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**Washington, DC, October 1, 2014** – Secretary of State Henry Kissinger ordered a series of secret contingency plans that included airstrikes and mining of Cuban harbors in the aftermath of Fidel Castro's decision to send Cuban forces into Angola in late 1975, according to declassified documents made public today for the first time. "If we decide to use military power it must succeed. There should be no halfway measures," Kissinger instructed General George Brown of the Joint Chiefs of Staff during a high-level meeting of national security officials on March 24, 1976, that included then Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld. "I think we are going to have to smash Castro," Kissinger told President Ford. "We probably can't do it before the [1976 presidential] elections." "I agree," the president responded.

The story of Kissinger's Cuban contingency planning was published today in a new book, [Back Channel to Cuba: The Hidden History of Negotiations Between Washington and Havana](#), co-authored by American University professor William M. LeoGrande and Peter Kornbluh who directs the National Security Archive's Cuba Documentation Project. Research for the book, which reveals the surprising and untold history of bilateral efforts towards rapprochement and reconciliation, draws on hundreds of formerly secret records obtained by the authors. The documents detailing Kissinger's Cuban contingency planning in 1976 were obtained by Kornbluh through a Freedom of Information Act request to the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library.



President Jimmy Carter and Cuban President Fidel Castro in Havana, Cuba, in May 2002.  
(Photo: Annemarie Poyo, The Carter Center)

According to the book, Kissinger's consideration of open hostilities with Cuba came after a protracted effort of secret diplomatic talks to normalize relations — including furtive meetings between U.S. and Cuban emissaries at La Guardia airport and an unprecedented three-hour negotiating session at the five-star [Pierre Hotel in New York City](#). Cuba's efforts at supporting the anti-colonial struggle in Africa, the authors write, "was the type of threat to U.S. interests that Kissinger had hoped the prospect of better relations would mitigate."

The book describes Kissinger as "apoplectic" with Castro — in oval office meetings Kissinger referred to the Cuban leader as a "pipsqueak" — for Cuba's decision to deploy thousands of soldiers to Angola to assist the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) party of António Agostinho Neto against attacks from insurgent groups that were supported covertly by the United States and apartheid regime of South Africa. Concerned that Castro would eventually broaden his military incursion beyond Angola, Kissinger counseled Ford that they would have to "crack the Cubans." "If they move into Namibia or Rhodesia, I would be in favor of clobbering them," Kissinger told the president, according to a [March 15, 1976, Oval Office memorandum of conversation](#)

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In the March 24 meeting with an elite national security team known as the Washington Special Actions Group, Kissinger expanded on the domino scenario. "If the Cubans destroy Rhodesia then Namibia is next and then there is South Africa," Kissinger argued. To permit the "Cubans as the shock troops of the revolution" in Africa, he argued, was unacceptable and could cause racial tensions in the "Caribbean with the Cubans appealing to disaffected minorities and could then spillover into South America and even into our own country."



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