

Kissinger had plans to attack Cuba, records show

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Miami: Nearly 40 years ago, US Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger mapped out secret contingency plans to launch air strikes against Havana and “smash Cuba,” newly disclosed government documents show.

Kissinger was so irked by Cuba’s military incursion into Angola that in 1976 he convened a top-secret group of senior officials to work out possible retaliatory measures in case Cuba deployed forces to other African nations, according to documents declassified by the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library at the request of research group National Security Archive.

The officials outlined plans to strike ports and military installations in Cuba and send Marine battalions to the US Navy base at Guantanamo Bay to “clobber” the Cubans, as Kissinger put it, according to the records. Kissinger, the documents show, worried that the United States would look weak if it did not stand up to a country of just eight million people.

“I think sooner or later we are going to have to crack the Cubans,” Kissinger told Ford at a meeting in the Oval Office in 1976, according to a transcript.

The documents are being posted online and published in “Back Channel to Cuba,” a new book written by the longtime Cuba experts William M. LeoGrande, a professor of government at American University, and Peter Kornbluh, the director of the archive’s Cuba Documentation Project.

The previously undisclosed blueprint to strike Cuba highlights the tumultuous nature of US-Cuban relations, which soured badly after the 1959 revolution that brought Fidel Castro to power.

Kissinger, who was secretary of state from 1973 to 1977, had previously planned an underground effort to improve relations with Havana. But in late 1975, Castro sent troops to Angola to help the newly independent nation fend off attacks from South Africa and right-wing guerrillas.

That move infuriated Kissinger, who was incensed that Castro had passed up a chance to normalise relations with the United States in favour of pursuing his own foreign policy agenda, Kornbluh said.

“Nobody has known that at the very end of a really remarkable effort to normalise relations, Kissinger, the global chessboard player, was insulted that a small country would ruin his plans for Africa and was essentially prepared to bring the imperial force of the United States on Fidel Castro’s head,” Kornbluh said.

“You can see in the conversation with Gerald Ford that he is extremely apoplectic,” Kornbluh said, adding that Kissinger used “language about doing harm to Cuba that is pretty quintessentially aggressive.”

The plans suggest that Kissinger was prepared after the 1976 presidential election to recommend an attack on Cuba, but the idea went nowhere because Jimmy Carter won the election, LeoGrande said.

“These were not plans to put up on a shelf,” LeoGrande said. “Kissinger is so angry at Castro sending troops to Angola at a moment when he was holding out his hand for normalisation that he really wants to, as he said, ‘lobber the pipsqueak.’”

The plan suggested that it would take scores of aircraft to mine Cuban ports. It also warned that the United States could seriously risk losing its Navy base in Cuba, which was vulnerable to counterattack, and estimated that it would cost \$120 million (Dh440 million) to reopen the Ramey Air Force Base in Puerto Rico and reposition destroyer squadrons.

The plan also drafted proposals for a military blockade of Cuba’s shores. The proposal warned that such moves would most likely lead to a conflict with the Soviet Union, which was a top Cuba ally at the time.

“If we decide to use military power, it must succeed,” Kissinger said in one meeting, in which advisers warned against leaks. “There should be no halfway measures — we would get no award for using military power in moderation. If we decide on a blockade, it must be ruthless and rapid and efficient.”

Kissinger, now 91, declined a request to comment.

The memos show that Donald H. Rumsfeld, who was secretary of defence from 1975 to 1977 under Ford, and again under President George W. Bush, was also present at the meeting when Kissinger ordered up the contingency plan. Rumsfeld, 82, also declined a request to comment.

Some Cuba historians said the revelations were startling, particularly because they took place just as the United States was coming out of the Vietnam War.

“The military piece dumbfounds me a little bit,” said Frank O. Mora, a former deputy assistant secretary of defence who now directs the Latin American and Caribbean Centre at Florida International University. “For Kissinger to be talking the way they were talking, you would think Cuba had invaded the whole continent.”

