

Impressions of Cuba-IV

Castro Disillusioned

This is the fourth of five articles based on a wide-ranging visit to Cuba.

By Dan Kurzman
Staff Reporter

Although Cuban Premier Fidel Castro basked in a new sense of security after he had thrown himself into Russia's arms, his fear of Soviet unreliability returned after the missile crisis of October 1962. And this factor, many non-Communist diplomats in Havana believe, should shape future U.S. policy toward Cuba.

The decision of Soviet Premier Khrushchev, facing the prospect of World War III, to pull his long-range missiles out of Cuba without even consulting him apparently convinced Castro that Moscow could not, in the final analysis, be relied upon to protect Cuba despite ideological ties.

His doubts about the Soviet Union thus began to parallel, in a sense, those that French President Charles de Gaulle harbors about the willingness of the U.S. to come to Western Europe's aid if it did not consider it in its own immediate interest to do so.

Everybody Knows

Some Castro enemies in Cuba tried to convince me that Cuba still had long-range offensive missiles hidden in caves. One dispossessed shopkeeper drove me about 30 miles out of Cienfuegos in south central Cuba to a beach that was hemmed in by soaring hills. A radar tower reached into the sky from one of them.

"Everybody around here knows that long-range missiles are buried in those hills," he said, adding that a vast network of underground passages had been built in the area. He pointed to several men on horseback we passed along the road and claimed they were Russians. They wore old civilian working clothes.

"There are large Soviet camps several miles off the main road," he said. "But don't expect me to take you there and have my license



Photo by George J. Kosholleck Jr., the Milwaukee Journal

A Communist Chinese military officer listens to Fidel Castro's speech during this year's 26th of July celebration in Santiago, Cuba.

number noted."

But for all the rumors, there appears to be no evidence that any offensive missiles remain in Cuba; defensive missiles may have been mistakenly taken for them. There is considerable indication that present relations between Castro and Khrushchev are not conducive to a new Russian life-or death gamble.

Castro's coolness toward the U.S.S.R. after the missile crisis was reflected in his subtle effort to profit from the Moscow-Peking rift. During 1963, increasing numbers of Chinese agricultural and other technicians

were invited to Cuba, Chinese documentary films were shown frequently, and friendship for China became a favorite theme of Cuban speechmakers and journalists.

Hint Is Taken

With the struggle for world Communist leadership intensifying, Moscow took the hint. It sent a trade commission to Havana last December and welcomed Castro to Moscow in January. Fidel returned home with an extraordinary agreement calling for Russia to buy half the Cuban sugar crop at a guaranteed price of 6 cents a pound every year through 1970.

Castro's only apparent

concession was to play down Chinese friendship. Few if any new Chinese technicians are believed to have arrived this year, although several hundred still remain. And Castro neglected to mention China at all in his all-embracing speech at the July 26th celebration.

That Castro nevertheless considers a divorce from Russia conceivable is reflected in the fact that while he used to remind the public constantly that Russia had guaranteed Cuba's security, he has in recent months stressed instead the need for Cuba to be able to defend itself.

He appears to be especially

discussing Castro's warning on Guantanamo, told me he had only meant that he would "consider" issuing orders to shoot back. Certainly the chances of Cubans shooting down a U-2 are remoter than ever.

Some diplomats in Havana feel that the U.S.—and Latin America — can profit considerably from the distrust between Russia and Cuba. On the one hand, they say, the economic blockade and encouragement of counter-revolutionary activities can never bring down the Castro regime but can serve to keep the two countries tied to each other.

On the other hand, it is argued, a gradual lifting of the blockade and disengagement from counter-revolutionary activities could produce the two conditions the U.S. has often said would make peaceful coexistence with Castro possible.

Castro, these diplomats point out, has promised to stop trying to subvert other Latin American countries if the U.S. refrained from trying to overthrow him. And they add that there has been little or no Castroite subversion this year. Furthermore, he would almost certainly be drawn away from the Communist bloc, it is maintained, if he could deal with the rest of the world.

Could Be Converted

In short, the diplomats feel, Castro-communism, a superficial kind of communism to start with, can gradually be converted into an independent Titoist or Ben Bella type of operation which would not pose a physical danger for the hemisphere.

Most of these diplomats have no regrets about the recent passage of resolutions by the Organization of American States calling on all member nations to cut trade and diplomatic relations with Cuba for past subversive actions in Venezuela.

Nor do they particularly favor an immediate halt of aid to Cuban rebels. Such actions, they say, are helping to drive home to the Cuban leaders the disadvantages of trying to promote hemispheric revolutions, and will lead more swiftly to a detente.

The answer of those who oppose this "soft line" is

concerned at present about how Russia would react if an incident at the American-occupied Guantanamo Naval Base escalated into an excuse for a full-scale U.S. attack. After several Cuban soldiers were recently wounded and one killed near the base—the U.S. has denied Cuban claims that the Americans were responsible—Castro announced that the next time the Cubans would "shoot back."

In Search of Clue

Castro apparently sought some clue of a possible Soviet reaction in the aftermath of the U.S. retaliatory attack in North Viet-Nam. He issued a formal statement after the attacks asking, in effect, that the Communist bloc strike back hard.

But with the soft Soviet verbal response hardly serving to dispel Cuban doubts about Russia's protective instincts, Cuban officials, in

by Missile Crisis

simple enough. Why try to Communist he is? Certainly Castro will never move completely out of the Soviet

THE WASHINGTON POST *Wednesday, Aug. 26, 1964* A 21

Union, whose support, leftists in other Latin American countries to take power. And finally, a soft attitude might encourage extreme NEXT: Communism's failure in Cuba.