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9/21/65

MEMORANDUM FOR: Mr. John Hart
FROM : Mr. Harold Swenson
SUBJECT : CIA Operations and Plot to Kill Fidel Castro, Raul Castro and Other Key Figures of the Present Regime in Cuba

Source: Victor ESPINOSA Hernandez (201-285147), born 26 August 1937 in Cardenas, Matanzas, Cuba, a PN trainee who was terminated as a malcontent on 20 March 1961. Present address is 415 East 52 Street, NYC, where his telephone is HA 1-7875.

Supplemental Data: ESPINOSA flew Air France from Orly Airport (confirmed by cachet in pp) on 29 May 1965 and on arrival in NYC the same day contacted an INS Agent named CAVASANJIAN (ph) who, on the basis of information in the story of ESPINOSA which appeared to affect U.S. security, notified the FBI. Special Agent Frank O'BRIEN of the NY Field Office of the FBI interviewed ESPINOSA on 2 May 1965. The FBI notified us on 3 May. I saw ESPINOSA on 4 May in the NY field office of the FBI. Frank O'BRIEN was present. (O'BRIEN said that INS at Washington, D.C. apparently had received a report and had notified FBI headquarters from which a supervisor had telephoned O'BRIEN to inquire whether O'BRIEN knew about aspects of ESPINOSA's story with derogatory allegations about the CIA, including [redacted].)

Lt. Col. Antonio Blanco Rios

Paraphrase of the source's story:

1. I do not have a high regard for the CIA or for most of the exiled Cubans but I am against the Castro regime for which reason I have become involved in these matters about which I must be sure the CIA is informed. I contacted the INS and the FBI because through them I could ensure contact with a responsible CIA officer.

2. I was a good friend of Rolando CUBELAS. We conspired together against BATISTA and we planned assassinations of Batista supporters. We carried out the killing of one of the SIM chiefs, RICO Gaian, successfully. A lot of things the anti-BATISTA students did were not effective but we did more than talk and this old assassination is proof that people like Rolando and myself act.

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File: Espinosa (201-285147)

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3. After CASTRO took over I left Cuba and engaged in anti-Castro activities. I got shot in the process, I was betrayed by some of the Cuban exiles when I was going to bomb Cuba, I saw how the CIA bungled and I became bitter. I was bitter about Rolando too. I thought that he had turned communist. I sent him a message a long time ago, telling him that he was a traitor and no friend of mine. That was when a Pan American stewardess whom he liked came to me with a message from him about how he was still a friend of mine and things were not like they seemed. I got mad and told her to tell him off for me and I showed her the bullet wound in my leg that I had because I was fighting CASTRO and those with him like Rolando. Afterwards I did not hear from Rolando until just a little while ago. *(FERNANDEZ)*

Angels 4. It was in May when I got a letter from an old friend, Luis FERNANDEZ. He had written to me before to let me know that he is working for the CIA in Paris. This letter in May was pretty confusing but Luis made it clear that there was something very important, that it involved Rolando CUBELAS, that Rolando wanted me to go to Paris on an urgent matter, and that another friend, Luis TRASANCOS, knew something about it. The letter said that the CIA knew about this and that Luis FERNANDEZ thought maybe the CIA already had told me to go to Paris, although he was not sure.

5. I decided to go to Paris because of the mention of Rolando. The CIA had taken my old Cuban passport when I was in training in Guatemala and never returned it. Also, because I got caught when I tried to bomb Cuba, the INS had warned me not to travel outside the U.S. saying I could go to jail for five years and I could not get a re-entry permit and all that. However, I checked with an INS officer who knew me. He said that probably the INS was not so interested in me anymore and I probably could get re-entry. Because the letter was so pressing in my travelling at once, I decided not to go through a lot of red tape. I went to Florida to see my brother, Rene, residing at 5000 SW 69th Avenue, Miami. He arranged through some friends whom I don't know to get me a false Cuban passport. (Note: The pp has number 423335, is dated 19 November 1964, bears the true name of the source, and has entry and departure cachets for London on 4, 7, 10 and 21 May 1965; for Le Bourget on 7 and 21 May; and for Orly on 29 May 1965.) I bought a ticket and left for Paris without having any trouble. I am not sure about the dates and the sequence of travel because everything was so hurried. I went to London as well as to Paris and I tried to go to Spain but had to turn back. Anyway I remember the important things.

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6. At Paris I telephoned Luis TRASANCOS who invited me to lunch in his apartment. When I got there, I found Alberto BLANCO, "El Loco", whom I have known since early 1959 and whom I considered a traitor. I called Luis aside to tell him this but Luis explained that BLANCO was instructed by Rolando CUBELAS to see me, that Loco and Rolando are against CASTRO, and that my seeing Loco was the reason that it was so urgent for me to come to Paris.

7. Rolando CUBELAS had been in Paris a couple of months earlier and, according to El Loco, had left a letter instructing El Loco to get word to me personally and asking that I get in touch with the CIA on the highest level. El Loco did not have the letter with him but I believe it. I know that Cubans are liars and exaggerate and are insecure and all that is wrong about them, but I know what is good about them and how to check on things. So I cross-questioned El Loco and others until I was sure that they told me the truth. What I am telling you is what I found out from El Loco, confirmed later through "El Mago" ROBRENO, and confirmed in part through questioning others who know parts of the story but not all of it.

8. Rolando CUBELAS plans to kill Fidel and Raul CASTRO and other key men in the regime. Rolando has a house at Varadero Beach adjacent to the house of Fidel, so it is easy for Rolando to get Fidel any time. The idea is not just to kill Fidel but to change everything in Cuba, so Rolando has the cooperation of other people whose names I do not know except for El Loco BLANCO and El Mago ROBRENO and ALMEIDA. Rolando is very security conscious so he does not want people involved to know any more than is necessary. You must understand the danger to these people. What I can tell you now is that El Loco has his faults and so does ROBRENO but both worship Rolando and are trustworthy insofar as he is concerned. El Loco is back inside Cuba now. El Mago Robreno is in Madrid and can get messages in and out. He is responsible for killing many of my friends and he kicked their dead bodies afterwards, so I do not like him and maybe later I shall kill him; but for now I believe that he is useful and can be trusted for the matters which involve Rolando and the plot against Fidel CASTRO.

9. Some of the CIA people are not trustworthy. This is what bothers Rolando CUBELAS and El Loco and El Mago and me too. This is why Rolando wants me to get his message through. He wants an answer fast. The message is that CUBELAS and the others with him are able to kill Fidel and others in the regime, but they need some help and they need to know whether the CIA and the U.S. Government are with them and willing to support them or not. If the answer is affirmative, Rolando will send

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details about what he needs and so forth. Time is important because Rolando says that he cannot delay more than three or four months. That is the maximum. Cuban security forces would find out and arrest everyone if there is more delay. Rolando will send someone to see you if you agree to support him. Among other things Rolando will need some money, Cuban not American, or some gold or something because some people have to be bought. Also he might need help getting people out. Anyway he needs to know your stand.

10. El Loco and El Mago said that on 5 or 6 June someone is passing through Madrid en route from Prague to Habana and that this person could carry the answer to Rolando. They did not say how I should get the answer to El Mago but I suppose I can fly to Madrid to give it in person and, if you want, one of you can accompany me. I myself suspect that Rolando will move earlier than in two or three months. I believe that 26 July is a good date because all the chief targets will be assembled so it will be easier to get them all fast, but Rolando did not send me this as his plan.

11. El Loco and El Mago have access to any Cuban Embassy in Europe and these embassies are engaged in contacts with communists and in subversion. The same applies to embassies in Africa. El Loco and El Mago could have been giving you valuable information all along. Yet your people play security games and do not use people like this. Instead you use unreliable and risky people.

12. El Loco was in Europe as an officer of Cuban Security. He had codes, ciphers and microfilm to prove this and he showed them to one of your people in Madrid. What better proof do you want? What did you do about it? Nothing. Yet this man, a member of the Cuban Security, offered to work as a double for you and he tried to tell you about Rolando's plot. Now he is back in Cuba. As the result of his frustration over your attitude, he was in terrible mental state when I saw him. Had I been your people in the CIA, I'd not have let him return that way. In his upset he could do something rash which might blow the whole operation.

13. El Mago ROBRENO is a delinquent. He shot an American in Cuba over some private disagreement. He shot a police officer. He beat up his wife, now his ex-wife. This is apart from his killings on behalf of CASTRO in the trials of counter-revolutionaries. This is why Fidel wanted ROBRENO out of Cuba. ROBRENO is a delinquent, a trouble maker and an embarrassment. In the Cuban embassies in Europe, they know this. So they do not want trouble and they see him. They do not believe that he is counter-revolutionary or plotting against the regime. He is useful.

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14. I sent El Mago a ticket so he could travel from Madrid to Paris to see me. This is because your people in Paris said they could not help me get a visa to Spain and because when I tried to enter Spain illegally I ran into trouble and turned back. As I said before, I wanted to get confirmation of what El Loco had told me. El Mago confirmed everything.

15. Now to mention the problems about your people, I must explain that these are incidental to the real reason for seeing you which is to give you the message from Rolando. I did that.

16. Rolando said that he did not trust [redacted] and did not want to see him even though [redacted] wanted to meet Rolando when Rolando was in Europe last. I have known [redacted] for years, since he was in Habana and belonged to the Vedado Tennis Club and was drunk by three p.m. every single day. Recently in Madrid, he has set up a Cuban girl in an apartment and he got her a job in a Cuban refugee office. She stole files or the contents of files from the office. She is working for the regime and [redacted] fell for her. Her nickname is Tota. This makes not a bit of difference to us except that it is further reason that people risking their lives against CASTRO do not confide in [redacted]. Do not confuse Tota with Beba, another Cuban girlfriend of [redacted]. Beba is the niece of Julio LOBOS. She is divorced from a friend of mine. She has been going with [redacted] and she is all right. [redacted] says that ^{NY} is the CIA chief for Spain and Africa. Some chief!

17. Another one of your people whom my friends do not trust and whom I do not trust is Carlos TEPEDINO. He has a jewelry shop here in NY around 47th Street. I sold him a couple of my paintings some time back. This is a man who is out to make money and who will do anything for money. You should not trust him but you do. For example, he told you that he has the confidence of Ambassador CARRILLO in Paris, that he could become better friends with CARRILLO if you supplied money with which to buy confiscated jewelry from CARRILLO. So you gave the money, the amount TEPEDINO asked for, TEPEDINO paid less for the jewelry to CARRILLO, TEPEDINO made a nice profit for himself, and CARRILLO thought it all very funny. CARRILLO told friends that he knows that TEPEDINO is working for you CIA people and won't tell TEPEDINO anything which CARRILLO does not want you to hear. CARRILLO told all this to El Loco BLANCO.

18. Also you should know that TEPEDINO tells you that he agrees with you but when he is with others who criticize you, he tells them that he agrees with them. He has been acting as

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a supposed intermediary between you and Rolando CUBELAS in connection with this plot. This is because CUBELAS trusted TEPEDINO as an old friend. Let me explain that this TEPEDINO is an older guy so the friendship is not like that between Rolando and myself. We double dated, fought and plotted together. This TEPEDINO is different. He is out to make money. He has been telling Rolando's friends over a period of time that he has CIA contacts and can get anything needed from the CIA. He has not come through. They want nothing else to do with him.

19. Another of your people is ^RVichy BERNAL who works for [redacted] in Madrid. BERNAL was Cuban Military Attache in Japan when he defected, absconding with \$18,000, all of which he kept for himself and none of which he contributed to the counter-revolutionary cause. This is the kind of person whom you trust and whom we do not.

20. About your Paris people, Bob, Dick and Maureen who is Dick's secretary, there is no complaint in particular. Maureen does not know when she is being kidded. Luis TRASANCOS and El Loco BLANCO saw her in Paris. They jokingly asked if she would work for the Soviets for twice what you people are paying her. She paled and swallowed the story. After El Loco told me the story, I talked to Maureen. I confirmed it. Maureen is the go-between for Luis TRASANCOS and Dick. The problem is that we can't be sure that we can get the story from Rolando CUBELAS to the CIA chiefs by using your Paris people. We don't want Luis TRASANCOS or Luis FERNANDEZ to know more than they need. This is just good security. They know enough about the general plan but they need not know details.

21. Others who know quite a bit are ARTIME and his aide, QUINTEROS. I don't think it good that ARTIME should be too involved but CUBELAS needed some help. CUBELAS met both ARTIME and TEPEDINO in Europe. They agreed on a few reference points on the north coast of Cuba as possible exfiltration places from which ARTIME could pick up CUBELAS' people if something goes wrong. Also ARTIME gave something to CUBELAS which CUBELAS took back to Cuba in his bag. I do not know whether it was a radio or not but you people ought to see to it that CUBELAS does have a radio so he can communicate with you.

22. A little about myself: I have some money. My family managed to get quite a bit out of Cuba. We are trying to get the rest of the family, my grandmother and my uncle out. They live at 15th and Linea in Vedado, Habana. My grandmother is Juan IRIVARREN and my uncle is Pedro HERNANDEZ. They are supposed to have gotten visas for Spain and to be getting exit permits but we have been hearing this for some time. I used my own money to buy passage for El Mago between Madrid and Paris and to pay my own expenses.

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23. El Mago does not work but his girl, Sonia, by whom he has a child, is working as a dancer in Spain; so he does pretty well there on her earnings. His wife and two children are in Miami now. His father, a fine guy and good newsman, is in New York some place.

24. I have done my part in getting word to you. If you want me to do something, let me know. If I get any further word, I'll get in touch with the FBI here, Frank O'BRIEN, and he will let you know so you can meet me. I have told all of this only to INS, the FBI and you. I am not going to say anything to anyone else.

*Swenson
Comment*

ACTION: I shall discuss with [redacted]. Frank O'BRIEN will notify us if he gets further word. If you want to test this by sending (via El Mago, unsavory though he be) a message to CUBELAS that we certainly are in favor of helping those who are trying to make Cuba free but that we want him to send someone responsible with full details before we make commitments, you can send me a cable while I am over in Madrid. As stated before, the file makes all of this seem a ball of wax. The foregoing account speaks for itself. Maybe the CUBELAS boys are sincere and will act, maybe they are just talking, maybe this is a provocation. If you want to find out all that El Mago knows, it probably will be necessary for a staffer to spend time with him. The Madrid Station was not disposed to do this when I was there last.

NOTE: I used the name Harold Safely in the meeting with ESPINOSA.

Harold Swenson

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