

January 11, 1967

Cooperation between the Czechoslovak and Cuban Intelligence Services

Citation:

"Cooperation between the Czechoslovak and Cuban Intelligence Services", January 11, 1967, Wilson Center Digital Archive, Archives of the Ministry of the Interior, Czech Republic, Prague. Contributed by Oldrich Tuma and translated by Ruth Tosek.
<https://wilson-center-digital-archive.dvincitest.com/document/112974>

Summary:

The report introduces Czechoslovak's assistance in the Operation MANUEL after the isolation of socialist Castro regime. Cuba looked for alternative routes in Europe in order to promote and influence the revolutionary movement in Latin America. Czechoslovakia assistance in the operation is of a strictly technical nature and its intelligence service is doing its utmost to protect the interests of the country by securing all technical matters. The report says that terminating the assistance was not possible for both practical and political reasons-- all direct flights between Czechoslovakia and Cuba would be suspended and a drastic cooling off of relations between two governments. Czechoslovak's refusal in assisting the operation would be interpreted as a political decision to suspend assistance to the national liberation movement in Latin America countries. However, the reports says that the assistance of Czechoslovak intelligence service to the operation is in no way amounts to agreeing with its political content and constitutes a minor aspect of intelligence work. The Soviet intelligence was also involved in organizing the operation in Moscow and offered assistance to its Cuban counterpart.

Original Language:

Czech

Contents:

Translation - English

Appendix to ref. No. A/00/10-67

Excerpt from the report

“Cooperation between the Czechoslovak and Cuban intelligence services”

/submitted to the Minister of Interior under ref. No. A/0028/10-67 to the Head of the 8th Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, on January 11, 1967

Assistance in ensuring the Operation MANUEL

The main reason for introducing this operation was the isolation of Cuba which became even more acute following the revelation of the socialist nature of the Castro regime. The severing of relations between Latin America and Cuba was accompanied by breaking off transport communications and, in their attempt to promote and influence the revolutionary movement in Latin America the Cubans had to look for alternative routes through Europe, where US attempts to isolate Cuba were not successful. In the initial stage of the operation we assisted in securing the conspiratorial transit of a group of Venezuelan partisans who were returning in December 1962 from a training session in Cuba. This one-off request by our Cuban friends, which tested the security of the transit, was followed by a request for assistance for other groups of Latin Americans as well; for the long-term this was confirmed in the negotiations mentioned above. The number of participants in transit varies depending on the international situation and on the internal conditions in Latin America. Between the inauguration of the operation and the end of November 1966 the Czechoslovak intelligence service enabled 753 participants to pass through Czechoslovakia in transit.

(Note: up to 1.11.1967, the total number had risen to 913).

Our assistance in the operation is of a strictly technical nature and it involves the following:

a) the resident's office of the Czechoslovak intelligence service in Havana receiving information from the Cuban intelligence service about the arrival of participants in Czechoslovakia, together with the necessary data which it passes on to the centre and, in accordance with its instructions, acts in collaboration with the Cuban representatives on current problems and shortcomings, discovered in the implementation of the operation in Prague;

b) two appointed officials of the Czechoslovak intelligence serviced in Prague, legalized to participants of the operation as employees of an unspecified Cuban organization who are directly responsible for the technical aspects of the transit.

The composition of the participants varies and reflects the situation in the national liberation movement in Latin America, the organizational strength and role of its individual sections. The view which individual communist parties hold on armed struggle is demonstrated by their more active or less active role in the selection of participants (in the past the Communist Parties of Colombia, Guatemala, Venezuela and, to some extent Argentina carried out the selection themselves); the views of these parties are also demonstrated by the attitude they adopt to the operation as a whole. The predominant orientation of Cuba on the subject of armed struggle is demonstrated by the fact that in its search for allies it does not concentrate merely on forces with a socialist orientation and, whenever it finds itself in conflict with communist parties, it also uses other organizations and trends, at times even fractional, anti-Party (pro-Chinese) and nationalist groups when selecting participants. This explains why in addition to sincere revolutionaries (including members and

officials of Communist Parties), the groups of participants even include people with tendencies to adventurism, others who see their participation as a tourist venture and even those who belong to hostile agencies. Even though on arrival in Cuba participants have to undergo training in special centres before being selected and have to go through a screening waiting period, they have included a number of outright agents of enemy intelligence services (according to the information provided by the chief of the training centre, a Dominican participant betrayed in 1964 and publicly renounced his revolutionary activities at a press conference). That same year an official of the intelligence service, responsible for the preparation of participants from Central America, defected from Cuba. The Czechoslovak intelligence service has no possibility of exercising any influence on the selection, and the Cubans themselves claim that they, too, are not able to influence the selection since this is regarded as the exclusive responsibility of individual organizations of the national liberation movement in Latin America.

The Operation MANUEL is a complicated and politically sensitive affair primarily because its operation is at times in outright contradiction with the line of Communist Parties in Latin America and places Czechoslovakia into the position of a transfer station for revolutionaries sent out; articles about Czechoslovakia in this sense have already appeared in the foreign press. Our participation has taken this danger into consideration and every effort is being made to protect the interests of Czechoslovakia; the logical conclusion is the need to protect those involved in the operation and the undeniable fact that they are for the most part sincerely progressive people who at times make political mistakes. The Czechoslovak intelligence service has neither the right nor the possibility to judge any objections which communist parties raise against the operation. The leaderships of certain communist parties have reservations regarding the selection of the participants, but many of their members and officials have used and still use the transit routes under the operation, judging by the fact that many participants are demanding contacts with comrade Fortuny (Guatemalan CP), comrade Carreras (Venezuelan CP), comrade Otero (Bolivian CP) and that in October 1966 the Argentinean Communist Party even dispatched one of its officials to Prague to deal with the transit of a group of participants.

The Czechoslovak intelligence service is doing its utmost to protect the interests of Czechoslovakia by securing all technical matters concerning the people in transit. By verifying, possibly adapting chosen travel routes, by offering basic instructions on the regime of travel at transit locations, by confiscating damaging material (Cuban passports, propaganda material, etc.), in rare instances by modifying faulty travel documents, we are reducing the risks to a minimum. The disclosure of certain working methods to possible enemy agents is balanced by the protection of honest participants in the operation against being revealed.

Calling off our assistance in the Operation MANUEL would not solve the major risks for Czechoslovakia; on the contrary, these risks would only become greater. The choice of Prague as a transit station for the participants in the Operation MANUEL has been determined by objective conditions of international links with Cuba, which do not depend on us. Apart from our airlines, the only other companies flying to Cuba are Cuban airlines, Soviet Aeroflot, the Spanish Iberia and Mexican airlines; of these only flights to Prague and Moscow are suitable for the purpose of the operation. Consequently, if we should stop taking part in the operation, its participants would pass through Prague as ordinary passengers and would receive their instructions from the Cuban residentura in Prague which is not capable of handling all their requirements as well as the Czechoslovak intelligence service is able to do by using all its professional and technical facilities. The fact that the handling would be done by the Cubans themselves in no way reduces the responsibility and vulnerability of Czechoslovakia as a transfer station for the transit of the participants in the Operation MANUEL on their way to Latin America. Unprofessional handling only substantially increases the risk.

The necessity for a professional solution of the problems is borne out by many examples; even in the recent past when the above-mentioned official of the Central Committee of the Argentinean CP, who was ignorant of the situation and was not prepared to allow anyone to interfere with his work, caused complications which could have seriously endangered participants abroad.

The total and definite cessation of the operation is out of the question since this could be carried out only by suspending all direct flights between Czechoslovakia and Cuba and by a ban imposed on the activities of members of the Cuban intelligence service at the Cuban Embassy in Prague, in other words, by resorting to acts hostile to the Cuban Republic.

Apart from these practical aspects, it is essential to consider also the political aspects since the mere refusal to offer further assistance to the Operation MANUEL would result in a drastic cooling off of relations with Cuba, not only with regard to the Ministry of Interior but as a whole, because leading Cuban representatives regard the Operation MANUEL as a commitment of fundamental significance towards the national liberation movement; the highest representatives, including Fidel Castro, deal with participants prior to their journey abroad and our refusal would be interpreted as a political decision to suspend assistance to the national liberation movement in the countries of Latin America.

Updating the report as of 1.11.1967

Prospects of the operation:

The liquidation of certain partisan centres, the arrest or betrayal of participants (in part possibly under the psychological influence of setbacks suffered by the movement of late) have given counter-revolutionary groups in the countries of Latin America and in the US further material on the course of events in connection with the Operation MANUEL. It cannot be ruled out that people who have been infiltrated by the enemy to participate in the operation, as agents will be exploited for propaganda purposes so that their revelations would further step up the campaign directed both against Cuba as well as the socialist camp countries. This tendency can be confirmed by the case of the traitor Caraquela who allegedly contacted the Venezuelan authorities in October last year and whose testimony was used in August 1967 as one of the documentary materials for the negotiations of the Organization of American States on "the Cuban subversive activities in Latin America". A detailed account of the travel routes used by the participants in the Operation MANUEL contained in his testimony, as well as certain cases of betrayal in the past, demonstrate that the operation is and will be under surveillance so that the hopes of its participants for an unrecorded return to their mother countries are relatively small. The deterioration of the situation and the increasing risks of the operation emerge also from the makeup of the travelling participants. While during the first years they consisted mostly of people of good qualities, expertise and devotion to the revolutionary movement, it is increasingly evident that nowadays more and more people using the route are of lower intelligence and to an increasing extent even those for whom it is likely that a paid trip across Europe to Cuba is a far stronger motivation than interest in the revolutionary struggle.

One must, therefore, expect further arrests of participants, regardless of whether they have travelled in the past or are travelling at present, and it is likely that as a result of such repression the transit of many more people through Czechoslovakia and the assistance provided during their clearance for dispatch will be exposed. In this connection, one must expect that Czechoslovakia may again be accused of tolerating the operation or supporting it outright.

Position of the Soviet intelligence service:

At meetings of representatives of the 1st Administration of the Ministry of Interior and of the Soviet intelligence service held in Moscow in June 1967 discussions took place on the assistance which the Soviet friends are offering the Cuban intelligence service. It became clear in the talks that the Soviet friends, too, participated in organizing the Operation MANUEL in Moscow. Our political evaluation is in full accord with the assessment of the Soviet friends, and the Soviet friends participate in the operation since this is inevitable in the same way as the Czechoslovak intelligence service. Essentially they do not wish to create complication which would be unavoidable in the event of a refusal and the Cubans would see this as a fundamentally negative response to help for the national liberation movement in Latin America.

Proposed measures:

Operation MANUEL- the Czechoslovak intelligence service sees the operation as a practical expression of Cuban theoretical concepts on the decisive role of armed uprisings in developing countries that have become the foundations of Cuba's foreign policy and have been enshrined in the conclusions of the Tri-continental Conference last year in Havana. This line does not take fully into consideration the objective situation in the Latin American countries, and instead of concentrating on well-considered political work, oriented at risky armed activities which cannot count on broader political support, gamble with human and material resources, frequently compromise and isolate progressive forces and cause considerable moral and political damage. Basically, this line comes close to the Chinese understanding of the tasks and forms of the work of the international communist movement and is, consequently, backed by certain factions in the Latin American countries. The assistance which the Czechoslovak intelligence service provides the Operation MANUEL is in no way amounts to agreeing with its political content and constitutes no more than a marginal and minor aspect of intelligence work. That is why special officials have been selected for its implementation; we are consistently isolating this activity from the work of the I. Administration of the Ministry of the Interior. The actual handling of the operation involves various matters of a technical and operational nature, which are open to question and require a tactful approach when dealing with the Cuban intelligence service.

In the light of this unfavourable political character of the operation and with a view to the objective situation, a choice must be made between the following two options in our approach to the Operation MANUEL:

Option I:

Terminate our assistance in the organization of the Operation MANUEL in view of the above-mentioned political nature of the operation, which provokes complaints by representatives of communist parties in Latin America and damages Czechoslovakia. This measure would have to be conveyed and explained to the Cuban side on an appropriate political level either in Prague or in Havana (Ministry of Foreign Affairs) and not by liaison officials of the intelligence services.

Advantages of termination:

a) We would put an end in part to complaints raised against Czechoslovakia on an international level.

b) We would get rid of all responsibilities for its technical organization; we could release two of our special officials and we would save the expenses incurred by the sojourn of the participants in Czechoslovakia. The financial savings would, however, not be substantial since the Cubans themselves cover the decisive part in hard

currency e.g. travel expenses, accommodation in hotels (unless our conspiratorial apartments are used), food, purchase of clothing, etc.

Disadvantages of termination:

a) The termination of our assistance would have a considerable political impact since the Cuban Government regards the operation as a fundamental form of assistance to the national liberation movement in Latin America. Refusal to offer assistance would, therefore, not be connected only with the Ministry of Interior and the intelligence service but with the overall attitude of Czechoslovakia and the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia to the national liberation movement and towards Cuba, and would inevitably be reflected in a general acute worsening of relations between states.

b) The operation would continue without our participation. The Cubans themselves would organize it and its participants would act as tourists in Czechoslovakia, or as normal passengers on international airline flights. The operation could be terminated in an effective manner only by radical steps directed against Cuba, for example, by suspending flights to Cuba, introducing strict controls of the Cuban Embassy in Prague and restricting its activities, etc. – otherwise it is impossible to stop the transit.

c) Risks for Czechoslovakia would diminish neither in relations with communist parties nor in relations with capitalist countries because Prague would continue to be the halfway stop on a transfer station and Czechoslovakia would be accused of at least tolerating the operation.

d) There will be increased risks for the participants of the operation in view of inadequate instructions, travel with two passports (up till now passports have been exchanged in Czechoslovakia where Cuban passports which were taken away from the participants were returned to our friends), travel with flawed documents and an inadequate knowledge of travel routes as well as of the control regime at transit localities outside Czechoslovakia.

e) Apart from an enemy agency, the operation will be exposed by the exposing of honest participants that will occur because of the said shortcomings. Such exposures could well be used in propaganda against Czechoslovakia whereas reports by enemy agents are generally concealed in view of their security and cannot be used for propaganda purposes straight away.

Option II.

Continue assistance to the Operation MANUEL, while fully aware of its adverse political aspects and take the following measures:

1) Discuss the situation with representatives of Latin American communist parties which are affected by the operation (through the International Department of the Central Committee of the Czechoslovak Communist Party), learn their main comments and suggestions for eliminating or reducing risk factors. Inform them of our position as a travel crossroad towards Cuba and the consequent impossibility of preventing the transit of participants in the operation without taking hostile steps against Cuba (suspending flights, control and restriction of the activities of the Cuban Embassy in Prague, etc.); this would be accompanied by jeopardizing mutual relations and in the final analysis would reinforce the adventurist tendencies of the Cubans.

2) Discuss the Operation MANUEL at Party level with representatives of the Cuban Communist Party with a view to improving the selection of participants and excluding

persons who have not been approved. Explain the fundamental risks, which are unjustifiable for all parties involved (Cuba, the national liberation movement in Latin America and Czechoslovakia) and do not make up for the possible contribution which these people are able to offer the revolutionary movement.

3) Agencies of the Czechoslovak intelligence services - the resident in Havana - will discuss the following organizational measures with the Cuban Ministry of Interior:

a) Not increasing the number of participants dispatched in light of the realistic possibilities of the existing travel channels. Adapting the number to the concrete international situation, which may require limiting or at moments of crises total temporary termination of the operation;

b) Reducing the size of groups to 3-4 and a maximum of two nationalities, not to send family members of the participants but instead leave the organization of their travel to the Cuban Embassy in Prague;

c) Improving the quality of travel documents, provide better briefing when contacting our staff in Prague and improve all material facilities.

4) Increase the control and improve the quality of the registration of participants in transit by technical measures.