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6 May 1960

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

SUBJECT: Meeting with Dr. Manuel Antonio Varona on 5 May in New York City,
1030 to 1315 hours

GENERAL

1. Varona arrived the evening of 4 May and registered at the St. Moritz Hotel. After several unsuccessful efforts to reach him there (because his plane was late), I finally got him out about 2330 hours and scheduled a meeting with him for the next morning. I met him in the lobby of the hotel, and we spent the better part of the next three hours in a stroll around Central Park and at lunch. For the first hour or so Varona unloaded a number of thoughts on the current political situation; most of these we are already familiar with, but among the points that he had to make were some which may be new and which are covered below.

2. Varona was shocked over the Senate Internal Security Subcommittee's choice of Col. UGALDE Carrillo to testify before them. Varona describes this person as an absolute war criminal who has no business appearing before any official United States body. He says that he might resign himself to the fact that in our democratic, parliamentary system of government such things can happen, there is not the slightest possibility that the average Latin American could ever understand that this action does not represent the thinking of the entire United States Government. When I tried to explain this in terms of our traditional separation of powers between the legislative and Executive branches, the fact that we are in an election year, and other extenuating circumstances, Varona expressed amazement that we have no more of a sense of com on purpose here in this country than we apparently do. The Legislative Branch goes one direction and the Executive Branch goes another and there appears to be little coordination between the two.

3. Varona was also quite unhappy about the special procedure which Immigration had given him when he reached New York the night before. He thought that he had been handled in a rather discourteous way and could not understand why he was placed on parole and instructed to keep Immigration and Naturalization informed of his address at all times. I explained this special procedure to him and emphasized the fact that it was something that we laid on for only certain select people, that it was cutting through mountains of red tape in permitting visitors such as Varona to move around the country or even to leave it and return without the normal administrative difficulties. This mollified him, and from that point on I would say that our conversation was on a very cordial plane.

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4. Having just returned from the Conference on Democracy and Freedom in Caracas, Varona had a number of thoughts on that. He considered the Conference a great success from the standpoint of the liberal Cubans who had opposed any resolution approving the Castro regime. He said there was a strong move afoot to put over such a resolution but that he, Sanchez Arango, Jose Ignacio Masco and others were able to keep such a resolution from being passed. The main sponsors of this, by the way, were members of the left wing of the Accion Democratica of Venezuela. He also said that a number of people of liberal tendencies attended the meeting with gross misconceptions concerning the nature of the Castro regime and that he and the other Cubans that I mentioned were able to convert a number of these. Among them were Allende (fnu) of Argentina and several others whose names he has recorded. In other words, some good missionary work was done at the Conference. In terms of official results, there was very little. He told me that the agenda was not terribly well worked out, that the people in attendance at the Conference were of many political hues and that nothing of great interest took place on the floor itself but rather in private caucuses and small meetings behind the scenes. I'll mention some of the results of the Conference which are of interest to us operationally in succeeding paragraphs.

5. He quite naturally had a great deal to say about the Castro regime and he pointed out three areas in which Castro enjoys a great propaganda advantage today, areas which we would be well advised to keep in mind in planning our own propaganda. These are the following:

- a. Castro's conversion of former military barracks into schools. This has been a tremendous propaganda success for Castro. He has managed to soft-pedal completely the fact that he's built new barracks and that the army is now bigger than it ever has been.
- b. The latent mistrust or outright dislike of the United States in the minds of most Latin Americans. Castro has been able to play this theme backward and forward, openly and tacitly, with great success.
- c. The apparent affinity of the United States' Senate for former supporters of the Batista regime. This has been touched on in an earlier paragraph.

PERSONAL

6. Varona told me that he planned to go to Miami on 6 May and return to New York City on the eighth or the morning of the ninth. During these two or three days in Miami he wants to find an apartment. He will return to New York in time for the meeting of other Cuban opposition leaders, including Justo Carrillo, Masco and others, and has no intention at this time of going to Washington.

7. He would like to bring his wife and daughter to the States as soon as possible but hopes he can allow his daughter to finish primary school, which will

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take until around 10 June, before bringing her and the other over. He is also quite concerned about the servant, an old family retainer, whose visa has not yet been issued because of some difficulties she got into several years ago without being aware that she was breaking a United States' law. This matter has been covered in an exchange of cables and I recommend that we do whatever we can for the woman so as to set the Varona family's mind at ease on this point.

PROPAGANDA

8. During our conversation Varona made a number of points which may be of value in connection with our forthcoming propaganda program. Several of our vulnerabilities I've referred to in one of the earlier paragraphs, and we should do whatever we can to repair them. Another point of interest was Varona's feeling toward Francisco ICHASO. This gentleman used to be a writer of editorials for Diario de la Marina, and he has also worked for Bohemia and station CMC. He was pro-Batista at one time. Varona has a very high regard for him as a writer and feels that he can be useful if he writes anonymously or under a pen name. He is most anxious to bring him out and will undoubtedly plan on using him for propaganda writing if and when Ichaso gets out of Cuba. Concerning the Caracas Conference which just finished, Varona told me that the speech which Caldera (I believe it is Rafael Caldera) made at the closing session was, in his own words, "formidable", a tremendous speech. This, for some reason, has not been publicized either in Latin America or here in the United States, according to Varona. It would be very good for us to do everything possible to spread the word of Caldera throughout the hemisphere. Varona also said that Eduardo Frei Montalva of Chile spoke extremely well on the opening day but that his remarks were off-the-cuff and there probably is no written record of what Frei had to say.

9. Before leaving Caracas, Varona organized a nucleus of a propaganda outlet there. He expects to use Caracas as a distribution center for propaganda throughout South America and the Caribbean. He had a talk with President Betancourt there who approved this activity. Betancourt told Varona henceforth to go directly to the Minister of Treasury, MAYONRE, as his official contact.

POLITICAL ACTION

10. Varona obviously has a great many ideas on the political field. He has a representative in Caracas, as I have mentioned, and he hopes within the near future to have his own people in every country of the hemisphere as agit-prop types. One of the men that he expects to use for this type is Amelio FIALLO, who is now in Miami and who has been mentioned in communications to the Field and in a memorandum from ²⁴CPA/M. Fiallo is a Cuban, a former member of Acción Católica. He's extremely well-oriented politically and an excellent speaker. Fiallo made only one mistake in his political career, according to Varona. That was in 1958, when he supported the idea of elections under the Batista regime. He has since seen the light and is now considered quite reliable and valuable by Varona, who plans to send him on a tour of Latin America.

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11. Varona told me that before leaving Cuba he was able to organize a complete underground movement of people who are not openly identified with the Autentico Movement.

12. Concerning a site for a future Junta, Government-in-exile, Directorio or what have you, Varona doubts that Costa Rica will be suitable. Relations between "Pepe" Figueres and President Echandi are not as good as they would have to be for Figueres to obtain the approval of Echandi for such activities. There would be no problem in holding a meeting or series of meetings of this group in San Jose, but as a permanent site, it is doubtful, in Varona's opinion. (I didn't bring up the concept of a government-in-exile or any of the attendant legal problems, so we didn't discuss this. In my view it would be better for the Bender-Carr group to raise the point.)

13. When I asked him then what would be a better permanent site for the directing body, he said that Mexico would be good, but the United States would undoubtedly have to be the main assembly point for these people.

14. Varona raised the question of Sanchez Arango. He leans in favor of having Sanchez join the Directorate, if I may call it that. He did say that Sanchez, like Rubio Padilla, has to be handled with kid gloves. For example, Sanchez should never attend a meeting of Cubans and their American advisors, e.g. Mr. Bender or Mr. Carr, for the reason that to Sanchez Arango this would appear to be servitude on the part of the Cubans towards the Americans. And if at any later date he had a difference of opinion with the other Cubans in the group, he might charge them with being lackeys of the Americans. With this in mind, Varona recommended that we talk to Sanchez Arango separately before he joins any Cuban group under our sponsorship.

15. When I gave Varona the letter from Juan Antonio Rubio Padilla, he asked me what I thought of Rubio. In non-committal fashion I turned the question around to Varona himself. At this, he smiled and paused a long time and then told me that Rubio was a fine man but that he had lost two sons who died of the same illness, that this has made of him, if not a bitter man, one who retains his independence to an extreme. This is his principal characteristic. Politically, he is quite conservative but free of any involvement with the Batista regime. He's a man who likes to work alone and who is not inclined to go along with the will of the majority in situations like the present one where members of the opposition to Castro are trying to organize despite internal political differences.

16. In connection with his entry at Idlewild on 4 May, Varona asked Carr for some help when Carr called him later in the evening. Carr in turn referred him to a gentleman named Leon Dennon who lives at 77 Park Terrace East and has two telephones, A 9-1444 and IC 7-4472. Dennon telephoned Varona on the morning of 5 May at Varona's hotel and volunteered to help Varona with any problems he might have with Immigration and Naturalization. After I had explained to him

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What the special procedure involved, Varona saw no further need to talk to Dennen. However, I suggested we check with Carr to find out how this can get into our operation.

17. The political part of our discussion was to have followed a format which Mr. Groller and I worked out before I left. It was to include a rationale for the present United States' position in Latin America and was to cover such items as his travel to Washington, but the conversation quickly took such a turn that I made a couple of on-the-spot changes. For one thing, Varona is quite familiar with United States' thinking on Cuba and is unhappy about it. In the respects I have mentioned earlier, but at least he's sophisticated enough to understand the why's and wherefore's. One fairly important point which he did cover, however, concerned the Border-Carr group. I told Varona very frankly that certain activities were not within my province but there was a group that I was aware of, headed by Mr. Carr (whose name incidentally Varona had mentioned to me first), that this group was completely reliable and well-intentioned and did have the proper contacts with our government and that he should have no reservations about working with this group. At this same time, I gave Varona my own emergency telephone number, ME 5-4269, in case he should have any problems with United States' authorities such as INS. And I also discussed with him a number of figures of importance in the Caribbean political situation—intelligence matters which an American official would have interest in. The subjects that I "avoided" were paramilitary and the question of conversion of pesos for dollars. He didn't bring up the point on we talked about so many other things that I decided to leave this one for the attention of the Border-Carr group, as it looked like a good opportunity for them to help Varona out and thereby establish that much more rapport.

18. Varona told me that in the twelve hours or so that he'd now been in New York he had already received an approach from Eusebio Mujal, the former chief of the CTC under Batista. Through a man named Alberto or Alfredo Cruz, Mujal sent word that he recognized that any return to the status quo under Batista is now out of the question and that he is willing to bury old differences and work in complete harmony with such people as Tony Varona with the same objective of ridding Cuba of Fidel Castro. Varona is not going to reject this proposal out of hand but is going to study it very carefully and talk to some of his Cuban colleagues about it. In this connection, it is interesting to note that Varona and perhaps other Cubans may well be softening towards the former "untouchable" groups of Batisteros as in the case of Mujal and Ichazo, the writer that I mentioned elsewhere.

PARAMILITARY

19. We did not discuss this subject at great length as I had very carefully drawn a line between the activities in which I had a legitimate interest as a United States' Government official and those which could best be handled in conjunction with private groups, i.e. the Carr-Border group (see paragraph 17). However, Varona did mention to me that he had, in Venezuela, a friend who was a

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wealthy owner of a finca and that this friend had promised him the use of the finca for such parasilitary training purposes as he might have at some later date. The conversation did not permit me to learn the man's name at the time and I mention the point here merely as a lead for possible later follow-up.

STAYBEHIND

20. Varona told me that he had lined up a ham radio operator in Caracas, Venezuela and that he wished to institute a radio schedule between a man in the Miami area and the one in Venezuela to give him communication with his group down there. This pattern was established during the Batista regime by the rebel units, and it is desirable now, according to Varona, in view of the atrocious communication facilities between Caracas and the United States. I suggested that we might be able to help him set up the American end of this net.

21. When I brought up the point of establishing staybehind commo with his people in Cuba to be in readiness in the event of a break in relations with the United States, he was quite enthusiastic. He is going to come up with names of people who could come to this country for three or four weeks for the necessary commo training and then go back in to work transmitters-receivers and/or to train others. I also promised Varona that we could make radio transmitter-receivers available to him.

COVER

22. I used the name "Robert Rogers" with Varona. Since ALMAIL-3 was also in town, had seen me the preceding day and also knows me as "Rogers" this looked like the best alias.

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