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Note
Memorandum

CONFIDENTIAL

[Ottawa], May 4, 1961

NATO MINISTERIAL MEETING – MAY 1961
CUBA

TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

(1) Private Conversations

No doubt there will be opportunities for private conversations on this important and delicate subject with the US Secretary of State. It would seem desirable that the more difficult points be made in such private conversations rather than in the full Council Meeting.

In conversations with Mr. Rusk you might wish to express very frankly your misgivings about the consequences of any armed attack on Cuba or even of continued rumours of the possibility of such an attack by United States forces.

While Canadians are aware of the dangers presented by developments in Cuba and in Cuba's relations with the Soviet bloc, and while many Canadians strongly deplore the treatment of the Church in Cuba, it cannot be assumed that the Canadian people would sympathize with any move by the United States to upset the Castro régime by force from outside. The memories of United States domination of various Caribbean countries in the past, the general dislike in Canada of interference by one country in another country's affairs, the tendency of some Canadians to regard United States intervention in Cuba as designed to protect or restore rather selfish United States interests and the important fact that Cuba is such a small country compared with the United States could well combine to offset any disapproval which there is in Canada of the practices of the Castro Government.

The United States therefore cannot count on a sympathetic Canadian reaction to the use of force against Castro. Such a development, apart from its other consequences, could impose a considerable strain on United States-Canadian relations. Even the continuation of rumours of a possible invasion is bound to affect the attitudes of many people in Canada towards the United States. Moreover the adoption of further coercive economic measures (such as foreign assets control measures) could complicate relations between the United States and Canada.

Although the United States obviously has to take many other considerations into account, it is to be hoped that in the interests of United States-Canadian relations some way can be found of easing the tension in the Caribbean without armed intervention or extreme economic measures. It would seem important that whatever steps are taken carry the judgment of the principal Latin-American countries.

(2) Council Discussions

You may consider that the raising in Council of the Cuban question should be left to the United States since it might be taken amiss if Canada were to bring up the matter. If we are to have any influence on United States decisions regarding Cuba it would seem undesirable for us to appear to be exposing them to criticism in the more or less public discussions of the Council.