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Divided Agencies: Internal Strife in the Fight Against Castro

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DIVIDED AGENCIES: INTERNAL STRIFE IN THE FIGHT AGAINST CASTRO

by

Stephanie Schmidt

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ABSTRACT

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by

Stephanie Schmidt

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This thesis examines how the Central Intelligence Agency and the U.S. State Department differed in their approaches to dealing with the Castro regime from 1959 through the aftermath of the Bay of Pigs Invasion. Using declassified documents from the CIA and State Department, I argue that the approaches of the CIA in dealing with the Castro regime were more aggressive than the approaches of the U.S. State Department. Many of the primary sources used in this work were accessed in the CIA electronic reading room and on the office of the historian website. The office of the historian is an official government office within the Bureau of Public Affairs responsible for publishing declassified historical documents related to U.S. foreign policy. The thesis contributes to the historiography of U.S.-Cuban relations by exposing tensions and rifts inside the U.S. government during a pivotal era in the history of both nations.

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Introduction

Cuba has long been a nation dominated by foreign powers. Spain and the United States have both exerted their influence over the island nation. Spain was first from early 1500s to 1898 and the United States became more involved in Cuba after the Cubans organized an independence movement against Spain. Over the course of the twentieth century the United States and Cuba had a dynamic relationship. This relationship was most tumultuous after Fidel Castro took power and the United States government agencies were divided on the issue of how to most effectively deal with the Castro Regime. In my thesis, I argue that the CIA had more aggressive foreign policy strategies for Cuba than did the State Department from 1959 through the Cuban Missile Crisis. Prior to the Bay of Pigs invasion, the CIA had more of a hand in guiding policy. However, after the Bay of Pigs failure, much of that changed. The rise, of Fidel Castro was the spark that ignited the turbulent relationship between the United States and Cuba. His rise was rooted in a long Cuban struggle against imperialism.

When Christopher Columbus first encountered the island in 1492, he described it as the most beautiful land he had ever looked upon. As it turned out, Columbus was not alone in his admiration of the land we today call Cuba. For more than four centuries Spain guarded Cuba as one of its prized possessions due to all of its resources. The island's Spanish rulers dubbed the island "the Pearl of the Antilles," as it was the largest island in the Caribbean and centrally located, making it exceptionally valuable in the sphere of global trade.¹

¹ Peter Moruzzi, *Havana Before Castro: When Cuba was a Tropical Playground*. (Layton: Gibbs Smith, 2008), 12-14.

Cubans, however, became increasingly dissatisfied with colonial rule and in the early 1880s began to speak about organizing an independence movement which would free them from Spanish colonial rule.² However, not all Cubans wanted independence. There was a group of Creole elites called “the autonomists” who supported maintaining a colonial relationship with Spain because they feared decolonization would result in economic instability for Cuba.³ As the autonomists feared, the Cuban economy did indeed destabilize, but not due to decolonization. Instead, the economy was negatively affected by a drop in sugar production in Cuba during the Ten Years war from 1868 to 1878.⁴ The damaged economy was enough for some autonomists to accept the idea of fighting for independence.

A Cuban journalist and poet named Jose Martí organized a sophisticated independence movement by mobilizing Cubans who were in favor of independence. His forces included Cubans living on the island along with members of the Cuban diaspora who fled Cuba and settled in American cities like New York and Tampa. The independence war began in 1895 and raged on through 1897. Initially the insurrection was little more than a few isolated skirmishes, but it developed into a revolution which demanded Spain’s attention. Spain sent troops to put down the rebellion, but the Cuban independence movement persisted. After two years of fighting Spain granted Cuba limited autonomy on January 1, 1898.⁵

² Louis Pérez Jr., *Cuba and the United States: Ties of Singular Intimacy*, Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2003, 80.

³ Pérez, *Cuba and the United States*, 55.

⁴ Pérez, *Cuba and the United States*, 57.

⁵ Pérez, *Cuba and the United States*, 70-84.

Cuba was freer than it had ever historically been from imperialist and colonial interests. However, officials in the U.S. government capitalized on Cuba's vulnerable position by staging the explosion of the USS *Maine* in Havana harbor. The destruction of the *Maine* was conveniently blamed on Spain, and thus was able to intervene in Spanish/Cuban relations and "free" Cuba entirely from colonial rule. The intervention in Spanish/Cuban relations at such a critical point in Cuba's history enabled the United States to position itself as Cuba's rescuer and thus make demands from their newly acquired ally.

Once Cuba was mostly under U.S. control, they quickly drafted the Platt Amendment which ensured the United States permanent access to Cuba and the right to intervene in Cuba's governmental affairs. The nation went through a series of puppet governments controlled remotely from Washington, D.C. American businesses were established in Cuba and flourished throughout the first half of the twentieth century. Americans built homes in Cuba and the island became one of the top American tourist destinations. The relationship Cuba had with the United States caused the Cuban economy to boom due to new global trading opportunities, increased tourism, and industrial development. By the 1950s, however, there was substantial discontent in the country. The leaders were corrupt and led with their own best interests in mind, rather than the interests of the nation. The rich became richer, while most of the peasants were illiterate, unskilled workers with no access to health care.

A revolution was born from the discontent felt by many Cubans. A revolutionary force led by Fidel Castro developed in the early 1950s and erupted in an attack on July 26, 1953. The Castro brothers and roughly 140 rebels attacked the Moncada barracks,

a federal Garrison in Santiago de Cuba, in an effort to spark a revolution. The revolutionary leaders identified the barracks as an ideal place to launch the revolution because the barracks had massive amounts of weapons. Therefore, if the attack were successful, the revolution would have acquired a multitude of firearms to add to their stock.⁶

The revolutionaries, however, were unsuccessful. Some of the men were executed, but Fidel Castro was put on trial and given the opportunity to defend his actions. It was in these hearings that Fidel Castro delivered his most famous speech: *History will Absolve Me*. In the four-hour speech, Castro attempted to defend himself by justifying his revolutionary ideals and criticizing Fulgencio Batista, the dictator of Cuba in 1953. Castro stated in his speech “we set out to fight for Cuba’s freedom and we are not ashamed for having done so.”⁷ Castro was found guilty of conspiring and staging an attack and was sentenced to fifteen years in prison. Of those fifteen years he served less than two as Batista released a slew of political prisoners as a result of international pressures asking him to do so. Therefore, Fidel Castro was free. Castro and his revolutionaries had indeed lost the battle at the Moncada barracks but would reemerge in 1959 to win the war.

This work examines the roots of Cuba’s conflict with the United States starting with the first Cuba’s Revolution from Spain in 1898 and concluding with the close of the Cuban Missile crisis in 1962. However, in order to understand events in this era, it is

⁶ Jane Franklin and Noam Chomsky, *Cuba and the U.S. Empire: A Chronological History*, (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2016), 15.

⁷ Fidel Castro, “History Will Absolve Me,” Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, La Habana, Cuba, 1953, Castro Internet Archive, Accessed August 30, 2018.

vital to understand the earlier history of Cuba and its relationship to the United States. Castro may have never risen to power in the first place had it not been for the imperial relationship between the United States and Cuba. Thus, the first chapter opens with a discussion on how America became invested in Cuba and what the United States had to lose from a revolutionary movement like that of Fidel Castro's. The first chapter lays the framework for many of the conflicts that came to a head in the early sixties, and still haunt the United States and Cuba today.

The second chapter outlines the rise of a new regime in Cuba. What started out as a laughable rebellion in the Sierra Maestra mountains quickly gained traction and became a widely known and feared rebel group. Those rebels were led by Fidel Castro, his brother Raúl Castro, and his partner Ernesto "Che" Guevara. The regime made their way from the southeastern region of Cuba toward Havana. They successfully overthrew the Batista regime and declared victory on January 1, 1959. U.S. government officials were certainly threatened by Fidel Castro and his rebels, because the U.S. supported the Batista regime. It is an understatement to say that they were perturbed by the Cuban Revolution and its new leaders.

The third chapter outlines the controversy in approaches on dealing with Castro, within different agencies in the United States. As officials in the United States government adjusted to the changing state of affairs in Cuba, some agencies developed negative views about the new revolutionary leader. This was largely due to the fact that Castro condemned imperialism and argued that Cuba could never be truly free if its government continued to be monitored, influenced and driven by the United States. The U.S. was however comforted by the fact that Castro preached democratic ideals and

valued the voting and elections process. For example, in January of 1959 Castro claimed that Cuba would have no more dictators and stated in a BBC interview, “I would think that in 18 months, about, we will have free elections.”⁸

Castro also preached other ideals. He valued things like education and literacy, accessible health care, and national pride. One of the most notable aspects of Castro’s speeches was his ability to communicate his nationalist ideals without sounding like a crazed, power hungry hypnotist who forced his people to adopt his beliefs. His speeches were peaceful yet strong. In examining Castro’s speeches, it becomes evident how he was able to appeal to the masses. He identifies the people as the heart and soul of the revolution in an effort to encourage people to relate to the movement and develop a sense of ownership of the movement. As the people began to feel validated and feel like they were part of something bigger than themselves, the population quickly developed a heightened sense of nationalism. In his speeches, Castro demonstrated a dedication to his countrymen and demanded justice, freedom, and human rights for all Cubans, not only the members of the privileged class, which he argued was the case with Batista in office.

His anti-imperialist rhetoric, however, quickly turned into actions that U.S. policy makers perceived as hostile toward American interests. Conflicts between the two nations developed early on. Castro instituted an agrarian reform in the summer of 1959, which was arguably the spark of the conflict between the United States and Cuba. He

⁸ Fidel Castro, *Fidel Castro on his beard, Free Elections & Gambling*, (1959, London: BBC News), YouTube, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iDZ5GyVDqOc>.

aimed to redistribute land that belonged to wealthy farmers and plantation owners, including Americans, to peasants who could work the land to provide for their families. While Castro believed the outcome of his policies would benefit his people and raise the standard of living for average Cubans, U.S. officials interpreted his new programs and legislation as acts of aggression toward U.S. businesses and the U.S. government. The Agrarian Reform went into effect on June 3, 1959. What followed was a battle of tug of war between the United States and Cuba. First, U.S businessmen and policy makers protested Castro's agrarian reform, then Castro reduced the amount of money Cuba paid to the American owned Cuban Electric Company. The decrease in revenue was answered with U.S. bombs being dropped over Cuban sugar mills in the country side. The bombings pushed Castro to expropriate 70,000 acres of property owned by U.S. companies. The United States government then embarked on a series of protests which only worsened the heated situation.⁹

United States officials refused to allow Castro to make changes in Cuba if those changes came at the expense of American property. Therefore, as Castro embarked on more and more expropriation campaigns, U.S. officials and property owners became increasingly infuriated with him. When Castro entered into trade agreements with countries in the Eastern Hemisphere, such as the Soviet Union, United States officials were more threatened than ever.

Even after Castro developed left-leaning policies and made economic agreements with the Soviet bloc, Castro still maintained that he was not a communist. By the time Castro did declare himself a communist and produce a socialist constitution

⁹ Franklin, *Cuba and the U.S. Empire*, 21-24.

for his nation on May 1, 1963, the U.S. government had already turned against him. U.S. officials perhaps believed that Castro's actions spoke louder than his words. Several members and agencies of the U.S. government had long been concerned that Cuba would fall to communism. Therefore, it came as little surprise when it did.

Chapter four and five of this thesis explores the relationship between Cuba and the United States under the Kennedy administration. The Kennedy administration took over the plans drafted during the Eisenhower administration. In both 1959 and 1960 plans by U.S. government agencies were set in motion to combat what U.S. officials perceived to be direct aggression from Fidel Castro. The State Department and the CIA were the two main contributors of strategies on how to deal with the Cuban "problem" during the early years of the Castro regime. The two agencies competed with one another to craft the most cunning and effective plans for destabilizing Cuba; plans which Kennedy executed quickly after becoming president.

This thesis argues that the CIA's plans and strategies for dealing with the Castro regime were more aggressive than the plans devised by the State Department. The CIA drafted plans for an invasion of Cuba even when some argued that Cuba posed little threat at all to the United States. Even after their first plan, "Operation Zapata" or the "Bay of Pigs" as it is commonly known, failed miserably, the CIA still did not alter their strategy. They instead designed another plan, "Operation Mongoose," which consisted of propaganda initiatives, another land invasion and assassination plots against Fidel Castro.

In contrast to the CIA, the State Department used different methods to deal with the Cuban situation. They argued for the use of economic warfare rather than military

warfare. They tried to destabilize Cuba by using more peaceful methods and strategies. The State Department was by no means friendly to Fidel Castro or members of his revolution, but they certainly opposed an attack on the nation. They focused their energies on propaganda, infiltration, and economic sabotage. The details of strategies proposed by the CIA and the State department are analyzed in Chapter 3, in a discussion of cutthroat economics versus military force.

From the time Castro rose to power in 1959 through the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962 neither the CIA nor the State Department altered their strategies much. The passage of time and the worsening relationship between Washington and Havana did not seem to be catalysts for change. Once the CIA and the State Department developed their approaches, they maintained those approaches in most instances from the start of Castro's revolution through the Cuban Missile Crisis.

My research relies on documents from each agency to track the decisions made from the beginning of the Castro administration through the Cuban missile crisis. Records from the CIA include estimates, memorandums, weekly summary reports and other documents from CIA declassified files. The documents lend insight on vital pieces of information like how the CIA felt about Castro, the CIA's evaluation of Cuba's relationship with the Soviet Union, and outlook for future relations between the United States in Cuba.

The State Department's documents from this period indicate that the State Department took a different approach toward Castro between 1959 and 1962. While the State Department documents illuminate intricate propaganda schemes and plans of economic sabotage, they also demonstrate the State Department's willingness to work

with Cuba. In certain instances, the State Department even listed expectations which Cuba needed to meet in order to continue to pursue a diplomatic relationship with Castro's revolutionary regime. These documents indicate that the State Department attempted to influence the revolutionary government, and State Department officials seem to have had some hope for mending the damaged relationship. I argue that such documents tell a story that is often missed in the historiography of U.S. Cuban relations: a story of attempts at compromise between two antagonistic nations.

Though these two agencies operated within the same country, they had vastly different ideals and methods in regard to handling foreign relations. This thesis aims to examine the stance of the Central Intelligence agency and the position of the State Department in their dealings with Cuba from the start of the Castro administration through the aftermath of the Bay of Pigs.

Historiography

The historiography of U.S./Cuban relations is vast. Scholars have used many different approaches in their study of U.S. Cuban relations, but the relationship between the State Department and the CIA has been underexplored. This work aims to compare the differences between the CIA's approach and the State Department's approach to Cuban affairs between 1959 and the aftermath of the Bay of Pigs invasion of 1961.

A useful chronological guide for this research is Jane Franklin's *Cuba and the U.S. Empire*. Franklin does not propose an argument in her work. The book offers a day by day chronology of Cuba's important events from 1492 up to the twenty first century. Franklin's work serves as a valuable reference guide for dates and events. She devotes substantial attention to the CIA and the State Department. Franklin also highlights key points of the attempted assassinations against Castro. In the text Franklin describes the uncertainty surrounding who ordered the attempted assassinations of Fidel Castro, who was hired to carry them out, and who in the U.S. government knew about the orders.

One of the leading scholars of Cuban history, Louis Pérez, Jr., has contributed a vast amount of literature to the historiography of U.S./Cuban relations. Two of his works are especially relevant when discussing imperialism and comparing motives and approaches of U.S. government agencies. In *Cuba and the United States: Ties of Singular Intimacy*, Pérez argues that the United States has never been supportive of Cuban independence importantly because of Cuba's position in global trade routes. Thus,

the United States government never wanted Cuba to be a free nation with sole ownership of valuable coastal land. After the first Cuban Revolution of 1898, U.S.

officials did not want Cuba to be the sole owners of these resources because they wanted to be able to construct ports for trade. In this work, Pérez traces the history beginning with the first Cuban independence war with Spain and ending with the Cuban Revolution. In his comments on the Cuban Revolution and the U.S. reaction to it, Pérez explained that assassination plans for Castro and invasion plans for Cuba were both unsuccessful due to the fact that many government officials, the CIA especially, underestimated how much the Cuban people supported Castro.¹⁰

In *Cuba in the American Imagination*, Pérez states that “all that is American Imperialism, has been practiced in Cuba.”¹¹ Pérez’s argument in *Cuba in the American Imagination* thus contends that Cuba was a preliminary run for U.S. imperialism abroad. He argues that the United States’ actions in Cuba signaled to the world how U.S. officials wanted America to be defined and perceived. Furthermore, U.S. actions in Cuba exposed America’s purpose in the world. He further argues that power and morality are linked and that the United States government tried to convince its people that owning Cuba was a plausible goal.

Like Pérez, Michael Neagle argues in *America’s Forgotten Colony* that by roughly 1915, most Americans firmly believed that the U.S. government would make short work of acquiring Cuba. He argues that this became especially true as more investors and land owners purchased property in Cuba. Americans expected that ownership of Cuba by the United States would be a self-fulfilling prophecy. American imperialism was alive and thriving in twentieth century Cuba. However, Neagle’s

¹⁰ Pérez, *Cuba and the United States*, 249.

¹¹ Pérez, Louis A. Jr., *Cuba in the American Imagination: Metaphor and the Imperial Ethos*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press. 2008. 1.

narrative is different from other scholars because he argues that Cold War issues resulted from events in the twentieth century. He points to legislation such as the Platt Amendment and American businessmen endorsing casinos and other outlets for vice on the island to support his claim. However, he also argues that the relationship between the United States and Cuba from 1898-1953 was not as adversarial as their relationship during Castro's rule. I challenge this assertion because I would argue the relationship was only less adversarial from 1898-1953 because the United States occupied Cuba for many of those years. Therefore, United States officials had less problems with the Cuban government during this period because they ran the Cuban government and were faced with less opposition.

Jules Benjamin's *The United States and Cuba* has a similar argument to that of Neagle in his discussion of the root cause of the United States' adverse relationship with Cuba. He claims that modern conflicts between the two nations are rooted in the history of U.S. dominance over Cuba and Cuba's resistance to that influence. Benjamin further examines the difficulties Cuba faced as a result of its relationship to the U.S. and effects of U.S. imperialism on the island. He also discusses the role of economics in regard to U.S. /Cuban relations and policymaking.¹²

Stephen Cimbala approaches the topic of relations between the United States and Cuba through a military lens in *Military Persuasion*. His main argument in the piece is the military success during the Cold War, in Cuba, was determined mostly by how effective the United States, the "deliverers of a threat", were in convincing Cuba, "the

¹² Jules Benjamin, *The United States and Cuba: Hegemony and Dependent Development*, (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburg Press, 1977, xi.

receivers of the threat,” that if certain demands or objectives were met, there would be no military escalation.¹³ He comments specifically on how the CIA was ineffective at delivering threats because their plans were insufficient when it came to Cuba and they seriously underestimated Fidel Castro. Cimbala’s narrative is interesting because his topic is focused on military tactics but his arguments center around diplomacy.

Lars Schoultz has a stance on the issue of foreign relations with Cuba that is similar to that of Cimbala. Schoultz’s argument in *That Infernal Little Cuban Republic* aligns with Cimbala in that it references the effort that the United States needed to establish a policy of “nut-pinching,” as Sen. J. William Fulbright called it.¹⁴ Schoultz’s central argument is that American ideology is deeply rooted in sixteenth-century realism, emphasizing that the “strong do what they want, and the weak accept what they must.” He claims that because the Bay of Pigs invasion was a failure, the United States had to weigh its opportunity costs for an additional invasion, and the U.S. government ultimately decided that it would be less costly to establish an embargo against Cuba than it would be to plan and execute another invasion.¹⁵

In the year before the Bay of Pigs invasion, President Eisenhower chose to establish the 1960 embargo. However, though there would be no subsequent invasion, the conversation on assassinating Fidel Castro was not entirely off the table. Schoultz points out that the United States government, and the CIA in particular, did not halt

¹³ Stephen Cimbala, *Military Persuasion; Deterrence and Provocation in Crisis and War*, (University Park: Penn State Press), 1994, 21.

¹⁴ Lars Schoultz, *That Infernal Little Cuban Republic: The United States and the Cuban Revolution*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 5.

¹⁵ Schoultz, *That Infernal Little Cuban Republic*, 555.

assassination attempts on Fidel Castro until the late 1970s.¹⁶ Schoultz titled one of his chapters “He’s Going to be There until He Dies,” a line most famously spoken by President Lyndon B. Johnson in 1966. As it turns out, Johnson was correct in his assumption that Castro would “be there until he died,” because Castro passed his power on to his brother Raúl Castro in 2008 and succumbed to a death by natural causes in November of 2016. A statement like “He’s going to be there until he dies” would be a rather obvious statement if it had been made about a national leader that U.S. officials liked and respected. However, this statement, when made about Castro, was meant negatively. U.S. government officials tried multiple times to assassinate Castro and were disappointed with their failure to succeed in their mission. Later presidents also eagerly awaited Castro’s death. In 1990 Bill Clinton stated that Castro “can’t last forever. No one lives forever. . . One day the good Lord will take Fidel Castro away.”¹⁷

While the CIA prepared for the initial attacks against Castro’s life, President Kennedy approved the 1960 embargo in hopes that it would cause Castro’s regime to collapse and make way for Kennedy to bring about the demise of the Castro regime. While the embargo certainly did damage to Cuba, the U.S. never attained its goal to overthrow the Cuban government while Fidel was still alive. The central question of Schoultz’s work becomes: How did Cuba prevail, despite their refusal to “accept what they must.”

¹⁶ Schoultz, *That Infernal Little Cuban Republic*, 200.

¹⁷ Schoultz, *That Infernal Little Cuban Republic*, 561.

William Leogrande and Peter Kornbluh's *Back Channel to Cuba* provides the reader with an account of the factors which stalled and accelerated U.S. relations with Cuba in the 20th Century. The authors focus on unconventional ways in which information circulated between the two countries. The main argument is that state secrets and sensitive information were oftentimes transferred through the hands of unlikely sources including ABC journalists and Pope Francis. Leogrande and Kornbluh dedicate much time to the discussion of the CIA and their relationship with Cuba. They further commented on how the assassination attempts of Fidel Castro may have been too elaborate and that this complexity may have contributed to their failure. They discussed the strategies for assassinations such as poisoned scuba equipment, poisoned cigars, and contaminated pills. Lastly, they argued that the "perpetual antagonism" between the United States and Cuba was of the "most entrenched and enduring conflicts in the history of U.S. foreign policy."¹⁸

I aim to explore this conflict differently than many historians and scholars have thus far. Much scholarship has been published on the differing ideals stemming from Washington and Havana. However, there are fewer works of scholarship that focus on the internal tensions in the United States approach toward Cuba.

My thesis contributes to the scholarship on the history of U.S./Cuban relations and has a specific niche because the narrative will be situated within the context of documents produced by the CIA and the U.S. State Department. My work will be

¹⁸ Leogrande William M, and Peter Kornbluh, *Back Channel to Cuba: The Hidden History of Negotiations between Washington and Havana*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press), 2014, 2.

organized in a similar fashion to that of Michael Neagle's, as I aim to date my research back to the late nineteenth century.

Chapter 1

From Colony to Puppet Government

The relevant history of the relationship between Cuba and the United States began around the turn of the nineteenth century, during Cuba's independence movement from Spain. Spain colonized Cuba in the early 1500s and maintained control of the island until 1898. Spain developed an unprecedented sugar industry in Cuba and by the mid-1800s it became the world's number one producer of sugar. Cuba exported other goods like coffee and tobacco, but sugar comprised 83 percent of Cuban exports.¹⁹

U.S. government officials, businessmen, and investors were not oblivious to the enormous profit turned by the sugar industry in Cuba, as the United States was the recipient of 40 percent of all exported Cuban sugar. By the late 1880s the U.S. imported more Cuban goods than Spain. The sugar industry, coupled with Cuba's prime location for trade, and potential for naval bases, made Cuba an ideal subject for purchase by the United States.

The United States government did in fact attempt to buy Cuba from the Spain government. In fact, in 1854 under the leadership of President Franklin Pierce, the U.S. government drafted an official document called the Ostend Manifesto which recommended that Cuba be sold to the U.S. by Spain for the price of 130 million dollars, the equivalent of roughly 3.5 billion dollars today. The authors of the document suggested that if Spain refused to sell Cuba, "we shall be justified in wresting it from

¹⁹ Jane Franklin, *Cuba and the U.S. Empire*, 4.

Spain... upon the very same principle that would justify an individual tearing down the burning house of his neighbor if there were no other means of preventing the flames from destroying his home.”²⁰ The Ostend Manifesto was rejected by Congress and U.S. officials put to rest the idea of purchasing Cuba from Spain. However, the issue resurfaced in 1897 under the William McKinley administration and the United States treasury offered Spain 300 million dollars, the equivalent to roughly 8.3 billion dollars today, and Spain rejected the offer.²¹

In the years that U.S. government officials worked on persuading Spain to sell Cuba, many Cubans mobilized and established an independence movement to free themselves from Spanish rule. This independence movement was an extension of the two previous wars fought between Cuban revolutionaries and Spanish soldiers. The two wars were the Ten Years' War from 1868-1878 and the Guerra Chiquita from 1879 to 1880.

The desire for independence in Cuba was not universal. There were autonomists, also known as loyalists, who preferred to remain a colony of Spain because they feared economic collapse would be inevitable if Spain were pushed out. There were also separatists who sought freedom from Spain and believed in “Cuba Libre” or “Free Cuba.” Jose Martí, the most prominent leader of the Independence movement, described “Cuba Libre” as more than just freedom from Spain, but rather, freedom from all imperialist influence.²² He founded the official Cuban Revolutionary Party in 1892, and battle broke out between Spain, some Cuban loyalists, and the

²⁰ Franklin, *Cuba and the U.S. Empire*, 5.

²¹ Schoultz, *That Infernal Little Cuban Republic*, 21.

²² Pérez, *Cuba and the United States*, 77.

Cuban Revolutionary Party in 1895.²³ After much fighting, leaders of the revolution like José Martí and Antonio Maceo were killed and finally in 1897 the Spanish queen offered limited autonomy to Cuba. However, neither the loyalists nor the rebels accepted the offer.²⁴ With the fighting raging in Cuba, President McKinley of the United States looked upon the Cuban situation with acquisitive eyes

The opinions of Cubans on U.S. intervention were largely mixed. Many of the Spanish born inhabitants of Cuba, called *peninsulares*, favored U.S. intervention because they preferred a government run by the United States than a government run by Cubans. Cuban businessmen and property holders favored U.S. intervention because they presumed their economy would improve if the U.S. took over. Those who opposed U.S. intervention were mostly the poor farmers and impoverished rural populations who thought their situation might worsen with a U.S. takeover.²⁵ The United States intervened in 1898 in spite of opposition from groups of Cuban rebels. U.S. officials assumed that if the Cubans were successful in ousting Spain with American help, that the Cubans would feel indebted to the United States.

In February of 1898 the USS *Maine* blew up in Havana harbor. The blast killed 260 crew members. Officials in the U.S. government accused Spain of bombing the ship, which provided justification for militarily intervening in Cuba. Two months after the sinking of the USS *Maine*, congress approved a proposal to militarily invade Cuba with the intention of relinquishing Spanish rule in Cuba.

²³ Franklin, *Cuba and the U.S. Empire*, 7.

²⁴ Franklin, *Cuba and the U.S. Empire*, 8.

²⁵ Pérez, *Cuba and the United States*, 88-89.

The United States wasted no time and within 10 days of congressional approval for Cuban intervention, the Teller Amendment was drafted.²⁶ The Teller Amendment stated that the United States would not colonize Cuba but instead would temporarily occupy the island until the Cubans were deemed able to self-govern.²⁷ President McKinley then declared a blockade in Cuba to prevent Spain from reaching the Island. The Spanish declared war and U.S. congress answered back with their own declaration of war on April 25, 1898. The physical war lasted through the summer of 1898 with Spain and the United States drawing an armistice in August of 1898, followed by the Treaty of Paris, which officially ended the Spanish-Cuban-American War. In all, the United States acquired the territories of Puerto Rico, Guam, the Philippines and temporary control over the island of Cuba.²⁸ As Lipman writes, “Spain handed its colony over to the United States rather than grant Cuba independence. In this manner, The United States erased more than thirty years of Cuban struggle and disingenuously positioned itself as Cuba’s liberator.”²⁹

Due to Cuba’s proximity to the United States and its apparent vulnerability, the United States developed a sense of presumed ownership of the island. John Quincy Adams once referred to Cuba as a “natural appendage to North America.” He furthered that statement by arguing that once Cuba broke away from Spain, that it would naturally gravitate toward the U.S.³⁰ On top of the United States’ presumed ownership of Cuba, Lars Schoultz points out that the U.S. imperialists considered the United States a

²⁶ Franklin, *Cuba and the U.S. Empire*, 8.

²⁷ Jane Lipman, *Guantánamo: A Working-Class History Between Empire and Revolution*, (Oakland: University of California Press, 2008), 34.

²⁸ Franklin, *Cuba and the U.S. Empire*, 9.

²⁹ Lipman, *Guantánamo*, 21.

³⁰ Schoultz, *That Infernal Little Cuban Republic*, 18.

paternal figure to Cuba; a teacher of sorts.³¹ Similarly, Michael Neagle notes how U.S. journalists and artists often portrayed Cuba as a threatened female or damsel in distress, with the United States coming swiftly to its rescue in times of need.³²

The Platt Amendment of 1901 was a document that reinforced the Teller Amendment and provided new stipulations regarding U.S.-Cuban relations. The document was drafted by Elihu Root of the United States and was presented to Cuba. The first stipulation was the Cuba would be under occupation of the U.S. until it was determined by the U.S. that Cuba was capable of self-governing. The Platt Amendment further stated that Cuba would allow the United States to intervene in governmental affairs at any time after the occupation, to protect the interests of independent Cuba. In addition, the document stipulated that Cuba was required to sell or lease segments of coastal land to the United States for use by the U.S. Navy. Lastly, the document prohibited Cuba from entering into any treaties with other foreign countries and also prohibited Cuba from allowing foreign nation besides the U.S., occupy any part of the island. Though the Platt Amendment was unpopular with most Cubans, the U.S. officials insisted that the United States would not withdraw until Cuba incorporated the Platt Amendment into its new constitution. With the declaration of Tomás Estrada Palma as president, Cuba incorporated the Platt Amendment and withdrew their troops.³³

After American soldiers no longer occupied the island, the United States government managed to keep its grasp on Cuba via a legal lease of forty-five square

³¹ Schoultz, *That Infernal Little Cuban Republic*, 30.

³² Michael Neagle, *America's Forgotten Colony: Cuba's Isle of Pines*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 30.

³³ Lipman, *Guantánamo*, 23.

miles of land encompassing Guantánamo Bay, which was imposed in 1903.

Guantánamo was not the U.S. government's first choice for the placement of a navy base. They desperately wanted a base in Havana. But Cuban leaders fiercely resisted ceding land in Havana, offering Guantánamo to pacify the United States.³⁴

U.S imperialists' deep desire for Havana was partly due to their perception that more people in Havana were of European descent and had fairer skin than people in other regions of the island. Cubans in eastern provinces, including Guantánamo were populated mostly by people of color. In the eyes of U.S. officials, this made Guantánamo seem backward and wild in comparison to the *more civilized* Havana. Some officers were consumed by the racial issue and "imagined the possibility of possessing Guantánamo, without possessing the Guantanameros."³⁵ Despite their desire for Havana, the U.S. settled for Guantánamo because its location within the Caribbean was attractive even though they did not perceive the people as such.

The United States seized for itself a one-sided deal on the land surrounding Guantánamo. It was leased to the United States by Cuba for a fee of two thousand dollars, in gold coin, per year, roughly \$52,000 today. The U.S. essentially grabbed complete authority, jurisdiction, and control of the territory. Additionally, there was no end date on the lease contract for the property. Thus, the eternal control extended by the lease of Guantánamo amplified the United States' presumed sense of ownership of the island as a whole.

After Guantánamo was secured for the United States, American businesses began to flourish in Cuba. Businessmen argued that since the U.S. continental frontier

³⁴ Lipman, *Guantánamo*, 24.

³⁵ Lipman, *Guantánamo*, 22.

was closed, those looking for farming opportunities would find the most luck in Cuba.³⁶ To American business owners Cuba was the new land of opportunity.³⁷ One of the main concerns for Americans looking to start businesses in Cuba was personal safety and security of their investments.

Large land-owning companies like the Isle of Pines Company put those fears to rest by reporting that “the United States government has absolutely pledged itself to see that an orderly government is maintained and there is today in the Isle of Pines as perfect security of life and property as in any part of the United States.”³⁸ These landholding companies also lobbied for the annexation of Cuba because Cuba becoming a legal territory of the United States would secure all investments. The best way to try and assure that annexation would take place was to encourage more Americans to invest and settle in Cuba.³⁹

Landholding companies also made it their mission to ensure investors that they would not be poorly received by the Cuban people. They pledged that the island natives were quite welcoming to the incoming Americans. The natives were also reported as being non-hostile, intelligent, *even* gentlemanly—as opposed to the heathens and savages depicted in the media.⁴⁰ Their efforts were not in vain because American interest certainly did take off. By 1910 roughly 10,000 Americans owned property in Cuba.⁴¹

³⁶ Neagle, *America's Forgotten Colony*, 42.

³⁷ Neagle, *America's Forgotten Colony*, 28.

³⁸ Neagle, *America's Forgotten Colony*, 53.

³⁹ Neagle, *America's Forgotten Colony*, 63.

⁴⁰ Neagle, *America's Forgotten Colony*, 51

⁴¹ Neagle, *America's Forgotten Colony*, 53.

There was an increase in the number of sugar plantations following the influx of American business to the island. Most of the large companies such as the Cuban-American Sugar Company, United Fruit Company and Guantanamo Sugar Company were based in eastern Cuba.⁴² There were a few factors to explain this occurrence. First, the east was heavily populated by impoverished people of color, who represented a potential workforce. Additionally, there were migrant workers from Barbados, Jamaica, and Haiti who settled in eastern Cuba which added to the workforce.⁴³ Thirdly, the United States government maintained control of the port at Guantánamo. This made eastern Cuba an ideal location for growing sugar because it would not have to be transported a far distance before it could be exported.

Sugar, however, was not the only valuable export. The rum and cigar industry also piqued the interest of American investors. Cuba's soil and climate were ideal for the growing of tobacco. Thus, the cigar industry in Cuba was booming until the 1930's when cigarettes surpassed cigars on the popularity scale.⁴⁴ Other business tycoons sought to make profits in Cuba as well. Businesses like the United Fruit Company, Goodyear Tires and Westinghouse all capitalized on opportunities to be had in Cuba. Much of the economic boom in Cuba however was centralized in Havana, leaving the rural populations still living in poverty.⁴⁵

There was great variation among the landowning Americans in Cuba. Socioeconomic status dictated their Cuban experience. Typically, farmers and members of the middle class made Cuba their permanent home, as they could not afford to

⁴² Lipman, *Guantánamo*, 26.

⁴³ Lipman, *Guantánamo*, 26.

⁴⁴ Moruzzi, *Havana Before Castro*, 31.

⁴⁵ Moruzzi, *Havana Before Castro*, 22.

migrate between Cuba and the United States for leisure or more desirable weather. Those of higher socioeconomic status, typically employed workers to operate their farms and businesses and enjoyed the luxury of returning to the United States whenever they desired.⁴⁶

Following the onset of Prohibition in the United States and the dawn of the roaring twenties, “Cuba became the playground of the Caribbean.”⁴⁷ Cuba quickly became America’s number one tourist destination. American investors began purchasing land to construct hotels and casinos. One of the most notable sales of Cuban land was to John McEntree Bowman. Bowman was the owner of the luxurious Biltmore hotel chain in America. He was eager to build what became known as the Sevilla-Biltmore, the most glamorous hotel in Cuba before the Hotel Nacional’s construction in 1930. Bowman then went on to purchase other properties in Cuba such as the Havana Jockey Club, the Gran Casino Nacional and racetracks.⁴⁸

American tourism in Cuba boomed throughout the 1920s. Americans arrived by ship and by plane and made regular stops at taverns, casinos, and cabarets. Cuba was described on a vacation promotional booklet published by the Winter in Cuba Committee as a place where “Beauty reigns, relaxation prevails, and by courtesy of license your personal liberty is unrestricted. Havana is one of the best-ordered capitals in the world and is surely the liveliest.”⁴⁹ Cuba saw great economic gains in the twenties. However, much of that changed after the crash of the American stock market

⁴⁶ Neagle, *America’s Forgotten Colony*, 71

⁴⁷ Franklin, *Cuba and the U.S. Empire*, 11.

⁴⁸ Moruzzi, *Havana Before Castro*, 39.

⁴⁹ Moruzzi, *Havana Before Castro*, 38-39.

in 1929, the onset of the great depression, and the end of Prohibition.⁵⁰ In an attempt to combat the receding numbers of tourists, the renowned American architectural company McKim, Mead and White constructed the Hotel Nacional in 1930. It was finished with a blend of art deco, Moorish, and classical features. It quickly became the country's leading hotel. After it opened it was reserved exclusively for tourists. No Cuban citizens other than government officials holding high office were permitted to stay at the Hotel Nacional de Cuba.⁵¹

Politics in the 1920s were not as laid back as the social climate. In 1925 general Gerardo Machado became president of Cuba. He was a nationalist and a supporter of Cuban nationalist groups. The United States did not intervene in his regime because he was a known friend to U.S. business. After three years in office, Machado essentially reelected himself as president and assigned himself a six-year term, rather than a four-year presidential term. His totalitarian governmental style, coupled with his reputation for ruthlessness and cruelty, earned him the title of dictator.⁵²

Cuban society and public opinion surrounding Machado was fragmented at first but quickly took a downward turn. Both Machado and his law enforcement became known for their brutal treatment of the Cuban people. Students and nationalists were rallying. The business owners, many of which were American, demanded U.S. intervention because they were facing government oppression from above and nationalist resistance from below. Before the United States had the opportunity to intervene, Machado resigned the presidency and fled the country to avoid total

⁵⁰ Moruzzi, *Havana Before Castro*, 44.

⁵¹ Moruzzi, *Havana Before Castro*, 49.

⁵² Franklin, *Cuba and the U.S. Empire*, 12.

insurrection and probable death.⁵³ One account of Machado's escape describes how the dictator's plane was chased by gunman in cars. The attackers were unable to stop the plane and Machado then resided in the United States for the remainder of his life.⁵⁴ In lieu of Machado's absence, Cuba named Carlos Manuel de Cespedes as an interim president, until elections could be held. Cespedes was a strategic choice for a leader, because he was a former ambassador to Washington. However, the American-born Cespedes did not last long in office. The Roosevelt administration partnered with Cuba's Army Chief of Staff, Fulgencio Batista, and quickly overthrew the Cespedes regime.⁵⁵ Batista served as a leader of the country from 1933 to 1940 when he was officially elected president. He served as official president from 1940 to 1944.

The Good Neighbor Policy was a new foreign relations policy aimed at trying to smooth the waters between the U.S and Latin America. President Franklin D. Roosevelt was responsible for the execution of this new policy. His goal was to avoid armed intervention of any kind in Latin America and Cuba especially. The Good Neighbor Policy was in direct odds with the newly rescinded Platt Amendment. President Roosevelt's foreign policy was non-intrusive and promoted more self-determination for Cuba than most other American policies had in the past. However, such a hands-off relationship was easy to maintain, with President Batista in office in Cuba, as he was effectively attached to Washington via puppet strings.

Batista served his elected presidency from 1940-1944. After the end of his term, he held a powerful position in government as a provincial senator before running again

⁵³ Franklin, *Cuba and the U.S. Empire*, 12.

⁵⁴ Moruzzi, *Havana Before Castro*, 52.

⁵⁵ Schoultz, *That Infernal Little Cuban Republic*, 32.

for president in 1952. His chances of winning the election were slim and instead of letting democracy run its course, he staged a governmental coup, nullified the constitution and declared himself the new dictator of Cuba. Harry Truman and his governmental officials moved quickly to recognize the new regime and supported Batista's efforts.⁵⁶ The support of the Truman administration was linked to the fact that Batista was a friend of American business. It was even rumored that the dictator was installed with the help of Wall Street sugar investors.⁵⁷ As the Batista dictatorship gained traction, oppositional forces began assembling. Peter Moruzzi sums up the state of Cuba at the dawn of the 1950s as follows:

Cuba's Achilles' heel was an economy dominated by American Companies, and a relatively small Cuban elite. This was particularly evident in the contrast between prosperous Havana and the country's desperately poor rural areas, where the growing seeds of discontent would be harvested by Castro and his revolution.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Franklin, *Cuba and the U.S. Empire*, 15.

⁵⁷ Art Shields, "Wall Street's Sugar Baby-Fulgencio Batista," *The Daily Worker*, (New York, NY), December 23, 1956.

⁵⁸Moruzzi, *Havana Before Castro*, 56.

Chapter 2

The Rise of a New Regime

Fidel Castro graduated from law school in 1950 and began his crusade against Batista just two years later. His revolution was both political and social. He mobilized members of the rural and peasant classes and trained them in guerilla warfare tactics. He preached and promoted self-determination, anti-imperialism, and nationalist ideology. Castro's goal to overthrow the Batista regime was clear, but the CIA was uncertain of what would follow Batista's overthrow.⁵⁹ The CIA held that Castro's main objectives were to consolidate power and place the nation in his hands alone, distance Cuba from U.S. influence, and equalize wealth and privilege of all Cubans.⁶⁰

Castro firmly believed in fighting to right the wrongs he felt Batista and the United States had committed against the nation of Cuba. Therefore, on July 26, 1953 Fidel Castro, and brother Raúl Castro led roughly 140 revolutionaries in an attack on the Moncada Barracks in Santiago de Cuba. The Moncada Barracks, one of the largest military garrisons in Cuba was an ideal location to wage an attack because it housed many weapons which, Castro and his revolutionaries would gain for use in their revolution, if the attack on the Moncada Barracks were successful.⁶¹

However, their attack failed and some of the revolutionaries were executed. Raúl Castro was spared his life but was arrested. Fidel Castro managed to escape and took refuge for several days in the Sierra Maestra mountains. After he was sure he would not

⁶⁰ "Fidel Castro and the Cuban Revolution," 1969, 3.

⁶¹ Franklin, *Cuba and the U.S. Empire*, 15.

be tortured by the Batista Police and was promised a fair trial, he surrendered and was taken in to custody. In Fidel Castro's defense hearing, he delivered a speech which became the most famous speech of his life, a speech titled "History Will Absolve Me." In his trial on October 16, 1953 he proclaimed:

I warn you, I am just beginning! If there is in your hearts a vestige of love for your country, love for humanity, love for justice, listen carefully. I know that I will be silenced for many years; I know that the regime will try to suppress the truth by all possible means; I know that there will be a conspiracy to bury me in oblivion. But my voice will not be stifled – it will rise from my breast even when I feel most alone, and my heart will give it all the fire that callous cowards deny it.

Castro was ruled guilty for conspiring against the Batista regime and was sentenced to 15 years in prison. However, in 1955 he and other political prisoners were granted amnesty by President Fulgencio Batista and fled to Mexico. In Mexico Castro met Ernesto "Che" Guevara, an Argentine revolutionary and together, Fidel Castro, Raúl Castro, and Che Guevara made plans for a revolution. In Guevara's journal he wrote:

I talked all night with Fidel. And in the morning, I had become the doctor of his new expedition. To tell the truth, after my experiences across Latin America I didn't need much more to enlist for a revolution against a tyrant. But I was particularly impressed with Fidel. I shared his optimism. We needed to act, to struggle, to materialise our beliefs. Stop whining and fight.⁶²

Over the course of 1955, Castro and Guevara garnered the support of roughly 80 men to sail to Cuba with them the following year and begin the revolution. The group of revolutionaries sailed from Mexico to eastern Cuba on an old leisure yacht named the Granma. In early December of 1956 the Granma reached Cuba. Shortly after landing, the revolutionaries were ambushed by Batista's men. Over half of the revolutionaries were killed in battle. The surviving members of the group took refuge in the Sierra

⁶² Anwar A. Kahn, *My Friend Che Guevara*, Sri Lanka Guardian, October 2, 2018, accessed on November 24, 2018, <https://www.sguardian.org/my-friend-che-guevara/>.

Maestra mountain range where they regained their footings to stage the revolution.⁶³

As Castro and his revolutionary force in the Sierra Maestra mountains planned their revolution, their ideals spread throughout the island. The ideals manifested into an attack on the Presidential Palace on March 13, 1957 by a group of students aiming to assassinate Fulgencio Batista. Batista however, managed to escape the assault unscathed but there was much bloodshed on both the side of the Cuban army and that of the rebels. The attack was unsuccessful, and Batista remained in power.⁶⁴

After the assault of the Presidential Palace, Batista and his police became seemingly paranoid about revolutionary attacks and became more aggressive and brutal toward discovered conspirators.⁶⁵ Revolutionary activity also became more discreet. Castro and the revolutionaries moved carefully for several months. Some Cubans even believed Castro had given up the fight all together.⁶⁶ Skirmishes began to once again break out in early 1958 and Batista had begun using U.S. trained and military personnel, and U.S. weaponry, supplied by the CIA, to combat the revolutionaries.⁶⁷ Furthermore the U.S. Consul in Santiago de Cuba reported that Batista's police applied their "own system of justice which is swift, effective and without appeal. As a daily occurrence bodies of young men are found hanged or lying along the roadside with as many as 40 bullet holes."⁶⁸ The brutality of the Cuban government was actually working against Batista because more Cuban people began to support the

⁶³ Franklin, *Cuba and the U.S. Empire*, 16.

⁶⁴ Franklin, *Cuba and the U.S. Empire*, 16.

⁶⁵ Franklin, *Cuba and the U.S. Empire*, 16.

⁶⁶ "Cuban Says Castro Has Stopped the Fight," *The New York Times*, (New York, NY) April 13, 1957, 12.

⁶⁷ Schoultz, *That Infernal Little Cuban Republic*, 72.

⁶⁸ Schoultz, *That Infernal Little Cuban Republic*, 77.

revolution as they witnessed how cruel the Batista regime appeared.⁶⁹

Fidel Castro fulfilled his promise, that his voice would not be stifled, and by November of 1958, the revolutionaries had gained traction. On January 1, 1959 President Batista fled Cuba after his six-year battle against the revolutionaries. The revolutionary forces took control of the capital city of Havana that very same day.⁷⁰

It was reported by American Embassy staff in Havana, that the overthrow of the Batista regime ignited a series of chaotic riots and looting across the capital city of Havana.⁷¹ The revolutionaries broadcasted on the national radio station condemning such behavior, but the destruction continued. People forced their way into prisons and freed all prisoners. After the revolutionaries were able to force the Cuban army to surrender to their will, they were able to use that military force to suppress the violence in Havana.⁷²

The United States kept a close eye on Cuban affairs in the days following Batista's overthrow. The American embassy called a meeting to discuss the recent events. All the men present at the meeting argued that it would be in the best interest of United States Businesses in Cuba, for the U.S. government to recognize the new Cuban regime. On January 6, 1959 the American embassy advised President Eisenhower and congress to recognize the new regime before Castro arrived in Havana because though he was not instated as the official President of Cuba, he was

⁶⁹ Schoultz, *That Infernal Little Cuban Republic*, 77.

⁷⁰ Franklin, *Cuba and the U.S. Empire*, 18.

⁷¹ U.S. Department of State, *Telegram from the Embassy in Cuba to the Department of State*, Foreign Relations of the United States, 1958-1960, Cuba, Central Files 737.00/1-159, Volume VI, Document 210, Havana, 1959.

⁷² U.S. Department of State, *Telegram from the Embassy in Cuba to the Department of State*, 1959.

“unquestionably the boss.”⁷³ On January 7, 1959 John Foster Dulles, the U.S. Secretary of State wrote to president Eisenhower and reported that the nation of Cuba had returned to a peaceful state and there appeared to be no communist underpinnings in the new provincial government. Dulles ended his memorandum by requesting that President Eisenhower recognize the new regime. ⁷⁴

On January 9, 1959 Fidel Castro arrived in Havana and delivered a powerful speech, debriefing the revolution’s success. Castro identified the four main desires of the Cuban people as human rights, peace, liberty, and honest government. He promised that the new provincial government were actively making efforts to implement changes that would satisfy these desires. He further announced that he would not accept any kind of chief or ministerial position. Instead, he argued that he was more passionate about overseeing and reorganizing the Cuban military.⁷⁵ In his speech he stated:

I was asked what troops I would prefer to command, and I answered I would prefer to command the people. Because the people are unconquerable and it was the people who won this war, because we had no army, we had no fleet, we had no tanks, we had no planes, we had no heavy guns, we had no military academies or recruiting and training teams. We had neither divisions nor regiments nor companies nor platoons, but we have the confidence of the people, and with this alone we were able to win the battle for liberty. The people have won this war. ⁷⁶

⁷³ U.S. Department of State, *Telegram from the Embassy in Cuba to the Department of State*, Foreign Relations of the United States, 1958-1960, Cuba, Central Files 737.00/1–659, Volume VI, Document 216, Havana January 6, 1959.

⁷⁴ U.S. Department of State, *Memorandum from the Secretary of State to the President*, Foreign Relations of the United States 1958-1960, Cuba, Central Files, 737.00/159, Volume VI, Document 217, Havana, January 7, 1959.

⁷⁵ U.S. Department of State, *Telegram from the Embassy in Cuba to the Department of State*, Foreign Relations of the United States, 1958-1960, Cuba, Central Files 737.00/1–959, Volume VI, Document 220, Havana, January 9, 1959.

⁷⁶ Fidel Castro, “Speech Delivered in Ciudad Libertad,” (Havana, Cuba, January 9, 1959), Latin American Information Center, <http://lanic.utexas.edu/project/castro/1959/>

Castro was passionate about the will and vigor of the people and was proud of his nation. Still, the New York times reported on January 4, 1959 that Castro had no desire to run the country himself, and that his only aim was to “bring democracy to Cuba.”⁷⁷ Though neither of these statements by Castro stood the test of time, they temporarily pacified U.S. foreign policy leaders’ fears of communism spreading throughout the western hemisphere, and a new radical revolutionary regime. However, the relatively tranquil relationship between Castro and the United States government would be short lived. Ten days later Castro publicly condemned U.S. involvement of any kind in Cuban affairs, and by February 13, 1959 Fidel Castro was the new Prime Minister of Cuba.⁷⁸

American Embassy staff first hinted at the threat of communism in Cuba in April of 1959. The dispatch began with a summary based on embassy staff observances. It stated:

Under the benevolent tolerance of Fidel Castro and sheltered by his unfriendly attitude toward the United States and his drastic program of social and economic reform, Communism is growing in Cuba and successfully infiltrating various sectors of public life. The Communist Party (PSP) is functioning openly, and a number of publications and radio-TV programs are carrying its message. Main centers of Communist strength are in the Revolutionary Army and the labor unions.⁷⁹

The report continued by stating that though Castro himself had not identified as a communist, he was still no friend to the United States. The report summary mentioned that communists had infiltrated various sectors of Cuban life and was allegedly spreading. However, the report also noted there some groups within Cuba like the Catholic Church who opposed it and encouraged resistance to it. University statistics as

⁷⁷ “Castro Wins: New Regime for Cuba,” The New York Times, (New York, NY) January 4, 1959.

⁷⁸ Franklin, *Cuba and the U.S. Empire*, 19.

⁷⁹ U.S. Department of State, *Dispatch from the Embassy in Cuba to the Department of State*, Foreign Relations of the United States, Cuba, Volume VI, Document 278, Havana, April 14, 1959.

of April 14, 1959 remained unclear. It was documented that students had given left leaning speeches, but the popularity of the speeches remained ambiguous. The embassy argued that communist ideology was gaining momentum in Cuba for a few reasons. The first of which was that the communists cooperated with the revolutionary movement, thus winning their right to exist as a political group in Castro's new honest government. The second factor in communist success was that though Castro had not openly declared himself a communist, many communist ideals and strategies paralleled those of Castro. Lastly, the communists were ready to fill the labor voids created by the overthrow of the Batista regime and the political exiles.⁸⁰

U.S. officials wanted to keep the communism contained and hinder the growth of the movement. The embassy drafted an action plan to combat the communist threat. They had a sixteen-step plan, with various tactics such as be friendly with the Cuban government, but be firm about negative feelings toward communism, try to keep Castro isolated from the communists, publish and shame discovered communists in the local Cuban media, and assist anti-communist Cubans in applying for U.S. visas.⁸¹ However, analysts for the State Department argued that the surest way to stop Cuba from turning into a communist regime, was to ensure that the relationship between the United States and Fidel Castro was strong and positive. This is a key difference between the State Department's approach to dealing with Castro and the CIA's approach. The State Department aimed to keep a good relationship with Cuba, whereas the CIA's mistrust of Castro may have clouded their ability to focus on a positive relationship with the nation

⁸⁰ U.S. Department of State, *Dispatch from the Embassy in Cuba to the Department of State*, 1959.

⁸¹ U.S. Department of State, *Dispatch from the Embassy in Cuba to the Department of State*, Document 278, Havana, April 14, 1959.

as a whole. The State Department quickly began planning a trip for Fidel Castro to visit the United States.

For Washington, Castro's visit was an opportunity for the United States to develop a positive relationship with Castro that could potentially foster grand economic opportunities for the United States and spare them future conflict. For Castro, the visit offered him a chance to discuss with the United States government how he wanted Cuba to be situated in U.S. foreign policy. Castro could articulate to U.S. officials that he had no interest in the United States exerting any kind of influence over the island of Cuba. However, Washington was prepared with scripted lines to pitch to Castro during the meeting, to try and persuade him to work with the United States in order to further U.S. interests.

There were three approaches that the State Department proposed as acceptable suggestions on how to treat Castro during his visit to Washington. The first approach was to explain to Castro that the United States has always supported the development of democracy in Cuba, and to remind Castro that this was the goal when the United States aided the Cubans in their first revolution against Spain. Furthermore, they wanted to convince Castro that the only reason his revolutionaries supported his overthrow of Batista was because they hoped that the new regime would be a representative democracy.⁸² The writers of the memorandum intended that their suggestions to Castro would accomplish two goals. First, identifying that the United States was a friend to Cuba and wanted to see a democracy flourish there, would

⁸² U.S. Department of State, *Memorandum from the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs' Special Assistant (Hill) to the Assistant Secretary of State (Rubottom): Possible Line to Take in Replying to Castro*, Foreign Relations of the United States, Cuba, Volume VI, Document 282, Washington, D.C., 1959.

position the United States in a positive light historically as Cuba's rescuers and confidante. Second, they hoped it would force Castro to question the motives of his fellow revolutionaries. Did they overthrow Batista because they were opposed to corrupt government as Castro argued, or did they participate because they themselves desired democratic representation in their nation?

In the second approach on dealing with Castro, the State Department framed their narrative to argue that the Cuban revolution was neither motivated by anti-American ideology, nor by communist theory. Rather, it was supported by Cuban people who had been traditionally friendly toward the United States and thus, would never support a movement had it been laced with communist or anti-American sentiments.⁸³ This approach benefits the United States because it uses the people as a medium through which to control Castro. If Castro had the benefit of the people and their interests in mind, as he claimed, then he would be more receptive to the desires of those people—even if said desires were the manifestations of the U.S. government.

The third approach drafted by the State Department was to try to partner with Castro so that the United States could pursue interests that were best for both nations and respect each other's devotion to freedom.⁸⁴ This approach was ideal for the State Department because it would allow for access to Cuban resources by American businesses. The State Department would quite easily be able to use the mutual interests' clause to their advantage, and likely would. The idea of such a "partnership" harked back to an earlier relationship between the United States and Cuba, in which the

⁸³ U.S. Department of State. *Possible Line to Take in Replying to Castro*, Document 282.

⁸⁴ U.S. Department of State, *Possible Line to Take in Replying to Castro*, Document 282.

U.S. assumed it knew what was best for Cuba and denied Cuba any self-determination.

More than anything though, the central theme of each of the three of these State Department approaches was that United States wanted to step over Castro and appeal directly to the Cuban people.⁸⁵ This was the plan because U.S officials realized along with Castro, that the people had won the revolution and there was power in the masses. Therefore, if the United States government could win the hearts and minds of the Cuban people, and appeal to their desires, they could secure a stake in the new revolutionary regime.

The CIA was also preparing their own suggestions on how to deal with Castro during his visit. Due to the stark contrast of approach and tone in the CIA's document, it is unlikely that the State Department and the CIA were in dialogue with one another on this topic. The CIA briefed its members on Castro's history, his ideology, and what they thought they could expect from him in the months to come. The CIA half-heartedly commended Castro for his dedication to the revolution and argued that he was able to achieve success because of his ability to produce and distribute effective propaganda, his systematic approach to radicalizing his government, his attempts to educate the young and rural peoples, and his forced emigration of his enemies.⁸⁶ Thus, the CIA did not list qualities like effective leadership, strategic military plans, or a population that trusted him to describe why he was victorious in his revolution. This is likely because the CIA either did not believe he had those qualities or believed he had them but was threatened by his victory and did not want to bolster Castro's image any further.

⁸⁵ U.S. Department of State, *Possible Line to Take in Replying to Castro*, Document 282.

⁸⁶ Central Intelligence Agency, *Weekly Summary Special Report: Fidel Castro and the Cuban Revolution: The First Decade*, General CIA Records, February 7, 1969, 3.

The CIA then produced a confidential report prior to Castro's visit to Washington. The report outlined things to keep in mind in case one was to cross paths with Castro during his visit. The report proposed no approach to dealing with Castro, but rather line items or reminders on why one should not trust Castro.

The report from April 13, 1959 listed several alleged facts about Castro aimed to portray him in a bad light. The CIA anticipated that Castro would intend to put his best foot forward in Washington because he needed financial aid from the U.S. government in order to get his new regime off the ground. Without the aid, the CIA assumed that the new regime would collapse within a matter of months. In order to create the image that Castro and his revolutionaries were upstanding, civilized diplomats, the CIA predicted that Castro would bring Cuban businessmen and diplomats along to Washington as advisors, rather than fellow revolutionaries such as his brother Raul or friend and confidante Che Guevara. The CIA argued that bringing individuals like Raul and Che would too accurately represent the "bloodthirsty" atmosphere of the revolution, and Castro knew that would work against him in dealing with the United States.⁸⁷

The CIA also hinted in their report that communism, and communist ideals were circulating in Cuba. It pointed out that Castro's popularity was steadily declining among the upper and middle class, but that he was still a hero to the peasant class. Castro allegedly vowed to create a single middle class by elevating the poor at the expense of the upper classes. Finally, the CIA argued that Castro allowed the known communists to infiltrate the military, labor force, cultural centers, and educational institutions.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Central Intelligence Agency, *Memorandum for the Vice President from the DCI: Subject: Cuba*, by Allen Dulles, Executive Registry 11-3074, (Washington D.C., April 13, 1959), 2.

⁸⁸ Central Intelligence Agency, *Memorandum for the Vice President from the DCI: Subject: Cuba*, 4.

Therefore, the CIA wanted its members to be aware that though Castro was not a declared communist, that he did not necessarily oppose communism either.

In the report, Allen Dulles suggested that Castro would go over the head of the U.S. State department in order to appeal to the American people.⁸⁹ It is peculiar that Dulles would anticipate this course of action for Castro, because it was nearly exactly the same plan that the State Department intended to use on Castro. However, threatening that Castro would attempt to win over the American people, could have been simply Dulles' attempt to justify circulating anti-Castro and anti-Cuban propaganda.

The one thing that the CIA wanted the rest of the government to know prior to Castro's arrival was that Castro was no friend to the United States. Dulles stated that Castro "has shown considerable unfriendliness toward the U.S. government. By half-truths, exaggerations and outright lies, he has endeavored to whip up anti-Americanism in Cuba. Whether this is a result of deep personal prejudice or demagoguery to attract masses, has got to be proved."⁹⁰

Castro's visit to Washington D.C. from April 15, 1959 to April 26, 1959 was declared neither positive nor negative. He met with U.S. government officials during his stay and discussed a number of different issues. A few of which were his position on communism, his policies moving forward on American businesses in Cuba, and new democratic laws to be established in Cuba.

Overall the State Department claimed that after Castro's visit, that the man was still an enigma. Castro indicated that he intended to remain in the western camp,

⁸⁹ Central Intelligence Agency, *Memorandum for the Vice President from the DCI: Subject: Cuba*, 3.

⁹⁰ Central Intelligence Agency, *Memorandum for the Vice President from the DCI: Subject: Cuba*, 3.

meaning that his nation would not succumb to communism in the foreseeable future. He then explained some of his new ideas for land reform. These ideas worried the State department as they were somewhat rooted in leftist ideals due to their foundational principal: redistribution of property. These new ideals made more than just the State Department uncomfortable. Businessmen and those owning property in Cuba were off put because it appeared that U.S. business in Cuba could be ousted if Castro's new land reform policies were set in place.

The State Department reported that Castro insisted his new regime was democratic. The masses positively reacted to his speeches, new legislation, and approved overall of his leadership. The State Department, however commented in their summary of the Castro meeting, that Castro may have confused the appreciable roar of audiences with the concept of representative democracy. They further advised that the government of the United States not underestimate Castro, because, as a result of his visit, he gained insight on the inner-workings of American government. The State Department also feared that Castro might radicalize his revolution further because Castro was more concerned with the ends than the means.⁹¹

During his eleven-day stay in the United States, Castro made several public appearances in addition to his discussions with officials like Vice President Nixon in Washington. Castro spoke at Princeton and Harvard and Columbia. He also delivered a two-hour speech in Central Park. In his speeches and presentations, he repeated one message numerous times. That message was that the Cuban revolution was "not for

⁹¹ U.S. Department of State, *Memorandum Prepared in the Department of State, Subject: Unofficial Visit of Prime Minister Castro of Cuba to Washington—A Tentative Evaluation*, Foreign Relations of the United States, Cuba, Volume VI, Document 282, Washington, D.C., April 23, 1959. 483.

export.” He preached that he nor his countrymen would assist in other Latin American revolutions, but he would encourage such countries, who needed a revolution, to let Cuba be their example. ⁹² This had been one of the greatest fears of the CIA, that Castro would encourage other Latin American Regimes to cast out imperialists and oust figurehead or “puppet” style governments. ⁹³ The CIA especially feared this in nations already known to have communist infiltration. Therefore, Castro neither reinforced those fears, nor pacified them in his speeches in the States. The CIA would simply have to watch and wait.

Castro departed for Cuba on April 26, 1959. When he arrived home to his island nation, he began planning his new Agrarian reform, which would become the first of many hot button issues between the United States and their neighbor to the south.

The basis of Castro’s Agrarian Reform was to take land from great landowners and redistribute that land to Cubans who owned little to no land. Immediately, the capitalists in charge of the U.S. government were unsettled by phrase “redistribution of wealth.” At first however, the American government was much more worried about what this new Agrarian Reform would mean for American companies who owned land in Cuba.

Castro claimed that there was a solution for those who would be stripped of a portion of their land. He promised that companies and individuals whose land was redistributed, would be monetarily compensated for their lost land. Castro reminded his nation that

⁹² Franklin, *Cuba and the U.S. Empire*, 20-21.

⁹³ Central Intelligence Agency, *Memorandum for the Director: The Cuban Political Dilemma*, General CIA Records, Washington, D.C.1958, 3.

We must declare, as we always have under such circumstances, that we make laws only for the benefit of the nation, even if these laws must sometimes damage certain interests. We do not make laws by – hate, as we do not hate anybody. We understand perfectly that we are a consequence of the past, we have the obligation to correct past mistakes.⁹⁴

Therefore, Castro knew that this reform would be unpopular among some of his own countrymen but claimed that he was doing right by his country in pushing forward. However, landowners and businessmen did not see it that way. The new reform would be devastating to U.S. business in Cuba.

The market that would be especially damaged by Castro's new regime was the sugar market. U.S. economists argued that not only would U.S. revenue from the sugar industry plummet, so would the production of sugar in Cuba if Castro followed through on the reforms. By redistributing big business, sugar producing land to the unskilled peasantry, sugar production will naturally decline. This is widely due to that fact that even if the unskilled peasantry had the means and ability to plant, grow, and harvest sugar cane, there would still be a lull in production as the large companies harvested the last of their sugar, and the peasants learned the skills necessary to begin a new cycle. The productivity decrease however, would not happen right away because sugar takes roughly eighteen months to fully ripen. U.S. officials were unsuccessful in their attempts to persuade Castro to reconsider his reform, because Castro later declared that expropriations of U.S. land would begin within a year's time.⁹⁵ The Agrarian Reform Law officially went into effect on June 3, 1959. The U.S was dissatisfied with

⁹⁴ Fidel Castro, "On the Promulgation of the Agrarian Law," (Havana, Cuba), May 17, 1959, Latin American Information Center, <http://lanic.utexas.edu/project/castro/db/1959/19590517.html>

⁹⁵ U.S. Department of State, *Telegram from the Embassy in Cuba to the Department of State*, Foreign Relations of the United States 1959-1960, Cuba, Central Files, 837.16/6-1259, Volume VI, Document 320, Havana, 1959.

the compensation rate on lands to be appropriated from U.S. business owners, and they protest the reform. However, their protests were ignored⁹⁶

Threatened by the reform, the U.S. set out over the summer and early fall of 1959 to devise a plan to combat it. It was during this time in which Cuba lowered its national rates for electricity. This directly affected U.S. profits, as the Cuban Electric company was an American owned corporation. Infuriated by the loss of profits, coupled with the agrarian reform, the United States military went on to drop bombs on Cuban sugar plantations in October of 1959, just before a completed draft of the new policy towards Cuba was released to government officials.⁹⁷ In the new policy towards Cuba, the State Department claimed that Castro's new legislation and programs were not consistent with what the U.S. considered fair economic relations between the U.S. and Cuba. The U.S. was appalled by Castro's appropriations of U.S. land, and criticized his left leaning ideologies.

The State Department also divulged to the CIA, the U.S Information Agency, the U.S Embassy in Cuba and the Office of International and National Security Affairs, that Castro allowed communists to penetrate many facets of society, including high offices of government. However, the State department also knew that Castro had won over the hearts and minds of most of his people, and they had a deep adoration for him. Therefore, U.S. officials needed to tread carefully when entertaining the possibility of forcing Castro to alter his policies, as doing so could have severe consequences and

⁹⁶ Franklin, *Cuba and the U.S. Empire*, 21.

⁹⁷ Franklin, *Cuba and the U.S. Empire*, 22.

more anti-American sentiments. The U.S. needed an action plan to deal with what they considered to be an unstable and potentially hostile regime.⁹⁸

A plan was devised by the State department to formalize a new policy towards Cuba to manage relations during this delicate time. The policy insisted that by the end of 1960, Cuba must meet the basic requirements in the OCB Regional Operations Plan for Latin America, which is the document governing U.S. policy goals toward Latin American nations. Second, the United States should assure Cuba that the chances of U.S. intervention were slim to none, unless the U.S. needed to defend its interests or principles. Third, the U.S should avoid at all costs, encouraging the consolidation of the Castro regime. Fourth, any policies designed to encourage opposition to Castro, and would likely be accepted by the Cuban people should be pursued. Finally, any materials promoting representative democracy in Latin America should also be pursued to the fullest extent possible.⁹⁹ Therefore, the State Department's new policy on dealing with Cuba was to essentially cut the legs out from under Castro by turning his people against him and undermining his authority. Furthermore, spreading democratic ideals throughout Latin America was an attempt to contain the revolutionary ideals that made the new Cuban regime possible. These democratic ideals were also meant to contain the threat of communism that the U.S. perceived to be aggressively brewing in Cuba.

Castro however, had an answer for the United States. In October of 1959 Castro had not declared allegiance to the socialist or communist party. Instead he

⁹⁸ U.S. Department of State, "Memorandum from the Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs (Rubottom) to the Under Secretary of State for Political affairs (Murphy), Foreign Relations of the United States, Cuba, Central Files 737.00/10-2959, Volume VI, Document 376.

⁹⁹ U.S. Department of State, *Current Basic United States Policy Towards Cuba*, Washington, D.C., October, 1959.

suggested in his speech at the loyalty rally, that the United States government was offended by the new revolutionary reforms because they interfered with U.S. Interests. He goes on to discuss how any move Cuba could make would interfere with foreign interests, whether it be producing new crops, instating revenue boosting trade tariffs, increasing their exports, or installing a mine, other nations would be vexed by it because such a move by Cuba could cut in on their profits. In his speech he calls out the United States specifically in his speech and stated the following:

I ask: has the Revolutionary Government done anything that the people do not approve? What has the Revolutionary Government done except defend the interests of the people? What have we done except sacrifice ourselves for our country? In four centuries of Cuban history never has there been such an altruistic movement. . . Because our Revolutionary laws have an adverse effect on privileged classes inside Cuba and outside Cuba, they attack us and attack us and call us Communists. They accuse us, trying to find some pretext to justify aggression against our country. ¹⁰⁰

Castro identified the United States officials as “wretched conspirators”, thus arguing that the presence of communism and communist ideals in Cuba were a scapegoat for the United States government to act aggressively towards Cuba. When the underlying reason for the aggression was the frustration the United States felt due to having lost control over the resources of a nation that once turned colossal profits for them.

The theory of U.S. leaders having used communism as a scapegoat to invade Cuba is one that is relatively unique to Castro. Even if perhaps some Americans had considered the possibility that U.S. officials were more afraid of losing profits than they were of communism as an ideology, no one would voice that opinion. During the fifties

¹⁰⁰ Fidel Castro, “Speech to the People of Cuba at Loyalty Rally.” (Havana, Cuba), October, 26, 1959. Latin American Information Center, <http://lanic.utexas.edu/project/castro/db/1959/19591026.html>

and sixties in America, the House of Un-American Activities Committee of “HUAC” as it was commonly called, was constantly searching for American citizens who had communist ideologies or were in some way tied to the communist party. If Americans were found to have communist affiliations, it oftentimes destroyed their careers and their reputations. Therefore, it is unlikely that any American would have voiced this opinion or agree with Castro on any matter.

Castro’s address to the people continued and in it, he suggested that United States wanted nothing more than to bring down the new revolutionary regime. He stated, “They want to destroy the revolution with their terrorism and by means of economic strangulation. But the revolution is not just mine; the revolution belongs to the people and we are doing nothing but carry out the will of the people.”¹⁰¹ He pointed to economic strangulation as the strategy for the U.S. government’s plan to weaken Cuba. He was correct, however the “economic strangulation” Cuba had experienced up to that point was more of a gentle stifling, when compared to what was to come. Cuba had only seen the tip of the iceberg in regard to how far the United States would go to cripple the Cuban economy.

¹⁰¹ Castro, “Speech to the People of Cuba at Loyalty Rally, October, 26, 1959.

Chapter 3

1960: Cutthroat Economics vs Military Force

Fidel Castro and his fellow revolutionary leaders wasted no time in enacting the terms of the agrarian reform. In January of 1960 Cuba expropriated over 70,000 acres of the land from the United States. None of which was accompanied by a monetary compensation. U.S. companies who owned property in Cuba were outraged by the expropriations. U.S. Congress protested the seizure of land without compensation. Like their earlier attempts to stifle the agrarian reform, this new objection was similarly rejected by the Cuban government. As a result of Cuba's refusal to adjust the terms of the agrarian reform, U.S. officials began entertaining the idea of cutting the sugar quota.

The sugar quota was a vitally important aspect in Cuban trade. Cuba held a special position with the United States in regard to trade. Cuba paid less duties than all other countries and had a guaranteed sugar quota that the United States would purchase from them each year.¹⁰² Sugar and sugar products comprised 79 percent of Cuban exports to the United States in 1960. These exports were a significant annual source of revenue for Cuba; 342 million dollars to be exact.¹⁰³ If the sugar quota was cut, it would mean that the United States would no longer receive imported sugar from Cuba in the huge quantities it had in the past. Additionally, a cut in the sugar quota would likely devastate the Cuban economy because Cuba would have a copious supply of sugar, but no demand for it. U.S. officials in many government agencies believed that

¹⁰² Carmen Diana Deere, "US-Cuba Trade and the Challenge of Diversifying a Sugar Economy, 1902-1962," *Florida Journal of International Law* 29 no. 1, (2017): 159.

¹⁰³ Deere, "US-Cuba Trade and the Challenge of diversifying a Sugar Economy, 1902-1962", 172.

cutting the sugar quota would be an effective tool in forcing Cuba to submit to their will. However, that was a decision the President was not prepared to make just yet.

U.S. executive officials instituted immediate retaliation against Cuba for declining to amend the agrarian reform. More bombs were dropped on Cuban sugar plantations by the United States government. This time the bombs were not dropped in the rural country side, but rather on sugar plantations located in Havana province, close to the Cuba's capital city. It was the goal of U.S. foreign policy leaders to incite fear among the Cuban people, in hopes that the people of Cuba would demand that Castro work with the United States, instead of against them.

In February, Castro responded to the protest by stating he was willing to create a council that could act as a mediator between the United States and Cuba, with the goal being to discuss all of the differences between the two nations. His proposal was contingent upon a promise that the United States would halt attacks and other measures of hostility while the discussions took place. The offer was declined by the President because Washington received a tip that Castro agreed to sell twenty percent of Cuba's sugar supply to the Soviet Union for the next five consecutive years.¹⁰⁴

In February of 1960 the CIA began to perceive the Soviet Union's attitude towards Cuba was shifting from cautionary to supportive. This was affirmed with the Soviet Union's allocation of \$100,000,000 worth of economic aid credit.¹⁰⁵ The CIA reported that in the official communication records between Cuba and the Soviet Union

¹⁰⁴ Schoultz, *That Infernal Little Cuban Republic*, 114.

¹⁰⁵ Central Intelligence Agency, *Memorandum for the Record, NSC Briefing*, 17 February, 1960, (Washington, D.C.), 1960, 1.

there was no mention of a promise to supply Cuba with arms, but the CIA expected an arms deal would certainly manifest in the future. ¹⁰⁶

The trade and economic aid agreements between the Soviet Union and Cuba created even more tension than had already existed between the Cuba and the United States. Cuba had not declared itself communist as of the spring of 1960, but the growing relationship between Cuba and the Soviet Union was one that could not be ignored by the United States. The CIA drafted a briefing for the National Security Council, in which the CIA declared that the United States and Cuba could never have a friendly relationship if Fidel Castro remained in control. They claimed that Castro was influencing the media to whip up anti-American propaganda and the CIA feared for the lives of U.S. embassy employees stationed in Havana. The tensions were so high that they went so far as to devise an evacuation plan for embassy staff. ¹⁰⁷

The briefing for the National Security Council also warned of Fidel Castro and Che Guevara's opposition to foreign private investments in Cuba. The CIA claimed that the Cuban officials particularly condemned foreign industry. However, setting economic threats aside, the CIA further worried and anticipated that Castro would nationalize the land surrounding Guantánamo. ¹⁰⁸ It was believed that he was willing and able to remove American influence from Guantánamo because he so effortlessly removed American businesses from Cuba without compensation. The U.S. government seemed to be under the impression that Castro could and would do whatever he wanted and

¹⁰⁶ Central Intelligence Agency, *Memorandum for the Record, NSC Briefing 17 February 1960*, 2.

¹⁰⁷ Central Intelligence Agency, *Memorandum for the Record: NSC Meeting 10, March 1960*, (Washington, D.C.), 1960, 1.

¹⁰⁸ Central Intelligence Agency, *Memorandum for the Record*, 2.

wondered if he actually represented the desires of the Cuban people or if he was “just plain crazy.”¹⁰⁹

Cuba however, understood that they needed to be careful about making any new decisions that negatively affected U.S. interests until they had assurance that they could be backed economically, industrially and militarily by another super power. The Soviet Union had already agreed to purchase twenty percent of Cuba’s sugar crop for the year to come, but Castro wanted an opportunity to see what benefits, other than direct profit, were to gain by initiating trade with the Soviet Union. Therefore, Cuba entered into a trade agreement with Poland. Poland, then part of the Soviet Bloc, offered Cuba technical aid, scientific assistance, and credit to purchase industrial machines and equipment. Cuba also started negotiating with Hungary, another member of the Soviet Bloc, to ensure opportunities to purchase machinery in the future. Castro also set in motion, a trade agreement for Russian crude oil. If fueling stations were set up in Cuba with Russian oil, Cuba would then become a vital base for naval trade, due to its convenient location in the central Caribbean. Therefore, an oil agreement benefitted both Cuba and the Soviet Union.

In addition to the trade agreements, Castro also had the intention of sending Cubans “from all walks of life” accompanied by several government officials, to visit the Soviet Union in April of 1960. The goal of the trip for the Cuban civilians was to witness a different way of life than their own. The government officials, however, had a different agenda. They were there to investigate the extent of the Soviet Union’s willingness to militarily support Cuba. The CIA suspected that Castro desperately wanted to figure out

¹⁰⁹ Schoultz, *That Infernal Little Cuban Republic*, 113.

how far the Soviet Union would go to protect Cuba, in case of a U.S. intervention.¹¹⁰

The number of trade agreements between Cuba and the Soviet Union signaled to the CIA that Cuba itself was on the verge of going red.

The U.S. State department, on the other hand, was not so quick to chalk up the entire regime as communist. The State Department preferred to analyze the situation in Cuba objectively by identifying and separating current threats from future threats. They pointed out and did not deny that communist groups were allowed to openly exist in Cuba and had indeed infiltrated multiple facets of society. However, they refused to believe that the Communist forces had swayed Castro further to the left.¹¹¹ The State Department agreed with the CIA, by asserting that Castro would do anything he wanted without direction from foreign governments but were not convinced that he was a communist.

Additionally, the State Department added that the communists were certainly not strong enough to make a bid for power or the office of the prime minister. The suggested that the communists would avoid challenging Fidel for power and instead would center their efforts on covert infiltration in the government. The State Department also stated that Cuba in 1960 was not dominated by communists and they suggested that it would not be dominated by communists in the foreseeable future.¹¹² However, they were leery that the more aggravated Fidel Castro became with the United States, the stronger his relationship with the Soviet Bloc would become. The State Department

¹¹⁰ Central Intelligence Agency, *Memorandum for the Record, NSC Briefing* (Washington D.C.), April 7, 1960, 3.

¹¹¹ U.S. Department of State, *Special National Intelligence Estimate*, Foreign Relations of the United States 1958-1960, Cuba, Secret Files INR-NIE, (Washington, D.C.) March, 1960, 1.

¹¹² U.S. Department of State, *Special National Intelligence Estimate*, 1.

also made the connection that the Soviet Bloc would likely not hesitate to use Cuba as a pawn in order to initiate a military confrontation with the United States.

The CIA's opinion and the State Department's opinion on communism was different because the CIA was convinced that Cuba's relationship with the Soviet Union was a representation of Cuban ideology. The CIA's logic was as follows: Cuba has trade agreements with the Soviet Union, therefore Cuba is communist. The State Department on the other hand would argue that it was feasible for the Cuban government to have democratic ideals and also have trade agreements with communist nations. The State Department acknowledged that there was indeed communist infiltration in Cuban society, but that it was not necessarily connected to the newfound friendships with the Soviet Union. Furthermore, the State Department was thinking more broadly about Cuba and its unique position in global politics and economics, and thus arrived at the conclusion that Cuba's relationship with the Soviet Union was more threatening than communist groups within Cuba, because that relationship with the Soviet Union could yield military confrontations between the U.S. and the USSR.

In April of 1960 the State Department sent Richard G. Cushing from the office of public affairs to Cuba to analyze anti-Castro groups, public opinion and the economy. He reported that in his opinion, the new Castro regime was a dictatorship and argued that the only difference between Castro's Cuba and Batista's Cuba is that it was left leaning rather than right leaning. Cushing observed that there was no identifiable, organized, opposition to Castro and that the communists were making progress and had successfully infiltrated society. As for the economy, it was on the decline, and it would only worsen if the United States cut the sugar quota. Many Cubans were worried

about what would happen if the U.S. did cut the sugar quota and were in favor of keeping relations with the United States good enough to still maintain trade agreements.¹¹³

Cushing also reported that public opinion for Castro had dwindled down from 95% when he first became prime minister, down to roughly 50% by April of 1960. Most of the people who disapproved of Castro were in the middle to upper classes, but Cushing reported that Castro was also losing popularity amongst teachers as more Marxist materials became mandated in national curriculum.¹¹⁴ From this report the State Department pieced together a morose picture of Cuban life and Cuba's future.

Only twelve days after Cushing's report to the State Department came one of the first documented discussions of overthrowing the Castro regime. Edward E Rice, a member of the State Department's policy planning staff stated on April 13, 1960 "I hope and assume we are readying, for possible use, means for overthrowing the Castro regime; one should always have two strings to one's bow."¹¹⁵ By this Rice meant that the state department should start thinking about multiple action plans that could be taken to overthrow Fidel Castro. Rice and other U.S. government officials were also interested in overthrowing the neighboring regime of Rafael Trujillo in the Dominican

¹¹³ U.S Department of State, *Memorandum from Richard G. Cushing of the Office of the Public Affairs Advisor, Bureau of Inter-American Affairs, to the Deputy Director of the United States Information Agency: Reactions on visit to Habana*, Foreign Relations of the United States 1958-1960, Cuba, ARA Special Assistant Files: Lot 62 D 24, Volume VI, Document 497, (Washington, D.C.), April 5, 1960, 1.

¹¹⁴ U.S Department of State, *Memorandum from Richard G. Cushing of the Office of the Public Affairs Advisor, Bureau of Inter-American Affairs, to the Deputy Director of the United States Information Agency: Reactions on visit to Habana*, 1.

¹¹⁵ U.S. Department of State. *Memorandum from Edward E. Rice of the Policy Planning Staff to the Assistant Secretary of State for Policy Planning: Cuba and the Dominican Republic*, Foreign Relations of the United States 1958-1960, NSC Files: Lot 62 D 1, Volume VI, Document 504, (Washington, D.C.), April 13, 1960.

Republic, but the Dominican was not U.S. foreign policy leaders' first priority. Thus, Rice suggested that the State Department should consider a plan to overthrowing both regimes simultaneously because Trujillo was such a hated dictator, that the U.S. may have been able to capitalize on the distaste for Trujillo and use the support for overthrowing the Dominican Republic to help overthrow Cuba as well.¹¹⁶

The very next day, following Rice's proposal, a security council meeting was held in Washington to discuss potential options for removing Castro. Instead of the State Department committing to the overthrow of an entire regime, it was likely more feasible to first try and get rid of one man. Three possible outcomes to the Cuban situation were identified at the meeting and they were "(1) the assassination of Castro, which would make him a martyr, (2) Castro's suicide, which is a possibility in the event of failure and (3) a continuation of the present trend, resulting ultimately in a socialist dictatorship and a Batista-type terror in Cuba".¹¹⁷ Therefore Castro's suicide would have ultimately been the most ideal situation for members of the State Department and other governmental agencies who desired Castro's overthrow. However, there was no way to ensure his suicide, and the State Department did not want to sit idly by as Cuba became socialist and its people suppressed. Thus, the option to assassinate Castro was the best choice for them, but official assassination plans had not yet been designed. Before they drafted official assassination plans, they first wanted to see how the rumored economic strangulation tactics against Cuba materialized.

¹¹⁶ U.S. Department of State. *Memorandum from Edward E. Rice of the Policy Planning Staff to the Assistant Secretary of State for Policy Planning: Cuba and the Dominican Republic*, 1.

¹¹⁷ U.S. Department of State, *Memorandum of Discussion at the 441st Meeting of the Security Council*, Foreign Relations of the United States 1958-1960, Lot 66 D 95, Cuba, Volume VI, Washington, D.C., April 14, 1960, 1.

The State Department officially documented that they were entering into “stage 3” in their dealings with Cuba on May 11, 1960. Assistant secretary of State Roy R. Rubottom identified three strategic stages that the U.S. government steered through since the start of the Cuban Revolution. The first stage was consisted of acknowledging the Castro regime and welcoming Castro to the United States on a visit. The goal of the first stage was to neutralize any hostilities and try to persuade Castro to discover and cultivate a more westernized ideology. Castro did not cooperate as well as U.S. officials would have hoped, so the State Department initiated stage two of their dealings with Cuba.

Stage two was titled the “policy of restraint” and it was designed to be more of an observatory stage in which the State Department was neither hostile nor exceptionally friendly to their southern neighbors. The goal in taking this quiet position was to allow Castro to destroy U.S.—Cuban relations on his own, with no U.S. retaliation. This would have ideally helped garner the support of the Cuban people, by leading them to believe that the United States was wronged by Castro, the U.S was undeserving of that treatment, and furthermore was merciful enough to not enact counter attacks against Cuba. The State Department had hoped that their policy of restraint would have distorted the Cubans’ view of their leader enough to jump ship and side with the United States.

By May of 1960 stages one and two had come and gone, and Rubottom suggested it was time to begin the third stage which requires that

The United States use judiciously selected economic pressures at those points where Castro’s domestic and international policies have weakened Cuba’s economic structure in order to engender more public discomfort and discontent

and thereby to expose to the Cuban masses Castro's responsibility for mishandling their affairs ¹¹⁸

Rubottom further identified the area that the United States must attack first: foreign exchange. He suggested sabotaging Cuba's foreign trade because Cuba relied so heavily on imports, and their major export was sugar. The State Department first targeted the sugar quota because the United States was Cuba's best customer in regard to sugar. It would take little effort on the part of U.S. government officials to cut the sugar quota and cripple the Cuban economy. That is what the situation was coming to in April of 1960.

The CIA on the other hand, had implemented plans of their own. While the State Department was experimenting with cut throat economics, the CIA began drafting plans for an invasion of Cuba. In late March of 1960, Eisenhower sent a secret letter to Allen Dulles, authorizing the CIA to begin planning for an invasion of Cuba. ¹¹⁹ The plans that the CIA began to draw up set the invasion date for the spring of 1961. This invasion would come to be known as the Bay of Pigs Invasion. In the planning stages of the invasion, one thing was certain, air operations and air planes would play a key role in the attack. ¹²⁰

The overall goal of the invasion was to "bring about the replacement of the Castro regime with one more devoted to the true interests of the Cuban people and more acceptable to the U. S. in such a manner as to avoid any appearance of U. S.

¹¹⁸ U.S. Department of State, *Memorandum from the Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs (Rubottom) to the Acting Secretary of State: U.S. Sugar Legislation Required for Economic Action Against Cuba*, Foreign Relations of the United States 1958-1960, Lot 62 D 418, Cuba, Volume VI, (Washington, D.C.), May 11, 1960, 1.

¹¹⁹ Franklin, *Cuba and the U.S. Empire*, 25.

¹²⁰ Jack B. Pfeiffer, *Official History of the Bay of Pigs Invasion Volume I: Air Operations March 1960-April 1961*. Central Intelligence Agency, (Washington, D.C.), September, 1979, 4.

intervention.”¹²¹ The CIA aimed to orchestrate a scheme to oust Fidel Castro and his fellow revolutionaries and replace their regime with a new one which would be better for Cubans and friendlier to America. The goal was for the CIA to control all actions both inside and outside of Cuba and do so undetected by Castro and his officials.

In order to realize these goals, the CIA developed a four-step program to outline the major courses of action for the invasion. The first thing that the CIA identified as a necessary accessory to the plan were a group of anti-Castro Cubans who could unify, organize, and responsibly carry out orders from the CIA in order to carry out an overthrow the Castro regime. The CIA had been in contact with three opposition groups within Cuba and aimed to consolidate their efforts to form a military junta, united under the slogan “Restore the Revolution.”¹²² This slogan was meant to insinuate that the Castro Regime had veered off from the original values of the revolution and now was a dangerous detriment to society. The slogan was also effective in communicating the message that what the United States was orchestrating was a positive movement for Cuba. Therefore, it helped frame the junta in a positive way, making it an appealing, or at the very least competitive political alternative to Castro’s regime.

The next step in the program involved creating an avenue for mass communication of the opposition’s ideals and for the distribution of anti-Castro propaganda. The CIA decided that the best way deliver the information was through long and short-wave radio broadcasts. The location from which the broadcasts were to be released from was a broadcasting facility on Swan Island off the coast of Honduras.

¹²¹ Central Intelligence Agency, Official History of the Bay of Pigs Invasion Volume II Appendix I, “A Program of Covert Action Against the Castro Regime”, (Washington D.C.), March 16, 1960, 408.

¹²² Central Intelligence Agency, “A Program of Covert Action Against the Castro Regime,” 408.

The broadcasts were designed to be accompanied by written material and pamphlets dispersed secretively throughout the nation. ¹²³

The CIA's third step in the action plan was to appoint a covert intelligence force to serve as an intermediary between the United States and the opposition. The desired outcome of the intelligence intermediary was to provide constructive and reliable intel on the status of the Castro regime and the progress of the opposition force. The intermediary was also responsible for orchestrating the distribution of illegal, pro-opposition propaganda within the nation of Cuba. Finally, such an intelligence force would also recruit valuable individuals to join the opposition.

The last step in the process involved organizing a paramilitary training base for cadres to be prepped for deployment into Cuba. The goal of this unofficial, semi-militarized force would ultimately be to lead an insurrection in Cuba that would result in the overthrow of the Castro regime. The CIA began searching for locations outside the United States and Cuba which would be safe and undetectable sites for cadre training facilities. ¹²⁴ Thus, the CIA had bypassed economic strangulation tactics and moved more in the direction of military force.

In the spring of 1960, the State Department and the CIA's approaches to handling Cuba differed greatly. The State Department initiated cut throat economics, starting with a conversation of terminating the sugar quota, whereas the CIA designed a plan to combat the Cuban situation with military force. It would seem that the State Department in 1960 had not yet abandoned diplomacy and finesse as options for

¹²³ Central Intelligence Agency, "A Program of Covert Action Against the Castro Regime," 409.

¹²⁴ Central Intelligence Agency, "A Program of Covert Action Against the Castro Regime," 410.

settling the differences between two nations. The CIA on the other hand adopted Theodore Roosevelt's famous proverb: "Speak softly and carry a big stick."¹²⁵

Though the State Department and CIA's tactics were different, the two agencies still were aware of each other's plans and often made decisions together. By June of 1960 both the State Department and the CIA believed that it would be nearly impossible to have a friendly relationship with Cuba in the foreseeable future. They further both agreed that the situation in Cuba had to change and removing Castro from office was the best thing for the future of the relationship between the U.S. and Cuba.

The State Department, however, was not as aggressive as the CIA, and had not drafted any assassination plans or plans to overthrow the regime as of June 1960. Whereas the CIA had set plans in motion to overthrow the Castro regime. The State Departments opted for a more relaxed approach and argued that the United States government had to this point, minimally cooperated with the Cuban government, while offering enough cooperation to maintain the illusion to both American citizens and Cuban citizens, that trade relations were healthy. They also argued that they had made it a point to not silence Castro's anti-U.S. sentiments, lending him the opportunity to show his true colors to the rest of the world.¹²⁶ Therefore, the State Department aimed to make it appear as though Castro alone had sabotaged the relationship between the United States and Cuba, and the U.S. would come out looking like the victim.

¹²⁵ "1901: Big Stick Diplomacy," Caryl-Sue National Geographic Society, July 23, 2014, Accessed on October 11, 2018, <https://www.nationalgeographic.org/thisday/sep2/big-stick-diplomacy/>

¹²⁶ U.S. Department of State, "Memorandum from the Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs to the Secretary of State: United States Policies toward Cuba, Foreign Relations of the United States 1958-1960, 611.37/6-2760, Cuba, Volume VI, (Washington D.C.), June 27, 1960, 1.

It was in June of 1960 that the State Department became reasonably sure that Castro had indeed succumbed to the communists and was himself an undeclared communist. This observation helped to sway congress to set in motion an amendment of the sugar act, which included a clause on authorizing the president to cut the sugar quota for the remainder of 1960. The State Department was cautious in its discussions on cutting the sugar quota because the 1943 bilateral trade agreement between the United States and Cuba required a six-month notice for terminating the trade of any specific good. Terminating the agreement with disregard for the six-month notice could be a risky move because it would send the message to Cuba that the United States government refused to be fair. However, there was a way for the United States to elude the six-month notice obligation: by having the president declare a “state of emergency” and implement the Trading with the Enemy Act. This would immediately halt all trade between the two nations. The drawback of such a move is that it would be quite aggressive and also would commit the United States to labeling Cuba an official enemy. Identifying Cuba as an enemy prior to Castro declaring the nation communist could cause potential problems in the future and would cause the United States to appear quarrelsome, which is the opposite image the State Department was aiming to project.

The State Department anticipated that declaring a state of emergency or instituting the sugar amendment might cause Castro to retaliate by expropriating U.S. owned oil refineries, and sugar mills. If Castro chose to retaliate in this way, the State Department planned to urge other government officials and agencies to “refrain from any extreme overt retaliation, [this way] we would be the aggrieved party.”¹²⁷

¹²⁷ U.S. Department of State, *Memorandum from the Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs to the Secretary of State: United States Policies toward Cuba*, 2.

Secretary Anderson of the U.S. Treasury agreed that the United States should refrain from retaliation in the event Castro expropriated U.S. properties and businesses. However, he along with Secretary of State Christian Herter believed that the cut in the sugar quota alone would not solve anything and suggested “going all the way” and eliminating all trade with Cuba. He argued that eliminating the trade of one product at a time would allow Castro time to pick up the slack in between each economic blow. Thus, it would have little overall effect on the economy. Secretary Anderson argued that “Nibbling is no good; we should either take actions which will hurt or leave well enough alone.”¹²⁸ The State Department as a whole chose to neither implement solely the sugar amendment nor “go all the way”. Instead they opted for a plan that provided continuous economic blows in quick succession as to not allow Cuba the chance to recover between each act of economic sabotage. The State Department insisted that

It is important that the U.S. Government maintain its dignity and that any action which it may take should not be as a result of a stampede or panic; it should be, rather, a relentless, firm pressure, a steady turning of the screw, in a spirit of lamentation and sorrow rather than anger. . . we should try to use economic bullets rather than real ones.¹²⁹

On June 27, 1960, congress initiated the push to pass an amended sugar act including a passage which would allow President Eisenhower to eliminate the sugar quota all together. The U.S State Department’s assumptions were realized two days later, on June 29, 1960, when Fidel Castro nationalized all oil refineries owned by U.S.

¹²⁸ U.S. Department of State, *“Memorandum of a Conference, Department of State, Washington June 27, 1960: Questions Concerning the Program of Economic Pressures against Castro*, Foreign Relations of the United States 1958-1960, Lot 67 D 548, Cuba, Volume VI, (Washington D.C.), June 27, 1960, 2.

¹²⁹ U.S. Department of State, *“Memorandum of a Conference, Department of State, Washington June 27, 1960: Questions Concerning the Program of Economic Pressures against Castro*, 3.

companies which included Texaco, Shell and Esso.¹³⁰ This came earlier than anticipated. The State Department projected that Castro would expropriate American oil refineries *after* the sugar quota was cut. It appeared Fidel Castro was wasting no time and was aggressively perusing the goals of his revolution. The oil refineries, however, were only the tip of the iceberg. On July 5, 1950 Castro nationalized all U.S owned businesses and commercial property in Cuba.¹³¹ President Eisenhower then had no choice but to act.

One day after Castro nationalized the U.S. businesses, President Eisenhower declared the cut of the sugar quota. In numbers, this meant that the U.S. government officially declined to purchase 700,000 tons of sugar from Cuba in the 1960 calendar year. The United States government did not give Cuba a six-month notice and did not declare a state of emergency. Rather, the President cut the sugar quota disregarding any courtesies outlined in previous trade agreements, as a result of Castro's recent appropriations of U.S. businesses and property. The President stated:

Normally about one-third of our total sugar supply comes from Cuba. Despite every effort on our part to maintain traditionally friendly relations, the Government of Cuba is now following a course which raises serious questions as to whether the United States can, in the long run, continue to rely upon that country for such large quantities of sugar. I believe that we would fail in our obligation to our people if we did not take steps to reduce our reliance for a major food product upon a nation which has embarked upon a deliberate policy of hostility toward the United States.¹³²

The President continued by announcing that the U.S. would give their business to other countries on the world market to replace the 700,000 tons of sugar they

¹³⁰ Franklin, *Cuba and the U.S. Empire*, 26.

¹³¹ Franklin, *Cuba and the U.S. Empire*, 26.

¹³² Eisenhower, Dwight D., "The White House: Statement by the President," CIA General Files, (Washington D.C.), July 6, 1960, 3.

declined to purchase from Cuba. He further announced that the decision to cut the sugar quota was also influenced by the claim that Cuba had been trading with the Soviet Union and was using sugar as a currency. With that in mind the President was unsure how long Cuba would have been able to continue exporting sugar to the U.S. if they were shipping mass quantities to the Soviets. Thus, the President claimed he and fellow government officials including economic analysts were uncomfortable relying on Cuba because the United States would face a sugar shortage if Cuba were to run out of sugar. President Eisenhower closed his address by stating “The American people will always maintain their friendly feelings for the people of Cuba. We look forward to the day when the Cuban Government will once again allow this friendship to be fully expressed in the relations between our two countries.”¹³³ The President’s aspiration to reconcile with Cuba proved to be an unrealistic goal in the summer of 1960. Three days after Eisenhower cut the sugar quota, the Soviet Union emerged from behind their iron curtain to deliver a message to the United States.

On July 9, 1960 Nikita Khrushchev, the Soviet Premier announced “If necessary, Soviet artillery men can support the Cuban people with their rocket fire if aggressive forces dare to start an intervention against Cuba” and followed that statement by agreeing to purchase from Cuba, the 700,000 tons of sugar that was designated to be sold to the United States.¹³⁴ Che Guevara and Fidel Castro made statements regarding the Soviet embrace of their regime. Guevara boasted “Cuba today is a glorious island defended by the rockets of the greatest military power in history. . .We are practically the arbiters of world peace.” Fidel on the other hand used

¹³³ Eisenhower, “The White House: Statement by the President,” 3.

¹³⁴ Franklin, *Cuba and the U.S. Empire*, 26-27.

Khrushchev's statement to boast of the greatness of the Cuban people and their ideals. He stated, "Cuba does not depend for the defense of its sovereignty and independence on Soviet rockets, but rather on the reason and justice of its cause."¹³⁵

While the CIA estimated that many Cubans from the educated and elite class were opposed to the alliance with the Soviet Union, they argued that Cuba inched closer every day, to becoming a dictatorship run by communists. Finally, the CIA feared that Castro would put the good of the people second to his "greater ambition—humiliation of [the] U.S., wrecking of [the] inter-American system and eventual 'liberation' of all Latin America."¹³⁶

After Khrushchev's warning and subsequent comments by Cuban leaders, the CIA reported that these recent events "plunged US-Cuban relations into their most critical phase to date."¹³⁷ The CIA also feared that the recent events in Cuba had ignited a new fire in Castro's anti-American campaign and increased national support of the revolution. Furthermore, the CIA realized that cutting the sugar quota did not have the debilitating effect on the Cuban economy like the U.S. government had hoped. Instead, terminating the sugar quota only increased Cuba's dependency on the Soviet Union. Given the circumstances, the CIA believed that Castro was certainly more likely to sever all ties with the United States than he was to back down from the fight and restore relations.¹³⁸ Angered and frustrated, officials in the U.S. government sought to submit a complain to the United Nations and the Organization of American States suggesting that

¹³⁵ Central Intelligence Agency, NSC Briefing, 14 July 1960,1.

¹³⁶ Central Intelligence Agency, NSC Briefing, 3.

¹³⁷ Central Intelligence Agency, *Memorandum for the Director: Cuban Pot Boils Over*, (Washington, D.C.), July 15, 1960, 1.

¹³⁸ Central Intelligence Agency, *Memorandum for the Director: Cuban Pot Boils Over*, 3.

two agencies examine the current situation in Cuba. Such a move, however, would not produce any tangible results, and would likely aggravate Castro further. Therefore, the CIA decided it was time something be done to eliminate Castro.

In August of 1960 the CIA began taking measures to plan the assassination of Fidel Castro. The first plan, designed in early August, involved recruiting men from the American mafia and the criminal underworld assist in the planning. The man chosen was Robert Maheu, an ex-FBI agent who the CIA considered “tough enough” for the job. Robert Maheu asked the CIA if he could enlist the help of John Rosselli, a fellow American with Las Vegas underworld connections to assist him. The CIA obliged. With the help of the CIA Maheu and Rosselli began planning the assassination and recruited Cubans who opposed Castro to commit the official assassination. The assassination was to be executed by dropping a poisoned pill into Castro’s food or drink and was planned to be carried out in November of 1960. From 1960 to 1965 there were at least eight known attempts to assassinate Fidel Castro in which the CIA was involved. Besides the poisoned pills, there were also poisoned cigars, bacterial powders, a poisoned pen and attacks involving more traditional weapons such as guns.¹³⁹

In the meantime, while the CIA set in motion plans for an assassination, the rest of the U.S. government prepared for Fidel Castro’s arrival in New York for the United Nations conference in September of 1960. On September 26, Castro made a four-hour address to the United Nations. In his speech he covered the colonial history of Cuba up to Batista’s rule, retold the story of the revolution, and announced both the

¹³⁹ U.S. Congress, Senate, Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations, *Alleged Assassination Plots Involving Foreign Leaders*, 94th Cong., 1st sess, 1975, Rep 94-465, 71-79, <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP83-01042R000200090002-0.pdf>

economic and militaristic assaults on Cuba since he became the leader of the nation. He also went on to describe the ways in which the quality of life for Cubans had greatly improved since Batista's overthrow. Castro then opened his verbal onslaught of the United States with the following passage: "It has been proved that revolutions do not ruin countries, and that imperialist governments do try to ruin countries. Cuba had not been ruined; she therefore had to be ruined."¹⁴⁰ He then went on to deliver a play by play of the relationship between the United States and Cuba since he took the position of Prime Minister and began enacting new legislation for Cuba. When he arrived at the delicate topic of drafting trade agreements with the Soviet Union he stated, "We really did not have to ask permission from the State Department in order to sign a trade treaty with the Soviet Union, because we considered ourselves, and we continue to consider ourselves, and we will always consider ourselves, a truly independent and free country."¹⁴¹ In the rest of his speech he maneuvered through Cuba's position on other international issues like the 1960 status of the Congo and the Republic of China's admission into the United Nations. Finally, he ended his address by declaring Cuba's position on international politics and foreign relations: "We are, and always shall be for everything that is just: against colonialism, exploitation, monopolies, militarism, the armaments race, and warmongering. We shall always be against such things. That will be our position."¹⁴² It was with that statement that Castro exited the United Nations meeting and left home to Cuba two days later. Upon arriving home Castro was met with

¹⁴⁰ Fidel Castro, "Castro Denounces Imperialism and Colonialism at the United Nations, Washington, D.C.) September 26, 1960, Latin American Information Center, <http://lanic.utexas.edu/project/castro/db/1960/19600926.html>

¹⁴¹ Castro, "Castro Denounces Imperialism and Colonialism at the United Nations,"1.

¹⁴² Castro, "Castro Denounces Imperialism and Colonialism at the United Nations,"1.

more aerial bombs from the United States and in mid-October, he filed a formal complaint to the United Nations against the United States for aerial aggression.

From the CIA's perspective, Castro had become a bigger threat than ever. The CIA reported in October of 1960 that Cuba had received large arms shipments from the Soviet Union. Some of the specific items reported to have been delivered to Havana harbor were rocket arms, small electric plants, radar equipment, aircraft parts, bazookas, long-range reflectors and other small weapons.¹⁴³ Therefore, the plan to assassinate Castro was vitally important to the CIA in the fall of 1960. They had arranged for one hundred and fifty thousand dollars to be paid to the men who successfully delivered poisoned pills to Castro. The official plan was to get the poisoned pills to men within Cuba who had access to Castro and instruct them to contaminate Castro's food with the pills. The CIA reported that they insisted on using poisoned pills because they would not be able to convince anyone to accept the mission if they were mandated to use gunfire because their own chance of survival would have been slim. The plan to assassinate Castro in the fall of 1960 fell through because the CIA could not get their personnel and syndicates organized quickly enough to finish the job.¹⁴⁴ Therefore they waited in the wings for another opportunity.

The State Department on the other hand, again chose to not engage in violent acts against Cuba, but rather to initiate more economic attacks. The State Department drafted an action plan and presented it to President Eisenhower on October 13, 1960.

¹⁴³ Central Intelligence Agency, *Soviet Bloc Land Radar Equipment in Cuba as of October 1960*, CIA Princeton Collection, (Washington D.C.), October 2, 1960, 1.

¹⁴⁴ Central Intelligence Agency, *Summary of Facts Investigation of CIA Involvement in Plans to Assassinate Foreign Leaders*, Richard B Cheney Files at Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library. (Washington, D.C.) June 7, 1975.

The plan was to prohibit all U.S. exports to Cuba with the exception of medical supplies and staple food stuffs. Officials in the State Department did not believe that such embargo could end the Castro regime, but it would put added pressure on Cuban government officials. Additionally, it would not be categorized as an “intervention” so as not to initiate any military confrontation from the Soviet Union. There were a couple of cons associated with the State Departments proposed plan. First, the president was concerned with the reaction of other Latin American countries. Any that had strong communist movements would be disgruntled over the matter and the president hoped that they could justify the embargo well enough to avoid criticism. The second problem is that the President feared that the proposed embargo would appear to be an attack on the Cuban people, rather than an attempt to cripple the Castro regime.¹⁴⁵ The State Department did not want the Cuban people to feel abandoned, which is why they proposed to make exceptions for exports of medical supplies and staple foods. The President hoped he could frame the embargo in such a way that it would not cause violent retaliation from any party.

President Eisenhower enacted the partial embargo on U.S. exports to Cuba on October 19, 1960 and, in response, Castro nationalized the rest of American properties in Cuba on October 24, 1960.¹⁴⁶ In the weeks following the partial embargo, Cuba and the Soviet Union caught wind of a plan for the United States to invade Cuba and reported it to the United Nations. The United Nations responded by stating that Cuba’s charges against the United States were “monstrous distortions and downright

¹⁴⁵ U.S. Department of State, *Memorandum of a Conference with the President*, Foreign Relations of the United States 1958-1960, Cuba, Declassified Documents 601A, Cuba, Volume IV, Document 590. (Washington, D.C.), October 13, 1960,

¹⁴⁶ Franklin, *Cuba and the U.S. Empire*, 31-32.

falsehoods” and argued that the United States posed no threat to Cuba. It is curious that the United Nations believed that the United States posed no threat to Cuba because a vast amount of information on the impending Cuban invasion had been leaked from the U.S. government. Castro had received evidence from informants that the United States had organized training bases in Guatemala to prepare a Cuban opposition force for an invasion. The State Department was rattled by the intelligence leak and as a result proposed moving the trainings out of Guatemala and establishing training centers in the United States that could provide more security.¹⁴⁷ However, in late November of 1960, President elect John F. Kennedy was briefed on the official invasion plan of Cuba.

By the first week of December of 1960 the State Department received a dispatch from the Embassy in Cuba containing hard truths about the reality of the relationship between the United States and Cuba. Due to the contents of the dispatch the State Department came to terms with the fact that conciliation was not an option to solving the problems between the two nations. They also realized that time would not solve the problem because Cuba had not felt the sting of the economic blows because they received immediate economic support from the Soviet Union. Finally, the State Department believed that an armed invasion would not likely be successful because Castro has extended “government control over all aspects of the economic and social structure, [enacted] massive and skillful use of propaganda and drastically suppressed all individual liberties.”¹⁴⁸ In order for the United States to obtain a desired outcome in

¹⁴⁷ U.S. Department of State, *Memorandum from the Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs to the Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs*, Foreign Relations of the United States 1958-1960, Lot 62 D24, Cuba, Volume VI, Document 610, (Washington, D.C.), November 1960, 1.

¹⁴⁸ U.S. Department of State, *Despatch from the Embassy in Cuba to the Department of State*, Foreign Relations of the United States 1958-1960, Central Files, 611.37/12-560, Cuba, December 6, 1960 Volume VI, Document 616, 1.

Cuba, the government needed to pursue one of three options. The first was to negotiate a settlement with Cuba to meet the demands of each country. The second was to continue to observe the Cuban situation under the assumption that an opposition force will push for new policies in Cuba. The third option was for the United States to orchestrate the overthrow of Fidel Castro.¹⁴⁹

The State Department chose to go with the third option. This option aligned closely with the CIA's plan to invade Cuba, which had been in the works since the Spring of 1960. However, the State Department's approach to overthrowing the Castro regime was slightly different. The State Department laid out three steps to fulfilling the goal. The first was to further tighten economic sanctions against Cuba. Next, they would prepare and distribute massive amounts of Anti-Castro propaganda, followed by the termination of all diplomatic relations between the U.S. and Cuba. Lastly, the State department would encourage and strengthen the Cuban opposition force.¹⁵⁰ Their approach is still different from the CIA's because the CIA used a hands-on strategy and organized the official training of opposition forces, whereas the State Department opted for a hands-off approach acting as the opposition's glorified cheerleaders.

In mid-December of 1960 the State Department began having conversations about terminating diplomatic relations with Cuba. There were two unfortunate cons to breaking diplomatic ties. First was that the U.S. Embassy was valuable in forwarding intelligence on Cuba's military, economy, and policy changes to United States officials in Washington D.C. If relations ceased, the U.S. officials would not have as much access to Cuban intel and would instead have to rely mostly on anti-Castro informants.

¹⁴⁹ U.S. Department of State, *Despatch from the Embassy in Cuba to the Department of State*, 1.

¹⁵⁰ U.S. Department of State, *Despatch from the Embassy in Cuba to the Department of State*, 1.

Second was that American embassy in Cuba served as a physical symbol of the resistance to the Castro regime. A vacant embassy would send the message that the United States had given up the fight and had abandoned any anti-Castro Cubans still left on the island.

Despite the downsides, the State Department was easily persuaded to favor a break in diplomatic relations for a number of reasons. First, they realized that tighter policies had made it more difficult for the Embassy in Cuba to distribute information to Cuban citizens, thus the embassy did them little good in communicating to the people. Second, since Castro had nationalized all U.S. properties in Cuba, U.S. businesses had little influence over the decision to maintain diplomatic relations. Third, most of the anti-Castro Cubans had already left Cuba or had decided to leave in the coming months which meant that the U.S. had few friends left on the island. Finally, breaking diplomatic ties with Cuba would cause the United States less embarrassment in the long run because any U.S. backed invasion wouldn't be as ill-received by the rest of the world if the United States and Cuba had no diplomatic relationship.¹⁵¹ The year 1960 ended with diplomatic relations between the United States in Cuba still in-tact, but that was to be short lived.

¹⁵¹ U.S. Department of State, *Despatch from the Embassy in Cuba to the Department of State*, Foreign Relations of the United States 1958-1960, Central Files, 611. 37/12-1660, Cuba, Volume VI, , Document 623, (Washington, D.C.), December 16, 1960, 1.

Chapter 4

Kennedy, Castro, & Combat

Diplomatic relations between the United States and Cuba finally broke on January 3, 1961.¹⁵² This meant that the two countries would no longer have any formal dealings or communication and would not have government workers stationed in each other's nations. Therefore, the Kennedy administration had their work cut out for them because they would have no access to intel directly from Cuba and would have to strategically gather information from secret informants.

President-elect John F. Kennedy met with President Eisenhower on the eve of Kennedy's inauguration to discuss the Cuban situation. Eisenhower informed Castro that the United States had organized an opposition movement and band of cadres scheduled to invade Cuba with the intent of overthrowing the Castro regime. He detailed that the cadres were being trained in a remote facility in the interior of Guatemala and were on track to initiate an invasion in the spring of 1961. He urged Kennedy to pursue and accelerate the program and invasion plan. Finally, Eisenhower left Kennedy with his formidable opinion that the Castro administration could continue to exist in Cuba for long without becoming dangerous, possibly lethal to the United States.¹⁵³

During Kennedy's inaugural address, he tactfully stated his position on communism, the Soviet Union and Cuba, without directly calling upon certain groups or countries. He stated:

¹⁵² Franklin, *Cuba and the U.S. Empire*, 34.

¹⁵³ U.S. Department of State, *Editorial Note*, Foreign Relations of the United States 1961-1962, Volume X, FRC 65 A 3464, Cuba, Document 19, (Washington, D.C.) January 19, 1961, 1.

Let every other power know that this Hemisphere intends to remain the master of its own house. . . Finally, to those nations who would make themselves our adversary, we offer not a pledge but a request: that both sides begin anew the quest for peace, before the dark powers of destruction unleashed by science engulf all humanity in planned or accidental self-destruction.¹⁵⁴

In this passage, Kennedy pointed out that it was his goal to maintain democracy in the Western Hemisphere and to not let forces from the East creep in and take over his “house.” Kennedy essentially equates the United States with the entire Western Hemisphere. Thus, positioning the United States as the leader and policing agent of the Western Hemisphere. He then followed up by offering a proposal to work on mending relationships with enemy countries before the threat of nuclear war arises. Castro listened in as Kennedy delivered his proposal to “begin anew” with Cuba and Castro welcomed Kennedy’s proposal. He even went so far as to demobilize the Cuban militia because he assumed there was no longer a threat for a U.S. invasion.¹⁵⁵ To his dismay, Kennedy had not recalled the invasion plans and had not decelerated the invasion’s timeline.

The propaganda campaign in Cuba was still high on the list of priorities for the CIA and the National Security Council. They intensified their original plan of radio broadcasts and pamphlets as the main methods of propaganda distribution. The propaganda was meant primarily to encourage anti-Castro Cubans to stay confident and to encourage more people to join the fight against the Castro regime, especially in

¹⁵⁴ Kennedy, John F., “Inaugural Address,” John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, (Washington, D.C.), January 20, 1961. <https://www.jfklibrary.org/learn/about-jfk/historic-speeches/inaugural-address>

¹⁵⁵ Franklin, *Cuba and the U.S. Empire*, 37.

the months leading up to the invasion.¹⁵⁶ However, much of the distributed materials actually had the opposite effect. United States officials believed more of the propaganda than the Cubans, and many Cubans were rather offended by the propaganda because Castro had renewed historic nationalism in the people of Cuba. Therefore, many Cubans did not buy into the propaganda distributed by opposition groups or the United States. Much of the Invasion planned by the CIA was done so with CIA officials under the impression that there was opposition against Castro already brewing in the island.¹⁵⁷ In hindsight however, that was not the case.

By March of 1961 the CIA had an intricate plan laid out for anti-Castro forces to invade Cuba. They called the mission “Operation Zapata.” The invasion date was set for mid-April of 1961. The CIA chose Playa Girón, or the “Bay of Pigs” for numerous reasons. The first was that the landscape surrounding the coast was filled with mostly wetland, filled with bogs and swamp. This would make it a difficult location for Castro to defend because vehicles could not navigate through the terrain. The CIA also favored the Bay of Pigs over other locations because it was centrally located on the island. This was beneficial because if the opposition was victorious, a central location such as the Bay of Pigs was an ideal epicenter from which anti-Castro sentiments to spread throughout the island. Lastly, the Bay of Pigs offered multiple landing zones for aircrafts. There were two landing strips nearby and a few strips of beach that could serve as landing strips if needed.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁶ Taylor Commission, *Propaganda Action Plan in Support of Military Action Plan*, National Security Archive, November 1960-May 1961, (Washington, D.C.) undated, 1.

¹⁵⁷ Pérez, *Cuba and the United States*, 249

¹⁵⁸ Central Intelligence Agency, *Revised Cuba Operation*, Kennedy Library, National Security Files, (Washington, D.C.) March 15, 1961, 2.

The time of the initial landing was planned to be at night as to allow the most time for unloading supplies before being discovered by Castro's militia. The assault of Castro's air force was to begin the following morning. After Castro's air force was destroyed, the CIA's next step was to move the command ships into the harbor of the bay. They estimated that within seventy-two hours of the initial attack, the fighting would cease, and the U.S. could set up a provisional government at Playa Girón.¹⁵⁹

The Department of Defense evaluated the plan proposed by the CIA and pointed out potential disadvantages of the mission. First, the Chiefs of Staff identified that the landing strips surrounding Playa Girón were inadequate for B-26 planes. Second, there was no air operations base factored into the plan therefore, anticipating oncoming air attacks from Castro's forces would be difficult and nearly impossible. Third, they argued that it would be difficult for amateur pilots with minimal training to navigate at night and successfully execute a landing.¹⁶⁰ However, though there were risks and disadvantages to the plan, it was the best plan the U.S. Government had. Thus, they pursued it and continued to prepare for the invasion, which was only one month away.

Only five short days before the attack, the President's special assistant Arthur Schlesinger reported to the president, his concerns about the operation and what it would mean for the United States—win or lose. He encouraged Kennedy to stall the invasion so there was more time to adequately plan. He was concerned that the

¹⁵⁹ Central Intelligence Agency, *Revised Cuba Operation*, 3.

¹⁶⁰ Department of Defense, *Memorandum from Joint Chiefs of Staff to Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara: Evaluation of the Military Aspects of Alternative Concepts, CIA Para-military Plan, Cuba (S), Foreign Relations of the United States 1961-1962, Volume X, JCSM 166-61, Document 62, (Washington, D.C.), March 15, 1961.*

planning, beyond the initial attack, was lacking critical elements. He suggested including political, diplomatic and economic plans which could be set in motion after the provisional government was established, and such plans should be drafted by May 1, 1961. The absence of these plans would likely cause much confrontation from revolutionary Cubans, and much criticism from the world. He went on to say such a forceful invasion should only be initiated if Cuba presented a “demonstrable and convincing” threat to U.S. national security, which Schlesinger was skeptical about. He reported:

A great many people simply do not at this moment see that Cuba presents so grave and compelling a threat to our national security as to justify a course of action which much of the world will interpret as calculated aggression against a small nation in defiance both of treaty obligations and of the international standards we have repeatedly asserted against the Communist world.¹⁶¹

Thus, Schlesinger suggested to president Kennedy, that the United States government would appear hypocritical if they invaded Cuba because they so intensely criticized communist nations for violations of international standards. He was immensely concerned about the image of the United States and the image of the Kennedy administration. He additionally pointed out that Kennedy had changed the way Americans thought about government and had impacted foreign relations in a positive way. Further he described the government under Kennedy as one that has emerged “again as a great, mature and liberal nation, coolly and intelligently dedicated to the job of stopping Communism, strengthening the free and neutral nations and working for

¹⁶¹ Schlesinger, Arthur, *Memorandum from the President's Special Assistant to President Kennedy: Cuba: Political, Diplomatic and Economic Problems*, Kennedy Library, National Security Files 1/61-4/61, (Washington, D.C.), April 10, 1961.

peace.”¹⁶² In order to preserve the positive image of the Kennedy administration and of the U.S. as a whole, Schlesinger urged Kennedy to reconsider Operation Zapata and encouraged him to objectively weigh the pros and cons of pursuing the invasion. Finally, he added “people will assume that our action is provoked by a threat to something other than our security. . . they will assume that we are acting, not to protect our safety, but to protect our property and investments.”¹⁶³

Schlesinger was not alone in his concerns and was also not alone in his opinion that Operation Zapata should be reconsidered. Undersecretary of State Chester Bowles believed that U.S. national interests would not benefit from a cover operation like the one the CIA planned against Cuba. He suggested that the world’s opinion of Kennedy was too high to jeopardize over an operation from which he suggested there was little to gain. Bowles also brought up another point made by Schlesinger: the hypocrisy of it all. He cited the Act of Bogota, signed in September of 1960 in the Organization of American States agreements. It stated:

No State or group of States has the right to intervene, directly or indirectly, for any reason whatever, in the internal or external affairs of any other State. The foregoing principle prohibits not only armed force but also any other form of interference or attempted threat against the personality of the State or against its political, economic and cultural elements.¹⁶⁴

Therefore, Bowles, of the U.S. State Department, argued that the United States should keep to its word and keep out of Cuba. It would be difficult to condemn the communists

¹⁶² Schlesinger, Arthur, *Memorandum from the President’s Special Assistant to President Kennedy*, 1.

¹⁶³ Schlesinger, Arthur, *Memorandum from the President’s Special Assistant to President Kennedy*, 1.

¹⁶⁴ U.S. Department of State, *Memorandum from Undersecretary of State to Secretary of State Rusk*, Foreign Relations of the United States 1961-1962, Volume X, Document 31, (Washington, D.C.), March 1961.

for building empires, if the United States were invading countries who arguably posed little threat to U.S. national security. He commented on how treaty conditions should be recognized as binding law, and that President Kennedy had garnered much world support by being a man of principle.

Other members of the State Department such as Assistant Secretary of State Thomas Mann opposed the invasion. Mann was skeptical about the invasion and suggested that garnering enough support for an uprising against the Castro regime was an unrealistic goal because Castro had already garnered the support of most Cubans on the Island. Many government officials underestimated how many Cubans truly supported Castro.¹⁶⁵ In addition to Mann, Senator J. William Fulbright made the comment that “The Castro regime is a thorn in the flesh, but it is not a dagger to the heart.”¹⁶⁶ Therefore Fulbright viewed Cuba as more of an annoyance than a violent country posing a threat to the United States.

It is apparent that U.S. government officials had differing opinions on whether or not to invade Cuba. Allen Dulles and the CIA were neck deep in their invasion plans and were committed to act on them, while other government officials offered several reasons to abandon the mission. Nonetheless, it appears that no government officials opposed the mission because they believed it was *wrong* to invade Cuba but were instead worried that the invasion would end in failure or that the reputation of the United States would be tarnished as a result of the coup.

From the time Castro took over Cuba, the State Department and the CIA had differing opinions on how the new revolutionary regime should be handled. The State

¹⁶⁵ Pérez, Louis A. *Cuba and the United States: Ties of Singular Intimacy*, 249.

¹⁶⁶ Schoultz, *That Infernal Little Cuban Republic*, 153.

Department erred on the side of caution and aimed to solve issues between the United States and Cuba diplomatically, rather than using methods of aggression such as an invasion. In contrast, the CIA began planning Operation Zapata during the Eisenhower administration, before Castro nationalized U.S. oil refineries, before Castro nationalized all U.S. businesses, and before Cuba established concrete sugar trade agreements with the Soviet Union. CIA Director Allen Dulles was consumed by the task of containing communism and determined the timing of Castro publicly declaring himself a communist to be irrelevant because Dulles insisted Castro's regime was flooded with communist underpinnings all along.¹⁶⁷ Therefore Dulles believed that communism existed in Cuba, regardless of whether or not the leader of the movement was a declared communist.

These facts illustrate that the CIA's decision to overthrow the Castro regime was made prior to the occurrence of many serious points of contention between the United States and Cuba throughout 1960. Thus, the decision to invade was based on the presumption of communism and the threat that a full communist takeover of Cuba would result in a loss of profit for the United States. Therefore, the CIA felt the need to "nip it in the bud" and overthrow Castro before he had the chance to strip the United States of its investments in Cuba. Dulles had a "do onto others *before* they do it to you" mentality. The CIA thus favored military coup, rather than a diplomatic avenue from the start and by April of 1961 their plan was ready to be set in action. The attempts made by the State Department and other government officials to stall or stop the invasion were ineffective, as the CIA decided not to recall their plan to invade Cuba. Therefore, the

¹⁶⁷ Schoultz, *That Infernal Little Cuban Republic*, 562.

CIA made their final adjustments to the plan, and prepared the opposition force for battle.

The invasion officially began on April 15, 1961. The opposition arrived in the night and staged a series of air attacks on Cuban military targets. The goal in beginning the invasion with an air attack was to destroy military equipment and arms in hopes that Castro and his revolutionary militia would not be able to adequately fend off the attack. The CIA logically presumed that if Cuban planes were destroyed, it would be more difficult for the Cuban revolutionaries to defend themselves against an assault from opposition forces. However, Cuba's military equipment withstood the attack and Castro's aircrafts, his most valuable weapons, emerged unscathed. ¹⁶⁸

Arguably one of the devastating mistakes of the ground invasion was that the Cuban exiles waited two days after the airstrike to begin their attack on land. Because Castro's air force was not destroyed by the initial air attack, the two-day lull gave Castro's forces time to organize and respond. Therefore, on the night of April 17, 1961 when the opposition made their land attack and converged on Playa Girón, the Cuban revolutionaries were ready to strike back. Regardless of the odds, the opposition fought valiantly and trekked inland for two days, taking constant abuse from Castro's tanks and heavy artillery. By the end of the day on April 19, 1961 Castro's forces had pushed the opposition back to Playa Girón, the beach from which they attacked. The command ships stationed in the harbor sent many messages to the CIA communicating that they needed help, were out of ammunition, and were quickly running out of manpower. The

¹⁶⁸ Amaury Murgado, "The Bay of Pigs Invasion: A Case Study in Foreign Policy Decision-making," University of Central Florida Master's Thesis, 2009, 43.
<http://stars.library.ucf.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=5117&context=etd>

troops repeatedly begged for help from the United States government and their pleas went unanswered by President Kennedy who declined to admit the United States had any involvement in the plot to invade Cuba.

The command ships stationed in the harbor sent one final message to the CIA before being destroyed by an assault from Castro's air force. That message was "Castro is waiting on the beach."¹⁶⁹ With that, the opposition's command ships were destroyed, their extra ammunition, arms and other materials were sunk in the bay, and their fight was in its final hour. At that point, the practicality of a successful completion of the mission declined quickly and Castro's forces easily defeated the opposition, resulting in an embarrassing defeat for the anti-Castro invaders.¹⁷⁰

Another interestingly weak point of the invasion was that the United States anticipated that anti-Castro Cubans would join the fight against the revolutionary militias, and that Cubans who previously supported Castro would be enlightened by the democratic beliefs of the opposition and turn against the revolution. However, the CIA misjudged how committed the majority of Cubans were to the revolution. Thus, the revolutionaries would likely fight harder to defend their territory against invaders. Second, the Cubans who were opposed to the Castro regime were not likely to come forward and join the fight because of their faith in the United States military. Many Cubans who supported the U.S. believed that the U.S in all of its military glory could and would overthrow the regime with little effort. Therefore, they could not justify fighting in the battle themselves.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁹ Schoultz, *That Infernal Little Cuban Republic*, 143.

¹⁷⁰ Murgado, "The Bay of Pigs Invasion: A Case Study in Foreign Policy Decision-making," 44.

¹⁷¹ Pérez, Louis A. *Cuba and the United States: Ties of Singular Intimacy*, 249-250.

After the dust had settled at Playa Girón, Fidel Castro once again approached the podium to address the Cuban people and debrief the recent battle. Castro explained how the United States' plan to destabilize Cuba had come in three stages. The U.S. had first used tactics of economic aggression, followed by acts of "terrorism" in the form of bombs over the cane fields, and had come to a head with direct aggression in the form of an invasion of Cuba. Castro spoke about Kennedy in a disappointed yet strong manner. He stated:

We awaited his inauguration to see if he would do something different. We did not believe that he would continue with the errors of the previous administration. He himself said: "Let us begin anew." He did not begin anew; he began as of old. He not only followed the policy of Eisenhower, but he was even more aggressive against us. This gentleman has brought this problem on himself, through his lack of common sense. He has earned this discredit all by himself. While we waited for him to show what policy he was going to follow, he increased the attacks against us. He increased in intensity the aggression against our country. ¹⁷²

After Cuba declared itself communist, and the Bay of Pigs invasion failed, President Kennedy took full responsibility for the failure. The newly appointed Secretary of State, Dean Rusk, was disheartened by the failure and stated that the events at Playa Girón were "one hell of a way to close out my first hundred days as Secretary of State."¹⁷³ Shortly after the Bay of Pigs invasion, Kennedy organized a group of men to debrief the operation and investigate what could have been done to make the invasion more effective. The men assigned to the commission were Maxwell Taylor, Robert Kennedy, Allen Dulles, and Arleigh Burke. The commission investigated the shortcomings of the invasion and drew the conclusion that a special strategic committee was

¹⁷² Fidel Castro, "Castro Denounces U.S. Aggression," (Havana, Cuba), April 13, 1961, Latin American Network Information Center, <http://lanic.utexas.edu/project/castro/db/1961/19610423.html>

¹⁷³ Schoultz, *That Infernal Little Cuban Republic*, 143.

needed in order to stage future invasions like the Bay of Pigs. The commission also reported to the president that they believed the United States was losing the Cold War on all fronts and the only way to combat that is to unite all of the forces within the executive branch and work together against U.S. enemies.¹⁷⁴

The United States was indeed losing ground in the Cold War, or at least failing to contain the spread of Communism. On May 2, 1961, Fidel Castro declared Cuba a communist nation and set an agenda to being drafting a new socialist constitution for Cuba. In addition to the socialist constitution, Castro argued that the people of Cuba did not have time for elections because they were too busy fighting off North American imperialists. He added that Cuba had no used for political parties other than the revolutionary party because the presence of multiple political parties in Cuba was “Just an expression of class interests.” He further argued “Here there is just one class, the humble; that class is in power and so it is not interested in the ambition of an exploiting minority to get back in power. Those people would have no chance at all in an election.” He closed the discussion on open elections by stating “The revolution has no time to waste in such foolishness.”¹⁷⁵

The U.S. government responded to the recent events in Cuba with a new plan of how to proceed. The department of State provided two options for dealing with Cuba. The first was the immediate elimination of Fidel Castro. The second was a long-term isolation and containment plan which would ideally lead to an uprising by the Cuban people. The State Department favored option two. The first step in their action plan was

¹⁷⁴ Maxwell D. Taylor, “Letter to President Kennedy” in Official Report of the Bay of Pigs Invasion, (Washington, D.C.), June 13, 1961.

¹⁷⁵ Fidel, “Castro Proclaims Socialist Cuba,” (Havana, Cuba) May 2, 1961. Latin American Network Information Center, <http://lanic.utexas.edu/project/castro/1961/>.

to initiate an “Alliance for Progress” which was an organization meant to foster cooperation between the United States and Latin American countries. By developing this organization, it would strengthen the relationship with the U.S. and Latin America while pushing Cuba into the dark and isolating it from the rest of Latin America.

The second step was to construct a new façade for the United States. The State Department wanted Cuba and the world to believe that the U.S had abandoned the idea of an intervention and did not mean any harm. They further wanted their audience to believe that the United States number one objective in the Cuban dilemma was to see the Cuban people freed from oppression by Castro and from Soviet domination. To reach their goals, it became more apparent to the State Department that the United States should apply the “Trading with the Enemy Act” to Cuba, which would gradually reduce the few exports the United States sold to Cuba in 1961 such as food stuffs and medical supplies.

Lastly, the State Department suggested that the United States train freedom fighters to initiate a counter-revolutionary movement within Cuba itself. In order to accomplish this however, government agencies needed to get more intel. If the United States were to again invade Cuba, the State Department declared that it would be on overt operation and the United States would no longer hide behind the mask of a Cuban opposition force.¹⁷⁶

Months after the State Department devised their updated plan, the CIA began working on a new operation: Operation Mongoose. Chester Bowles of the State

¹⁷⁶ U.S. Department of State, *Paper Prepared for the National Security Council by Director of the Department of State Operations Center: Plan for Cuba*. Foreign Relations of the United States 1961-1962, Volume X, Lot 62 D1. (Washington, D.C.) April 17, 1962, 1.

Department suggested that Operation Mongoose was a “higher-level failure” than the Bay of Pigs invasion, meaning it would have greater repercussions in the event of failure on the part of the United States.¹⁷⁷ The basics of Operation Mongoose were quite similar to the plan designed by the State Department. The goal was to initiate a rebellion against Castro resulting in a revolt of the Cuban people against the Castro regime.

The first step in the Operation Mongoose was to establish a democratic political movement in Cuba. The political movement would then be coupled with economic sabotage, and psychological warfare to turn Castro’s people against him. One of the major economic blows in Operation Mongoose was when Kennedy instated a full economic embargo against Cuba in February of 1962.¹⁷⁸ The embargo has remained the symbol of U.S. hostility toward Cuba.

Robert F. Kennedy was appointed by John F. Kennedy to spearhead the CIA’s Operation Mongoose. After the economic embargo, Operation Mongoose quickly turned from destabilizing the Cuban economy, political atmosphere, and regime to another assassination attempt of Fidel Castro. There were several assassination attempts that stemmed from Operation Mongoose. Some of which were exploding conch shells, poisoned pens, sniper rifles, and the ever-creative fungus-infected scuba gear to be given as gift to Castro.¹⁷⁹ It is unconfirmed whether John F. Kennedy and Robert F. Kennedy knew about or approved of the assassination plans, or whether the CIA acted

¹⁷⁷ Schoultz, *That Infernal Little Cuban Republic*, 175-177.

¹⁷⁸ Leogrande, *Back Channel to Cuba*, 43.

¹⁷⁹ Leogrande, *Back Channel to Cuba*, 2.

alone. However, it is likely that the late President and his brother were somehow involved.

The CIA therefore continued their pattern of hostility toward Cuba throughout much of the Kennedy administration, while the State Department allowed events to unfold and veered away from using force. However, though the CIA and the State Department had different approaches in dealing with Fidel Castro and his nation, none of the strategies were effective. Cuba combatted the economic blows with Soviet trade agreements and combatted the physical invasion using strategies similar to those the revolutionaries had used to come to power in the first place.

Chapter 5

At the Brink and Beyond

The year 1962 was the point of no return for the United States and Cuba. All the past issues came to a head during the Cuban Missile Crisis. Kennedy was first informed about the missiles on October 14, 1962 after a U-2 spy plane completed a six-minute fly over of the island and captured photographs of a nuclear missile site. The CIA and the president kept the information secret until the issue was better investigated as not to panic the American people.¹⁸⁰

It was alarming for the president and government officials who were in the know, because nuclear weapons were the most destructive and powerful weapons in the world. After the second world war, officials tried desperately keep the United States the exclusive global owner of nuclear technology. The Soviet Union quickly developed nuclear weapons of their own and were then a major threat to the United States. However, the Soviet Union did not possess missiles that were in range of targeting the United States with an attack until they placed missiles in Cuba in the fall of 1962. The United States saw this as an act of aggression both on the part of the Soviet Union and on the part of Cuba. The result of a nuclear attack from missiles launched in Cuba would be devastating to the United States. If attacked, the United States would have presumably retaliated with equal force. The result of such an exchange may have

¹⁸⁰ Office of the Historian, *Transcript of a Meeting at the White House*, Foreign Relations of the United States 1961-1962, Volume XI, Cuban Missile Crisis and Aftermath, Document 16. Kennedy Library, President's Office Files, (Washington, D.C.), October 16, 1962.

resulted in mutually assured destruction for both the United States and the Soviet Union.

While Kennedy contemplated what to make of his newly acquired information, Khrushchev sent a telegram to the United States asking why Kennedy was so afraid of Cuba. He argued that the United States was such a prominent and powerful nation that it should never realistically fear a small island such as Cuba.¹⁸¹ However, it was not necessarily Cuba that the United States feared, but rather, their alliance with the Soviet bloc.

Khrushchev further maintained that two great nations such as the Soviet Union and the United States should be reasonable and should not push around small countries and force them to adhere to the same values and same style of government as the larger power. He pointed out that the Soviet Union would never agree with capitalism just as America would never agree with communism. He further suggested for both countries to not interfere with the internal affairs of smaller countries and for the United States and the Soviet Union to live in relative peace.¹⁸² Khrushchev may have strategically staged this telegram because he knew that if U.S. officials had not already discovered the Soviet missiles in Cuba, they soon would. This conversation then could be used as leverage to argue that the Soviet Union did not aim to militarily harm the United States, but simply level the playing field, as the United States had a missile base in Turkey.

¹⁸¹ U.S. Department of State, *Telegram from the Embassy in the Soviet Union to the Department of State, Moscow*. Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963, Volume XI, Central Files, 611.3722/10-1662. (Washington, D.C.), October 16, 1962

¹⁸² U.S. Department of State, *Telegram from the Embassy in the Soviet Union to the Department of State, Moscow*. 1962

By October 19, 1962, the CIA had produced a special national intelligence estimate on the missiles in Cuba. The CIA suggested that the Soviet Union installed the missiles in Cuba so they could use them as a bargaining chip. More specifically, the CIA anticipated that the Soviet Union would offer to trade Cuba for Berlin. Berlin was much more valuable to the Soviet Union both because it was geographically closer to the Soviet Union, and because the Soviet Union already controlled the eastern half of Berlin. Therefore, in the event of a trade, Berlin would be consolidated under Soviet rule. Cuba, on the other hand was closer to the United States, and the U.S. had been invested in the territory for decades. To the Soviets, trading Berlin for Cuba seemed like a win-win. The United States, however, did not see it that way and the CIA reported that the United States government would decline any offer to trade the two territories.

The CIA's national intelligence report stated that if the United States allowed the missile build-up to continue in Cuba, it would give momentum to the global communist movement. It would open the door for other communist countries to welcome the construction of missile bases in their counties. Furthermore, the CIA argued if the United States tolerated the presence of missiles in Cuba, it would cause the world to question why and make the United States appear weak and defeated by the communists. Therefore, the CIA thought it necessary to stage an attack on Cuba in order to forcibly remove the missiles from the island. The CIA thought it would be more effective to launch a surprise attack rather than to send a warning to Khrushchev or Castro. The CIA anticipated that the United States would have a better chance of victory, if the enemy were not expecting the attack.¹⁸³

¹⁸³ Central Intelligence Agency, *Special National Intelligence Estimate*, Foreign Relations of the United States 1962-1963, Volume XI, Cuba Document 32, (Washington, D.C.), October 19, 1962.

While the CIA discussed an attack on Cuba, Secretary of State Dean Rusk presented a different strategy. Rusk suggested that the United States establish a quarantine zone in the international waters surrounding Cuba. This quarantine zone would serve as a blockade, guarding the Cuban ports from receiving any materials from the Soviet Union meant to contribute to the construction of the missiles on the island. The blockade would ensure that the missile construction was halted while the United States and the Soviet Union sorted out the situation. The State Department, like other government agencies, was desperate to remove missiles from the island, however, the State Department opposed an invasion or an attack as a means to reach that end.¹⁸⁴ After the CIA's last invasion failed miserably, Kennedy thought it wise to go with the State Department's recommendation and stage a blockade of naval ships around the island. This way, Kennedy could be sure that the work on the missile was halted.¹⁸⁵

Negotiations between Kennedy and Khrushchev continued for thirteen days. Many Americans considered those to be some of the most stressful days the world had ever seen. Americans were preparing for nuclear war like never before. They were stocking their bomb shelters with canned goods and drinking water. People across the nation understood that one wrong move on the part of either party could have been catastrophic for the world. On October 28, 1962 Khrushchev sent a message to president Kennedy proposing that if the United States agreed to not invade Cuba, then the Soviet Union would remove their missiles from the island. The Soviet Union also requested that the United States remove their missiles from Turkey. President Kennedy

¹⁸⁴ Rusk, Dean. *Telegram from the Department of State to the Embassy in the United Kingdom*, Foreign Relations of the United States, Cuba, Volume XI, (Washington, D.C.) October 22, 1962.

¹⁸⁵ Stephen Cimbala, *Military Persuasion: Deterrence and Provocation in Crisis and War*, (University Park: Penn State Press), 2010.

initially agreed to only the first term, thus ruling out any future Cuban invasions.

Kennedy however took an additional two days to think over the request to remove American missiles from Turkey. In the final days of October 1963, the two countries signed nuclear treaties and agreed to establish a hot line between Washington and Moscow in hopes that future conflicts could be handled with more ease.¹⁸⁶

The CIA, however, could not let the idea of a physical invasion go. John McCone, CIA director and other officials tried desperately to keep President Kennedy from signing the agreement with the Soviet Union which banned the United States from invading Cuba.¹⁸⁷ They could not let an opportunity for redemption of their failure at Playa Girón slip away. To the CIA's dismay, the president did indeed sign the agreement, which halted all plans of a Cuba invasion from the CIA. Their attempt to hinder Kennedy from signing away their last hope of victory suggests that the CIA valued the possibility of a future invasion of Cuba more than settling one of the most stressful situations of the twentieth century.

The end of the missile crisis also brought about the end of Operation Mongoose. With the hope of a military invasion of Cuba off the table and the full economic embargo already established, there was hardly a purpose to pursue the operation further. Furthermore, Operation Mongoose was designed more for circumstances in which Fidel Castro was hostile to the United States. Operation Mongoose was even less useful after the State Department reported that Castro had made comments, after the missile crisis, alluding to a possible truce between the U.S. and Cuba. His change of heart may have stemmed from his understanding of how close

¹⁸⁶ Franklin, *Cuba and the U.S. Empire*, 60.

¹⁸⁷ Leogrande, *Back Channel to Cuba*, 59.

Cuba had come to being nothing more than a bargaining chip to the Soviet Union. As a result of his epiphany, Castro attempted to slowly decrease his dependence on Soviet supplies and the USSR as a whole. The State Department entertained his request, as they had a reputation for favoring discourse over militancy.¹⁸⁸ The conflict between the United States and Cuba was long from over and Castro was never able to reconcile with the U.S. leaders. Agencies maintained their same strategies for dealing with Cuba as they had from the beginning.

The State Department's willingness to hear Castro's request and engage in a discussion of his proposal demonstrates how the State Department kept to the same strategy they proposed when Castro took office: to open the floor for discussion before pursuing physical violence. Likewise, after the Bay of Pigs invasion and the missile crisis, the CIA also did not veer from their original approach to the matter of Cuban affairs and favored a militant response to the recent events in Cuba. They were and had always been prepared to march into Cuba, armed and dangerous. These two agencies had many decades to continue conjuring new ideas for foreign policy in regard to Cuba, because Cuba prevailed, and was a thorn in the side of the United States for years to come. The tension between the countries was so great that even when the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, the United States still maintained the embargo against Cuba.

Historians refer to the beginning of the 1990's in Cuba as the "Special Period." This was a prolonged period in which Cuba suffered a devastating socioeconomic collapse. The Cuban people were nearly starving and the government at times did not have enough revenue to keep the electricity on in the Capital, let alone more remote

¹⁸⁸ Leogrande, *Back Channel to Cuba*, 59-60.

areas of the island. During the Special Period, government officials made the executive decision to conserve what little energy they had during the economic collapse and turn on the public electric meters only during the day, so businesses could stay up and running.

In the special period, the people living on the rural farms were mostly untouched by the poverty that had devastated urban areas. This is widely due to the fact that people living in rural areas whose livelihood came from agriculture were able to grow their own food and butcher their own animals. They did not rely on imports from superpowers like the United States or the Soviet Union. The people living in the urban areas were the ones who struggled most. Citizens who had worked in offices or in factories their whole lives could not feed themselves because they lacked the skills and space to plant crops. Cuba developed an interesting system to combat the issue of starvation. They created urban farms. City dwelling Cubans transformed vacant lots in Havana, Santiago de Cuba, and other cities into large scale community gardens.¹⁸⁹

Because the economy was suffering many people simply did not have the funds to purchase items on the urban farms and thus the farms began allowing bartering and trading. Whole neighborhoods banded together to fulfill each other's needs. The urban farms were one way Cuba was able to survive after the collapse of the Soviet Union when American Presidents refused to reestablish trade with Cuba.

One could argue that the Special Period in Cuba was a golden opportunity for the United States to reestablish dominance in the region. With Cuba struggling, they may have been more likely to cooperate with U.S policies. The opportunity in Cuba for

¹⁸⁹ Salcines, Isis M. "Presentation and Tour of Farm," Organoponico Vivero Alamar, Havana, Cuba, 2016.

foreign business investments was at an all-time high, yet U.S. presidents during this period did not attempt to Capitalize on Cuba's misfortune. This could be widely due to the fact that in order to establish agreements with another country, it was necessary to have a diplomatic relationship with that country. Some argue that the United States declined to recommence their diplomatic relationship with Cuba, because it would have symbolized victory for the revolution. Further it would have represented a flawed and weak United States. It would have been an example of how communism could trump democracy.¹⁹⁰ Therefore, the United States government may have avoided reestablishing a relationship with Cuba in order to protect its reputation and prominent world status.

The decades passed and yet the United States never was able to overthrow or assassinate Fidel Castro. In fact, at the summit of Latin American Presidents gathering in 2006 Castro stated "I'm really happy to reach 80. I never expected it, not least having a neighbor, the greatest power in the world, trying to kill me everyday."¹⁹¹ Lars Schoultz was right in the sense that Castro would certainly die in Cuba before he would be overthrown. Castro passed the presidency on to his younger brother Raul Castro in 2006 due to old age and illness.

Fidel Castro died on November 25, 2016. He was 90 years old. The world opinion of Castro's death was quite mixed. The Cubans in Cuba mourned, while the Cubans in Miami celebrated. U.S. officials waited patiently to see what would come after Castro's death and if a turbulent page of history had finally turned. Though Fidel

¹⁹⁰ Pérez, *Cuba and the United States*, 258.

¹⁹¹ Post, Jerrold M. *Narcissism and Politics: Dreams of Glory*, (New York: Cambridge University Press.) 2014.

Castro's death was not synonymous with the death of the Castro regime, it was certainly symbolic. It was a symbol of success for the Cuban people, a symbol of perseverance for other suppressed nations, and it was a symbol of failure to the United States government.

For many, Fidel Castro was the revolution. Therefore, his peaceful death was a symbol of victory for Cuba because he was never brought to his knees by an imperialist power. He never was assassinated despite all the U.S. officials' attempts to do so, and he was never overthrown from by an internal rebellion. Because many Cubans view Castro as the physical representation of the revolution, these facts applied to Cuba as well. Revolutionary Cuba was never dominated by an imperialist power. After the Bay of Pigs invasion, it was never again attacked violently by the United States and the revolution was never seriously challenged by anti-Castro rebellion. Castro's death was mourned by many Cubans. Yet the symbolism of his peaceful death could also have given his supporters hope and confidence for the future of the regime.

Other nations were also watching the Cuban revolution unfold. In fact, one of the biggest worries of U.S. officials after 1959 was that Castro would export his revolution and try to help other Latin American countries to establish revolutionary movements. Therefore, the fact that Castro was never assassinated by and was able to keep his revolution going for decades was inspiring for onlookers. Castro's death served a symbol of perseverance to other suppressed nations.

The United States government, on the other hand, was dismayed by the fact that Castro was never taken out. He slipped through their fingers and despite their best efforts, there was nothing that could be done about it. Thus, Castro's peaceful death in

Havana represented total failure for the United States. The whole Cuban Revolution was a disappointment for the United States. It was the first time the United States had ever been embarrassed by a country so small in physical size and in the arena of global power. The United States had triumphed in the World Wars and was idolized by the rest of the world as an undefeatable heroic force. However, the undefeatable heroic force that was the United States was outmaneuvered by a country it used to dominate. Cuba was only the first of several similar embarrassments of the twentieth century. It is evident that U.S. government officials did not learn from their undesirable encounters with Cuba.

Conclusion

Cuba had an unfortunate hand dealt to it from the start. It had many positive attributes like the fertile land, the ideal climate, and its perfectly situated geographic locations. However, all of the positive attributes were also the cause of most of Cuba's problems. Larger, more powerful nations preyed upon Cuba so that they too could have access to such resources. Nations like Spain, United States, and the Soviet Union used Cuba to propel their own interests and the latter two abandoned Cuba when there was nothing left to gain from the small island.

After Castro nationalized U.S. businesses, the executive leaders placed an embargo on Cuba. Cuba then became invisible to the United States in the realm of global trade from that moment on. Cuba was similarly abandoned by the Soviet Union during its collapse. The Soviet Union had nothing more to offer to Cuba, and thus stopped sending supplies and ended trade as the Soviet bloc came crashing down. Cuba, therefore, has historically never gotten along with superpowers.

However, in the grand scheme of things, Cuba has prevailed. Things might have turned out differently had Castro not overthrown Batista, but the facts remain. Castro did overthrow Batista and it was a revolution unlike any other. Castro united the Cuban people under nationalist and anti-imperialist ideals. He and the masses believed in a Cuba for the Cubans. He was able to raise the standard of living in Cuba for the peasant class and achieve astonishing increases in literacy rates by the middle of his rule.

However, the fact remains that Cuba remains a relatively underdeveloped nation. In a recent trip to Cuba I witnessed much of the rural population living in humble

conditions with few or no luxuries. The infrastructure has been weathered by the course of time. Many buildings, roads, and bridges are dilapidated. Though Cuba did prevail under the Castro regime, and some Cubans remained fond of Castro, there is certainly room for improvement. Many Cubans living in the United States vowed to never go back to Cuba until the Castro's were out of office.

For the first few years of Castro's rule, he maintained that he was not a communist and even preached democratic ideals to his people. During the time in which he had not yet declared himself a communist, he argued that the United States labeled Cuba as communist because they needed a reason to invade. There were likely a number of reasons why U.S. officials categorized Castro and Cuba as communist. One reason was probably that Castro's agrarian reform was based on the communist principle of the redistribution of wealth. Another likely reason that the United States government labeled Castro a communist was that there were many communist groups operating within Cuba, and Castro allowed those groups to exist and assemble. However, simply because there are convincing reasons to believe Castro was a communist, does not mean that Castro was not on to an interesting theory about why Cuba was labeled communist.

Castro's argument that the United States used communism as a scapegoat to invade Cuba is an interesting stance. It was certainly convenient for U.S. officials to speculate that Fidel Castro was a communist after he had just expropriated millions of dollars of land, resources, and businesses from the United States. Thus, it is possible that U.S. officials sought a more compelling reason for invading a country than solely the loss of profits. They needed to be able to justify an invasion of Cuba to the rest of

the world and to the American people. They did not want their reputation tarnished by overthrowing a country that had long been an ally without just cause. Therefore, Fidel suggested that the United States label Cuba as communist to do just that--to invent a valid reason for an invasion.

Though it is just speculation, perhaps there is more to the story, a part that may only become disclosed after the U.S. government declassifies more government documents under the freedom of information act. Such declassified documents have revealed numerous vital pieces of information, like the CIA and State Department approaches and strategies for dealing with Cuba.

The CIA opted for a strategy that would bring Cuba to its knees and submit to the United States' will whereas the State Department opted for a more peaceful route. The CIA treated Cuba like a communist enemy, while the State Department extended Cuba more democratic courtesy. Lars Schoultz's definition of the democratic process bears an uncanny resemblance to how the State Department treated Cuba.

Democracy is . . . best conceived as a never-ending process of nonviolent contestation and accommodation, a process that requires the slow, ceaseless perfection of rules and procedures in a crowded environment where everyone has a right to help determine who gets what, when, and how. . . Democracies require people who know how to bargain.¹⁹²

The State Department tried numerous times to bargain with Cuba, all the while suggesting that the United States remain within the confines of international law and remain true to their treaty obligations. The State Department further tried to launch less violent initiatives because they thought the outcome would be better if they slowly deteriorated the Cuban economy, rather than staging a violent invasion.

¹⁹² Schoultz, *That Infernal Little Cuban Republic*, 565.

These two agencies strategies also withstood the test of time. The CIA director position as well as the Secretary of State position saw rotation in the years from the Cuban Revolution to the Missile Crisis. However, it would seem that the strategies each agency provided for Cuba were rooted too deeply to be overturned by a new administrator. For example, Allen Dulles, CIA director from 1953 to 1961, staged and implemented the Bay of Pigs invasion. His predecessor, John McCone, took over in November of 1961 and continued to plan Operation Mongoose. Operation Mongoose was just as large of failure as was the Bay of Pigs. Therefore, it would seem that the transition of power between Dulles and McCone had little effect on the CIA's strategy for dealing with Cuba.

The same was true for the State Department. There were three Secretaries of State between 1959 and 1963: John Dulles, Christian Herter, and Dean Rusk. John Dulles' position as Secretary of State ended in the same month that Castro visited the United States for the first time. Before Dulles left the State Department, he oversaw the drafting of a document outlining how to treat Castro in his trip to the United States. The document proposed encouraging democratic ideals and suggestive language to try and sway Castro back closer to center on the political spectrum. There was no talk in this memorandum about violence or conspiracy, rather just the simple art of persuasion.

Christian Herter, John Dulles' successor, continued a similar strategy of persuasion. In October of 1960 the State Department released a new policy for foreign relations with Cuba, which stated that it should be made clear that the chances of a U.S. invasion of Cuba were slim to none. The State Department followed that up by suggesting that democratic ideals within Cuba should be encouraged and the

consolidation of the Castro regime should be discouraged. Therefore, under Herter's leadership, the State Department maintained a persuasive rather than invasive strategy.¹⁹³

The third Secretary of State who falls into the scope of this study was Dean Rusk. Rusk accepted the position as Secretary of State on Kennedy's inauguration day. Rusk did not share Kennedy's desire for invasion. By the time Kennedy took office, the planning of the Bay of Pigs invasion was already well advanced. After the invasion failed miserably and the CIA began planning Operation Mongoose, Rusk was against it. During the Missile Crisis, Rusk advocated for a naval blockade instead of an invasion. In comparison, the Cuban Missile Crisis had a more favorable outcome than the Bay of Pigs invasion. It is quite possible that the State Department's less violent foreign policy for Cuba could have yielded even more positive results, had it been used in place of invasion plans.

The situation in Cuba could have had many different outcomes but the outcome that took place was one that no one in the United States government imagined would be the case in the early days of the Cuban Revolution. U.S. government officials imagined that Castro and his rebels would lose momentum or fail to overthrow Batista. When they did succeed in overthrowing the Batista regime, U.S. officials assumed Castro could be easily defeated. They were wrong. Castro preached that Cuba would "fight to the last man," and his vision of the future largely prevailed.¹⁹⁴ Against all odds,

¹⁹³ U.S. Department of State, *Memorandum of a Conference, Department of State, Washington June 27, 1960: Questions Concerning the Program of Economic Pressures against Castro*, Foreign Relations of the United States 1958-1960, Lot 67 D 548, Cuba, Volume VI, (Washington D.C.), June 27, 1960, 2.

¹⁹⁴ Castro, Fidel, *Castro Denounces U.S. Aggression*, 23 April 1961, Latin American Network Information Center,

pinched in the middle of a contentious ideological battle between two superpowers, the tiny island of Cuba was able to hold its own and maintain its independence to a large degree.

What became of the United States? U.S. presidents stayed bitter toward Cuba for the rest of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first century. The embargo stayed in place, American tourists were prohibited from traveling to Cuba, and education in America presented a warped view of the events in Cuba to its youth. As a middle and high school student growing up in Wisconsin, I learned about the conflict of Cuba through a lens tainted by bitterness. Educators at that level informed students like me that Cuba brought their problems on themselves and dished out unwarranted hostility to the United States. I did not learn that the struggle between the United States and Cuba was a long contentious battle in which both sides threw punches until I was in upper-level undergraduate courses. It was rarely mentioned that the United States government had made decisions such as cutting the sugar quota that positively contributed to Cuba's growing relationship with the Soviet Union. The United States enacted policies like this against Cuba that left Cuba with only two choices: to either let their country crumble, with devastating consequences for the population, or to align with the Soviet Union in order to strengthen their broken economy. Cuba chose the latter, and the U.S. government officials and policy makers were appalled by their decision.

In the twenty-first century, Cuba and the United States entered what foreign policy officials call a period of "normalization." However, things are still far from normal. The Obama administration removed some of the restrictions on Cuba and President Obama even went to Cuba for a visit in 2016, making him the first U.S. president to visit

Cuba in nearly nine decades. This visit, however, was only a preliminary step in what will likely be a long road to restoring diplomatic relations with Cuba. Obama also lifted some restrictions on American tourism in Cuba and took steps to adjust the embargo. Still, this step represents at best a beginning. Perhaps there is a brighter chapter for U.S. Cuban relations yet to come.

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