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September 16, 1985

Professor Matthew Meselson
363 Biochem Office
Harvard University
Cambridge, MA 01238

Dear Matt:

I am writing to see if I could possible interest you in directing an inquiry into the Cuban charges that the CIA introduced Dengue hemorrhagic fever (DHF) into Cuba in 1981.

As you may know the Cubans suffered an epidemic of DHF at that time and have consistently charged that the CIA was responsible. The enclosed memorandum summarizes what we know about the situation.

What I have in mind is the creation of a small group which would conduct an independent inquiry and reach whatever conclusions it could about the Cuban charges. We know that the CIA has in the past sought to spread disease. In light of that, I believe that private citizens have an obligation to take such charges seriously and to do what we can to investigate them. The ultimate aim is to get Congress to outlaw such activity by the agency.

Lance Lindblom the director of the The J. Roderick MacArthur Foundation is interested in this issue and would, I believe be able to arrange funding for the project. In any case, my request to you is to consider directing the substantive study. I would be glad to assume responsibility for raising the necessary funds and would provide whatever administrative support you needed.

Best regards,

Morton H. Halperin
Director

MHH/LC

MEMORANDUM

Subject: Cuban Dengue Fever Epidemic
26 June 1985

On a recent fact-finding mission to Cuba, Lance E. Lindblom, President of the MacArthur Foundation, met with Juan Antonio Blanco, the Deputy Director of the Department of the Americas of the Central Committee of the Cuban Communist Party. Blanco brought Lindblom's attention to the Cuban charge that the United States may have been responsible for the 1981 epidemic of dengue [DEN-ghee] fever in Cuba.

THE EPIDEMIC

Dengue hemorrhagic fever (DHF), the fatal form of dengue fever, struck four Cuban provinces, including Havana, in the summer of 1981. Before this outbreak, DHF had never before been seen outside of Southeast Asia. The epidemic in Cuba peaked in July and by the time it had receded a few months later, 344,000 Cubans had gotten it and 156, including 99 children, had died.

Scientists are not sure what causes DHF, but they suspect that it occurs when someone who has had one of the four different strains of dengue fever later gets another. Those who have dengue-1, 2, or 4 and within 5 years get dengue-2 seem to be most likely to get DHF. Dengue-2 and 3 have existed in the Caribbean for years while dengue-1, prevalent in Africa, only appeared in the Caribbean in 1977 and dengue-4, prevalent in Asia, in 1980. Dengue fever is transmitted by the aedes aegypti mosquito, common throughout the Caribbean and southwestern United States, and causes severe aches and pains (dengue is sometimes called "breakbone fever"), vomiting, headaches, high fever, and a rash

for 10 days. DHF starts with these same symptoms and then the patient's temperature begins to fall, his skin becomes cold and his pulse rapid, and he dies within 4-6 hours. Victims of DHF may also fall into severe shock, called dengue shock syndrome (DSS), before dying.

In 1977-8, there was an epidemic of dengue-1 in most of the Caribbean, including Cuba. The 1981 Cuban epidemic was of dengue-2 and apparently resulted in the outbreak of DHF. Cuba has apparently never before had an epidemic of dengue-2.

THE CHARGES

In a speech on July 26, 1981, Fidel Castro did not directly accuse the United States, but he said that he shared "the suspicion of people that plagues, and especially dengue, could have been introduced into our country by the CIA." The other plagues to which Castro was referring were African swine fever, blue mold in tobacco, and sugar cane rot. On August 18, Cuba brought its charge to the Geneva Disarmament Committee which oversees international agreements on biological warfare, but the Committee took no action.

A spokesman for the State Department declared on July 27 that Castro's suggestion was "totally without foundation" and pointed out that the Commerce Department had approved, nine days earlier, a request from the Pan American Health Organization to send 300 tons of the pesticide Abate to Cuba to combat the epidemic. The spokesman also suggested that the dengue-2 could have come from soldiers returning from Angola where it exists or from other Caribbean countries.

On September 10, 1984, Eduardo Arocena, reportedly connected to the terrorist group Omega 7, testified during his murder trial in Federal District Court in Manhattan that he had visited Cuba in 1980 in connection with a mission to introduce "some germs" into the country to begin a "chemical war" against Soviet troops there. In 1971, an unidentified CIA source told the Long Island newspaper Newsday that the CIA was linked to the introduction of African swine fever, never before seen in the western hemisphere, into Cuba resulting in the death of 463,300 pigs. The source said that he was given a vial of the swine virus to turn over to an anti-Castro group. Another unidentified source, a Cuban exile, said that he was on the fishing trawler that took the vial to Cuba, but neither source could confirm that the virus was directly responsible for the outbreak of swine fever six weeks later.

The following individuals have commented on dengue fever, but not on the Cuban accusation, in various articles:

1. Dr. Scott B. Halstead--world leading authority on dengue fever, chief of tropical medicine at the University of Hawaii, author of one of the main theories on the way DHF spreads.
2. Dr. Ronald St. John--chief of communicable diseases for the Pan American Health Organization.
3. Dr. Mahendra Dutta--National Institute of Communicable Diseases.
4. Dr. Duane Dubler--chief of a U.S. government laboratory in San Juan, Puerto Rico.
5. Dr. Mark Whiteside--Miami Institute of Tropical Medicine.
6. Dr. David M. Morens--Viral Diseases Division, Bureau of Epidemiology, Center for Disease Control.

Center for National Security Studies

Morton H. Halperin, Director

July 29, 1985

Mr. Lance E. Lindblom
J. Roderick MacArthur Foundation
9333 Milwaukee Avenue
Niles Chicago, IL 60648

Dear Lance:

As I mentioned on the phone it does not seem possible to get anything done after the middle of June.

The memorandum that I had prepared on Dengue Fever is attached. I would welcome any comments on it. In the fall I will use it as a basis to recruit a small committee to investigate the charges.

We will also establish a mechanism to learn from the Cubans when visa or travel denials appear likely so that we can try, when there is still time, to do something about it.

Expect a progress report in September.

Best regards,

Morton H. Halperin

Enclosure: Memorandum, Subject: Cuban Dengue Fever Epidemic,
26 June 1985