the way things were going, and the opportunities offered by the "shrine" to Hemingway. I commented that this was a conversation Ed Murrow had had with Mary Hemingway, that we had similar reports from other sources, and that this was worth assessing firmly and pursuing vigorously. If there are grounds for action, CIA had some invaluable assets which might well be committed for such an effort. McCone asked if his operational people were aware of this; I told him that we had discussed this, that they agreed the subject was worth vigorous development, and that we were in agreement that the matter was so delicate and sensitive that it shouldn't be surfaced to the Special Group until we were ready to go, and then not in detail. I

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I pointed out that this all pertained to fractioning the regime. If it happened, it could develop like a brush-fire, much as in Hungary, and we must be prepared to help it win our goal of Cuba free of a Communist government.

General Lemnitzer mentioned the beach reconnaissance by the U.S. Navy, which was evaluated by the JCS as having little risk. UDT teams would do this at night, and would not need to surface.

Mr. McCone mentioned that we were including sabotage in early actions. I commented that we had a number of such actions listed, but were only planning on a few most necessary ones. One example was the Soviet patrol craft, for which both Navy and CIA were tasked to plan sabotage. The President asked how this might be done. I replied that fuel, lubricants, crews, and the patrol craft were all potential targets -- that, for example, a boat laid-up for repair was a boat that wasn't out on patrol at a critical period.

Mr. Gilpatric mentioned that Mr. McNamara was intensely interested in creating a Defense pool of resources for covert actions, for Colombia for example, so that we wouldn't be faced with the problem of only having 4 PT boats as we do for Cuba.

The meeting then broke up, with the President saying go ahead on the Guidelines. General Taylor asked for his copies of the Guidelines back. I said I needed a copy, for my guidance and to show the operators such as Harvey and Craig. The President expressed his appreciation for what had been done so far. Gen. Taylor didn't persist at getting his copy back, so I retained it.

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