

UNITED STATES MISSION  
TO THE UNITED NATIONS

November 8, 1963

MEMORANDUM

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TO: Gordon Chase  
FROM: William Attwood

DECLASSIFIED

E.O. 12356, Sec. 3.4

NEJ 94-237

By llg, NARA, Date 4-12-96

Following is a chronology of events leading up to Castro's invitation on October 31, to receive a U. S. official for talks in Cuba:

Soon after joining the U. S. Mission to the U. N. on August 26, I met Seydon Diallo, the Guinea Ambassador to Havana, whom I had known well in Conakry. He went out of his way to tell me that Castro was isolated from contact with neutralist diplomats by his "Communist entourage" because it was known he was unhappy with Cuba's satellite status and looking for a way out. He, Diallo, had finally been able to see Castro alone once and was convinced he was personally receptive to changing course and getting Cuba on the road to non-alignment. Diallo added that the exile raids were an obstacle since they strengthened the hand of the hard-liners both with Castro and the public.

In the first week of September, I also read ABC correspondent, Lisa Howard's article, "Castro's overture", based on her conversation with Castro last April.

This article stressed Castro's expressed desire for reaching an accommodation with the United States and his willingness to make substantial concessions to this end. On September 12, I talked with Miss Howard, whom I have known for some years, and she echoed Ambassador Diallo's opinion that there was a rift between Castro and the Guevara-Hart-Alweida group on the question of Cuba's future course.

On September 12, I discussed this with Under Secretary Harriman in Washington. He suggested I prepare a memo and we arranged to meet in New York the following week.

On September 18, I wrote a memorandum based on these talks and on corroborating information I had heard in Conakry. In it I suggested that discreet contact might be established with the Cubans at the United Nations to find out whether Castro in fact wanted to talk, and on our terms. I showed this memo to Ambassador Stevenson, who felt the matter was worth exploring quietly and who indicated he might discuss it with the President.

On September 19, I met Harriman in New York. After reading my memo, he suggested I also discuss it with the Attorney-General because of the political implications of the Cuban issue.

On September 20, I made an appointment with the Attorney-General in Washington. Meanwhile, Stevenson obtained the President's approval for me to make discreet contact with Dr. Lechuga, Cuba's chief delegate at the United Nations.

On September 23, I met Dr. Lechuga at Miss Howard's apartment. She has been on good terms with Lechuga since her visit with Castro and invited him for a drink to meet some friends who had also been to Cuba. I was just one of those friends. In the course of our conversation, which started with recollections of my own talks with Castro in 1959, I mentioned having read Miss Howard's article. Lechuga hinted that Castro was indeed in a mood to talk, especially with someone he had met before. He thought there was a good chance that I might be invited to Cuba if I wished to resume our 1959 talk. I told him that in my present position, I would need official authorization to make such a trip, and did not know if it would be forthcoming. However, I said an exchange of views might well be useful and that I would find out and let him know.

On September 24, I saw the Attorney-General in Washington, gave him my September 18 memo, and reported my meeting with Lechuga. He said he would pass the memo on to Mr. McGeorge Bundy; meanwhile, he thought that it would be difficult for me to visit Cuba without it being known and risking

the accusation that we were trying to make a deal with Castro. He wondered if it might be possible to meet Castro -- if that's what he wanted -- in another country, such as Mexico, or at the United Nations. Meanwhile, he agreed it would be useful to maintain contact with Lechuga. I said I would so inform Lechuga and wait to hear from him or Bundy.

Back in New York, I informed Stevenson of my talk with Lechuga and the Attorney-General.

On September 27, I ran into Lechuga at the United Nations, where he was doing a television interview in the lobby with Miss Howard. I told him that I had discussed our talk in Washington, and that it was felt that my accepting an invitation to go to Cuba would be difficult under present circumstances, especially in view of my official status. I added, however, that if Castro or a personal emissary had something to tell us, we were prepared to meet him and listen wherever else would be convenient. Lechuga said he would so inform Havana. Meanwhile, he forewarned me that he would be making a "hard" anti-U.S. speech in the United Nations on October 7. I remarked that it wouldn't help reduce tensions; he replied he couldn't help making it because of the "blockade."

On October 7, in his reply to Lechuga's tough speech, Stevenson suggested that if Castro wanted peace with his neighbors, he need only do three things -- stop being a Soviet stooge, stop trying to subvert other nations, and start carrying out the promises of his revolution regarding constitutional rights.

On October 18, at dinner at the home of Mrs. Eugene Meyer, I talked with Mr. C. A. Doxiades, a noted Greek architect and town-planner, who had just returned from an architects' congress in Havana, where he had talked alone to both Castro and Guevara, among others. He sought me out, as a government official, to say he was convinced Castro would welcome a normalization of relations with the United States if he could do so without losing too much face. He also said that Guevara and the other communists were opposed to any deal, and regarded Castro as dangerously unreliable; and that they would get rid of Castro if they thought they could carry on without him and retain his popular support.

On October 20, Miss Howard asked me if she might call Major Rene Vallejo, a Cuban surgeon who is also Castro's current right-hand man and confidant. She said Vallejo helped her see Castro and made it plain to her he opposed the Guevara group. They became friends and have talked on the phone several times since the interview. Miss Howard's purpose in calling him now was that she thought any message from Lechuga would not get past the foreign office, and she wanted to make certain, through Vallejo, that Castro knew there was a U.S. official available if he wanted to talk. I told her to go ahead, so long as she referred to my

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talk with Lechuga and made it quite plain we were not soliciting a meeting but only expressing our willingness to listen to anything they had to say. She then called Vallejo at his home. He was out and she left word for him to call her back.

On October 21, Gordon Chase called me from the White House in connection with my September 18 memo. I brought him up to date and said the ball was in their court.

On October 23, Vallejo called Miss Howard at her New York apartment. She was out of town; he left word with the maid that he would call again.

On October 28, I ran into Lechuga in the U.N. Delegates Lounge. He told me that Havana did not think sending someone to the United Nations for talks would be "useful at this time". But he hoped he and I might have some informal chats from time to time. I said it was up to him and he could call me if he felt like it. He wrote down my extension.

On October 29, Vallejo again called Miss Howard at home. He assured her, in response to her question, that Castro still felt as he did in April about improving relations with us. As to his going to the United Nations or elsewhere for such a talk, Vallejo said it was impossible for Castro to leave the country at the present time. But he said he would relay her

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message to Castro (that there was now a U.S. official authorized to listen to him), and would call her back soon.

On October 31, Vallejo called Miss Howard, apologizing for the delay and saying he had been out of town with Castro and "could not get to a phone from which I would call you." He said Castro would very much like to talk to the U.S. official anytime and appreciated the importance of discretion to all concerned. Castro would therefore be willing to send a plane to Mexico to pick up the official and fly him to a private airport near Veradero where Castro would talk to him alone. The plane would fly him back immediately after the talk. In this way there would be no risk of identification at Havana airport. Miss Howard said she doubted if a U.S. official could come to Cuba but perhaps he, Vallejo, could come and see the official at the U.N. or in Mexico, as Castro's personal spokesman. Vallejo replied that Castro wanted to do the talking himself but did not completely rule out this situation if there was no other way of engaging a dialogue. It was agreed Miss Howard would relay the invitation to me and call Vallejo back as soon as possible with our reply. At this point she identified me as the U.S. official. Vallejo asked for the spelling, and

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recalled having met me in 1959 (I do not remember him). Miss Howard got the impression that Lechuga's previous message to Havana had not reached Vallejo or Castro.

On November 1, Miss Howard reported the Vallejo call to me and I repeated it to Chase on November 4.

On November 5, I met with Bundy and Chase at the White House and informed them of the foregoing. The next day, Chase called and asked me to put it in writing.

Wattwood:nmg



UNITED STATES MISSION  
TO THE UNITED NATIONS

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November 22, 1963

MEMORANDUM

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DECLASSIFIED  
E.O. 12356, Sec. 3.4  
NJ 95-132  
By cb, NARA, Date 1-6-95

TO: Gordon Chase  
FROM: William Attwood

Following is an addition to my memorandum to you dated November 8, 1963:

On November 11, Vallejo called Miss Howard again to reiterate their appreciation of the need for security and to say that Castro would go along with any arrangements we might want to make. He specifically suggested that a Cuban plane could come to Key West and pick up the emissary; alternatively they would agree to have him come in a U.S. plane which could land at one of several "secret airfields" near Havana. He emphasized that only Castro and himself would be present at the talks and that no one else -- he specifically mentioned Guevara -- would be involved. Vallejo also reiterated Castro's desire for this talk and hoped to hear our answer soon.

On November 12, Bundy called me and I reported Vallejo's message. He said this did not affect the White House decision that a preliminary talk with Vallejo at the United Nations should be held in order to find out what Castro wanted to

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talk about -- particularly if he was seriously interested in discussing the points cited in Stevenson's October 7 speech. Bundy suggested I transmit our decision to Vallejo, stressing the fact that, since we are responding to their invitation and are not soliciting a meeting, we would like to know more about what is on Castro's mind before committing ourselves to further talks in Cuba.

On November 13, I went to Miss Howard's apartment and called Vallejo at home. There was no answer. She then sent a telegram asking that he call her at his convenience.

On November 14, Vallejo called her. She gave him my message -- that we would want to talk to him here at the United Nations before accepting an invitation to go to Cuba. She said that, if he wished to confirm or discuss this further with the U.S. official, he could call him (Vallejo) at home on the evening of November 18. Vallejo said he would be there to receive the call. Meanwhile, he did not exclude the possibility of his coming to the United Nations and said he would discuss it with Castro.

On November 18, Miss Howard reached Vallejo at home and passed the phone to me. I told him Miss Howard had kept me informed of her talks with him and that I assumed he knew of

our interest in hearing what Castro had in mind. Vallejo said he did, and reiterated the invitation to Cuba, stressing the fact that security could be guaranteed. I replied that we felt a preliminary meeting was essential to make sure there was something useful to talk about, and asked if he was able to come to New York. Vallejo said he could not come "at this time". However, if that's how we felt, he said that "we" would send instructions to Lechuga to propose and discuss with me "an agenda" for a later meeting with Castro. I said I would await Lechuga's call. Vallejo's manner was extremely cordial and he called me "Sir" throughout the conversation.

On November 19, I called Chase, and reported the conversation.

Wattwood:nmg