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Operation MANUEL: Origins, Development and Aims

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Summary:

Comrade Josef Houska submits a document concerning issues related to cooperation with the Cuban intelligence service especially the Operation MANUEL to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. The Operational MANUEL started in 1962 when the Cuban intelligence asked the Czechoslovak resident in Havana to arrange a transit through Prague for Venezuelan nationals who underwent guerrilla training in Cuba. In 1964 talks were held between Cuban and Czechoslovak intelligence services but no formal agreement of the tasks and responsibilities was concluded between the two. The Soviet government was informed about the Operation MANUEL and stated its agreement with the project. Houska says that the main objective of the operation is the education and training of revolutionary cadres from Latin America and the organization of combat groups. Participants of the operation were not confined to cadres from among the ranks of communist parties but also included members from various nationalist and anti-American groupings. The routes of individual participants in the operation were determined by the Cuban intelligence service who mainly directed the Operation MANUEL. Houska says problems that arisen in the course of the operation were solved in collaboration with Cuban and the Soviet authorities. The document cautioned about counter-espionage institutions' increasing interests in the operation and the fact that the US intelligence service agents were among the operation participants. Houska says refusal to offer assistance would have a negative impact on Cuba and Czechoslovakia would lose control over the operation.

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Translation - English

Prague, November 17, 1967

1st Administration, Ministry of Interior
A-00921/10-67

Copy no. 1 STRICTLY SECRET

Central Committee of the
Communist Party of Czechoslovakia
8th Department
Comrade Mamula

Dear Comrade,

I am sending you a copy of a document, which I have passed on to the Comrade Minister; it is for your information and to be used by you. It concerns a whole series of problems related to cooperation with the Cuban intelligence service (especially the Operation MANUEL) and the issues arising from it and involve certain sensitive questions connected with relations with Cuba and fraternal parties in Latin America, together with a number of fundamental proposed solutions which are beyond the powers of the Czechoslovak intelligence service.

Enclosure: 2/16

With comradely greetings,

Col. Josef Houska
Chief of the 1st Administration
Ministry of Interior

Information on the Operation MANUEL

I. The origins, development and aims of the operation

In December 1962 the Chief of the Cuban intelligence service asked the Czechoslovak resident in Havana to arrange a single conspiratorial transit for Venezuelan nationals who had undergone guerrilla training in Cuba. In view of the fact that the secure and almost only conspiratorial connection between Cuba and Latin American is through Prague, our Cuban friends turned to us with the request to ensure the straightforward transit of further groups of Latin Americans. The Czechoslovak intelligence service agreed to these requests as part of the cooperation which existed at the time and this, in fact, gave rise to the subsequent Operation MANUEL.

The leadership of the Ministry of Interior was informed about the inauguration and progress of the operation in special reports; a summary report was drawn up in March 1963 together with proposals for measures, which were approved by Comrade Minister Strougal; he asked us to give every possible assistance to the Cuban friends. The leadership of the Ministry of Interior received regular reports on the further progress of the operation, above all, about the concrete assistance we were

requested to provide and which we gave the Cuban friends.

The system of cooperation between the Czechoslovak intelligence service and our Cuban friends in the Operation MANUEL is systematically discussed through the intermediary of our resident in Havana and with the Cuban liaison resident in Prague who is responsible for the dispatch of Latin Americans from Prague to Cuba. In March 1964 talks were held between the Chiefs of the two intelligence services and in conclusion the requests of the Cuban friends to the Czechoslovak intelligence service were put down in writing. But no formal agreement was concluded between the Cuban and the Czechoslovak intelligence services which would clearly specify the tasks, jurisdiction and responsibilities of the two parties involved in the operation since we had no intention of committing ourselves officially to a broad agreement as the Cuban friends would have liked.

Our Soviet friends have been informed about our cooperation in the Operation MANUEL at the residentura in Havana as well as in the centre, and stated their agreement with the project; but at the same time they drew our attention to the fact that the operation was the internal affair of the Cuban friends and that the Soviet comrades were unable to exert influence as regards its organization or substance. On the basis of information acquired in the course of the operation it was established that certain participants in the operation had been contacted by representatives of Latin American communist parties in Moscow or had been in the USSR for negotiations.

The negotiations with the Cuban friends have not so far dealt in detail with the content of the operation or with its organizational structure. For tactical reasons, the Czechoslovak intelligence service has not deemed it appropriate to request the Cuban friends to provide information on the operational procedure, on forms of training, on the connection and major objectives of individual groups. Our negotiations have been confined to comments and recommendations on those aspects of the operation in which we were involved operationally. That is why our information on this aspect of the operation is based purely on marginal facts obtained in talks with individual participants.

The main objective of the operation is the education and training of revolutionary cadres from Latin American countries and the organization of combat groups, capable of independent operations in their country. The Cuban friends proceed from the principle of the need to give maximum support to all forms of struggle, leading to the liberation of the Latin American nations.

The operation is directed by the Cuban intelligence service, which screens candidates for training within the limits of its possibilities. They are selected by the individual national liberation organizations in their countries; the intelligence service is responsible for the training and provides material resources for the entire opeeration. In organizing recruitment and possibly specialized training in accordance with the revolutionary situation in a given country, the Cuban friends cooperate with representatives of Latin American communist parties who are situated in Havana or who travel to Cuba to determine the form and extent of cooperation or conclude contracts to this effect (for example, an agreement with the Argentinean CP). But the operation is not confined solely to cadres from among the ranks of communist parties, it also includes members from various nationalist and anti-American groupings. Apart from the training of members of communist parties, training is also given to members of faction groups of these parties. The Cuban friends do not have full information about all the participants and they themselves have asked that our people should continue to assess the participants as they pass through Prague.

I. Our participation in organizing the Operation MANUEL

The Operation MANUEL involves both our rezidentura in Havana and the Cuban section of the I. Branch of the 1st Administration of the Ministry of Interior.

Our resident in Havana receives the names of the participants of the Operation MANUEL from the liaison officer of the Cuban intelligence service; this includes the names as they are mentioned in the Cuban passport which the participants use for their journey from Havana to Prague as well as the names in the travel documents which they use for their journey from Prague to the country of destination. The Cuban friends report any changes made to the passports as well as false stamps of other countries to conceal the participants' stay in Cuba. Whenever the participants of the operation know each other from the time of their training in Cuba have been entrusted with the same task and can travel together, a head of the group is appointed and his/her name is also disclosed. Finally, information is provided of the outline route, the country of destination and the degree of the reliability of the participant in the operation.

The Cuban friends mark the reliability of individual participants with the letters A, B, C.

A. Leading official of a communist party and revolutionary organizations enjoying full confidence and thoroughly screened;

B. Rank and file participants in the Operation MANUEL who are trusted and have been screened;

C. Rank and file participants who have not been fully screened and who do not enjoy full confidence in their discretion.

The resident in Havana passes this information on to the centre by cable together with the date of the participants' departure. The Czechoslovak side is further responsible for discussing with the Cuban friends any problems, which have arisen in the Operation MANUEL and for handing over to them the Cuban passports taken away from the participants in Prague.

The head of each group or each individual despatched will receive from the Cuban friends in Havana the telephone number of our agency telephone in Prague used for this purpose. He or she will also be given the password for contacts in Prague. The number of the agency telephone and the contact password are changed from time to time.

Up to May 1965 our side in Prague appointed an official driver and set aside a special car in addition to two comrades at the Cuban Department; the driver had the job of taking most participants in the operation from the contact locality to their hotels or to a conspiratorial apartment and of arranging other technical matters. As of May 1965 contacts, briefings for subsequent journeys and making arrangements for the participants in the Operation MANUEL are carried out by one woman comrade and one male comrade who use an official car for the transport of individual participants in the operation. They act as private persons who help the Cuban friends in making technical arrangements for the transit, or as Czech employees of ICAP (Cuban Institute for Friendship among the Peoples).

The participants make a telephone call from the airport, report the password and a meeting is arranged including an identification recognition sign. Formerly these meetings were held in the city centre, generally in the vicinity of the Czech Airlines offices whichh the participants reached by coach from the airport. This method was changed as of May 1965 in order to secure greater conspiracy and making it more difficult for the enemy to discover the methods of our operation.

Since May 1965 contacts generally take place in the airport transit lounge where access is restricted and where our officials contact individual participants personally. Whenever this is possible their connection is arranged immediately and they are able to purchase their onward ticket. In certain suitable instances, this reduces to a minimum the time participants of the operation have to stay in Czechoslovakia.

If a suitable connection is not available, the participants in the operation pass through passport and customs control, using their Cuban passports if they are to be accommodated in a hotel. They are taken to the VALENTINA conspiratorial apartment, to the VENKOV conspiratorial villa or to a hotel where a meeting has been arranged with them. At the meeting all problems connected with their onward journey from Czechoslovakia to Latin America are discussed, the travel documents they are to use for their journey from Czechoslovakia to the country of destination are taken from them.

In 1964, the journey from Czechoslovakia across West European countries was arranged in collaboration with the 10th Department of the 1st Administration of the Ministry of Interior which provided the passports to be used for the onward journey with a false Czechoslovak entry visa (not inside the passport, issued generally to tourists by the passport control) together with a false currency certificate. In addition, the 10th Department checks the quality of the forged travel documents as well as the quality of all entries made in these documents by the Cuban friends. The 10th Department also helped in choosing the most appropriate and most secure route from Czechoslovakia to the destination countries.

An instruction briefing concerning their onward journey is arranged with the head of the group or with individual participants prior to their departure from Czechoslovakia by air; the Cuban passports which they used to travel from Cuba and which served them only during their stay in Prague are taken away from them, and they are handed passports for their onward journey, which have a Czechoslovak visa and a currency declaration for the passport and customs check at Ruzyne airport, or at the appropriate railway checkpoint.

Between the middle of 1963 and in 1964 we managed to take advantage of a number of Latin Americans in the course of the Operation MANUEL who during their transit through Prague revealed a great deal of knowledge about their countries. The people in transit frequently told us certain facts which were new for us; we were also able to obtain information from the citizens of these countries where we do not have a residentura and about which we consequently had no information. This applied in particular to the Central American republics of Peru and Paraguay. Since it became evident in the course of time that the information was subjective and, above all, out of date, coming from people who had spent a long time in Cuba, this type of information gathering was abandoned. The ineffective nature of this type of fact gathering also played a role in this decision since the energy and resources expended in all this did not correspond to the facts obtained in this way.

II. Review of the number and composition of the participants, their routes to the destination countries

Between the launching of the operation on 17.12.1962 and 30.4.1966 we arranged the secret sojourn and conspiratorial departure from Czechoslovakia for a total of 639 individuals whom we registered in documents and who were catalogued on the basis of used documents.

Travel document to states:	Total number of persons:
United Kingdom	1

Argentina 73
Bolivia 3
Brazil 18
Chile 4
Dominican Republic 77
Ecuador 27
Guatemala 48
Haiti 1
Honduras 29
Colombia 63
Costa Rica 1
Cuba 3
Mexico 2
Panama 3
Paraguay 36
Peru 34
Puerto Rico 5
Salvador 28
Spain 1
Uruguay 8
USA 2
Venezuela 172

A table listing the number of participants per individual months is enclosed.

The nationality of individual participants basically corresponds to the documents used even though there have been exceptions, as was confirmed.

Most of the participants were young people, mainly students, youth officials and some of them were simple highlanders. Approximately 15% were officials of communist parties, national liberation movements and armed organizations, and about 0.5% were Cuban secret service agents.

The political conviction of most participants was outright pro-communist. In view of the conflict with the Chinese Communist Party, a certain number, above all members of factions in the communist parties, did not conceal their pro-Chinese attitude. Following their training in Cuba, even representatives of various factions in communist parties (for example, Saturnino Paredes Macedo from Peru) as well as nationalist groups and individuals who at some stage had been working against the communist party (for example, the Argentinean Peronist John William Cook and others) used the services of the Czechoslovak intelligence service in the Operation MANUEL.

The routes of individual participants in the Operation MANUEL are determined by the Cuban intelligence service and the centre is then informed through the intermediary of our residentura. We respect the selected routes unless they contradict the documents used. For example, we amend a route leading across Switzerland when the participant's sojourn in Cuba is to be concealed and his or her travel document contains a forged Swiss rubber stamp. We also change the route when travel documents are not in perfect order and the route is to lead via countries with a stringent checking regime.

Despite our endeavours to look for new methods and new connections for departures from Czechoslovakia to avoid a set regular pattern and the possible discovery of our

methods by the enemy, the following major cities in Western Europe are used most frequently for connections by air:

Frankfurt
Amsterdam -- used infrequently
Brussels -- used infrequently
Zurich
Paris
London -- used only exceptionally

In these cities the participants only change planes, or spend a few days there and continue via the following cities where they also change their connection to their destination country:

Lisbon
Madrid
Panama
Kingston
San Juan
Bogota
Caracas
Mexico City

When travelling by train the participants go mostly to the Federal Republic of Germany where most nationals from Latin American countries do not need a visa.

A greater variation of routes is made difficult by the limited financial resources which the participants in the operation receive in Havana.

III. Problems encountered in the course of the Operation MANUEL, the danger the operation represents for Czechoslovakia and its repercussions throughout the world.

Certain problems have arisen in the course of the Operation MANUEL; they have been solved in the course of time in collaboration with the Cuban and, at times, with our Soviet friends as well.

The most serious shortcoming was unprofessionally prepared forged passports, which the participants were to use for their journey to the destination country, together with flawed technical changes made in the genuine passports (forged rubber stamps, visas, amended data, etc.) We were prepared to deal with this shortcoming by training an expert in these matters at the 10th Department, but since the Soviet friends took over this task, our assistance in this respect was not needed.

Other shortcomings, such as the dispatch of a larger number of participants of various nationalities, each of them requiring special handling and making personal requests for an amendment to the route, were also eliminated over a certain period of time.

Personal requirements of participants, such as changing the colour of their hair, covering expenses incurred during the transit of Czechoslovakia, inadequate knowledge of certain facts and of the countries where the participants had allegedly spent some time, were also dealt with.

We regularly discussed these and certain other shortcomings with the Cuban liaison resident in Prague, and through the intermediary of our resident in Havana with senior representatives of the Cuban intelligence service and Interior Minister Ramiro Valdes.

In view of the increasingly tense international situation, isolation and, on the other hand, the increasing activity of the Cuban friends in the Latin American national liberation movement and the large number of participants in the Operation MANUEL which has continued for several years, we are justified in assuming that enemy counter-espionage institutions will take an increasing interest in the project. We must, furthermore, expect that the enemy knows the forms it takes and the methods used in channelling the participants through Prague. For example, we must consider the defection as far back as 1964 of an official of the Cuban intelligence service "VICTOR" who was responsible for the training of the participants of the operation from Central America in Cuba, and as one of the women participants revealed this official allegedly gave the Salvador police interrogators information about another participant.

According to newspaper reports, another participant, Luis Genao Espaillat from the Dominican Republic, who passed through Prague in 1964 and was housed in a conspiratorial apartment, held a press conference in December 1965 at which he renounced his revolutionary activities. We must reckon with the fact that the US intelligence service has its agents among the participants in the Operation MANUEL.

There are reports in the Western press from time to time that Czechoslovakia is a through station for "subversive" elements that travel from Latin America to Cuba or from Cuba to Latin America. The motivation of these reports is undeniably the fact that Prague is nowadays the only relatively reliable transit centre through which Latin American nationals can be dispatched to Cuba and back. But we must also realize that participants in the Operation MANUEL are not the only people travelling through Prague but that a far greater number from Latin America and from all over the world take that route because the Czechoslovak capital is a major international aviation crossroad (the most important on the route to Cuba).

The threat to Czechoslovak interests which could have emerged from accusations that we permit travel through our territory on flawed documents was to a large extent eliminated with the help of our Soviet friends and by improving the quality of the work of the documentation section of the Cuban intelligence service.

Czechoslovak interests will not be seriously threatened by the operations of the Operation MANUEL provided we are capable of continuously changing the forms of despatching its participants, reduce the time they spend on our territory to a minimum and, above all, if we conceal the involvement of our institutions in its organization. Agents of the Czechoslovak intelligence service involved in the operation must act in a convincing manner as private persons, possibly employed by a Cuban organization.

IV. Future prospects of the Operation MANUEL

Since the anti-imperialist and national liberation struggle in the Latin American countries will continue we expect that the operation will go on for quite a long time. This expectation is confirmed by the deliberations and conclusions of the Tricontinental Conference held in Havana in January 1966, which condemned North American imperialism and issued an appeal for an armed struggle. Leading members of the Cuban revolutionary government have declared on various occasions that Cuba would give every possible support to the national liberation movement both in Latin America and on other continents.

Another reason on the basis of which we can anticipate the long-term continuation of the Operation MANUEL is the fact that the Cuban friends increasingly consider themselves as the leading force of the national liberation movement in Latin America and will consequently endeavour to intensify guerrilla training of nationals of other Latin American countries in Cuba. This will result in an increase in the number of persons in transit through Prague but also more difficult checks and protection

against the penetration of the US agency into the operation. In the near future it will be necessary to consider new conspiratorial methods in organizing the operation to be introduced by us and by the Cuban side.

Since Czechoslovakia is the main country through which conspiratorial contacts between Cuba and Latin American countries are nowadays possible, we are convinced that the Cuban friends will continue to dispatch trained personnel via Prague.

Our participation in the Operation MANUEL is our contribution to the national liberation movement, which is our duty as stipulated in the documents of the 13th Congress of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. We must be aware that our refusal to give assistance would have a most negative impact on our Cuban friends, while it would basically not solve the problem since our relatively expert help on the territory of Czechoslovakia would be replaced by a series of less well-qualified measures by the Cuban friends and, what is more, we would lose control over the operation.

Review of the number of MANUEL participants passing through Prague on the basis of months of the years as of the beginning of 1962 until the end of April 1966

1962

December 16

1963

January 14
February 14
March 16
April 15
May 16
June 16
July 19
August 16
September 17
October 15
November 13
December 14

1964

January 12
February 15
March 24
April 25
May 24
June 25
July 24
August 25
September 17
October 14
November 15

December 9

1965

January 10
February 9
March 12
April 10
May 15
June 13
July 11
August 11
September 10
October 21
November 30
December 10

1966

January 10
February 14
March 14
April 9

Total 639
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