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MEMORANDUM FOR RECORD

PARAMILITARY STUDY GROUP MEETING

AT THE PENTAGON

110 CONTROL
CENTRAL SECURITY GROUP
MAR 3-20-2000

NINETEENTH MEETING

22 MAY 1961

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PRESENT

GENERAL TAYLOR
MR. DULLES

MR. ESTERLINE
MR. KING
COMMANDER MITCHELL
LT COLONEL TARMATER

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MANDATORY REVIEW
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MR. ESTERLINE: Yes, that's right. During the last month, during the critical period, they were responsive to my control to a satisfactory degree.

MR. ESTERLINE: On the 17th of March we received a clearance from the Special Group to attempt to set up an acceptable alternative to Castro. Our first immediate action was to establish a covert mechanism, through which we could accomplish the actions that would be necessary to get rid of Castro. At that time we formed what was known as the Frente Revolucionario Democrático. This was composed of five Cuban political leaders that we believed were most representative of the Cuban people, and at the same time were not tinged with the worst elements of Batista, nor were they so far to the left that they would be incompatible with U.S. interests.

QUESTION: The March 17th paper set forth several things to be accomplished -- political actions, propaganda actions, and the guerrilla action. As Task Force Commander, did you have responsibility for all three of these actions, or only for the third?

MR. ESTERLINE: No, I was responsible for all three. I had specific responsibility for the establishment of the Frente, and for the establishment of Swan Island, and other activities necessary for the creation of the paramilitary capability.

MR. KING: May I add at this point that each week on the political action side I met with the Assistant Secretary of State Hubottom and later on with Tom Mann, so State knew every move that was made.

QUESTION: What is your estimate of Mr. Bender's part in this operation?

MR. ESTERLINE: I consider that he is one of the unsung heroes in this operation.

QUESTION: What is your evaluation of Mr. Varona?

MR. ESTERLINE: First, he is insanely ambitious. He's an ignoramus of the worst sort; he doesn't like the United States, and he is absolutely unable to distinguish what is and what is not a Batistiano, and last, and most important, the man has no conception whatsoever of security. Furthermore, he had a radio operator with a clandestine set in Miami. We finally told him we

- 2 -

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knew about it and tried to support him. On one or two occasions we attempted to put arms into Cuba on the basis of his information. However, it soon became obvious that the Cubans were aware of what Mr. Varona was doing.

QUESTION: Did Mr. Cardona meet the requirements for leadership?

MR. ESTERLINE: No. However, Mr. Cardona came in at about the time it became apparent that the FRD was not meeting the requirements we had established. This was because the Frente had decided to establish themselves as an exclusive club. And when others appeared on the scene that were of value to us like Miro Cardona, they were not prepared to accept them under any conditions except those that would serve their own personal ambitions. After the Frente had become essentially an exclusive club, we formed a new organization in which the Frente could participate. This resulted in the Revolutionary Council headed by Dr. Miro Cardona. There was some careful consideration by both State and ourselves before we decided upon Dr. Cardona to head the organization because he, as almost any political figure in Cuba, is highly controversial. Many people consider him dangerously left and cannot understand why the U.S. has anything to do with him. However, based on my own observations, I don't think he's a dangerous political factor.

MR. ESTERLINE: Mr. Cardona is critical of the fact that we didn't give him more of the details of the operation; however, we could not. I've never encountered a group of people that were so incapable of keeping a secret. No Cuban was told the actual date of the invasion, nor where it would take place, until Colonel Hawkins told the Brigade under controlled conditions, and after they were briefed, they moved to sea. This briefing took place about the 11th or 12th of April, and yet there was some indication that the Soviets somewhere around the 9th had gotten the date of the 17th. They had the 17th and the 20th of April, which means that they were getting pretty close to the invasion date. Now at that time no Cuban knew the date, so we were able to isolate the fact that the leak could not have been Cuban, but there was no indication at any time that they had any idea where the operation was going to take place.

QUESTION: What was the date of the formation of the Council?

MR. ESTERLINE: About the first of March.

- 3 -

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