

September 1959

Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (CPCz) Politburo Resolution (with enclosures) on Arms Transfers to Cuba, September 1959

Citation:

"Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (CPCz) Politburo Resolution (with enclosures) on Arms Transfers to Cuba, September 1959", September 1959, Wilson Center Digital Archive, Central State Archive, Prague, Archive of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, fund 02-2, Politburo of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, 1958-1962, Vol. 259 and 343, point 29, page 19. Obtained and translated for the National Security Archive.
<https://wilson-center.drivingcreative.com/document/115138>

Summary:

Czech government decision in late September 1959, to approve sending what was euphemistically described as "special technical supplies" or "special technology" (but in truth were weapons, specifically 50,000 submachine guns and ammunition) to Havana, using a neutral Swiss firm as a cut-out to conceal the transaction, especially from American eyes.

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Politburo of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia

Strictly confidential!

3552/14

Point: Special technical supplies to Cuba

A Swiss firm is interested in purchasing special technology in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic for the Cuban armed forces. The Politburo of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia was informed in advance. On the basis of its resolution of 8 September 1959, a proposal for signing an authorized contract is being put forward. The matter was discussed with the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and National Defense.

Enclosure I

Proposed resolution

Enclosure III

Report

Presented by: Comrade F. Krajčír

25 September 1959

Number of pages: 8

It is necessary to return these materials to the Technical Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia within one month at the latest.

Comrade Hamouz[1]: there is no capacity for repairing submachine guns.

Question of manufacturing munitions

Comrade Jankovcová, Comrade Krajčír together with Comrade David are to verify in the resolution that the arms are really meant for the Cuban government.

Enclosure I

Resolution

Of the 69th meeting of the Politburo, Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, 29.IX.59

Point: Special technical supplies to Cuba

(Comrade F. Krajčír)

Resolution:

The Politburo of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia takes note of the introduced report
approves of:

1. Realizing the supply of specialized technology, or sending Czechoslovak samples to the Cuban government via a suitable intermediary on the basis of a license or another official document from a neutral country. This in the event that the Cuban government does not recognize the possibility of discussing these questions with the Czechoslovak government directly, and that before the realization of these prospective supplies, Comrade Krajčír would present the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia with an authorized proposal.[2]

2. The supply of 50,000 9mm guns of the Czechoslovak type 23/25, and the requested amount of corresponding munitions to the Cuban armed forces by way of the Swiss firm Philipp Friedlander as an intermediary.

3. Signing a contract with the Swiss firm P. Friedlander for the supply of the above noted 9mm guns and cartridges, on the basis of a Swiss re-export license and on the condition that the goods be picked up at the Czechoslovak border, with payment in cash in a foreign currency, so long as the company in question proves that the goods are designated for the Cuban armed forces.

III. The following are charged with:

Comrade Krajčír together with Comrade David are to ensure that before the contract is signed it is proven that the arms are designated for the Cuban government, and a prospective inquiry with the authorized Cuban state organs is not out of the question.

In 1959 and 1960, [Czechoslovak Minister of National Defense] Comrade B. Lomský, together with Comrade F. Krajčír, are to free from the army's supplies, for the purpose stated in point II/2, a total of 50,000 9mm guns, type 23/25, and 80 million 9mm cartridges, all in a manner that would allow at least 15,000 pieces to be shipped at the beginning of December 1959.

To be undertaken by: Comrade F. Krajčír
Comrade B. Lomský
Comrade V. David[3]

Those to be notified: [Chairman of the State Planning Committee] Comrade O. Šimůnek
[Czechoslovak Minister of Finance] Comrade J. Ďuriš
Comrade J. Hendrych

IV. Conclusion

With regards to the above, we recommend approving, after deliberations, this addition resolved in point III:

"Comrade F. Krajčír, together with Comrade David, is charged with ensuring that before the contract is signed it is credibly verified that the arms are designated for the Cuban government, and a prospective inquiry of the relevant Cuban state organs is not out of the question."

Furthermore, we recommend adding a sentence with the following wording to Point II/1:

"...and that, before the realization of these prospective supplies, the minister of foreign trade would always present the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia with a relevant proposal."

Prague, 28 September 1959 Department Head:
Signature unreadable

Enclosure III

Report for the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia regarding the discussion on supplies of specialized technology from the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic to the Cuban armed forces.

At the beginning of September of this year, the Swiss citizen Willy Strub visited the Ministry of International Trade's main Technical Department.[4] He produced a document with the credentials of Mr. Philipp Friedlander who is authorized by the Swiss to deal in arms and war supplies (license #1876 Eidg. Militardep.). The purpose of his trip was to discuss the possibility of supplying 50,000 pieces of 9mm guns and ammunition (5-10,000 pieces per gun) to the Cuban armed forces.

The Cuban locals have been interested in special technology from Czechoslovakia since the end of 1958. At the end of December last year, on behalf of a purely Costa Rican firm, the Czechoslovak national in charge of trade and assigned to Mexico passed on a request for military technology to aid Fidel Castro's units. Back then, the possibility of supplying trophies or older Czechoslovak arms was discussed with the Soviets. On 7 January of this year, the Soviet State Committee of Ministers for Foreign Affairs voiced a positive stance towards Czechoslovakia's intention to aid the liberation struggle in Cuba. In connection, the Politburo of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia in its resolution of 20 January 1959 (point 15) gave the minister of international trade the task of realizing the aforementioned supplies after a preliminary consultation with Soviet representatives, should the new Cuban government request them.

While discussing the news of the interview with the Popular Socialist Party of Cuba's representative, the 42nd meeting of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia also concerned itself with the question of supplying special technical aid to Cuba. The relevant resolution of 24 March 1959 (point 7) stipulated that a trade mission will be sent to Cuba, which amongst other things should inform the Cubans of our agreement with the eventual discussions concerning the supply of arms.

On the basis of this, in July of this year the head of the Czechoslovak trade mission, Comrade Maruška, held talks with the director of the National Institute for Land Reform, Captain Jimenez. In the closing discussions the above named Cuban functionary affirmed interest in arms from the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic. At the same time he voiced the opinion of the head of the government, Dr. Fidel Castro, that given the current tense situation the purchase of these goods could only be made by way of a third country, otherwise direct supplies from Czechoslovakia could be politically manipulated by the United States, as in the case of Guatemala.

Therefore, the Ministry of International Trade assumes that, taking into consideration the current viewpoint of the Cuban representatives, it would be useful to take advantage of suitable intermediaries, and possibly realize special technical supplies of Czechoslovak types to Cuba. This would be done on the basis of a license or another official document from one of the neutral states (Switzerland, Austria, Sweden, Finland).

The recent visit of Mr. W. Strub to Prague seems to be in line with the stated conception of the Cuban locals, who apparently found it suitable to locate an intermediary in neutral Switzerland. Willy Strub said that the transaction would be made on the basis of a proper Swiss re-export license, and in several shipments. Mr. Friedlander would personally come to Czechoslovakia to sign the authorized contract, and this on the condition that the price include transport to the Czechoslovak border, as well as transport to a loading dock (which should be in Rostock, East Germany), and that the shipment overseas would be arranged by the buyer. Payment would be made in Swiss Francs on an irreversible line of credit that Schweizerische Bankgesellschaft, Zurich, would open at the Czechoslovak State Bank in Prague. Mr. Strub also said that the purchase would be financed by the American religious organization CARE, which is apparently as a part of its charity work a major buyer of Cuban sugar, and apparently has an interest in our particular shipment. CARE's Vice-President, Benjamin Winkler, is in Havana at this time and awaiting news from Mr. Friedlander. Thus far, the Ministry of International Trade knows nothing about the

goals and intentions of the CARE organization.

The Swiss representative discussed other issues not dependent upon the supply of 9mm guns, which he asked be quickly sent to Cuba either through the aforementioned Benjamin Winkler, or directly to the leader of the Cuban armed forces, Raul Castro. However, employees of the Ministry of International Trade (acting as employees of Omnipol) slowed discussions due to doubts about the suitability of sending the requested samples from the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic directly to Cuba, so Mr. Strub agreed to take them himself and arrange in Switzerland their quick shipment to the interested parties. Having informed the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia beforehand, and with a resolution passed on 8 September 1959 (point 28) agreeing with this plan, the goods were handed over on 10 September of this year.

The called-for 50,000 guns would be covered by the main technical division of the Ministry of International Trade from its military supplies, allowing them to release 20,000 pieces this year, and the remaining 30,000 in 1960. As far as cartridges are concerned, the Ministry of National Defense is putting only 80 million pieces up for disposal, and of this about 1/4th this year and the rest next year. The requested number of cartridges (250-500 million pieces) is disproportionately high when compared with the number of requested guns. However, if the customer were to really order an amount exceeding the number of supplies freed by the Ministry of National Defense, the Ministry of International Trade would try to import the goods from either Poland or Bulgaria, and possibly, together with the Ministry of General Engineering they would try to find a means for the manufacture of these goods in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic.

The total cost value of the noted supplies amounts to about 32 million Kčs, of which the 50,000 9mm guns of Czechoslovak type 23/25 equal about 14 million Kčs, and the 80 million cartridges about 18 million Kčs. Considering the fact that arms of the 2nd category are involved-that is, used arms-it would be necessary to undertake an inspection of these guns. The Ministries of International Trade, National Defense and General Engineering are discussing this inspection in an effort to realize the first shipment in the greatest possible sum by the beginning of December at the latest, so that the wishes of the customer are adhered to. In addition, from our economic perspective, should the relevant payment in international currency add to the fulfillment of tasks planned for the year 1959, this would be welcomed.

Next week the Minister of International Trade will inform a representative from the Soviet State Committee of Ministers for International Trade of the discussions with the Swiss intermediary, and of the planned route for supplying the Cuban armed forces with the above noted guns and ammunition from the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic.

The realization of this transaction would have a series of advantages. Above all, it would be the first supply of specialized technology for use in the support of an anti-imperialist movement in the Central American region (not considering the supplies sent to Guatemala), and at the same time Czechoslovakia would not carry the risk of the naval transport. Furthermore, it would be a useful way to utilize guns already put out of commission, and the Ministry of National Defense would gradually release a total of 160,000 pieces for export by the year 1964. At the same time, old ammunition manufactured in the years 1946-1951 would be sold.

The question of supplying the Cuban armed forces with specialized technology by way of an intermediary was first discussed with the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and National Defense. Neither have objections to this export of goods. Therefore, the Ministry of International Trade recommends that the Politburo of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia pass the proposed resolution.

[1] The first page of this report consists of a page with these hand-written notes.

[2] The section in italics is added to the proposal in pen.

[3] In the previous resolution proposal V. David's name was included only in the "those to be notified" column.

[4] The main Technical Department of the Ministry of International Trade is de facto Omnipol. Apart from the export of so-called "special materials" under the company Omnipol, which concerns itself with foreign trade, the employees of the Technical Department were directly responsible for acquiring goods under embargo by the West.