

Detente and the Cuban Commandos

If the U.S. starts doing business with Fidel Castro's Cuba, as is expected within the next six months, CIA-trained, anti-Castro commandos will turn their deadly skills against the U.S.

This is the vow of commando leaders, who have threatened to launch a campaign of terror in the U.S. like the Irish militants have been waging against the British.

For 13 years, these commandos have risked their lives raiding Cuba. They have lost comrades who have been killed and captured by Castro's militia. Now they see the U.S. preparing to embrace the hated dictator they have been fighting.

We spent a week in Miami talking to Cuban leaders and checking into the terrorism that has already erupted in the Cuban community.

"If the U.S. recognizes Castro," said one leader grimly, "we will look upon the U.S. as our enemy."

Another threatened: "If the U.S. won't let us fight Castro in Cuba, we will fight Castro here."

Others predicted assassinations, bombings and sabotage against American congressmen and businessmen who support a Cuban-American thaw. One described the coming terror campaign menacingly as "civil war."

Cuban commandos boasted that they have already shot up the door of the FBI's Miami office, have blown up the car of an FBI informant and have tried to run down an FBI agent.

U.S. authorities discount most of the talk as bravado. They acknowledge that the Cuban community has been hit by a dozen or more bombings, including the car of an alleged FBI informant. But the explosions have been small, with no casualties.

Cubans who are considered soft on Castro have also received threats on their lives. For example, storekeepers who sell a controversial Cuban news magazine have been threatened.

Although the commandos told us they shot up the FBI entrance with a

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.45 revolver, the authorities claim the weapon couldn't have been larger than a small .22 pistol. It is even possible, they say, that the damage was caused by teenagers throwing rocks.

There is no denying, however, that the FBI's Cuban intelligence specialist had to dive over bushes to avoid being run down by an automobile that whipped around a corner and speeded straight for him.

The FBI contacted in Miami, had no comment on these incidents.

Miami's quietly competent Mayor Maurice Ferre acknowledged that a terror campaign is "definitely possible" in case the U.S. should restore official ties with Castro.

"Feelings run deep enough," he said, to cause Cuban militants to take desperate measures. "It could be like Ireland," he agreed. But he also said Cuban leaders have a tendency to overdramatize.

Although he confirmed terrorism in the Cuban community "undoubtedly is going on," he insisted it has been "greatly exaggerated." Most Cubans, he said, are law-abiding and grateful for the haven that the U.S. has provided them.

There are an estimated one million Cubans scattered across the U.S., with about half of them concentrated in the Miami area. They have formed several dozen anti-Castro organizations. The pattern, explained one official, "is for the members of the group to fight, fragment and form new splinter groups." Less than half a dozen organi-

zations are effective, U.S. authorities estimate.

Yet hundreds of Cubans have been trained by the CIA in the military arts. They are skilled in handling guns and bombs; they are ready to strike swiftly and silently. It would be ironic if they should now use their schooling in violence against the government that trained them.

Yet we spoke to CIA-trained Cubans who swore they would fight anyone who advocates rapprochement with Castro. This is now expected to be President Ford's first major foreign policy move.

Sources close to Secretary of State Henry Kissinger say he has wanted to normalize relations with Cuba ever since he began practicing detente diplomacy. It made no sense to him to seek friendship with Russia and China on the opposite side of the globe and remain hostile to Cuba only 90 miles from our shores.

Kissinger was blocked from improving relations with Havana, our sources claim, by former President Nixon who had an abiding hatred for Castro. This personal animosity dated back to an audience that Nixon, as Vice President, granted Castro in 1959.

Castro came away from the visit, he confided afterward, feeling it had been friendly. But Nixon told friends afterward that the interview had solidified his hatred of the Cuban dictator. Nixon reportedly was also influenced by his best friend, Bebe Rebozo, an American-born Cuban who is strongly anti-Castro.

With Nixon in seclusion at San Clemente and Ford now in charge of the White House, Kissinger is believed to have a better chance to work his way. The new President is inexperienced in foreign affairs and is expected to rely heavily on Kissinger's advice.

The Secretary of State has already sent signals to Havana through intermediaries that he would like to improve relations. Castro has responded favorably. Commenting on the official U.S. attitude toward Cuba, Castro told a Kissinger friend, Frank Mankiewicz, recently: "Cuba is the only country in the world where John Foster Dulles is still Secretary of State."

The cold war has ended, Castro pointed out, everywhere except between the U.S. and Cuba. But now, in response to Kissinger's overtures, the newspapers and radio stations in Cuba have toned down their attacks on the U.S.

One by one, Argentina, Barbados, Guyana, Jamaica, Panama, Peru and Trinidad-Tobago have established diplomatic relations with Cuba in defiance of the U.S.-imposed ban. Columbia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Honduras and Venezuela are getting in line. Not far behind them is the U.S. itself.

Footnote: Mankiewicz spent several days with Castro, filming his daily activities for a TV documentary. Mankiewicz found the Cuban leader to be immensely popular with his people. Castro drives his own jeep through the Havana traffic, acknowledging the friendly greetings of his fellow motorists.

Once they stopped at a restaurant in the outskirts of Havana. There was friendly banter between Castro and the waiters. "Tell these people that if they won't serve us lunch," he joked to an aide, "we'll lower their prices."

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Columnist Joseph Kraft is on vacation.