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Covert Imperialism: The Eisenhower Administration and Cuba

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Abstract

This paper tracks the Eisenhower Administration's shifting policy towards Cuba and its use of covert imperialism to obtain its objectives. The policy considerations of the United States centered around a convenience for American interests. The support for the Batista regime, despite its oppression, exacerbated anti-American sentiments in the Cuban Revolution and put it on a collision course with American interests. As engagement failed, Cuba nationalized, and tensions escalated, the Eisenhower Administration initiated a campaign of covert imperialism that sought a government more in line with its interests. The covert operations implemented included economic and political sabotage, assassination attempts, and the training of counter-revolutionary guerilla groups that eventually led to the failed Bay of Pigs invasion.

Keywords

Eisenhower Administration, Cuba, Covert Imperialism

Disciplines

International Relations | Latin American History | Political History | United States History

Comments

Written for HIST 412: Eisenhower & his Times

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Patrick Sullivan

Senior History Thesis

History 412 - Eisenhower & His Times

Professor Birkner

3 December 2021

Covert Imperialism: The Eisenhower Administration and Cuba



(Fidel Castro speech in 1960: photograph by Raul Corrales)¹

I affirm that I have upheld the highest principles of honesty and integrity in my academic work and have not witnessed a violation of the Honor Code.

¹ “Fidel Castro: The Life of the Cuban Leader.” *NBCNews.com*, NBCUniversal News Group, <https://www.nbcnews.com/slideshow/news/fidel-castro-the-life-of-the-cuban-leader-38242173/>.

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Table of Contents

Abstract and Table of Contents.....	1
Introduction.....	2
Literature Review.....	3
Origins.....	3
Eisenhower and his “Lieutenants”.....	4
U.S. Foreign Policy.....	6
The Cuban Revolution.....	8
Public Opinion and Media Coverage.....	9
Cuban Viewpoints.....	10
Covert Imperialism.....	11
Convenience.....	12
Aiding and Abetting.....	13
An Anti-American Revolution?.....	16
Misperceptions.....	17
Twilight of a Tyrant.....	20
Dawn of a Tyrant.....	21
Nationalism and Escalation.....	23
Covert Operations.....	27
Conclusions.....	30
Covert Imperialism.....	30
The Eisenhower Administration and Ike’s Role Within It.....	31
Inheritance.....	33
Legacy.....	36
Epilogue.....	37
Bibliography.....	40

“It has been observed that the nations most highly favored with freedom have not always been the most friendly to the freedom of others.”²

-John Quincy Adams

Introduction

Relations between the United States and Cuba, from the Spanish-American War of 1898 until the Cuban Revolution of the late 1950s, were almost entirely influenced by America acting as a “protector” over Cuba along with other Latin American countries.³ The United States used its immense economic, political, and military power to its advantage in their Cuban policy. The Cuban Revolution marked a turning point in relations as the Cuban people began to take more of a role in the destiny of their country. The subsequent, escalating nationalization by Cuba of key industries brought on an array of economic sanctions, sabotage, and covert operations by the Eisenhower Administration that alienated the Castro regime away from America and towards the Communist-bloc, outlasting even the Cold War with the Soviet Union.

The first part of this paper will outline various relevant themes important to understanding how to conceptualize U.S-Cuban relations and the development before and after the Cuban Revolution. The second part will use the literature discussed in the first part, and other sources, to follow the development of the Eisenhower Administration’s use of covert imperialism in Cuba. The paper will end with conclusions on the role of Ike, his legacy, and other pertinent questions.

² John Quincy Adams, “Oration,” 4 July 1793, p. 9, University of Missouri Special Collections as quoted in Hopkins, *American Empire*, 687; Adams was referencing “Britain’s attempts to coerce the mainland colonies into submission.”

³ Alex von Tunzelmann, *Red Heat: Conspiracy, Murder, and the Cold War in the Caribbean* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2011), 21. In the decades following Cuban independence, the United States “created protectorates in Panama, the Dominican Republic, Nicaragua, and Haiti, annexed Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands, took over customs and excise duties in four countries, established naval bases across the Caribbean region”. Additionally, the United States increased its investments abroad from \$200-300 million to \$4 billion along with building and controlling the Panama Canal.

Literature Review

Origins

In a study of the U.S.-Cuban relations during the Eisenhower Administration, it would be first helpful to understand the origins of 1950s' relations. Three books were fundamental in framing developments in Cuba. The first, Jane Franklin's *Cuba and the U.S. Empire: A Chronological History*, outlined the relationship by methodically identifying points that were key to the story. Franklin's book provided a useful timeline and details of events distilling them into concise descriptions.⁴ The second book, *Cuba: What Everyone Needs to Know* by Julia Sweig, supplements the first source by going into greater depth on key questions about Cuban history. Sweig included chapters on why the Batista regime collapsed, whether Castro was really a Communist, U.S. reaction to the Cuban revolutionaries, and U.S. economic interests.⁵ Additionally, *United States–Cuban Relations: A Critical History* by Esteban Morales Dominguez and Gary Prevost brings an acute perspective that analyzes the broader trends and patterns in the long and tumultuous relationship.⁶ These sources provide the frame of references necessary to form a foundation of fact that the paper can build upon. The literature on this topic remains quite substantial, and cannot be fully covered in this paper, so these sources and others will help to orient and enlighten further discussion

The origins of the Eisenhower Administration's foreign policy will also be important to understand in order to contextualize the developments in Cuba. As America became a dominant, global superpower after World War II, it took on increasing responsibility and action on the world stage. A.G. Hopkins's *American Empire* investigates the development of America in the world over the span of three centuries. He noted that, due to its proximity, the U.S. had a

⁴ Jane Franklin, *Cuba and the U.S. Empire: A Chronological History* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2016).

⁵ Julia Sweig, *Cuba: What Everyone Needs to Know* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

⁶ Esteban Morales Domínguez, and Gary Prevost, *United States–Cuban Relations: A Critical History* (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2008).

permanent interest in ensuring stability and cooperation in the Caribbean. Hopkins describes how the Cuban Revolution and Castro were influenced by United States policy toward Cuba.⁷

Richard Immerman's *Empire for Liberty* explores how individuals shaped the course of the American Empire. Immerman explains how the American ideal of liberty and its empire were on a collision course. This helps shed light on the conundrum that U.S. policy makers had to reconcile in the 20th century in Cuba. The most notable chapter for this paper spotlights President Eisenhower's Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles. The analysis of John Foster Dulles as a "cold warrior" provides insight into the foreign policies and objectives of America during the Eisenhower Administration that affected the course of the Cuban Revolution and events following. Immerman highlighted Dulles's usage of the terms "boundary-barrier" and relatedly "group authority": "the normative strategy employed by those with sufficient power to make the rules (the "group authority") to deny the wishes (i.e., to deny fully liberty and opportunity) to those subject to the rules."⁸ The spotlight on John Foster Dulles helped to frame how the Eisenhower Administration's foreign policy towards Cuba was conceptualized.

Eisenhower and his "Lieutenants"

A further analysis of the literature on Eisenhower's Administration would be helpful to understanding its role in the development of policy and events in Cuba. Firstly, Eisenhower's autobiography provides his own perspective on the development of events in Cuba. To support this, Louis Galambos's biography, *Eisenhower: Becoming the Leader of the Free World* follows his journey from Kansas to the highest levels of military and government. The biography highlights Eisenhower's sympathies to revolutionary movements but also his weakening sympathy to them when they blended into expansions of communist power. Galambos noted how

⁷ A.G. Hopkins, *America Empire: A Global History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 682.

⁸ Richard Immerman, *Empire for Liberty: A History of American Imperialism from Benjamin Franklin to Paul Wolfowitz* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 175.

Eisenhower's style of leadership may have worked in great-power relations but that it succeeded less so with revolutionary movements. As Ike pursued stability in a peaceful world, revolutionaries sought change from the status quo.⁹

Another work of note, *The Age of Eisenhower: America and the World in the 1950s* by William Hitchcock, supports Galambos by going into greater detail on the Eisenhower Administration and policies in Cuba. The chapters "Dark Arts for a Cold War" and "Secret Wars in the Third World" were especially pertinent to this paper as they detail the shift to covert operations under the Eisenhower Administration. The chapters point to the centrality of the CIA as a tool in American foreign policy, most evident early on in Iran and Guatemala. Hitchcock noted the contradiction of Eisenhower's "Good Neighbor Policy" in terms of the Guatemalan intervention and the Cuban policy at the end of his second term. The constraints of an overt intervention, which would provide a counterpart for the Soviet intervention in Hungary, required America's role in the anti-Castro plot to be as invisible as feasible. Concluding on the legacy of Eisenhower's covert operations, Hitchcock stated that "Eisenhower failed to anticipate that covert operations, once started, have a curious way of expanding until they take on a life and momentum of their own."¹⁰

Two figures central to the foreign policy intricacies of the Eisenhower Administration that should be more extensively understood were John Foster Dulles and Allen Dulles. Stephen Kinzer's *The Brothers: John Foster Dulles, Allen Dulles, and Their Secret World War* portrays the lives of the brothers and their substantial influence in the Eisenhower Administration. The book contributes to the literature and this paper by exploring the underbelly of overt and covert

⁹ Louis Galambos, *Eisenhower: Becoming the Leader of the Free World* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2018), 198, 205.

¹⁰ William Hitchcock, *The Age of Eisenhower: America and the World in the 1950s* (New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2018), 454-455.

operations against Cuba which laid the foundation for decades of hostility. In further analysis of Allen Dulles, Peter Grose's *Gentleman Spy: The Life of Allen Dulles* goes into detail on Allen's life from his early years, his rise in the OSS during WWII, to his tenure as CIA Director. This book shows Allen Dulles's development in spycraft and turn to covert operations. It also gives insight into the type of leader Allen Dulles was as director of the CIA and the inner-workings of the operations against Castro and Cuba. Additionally, Richard Bissell's autobiography *Reflections of a Cold Warrior*, provides his personal account of the covert operations.¹¹

U.S. Foreign Policy

Alex Von Tunzelmann's *Red Heat: Conspiracy, Murder, and the Cold War* brings United States-Cuban relations into wider focus regarding American policy in the Caribbean.

Tunzelmann describes how the United States and eventually the Soviet Union attempted to exploit the Caribbean islands, specifically Cuba, as tools for their Cold War objectives. The consequences of these interventions – tyranny, violence, and poverty to name a few – shows how detrimental American policy was. The author provides, in exacting detail, the development of events in the Caribbean and U.S policy and actions towards its southern neighbors. Finally, Tunzelmann explains how American policy in the Caribbean acted as precedent for future American-led interventions. Not only in a figurative sense, as she describes, but in a literal sense as the *Small Wars Manual* of the United States Marine Corps that would be used in future operations was built on the experiences of Marines in the Caribbean.¹² This book provides excellent insight into American policy in Cuba in the context of the Caribbean as well as the ramifications of those policies and actions.

¹¹ Stephen Kinzer, *The Brothers: John Foster Dulles, Allen Dulles, and Their Secret World War* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2013); Peter Grose, *Gentleman Spy* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1994).; and Richard Bissell, Jonathan E. Lewis, and Frances T. Pudlo, *Reflections of a Cold Warrior: From Yalta to the Bay of Pigs* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996).

¹² Alex von Tunzelmann, *Red Heat*, 6.

Another book indispensable to the literature and this paper was John Prados's *Safe for Democracy: The Secret Wars of the CIA*. Prados contributes to the literature by placing the story of the CIA's covert operations in the context of America's commitment to democratic values and institutions. Prados explained that "a true democratic policy cannot exclude any political belief," and the secret wars in Cuba certainly fell short of that threshold.¹³ It contributes further to this paper by examining the efforts of presidents and Congress to control the CIA as well as other choices made in secret wars. On this note, *Ike's Bluff: President Eisenhower's Secret Battle to Save the World* by Evan Thomas examines Eisenhower's role in foreign policy. Thomas explained that there was more to the image of the "benevolent grandfather": a cold-blooded, keen tactician, and effective at manipulating others.¹⁴

Furthermore, *Waging Peace: How Eisenhower Shaped an Enduring Cold War Strategy* by Robert Bowie and Richard Immerman, provides insight into the strategy that Eisenhower employed in foreign policy. This book does an excellent job in showing how Eisenhower's foreign policy was formulated on a deliberate basis. The development of the usage of covert operations and psychological warfare, as a tool of the grand strategy, was expanded under Eisenhower and further explained in this book. The authors note that it was the "successful" CIA operations in Iran and Guatemala that "generated undue confidence that covert action could effectively contain indigenous unrest." Although the authors criticized these parts of Eisenhower's legacy, they did commend him for being "critically important" in American financing of development for the third-world as well as creating the "new look," grand strategy used throughout the Cold War by successive administrations.¹⁵ For specifics on American

¹³ John Prados, *Safe for Democracy: The Secret Wars of the CIA* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, Publisher, 2006), 342.

¹⁴ Evan Thomas, *Ike's Bluff: President Eisenhower's Secret Battle to Save the World* (New York: Back Bay Books / Little Brown Company, 2012).

¹⁵ Robert Bowie and Richard Immerman, *Waging Peace: How Eisenhower Shaped an Enduring Cold War Strategy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 253.

operations in Cuba, the Inspector General's Survey of the Cuban Operation as well as the *Foreign Relations of the United States* can provide valuable insights and details that might not have been covered in high-level literature.¹⁶

The Cuban Revolution

The Cuban Revolution marked the turning point of relations with the United States. Jules Benjamin's *The United States and the Origins of the Cuban Revolution* outlines the critical role of the United States in the development of the Cuban Revolution.¹⁷ Washington did not recognize its own role in the failure of the old regime as Batista's fall from power was attributed to his corruption and repression. Benjamin noted that the mood swing in Washington from a "sense of confidence" in 1959 to a "sense of betrayal" in the fall helped to explain the rapid shift from a policy of "wait and see" to one of "all-out political and economic warfare."¹⁸

To further understand the Cuban Revolution in the context of U.S. policy, Lars Schoultz's *That Infernal Little Cuban Republic: The United States and the Cuban Revolution* provides an expansive chronicle of how ten successive U.S. administrations attempted to end the Cuban Revolution. Schoultz argues that despite the overwhelming advantage in size and power of the United States over Cuba, the "Cubans' historical insistence on their right to self-determination has inevitably irritated American administrations, influenced both U.S. domestic policies and foreign policy, and led to a freeze in diplomatic relations of unprecedented longevity."¹⁹

¹⁶ Inspector General's Survey of the Cuban Operation and Associated Documents. https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/DOC_0000129914.pdf; and John Glennon. *Foreign Relations of the United States*, vol. 6, "Cuba". Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1991.

¹⁷ Jules R. Benjamin, *The United States and the Origins of the Cuban Revolution: An Empire of Liberty in an Age of National Liberation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 21.: Benjamin writes that the United States's influence in Cuba derived from "U.S. military power, from its proximity, from the force and structure of its huge economy, and, finally, from its intention to mold Cuban society."

¹⁸ Jules Benjamin, *The United States and the Origins of the Cuban Revolution*, 67.

¹⁹ Lars Schoultz, *That Infernal Little Cuban Republic: The United States and the Cuban Revolution* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 554; For additional sources, see Marifeli Pérez-Stable. *The Cuban Revolution Origins, Course, and Legacy*. 2nd ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.; and Julia Sweig. *Inside the Cuban Revolution: Fidel Castro and the Urban Underground* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2002).

Public Opinion and Media Coverage

The early media coverage of Castro and the July 26 Movement was instrumental in giving the movement attention and swaying public opinion in their favor. *Reporting the Cuban Revolution: How Castro Manipulated American Journalists* by Leonard Ray Teel was critical in showing how major American journalists aided in the image-making of Castro and his revolution.²⁰ Additionally, an article by Joel Phillip Kleinman provides further evidence of the influence that American news media had on the Cuban Revolution.²¹

Herbert Matthews was particularly influential in the original development of Castro's movement from being seen as a band of guerillas in the Sierra Maestra to the seeds of a revolution against Batista.²² Matthews developed a "strong network of sources in Cuba who told him what was happening and what was yet to come." One of his sources, Rufo Lopez-Fresquet, a conservative anti-Batista economist, believed Matthews' articles "had made Castro a hero, greatly helping him to recruit reinforcements."²³ Alongside this, Herbert Matthews was exerting influence in Washington, as policy makers wanted his opinions on the situation and how to move forward. His role in the Eisenhower Administration was not peculiar though:

He acted as a kind of special ambassador, hoping to improve relations with Havana. It was not an unfamiliar role for a foreign correspondent in the mid-twentieth century. By involving himself in the diplomatic process, Matthews followed in the footsteps of other correspondents, including Walter Duranty, who helped bring about U.S. recognition of the Soviet Union in the 1930s.²⁴

²⁰ Leonard Ray Teel, *Reporting the Cuban Revolution: How Castro Manipulated American Journalists* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2015).

²¹ Joel Phillip Kleinman, "Major American news magazines and the Cuban Revolution | 1957--1971," (1972). Graduate Student Theses, Dissertations, & Professional Papers. 2900. <https://scholarworks.umt.edu/etd/2900>.

²² Patterson, *Contesting Castro: The United States and the Triumph of the Cuban Revolution*, 77. "Matthews not only reported that Castro was alive but also that the rebel and his youthful army were thriving. The writer deemed Castro a formidable opponent for the regime because he could exploit public discontent with Batista's repression, governmental corruption, and economic uncertainties ... In the articles, Castro himself appeared as an inspiring, fanatical, and courageous leader with a vague program."

²³ Anthony DePalma, *The Man Who Invented Fidel: Cuba, Castro, and Herbert L. Matthews of The New York Times*. 1st ed. (New York: Public Affairs, 2006), 160.

²⁴ DePalma, *The Man Who Invented Fidel*, 161.

Matthews was the primary example of how the media affected the course of events of the Cuban Revolution and subsequent events. The media certainly affected the public opinion towards Castro and Cuba and these opinions shifted towards an aversion to him in 1959.²⁵ An example of the media in perceiving the Cuban situation comes from a broadcast in May 1959:

CBS Radio presents 'Is Cuba Going Red?' Good Evening, the inescapable fact is brutally simple the island of Cuba, ninety miles off our shores, site of the American naval base that guards our Southern defenses, anchor for our defense of the Panama canal, and key to the political future of Latin America, this Cuban island today is a totalitarian dictatorship and is rapidly becoming a communist beachhead in the Caribbean. Cuba is today a one-man government held together by promises and fear. That is why this report will be told in my voice rather than the voices of Cubans themselves.²⁶

This broadcast, made in collusion with the CIA, shows how the media began to demonize Castro and push fears of communism into perception toward Cuba. As Castro and Cuba became to be seen as more communistic, the American public developed an animus towards him.

Herbert Matthews and other media figures gave a spotlight to the Cuban Revolution which brought sympathy from like-minded Cubans and Americans who could connect with the national revolution. The disillusionment of the media, after their hopes for more freedom in Cuba were crushed, shows the inherent problem with covering revolutions when reports are “dominated by the hopes of the men ... seeing not what *was*, but what men *wished to see*.”²⁷ The influence of the American media in its perception of Castro and the growing American public antipathy towards him, in part, pushed Eisenhower to go further with operations against him.

Cuban viewpoints

Fidel Castro: My Life: A Spoken Autobiography by Fidel Castro and Ignacio Ramonet helped popularize the Cuban leader's views.²⁸ It also helps to suggest Castro's motive in seeking

²⁵ William G Mayer, “Trends: American Attitudes toward Cuba” *Public Opinion Quarterly* 65, no. 4 (2001): 585–606. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3078757>; and Daniel W. Fisk, “Cuba and American Public Opinion,” *ASCE*, 30 Nov. 1999, https://www.ascecuba.org/asce_proceedings/cuba-and-american-public-opinion/.

²⁶ Brendan James, and Coleman, Noah, “Blowback Season Two: Episode Three,” <https://omny.fm/shows/blowback> 2021, (00:30-01:06).

²⁷ Teel, *Reporting the Cuban Revolution*, 189.

²⁸ Fidel Castro and Ignacio Ramonet, *Fidel Castro: My Life: A Spoken Autobiography* (New York: Scribner, 2008).

independence from the United States as well as developing ties with the Soviet Union. Another vital source to understanding Cuban viewpoints, especially concerning American covert operations, was Fabian Escalante's *The Secret War: CIA Covert Operations in Cuba 1959-62*. Escalante, the former head of Cuban State Security, was regarded as one of Cuba's foremost authorities on U.S. covert operations in Cuba. Additionally, the book *CIA Targets Fidel* was helpful as it includes further commentary by Fabian Escalante and the 1967 CIA Inspector General's Report on plots to assassinate Fidel Castro. Finally, Fabian Escalante's *Executive Action: 634 Ways To Kill Fidel Castro* provides even greater detail into the United States government's operations against Castro. An understanding of Cuba's response to America's covert imperialism contributed greatly to this paper. Other sources, ranging from top-level Cubans to ordinary citizens, were also helpful in supporting the previous sources in understanding how Cubans reacted to growing tension with the United States.

Covert Imperialism

The major idea of this paper, "covert imperialism," should be properly outlined before further discussion. The first part of the term can be discerned as meaning "secret" or "hidden" while the second part means to many as "one country exerting power/influence to its advantage." In this paper, "covert imperialism" will mean an intentional covert policy and action on part of a greater nation on a lesser nation in order to influence developments in the greater nation's favor.

Imperialism has had a fundamental root in humanity, throughout history, with great powers exerting their influence on smaller powers. After World War II, as decolonization and nationalism began to increase, it became necessary for the United States and other colonial powers to obscure their imperial role. As such, the United States mainly used "covert" means of imperialism, such as providing economic and military support to regimes in exchange for support

of U.S. interests. This was the policy in Cuba during the 1950s until the Cuban Revolution when Batista was toppled by Castro and the July 26 Movement

Once Castro enacted reforms that hurt U.S. interests and turned towards communism, the Eisenhower Administration began to employ a more insidious form of covert imperialism: a campaign of political, economic, and psychological sabotage against Cuba in order to undermine Castro, or what is now called “regime change.” The Eisenhower Administration first used covert imperialism to protect its interests in Cuba through Batista, despite his corruption and repression. Then the administration used covert imperialism to clandestinely push for regime change towards a more favorable government. Both efforts, before and after the Cuban Revolution, were misguided: the former by creating conditions favorable to an anti-American revolution and the latter by alienating Cuba towards the support of the USSR.

Convenience

On March 10, 1952, General Fulgencio Batista initiated a coup, suspended the constitution, cancelled elections, and became dictator.²⁹ The Truman Administration, acting out of concern for U.S. interests, quickly recognized the pro-American Batista government and committed military and economic aid even as organized resistance began.³⁰ Thus began the policy of supporting Batista that was inherited and continued by the Eisenhower Administration.

The relationship of 1950s Cuban governments with the United States can be characterized as one that has varied in convenience for both sides. Although the United States exerted considerable influence in Cuba, through its aid and overwhelming military capability, it

²⁹ Tunzelmann, *Red Heat*, 52. General Batista had been running for president in the 1952 election but had little chance of winning so staged a military coup to consolidate his power. Also during these elections, Fidel Castro, who had graduated from law school in 1950, was running for Congress as a member of the Orthodox party. The coup of Batista enraged Castro and gave him immediate reason for becoming revolutionary; Domínguez and Prevost, *United States–Cuban Relations: A Critical History*, 35. The authors describe how after the coup, “Fidel Castro gathered a number of students and workers around him and sought to begin a national uprising by capturing the army barracks at Moncada, Santiago, and the Cespedes barracks in Bayamo. They attacked on July 26, 1953. In the ensuing battles, most of the attackers were killed and Castro was captured.”

³⁰ Franklin, *Cuba and the U.S. Empire: A Chronological History*, 15.

could not affect events on the ground like Cubans themselves could. The military coup of Batista in 1952 and later the Cuban Revolution were events that the United States could not predict, nor have influence on, and only could react to after the fact. The United States government's subsequent relationship with Cuba after these events centered around a convergence of interests, mainly being pro-American and anti-Communist. As noted by Hitchcock, "As a pro-American, anticommunist, moneymaking tropical den of inquiry, Batista's Cuba found plenty of sympathetic supporters in the corridors of power in Washington."³¹

Once opinion turned sour on Batista and it was found that he was using American arms against Cubans, the Eisenhower Administration was forced to shift its support from a pro-American regime to emphasize the values of the American political culture and international order. Thus, as Cuba became more inconvenient for the United States, it began a shift to a comprehensive strategy to undermine Castro and install a more favorable government.

Aiding and Abetting

The Eisenhower Administration, in a paradox of American values, "aided and abetted" Batista, Castro, and other revolutionary and counter-revolutionary forces in Cuba. The Eisenhower Administration supported Batista with military aid as well as assisting the expansion of Cuban intelligence services and secret police.³² Batista's counterinsurgency tactics drew condemnation in Cuba and abroad. Batista's police "routinely kidnapped suspects, tortured them to death, and threw their bodies into the streets to instill fear across the country."³³ What worried

³¹ Hitchcock, *The Age of Eisenhower*, 443.

³² Patterson, *Contesting Castro: The United States and the Triumph of the Cuban Revolution*, 58. "Before Batista's 1952 coup, the United States, as part of its Cold War effort to gird the globe with military partners and bases, signed agreements with Cuba to install U.S. Army, Navy, and Air Force missions on the island and to provide military equipment under the Mutual Defense Assistance Act." This military support would continue and increase under Batista.

³³ Hitchcock, *The Age of Eisenhower*, 444.

American officials more was Batista had used the tanks, aircraft, and artillery that were sold to his regime by the United States against his own people, directly violating the terms of the sales.³⁴

Batista conned the United States government into believing that American military aid was only for “hemispheric defense,” that the revolutionaries were nothing to worry about, and that he had a firm grip on Cuba.³⁵ Batista’s support for U.S. Cold War policies and the American proclivity to keep the status quo instead of an unknown, potentially communist, revolution led the Eisenhower Administration to continue its support.³⁶ The aid to Batista kept him in power and would only be questioned once the United States was implicated in Batista’s injustices.

Aiding and abetting went both ways, though. Batista “gladly abetted the exploitation of his country by American corporate, entertainment, and gambling interests because he got rich in the process.”³⁷ Batista aligned himself with wealthy landowners and the military while also enabling American companies to generate hefty profits. Batista also enabled a “flourishing underground traffic in drugs and prostitution” in order to solicit more bribes and reinforce the allure of Cuba to wealthy Americans.³⁸ The intersection of Batista’s interests and American interests made his regime convenient to the status quo in the Caribbean.

At the end of 1957, Batista was becoming an increasing liability to the Eisenhower Administration. The United States was starting to come under considerable pressure from

³⁴ Hitchcock, *The Age of Eisenhower*, 444.

³⁵ Domínguez and Prevost, *United States–Cuban Relations: A Critical History*, 36. During the last years of Batista’s reign, in addition to the 26 July Movement waging war against Batista’s army, “many Cubans were bombing installations, executing police, and undermining confidence in the Batista government.”

³⁶ Patterson, *Contesting Castro: The United States and the Triumph of the Cuban Revolution*, 59. “Although U.S. officials publicly explained that the Cuban-American military relationship provided defense of coastal sea communications, maritime routes, and the Panama Canal, ensured that Cuba’s military would be at U.S. disposal during a major war, and guaranteed U.S. access to Cuban bases, privately they acknowledged that the regime marshaled the aid for internal security.”

³⁷ Hitchcock, *Age of Eisenhower*, 444; Domínguez and Prevost, *United States–Cuban Relations: A Critical History*, 35. The authors note that “American fascination with Cuba had begun in the 1920s during the U.S. prohibition times when U.S. citizens went to Cuba to drink and gamble in facilities operated by North American mobsters. In the 1950s, organized crime and the Batista government cooperated in personal enrichment.”

³⁸ Hitchcock, *Age of Eisenhower*, 444.

domestic and foreign forces to put an embargo on arms to the Batista Regime.³⁹ Despite this, the Eisenhower Administration continued to send arms and train Batista's forces until March 1958.⁴⁰ The Eisenhower Administration supported Batista until the last minute and would even attempt to help Batista in maneuvering his future in the twilight of his regime.⁴¹

As revolutionaries gained more ground, the United States presented an olive branch to Batista. On 9 December 1958, the Eisenhower Administration sent a secret emissary, William D. Pawley, to meet with the Cuban leader. Pawley attempted to persuade him to accept exile at Daytona Beach Florida, "leaving the government in charge of a U.S.-approved junta." Batista refused.⁴² How different events would have gone if Batista had accepted this deal cannot be determined. What can be ascertained was that this generous deal for Batista was "too little, too late" as it did not consider Batista's obtuseness in the face of the accelerating Cuban Revolution. Although Batista may have been deposed earlier, it is not evident that a U.S.-backed military junta would have been able to consolidate enough support from the Cuban people and stymie the July 26 movement.⁴³

The Eisenhower Administration, in contradiction of its support for Batista, also aided and abetted counterforces against him. One example was Carlos Prio, the former president of Cuba, giving Castro \$50,000 in McAllen, Texas in September 1956.⁴⁴ Although Prio made sure to

³⁹ Glennon, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 8.

⁴⁰ Franklin, *Cuba and the U.S. Empire: A Chronological History*, 16-17.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁴² Franklin, *Cuba and the U.S. Empire: A Chronological History*, 17; Glennon, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 281.

⁴³ Domínguez and Prevost, *United States–Cuban Relations: A Critical History*, 38. The authors write that "such a scenario was in all likelihood a U.S. dream" and that "Batista's stubborn refusal to hand over power ultimately undermined U.S. plans for a transition that would have kept Cuba in its neocolonial status."

⁴⁴ Tunzelmann, *Red Heat*, 71; Patterson, *Contesting Castro: The United States and the Triumph of the Cuban Revolution*, 64. Additionally, "A longtime student of Cuban affair, the journalist and Castro biographer Tad Szulc, basing his argument on slender evidence and unattributed, confidential sources, plausibly suggest that in 1957-58 the CIA funnelled \$50,000 through Vice Consul Wiecha to the Castro organization in Santiago ... Another writer hints that the U.S.-based company Interarms, which was sometimes used by the CIA to channel weapons abroad, sold arms to pro-Castro groups in the United States."

emphasize that he was not connected to the U.S. government, a well-informed KGB operative later alleged that this money came from the CIA.⁴⁵ The aid to Castro provides a clear contradiction between supporting the Batista regime and the counter forces against him.

An Anti-American Revolution?

The development of the Cuban Revolution centered around discontent with Batista and his oppressive regime. Right after Batista's coup in 1952, roots of revolution began sprouting, most notably by way of Fidel Castro. Castro sought a governmental role when the coup happened. He was incensed at Batista. His infamous "history shall absolve me" speech set the foundations for his denunciation of the Batista regime and later movement.⁴⁶

The misconceptualization within America and therefore the Eisenhower Administration, concerned how much the Cuban Revolution was anti-imperialist and anti-American.⁴⁷ The history of the United States as the de facto mirror image of Spanish colonial rule was evident to many in Cuba from the beginning of the 20th century to the revolution. The Cuban Revolution became "a colonial revolt by proxy."⁴⁸ Batista was increasingly seen as the "collaborator-in-chief of American imperialism" and the "personification of the evils that had fallen upon Cuba."⁴⁹ The Eisenhower Administration's continuing support of Batista until late 1958, despite his deficiencies, played into historic Cuban conceptions of American imperialism. The Military Aid Program (MAP) provided by the United States gave the Cuban military both hard power but also

⁴⁵ Tunzelmann, *Red Heat*, 71.

⁴⁶ Domínguez and Prevost, *United States–Cuban Relations: A Critical History*, 36. The authors note that "this speech established Fidel as the primary opponent of the Batista regime and also spelled out the key conditions that would spawn the revolution to follow."

⁴⁷ Patterson, *Contesting Castro: The United States and the Triumph of the Cuban Revolution*, 22. "Some Cuban scholars, no doubt influenced by their desire to improve U.S.-Cuban relations, have preferred to argue that Castro and the rebels were not anti-American, but rather anti-imperialist."

⁴⁸ Hopkins, *American Empire*, 676; Thomas Patterson, *Contesting Castro: The United States and the Triumph of the Cuban Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 21-22. "Castro remarked privately in mid-1955 that the 'the Yankee penetration of Cuba was complete.' From this observation, Castro drew a conclusion that strengthened throughout the decade: The revolution against Batista would necessarily become a revolution against U.S. island interests—against the Cuban dependency upon the United States that the Batista regime sustained."

⁴⁹ Hopkins, *American Empire*, 676.

technical and strategic advisers that were indispensable to Batista's war on the revolutionaries.⁵⁰

The cessation of support from the United States to the Batista Regime occurred too late to obscure or soften any reaction from the July 26 Movement and Cuban people.⁵¹ Batista had become a figurehead for American imperialism which, in turn, drove the Cuban Revolution towards an anti-imperial and therefore anti-American trajectory.

Misperceptions

The Eisenhower Administration suffered from several misperceptions, or biases regarding Cuba. These ranged from Ike's ambassadors in Cuba to American assumptions about the supposed inferiority of Cubans and the ability of Batista to keep a lid on dissent. These misperceptions allowed for an overestimation of Batista's strength in Cuba and an underestimation of the July 26 Movement and Cuban Revolution. Further, the failed policy of the United States, in engaging Castro, stemmed from its focus on communism and Cold War politics. The Eisenhower Administration's inability to reconcile the then perplexing questions of Cuba, namely Castro and the Cuban Revolution's communist-links, with its economic and security interest would lead to a "wait and see," reactive approach.

The ambassadors in Cuba during Eisenhower's two terms in office did not offer much help in improving the status quo in Cuba, or the Eisenhower Administration's perception of it. Arthur Gardner, ambassador to Cuba from 1953-57, turned a blind eye to Batista's abuses.⁵² Gardner, a Republican businessman, had become a close friend of Batista and "actively obstructed the reporting of the true picture." Terrence Leonhardy, who worked on Cuban affairs at the State Department, aptly remembered that "the only time we really got any good political

⁵⁰ Domínguez and Prevost, *United States–Cuban Relations: A Critical History*, 35. The military assistance grants from the United States to Cuba amounted to "\$1.5 million annually from 1954 to 1956 and doubled this figure during the 1957-1958 period. A U.S. military mission assisted in training Batista's army."

⁵¹ Tunzelmann, *Red Heat*, 145.

⁵² Schoultz, *That Infernal Little Cuban Republic*, 67.

reporting out of Cuba was when he was away.” Ambassador Gardner, Leonhardy said, “would not sign anything going out of the Embassy that was at all critical of the regime.” As a result, the “potential for a revolution barely registered in the United States.”⁵³ Herbert Matthews, who was central to the coverage of Castro and the July 26 Movement, traveled to Washington to express his concerns with Ambassador Gardner. He spoke to John Foster Dulles urging Gardner’s firing. It is not evident whether Matthews was the significant factor in Gardner’s resignation or just one amongst a confluence.⁵⁴

His successor, Earl Smith, also fell victim to Batista’s wiles becoming one of his principal supporters.⁵⁵ To the ambassador's credit, as outlined in his book, he did attempt to persuade the State Department, the embassy staff, and the local CIA station in Havana that the July 26 Movement led by Castro was communist-driven, though there was no evidence for his claims at the time.⁵⁶ Even Allen Dulles, the CIA Director, told the Senate in a secret briefing on 26 January 1959 that “we do not think Castro has any communist leaning.” He went on further to say, “we do not believe Castro in the pay of or working for the communists,” but that “this is a situation on which the communists could capitalize if there is not a move to get control of the situation more fully than Castro has control of it now.”⁵⁷ Dulles stopped short of supporting U.S intervention in Cuba, though, which contrasted the Eisenhower Administration’s “soft” intervention of supporting Batista and the later “hard” intervention of clandestine operations.

⁵³ Tunzelman, *Red Heat*, 66.

⁵⁴ DePalma, *The Man Who Invented Fidel*, 161.

⁵⁵ Schoultz, *That Infernal Little Cuban Republic*, 67; Dominguez and Prevost, *United States–Cuban Relations: A Critical History*, 38. The authors note that “Ambassador Smith repeatedly ignored directives from Washington to distance himself from Batista and eventually threw all of his support behind what proved to be fraudulent November, 1958 elections that would have passed power in early 1959 to a hand-picked Batista successor Rivero Aguero.”

⁵⁶ Thomas, “Cuba: The United States and Batista, 1952-58”, 171.

⁵⁷ “Allen Dulles in 1959: Castro Has No 'Communist Leanings'.” *UPI*, UPI, 27 Mar. 1982, <https://www.upi.com/Archives/1982/03/27/Allen-Dulles-in-1959-Castro-has-no-communist-leanings/9621386053200>.

Additionally, Latin American politics, specifically Caribbean politics, co-opted American language and ideology to its advantage: “communism was just a word people used when they wanted the attention of Washington. Ideology of any sort was largely irrelevant to political life.”⁵⁸ Batista had invited communists into his cabinet and then shifted to become a brutal anti-communist. Fidel Castro understood this language as well. Castro attempted to obscure communist sentiment in his movement so as to win support in the United States.⁵⁹ According to Tunzelmann,

If communists were useful to his cause, he would recruit them. If corrupt right-wing politicians offered him money, he would take it. He was sincere in his nationalism: his idolization of Jose Marti was genuine and profound, and he did, unquestionably, love Cuba. Everything else was open to negotiation.⁶⁰

The Eisenhower Administration’s perception of Cuba was influenced by the broader Cold War, and both Batista and Castro understood and exploited this reality.

Eisenhower himself noted the problem with the perception of Castro and the Cuban Revolution. In the oral history project, *Reminiscences of Dwight D. Eisenhower*, he remembered that “from the beginning many, including Senator [John F.] Kennedy and others argued that Castro was a new Bolivar.” Eisenhower explained that “all of us” hated the Batista regime, a dictatorship that “had used the methods of Hitler to retain his power.” Ike explained the primary problem with their perception of the Cuban Revolution: “is this a communist movement, or is it an actual liberation of a country?”⁶¹ The inability to reconcile this conundrum between liberation and nationalistic communism led to a delayed, reactive response that escalated tensions and

⁵⁸ Tunzelmann, *Red Heat*, 78-79.

⁵⁹ Patterson, *Contesting Castro: The United States and the Triumph of the Cuban Revolution*, 22. “Castro also worked to cultivate a tolerant, friendly public opinion in the United States in order to satisfy a major rebel objective: Washington’s jettisoning of its support for the Batista regime.”

⁶⁰ Tunzelmann, *Red Heat*, 78-79.

⁶¹ Eisenhower Administration Project, *Reminiscences of Dwight D. Eisenhower* (New York: Columbia University Oral History Research Office Collection, 1967), 66-67.

alienated Cuba. The misperceptions of the Eisenhower Administration towards Cuba, along with his anti-Communist and pro-American stances, allowed for a delinquent toleration of Batista.

Twilight of a Tyrant

At the end of 1958, on New Year's Eve, Batista fled from Cuba with friends, supporters, and loot from Cuba's treasury.⁶² Julia Sweig, in explaining the collapse of the Batista Regime, noted that the defeated, divided military fighting against an ever-increasing insurgency was just one reason for the revolution's success: while public sentiment against Batista was becoming more widespread, the support for the July 26 Movement was reaching "euphoric" levels.⁶³ President Eisenhower recalled how in the final days of 1958 the CIA began to suggest that "a Castro victory might not be in the best interests of the United States."⁶⁴ The United States started seeing the writing on the wall and began to plan for a post-Batista Cuba.⁶⁵ The Eisenhower Administration believed it could install a friendly government, with various precedents in Iran and Guatemala supporting this line of thinking.⁶⁶ Eisenhower remembered that "our only hope, if any, lay with some kind of non-dictatorial "third force," neither Castroite nor Batistiano."⁶⁷

The fall of the Batista regime at the end of 1958 should not have surprised the United States. To some people, it showed the victory of a popular revolution against a tyrannical dictator. This partly American idea drove early caution in criticism against the perceived "freedom" of the Cuban people from Batista. It was in this "twilight," the fall of Batista, that

⁶² It has been reported that Batista took with him over \$300 million dollars from Cuba. This number adjusted for inflation from 1958 to 2021 would amount to \$2,885,273,356 billion dollars.

⁶³ Sweig, *Cuba: What Everyone Needs to Know*, 36.

⁶⁴ Eisenhower, *Waging Peace*, 521.

⁶⁵ Domínguez and Prevost, *United States–Cuban Relations: A Critical History*, 37. As Batista lost control of Cuba during 1958, Wayne Smith recounted that "the strategy of the U.S. government became one of seeking a means to keep the Cuban capitalist system in place without Batista as its head. U.S. policy was built around having Batista cede power to non-revolutionary political forces that could somehow gain support from the Cuban people while marginalizing the role that forces from the 26th of July Movement would have in the new government."

⁶⁶ Eisenhower, *Waging Peace*, 521.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

American policy became confused. Had the United States known earlier that Batista's fall was coming, the twilight phase and eventual rise of Castro may have taken a different path entirely.

In a memorandum of a conversation at the State Department on 23 December 1958, assistant secretary for inter-American affairs Roy Rubottom explained that "Batista's achilles heel" was the "fact that he seized power illegally in 1952 and has not been able to cleanse himself of that stigma by any subsequent actions."⁶⁸ The Eisenhower Administration, surprisingly, did not give much thought about what to do about Batista prior to 1958. It would only be after the Cuban elections in November 1958, aimed at establishing Batista's credibility, that the Eisenhower Administration began taking a more active role. Ambassador Smith, who had hoped that an alternative to Batista and Castro would emerge, even conceded that the elections were rigged after Andres Rivero Agüero, Batista's candidate for president, won.⁶⁹ It had now become evident that the United States did not have much time to influence events in Cuba before the ascendancy of the Cuban rebels.⁷⁰ Batista left power in 1959 just as quickly as he took it in 1952.

Dawn of a Tyrant

Fidel Castro and the July 26 Movement, once clandestine in nature, took power after Batista's departure.⁷¹ Although Judge Manuel Urrutia was sworn in as the first president, it was Fidel who was the center of the revolution. This was evident through their campaigns against Batista, Cubans' triumphant reception of Castro, Castro swearing in Urrutia himself, and Castro

⁶⁸ Glennon, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 308.

⁶⁹ Franklin, *Cuba and the U.S. Empire: A Chronological History*, 17.

⁷⁰ Patterson, *Contesting Castro: The United States and the Triumph of the Cuban Revolution*, 121. "To contain Castro, U.S. leaders had to have Batista's cooperation. It was denied to them. Batista refused to create the conditions necessary for an orderly electoral process. He refused to follow U.S. instructions. He harbored his own brand of Cuban nationalism. Indeed, he too resented outsiders who told him how to run his nation's affairs ... Although he converted American arms, he chafed at any U.S. pressure that would diminish his power."

⁷¹ Domínguez and Prevost, *United States-Cuban Relations: A Critical History*, 38. "Within hours after Batista's departure the leaders of the July 26th Movement consolidated power and began to move Cuba down a path of revolutionary change that would inevitably bring it into direct confrontation with the United States."

meeting with a U.S. consul general based in Santiago.⁷² Castro framed the ascendant Cuban Revolution in historical terms. In a speech in Santiago on January 2nd, 1959, Castro explained:

This will not be like 1895 when the Americans came and took over. Nor will it be like 1933 when the people began to believe that the revolution was going to triumph and Mr. Batista came in to betray the revolution. Nor will it be like 1944 when the people took courage believing they had finally reached a position where they could take over power, while those who did assume power proved to be thieves. We will have no thievery, no treason, no intervention. This time it is truly the revolution. Even though some may not desire it.⁷³

This showed that the Cuban Revolution was fundamentally different from past political developments. In *Waging Peace*, Eisenhower noted that Castro had declared that “he would not side with the United States in the cold war.” Castro also “denounced us for fifty years of ‘interference’ in his country, interference which he would now end.”⁷⁴ Castro’s rhetoric foreshadowed a collision course with its northern neighbor.

Castro understood that revolutions in the past had been hijacked by greater forces and that he needed to consolidate the revolution. At the end of February 1959, Castro postponed the elections for two years. Although at first Castro chose a diverse government, he slowly began to remove people and replace them with loyalists such as his brother Raul Castro and Che Guevara.⁷⁵ He also began to purge potential leadership threats such as Huber Matos, a commandante of the 26 July Movement, who was imprisoned for “counter-revolutionary activity.”⁷⁶ Additionally, Camila Cienfuegos, who was a major part of the 26 July Movement

⁷² Castro and Ramonet, *Fidel Castro: My Life: A Spoken Autobiography*, 215. Castro reflected that “I had no interest in being president. What I wanted to pursue was the Revolution, the army, the development of our heroic Rebel Army ... I was interested in the laws that the revolution would put in place, and in the application of the Moncada programme.”

⁷³ Brendan James, and Coleman, Noah, “Blowback Season Two: Episode Three,” <https://omny.fm/shows/blowback> 2021, (1:18:00-1:19:30).

⁷⁴ Dwight Eisenhower, *Waging Peace: The White House Years: 1956-1961* (New York: Doubleday & Company, INC., 1965), 522-523.

⁷⁵ Domínguez and Prevost, *United States–Cuban Relations: A Critical History*, 47. “From the perspective of the U.S. government, shifts made in the leadership of the Cuban government in the fall of 1959 signaled the movement of the Cuban government in a more radical direction.”

⁷⁶ Domínguez and Prevost, *United States–Cuban Relations: A Critical History*, 47.

along with being head of Cuban armed forces after the revolution, went missing after his plane disappeared.⁷⁷ Allen Dulles reported to President Eisenhower that “the Castro regime is moving towards a complete dictatorship” and that “Communists are now operating openly and legally in Cuba.”⁷⁸ Eisenhower reflected on how “mass executions of Castro’s enemies were under way,” and that “in the ensuing weeks the number of executions mounted.”⁷⁹

The developing events in Cuba could only be observed by the United States. The Eisenhower Administration had to “wait and see” for how the new revolutionary government’s posture towards them would emerge in order to react.⁸⁰ The trials of Batista-era officials were foreboding for the United States and drew criticism in American media. Eisenhower himself was “highly suspicious” of Castro as a communist and “deeply disgusted at his murderous persecution of his former opponents.”⁸¹ Ike even inquired whether the U.S. could refuse Castro’s visa when he was invited to the United States in April by the National Press Club.⁸² He was advised that this would be unwise, under the circumstances, but Eisenhower nevertheless refused to see him.⁸³ The “wait and see” policy and misperceptions in Castro’s Cuban Revolution made it so the United States was too late to influence its trajectory.

Nationalism and Escalation

The ideology of nationalism exacerbated relations after the revolution for both the United States and Cuba. Quick recognition of the new Cuban government by Eisenhower signalled that

⁷⁷ Ibid. There remains no evidence of the wreckage of the plane nor any culpability on the part of Castro. The timing and Camilo’s high-level position in the revolution as well as his considerable popular support raises serious questions of whether it was truly an accident. It was more likely a devious, purposeful ploy by Castro to consolidate power.

⁷⁸ Eisenhower, *Waging Peace*, 523.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 522.

⁸⁰ Morley, *Imperial State and Revolution: The United States and Cuba, 1952-1986*, 311. “Between 1959 and 1961, the Castro forces consolidated their hold on political and state power, pursuing a national and social revolution based on fundamental transformations of class and property relations.”

⁸¹ Eisenhower, *Waging Peace*, 522.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Eisenhower, *Waging Peace*, 523.

a positive relationship was possible.⁸⁴ Despite this, within a matter of weeks of Castro entering Havana, the Eisenhower Administration “began to examine measures that might be effective in restraining Castro if he should develop into a menace.”⁸⁵ It was not yet evident whether the Cuban Revolution was truly communist and what reforms the revolutionary government would enact. Despite this, there was both an opportunity and motive to engage Cuba.⁸⁶ The opportunity arose from Castro’s initial intentions to have a friendly relationship with the United States. The motive arose from the advantage of continuing a beneficial relationship with Cuba as well as keeping Cuba from becoming a Communist satellite.

Fidel Castro made two trips to America in 1959, putting on a “charm offensive,” in order to bring attention, sympathy, and support to his recent revolution and the future of his country. Castro met with then-Vice President Richard Nixon, along with other Eisenhower Administration officials, on 19 April 1959.⁸⁷ After the three hour conference between Nixon and Castro, Nixon wrote a long memorandum of which his conclusion was that Castro was “either incredibly naive about Communism or under Communist discipline.”⁸⁸ By the end of 1959, the administration was discussing options toward Cuba, including changes to the U.S.’s sugar quota for Cuba as well as inducing “all Latin American Governments to watch Castro carefully and to counter any move of his to promote revolution in the Western Hemisphere.”⁸⁹ By early 1960, the administration wholly agreed that “something would have to be done.” But as Ike noted, “the

⁸⁴ Glennon, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 347. In a memorandum from John Foster Dulles to President Eisenhower, he requested authorization for the recognition of the new Cuban government.

⁸⁵ Eisenhower, *Waging Peace*, 524.

⁸⁶ Benjamin, *The United States and the Origins of the Cuban Revolution*, 175. Interestingly, “much of Washington was less nervous than usual about communist subversion at this time. By chance, the rise of Castro coincided with a period of detente in U.S.-Soviet relations.”

⁸⁷ Benjamin, *The United States and the Origins of the Cuban Revolution*, 178. Benjamin notes that “Nixon’s interview with Castro reflected both the paternalistic attitude often taken towards Cuban leaders as well as a growing suspicion that the new Cuban prime minister bore close watching. Nixon unselfconsciously gave Castro a lecture on such subjects as democracy, capitalism, and the menace of communism. The vice president advised Castro to hold elections and attract foreign capital, suggesting Puerto Rico as an appropriate model.”

⁸⁸ Eisenhower, *Waging Peace*, 523.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 524.

questions were what, when, and under what circumstances.”⁹⁰ During this time, President Eisenhower decided that, given the problems and collective action required for solving them, “the time had arrived for a presidential journey to South America.”⁹¹ Only two weeks after returning from this trip, President Eisenhower ordered the CIA to begin organizing the training of Cuban Exiles “against a possible future day when they might return to their homeland.”⁹² Another major development during March 1960 was the explosion of French freighter La Coubre in Havana harbor while dock workers were unloading 76 tons of grenades and munitions.⁹³ Fidel Castro blamed the United States as being responsible for the explosion in an act of sabotage, to which the U.S. swiftly denied.⁹⁴ The explosion gave fodder for Castro to blame the United States for intervention and for the United States in their case against Castro and for further intervention. In any event, the explosion marked a souring point in relations.

The “agrarian reform” and expropriation of United States’s business assets along with the developing relationship with the Communist-bloc led the Eisenhower Administration toward a hardline stance against Cuba.⁹⁵ With each action on part of Castro, the Eisenhower Administration became further entrenched in its view of him as a dictator and communist. With every action by the United States, Castro became further entrenched in his view of the United States as an imperial power attempting to exert its influence on Cuba. The Eisenhower

⁹⁰ Ibid., 525.

⁹¹ Ibid. Eisenhower traveled to Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Uruguay, and Puerto Rico during this trip.

⁹² Ibid., 533.

⁹³ Phillips, R. Hart (6 March 1960). "Castro Links U.S. to Ship 'Sabotage'; Denial is Swift" (PDF). *New York Times*. Retrieved 21 March 2016.

⁹⁴ Domínguez and Prevost, *United States–Cuban Relations: A Critical History*, 47. There remains no direct proof of CIA involvement in the explosion. It is possible that anti-communists in Cuba could have orchestrated this as a pretext for U.S.-Cuban dissension and U.S. intervention. Nevertheless, the event marked a turning point in relations between the two countries: “On March 17, 1960, the United States formally approved a program of covert operations aimed at toppling the Cuban government.”

⁹⁵ Domínguez and Prevost, *United States–Cuban Relations: A Critical History*, 46. “Agrarian reform forced a direct confrontation between the Cuban Revolution and U.S. economic interests because many Americans owned large sugar cane plantations. As a result, the U.S. government hardened its position towards Cuba, questioning the legitimacy of the measures and demanding explanations.”

Administration misunderstood that the Cuban Revolution was as much a revolution against Batista as a revolution against American imperialism. America's past control of Cuban affairs, its support and assistance to Batista, its capitalism, its "gangsterismo" infected Cubans with anti-American sentiment. This anti-American sentiment was the basis for nationalism within the Cuban Revolution. It was only natural then that Cuba attempted to become more independent from the United States through expropriation, nationalization, and reform. The United States primarily understood the relationship in terms of its own benefit rather than the benefit of Cubans themselves. The "evident hostility" of the United States "encouraged the radicalization of Cuba, both in defense and as a response."⁹⁶

Eisenhower announced on July 6, 1960 that the remainder of Cuba's sugar quota for 1960 would be suspended.⁹⁷ He explained that "Cuba's agreement to sell large quantities of sugar to the U.S.S.R. had made the island an undependable supplier."⁹⁸ Eisenhower reflected that "we continued, however, to keep emergency plans for Cuba ready. These included such possibilities as blockade, military action, and joint action with Latin American countries."⁹⁹ The last overt escalatory actions in the "mutual economic slug match" came quickly: in August when Cuba nationalized large portions of U.S. property in Cuba; in October when the United States cut all trade with Cuba; and finally, when Castro responded by nationalizing the remaining U.S.-owned assets. "The cycle of assault and protest, counter-assault and counter-protest was finally ended with the severing of diplomatic relations on January 3, 1961."¹⁰⁰

The trajectory of escalation in the U.S.-Cuban relations accelerated as Cuba increasingly nationalized its land and industry. The United States's sharp criticism of land reform and the

⁹⁶ Prados, *Safe for Democracy*, 265.

⁹⁷ Franklin, *Cuba and the U.S. Empire: A Chronological History*, 34.

⁹⁸ Benjamin, *The United States and the Origins of the Cuban Revolution*, 195.

⁹⁹ Eisenhower, *Waging Peace*, 535.

¹⁰⁰ Benjamin, *The United States and the Origins of the Cuban Revolution*, 195.

expropriation of U.S. assets only led to a doubling down of Castro's intentions to be truly independent from America. The escalating developments altered both policy and rhetoric. In an interview with Look Magazine in 1960, Che Guevara, who played a major role in the Cuban Revolution and the new revolutionary government, perceptively described the problem with United States policy in Cuba and escalating actions between both sides:

What lies ahead depends greatly on the United States. With the exception of our agrarian reform which the people of Cuba desired and initiated themselves, all of our radical measures have been in direct response to direct aggressions by powerful monopolists by which your country is the chief exponent. U.S. pressure on Cuba has made necessary the radicalization of the revolution. To know how much further Cuba will go, it would be easier to ask the U.S. government how far it plans to go.¹⁰¹

Instead of direct engagement, the United States chose to “watch and wait” to see how Cuban policy developed in order to react accordingly. This strategy made it more likely that Cuba would take a course displeasing to the United States. It put the burden on the new government and eventually just Castro to dictate the course of events. A more proactive, positive approach, with mediation of concerns and concessions, would have been more effective in discouraging nationalization and ensured a more stable, cooperative relationship in the long term. Instead, As Cuba increasingly nationalized land and industry, the United States pursued a campaign of covert imperialism towards a more anti-Communist, American-friendly Cuban government.

Covert Operations

The American government's use of covert operations in foreign policy began during the Truman Administration.¹⁰² During his campaign for the presidency, Eisenhower had always told Dulles to “qualify liberation as peaceful.” In turn, covert operations would be central and the Dulles brothers agreed, perceiving the CIA as an “ideal instrument” for expanding the influence of

¹⁰¹ Brendan James, and Coleman, Noah, “Blowback Season Two: Episode Three,” <https://omny.fm/shows/blowback> 2021,(1:16:50-1:17:24).

¹⁰² Hitchcock, *The Age of Eisenhower*, 153.

the American empire.¹⁰³ President Eisenhower “enhanced” the use of secret operations.¹⁰⁴ The expansion and development of covert operations under Eisenhower centered around two documents: NSC 5412 and the Doolittle Report. These documents provided the foundation that the operations in Cuba would emerge from.

The Eisenhower Administration, as Castro “emerged as Moscow’s man in the Western Hemisphere, began a campaign of covert operations against Cuba and Castro.¹⁰⁵ At the end of 1959, “small-scale, lower-level” operations were authorized by the director’s office of the CIA. The CIA began training Cuban exiles “for infiltration into the island in order to sabotage sugar mills and other economic targets.” In January of 1960, Allen Dulles, the director of the CIA, brought this plan to President Eisenhower. As national security advisor Gordon Gray recalled:

The president said he didn’t object to such an undertaking and, indeed, thought something like this was timely. However, he felt that any program should be much more ambitious, and it was probably now the time to move against Castro in a positive and aggressive way which went beyond mere harassment. He asked Mr. Dulles to come back with an enlarged program.¹⁰⁶

Eisenhower further explained to Dulles: “Allen, this is fine, but if you’re going to make any move against Castro, don’t just fool around with sugar refineries. Let’s get a program that will really do something about Castro.”¹⁰⁷ The plan, to be led by Richard Bissell, would “focus on overthrowing Fidel, by means of sabotage and promotion of counterrevolutionary activity in Cuba.”¹⁰⁸ Less than two weeks after green lighting these operations, Eisenhower publicly

¹⁰³ Immerman, *Empire for Liberty*, 181.

¹⁰⁴ Prados, *Safe for Democracy*, 336.

¹⁰⁵ Thomas, *Ike’s Bluff*, 386.; Eisenhower, *Waging Peace*, 536. By July of 1960, Allen Dulles and the CIA were becoming suspicious of the USSR-Cuban connections. Dulles reported to Eisenhower that “a number of large unidentified packages have been brought into Cuba.” He also noted that “it may be that the Soviets are putting up a short-range missile base somewhere on the island.” Despite this, there was no evidence at the time that the Soviet Union was transporting “major military items” to Cuba but this would foreshadow the Cuban Missile Crisis. The first confirmation of Communist support to Cuba came from photographs of Czech rifles in the hands of Cubans in Havana.

¹⁰⁶ As quoted in Benjamin, *The United States and the Origins of the Cuban Revolution*, 189.

¹⁰⁷ Tunzelmann, *Red Heat*, 166.

¹⁰⁸ Tunzelmann, *Red Heat*, 166.

announced a policy of non-intervention in Cuba saying that he “respected Cuba’s right to enact social revolution.”¹⁰⁹ The two sides of Eisenhower, his public and private side, were evident in his secret push for covert actions while he publicly stated a policy of non-intervention.

On 18 January 1960, the CIA created a special task force, mainly comprised of veterans from the 1954 operations against Arbenz in Guatemala, to prepare a “wide-ranging assault” on the Castro regime. On March 14, the plan was sent to Eisenhower and three days later meeting with Allen Dulles, he approved it. The enlarged program now included:

The creation of an organized political opposition from among Cuban exiles, the construction of a secret radio transmitter for “black” propaganda broadcasts, the conduct of sabotage and intelligence operations within the island, and the creation of a paramilitary force among dissidents Cubans for possible use at a later date.¹¹⁰

Additionally, the CIA, in coordination with the U.S. Mafia, implemented a separate project to assassinate Castro and other high-level Cuban leaders.¹¹¹ As Benjamin noted, these actions were to be complemented by economic denial and eventual economic warfare.¹¹² Throughout 1960, the Eisenhower Administration conducted countless covert actions in their secret war against Castro. The training of exiled Cubans as guerilla fighters was intended for use in an invasion near Trinidad where they would establish a bridgehead and call on the international community for help. This would be the necessary pretext for a U.S.-led coalition force to invade Cuba and set up regime change. The low intensity, cost, tech, and risk involved with the initial operations helped to justify and rationalize the tactics for the Eisenhower Administration.

In a study of the Eisenhower Administration’s covert operations in Cuba, there should be a consideration of the means. American values, such as democracy and freedom, were ignored

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 167.

¹¹⁰ Benjamin, *The United States and the Origins of the Cuban Revolution*, 189.

¹¹¹ For more information on attempted assassinations, see Fabian Escalante, *Executive Action: 634 Ways to Kill Fidel Castro* (New York: Ocean Press, 2006); and Fabian Escalante, *CIA Targets Fidel: Secret 1967 CIA Inspector General’s Report on plots to assassinate Fidel Castro* (Melbourne: Ocean Press, 1996).

¹¹² Benjamin, *The United States and the Origins of the Cuban Revolution*, 189.

and abused by the United States with their support of Batista and regime change. The “good neighbor” policy of the Eisenhower Administration constrained them into first using acceptable, overt means to dissuade Cuba to not nationalize. Once Cuba seemingly went red, the Eisenhower Administration turned to covert operations that begs questions of their values and ethics. In the summer of 1960, the CIA began to plot the death of Castro, authorized by Ike, now regarded as a “dangerous stooge of Moscow.” The plots included hiring the mafia to stage a “gangland-style” assassination of Fidel. These plots, although there were many attempts at carrying them out, failed in the end.¹¹³ The covert operations, such as attempted assassinations, were not conducive to a regime change towards a favorable government. The hypothetical removal of Castro cannot be said to necessitate instability in Cuba and the rise of an America-supported junta. The Cuban people were more loyal to their leader and his regime than the United States realized. The failure of covert operations lied in their obscurity. No covert operation could be held secret that was expansive enough to take down Castro and install a regime friendly to the United States.

Conclusions

Covert Imperialism

The development of covert imperialism after World War Two was evident in the Eisenhower Administration’s policy in the third world. It used economic and military aid to support friendly regimes as well as using covert operations to undermine unfriendly regimes.¹¹⁴ The use of economic and military aid was justified in that it provided stability in countries and gave them reason to do good by American interests. It was not justified in giving support to oppressive regimes, like Batista’s, which allowed them to consolidate power for themselves.

¹¹³ Thomas, *Ike’s Bluff*, 386.

¹¹⁴ Morris H. Morley, *Imperial State and Revolution: The United States and Cuba, 1952-1986* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 301-303.

Once Cuba consolidated itself as a leftist regime under Castro, the United States attempted to use covert imperialism to its advantage.¹¹⁵ The tactics, discussed in past sections, were provocative in nature and were not sufficient to meet the end goal of regime change. The provocations of the covert actions emboldened Castro to further his independence from the United States and pushed him to find new friends, namely the Soviet Union. The support for Castro from the Soviet Union provided the ultimate justification for further covert imperialism, further emboldening the United States to take on a more ambitious program against Castro and Cuba. The short-term and long-term effects of American covert imperialism in Cuba were similar: it inflamed the Cuban people and Castro; and it pushed Cuba away from America's orbit leading to decades of hostility.

The miscalculations of American policy in Cuba showed their hubris in thinking that covert action could bring their ideal end goals. Eisenhower, like many other presidents, fell to the temptation “that things can be accomplished on an unattributable or quasi-covert basis when open intervention seems undesirable.”¹¹⁶ The successful precedents of covert action during the Eisenhower Administration emboldened them in their use of covert imperialism. Prados, in *Safe for Democracy*, concluded that despite the “successful” precedents in Iran and Guatemala, “the record shows that secret wars, like military action, to be a blunt instrument.”¹¹⁷ In Ike's pursuit of an American policy victory in Cuba, he relied too heavily on “blunt” covert action.

The Eisenhower Administration and Ike's Role Within It

¹¹⁵ Fidel Castro and Ignacio Ramonet, *Fidel Castro: My Life: A Spoken Autobiography*, 255. Castro reflected on the complicity of the United States in operations against Cuba: “From the first moment [to this day], the American administration has been working to create an unfavorable image of the Cuban Revolution. They have carried out huge publicity campaigns against us, huge attempts to isolate Cuba. The objective has been to halt the influence of revolutionary ideas. They broke off diplomatic relations in 1960 and took measures to impose an economic blockade.”

¹¹⁶ Prados, *Safe for Democracy*, 647.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 648.

The obscurity of Eisenhower's role in his administration, especially at the time, have made it hard to pin culpability for developments in Cuba. Ike certainly had much influence on high-level strategy towards Cuba, seen in NSC notes and other sources, but it can be difficult to hold him responsible for lower-level action in covert operations, such as aforementioned mob connections.¹¹⁸ In this case, it is evident that Eisenhower did authorize the covert operations, including the assassinations, against Castro. Eisenhower, in *Waging Peace*, spoke to the delegation of authority in his administration: "Although no staff, council, or cabinet attempted to make decisions for me, yet every subordinate was always expected, within his own area of delegated authority and within the limits of established policy, to solve his own problems."¹¹⁹

When Allen Dulles came to Eisenhower with the proposed plan, he asked for a more enlarged plan that was more ambitious to which he would later authorize.¹²⁰ Eisenhower as the gatekeeper for covert operations indicates his role in two ways: it shows he authorized covert imperialism; it also shows that he merely approved them and did not provide proper oversight for effective and ethical operations.

President Eisenhower, like other presidents, suffered from contradictory impulses. The motivation to act, "to move a situation in a direction favorable to their perception of U.S. interests," was certainly intensified by the Cold War, the 1960 presidential election, and growing American antipathy towards Castro. Contrary to this interventionist impulse was the affirmation of democratic principles, seen in his and others presidential discourse on Cuba.¹²¹ The United States opposed Castro as a dictator but accepted Batista's coup in 1952 and continued to support his regime until the last minute.¹²² The lens of convenience that America viewed the Batista and

¹¹⁸ Tunzelmann, *Red Heat*, 166.

¹¹⁹ Eisenhower, *Waging Peace*, 632.

¹²⁰ Tunzelmann, *Red Heat*, 167.

¹²¹ Prados, *Safe for Democracy*, 648.

¹²² Prados, *Safe for Democracy*, 336.

Castro regimes, and America's subsequent policy reactions, shows the contradiction in the foreign policy of the United States in relations with regimes. It is in this way that Eisenhower suffered from his zero-sum Cold War strategy.

Eisenhower and many other administrations did not understand that "covert operations have impeded far more than the average enhanced the evolution of the democratic tradition." The Eisenhower Administration's prior success with covert actions obscured their limitations. As Prados noted, "covert operations should be reserved for the scenarios - more limited in scope and goals - where they can be truly useful."¹²³ The Eisenhower Administration relied too heavily on covert operations in their policy considerations towards Cuba.

Eisenhower's decision to go ahead with covert operations, before it was evident that Castro was turning to the Soviets and away from America, shows how he was ever the contingency planner. Richard Bissell always "insisted that he was operating at the direction of 'higher authority'." To counter this, "the orders were conveyed 'circumlocutiously,' i.e., indirectly, in order to preserve plausible deniability."¹²⁴ Bissell did not need much prodding. "An offhand comment from the president, relayed by Allen Dulles, would do." Chester Cooper, a senior CIA official, spoke on Bissell's perception of authorization as a "double negative": "I think the fact that Eisenhower didn't say 'don't do it' was enough for Bissell."¹²⁵

Furthermore, Eisenhower "*did* approve an invasion-dependent scheme, and he knew that John [F.] Kennedy would have to execute it or cancel it." He also "knew that Kennedy lacked the detailed understanding that might have guided a decision." Prados even goes so far as to say that "Eisenhower's not acting to halt the operation essentially constituted approval."¹²⁶

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Thomas, *Ike's Bluff*, 387.

¹²⁵ Thomas, *Ike's Bluff*, 387.

¹²⁶ Prados, *Safe for Democracy*, 235.

Inheritance

To whom the Cuban situation would be inherited depended on the 1960 presidential election. Vice-President Richard Nixon was adamant about exerting pressure on Cuba. Despite this, he had to keep secret about the plans that were already being carried out and future ones. Additionally, the administration's support of Batista and his subsequent fall to the revolutionaries gave then Senator Kennedy adequate fodder for criticism. This allowed Kennedy to be more hardline against Cuba and thus outflank Nixon in 1960. A transcript from the second debate encapsulated the tension during the campaign concerning Cuba:

Moderator: "The first question is from Mr. Niven and is for Vice President Nixon."

Mr. Niven: "Mr. Vice President, Senator Kennedy said last night that the administration must take responsibility for the loss of Cuba."

Vice President Nixon: "First of all, I don't agree with Senator Kennedy that Cuba is lost. I believe that we are following the right course. The course which is difficult, but a course which under the circumstances is the only proper one which will cede of the Cuban people get a chance to realize their aspirations of progress through freedom. No Cuba is not lost, and I don't think this kind of defeatist talk by Senator Kennedy helps the situation one bit."

Moderator: "Senator Kennedy, would you care to comment?"

Senator Kennedy: "In the first place, I never suggested that Cuba was lost, except for the president. Arthur Gardner, a Republican ambassador, Earl Smith, a Republican ambassador, in succession, both have indicated in the past six weeks that Castro is a Marxist, that Raul Castro is a communist, and that they got no effective resolve. Instead our aid continued to Batista, which was ineffective. We never were on the side of freedom. We never used our influence when we could have used it most effectively. And today, Cuba is lost to freedom. I hope someday it will rise"¹²⁷

The 1960 presidential election certainly complicated the Cuban situation. Vice President Nixon, in a sense, had his hands tied behind his back in not being able to show what the Eisenhower Administration was doing about Castro. Kennedy was able to dominate Nixon in this respect and in the debates. The electorally key state of Florida, which had many ex-Cubans, made it so a tough stance on Castro was necessary for both.¹²⁸ Kennedy, although informed on the Cuban situation, would not find out about the extent of the plans for Cuba until after his victory.

¹²⁷ Brendan James, and Coleman, Noah, "Blowback Season Two: Episode Three," <https://omny.fm/shows/blowback> 2021, (0:00-01:12).

¹²⁸ Despite hardline stances from both, Richard Nixon won the state of Florida in the 1960 Presidential Election.

In the days prior to Kennedy's inauguration, the Eisenhower Administration was still contending with problems that could only be passed on to the next administration. Whiting Willauer, in a memo on 18 January 1961, explained that "the Cuba project might not succeed under existing plans, that to proceed *assumed* the United States stood ready to intervene."¹²⁹ President Eisenhower, in the last Eisenhower-Kennedy transition meeting, urged that America must support "to the utmost" those who struggle against Castro and that responsible action meant "to do whatever is possible."¹³⁰ Eisenhower's assertion to Kennedy about the necessity of the campaign against Castro delineated his perspective on the United States' role in Cuba, harkening back to the historic role of the United States as protector of the island.

John F. Kennedy and his administration inherited a problem with Cuba in two ways: the escalation of action leading to the end of relations in January 1961; and the intelligence-counterrevolution complex, directed by the CIA, that was eager to carry out their plans against Castro and Cuba. Eisenhower reflected on this inheritance and the problems with it:

So, to the incoming administration, we left units of Cuban refugees busily training and preparing hopefully for a return to their native land. Because they had as yet been unable to find a leader they wanted—a national leader known to be both anti-Castro and anti-Batista—it was impossible to make specific plans for a military invasion. However, their hatred of Castro, their patriotism, and their readiness to sacrifice for the restoration of freedom in Cuba could not be doubted.¹³¹

The inheritance of this program would lead to the failed Bay of Pigs invasion. With Allen Dulles staying on as CIA director, much of the apparatus for the covert operations remained the same. This was confounded by the "disposal problem" which posited that if Kennedy did not go forward with the Bay of Pigs invasion, then all the anti-Castro, trained guerillas would have to be dispersed and would probably go to Miami where the Cuban exiles would chide Kennedy for his

¹²⁹ Brendan James, and Coleman, Noah, "Blowback Season Two: Episode Four," <https://omny.fm/shows/blowback> 2021, (23:10-24:30).

¹³⁰ Prados, *Safe for Democracy*, 233.

¹³¹ Eisenhower, *Waging Peace*, 614.

weakness in not taking on Castro.¹³² Further, President Kennedy regarded national security meetings as a “waste of time,” with his NSA McGeorge Bundy getting rid of much of Eisenhower’s planning process. As Evan Thomas noted, “with very little questioning or debate, Bissell was able to persuade Kennedy to sign off on a CIA-backed invasion of Cuba by an exile force in April.”¹³³ The inexperience of Kennedy compounded the inheritance/disposal problems.

After the failed Bay of Pigs invasion, Eisenhower maintained that he bore no responsibility as he had never approved any invasion.¹³⁴ Later after JFK’s death, Ike explained further that he never approved the plan due to lack of unified political leadership among the exiles.¹³⁵ Although he never approved the actual invasion, he did approve the operations that set up the invasion. Semantically, Ike asserted that there was a “program” but not a plan. John Prados, in *Safe for Democracy*, rebutted Ike’s assertion by noting that there was a tentative date for an invasion near Trinidad on 6 December 1960 and a D-Day set for March 1961.¹³⁶ This revelation points to a more definitive schedule for the “program”, or plan of operations authorized by Ike. Furthermore, in a postmortem of the Cuban operations, Gen. Maxwell Taylor concluded that “it had been incumbent on the president, at the latest November-December 1960, to make the basic decision as to how far the United States was willing to go.”¹³⁷ Eisenhower’s reluctance to make this decision would lead to President Kennedy’s eventual misguided decision to move forward with the Bay of Pigs invasion without appropriate air power. It is unclear, though improbable, that Ike would have authorized the invasion in the way that Kennedy had.

Legacy

¹³² Brendan James, and Coleman, Noah, “Blowback Season Two: Episode Four,” <https://omny.fm/shows/blowback> 2021, (46:35-48:10).

¹³³ Thomas, *Ike’s Bluff*, 405.

¹³⁴ Prados, *Safe for Democracy*, 234.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Prados, *Safe for Democracy*, 234.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 233.

The legacy of President Eisenhower in Cuba remains murky. His administration certainly aided in the downfall of Batista and the rise of the Cuban Revolution. Once the relationship became untenable to the administration, they began a campaign of covert actions against Cuba. Eisenhower and his administration should be held accountable for its failed engagement with Castro as well as its actions in America's secret war against Cuba.

The United States government's use of public money in covert operations against Cuba, authorized by Ike, that saw mob connections, training of guerillas, bombings, and attempted assassinations, remains a major dark spot in the history of the CIA and United States government. The Eisenhower Administration's expansion of the CIA and proliferation of covert operations led to its Cuban campaign, entrenchment of cold relations with Cuba, and future covert action.

The framing of the Cuba affair in terms of liberation and the Cold War provided justification for the Eisenhower Administration in their use of covert imperialism. Benjamin noted the paradoxical nature of the United States: "The loud cry from Washington that the island had become a totalitarian society only partly obscured the fact that U.S. policy toward Cuba was in fact what the American people expected from its Cold-War enemies, not its own government."¹³⁸ The Cold War obscured Eisenhower and America from the limitations and effects of covert imperialism. Despite its inherent covert nature, the covert operations were not effectively kept secret nor did they provide the scale necessary to change the increasingly entrenched status quo in Cuba. Eisenhower's reluctance to use overt actions in his Cuban policy shows how the constraints of global perception limit intervention. The legacy of covert operations and imperial ambitions evident in the Cuban policy remains a dark spot on the Eisenhower Administration and President Eisenhower's role in the third-world.

¹³⁸ Benjamin, *The United States and the Origins of the Cuban Revolution*, 211.

Epilogue

The Eisenhower Administration's Cuban policy was not just passed on to the next administration but would outlast the Cold War and even preside over current relations.¹³⁹ Once the trajectory of a relationship begins, it takes a critical mass of counter-forces to bring it back to normal. The electorally key state of Florida necessitated a hardline stance against Castro and Cuba in order to assuage ex-Cubans. This political reality has made it so the political system was and is not conducive to improving or normalizing relations. Under President Barack Obama, steps were taken to normalize relations but much of his work was undone by President Donald Trump. Although President Joe Biden promised to continue Obama's policy on Cuba, recent protests and the government's subsequent crackdown have pushed his administration to reevaluate their position.¹⁴⁰ The pendulum swing of presidential policy towards Cuba shows how the American political system remains not conducive to positive long-term policy directions.

The recent eruption of protests in Cuba, the largest in a quarter century, were aimed mainly at the government for longer lines and shortages of food/medicine. Some protesters demanded a faster pace of vaccination against COVID-19 while others called for political change. The Cuban government blamed the U.S. sanctions for their role in Cuba's hardships, which they say cost the island \$5.5 billion in 2020. They also charged the United States with orchestrating the protests through social media, mainly Twitter, where hashtags such as #SOSCuba took off and went viral.¹⁴¹ There remains no major evidence that the United States or CIA had any role in these protests, although it would fit their modus operandi. The blame-game

¹³⁹ Morley, *Imperial State and Revolution: The United States and Cuba, 1952-1986*, 305.

¹⁴⁰ Trevor Hunnicutt and Matt Spetalnick, "Biden Policy on Cuba Remittances Needs More Work, U.S. Official Says," (*Reuters*, 6 Nov. 2021), <https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/biden-policy-cuba-remittances-needs-more-work-us-official-2021-11-05/>.

¹⁴¹ Andrea Rodriguez, "Explainer: Causes of the Protests in Cuba," (*AP NEWS*, Associated Press, 14 July 2021), <https://apnews.com/article/joe-biden-europe-business-health-cuba-53b679e5500247f8bf6195b692015605>.

by Cuba shows how U.S. policy towards its southern neighbor has been ineffective. It has alienated the Cuban government and made the Cuban people suffer the consequences. Although the proximity between the countries has been the source of much animosity, it can also provide the opportunity and impetus for cooperation and reconciliation.¹⁴²

Drastic changes in the way the United States acts towards nations of asymmetric power are required in order to use its soft and hard power advantages most effectively. Since World War II, America has often struggled with transplanting its principles into policies and learning from its mistakes.¹⁴³ The use of its hard power in the internal affairs of other countries can threaten to undermine its soft power. Similarly, not using its hard power to positively progress the development of other nations can also threaten to undermine its soft power. This “catch-22” will have to be reconciled so that America can stand up for its principles of freedom and democracy while also respecting the sovereignty of other nations.

“There is that other America, North America, that is not ours, and whose enmity it is neither wise nor viable to encourage. However, with firm propriety and an astute independence, it is not impossible—and indeed it is useful—to be friends.”¹⁴⁴ —Jose Marti

¹⁴² William M. Leogrande and Peter Kornbluh, *Back Channel to Cuba: The Hidden History of Negotiations between Washington and Havana* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 417.

¹⁴³ Hopkins, *American Empire*, 737. “Like other great states, the *United States of Amnesia*, as it has been called, carries forward elements of the past that are congenial to those in power, while discarding alternatives that might challenge the dominant orthodoxy. As a result, the “lessons of liberation” are often unknown or ignored. Hubris then works its way toward nemesis, which may result from overstretch, as in the case of Britain, or overconfidence, as in the case of the United States. There is no easy solution to this problem. Indeed, there may be no solution at all.”

¹⁴⁴ Leogrande and Kornbluh, *Back Channel to Cuba*, 417.

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