

# Who put the “Cuba” in the Cuban Missile Crisis?

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The Cuban Missile Crisis was the closest the world ever came to nuclear annihilation. In this crisis, Cold War tensions heightened to almost world war status as the United States confronted its nemesis the Soviet Union to negotiate the fate of Cuba which was now armed with missiles capable of delivering nuclear warheads to targets thousands of miles away. In this international struggle, the actions and intentions of Fidel Castro have been dramatically overshadowed by those of United States' President John F. Kennedy and Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev.

In United States' historiography, the importance of Cuba in the Cuban Missile Crisis has been marginalized by the threat of Soviet made military hardware in the Western Hemisphere. In contemporary times, literary and cinematic interpretations of the Cuban Missile Crisis have still excluded a Cuban perspective in their material. Mark Laffey and Julia Weldes discuss this issue in their article entitled "Decolonizing the Cuban Missile Crisis" in which a cinematic interpretation of the Cuban Missile Crisis entitled *Thirteen Days* (2000) starring Kevin Costner, was screened in Havana. Laffey and Weldes state that the lack of a Cuban perspective in this movie caused Castro to pose the question "Where are all the Cubans?"<sup>1</sup>

In Robert Kennedy's memoir of the Cuban Missile Crisis entitled *Thirteen Days* ---the primary source material for the movie--- Castro is only mentioned by name three times. Kennedy mentions Castro's pilot in the first chapter of the book saying that the pilot's "boastful and intoxicated way [of talking] about the nuclear missiles"<sup>2</sup> led American intelligence operatives in Cuba to the discovery of the missiles in the first place. Kennedy also mentions Castro directly twice in strategies discussed at President Kennedy's specially formed Executive Committee meetings. One strategy was the tactic of stopping the flow of Soviet supplies to Cuba and then "concentrating on Cuba and Castro"<sup>3</sup> and the

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<sup>1</sup> Mark Laffey and Julia Weldes, "Decolonizing the Cuban Missile Crisis" *International Studies Quarterly* 52 (September 2008): 559

<sup>2</sup> Robert Kennedy *Thirteen Days: A Memoir of the Cuban Missile Crisis* (New York: McCall Corporation, 1968), 23

<sup>3</sup> Kennedy, 27

other strategy was that the United States government “send a letter to Castro”<sup>4</sup> and reach a solution. The Kennedy administration chose the former in that Soviet supplies to Cuba were stopped by a naval blockade, but never dealt with Cuba directly. Therefore Cuba and the Castro regime were never even considered to be a major part of the crisis from the American perspective.

Laffey and Weldes point to the ExComm transcripts for answers to this lack of a Cuban perspective. In their analysis they state that the U.S. government did not believe Cuba to be important to the crisis because they believed Cuba to be a “Soviet-puppet state,”<sup>5</sup> implying that the Castro regime was perfectly in line with the ideologies and aspirations of the Soviet Union. This “puppet state” theory is supported by many documents written by American intelligence officers such as a memorandum CIA Operations officer William K. Harvey and Acting Chairman of the Board of Estimates Abbot Smith sent to General Lansdale stating that “the USSR’s primary stake in Cuba is political.... The Soviets value the Cuban example as showing. . . that the [Soviet] Bloc will provide such a revolutionary regime with the economic aid required to offset anticipated US economic warfare and to develop the country.”<sup>6</sup> Documents pertaining to Cuba such as United States Information Agency memoranda refer to Cuba as the “1<sup>st</sup> Soviet satellite in America.”<sup>7</sup> Former Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara stated at the 1992 Havana Conference that the Kennedy Administration viewed the Castro regime in Cuba as “‘puppet’ of the Soviet Union.”<sup>8</sup>

However, this theory is based in the United States’ perspective only and does not take into account the Soviet and Cuban perspectives. Meanwhile Soviet historians and eye witnesses to the event

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<sup>4</sup> Kennedy, 31

<sup>5</sup> Laffey and Weldes 261

<sup>6</sup> William K. Harvey and Abbot Smith to General Lansdale 17 August 1962, in *The Kennedys and Cuba: The Declassified Documentary History* ed. Mark J. White (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1999), 136-137

<sup>7</sup> Donald M. Wilson to General Edward G. Lansdale July 20, 1962, in *Psy-War on Cuba: The Declassified History of U.S. Anti-Castro Propaganda*. Ed. Jon Elliston (Melbourne, Australia: Ocean Press, 1999), 108

<sup>8</sup> James G. Blight, Bruce J. Allyn and David A. Welch *Cuba on the Brink: Castro, the Missile Crisis, and the Soviet Collapse* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1993), 34

such as Sergei Khrushchev state that the Soviet government had little influence in the outcome of the Cuban Revolution and the placement of missiles into Cuba was intended to be more like aid to a fellow communist nation than acts of a superior nation on its subordinate. Cuban historians, especially after the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s, have attempted to redefine the Cuban Missile Crisis from their own national points of view, independent from the influences of historiography from Russia and the United States. In their analyses of the event, Cuban historians such as Tomas Acosta and Carlos Lechuga pose the statement that Cuba turned to the Soviet Union for “mutual defense” and that Cuba was betrayed by the Soviet Union in negotiations.

After analysis of the early years of the Cuban Revolution and the Cuban Missile Crisis, it is my conclusion that Cuba was not nor ever intended to be a Soviet puppet state. Although Castro’s revolution has similarities to Marxist-Leninist doctrine, his actions and ambitions were sharply different from those of Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev and other Soviet policymakers especially concerning strategies during the Cuban Missile Crisis. In this thesis, I will analyze the issue of Cuban communism and how it differed from communism of the Soviet Union’s and how it led to the Cuban Missile Crisis in the fall of 1962. I will focus mostly on the limited but important Cuban material. I will cite Soviet material when it is necessary for understanding the ideological and tactical differences between Cuba and the Soviet Union.

In order to understand the context of the Cuban Missile Crisis, it is first necessary to discuss the Cuban Revolution and its ideologies that formed independently of the Soviet Union. On January 1, 1959, Castro had sent Fulgencio Batista into exile and was able to bring the entire island of Cuba under his control. On the fortieth anniversary of the Cuban Missile Crisis, Sergei Khrushchev, son of Nikita Khrushchev Premier of the Soviet Union wrote the scholarly article entitled “The Cuban Missile Crisis” and explained that the success of the Cuban Revolution was due to Castro’s own work and not the work

of the Soviet Union. Khrushchev blatantly stated in the introductory paragraphs of this article that “the entry into Havana... of Fidel Castro’s guerrillas and Batista’s flight failed to attract any particular attention in Moscow.”<sup>9</sup>

Sergei Khrushchev buttressed this point by stating that the Soviet embassy in Havana was shut down in 1952. Sergei Khrushchev built on this by stating that his father asked for information on Cuba during the time shortly after the success of the Cuban Revolution, “neither the International Department of the [Communist Party of the Soviet Union] Central Committee, nor the KGB intelligence, nor the military intelligence had any idea who Fidel was, what he fought for, and what aims he pursued.”<sup>10</sup> Sergei Khrushchev emphasized this point by stating that his father asked the Cuban communists for their opinion on Castro and was told that “Castro was a member of the big bourgeoisie and a CIA agent to boot, [and that there was no] particular difference between him and Batista.”<sup>11</sup>

Richard Gott, author of the book *Cuba: A New History* confirmed this theory by citing a passage from Khrushchev’s memoir. “When Fidel Castro led his revolution to victory, and entered Havana with his troops, we had no idea what political course his regime would follow.”<sup>12</sup> Gott then cited a statement made by Che Guevara biographer Jon Lee Anderson who argued “the Kremlin did not suddenly ‘discover’ Cuba by spinning a globe after reading the news reports of its revolution.”<sup>13</sup> Anderson suggested that the Soviet Union had been keeping track of the Cuban Revolution and had tentative theories of its ambitions. Gott qualified Sergei Khrushchev’s statement by indicating that although certain members of the Soviet Union may have been keeping track of Castro and his revolution this information never “percolated through to the Politburo.”<sup>14</sup><sup>15</sup> Gott’s argument is the most believable due

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<sup>9</sup> Sergei Khrushchev, “The Cuban Missile Crisis” *International Affairs* 48 (2002): 94

<sup>10</sup> Khrushchev, 94

<sup>11</sup> Khrushchev, 94

<sup>12</sup> Richard Gott, *Cuba: A New History* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2004), 181

<sup>13</sup> Gott, 181

<sup>14</sup> The Soviet legislative body.

to the fact that although it is possible that the Soviet bureaucracy knew of the Cuban Revolution, it is obvious that Nikita Khrushchev and the rest of the Soviet leadership did not know.

In his article entitled "Cuban Communism," Irving Louis Horowitz outlined five points as to why Castro did not openly embrace Marxist-Leninist ideology at the time of the triumph of his revolution. The first point Horowitz made was that Soviet style communism would "elevate Havana to a supreme place in the bureaucratic hierarchy,"<sup>16</sup> and would thus take away some of Castro's rural charisma. This point is well taken considering the emphasis of Marxist doctrine on industry and the influence of Castro on the success of the Cuban Revolution. Horowitz also addressed the issue of Castro's charisma in his second point in which he states that the bureaucracy of the Communist Party "threatened the charismatic basis of Fidel's leadership."<sup>17</sup> Several historians have believed that the presence of Castro was vital to the success of the Cuban Revolution and that the marginalization of Castro's charisma would have threatened the overall success of the Revolution.

The third point Horowitz posed was that if Castro were to allow orthodox communist doctrine to run his country, he would "be saddled with not only material but ideological dependence on the Soviet Union."<sup>18</sup> This would prove problematic in a logistical sense based on the geographical location of Cuba and its distance from the Soviet Union. Being forced to depend on a country literally on the other side of the world for political and material sustenance would place the success of the Revolution in jeopardy. The fourth point Horowitz made is that the adoption of orthodox communism would cause Cuba to be politically and economically isolated from the rest of Latin America. Cuba's expulsion from the

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<sup>15</sup> Gott, 182

<sup>16</sup> Irving Louis Horowitz "Cuban Communism" in *Cuban Communism*, ed. Irving Louis Horowitz (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1977), 23

<sup>17</sup> Horowitz, 23

<sup>18</sup> Horowitz, 23

Organization of American States on January 1962<sup>19</sup> after it was declared a communist state demonstrates that this point was valid.

The final point Horowitz posed was that the adoption of orthodox communist doctrine would crush the “revolutionary will” of the Cuban people. The adoption of Soviet authoritarian communism would extinguish the “human quality that had overcome so many hardships and had actually made the Cuban Revolution possible.”<sup>20</sup> The action of adopting orthodox communism could very well crush this “revolutionary will” due to the notion that such an action would simply cause Cuba to change hands from one superpower to another. This point is the strongest element of Horowitz’s argument of the historical context of the Cuban Revolution.

In order to fully understand the impact of this element in Horowitz’s theory, it is necessary to analyze the relationship between Cuba and the United States in the first half of the twentieth century. In 1895, the Cuban people revolted against Spain, their imperial homeland. The United States intervened in Cuba’s defense and went to war against Spain in 1898. With Spain defeated, the United States occupied Cuba and assisted in its reconstruction as an independent nation. In her dissertation entitled, “Closed Door Imperialism: The Politics of Cuban-U.S. Trade, 1902-1933” Mary Speck analyzes the efficacy of two political stipulations placed on Cuba from the United States: the Platt Amendment and the Reciprocity Treaty. Speck explains the rationale for these two stipulations by quoting President William McKinley and his desire for creating “singular ties of intimacy”<sup>21</sup> between the United States and Cuba.

The Platt Amendment served as the legal justification for the United States to intervene militarily in Cuban politics in order to restore democratic order in the event the United States believed

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<sup>19</sup> Blight, Allyn and Welch, 17

<sup>20</sup> Horowitz, 23

<sup>21</sup> Mary Speck, “Closed Door Imperialism: The Politics of Cuban-U.S. Trade, 1902-1933” *Hispanic American Historical Review* 83 (2005): 449

such actions to be necessary. The Reciprocity Act, promised Cuba that the United States would maintain low tariff rates. Speck quotes the April 1901 edition of the Havana newspaper *La Discusion* in explaining the rationale for these political stipulations: “The United States desires certain political advantages in Cuba, while Cuba desires certain economic advantages in the United States.”<sup>22</sup> Speck’s article sharply criticized the Platt Amendment and the tariff rates. Instead of constructing Cuba’s national infrastructure, Speck noted “U.S. trade and investment . . . ‘decapitalized’ ‘denationalized’ and ‘underdeveloped’ the island.”<sup>23</sup>

Speck identified the U.S. market economy as “an instrument of hegemony.”<sup>24</sup> Speck points out that although in the beginning European countries were able to maintain a hold in the Cuban economy, the United States soon became the chief supplier of Cuban imports arriving at an average of 71% from 1915-1924<sup>25</sup>. Speck does indicate however that in some instances the U.S. influence in Cuba did have positive effects on the Cuban infrastructure. Speck identifies the U.S.-Cuban joint company the Cuban Portland Cement Corporation as a positive example of U.S.-Cuban cooperation by indicating that this company was capable of producing one thousand barrels of cement a day<sup>26</sup>.

The effects of these two acts of legislation served to frustrate Cuba’s attempts at resisting U.S. incursion in their domestic affairs while they triggered economic and political failures in the country and made the nation ripe for the Cuban Revolution of 1959.

U.S. economic domination in Cuba intensified during the 1950s right before the Cuban Revolution. In his article entitled “Castro, Cuba, and the United States” (1967) Philip W. Bonsal analyzed the American influence on the industries in Cuba from the 1940s to the late 1950s. Bonsal indicated that

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<sup>22</sup> Speck, 455

<sup>23</sup> Speck, 451

<sup>24</sup> Speck, 451

<sup>25</sup> Speck, 462

<sup>26</sup> Speck, 474-475

although the United States dominated only one third of Cuba's sugar industry, Cuba's primary export, American companies still dominated Cuba's modern infrastructure. This included the telephone, electric light and power companies as well as two of the three crude oil refineries (the other company owned by an Anglo-Dutch conglomerate) and a major railroad company on the eastern side of the island.<sup>27</sup> Bonsal adds that the retail merchandising and tourist markets were also dominated by American capitalists.

These two analyses demonstrate that although Cuba was formally declared independent in the final years of the nineteenth century, Cuba was still dominated, this time by the United States. A half century later, the Cuban Revolution was meant to liberate the people from the economic dependence that the U.S. had imposed upon them. This is demonstrated by the statement, *sin cuota, pero sin amo*<sup>28</sup>: a popular slogan that circulated shortly after the Revolution. The notion that the Cuban people would eagerly accept a system in which they were wholly dependent, both ideologically and materially, on the USSR is contradictory to the Cuban spirit of liberty. This sentiment is supported by a statement made by Carlos Lechuga in his book entitled *In The Eye of the Storm* in which he says "the Cuban Revolution was independent of the Cold War; it was a native product, whose roots went back to the first war of independence against Spanish colonialism in the latter part of the last century."<sup>29</sup>

Under these geopolitical and cultural circumstances, a unique style of communism evolved in Cuba. In the same collection of articles, Horowitz explained that Cuban-style communism formed naturally in a way that was contrary to traditional Marxist-Leninist doctrine. Horowitz pointed out that at the time of the Cuban Revolution; there was no proletariat, no urban working class to unite together against the capitalist oppressors. In Marxist-Leninist doctrine, the proletariat is vitally important to a successful communist revolution. However, as Horowitz also pointed out, Cuba was not an industrialized

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<sup>27</sup> Bonsal 270

<sup>28</sup> Goff, 184: Spanish for "without a quota but without a slave-master."

<sup>29</sup> Carlos Lechuga *In The Eye of the Storm* (Melbourne, Australia: Ocean Press, 1995), 16

state, being that only 56 percent<sup>30</sup> was urbanized and therefore could not have a fully developed proletariat for a traditional communist revolution. As a result of this, Cuba could not survive on its own industrial strength and would require imported industrial goods for sustenance and therefore could not become self-sufficient.

Therefore in the doctrine of Cuban communism, the guerrilla is the driving force of social revolution in lieu of the proletariat. While running for public office as a member of the Cuban Orthodox Party, Castro spoke to Luis Conte Aguero, radio commentator and leader of the Orthodox Party. He was reported to have said that he wanted to “organize the men of the 26<sup>th</sup> of July movement,”<sup>31</sup> making them into “an unbreakable body of fighters.”<sup>32</sup>

During the Cuban Revolution, Ernesto “Che” Guevara cemented this theory of the guerrilla’s importance to social change in the following statement:

We must come to the inevitable conclusion that the guerrilla fighter is a social reformer, that he takes up arms responding to the angry protest of the people against their oppressors, and that he fights to change the social system that keeps all his unarmed brothers in ignominy and misery. He launches himself against the conditions of the reigning institutions at a particular moment with all the vigor that circumstances permit to breaking the mold of these institutions.<sup>33</sup>

Although Castro had vaguely defined himself as a “humanist” early in his political career, after April 1959 he began to exhibit signs of moving rapidly to the left culminating a speech given in December, 1961 in which he formally declared himself a communist.<sup>34</sup> Sergei Khrushchev indicated that this was due to the fact that on Castro’s visit to the United States he visited with Vice President Richard Nixon instead of President Dwight Eisenhower. The latter had a golf game he had to attend. “Had the

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<sup>30</sup> Horowitz, 53 Horowitz also indicates that these figures cannot be confirmed precisely.

<sup>31</sup> The “vanguard” of the Cuban Revolution dating back to Castro’s failed assault on the Moncada Barracks in Santiago de Cuba which took place July 26, 1953.

<sup>32</sup> Horowitz, 67

<sup>33</sup> Horowitz, 71

<sup>34</sup> Horowitz, 69

President taken a couple hours from his golf game [and] talked in a proper and respectful manner to the visitor” Sergei Khrushchev noted: “history possibly would’ve taken a different course: no Cuban, let alone missile crisis would have happened at all.”<sup>35</sup>

Although no surviving complete account explains the nature of the meeting in detail, Richard Gott drew the connection that Nixon’s staunch anti-Communist stance compelled Castro to side with the communists. Gott based his theory by referencing a statement made by Nixon stating that Castro was “either incredibly naïve about Communism or under Communist discipline.”<sup>36</sup> Sergei Khrushchev also speculates that if Eisenhower had taken the time to visit Castro, Cuba would have most likely become a moderate democracy and would be “moderately friendly to the U.S. . . . like Costa Rica.”<sup>37</sup>

Sergei Khrushchev’s statement demonstrates an enormous amount of naivety and wishful thinking. While it is true that if Eisenhower had received Castro instead of Nixon; Castro may not have immediately become a communist, the structure of Cuban issues to be resolved with the United States had the potential to produce antagonism between the two nations. The “human will” of the Cuban Revolution was to rid itself of domination by the United States, therefore, anti-U.S. sentiments already existed in Cuba without Castro’s communist transformation. This sentiment was intensified by Castro’s First Declaration of Havana made shortly after the Triumph of the Revolution which states, “The People of Cuba strongly condemn the imperialism of North America for its gross and criminal domination, lasting for more than a century, of the peoples of Latin America.”<sup>38</sup> This animosity strained tensions between the U.S. and Cuba regardless of diplomatic protocol.

Although Castro was not officially a communist before his meeting with Nixon and may not have declared himself a communist if that meeting had never occurred, other members of his movements

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<sup>35</sup> Khrushchev, 95

<sup>36</sup> Gott, 179

<sup>37</sup> Khrushchev, 95

<sup>38</sup> Gott, 184

such as Castro's brother, Raul Castro and fellow revolutionary Che Guevara were either communists or radical Marxists. This fact alarmed Washington as Gott pointed out. Gott strengthened his point by referencing a memo written to Eisenhower by CIA chief Allen Dulles during the final days of the Cuban Revolution indicating that, "Communists and other extreme radicals appear to have penetrated the Castro movement. If Castro takes over, they will probably participate in the government."<sup>39</sup> Therefore, although Fidel Castro may not have been a Communist, the presence of Communists in his government would have alarmed the U.S. government and caused tensions in U.S.-Cuban relations. Contrary to Sergei Khrushchev's speculation this mutual animosity and mistrust would prevent Cuba from becoming a "moderately friendly" nation to the United States.

Fidel Castro fully outlined his political ideologies in a speech given December 1, 1961 in which he said the following:

We began in the university to make the first contacts with the Communist Manifesto, with the works of Marx and Engels and Lenin. That marked a process. I can say an honest confession, that many of the things that we have done in the revolution are not things that we invented, not in the least. When we left the university, in my particular case, I was really greatly influenced--- not that I will say I was in the least a Marxist-Leninist.<sup>40</sup>

Castro concluded his speech by making the statement, "I am a Marxist-Leninist and I will be one until the last days of my life."<sup>41</sup> Hugh Thomas, author of the book *Cuba* indicates that this was the first time Castro publically declared himself as an "apprentice of Marxist-Leninism"<sup>42</sup> stating that Cuba in the future would be led by "collective leadership."<sup>43</sup>

In declaring himself an "apprentice of Marxist-Leninism," Castro stated that he subscribed to Marxist theory as interpreted by Russian revolutionary Vladimir Lenin. Marxist-Leninist theory states

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<sup>39</sup> Gott, 179

<sup>40</sup> Horowitz, 70

<sup>41</sup> Horowitz, 70

<sup>42</sup> Hugh Thomas, *Cuba* (London: Pac MacMillian, 1971), 933

<sup>43</sup> Thomas, 934

that imperialism is the highest form of capitalism, which coincides with Castro's anti-U.S. political stance. In declaring himself a Communist, Castro stated that he advocated the redistribution of wealth in his nation. This is supported by the Agrarian Reform Law of June 3, 1959, the Law of Nationalization of July 6, 1960, and Law 890 of October 14, 1960. These acts of legislation expropriated land and industries in Cuba placing them in the hands of the Castro regime. As a result of these actions, American companies with economic interest in Cuba issued 8,816 certified claims against Cuba totaling to \$1,799,548,568.69.<sup>44</sup>

Fidel Castro's formal declaration as a Communist and a Marxist-Leninist resulted in the United States attempting to isolate the island economically and politically. In 1960, the United States invoked a trading embargo with Cuba. As these acts of aggression were taking place, Castro lived in fear of the United States believing that the U.S. would invade his island and crush his regime. The presence of a Communist dictatorship in the western hemisphere dramatically alarmed the United States because the containment of Communist countries was a primary element of U.S. Cold War strategy.

Castro's fears became a reality when 1,500 CIA-trained Cuban mercenaries attempted to invade the island in April of 1962 in an event known as the Bay of Pigs Invasion, known to the Cuban people as Playa Giron invasion. This invasion was a poorly executed attempt by the Kennedy administration to try to remove Castro from power and also violated the Act of Bogota, the document that established the Organization of American States, which states "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."<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Kirby Jones "The Issue of Claims as Seen by the United States" in *Subject to Solution: Problems in U.S-Cuban Relations* eds. Wayne S. Smith and Esteban Morales Dominguez (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc.1988) 70

<sup>45</sup> Memorandum from Under Secretary of State Chester Bowles to Secretary of State Dean Rusk, March 31, 1962, in *The Kennedys and Cuba*, ed. Mark J While (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1999) 22

Castro would later speak of the invasion as a “fait accompli plan” which “existed for destroying the Revolution despite the fact that at that point the Revolution wasn’t even officially Socialist.”<sup>46</sup>

Following this attempt, Castro was extremely wary of the United States. He feared that the U.S. would mount another invasion and succeed in removing him from power. These fears were very well grounded. On May 4, 1961, the Interagency Task Force of the U.S. National Security Council wrote an analysis entitled “Cuba and Communism in the Hemisphere” and drew the conclusion that “There is no sure way of overthrowing Castro short of military intervention.”<sup>47</sup> Another U.S. justification for military intervention was that the removal of Castro would only partially solve America’s problem concerning communism in Cuba, because if Castro were ever removed, he would easily be replaced by his fellow revolutionary comrade Ernesto “Che” Guevara.<sup>48</sup> In order to fully dismantle Cuba’s communist regime, the United States would have to invade and occupy Cuba.

Shortly after the publication of “Cuba and Communism in the Hemisphere” the CIA authorized Operation Patty. This was a multifaceted plot designed to kill both Castro and his brother Raul while creating a justification for U.S. military intervention in Cuba. This plan was scheduled to be executed July 26, 1961 during a nationwide celebration of the July 26<sup>th</sup> Movement. At this celebration, Castro and his brother Raul would be targeted for assassination as they gave their speeches at functions in Havana and Santiago de Cuba respectively.

The assassination of Raul Castro would take place from one of the houses close to the stadium where Raul was scheduled to give a speech. A .30 caliber machine gun would be assembled in this house and would scope out Raul while he was giving his speech. Shortly after the gunshot, four men armed with grenades would enter the crowd and confirm the death of Raul. The assassins assumed that if this

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<sup>46</sup> Fidel Castro and Ignacio Ramonet *Fidel Castro: My Life* (New York: Scribner, 2006), 269

<sup>47</sup> Tomas Diez Acosta *October 1962: The ‘Missile’ Crisis As Seen From Cuba* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 2002), 31

<sup>48</sup> Philip Brenner, “Cuba and the Missile Crisis,” *Latin American Studies* 22 (February 1990): 118

attack failed, Raul would flee to the airport in Santiago de Cuba to fly to Havana and therefore had assembled six men armed with machine guns at the airport to shoot Raul on sight.

After the assassination of Raul Castro took place, mortar attacks were scheduled to go off at the Hermanos Diaz oil refinery and near the U.S. Naval Base at Guantanamo Bay. CIA operatives would then release a story stating that “Cuban military commanders, blinded by the assassination that had taken the life of Raul Castro, had gone to the extreme of attacking the naval base.”<sup>49</sup> This action would justify U.S. military intervention. Shortly thereafter, the assassination Castro would be executed. The plan for assassinating Fidel Castro involved placing an 82 millimeter mortar shell in the Plaza of the Revolution in Havana near the stage where Castro was scheduled to give a speech. The size of the shell was intentionally designed to kill as many people as possible targeting specifically Castro and other subordinate members of the Cuban Revolutionary Government. After the assassination of Fidel Castro, assassins and saboteurs already positioned in the Cuban provinces of Camaguey and Las Villas would mortar buildings of communist party members and destroy bridges to impede Cuba’s ability to defend itself.<sup>50</sup>

Operation Patty was authorized in the final days of June in 1961 but was not executed due to the fact that Cuban security forces who had apparently infiltrated the CIA intercepted information about the plan. The Cuban government allowed the plan to mature to the point where it knew that all parties were identified and then canceled all events scheduled for July 26 and subsequently arrested all the operatives. The Cuban government formally condemned the action on August 12, 1961.<sup>51</sup>

The U.S. government continued to develop plots to assassinate Castro using various methods such as exploding and poisoned cigars, having Castro write with a pen known as the AM/LASH device, a

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<sup>49</sup> Acosta, 40

<sup>50</sup> Acosta, 40

<sup>51</sup> Acosta, 41

pen outfitted with a finely crafted hypodermic needle capable of injecting poison into the user's bloodstream.<sup>52</sup> The U.S. government planned to employ the Mafia as a delivery system for these devices due to their connections with the island.<sup>53</sup> Richard Bissell, a high ranking operative in the CIA Cuba Project later stated, "I hoped the Mafia would achieve success. My philosophy during my last two or three years in the agency was very definitely that the ends justified the means."<sup>54</sup>

In his book, *The Castro Obsession: U.S. Covert Operations Against Cuba 1959-1965*, Don Bohning confirmed Acosta's accounts on U.S. sponsored plots to assassinate Castro and built upon them by citing other plans for defeating the Castro regime calling them "pretexts for invasion." These plans include the "Remember the Maine" plan by which an unmanned U.S. naval vessel en route to the U.S. Naval base at Guantanamo Bay would be detonated in Cuban waters, prompting U.S. fighters to "'evacuate' remaining members of nonexistent crew."<sup>55</sup> This harkens back to the Maine Incident of 1898 which prompted the U.S. to declare war on Spain. Another plan Bohning referenced was known as the "Communist Cuban terror campaign in the Miami area, in other Florida cities, and even Washington." Under this plan the U.S. government planned on "sink[ing] a boatload of Cubans en route to Florida (real or simulated)" stating that the U.S. could "foster attempts on lives of Cuban refugees in the United States even to the extent of wounding in instances to be widely publicized."<sup>56</sup> Bohning also outlined a plan known as "Elimination by Illumination," a plan catering to the Catholics in Cuba which "consisted of spreading the word that the Second Coming of Christ was imminent and that Christ was against Castro [who] was the anti-Christ."<sup>57</sup> Cuban Carlos Lechuga confirmed this plan in his book *In the Eye of the Storm*.

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<sup>52</sup> "Assassination plots against Fidel Castro" in *Cuban Revolution Reader* ed. Julio Garcia Luis (Melbourne, Australia: Ocean Press, 2008), 89

<sup>53</sup> Don Bohning, *The Castro Obsession: U.S. Covert Operations Against Cuba 1959-1965* (Dulles, Virginia: Potomac Books, 2005), 25

<sup>54</sup> Bohning, 26

<sup>55</sup> Bohning, 99

<sup>56</sup> Bohning, 99

<sup>57</sup> Bohning, 94

On November 30, 1961, President Kennedy authorized Operation Mongoose: the largest operation ever undertaken by the CIA. Operation Mongoose was a six phased operation designed to remove Castro from power and to “insure the replacement of the Castro regime with a friendly government.”<sup>58</sup> This statement is supported by a memorandum written by Task Force W, the authors of Operation Mongoose in a document entitled “Plan for Cuba.”

The first stage of the operation was entitled “Action” and was scheduled to go into effect in March 1962. The purpose of action was to “start moving in” that is to say, infiltrate Cuba and prepare for the uprising. The second stage of the operation was entitled “Build-Up” and was scheduled to take place in April-July 1962. The purpose of “Build-Up” was the “activat[ion] [of] the necessary operations inside Cuba for the revolution and concurrently applying for vital political, economic, and military type support from outside Cuba.” The third stage of the operation was entitled “Readiness” and served as a deadline for strategy. Stage four, entitled “Resistance” involved placing the guerrilla fighters in position in Cuba. The fifth stage of Operation Mongoose was entitled “Revolt” and authorized the strategically placed guerrilla fighters to begin their disturbances against the communist regime. The final stage of Operation Mongoose was entitled simply as “Final” and would involve the “establishment of [a] new government.”<sup>59</sup>

Operation Mongoose had a variety of contingency plans by which in the event of failure at any moment by the Cuban guerrillas, as had been the case in the Bay of Pigs invasion, the United States would intervene militarily in the Cuban counterrevolution.

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<sup>58</sup> Acosta, 77

<sup>59</sup> The Cuba Project, Program Review by Brig. Gen. Lansdale, February 20, 1962 in *Psy-War on Cuba: The Declassified History of U.S. Anti-Castro Propaganda* ed. Jon Elliston (Melbourne, Australia, Ocean Press, 1999) 76

In the CINCLANT<sup>60</sup> memorandum dated 25 September 1962, three different contingency plans were outlined for military intervention in Cuba. The first plan was entitled OPLAN 314-61 and outlines a standard plan for military intervention in Cuba. OPLAN 314-61 stated that airborne and amphibious attacks would be conducted simultaneously in the vicinity of Havana reinforced by the garrison at Guantanamo Bay. OPLAN 314-61 also mentioned “mop-up” operations in eastern Cuba. The timeframe for OPLAN 314-61 stated that “this plan calls for the first U.S. landings on the 18<sup>th</sup> day after receipt of this order to execute.” OPLAN 316-61 dealt with an elevated timetable and followed slightly different tactics. This plan was designated as the “quick reaction plan” and involves air strikes executed five days earlier than the standard OPLAN 314-61 timetable. The last contingency plan in this memorandum was designated OPLAN 312-62 and dealt with the “fast application” of military intervention in Cuba in which airstrikes would be executed “with time increments of 6, 12, and 24 hours from a no-warning condition.”<sup>61</sup> Military targets such as airfields, aircraft, naval vessels, and garrisons were given top priority in this contingency plan.

During the same time Castro countered these acts of aggression by formulating his own military schemes. One covert military plan Castro created was known as Operation Boomerang. Under the conditions of Operation Boomerang, Castro would authorize sympathetic Cubans living in the United States to attack military and civilian targets in the most populous American cities if the United States ever invaded Cuba.<sup>62</sup> The Castro regime also cracked down on possible subversive activities in Cuba by passing an act of legislation known as Law 998 that was ratified in November 29, 1961. Law 998 stated

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<sup>60</sup> CINCLANT stands for Commander in Chief of Atlantic Operations. September 25, 1962 in *October 1962: The 'Missile' Crisis as seen from Cuba* (New York: Pathfinder Books, 2002) 91

<sup>61</sup> Acosta, 91

<sup>62</sup> James A. Nathan, *The Anatomy of the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2001) 25

that any member of a counterrevolutionary movement living in Cuba whether the movement was based domestically or by a foreign government would be sentenced to death.<sup>63</sup>

The Castro regime also sought military aid from the Soviet Union during this time. In the latter half of 1961, the Cuban government signed two military agreements with the Soviet government for aid and military supplies. The first agreement, ratified on August 4, 1961 granted the Cuban government \$48.5 million in military aid and equipment.<sup>64</sup> The second agreement, ratified on September 30, 1961 promised Cuba \$149.55 million in military aid and equipment. Cuba was obligated to repay only \$67.55 million of this aid over a ten year period at two percent interest.<sup>65</sup> The third military agreement signed later in July of 1962 was Operation Anadyr<sup>66</sup> in which nuclear missiles were transported from the Soviet Union to Cuba. From 1961-1962 the Soviet Union and other Communist bloc nations also sent economic aid to Cuba amounting to the sum of \$570 million dollars.<sup>67</sup> Russia also placed a quota for 3 million tons of sugar to be imported from Cuba in 1962.<sup>68</sup>

Khrushchev was also well aware of American aggression against Cuba that he had to protect his communist ally in the Western Hemisphere. Therefore he began to authorize plans to put missiles and nuclear weapons into Cuba in order to deter the United States. This is well articulated through hindsight in his memoirs which read:

We wanted Cuba to remain revolutionary and socialist, and we knew Cuba needed help in order to do so . . . we had no other way of helping them meet the American threat except to install our missiles on the island, so as to confront the aggressive forces of the United States with a dilemma: if you invade Cuba, you'll have to face a nuclear missile attack against your own cities.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Acosta, 73

<sup>64</sup> Acosta, 65

<sup>65</sup> Acosta, 66

<sup>66</sup> Known in Cuba as Operación: Anadir, from the Spanish verb meaning "to add."

<sup>67</sup> Thomas, 934

<sup>68</sup> Thomas, 938

<sup>69</sup> Daniella Spenser "The Caribbean Crisis" in *In from the Cold Latin America's New Encounter with the Cold War* ed. Gilbert M. Joseph (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008) 73

However, some historians have suggested that protecting Cuba from American aggression may not have been the only reason behind placing the missiles in Cuba. Other reasons included, repairing the missile gap between the United States and the Soviet Union, bettering Soviet relations with Latin America, and regaining prestige in the eyes of their Chinese counterparts.<sup>70</sup> Don Munton and David A. Welch indicated in their book entitled *The Cuban Missile Crisis: A Concise History* that a schism occurred between China and the Soviet Union in terms of Marxist doctrine. Munton and Welch indicated that Chinese communist leaders questioned Khrushchev's orthodoxy in Marxist ideology and his resolve against the spread of capitalism. Munton and Welch theorized that a possible reason for Khrushchev putting the missiles in Cuba was to prove the resolve of Khrushchev and the Soviet Union against capitalist aggression thus regaining prestige in the eyes of the Chinese communists.<sup>71</sup> If this was his intention it dramatically backfired at the end of the crisis.

Other possible ulterior motives aside, Khrushchev authorized the sending of missiles to Cuba under the guise of protecting Cuba from another American invasion. This is supported by a statement made by Khrushchev to Castro stating: "I am absolutely sure that in revenge for the defeat at Playa Giron, the Americans are going to launch an invasion against Cuba, not with mercenaries this time, but with their own armed forces. We have reliable intelligence on that."<sup>72</sup>

Khrushchev was correct in predicting this as stated by previous evidence. Khrushchev is also reported to have told Castro, "We have to pay the Americans in kind, to give them a taste of their own medicine, and make them feel what it's like to live with nuclear weapons trained on you."<sup>73</sup>

In retrospect, Castro is reported to have said the following about Premier Khrushchev:

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<sup>70</sup> Don Munton and David A. Welch *The Cuban Missile Crisis: A Concise History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007) 22

<sup>71</sup> Munton and Welch, 22

<sup>72</sup> Acosta, 96

<sup>73</sup> Acosta, 96

Nikita was very clever in the way he presented the issue to the other leaders of the Soviet party and in his underlying thinking . . . in light of the facts we know today about the real international relationship of forces, it's clear that a remedy was needed . . . If what they really had was only fifty or sixty missiles, there is no doubt that the presence of those forty two missiles significantly improved the situation; it almost doubled the effective delivery systems.<sup>74</sup>

Hugh Thomas in his authoritative book, *Cuba*, indicated that although the placement of Soviet missiles in Cuba shifted the balance of nuclear power to the Soviets' favor using the best of the Russian's nuclear arsenal, Soviet military strength still floundered compared to that of the U.S. In the early 1960s, according to Thomas, the Russian nuclear arsenal had "five times fewer nuclear delivery weapons" than the arsenal of the United States.<sup>75</sup> Thomas expanded on this statement by indicating that the Russian military possessed between 350 to 700 short range nuclear missiles. From Russia the furthest reach of these missiles was to Europe. They were incapable of reaching the United States from Russia. Thomas also points out that while the U.S. possessed 600 intercontinental ballistic missiles, Russia only had 200 in its arsenal.<sup>76</sup> Therefore, although Russia sent very powerful elements of its nuclear arsenal to Cuba and such actions did shift the balance of nuclear power into their favor, the United States still was superior to the Soviet Union and any nuclear exchange would definitely annihilate Cuba.

On May 29, 1962 a group of Soviet nuclear scientists officially disguised as agricultural technicians including Marshal Sergei Biryuzov vice minister of defense,<sup>77</sup> arrived at Cuba with the preliminary plans for placing missile launchers in Cuba. This plan was officially designated as an agricultural project. In this preliminary stage of placing nuclear missiles into Cuba, Castro and his brother Raul met with these Soviet representatives in Havana. Castro later recalled the event in his most recent biography:

After offering the information I mentioned they asked what I thought should be done to avoid the attack. I answered calmly: 'Make a public statement warning the United States, just as they

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<sup>74</sup> Acosta, 96

<sup>75</sup> Thomas, 943

<sup>76</sup> Thomas 944

<sup>77</sup> Although he was officially traveling under the alias of "Engineer Petrov."

do in similar circumstances, that an attack on Cuba will be considered an attack on the Soviet Union.<sup>78</sup>

According to Castro, the Soviet representatives “sat and thought about it for a while and then added that in order for it not to be just a simple statement, certain concrete measures had to be adopted.” The delegates then concluded their discussion by stating that “it was a good idea to install a minimal number of medium-range missiles in Cuba.”<sup>79</sup>

After this initial step, Khrushchev began to make promises to the Cuban people that he either did not keep or that had different connotations to the Cuban people than he had intended. As part of the Cuban delegation to the Soviet Union which took place in June of 1962, Raul Castro had asked Premier Khrushchev “What precautions have you taken in case the operation is discovered by the U.S. before it is made public?” Khrushchev is reported to have responded, “Don’t worry, I’ll grab Kennedy by the balls and make him negotiate. After all, they have surrounded us with their bases, in Turkey, and in other places.”<sup>80</sup> Khrushchev also repeatedly stated to Raul and to Che Guevara that in any situation, he was willing to send the Baltic fleet to Cuba to protect the Cuban people from American aggression.

This account of Khrushchev’s actions is taken from Tomas Diez Acosta’s book, *October 1962: The ‘Missile’ Crisis as Seen from Cuba*. Acosta’s account of Khrushchev’s actions debunked Sergei Khrushchev’s theory that Premier Khrushchev was innocently pushed into placing the missiles into Cuba as a deterrent. In order to fully understand the differences of interpretations it is necessary to understand the life and career of Acosta. The latter joined the Cuban Revolutionary Armed Forces (FAR) in 1961 and was mobilized in Cuba during the crisis as a political instructor of Military Unit 2562 in the western region of Cuba. Acosta then taught history from 1970 to 1986 at the General Maximo Gomez Academy of the FAR. Acosta received a degree in political science from the University of Havana in 1976.

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<sup>78</sup> Castro and Ramonet, 271

<sup>79</sup> Castro and Ramonet, 271

<sup>80</sup> Acosta, 104

Finally, Acosta retired from the Cuban military in 1998 at the rank of Lieutenant Colonel.<sup>81</sup> Acosta had access to materials from the Cuban perspective that point out the “other side” of Sergei Khrushchev’s naïve account of his father’s actions during the crisis.

In August 1962, Khrushchev sent Aleksandr Alekseev, the recently appointed Soviet Ambassador to Cuba, to Havana with a draft of the agreement that would place nuclear weapons on Cuban soil. Castro vehemently did not agree with the text of the agreement because he believed that this agreement should appear as a military agreement for mutual defense. Later on that month, Castro sent Che Guevara and Emilio Aragonés to Moscow carrying their revised version of the agreement as a counterproposal. Khrushchev agreed to the proposed revisions but insisted that the agreement not be published until after the missiles were operational. This was the first of several important differences of opinion between the Soviets and the Cubans. Although Khrushchev was confident that the missiles would be properly hidden from sight, Che and Aragonés both believed that the missiles would be discovered long before they were operational.<sup>82</sup>

After this meeting, the Soviet Union began to send an entire arsenal of nuclear weaponry to Cuba. Thirty six R-12 MRBM missiles were sent in three regiments of twelve to the island. The yield of each nuclear warhead ranged from 200 kilotons to 1 megaton or more. In simpler terms, a single warhead possessed between fifteen to seventy times the destructive power as the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima.<sup>83</sup> The R-12 missiles on which the warheads would be delivered had a range of 1,300 miles making it possible for New York, Dallas and Chicago as well as many cities in Latin America to become targets.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Acosta, 9

<sup>82</sup> Munton and Welch, 30

<sup>83</sup> Munton and Welch, 32-47

<sup>84</sup> Munton, 39

The Soviets also sent 24 R-14 IRBM missiles to Cuba in two regiments of twelve. The warheads for the R-14 missiles were just as destructive as the warheads designed for the R-12. The actual missiles never reached Cuba, however, several of the warheads arrived at Cuba's port of La Isabela on the Soviet ship *Aleksandrovsk* without American detection on October 23. Had the missiles been installed in Cuba, the targeting range would have been such that virtually any city in the continental United States would have been a target as well as most Canadian and Latin American cities.<sup>85</sup>

The Soviet Union also provided Cuba with an arsenal of conventional weapons. Four reinforced motorized rifle regiments amounting to 14,000 soldiers were deployed with a wide variety of equipment at their disposal including tanks and anti-aircraft artillery. Six Luna missiles equipped with 2 megaton nuclear warheads were also sent to Cuba. The Luna missile was a short range missile with only a range of forty miles. Khrushchev had authorized the Luna missiles to carry nuclear missiles in September 1962.<sup>86</sup> Every nuclear warhead required specific conditions for storage as General Beloborodov explained "One of the big problems that had to be resolved in connection with the nuclear warheads was the climate in Cuba. The warheads required humidity below 50 percent and a temperature not higher than 20 degrees [Celsius] so air-conditioned vehicles had to be built for their transportation and maintenance."<sup>87</sup>

As part of the agreement Cuba received from the Soviet Union 42 IL-28 bombers, each of them outfitted to carry an eight to twelve megaton nuclear bomb to targets within a 600 mile radius. The Soviets also sent forty of their most advanced fighter planes at the time: the MiG-21.<sup>88</sup>

The presence of such a destructive arsenal had concerned Castro as he indicated in an interview recorded in 1997.

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<sup>85</sup> Munton and Welch, 40

<sup>86</sup> Munton and Welch, 40

<sup>87</sup> Acosta, 114

<sup>88</sup> Munton and Welch, 41

We did not like the rockets. If it had only been a matter of our defense, we would not have accepted the missiles. But don't go and think that it was fear of the dangers that could have followed from having the missiles here; it was because of the way in which this could tarnish the image of the Revolution, and we were very zealous about the image of the Revolution in the rest of Latin America; and this in our opinion had a high political cost for our country's image.<sup>89</sup>

This statement contradicted the statements he had made in 1962 which indicate possible hindsight and political flip-flopping to save face. This is also a demonstration of revisionism: a method by which historians submit new hypotheses counter established interpretations in order to "revise" them. This is seen throughout interpretations of this event done by Cuban historians. By adopting a revisionist stance, Cuban historians and the Castro regime itself have attempted to marginalize the aggression demonstrated by the regime during the Cuban Missile Crisis.

The task of installing the missiles in Cuba was placed under the authority of Marshall Sergei Biryuzov, a man described by Soviet Deputy Prime Minister Anastas Mikoyan as "not very bright. . ."<sup>90</sup> The missiles were placed at various locations under the cover of palm trees. The storage for the missiles proved to be a tactical error in procedure. As Mikoyan would later explain "I myself had seen those palms and there was no way anybody was going to hide rocket launch sites under them."<sup>91</sup>

General Gribkov later explained the logistical issues of concealing the nuclear warheads which can be seen in the following text:

We foresaw, naturally, the possibility that U.S. intelligence might discover us. As it turned out, on October 14 they photographed white slabs of concrete. Naturally, they could be seen quite well from the air and were very difficult to disguise. . . Some of our comrades. . . thought that the missiles could be placed in such a way that they could not be distinguished from palm trees, but that was a stupid conclusion, because the missile sights had to be prepared, cables, hung, launching pads built—in other words, everything was complicated. Naturally, their intelligence discovered us for all those reasons. That's what intelligence is for. But the fact is, they discovered us late.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Spenser, 80

<sup>90</sup> Spenser, 81

<sup>91</sup> Spenser, 82

<sup>92</sup> Acosta, 121

Castro later explained that the issue of concealing the missiles and warheads was an avoidable mistake:

If we had known what those missiles were like and if the question of camouflage had been posed to us, it would have been easy to decide what to do... In a country where there are so many construction projects, so many big chicken barns and all sorts of things, it would have been the easiest thing in the world to build all those installations under roofs or something else, and they would have never been discovered.<sup>93</sup>

On October 22, 1962, the crisis began when a U-2 spy plane flying overhead photographed missile silos being erected in San Cristobal, Cuba. This event also, Castro explains could have been avoided:

The question arises. What were the surface-to-air missiles there for? What were they doing there? Why put in surface-to-air missiles and allow U-2s to fly over? To permit this was, I believe, unquestionably a political mistake. I don't blame the military men for that . . . Undoubtedly, they had strict orders . . . I am sure that they had orders not to fire on the U-2s . . . but it is incredible to me that . . . those planes were allowed to fly over. . . What were those surface-to-air missiles doing there?<sup>94</sup>

As a result of this discovery, the American Strategic Air Command (SAC) was placed on maximum alert and the garrison of American troops at Guantanamo Bay was dramatically increased. The United States was planning for armed combat. This is evidenced by the order given by the commander of the base at Guantanamo Bay stating that all civilian residents must evacuate.<sup>95</sup>

While the U.S. military was reorganizing itself, President Kennedy arranged an Executive Committee on October 16, known as ExComm consisting of 25 members including himself, Vice President Lyndon Johnson, Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy, Secretary of State Dean Rusk and Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara.<sup>96</sup>

In their meetings, members of ExComm developed a series of options or "tracks" to choose in order to resolve the crisis. The first option or "Track A" dealt with political pressure on Cuba and the

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<sup>93</sup> Acosta, 121-122

<sup>94</sup> Acosta, 122

<sup>95</sup> Acosta, 144

<sup>96</sup> Kennedy, 19

Soviet Union followed by military intervention “if satisfaction is not received.” “Track B” or the second option favored a direct assault on Cuba “without prior warning.”<sup>97</sup> The third option, “Track C” served as a hybrid for the two previous “tracks” stating that political pressures should be placed on Cuba as well as a total naval blockade of the island. “Track C” also left declaring war on Cuba as a possibility. The final option, “Track D” stated that the United States would conduct a full scale invasion of Cuba in order to “take Cuba away from Castro.”<sup>98</sup> The Kennedy Administration was willing to commit 85,000 men (40,000 of which were Marines), 183 U.S. Navy warships, and 579 aircraft<sup>99</sup> to a potential invasion of Cuba. The Administration eventually authorized a military blockade (officially termed as a “quarantine”) around Cuba consisting of sixteen destroyers, three cruisers, an anti-submarine aircraft carrier, and six utility ships.<sup>100</sup> These vessels were given orders to disable, instead of sink any hostile Russian vessel heading to Cuba.

During this time, Castro began to reorganize his political and military structure. He reassembled his military defense units in the mountains into three different divisions: eastern, central and western. Each of these divisions had their own military presence and political jurisdiction. Castro appointed his brother Raul as commander of the Eastern province. Commander Juan Almeida was named the leader of the central province and Che Guevara assumed command of the western province in Pinar del Rio. Castro remained in Havana to maintain control of Cuba from its capital.<sup>101</sup> The eastern part of the island, under the command of Raul Castro united together for battle under the slogan “*Listos para vencer.*”<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Kennedy, 28

<sup>98</sup> Kennedy, 29

<sup>99</sup> 579 aircraft were already prepared for an invasion. 1,000 additional aircraft and 15,000 men were being deployed to Florida during this time with provisions for two weeks.

<sup>100</sup> Thomas, 954

<sup>101</sup> Acosta, 145

<sup>102</sup> Thomas, 955; “Ready to vanquish.”

Thomas also points out that during the crisis 20,000 Russian troops were garrisoned on the island and were ready to defend Cuba in the event of an invasion.<sup>103</sup>

On October 23, 1962, Kennedy delivered his televised speech calling for Cuba to disarm and declaring a naval quarantine. To Kennedy's speech, Castro gave his rebuttal: "If the United States desires disarmament, magnificent! Let us all support a policy for the dismantling of bases, of troops throughout the world... but we are not in agreement with a policy that calls for disarming ourselves in the face of the aggressors."<sup>104</sup> On the same day Castro made a declaration which in *Hoy* the Cuban National Newspaper. The following is an excerpt:

At 5:40 p.m. the Prime Minister, Commander in Chief of the armed forces, ordered the entire Revolutionary Armed Forces to be placed on combat alert status, taken only in cases of critical danger. This measure was taken in response to the reports coming from the United States, and to the mobilization of U.S. military forces against our country. The nation has awakened on a war footing, ready to repel any attack.<sup>105</sup>

On October 24, Castro met with his chief of intelligence Captain Manuel de Jesus Quinones to calculate how many ships and soldiers the Americans would use in order to mount an invasion of Cuba. Quinones stated that United States would use five or six divisions and would need between 120 to 130 ships to transport them all. Such an invasion would take five to six days to accomplish. Quinones also noted that if the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division were ever activated, the first stage of the invasion would take place five or six hours after.<sup>106</sup>

To combat the possibility of air raids, Castro placed reserve batteries of anti-aircraft artillery on the outskirts of Havana. Twenty four of these batteries were placed at three points in the city and were

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<sup>103</sup> Thomas, 955

<sup>104</sup> Acosta, 161

<sup>105</sup> Blight, Allyn, and Welch, 15

<sup>106</sup> Acosta, 164

mobile in order to facilitate easy relocation. Castro justified this by saying, “There is no political reason whatsoever why we shouldn’t shoot down an aircraft flying 300 feet over our heads.”<sup>107</sup>

On October 25, Castro developed the Defensa Popular or People’s Defense, which consisted of men and women of all different civilian professions. The DP was assembled into various combat battalions and civil defense units including health and sanitation brigades, firefighters, and repair units in order to assist the war effort should combat arise.<sup>108</sup>

On October 26, Castro met with Soviet General Issa Pliyev to discuss the issue of American planes flying over Cuban airspace. Castro told Pliyev that he would order his military to shoot down any low flying American aircraft saying, “We cannot tolerate these... overflights because any day at dawn they’re going to destroy all these units.”<sup>109</sup>

Later that day Pliyev sent a coded message to Moscow saying that an attack was imminent and that he was going to disperse *techniki*: the act of moving the warheads from their storage units closer to the missiles so they could be used in the event of an American attack. Pliyev received a message back from Moscow stating, “You are forbidden to apply nuclear warheads to FKR, Luna, IL-28s without authorization from Moscow.”<sup>110</sup>

That night Castro sent a message to Premier Khrushchev stating the dire situation of the Cuban people. The following is an excerpt from that letter dated October 26:

After analysis of the situation and the reports in our possession, I consider aggression to be almost imminent—within the next twenty-four to seventy-two hours. There are two possible variants: the first and most probable is an air attack . . . the second which is less probable though entirely possible is invasion . . . Should the second variant take place and the imperialists invade Cuba with the intention of occupying [the country], the dangers of this aggressive policy for humanity are so great that after such an event the Soviet Union must never allow circumstances in which the imperialists might carry out a nuclear first strike against it. I say this because I believe that the imperialists’ aggressiveness has become extremely dangerous, and if they do indeed perform an act so brutal and in such brazen violation of universal law and

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<sup>107</sup> Acosta, 164

<sup>108</sup> Acosta, 165

<sup>109</sup> Munton, 43

<sup>110</sup> Munton, 43

morality as invading Cuba, that would be the moment to eliminate that danger for ever, in an act of the most legitimate self-defense. However hard and terrible the solution might be, there is no other.<sup>111</sup>

The content of the message was read to Premier Khrushchev by Oleg Troyanovsky who told Khrushchev, "In Castro's view, in the face of and inevitable clash with the U.S.A., the imperialists must not be allowed to deliver a strike" and then corrected himself by saying, "to be the first to deliver a nuclear strike."<sup>112</sup> Khrushchev was appalled by this statement and stated, "It is insanity... We have supplied the missiles in order to prevent an assault on the island, to preserve Cuba, to defend socialism, while he, not only is he to perish himself, he's dragging us down with him."<sup>113</sup> This letter provided incentive for Khrushchev to negotiate with Kennedy exclusively while leaving Castro and the Cuban people out of the negotiations.

Cuban historians have posed several arguments that question this. Tomas Diez Acosta stated in the seventh chapter of his book that theories suggesting that this letter pushed Khrushchev to independently broker for a solution to the conflict "lack[s] any objective basis<sup>114</sup>" and noted that the United States and the Soviet Union were already negotiating for peace before Castro's letter of October 26 was sent. Although this is true, the content of the letter and the reaction of Premier Khrushchev as told by his own son also emphasize the notion that it would not be prudent to include the Cuban people in the negotiations due to the ambitions blatantly stated by their leader. Had this letter not been sent, or had it contained a different message, it is possible that Khrushchev may have let the Cuban people in on negotiations.

By adopting a revisionist stance, Cuban historian Carlos Lechuga attempted to clarify Castro's intentions in his book entitled *In the Eye of the Storm*. Lechuga explained that Castro dictated his letter to Soviet First Secretary Monakhov who evidently did not speak Spanish well. Lechuga stated that the

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<sup>111</sup> Castro and Ramonet, 279

<sup>112</sup> Khrushchev 111

<sup>113</sup> Khrushchev 111

<sup>114</sup> Acosta, 172

letter was written in Russian by “another functionary”<sup>115</sup> named Darusenko who translated Castro’s notes. Lechuga’s revisionist theory indicates that the real nature of Castro’s message was lost in translation.

This theory is very difficult to believe based on the evidence. If Castro’s message had been misunderstood, he would have sent a follow up message that clarified his intentions. It is true that Castro doubted that Khrushchev fully understood the meaning of his message and did send follow up messages to clarify his intentions, but the content of those messages only serve to strengthen the meaning of the October 26<sup>th</sup> letter. The following is an excerpt from a message written to Khrushchev by Castro on October 31:

You based [your letter] on the alarming news you say you have received from Cuba and, lastly, my cable of 27 October. I do not know what news you may have received; I am simply referring to the message I sent you the night of the 26 October, received by you on the 27<sup>th</sup>. What we did in the face of events, Comrade Khrushchev, was prepare ourselves to fight. In Cuba there was but one kind of alarm: the alarm that called our people to arms. When in our judgment the imperialist attack became imminent, I decided that I should communicate that news to you, and alert both the government and the Soviet [military command]—since there were Soviet forces committed to fighting alongside us in the defense of the Republic of Cuba against outside attack—of the possibility of an attack that it was not within our power to halt, although we might indeed resist it . . . The danger could not daunt us, because we have felt it hanging over our country for many years, and to a certain extent we have become used to it . . . The eyes of many men, Soviet and Cuban, who were willing to die with supreme dignity, wept as they learned of the surprising and unexpected and practically unconditional decision to withdraw the weapons. You may not know to what degree the Cuban people were prepared to fulfill their duty to the patria and to humanity.<sup>116</sup>

This excerpt is taken directly from Castro’s most recent biography, the most current source. Had Castro been misquoted he would have stated so either in the letter or in the interviews conducted for this biography. The second half of this letter does indicate, however, that the Soviets attack after “the imperialist attack.”<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Lechuga, 90.

<sup>116</sup> Castro and Ramonet, 282-283

<sup>117</sup> Castro and Ramonet, 284

In any case, compelling Khrushchev to launch the missiles would have been a monumental task due to his views concerning the function of the missiles in Cuba. Khrushchev believed that they were more of a deterrent instead of weapons to be fired, as he would explain to his colleagues. "Every idiot can start a war, but it is impossible to win this war [with nuclear weapons]. Therefore these missiles [are] . . . to scare them, to restrain them . . . [and] give them back some of their own medicine."<sup>118</sup>

Khrushchev therefore forbade anyone from mounting the nuclear warheads on the missiles. Nikita Khrushchev's son, Sergei Khrushchev later asserted that his father never intended to use the missiles in the first place by explaining that his father "felt that would have made it easier for a madman to start a war."<sup>119</sup> As a result the nuclear weapons were never used.

On October 27, the Cuban military began to open fire on American planes, as per Castro's order. "We could say that the war started in Cuba on October the 27<sup>th</sup> in the morning. Of course, those fast flying jet planes, as soon as they heard the first shots, went higher to evade our artillery . . . We couldn't shoot down any of the low-flying planes. But we demonstrated our resistance." Castro later explained.<sup>120</sup> In an act of solidarity, the Soviets began to fire their antiaircraft artillery as well. As a result, an American U-2 spy plane piloted by Major Rudolf Anderson was shot down at 10:17 A.M. over Banes in Eastern Cuba. On the same day, Castro wrote a letter to the UN Secretary General saying, "Cuba is willing to discuss its difference with the United States as much as necessary, and to do everything it can to cooperate with the United Nations to resolve the present crisis; but Cuba flatly rejects any act violating the sovereignty of our country."<sup>121</sup>

On October 28, Khrushchev announced that he would remove the missiles and nuclear warheads from Cuba in exchange for the United States withdrawing its own Jupiter missiles which were

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<sup>118</sup> Nathan, 187

<sup>119</sup> Bruce J. Allyn, James G. Blight, David A. Welch, "Moscow, Havana and the Cuban Missile Crisis" *International Security* 14 (Winter 1989-1990): 169

<sup>120</sup> Acosta, 174

<sup>121</sup> Acosta, 175

located in Turkey. Kennedy had asked that this be kept a secret. As per the agreement, President Kennedy publically proclaimed that the United States would never invade Cuba. Khrushchev had made this deal without consulting Castro. In fact, according to his most recent biography, Castro learned of the exchange through the international press instead of Khrushchev himself. The news of the deal hit the Cuban people with indignation as Castro later recalled:

When the news reached us . . .it produced great indignation, because we had felt that we had become some kind of bargaining chip. Not only was this a decision taken without consulting us, several steps were taken without informing us. They could have informed us of the messages of the 26<sup>th</sup> and the 27<sup>th</sup> we heard over the radio on the 28<sup>th</sup> that there had been an agreement . . . the reaction of our nation was of profound indignation, not relief.<sup>122</sup>

Upon hearing the news personally, Castro “swore, kicked the wall and broke a looking glass in his fury.”<sup>123</sup>

Later that afternoon, Castro made a public announcement stating that “The guarantees mentioned by President Kennedy that there will be no aggression against Cuba will be ineffective unless, in addition to the removal of the naval blockade that he promises, the following measures among others are adopted.”<sup>124</sup> Castro then drew a five point plan outlining the conditions for post-crisis relations between Cuba and the United States.

The first point of Castro’s plan was that the economic embargo placed on Cuba by the United States in 1960 must be lifted. This would enable Cuba to trade freely with any nation in the world. The second point in Castro’s plan was that the United States must end all subversive activities designed to remove the communist regime from power. Castro defined these activities as the dropping of explosives by air, sea and land vehicles, the organization of invasions by Cuban exiles or others, and acts of espionage and sabotage. The third point of Castro’s plan was that the acts of piracy undertaken by the United States and Puerto Rico were to cease. The fourth point was that the United States would

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<sup>122</sup> Spenser, 89

<sup>123</sup> Thomas, 960

<sup>124</sup> Acosta, 179

recognize the sovereignty of Cuban airspace and waters and would never send intruders again. The fifth and last point of Castro's plan was that the United States must withdraw from its garrison at Guantanamo Bay and return the territory to Cuba.<sup>125</sup>

All of these points were rejected by the United States.<sup>126</sup>

The aftermath of the Cuban Missile Crisis had a devastating effect on the Cuban people. Che Guevara was inspecting his military units as commander of the garrison at Pinar del Rio when he received the news. Eye witnesses described that Che "went mad, threw his beret to the floor and furiously repeated that this was a violation because he had conversations in Moscow and they had been for something different."<sup>127</sup>

At this time, according to rumor, Castro supposedly instructed President Dorticos to handle the public affairs of the country while he took the month off to recover from the political blow. Cuban citizens began to write letters to the Soviet Embassy in disgust saying that the Soviet Union was using Cuba as a bargaining chip to resolve their issues with the United States.<sup>128</sup>

On November 1, Castro made a declaration to the Cuban people saying, "It is a shameful policy to hide the most serious issues from public opinion. It is difficult for the Communists to criticize the Soviet leadership, but you cannot refrain from doing so if you want to follow your conscience and be in agreement with history."<sup>129</sup> Ironically enough, no other communist nation reported on this declaration.

Throughout the month of November 1962, the Chinese Embassy in Havana organized large demonstrations in solidarity for the Cuban people. These demonstrations were intended to ensure that

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<sup>125</sup> Acosta, 180

<sup>126</sup> Acosta, 180

<sup>127</sup> Spenser 90

<sup>128</sup> Spenser, 90

<sup>129</sup> "Today I am prouder than ever before of being a son of this nation" Fidel Castro November 1, 1962 in *The Cuban Revolution Reader* ed. Jose Garcia Luis (Melbourne, Australia: Ocean Press, 2008), 165

the problems of the crisis would be resolved without alienating Cuba. During this time Cubans began to align with the Chinese communists which took prestige away from the Soviet communists.<sup>130</sup>

In spite of all these events and sentiments, Khrushchev believed the crisis was a victory for both the Soviet Union and Cuba. He articulated his views to Carlos Rafael Rodriguez of the National Agrarian Reform Institute in December 1962:

We have also felt a lot of bitterness. . . We have never declared that the missiles are going to be used to convert Cuba into a launching pad against imperialism . . . Only fools can claim that we placed the missiles there with the intention of keeping them . . . We consider that we have achieved a victory for Cuba and for the Soviet Union, that the objectives we had when we placed them there have been achieved. We have retreated tactically, but they have retreated fundamentally. I repeat: we have not retreated on any front, we are not on the defensive anywhere; I insist, anywhere, even in Cuba. We are on the offensive everywhere.<sup>131</sup>

In the same visit, Khrushchev is also reported to have asked senior delegate member and leader Carlos Rafael Rodriguez, "Tell me, why is Fidel so angry with me? Doesn't he know that I love him like a son?" To which Rodriguez replied, "That's just the problem, Nikita, he's *not* your son. He's the leader of a sovereign country, in spite of what you people did to us in the October crisis."<sup>132</sup>

However, the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party is not of the same opinion as Khrushchev as they articulated in a report in October 1964 which states "All in all, the missile crisis of 1962 caused serious damage to Soviet-Cuban relations and in 1964 'we still feel them.'"<sup>133</sup>

In April 1963, Castro went to Moscow in order to achieve a permanent commitment from the Soviet Union to defend Cuba in the event of a hostile attack. Castro wanted Cuba to enter the Warsaw Pact and be militarily aligned with the Soviet Union. The Soviets declined both attempts of admission in order to avoid giving Kennedy an excuse not to adhere to the declaration that ended the Cuban Missile Crisis. Later in January 1964, Castro returned to Moscow and received a statement that the Soviet Union

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<sup>130</sup> Spenser, 90

<sup>131</sup> Spenser, 91

<sup>132</sup> Blight, Allyn, and Welch, 190

<sup>133</sup> Spenser, 92

would defend Cuba from any aggression with all means at their disposal, but Cuba would never be admitted to the Warsaw Pact.<sup>134</sup>

Cuban-Soviet relations were not the same after the Cuban Missile Crisis. In January 1968, Castro gave a speech to the Central Communist Party and described the early relations between Cuba and the Soviet Union: "At that time we had a very high regard for the Soviet Union, I think more than it deserved."<sup>135</sup> In the same speech, Castro described the Soviet pact of placing nuclear warheads in Cuba as "one of the most incredible hoaxes ever written... it was the work of bureaucratic cretins, absolutely impolitic."<sup>136</sup>

The Cuban Missile Crisis in many ways caused more problems than it solved. As a direct result of the crisis, Soviet influence in Latin America suffered dramatically, according to Che Guevara. The Soviets' prestige suffered and allowed China to move in and win the hearts and minds of Cuban citizens. Although Khrushchev succeeded in protecting Cuba from an American invasion, he did so in a way that indicated he "[had not] thought things through or prepared backup plans for various contingencies. He badly misjudged the American response, improvised madly when he was found out, and was fortunate the crisis ended as safely as it did."<sup>137</sup>

The Cuban perspective in this conflict indicates that the Cubans saw themselves independent from the two superpowers. Cuban historians Gott, Thomas, Acosta and Lechuga demonstrate this very well in their interpretations of the event. The arguments posed by these historians effectively state that the U.S. was erroneous in stating that Cuba and Castro were "Soviet puppets." Soviet historians, such as Sergei Khrushchev confirm this point especially by citing the acceleration of Soviet-U.S. negotiations after the startling letter from Castro to Khrushchev dated October 26. This event indicates a gap in strategy and intentions of both parties concerned indicating that the relationship between Cuba and the

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<sup>134</sup> Ray S. Cline, "Commentary: The Cuban Missile Crisis" *Foreign Affairs* 68 (Fall 1989): 193

<sup>135</sup> Spenser, 95

<sup>136</sup> Spenser, 97

<sup>137</sup> Spenser, 99.

Soviet Union was not as paternal as the U.S. had suspected. This is the strongest element of Sergei Khrushchev's interpretation of this event; his weakest point is his overwhelming naivety concerning the relationship between the United States and Cuba.

After researching this topic in greater detail, it has become my interpretation that the Soviet historians' strongest point is the Cuban historians' weakest point. Both Acosta and Lechuga attempt to clarify Castro's meaning and intentions in his letter to Khrushchev of October 26 by revisionist means. These arguments, however, are poorly crafted and do not reflect the views of the parties concerned, namely Castro. It is my interpretation that instead of viewing the missiles and warheads as a deterrent, in the way Nikita Khrushchev and other members of the Soviet leadership intended, Castro viewed the missiles as a possible offensive weapon to finally rid Cuba of the looming American presence that had threatened his government early in his regime.

Castro's choice to view the missiles as an offensive weapon destroyed any possibility for Soviet military aid in the future as demonstrated by the repeated Soviet refusal to add Cuba to the Warsaw Pact. This demonstrates that the Soviet leadership was aware of the volatile aggressive tendencies that existed between the United States and Cuba and that adding Cuba as an integral part of its collective would only heighten Cold War tensions to an unnecessary level.

The strain on Cuban-Soviet relations after the crisis only proved to widen the gap between Cuba and the Soviet Union. This is demonstrated by Castro's refusal to sign the Arms Control Treaties of October-November 1963, acts of legislation that Khrushchev had brokered with Kennedy during the crisis. Castro vehemently refused to sign this Limited Test Ban treaty on the grounds that Cuba was "in the neighborhood of Yankee imperialism."<sup>138</sup> On January 2, 1965, on the sixth anniversary of the Triumph of the Cuban Revolution, Castro formally denounced the Soviet Union and declared that it may be necessary someday to separate Cuba from "the socialist camp" due to irreconcilable differences. Also

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<sup>138</sup> James G. Blight and Phillip P. Brenner *Sad & Luminous Days: Cuba's Struggle with the Superpowers After the Missile Crisis* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc. 2002) 100

in this speech, Castro declared that Cuba “must find solutions which bring about the unity of form and substance, and not the divorce between form and substance.”<sup>139</sup>

In their book, *Sad & Luminous Days: Cuba’s Struggle with the Superpowers After the Missile Crisis*, James G. Blight and Phillip P. Brenner argue that this statement was a declaration that Russia would never “Sovietize” Cuba. I concur with this interpretation based on the fundamental grounds of Cuban communism and the aftermath of the Cuban Missile Crisis. While it is true that the fallout of the Cuban Missile Crisis strained Cuban-Soviet relations, and prevented the Soviets from providing military aid to Cuba, the Soviet Union continued to provide economic aid and sugar quotas to Cuba until its collapse in the early 1990s.

The Cuban Missile Crisis had the potential for a disaster of apocalyptic proportions. The lack of ideological and tactical unity on the side of the Soviets and the Cubans coupled with the vague assumptions made by the United States about Cuba nearly caused a chain reaction that engulfed the entire world in nuclear war.

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<sup>139</sup> Blight and Brenner, 101

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