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Likelihood of an Attempted Shoot-Down of a U-2

Submitted by the
DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

Concurred in by the
UNITED STATES INTELLIGENCE BOARD

As indicated overleaf
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LIKELIHOOD OF AN ATTEMPTED SHOOT- DOWN OF A U-2

THE PROBLEM

To estimate Cuban and Soviet intentions with regard to US overflights of Cuba.

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1. When we last reviewed this general subject in December 1963, we estimated that the Soviets would probably relinquish control of the SAM system in Cuba, perhaps shortly after the Cubans were able to operate the entire system. We further estimated that Castro might endeavor through diplomatic and propaganda means to force a political solution with regard to the overflights, beginning such a campaign even before final transfer of the system.

2. Castro is now engaged in a campaign of this sort; we believe that he still prefers to try to force the cessation of U-2 flights by political pressure at the UN and elsewhere. Because he expects to gain complete control of the SAM system within the next few weeks he hopes that, with Soviet support, his warnings will be taken seriously and the US compelled to abandon U-2 flights over Cuban territory.

3. The Soviets must for obvious reasons give strong political support to Castro, yet they almost certainly wish to avoid the major crisis which would follow a shoot-down. They could escape such a crisis by withholding control of the SAM system, and we do not rule this out despite the high political cost to the USSR. The US, however, can have no assurance that Khrushchev will take this way out. Indeed, we continue to estimate that the odds

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favor the complete turnover of controls to Cuban personnel. Moreover, the Soviets probably still hope to persuade the US to discontinue or modify the overflight program. Recent Soviet approaches to the US may have been designed to gain time and probe for a possible settlement. Probably also the Soviets will strongly urge Castro to try all possible political actions before shooting.

4. If Castro obtains control of the SAM system and becomes convinced that agitation and pressures are ineffective, we believe that there will be a significant and, over time, growing chance that he will order a shoot-down. Indeed, he may believe that any US military reaction will be a limited one, and could even help his case by incensing world opinion. We think this general estimate is supported by his May Day speech.

5. There is, of course, a possibility of an unauthorized shoot-down attempt; in view of the importance to Castro of this matter we believe the chances of such an occurrence are small.