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OA/ID Number: 21710
Scan ID: 300226SS
Document Number: 9902275

Folder Title:
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'99 APR 8 PM 1:50

WE

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

'99 APR 9 PM 7:14

April 8, 1999

ACTION

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

FROM: SAMUEL BERGER (K) For
LARRY STEIN JS

SUBJECT: Reply to Letter from Representative Menendez

Purpose

Reply to Representative Bob Menendez on Cuba policy.

Background

Representative Menendez expressed concern with several recent actions regarding Cuba. He indicated that your statement of March 15 -- in which you said you were "deeply disappointed" by the sentencing of four Cuban dissidents and called on the Cuban government to release them immediately -- was too mild. He also criticized the Baltimore Orioles' exhibition games, claiming they signaled that the USG "places greater value on cooperating with Cuba's dictator than ... on standing up for the Cuban people." He urged you to cancel the Orioles' exchange and to repeal the measures to reach out to the Cuban people that you announced in January.

The reply indicates that you share Representative Menendez's deep desire to promote a peaceful democratic transition in Cuba and his revulsion for GOC violations of human rights. It notes that measures in support of the Cuban people are focused on benefiting the Cuban people, not the Castro government.

RECOMMENDATION

That you sign the letter at Tab A.

Attachments

- Tab A Reply to Representative Menendez
- Tab B Incoming Correspondence

cc: Vice President
Chief of Staff

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

Dear Bob:

Thank you for writing regarding my policy toward Cuba. I share your deep commitment to promoting democracy, respect for human rights, and economic freedom in Cuba.

The recent sentencing of the four leaders of the Internal Dissident Working Group underscores Fidel Castro's unwillingness to allow basic rights and the need for sustained international pressure on the regime to change. As I said at the time, Vladimiro Roca, Felix Bonne, Rene Gomez Manzano, and Marta Beatriz Roque did nothing more than assert their right to speak out about their country's future and to seek a peaceful democratic transition in Cuba. In denying the activists due process and an open hearing, Castro's regime showed disdain for the democratic values we and our allies embrace.

The measures I announced in January, including licensing of the Baltimore Orioles' exhibition games, were intended to reach out to the Cuban people, without strengthening the Castro government. The expansion of people-to-people contacts and the measures facilitating the flow of remittances and food, air travel, and direct mail reflect our desire to help the Cuban people, encourage civil society, and help them prepare for a democratic future. These steps provide the people of Cuba with hope in their struggle against a system that for four decades has denied them even basic human rights. The government's repressive actions increase the people's need for our support and for exposure to the democratic values for which we stand.

It is important to note that we have sought to implement the measures in a manner that maximizes the benefit to the Cuban people and denies benefit to the Castro regime. We are taking particular care, for example, that exports of food and agricultural products go only to independent nongovernmental entities, such as churches, charities, family restaurants and

private farmers. Our position has been clear that we neither intend nor expect the measures to alter our relations with the Cuban government. Through effective embargo enforcement and a comprehensive diplomatic strategy, we are maintaining strong pressure on the regime to undertake the fundamental political and economic reforms for which the Cuban people yearn.

Again, thank you for your letter. I appreciate hearing your views and assure you that we will continue to do all we can to expedite a transition to democracy in Cuba.

Sincerely,

RM

The Honorable Robert Menendez
House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515-3013

OK to AP

*-D
G*

OK to AP

Phil 4/12

ROBERT MENENDEZ
13TH DISTRICT, NEW JERSEY
VICE CHAIR OF THE DEMOCRATIC CAUCUS

COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION
AND INFRASTRUCTURE

SUBCOMMITTEES:
AVIATION
WATER RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENT

COMMITTEE ON INTERNATIONAL
RELATIONS

SUBCOMMITTEES:
INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC POLICY AND TRADE
WESTERN HEMISPHERE



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-3013

2275

REPLY TO:

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WASHINGTON, DC 20515-3013
(202) 225-7919

DISTRICT OFFICES:

☐ 911 BERGEN AVENUE
JERSEY CITY, NJ 07306
(201) 222-2828

☐ 654 AVENUE C
BAYONNE, NJ 07002
(201) 823-2900

☐ 263 HOBART STREET
PERTH AMBOY, NJ 08861
(732) 324-6212

March 22, 1999

The President
The White House
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

I am writing to express my deep disappointment in the weak statement that you made concerning Cuba's sentencing of four human rights activists on Monday and to urge you to respond to the recent crackdown in Cuba and sentencing of Cuba's leading human rights activists, Vladimiro Roca, Felix Bonne, Marta Beatriz Roque and Rene Gomez Manzano by repealing the measures you announced on January 5, including the licensing of the exhibition baseball games between the Baltimore Orioles and the Cuban National Baseball Team.

At a time when Castro has announced a new law authorizing extensive jail terms for internal dissent and when Castro's kangaroo court has just sentenced Cuba's leading human rights activists to prison terms ranging from 3 ½ to 5 years just for criticizing the regime, it is not time to play ball with Cuba.

Baseball is America's national pastime. It is a symbol of our heritage and national values. It is the sport for which the American President kicks off the season by throwing the first pitch. Baseball is Americana, as the saying goes, "as American as baseball and apple pie."

The exhibition games are anything but compatible with American values. Americans have rights. Americans have the right to organize labor unions, to lobby and criticize our government, without fear of reprisal and to vote for a change in our leadership at the ballot box. Cubans share none of these basic rights.

If you permit the exhibition games to go forward, you will be sending a message to Cuba -- not about American values -- but that the United States places a greater value on cooperating with Cuba's dictator than they do in standing up for the Cuban people at a time that they are struggling to exercise their basic human and civil rights.

Page Two - President Clinton

Mr. President, I urge you to repeal the measures that you announced in January to ease U.S. policy toward Cuba. Clearly, these overtures to the Cuban regime were not reciprocated to by progress toward democratic reform by the Castro regime.

I also urge you to condemn the conviction and sentencing of Cuba's leading human rights activists and to send a message to them, by canceling the exhibition baseball games, that America stands in solidarity with them and others like them who are challenging the status quo in Cuba and risking their life and liberty. America's policy toward Cuba is to expedite a transition to democracy, not to play ball with this hemisphere's last dictator.

Sincerely,



ROBERT MENENDEZ
Member of Congress

NSC PACKAGE

4/12/99
(date)

RM:

OK FOR SIGNATURE PER **PHIL CAPLAN/SEAN MALONEY**.

RETURN ALL LETTER(S) AND ORIGINAL MEMO(S) TO
STAFF SECRETARY'S OFFICE.

cc
(initials)

Okay for Signature by
Staff Secretary Phil Caplan
Date 4/12/99

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

April 12, 1999

Dear Bob:

Thank you for writing regarding my policy toward Cuba. I share your deep commitment to promoting democracy, respect for human rights, and economic freedom in Cuba.

The recent sentencing of the four leaders of the Internal Dissident Working Group underscores Fidel Castro's unwillingness to allow basic rights and the need for sustained international pressure on the regime to change. As I said at the time, Vladimiro Roca, Felix Bonne, Rene Gomez Manzano, and Marta Beatriz Roque did nothing more than assert their right to speak out about their country's future and to seek a peaceful democratic transition in Cuba. In denying the activists due process and an open hearing, Castro's regime showed disdain for the democratic values we and our allies embrace.

The measures I announced in January, including licensing of the Baltimore Orioles' exhibition games, were intended to reach out to the Cuban people, without strengthening the Castro government. The expansion of people-to-people contacts and the measures facilitating the flow of remittances and food, air travel, and direct mail reflect our desire to help the Cuban people, encourage civil society, and help them prepare for a democratic future. These steps provide the people of Cuba with hope in their struggle against a system that for four decades has denied them even basic human rights. The government's repressive actions increase the people's need for our support and for exposure to the democratic values for which we stand.

It is important to note that we have sought to implement the measures in a manner that maximizes the benefit to the Cuban people and denies benefit to the Castro regime. We are taking particular care, for example, that exports of food and agricultural products go only to independent nongovernmental entities, such as churches, charities, family restaurants and

private farmers. Our position has been clear that we neither intend nor expect the measures to alter our relations with the Cuban government. Through effective embargo enforcement and a comprehensive diplomatic strategy, we are maintaining strong pressure on the regime to undertake the fundamental political and economic reforms for which the Cuban people yearn.

Again, thank you for your letter. I appreciate hearing your views and assure you that we will continue to do all we can to expedite a transition to democracy in Cuba.

Sincerely,

RB

The Honorable Robert Menendez
House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515-3013

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NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

ID 9902275

REFERRAL

DATE: 13 APR 99

MEMORANDUM FOR: WH STRIPPING DESK

DOCUMENT DESCRIPTION: TO: MENENDEZ, ROBERT

SOURCE: PRESIDENT

DATE: 12 APR 99

SUBJ: REPLY TO LTR FM REP MENENDEZ RE RECENT INITIATIVES ON CUBA

REQUIRED ACTION: FOR DISPATCH

DUE DATE: 14 APR 99

COMMENT:


 FOR

JOHN W. FICKLIN

NSC RECORDS MANAGEMENT OFFICE