

Dangerous Obsession: The Troubled History of US-Cuban Relations

by Aaron Birks

Abstract

The objective of this research is to provide a better understanding as to why Cuba, more than any other Latin American nation maintained its enormous place in the American imaginary throughout the tensest decades of the Cold War. Immediately following the success of the Cuban Revolution, misinterpretations of Cuban objectives, fears of Soviet style Communist expansion, and the resulting failures in American policy turned Cuba from ally to enemy. By examining recently declassified government documents, recorded conversations, and interviews with the most influential figures involved in producing this Cold War foreign policy quagmire, this paper will illuminate one of the most misunderstood aspects of American Cold War history. This research will bring better understanding as to why the US Government's frequent mishandling of Cuban affairs only intensified America's obsession with Cuba and its seemingly invincible dictator.

The conclusion of World War II brought with it more questions than answers for the citizens of the world. The United States of America and the Soviet Union emerged as victors of the war, and new hostilities developed between the two nations almost immediately. In the place of a clear-cut conflict against a recognized evil arose a new war based on vastly different social, political, and economic ideologies.

The first hints of the Soviet Union's plans to extend their influence emerged immediately following WWII in Iran, Turkey, and Greece. Recognizing the possibility of Communist success in Greece and Turkey specifically, President Truman promised America's help to stem the tide. In a speech delivered to Congress in 1947, the president laid the foundation for what would become known as the Truman Doctrine:

The seeds of totalitarian regimes are nurtured by misery and want. They spread and grow in the evil soil of poverty and strife. They reach their full growth when the hope of a people for a better life has died. We must keep that hope alive. The free peoples of the world look to us for support in maintaining their freedoms [...] Great responsibilities have been placed upon us by the swift movement of events.¹

Although he envisioned this support specifically for Greece and Turkey, Truman's remarks quickly became America's justification for opposing Communism across the globe. The Soviet Union's actions and the resulting Truman Doctrine set the stage for the long and potentially world ending conflict known as the Cold War.

This new kind of war would be waged in a completely new way. The achievement of nuclear capability by the Soviet Union in 1949 and the coinciding threat of nuclear exchange meant that direct conventional confrontation was mostly out of the question. Although both sides embarked on a decade's long arms race in preparation for just such an occurrence, the real battles of the war were fought by proxy in exotic locales far removed from either nation's home soil. In what would rapidly

¹ Address of the President of the United States, President Harry S. Truman, 80th Congress, 1st Session, *Recommendation for Assistance to Greece and Turkey*, March 12, 1947

become the center of international intrigue and American fear, the small island nation of Cuba became emblematic of this new form of US-Soviet proxy conflict.

By the time Fidel Castro's 26th of July Movement toppled Cuban President Fulgencia Batista and assumed power in 1959, America had already developed an unwavering opposition towards anything resembling Communism. The strategy known as the Truman Doctrine became the United States' foreign policy modus operandi from 1947 onward, and provided justification for Soviet containment across the globe. This justification for action against Communist aggression, combined with repeated anti-Communist successes in Iran, Greece, Turkey, and Guatemala, proved to the US Government and its clandestine communities that it could operate with impunity anywhere in the world. When met with the seemingly inconsequential challenge of Fidel Castro and his new Cuba however, America's previously used tactics proved futile.

The failure of the United States' strategy towards Cuba created the very situation American policy makers hoped most to avoid: a Soviet aligned Communist nation directly off the coast of the United States. Propelled by a history of success and further emboldened by repeated losses, the United States' strategy turned Cuba into a spectacle unrivaled in Cold War history. A refusal to consider alternative approaches to foreign relations turned the repeated failures in Cuba into an obsession wildly disproportionate to the island's diminutive place in the world. Hubris and stubbornness led to failure; failure became obsession; and obsession brought Cuba out of relative obscurity to the forefront of America's Cold War fears.

Prior to its long confrontation with Cuba, the US Government established its 'can't lose' attitude towards Communist expansion through a series of victories all over the world. Successful operations in Greece and Turkey in the late 1940s set the precedent for US involvement, but its successes in Latin America – and most notably in Guatemala – created the standard for future clandestine operations against governments deemed vulnerable to Communist influence. A new trend towards land redistribution and social welfare had taken hold in Latin America, which to US policy makers, looked suspiciously like Soviet encroachment. American concern grew as revolutions gained momentum during the 1950s and plans to redistribute agricultural land rose in popularity. The small nation of Guatemala followed this popular Latin American trend and quickly became the target of the US Government and its clandestine services in 1952.

Guatemala is important to America's future obsession with Cuba and its dictator for several reasons. First and foremost, Guatemala became the proving ground for new CIA tactics between 1952 and 1954, which were the direct predecessors of those used in Cuba. Successes in Iran, Greece, and Turkey during the 1940s had already proven to the US Government that it could achieve its goals anywhere in the world. When democratically elected President Jacobo Arbenz took office in Guatemala in 1951 under a banner seemingly akin to Soviet Communist ideology, the US Government decided it was necessary to remove him. The actions taken by the CIA in Guatemala produced America's guidelines for its eventual operations in Cuba, and demonstrate why the US Government was so tied to this one particular strategy in Latin America.²

Some of the most successful developments in covert political strategy came in the form of CIA sponsored psychological operations in Guatemala. Although not fully trusted by those in the US intelligence services, former CIA officer Richard Bissel describes psychological warfare as being particularly important to the eventual removal of Guatemalan President Jacobo Arbenz and his administration.³ Initially, Bissel "placed little faith in psychological warfare," but realized its

² Gerald K. Haines. "CIA and Guatemala Assassination Proposals 1952-1954." June 1, 1995. <https://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB4/docs/doc01.pdf>.

³ Richard M. Bissell and Jonathan E. Lewis. *Reflections of a Cold Warrior: From Yalta to the Bay of Pigs*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996. 90

importance after seeing the “effectiveness of the real paramilitary steps that were being taken enormously enhanced by skillful psychological exploitation.”⁴

Of the different psychological strategies used, radio stations set up in neighboring countries under the guise of being locally owned and operated proved especially effective in Guatemala. The clever use of the station known as The Voice of Liberation magnified each CIA success and mitigated setbacks. Broadcasts even convinced the majority of Arbenz’ air force pilots to defect to Guatemalan exile Carlos Castillo Armas’ opposition movement during a key moment of the operation.⁵ The success of The Voice of Liberation eventually led directly to the creation of the Radio Swan and Radio Americas, Cuba’s own CIA sponsored dissident radio stations.⁶

Planning for the removal of Jacobo Arbenz also led the United States government to develop – and justify – targeted assassinations in Latin America. Although Arbenz left Guatemala before any assassinations could be carried out, the operational plans for the assassination of political figures and Communist sympathizers were already well thought out by the time Fidel Castro rose to power in 1959. These plans included “various suggestions for the disposal of key Arbenz government officials and Guatemalan Communists” as well as the creation of teams of Guatemalan exiles trained by the CIA to carry out the killings.⁷ The scope of these plans for the Arbenz government were a direct predecessor to the now infamous attempts at killing Fidel Castro throughout the entirety of the Cold War.

Although the CIA pressed the sole use of its resources in Guatemala, some components of the US Government did in fact call for a more measured response to Jacobo Arbenz and his new government. The Department of State’s Bureau of Inter-American Affairs for example did not want to portray “the spectacle of the elephant shaking with alarm before the mouse.”⁸ The Bureau instead advocated for economic incentives to be levied against the Arbenz administration to persuade his decision-making processes. These voices within the US Government eventually became “the official public US policy” towards Guatemala, but the truth was altogether different.⁹ The CIA greatly feared Guatemala becoming a Soviet pawn and carried out clandestine operations until the successful removal of Jacobo Arbenz in 1954. In a similar fashion, opponents of the kinds of clandestine operations committed in Cuba were ignored, with America’s top officials favoring easy and immediate action over potentially drawn out negotiations. Building on their previous successes around the world, the Guatemalan coup orchestrated by the CIA proved that they could operate with impunity in Latin America and avoid a more time consuming diplomatic approach. More importantly, the US Government now had a proven playbook for any potential rogue nation in the region.

The significance of the operations in Guatemala in relation to those executed by the US in Cuba cannot be understated. The planned assassinations, clandestine support for competing political and military actors, the continuous execution of psychological operations, and the huge amount of resources invested into Guatemala were repeated in essentially the same manner in Cuba just six years later. It is not simply the fact that the CIA assembled its Latin American anti-communist strategy while overthrowing the Guatemalan President that makes it so significant however. The successes in Guatemala and the subsequent failures in Cuba tell an extremely important story about the motivating factors behind America’s obsession with Cuba during the Cold War.

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Ibid, 86

⁶ Ibid, 88

⁷ Haines “CIA and Guatemala Assassination Proposals 1952-1954”

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Ibid

Guatemala and Cuba possessed many similarities during the 1950s, but resulting US Governmental action produced entirely different results in the American mindset. Initially, the actions taken against Guatemalan President Jacobo Arbenz produced “a great deal of public outcry” within the United States.¹⁰ The ensuing success however silenced further reaction. This attention from the American public stands in stark contrast to the spectacle and media circus Cuba quickly became. One nation was sparsely covered by American media outlets, while the other continuously drew the attention of the entire United States and much of the world from 1960 onwards. The one deciding factor is that America failed in Cuba, and its repeated attempts to win only intensified Cuba’s lofty position in the American mind.

The successes in Guatemala essentially secured America’s foreign policy reaction to rogue governments in Latin America. These victories also assuaged negative reactions to its policies from the American citizenry and the media. Hubris, combined with a *carte blanche* to act in any way it deemed fit, meant that the US Government was initially unconcerned when Fidel Castro’s July 26th Movement rose to prominence in Cuba.

The fears of Castro’s revolution posed little initial concern for a multitude of reasons. First, Fidel Castro did not threaten the longstanding ties between the United States and Cuba. From 1898 onward, the US had maintained substantial influence over the island nation and had “built up an economic position as important as its political one.”¹¹ By the 1920s, American interests maintained control of over 60 per cent of Cuban sugar production and had developed massive landholding across the island.¹² These close economic ties translated into strong cross-cultural relationships. These relationships in turn lead to a large number of American educated Cuban citizens and the development of a large émigré population centered in Florida. Aside from vague talk concerning agrarian reform, Fidel Castro initially made no threats to these longstanding ties formed between America and Cuba.¹³

The other key factor in the US Government’s lack of concern towards Fidel Castro was that they did not believe he had the capabilities necessary to sway the Cuban masses. According to an intelligence estimate compiled in 1958, many within the US Government did not even think Castro had the popular support necessary to overthrow President Fulguencio Batista, let alone establish a viable dictatorship. Within this intelligence estimate, analysts concluded that the July 26th Movement and its leader “Fidel Castro had failed to convince the majority of Cuban people that his program, in preference to Batista’s [were] worth fighting for.”¹⁴ The United States recognized the power of the Castro’s movement but expected few results mostly due to the “relative economic prosperity” many Cubans continued to enjoy during this time.¹⁵

If any concern did arise out of Castro’s mounting success against Batista, it was due to the potential for Communist sympathizers to gain influence within his movement. Most importantly for American analysts were the “few alleged Communists who held moderately important positions in the 26 July Movement, especially among the troops led by Raul Castro.”¹⁶ With Communist influence already the focal point of US foreign policy, the fact that Communist sympathizers had penetrated the Movement’s lower levels surely raised eyebrows in Washington. Despite these

¹⁰ Bissell, *Cold Warrior*, 90

¹¹ Hugh Thomas. "American Heritage." *The U.S. And Castro, 1959–1962*. October 1, 1978. <http://www.americanheritage.com/content/us-and-castro-1959-1962?page=2>

¹² Ibid

¹³ Allen Dulles. “Special National Intelligence Estimate Number 85-58: The Situation in Cuba.” November 26th, 1958. http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document_conversions/89801/DOC_0000027105.pdf

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ Ibid

concerns, US Government fears were allayed by the relative neglect Communists encountered from other anti-Batista forces and Fidel Castro himself. Although Castro's brother Raul was a devoted Communist, Fidel Castro openly proclaimed to the American Government and to the world that he had little sympathy for Communist ideology.¹⁷

In January 1959 Fidel Castro and his 26 July Movement successfully fought their way down from the Sierra Maestra Mountains and overthrew President Batista. Fidel Castro was the hero of the revolution and immediately found himself in the spotlight of Western news outlets. One of Fidel Castro's first appearances in Western media came in the form of an interview on the Ed Sullivan Show just days after the overthrow of Batista. Castro proclaimed that Batista's regime was "the last dictatorship in Cuba," and praised the United States as a protector of the persecuted peoples of the world.¹⁸ Castro's attitude and language during the interview were anything but worrisome in the eyes of Western audiences as he promised to strengthen and "improve Cuba's democratic institutions;" rhetoric that seemed to assure a cordial relationship with the United States in the future.¹⁹

American fear of Communist encroachment within Cuba was further dispelled after Castro's victory. The main Communist organization in Cuba known as the PSP had "withheld its support until the victory of the revolution was clearly impending" but was rebuffed by Castro when its support was finally offered.²⁰ Castro even acted to "break the control of organized labor which the Communists had seized on the collapse of the Batista regime," providing further assurance that Cuba was not destined to become a Communist nation.²¹ These seemingly pro-capitalist and pro-democratic statements were short-lived however, and Castro's position changed dramatically over a short period of time.

Within the span of several months, the new government in Cuba removed its figurehead President Manuel Urrutia and placed Fidel Castro as the de facto ruler of the country. Castro's first moves appeared to the US Government as decidedly more Communist in nature. He expanded upon the vague promises of agrarian reform he had promised throughout the revolution and moved to redistribute land holdings to Cuban peasants. A large volume of American owned lands and businesses were repatriated almost immediately, along with a promise of future repayment by way of bonds issued by the Cuban Government.²² Castro's reforms not only angered US business owners but also the Cuban middle-class on which the ideals of the revolution were based.²³

According to a review of his actions by the CIA three years after his assumption of power, Fidel Castro had become convinced that he could find no support in the US.²⁴ Within this review analysts estimated that by March of 1959 Castro had already begun to marginalize many of his former supporters, compounding his isolation even further:

Although Castro remained a hero to the peasantry, his original supporters were increasingly disillusioned by his radical and impulsive reform measures and his chaotic administration. Defectors from the movement became increasingly frequent.

¹⁷ Ibid

¹⁸ "Fidel Castro Interview on the Ed Sullivan Show." The Official Ed Sullivan Site.

¹⁹ Ibid

²⁰ Sherman Kent, "Memorandum for the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency: Why the Cuban Revolution of 1958 Led to Cuba's Alignment with the USSR." February 21, 1961.

http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document_conversions/89801/DOC_0000132656.pdf

²¹ Ibid

²² "CBC Digital Archives - Great Interviews - Fidel Castro: After the Revolution." CBCnews. CBC/Radio Canada

²³ Kent, "Cuba's Alignment with the USSR." CBCnews. CBC/Radio Canada

<<http://www.cbc.ca/archives/discover/great-interviews/revolution-in-cuba-1.html>>.

²⁴ Ibid

In these circumstances, the Communists became the only dedicated and effective organizers, operators, and supporters upon whom Castro could rely, and Raul Castro and Che Guevara were at hand to influence him toward increasing reliance on them.²⁵

Further reliance on Communist supporters in turn influenced further defections. By the summer of 1959, any criticism of Communism was declared counterrevolutionary in Cuba.

In the span of less than a year, Fidel Castro quickly repositioned himself against American interests. The democratically governed and American aligned Cuba that the US Government had hoped for had become the Communist dictatorship it most feared. Fidel Castro had declared his support for Marxist ideologies and began actively seeking support and guidance from the Soviet Union. In February of 1960, Cuba and the USSR enacted a joint economic and trade agreement.²⁶ During this same period Cuba established diplomatic and economic relationships with China, North Korea, North Vietnam, Albania, and Outer Mongolia.²⁷ As 1960 progressed “President Eisenhower became plainly intolerant of the Castro regime,” and American policy quickly changed to reflect these feelings.²⁸

The last straw in the collapse of Cuban-American relations came in May of 1960. Castro’s friendship with the Soviet Union had grown steadily throughout 1959 and reached a new level of importance in the new year. In May, “Castro ordered certain US-owned refineries in Cuba to refine Soviet crude oil and, on their refusal, expropriated them.”²⁹ In response, the United States moved to eliminate Cuba’s “privileged position in the US sugar market;” an economic relationship of extreme importance to Cuban enterprises.³⁰ In October of 1960 the United States established a general economic embargo against Cuba and initiated a formal break in relations in January of 1961.³¹

Although the United States Government felt that Cuba’s own actions necessitated a harsh economic penalty, America’s response was contrary to the ideals of the Truman Doctrine. Any chance of a congenial relationship was likely lost after the expulsion of American owned refineries in 1960, but the US Government’s reaction all but guaranteed Cuba would fall completely under Communist influence. If seeds of totalitarian regimes were truly sown in misery and want, emplacing such a severe embargo on the island nation could only have served to solidify Castro’s dictatorship. The magnitude of the embargo made a strong claim that America was unwilling to seriously pursue any options besides Castro’s overthrow.

Despite the official break in diplomatic and economic ties in 1961, fears of Soviet weapons platforms and staging bases in Cuba had already sent US policy makers into a panic in the previous year. Riding the wave of successful covert political operations undertaken throughout the late 1940s and 50s, US policy makers established the “Cuba Plan” and made the decision to overthrow Fidel Castro on January 13, 1960.³²

The strategies of the Cuba Plan were initially almost identical to the plans used in Guatemala two years prior. Like the previous action, psychological operations formed a central component of

²⁵ Ibid

²⁶ "Chronology of Specific Events Relating to the Military Buildup in Cuba." December 4, 1962. George Washington University National Security Archives. http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nsa/cuba_mis

²⁷ Ibid

²⁸ Ibid

²⁹ Sherman Kent, “Memorandum for the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency: Why the Cuban Revolution of 1958 Led to Cuba’s Alignment with the USSR.” February 21, 1961.

http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document_conversions/89801/DOC_0000132656.pdf

³⁰ Ibid

³¹ Ibid

³² Bissell, *Cold Warrior*, 153

the anti-Castro plan. CIA engineers set up radio stations designed to broadcast into Cuba and undermine the dictator's support. Information campaigns against Castro were an important piece of the puzzle, but the US Government eventually turned to a much more proactive and aggressive approach to overthrowing the rogue dictator.

CIA and military planners envisioned the use of Cuban exiles to do their own dirty work on the island of Cuba. Displaced and eager to help in Castro's overthrow, these exiles were recruited to become masters of infiltration and sabotage; CIA trained clandestine warriors who could operate freely within Cuba and prep the country for the establishment of a new government.³³ Although these men were to be trained in US territory, a State Department decree forbid any such activity on American controlled land, and in an ironic twist they were instead sent to Guatemala to receive instruction from the CIA.³⁴

By the end of 1960 small forces of guerrilla operators consisting of exiled or displaced Cubans were hard at work on Cuban soil. Guerrillas conducted raids and other destabilizing activities with frequency, but problems consistently plagued the operations.³⁵ Eventually several of the men participating in the program – including three Americans – were discovered and executed by Castro. As problems mounted for anti-Castro operations, new complications with CIA trained guerrilla forces emerged which threatened the very heart of the program.

Rivalries between the different CIA trained groups soon materialized within the Cuba Plan. It became clear to CIA planners “that the leaders of the Cuban exile community, centered in Miami, were in competition with one another for US funds, supplies and support.”³⁶ These rivalries between the different groups based in the United States meant that American planners had to take total control of the separate Cuban forces. None of the decision-making processes could be left to superiors of the exile commandos, greatly increasing the strain on operations. As problems mounted Cuban informers continued to make operations even more dangerous, and the “efforts to build a secure and successful guerrilla network failed abysmally.”³⁷

Problems with Cuban émigré communities in Miami created even more obstacles for United States' insurgency program. The leaders of the disparate exile group's constant competition for political power and money eventually spilled over into the US Government's psychological operations campaigns. The rivalries were so intense that they impaired the effectiveness of the CIA's Radio Swan and brought unwanted attention to Cuban operations. The station had been broadcasting its anti-Castro messaging throughout Miami communities and the whole of Cuba, but exile Cuban political rivalries soon found their way onto the airwaves. For audiences in Havana – whom the radio station was designed to serve – it became “disheartening to hear broadcasts by exile program managers who seemed more concerned with serving the political ambitions of Cubans in Miami than with the situation of those trapped on the island.”³⁸ The Eisenhower Administration quickly recognized the failure of its halfhearted attempts at regime change and redoubled its efforts to rid the country of Fidel Castro. Instead of considering alternate strategies less dependent on CIA sponsored insurgencies however, the US Government began to formulate a much more drastic plan to rid Cuba of its dictator. It is at this time that the proposal for an exile led invasion of the island materialized, and the plans for Brigade 2506 and the Bay of Pigs were put to paper.

³³ Ibid, 154

³⁴ Ibid

³⁵ Ibid, 155

³⁶ Ibid, 155

³⁷ Ibid, 156

³⁸ Ibid, 156

President Eisenhower did not remain in office long enough to see his plans for a Cuban invasion through to fruition. The plans were concrete enough however that all the incoming president had to do to initiate them was sign on the dotted line. Luckily for the designers of the Bay of Pigs invasion, John F. Kennedy was a staunch anti-Communist and devoted to removing the threat of Castro's dictatorship from Cuba.

By the time John F. Kennedy rose to the presidency, the Truman Doctrine had morphed from a plan to protect two small nations into a charge to protect the entire world from Communism. At his inaugural address in 1961 President Kennedy reaffirmed America's commitment to battling Communism, stating that the U.S. would "support any friend, oppose any foe, in order to assure the survival and the success of liberty."³⁹ Kennedy's speech in 1961 left no doubts to his stance on Communism and the Soviet Union. Although his remarks were directed at Communist encroachment on the whole, his views were molded by the perceived Communist threat 90 miles off the American coast.

During his campaign for the presidency in 1960, John F. Kennedy had used Cuba as a platform to establish his anti-Communist ideals to his supporters. A speech by Kennedy at a Democratic dinner in October 1960 reveals the enormous importance the soon-to-be president placed on the small island nation and its new leader:

Castro is not just another Latin American dictator - a petty tyrant bent merely on personal power and gain. His ambitions extend far beyond his own shores. He has transformed the island of Cuba into a hostile and militant Communist satellite - a base from which to carry Communist infiltration and subversion throughout the Americas. With guidance, support, and arms from Moscow and Peiping, he has made anti-Americanism a sign of loyalty and anti-communism a punishable crime - confiscated over a billion dollars' worth of American property - threatened the existence of our naval base at Guantanamo - and rattled Red rockets at the United States, which can hardly close its eyes to a potential enemy missile or submarine base only 90 miles from our shores.⁴⁰

His speech to the supporters of his campaign proved not only his staunch opposition to Fidel Castro, but also in America's responsibility to take action against him. Just one week after the inauguration, a meeting was called with strategic planners to discuss the potential action on Cuba.⁴¹ The meeting showed clandestine community that Kennedy was primed and ready for decisive action.⁴² As John F. Kennedy walked into the White House in January 1961, the Bay of Pigs invasion was already in motion.

As preparations for the covert invasion of Cuba gained steam, other strategies were placed before the new president in an attempt to stave off what many believed to be a foolish undertaking. Kennedy's special advisor and historian Arthur Schlesinger Jr. pleaded with him in early February to consider other possible approaches to the Cuba problem. Schlesinger knew that "however well disguised the action might be, it would be ascribed to the United States."⁴³ In his view any recognition by the international community of America's involvement would result in "a wave of

³⁹ Inaugural Address of the President of the United States, John F. Kennedy, January 20, 1961. John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum. <http://www.jfklibrary.org/Asset-Viewer/BqXIEM9F4024ntF17SVAjA.aspx>

⁴⁰ John F. Kennedy, "Speech at Democratic Party Dinner," Cincinnati, Ohio, October 6, 1960. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=25660>

⁴¹ Bissel, *Cold Warrior*, 156

⁴² Ibid

⁴³ Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. "Memorandum for the President," February 11, 1961. <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v10/d43>

massive protest, agitation and sabotage throughout Latin America, Europe, Asia and Africa.”⁴⁴ Schlesinger’s suggestions included multiple alternative approaches to ousting Castro, including the provocation of his dictatorship into taking offensive action first. He also proposed including the entirety of Latin American nations loyal to the United States in any plans against the Castro regime.⁴⁵

Recognizing the firm will of John Kennedy, Schlesinger further pleaded that “at one stroke, [this action] would dissipate all the extraordinary good will which has been rising toward the new Administration throughout the world [...] and would fix a malevolent image of the new Administration in the minds of millions.”⁴⁶ Others in the Kennedy Administration echoed the concerns of Schlesinger’s pleas, but all fell on deaf ears. The previous actions of the CIA throughout the world had proven too effective and too easy. Dismissing the foresighted wisdom of his advisors, President Kennedy ordered the invasion of the Bay of Pigs to commence.

Although plans had been constructed by some of the brightest minds in the Eisenhower Administration, the operation to invade Cuba began to unravel almost as soon as it was set into motion. What was initially intended to be a small, mobile group of five hundred men quickly ballooned to a full-sized invasion force of nearly thirteen hundred exile fighters eager to take back their homeland. The Cuban fighters that comprised Brigade 2506 – the CIA’s main invasion force trained and prepared in Guatemala – became so eager to invade their homeland that they threatened to attack on their own without any American assistance.⁴⁷ At one point the timeline for the invasion was pushed back by the Kennedy Administration, angering the exile force even further. The volatile attitudes of the CIA trained Cuban fighters became a deciding factor in finally selecting April 17th, 1961 as the date for the invasion.⁴⁸

The results of the Bay of Pigs Invasion are a well-known history. The force that landed on the shores of Cuba on April 17th initially found some success against local Cuban forces, but were quickly driven back by Castro’s military. In a matter of three days, the CIA trained exile force intended to penetrate deep into Cuba and spark a popular uprising against Fidel Castro was stopped cold.

Many reasons were given for the failure, including a lack of proper support from American forces and even speculation that Fidel Castro was aware in advance of the location and time of the attack. Regardless of all the particulars of the defeat, the fact remained that America had been dealt its first real blow in its ongoing campaign against Communism. The grandiose and public nature of the loss and the revelation of what the US was trying to accomplish in Cuba put the small island nation at the forefront of American minds.

Immediately after the defeat at the Bay of Pigs, the Wall Street Journal published a cable from Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev to President Kennedy for all of America to see. In the note, Khrushchev “assailed the US for aggression in Cuba and promised all necessary assistance to the Castro regime in its battle against anti-Castro invaders.”⁴⁹ If there was any question to the severity of the Soviet Union’s involvement in Cuba prior to the Bay of Pigs invasion, there was certainly none after its failure. Khrushchev’s note to President Kennedy put the threat of the Soviet Union right on America’s doorstep in a highly visible way. With the development of Soviet intercontinental ballistic

⁴⁴ Ibid

⁴⁵ Ibid

⁴⁶ Ibid

⁴⁷ Bissell, *Cold Warrior*, 163

⁴⁸ Ibid

⁴⁹ "Reds Pledge Aid to Cuba, Assail U.S.; Kennedy Warns Soviet to Keep Out." The Wall Street Journal Article Archive. April 19, 1961.

missiles in full swing and the Soviet's relationship with Castro now solidified, Cuba thrust itself into the spotlight as the most dangerous nation in the Western Hemisphere.

The Bay of Pigs not only secured Soviet help for Cuba but also aided in solidifying Fidel Castro's hold on the island nation. In a conversation between Kennedy advisor Richard Goodwin and Ernesto 'Che' Guevara in August of 1961, Che thanked Goodwin for the Bay of Pigs, stating that "it had been a great political victory for them – enabling them to consolidate – and transformed them from an aggrieved little country into an equal."⁵⁰ This solidification – combined with the proof that Cuba could withstand the world's greatest superpower - also emboldened revolutionaries fighting their governments throughout Latin America.

The notion that it could operate with complete impunity and with no consequences to its actions led the American Government to failure in Cuba. The Bay of Pigs accomplished nothing in the way of removing Fidel Castro or diminishing Communist sentiments on the island. To the contrary, the failed invasion only helped to make America's greatest fears come true. In the place of a Caribbean ally ninety miles off the US coastline now stood a firmly entrenched Communist government harboring deeply rooted anti-American sentiment.

The failure at the Bay of Pigs also served to draw America deeper into conflicts in other parts of the globe. The situation in Southeast Asia was heating up in 1961, and President Kennedy saw the loss at the Bay of Pigs as reason to entrench the United States even more adamantly in Vietnam. In a meeting with advisor John Kenneth Galbraith in 1961, President Kennedy proclaimed that "there are limits to the number of defeats I can defend in one twelve-month period. I've had the Bay of Pigs, pulling out of Laos, and I can't accept a third."⁵¹ The loss at the Bay of Pigs proved a substantial blow to the Kennedy Administration, but no one would have believed that a loss to such an insignificant nation would help produce one of the worst wars in US history.

The failure at the Bay of Pigs did not spell the end for US intervention in Cuba but led to an even more highly motivated obsession with Communist spread both in the Caribbean and around the globe. According to then Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, he and the rest of the cabinet became "hysterical about Castro at the time of the Bay of Pigs and thereafter."⁵² The extremely public nature of the loss both at home and internationally hardened President Kennedy and the US Government's resolve. With any further overt plans out of the question, President Kennedy sent out the call for a new clandestine strategy towards Cuba. What resulted were some of the most terrible plans US policy makers have ever put to paper and proof of the US Government's dangerous fascination with Cuba at the time.

Following the events of the Bay of Pigs and prior to the Cuban Missile Crisis, the US Government continued in its efforts to dispose the Cuban dictator and reestablish a favorable American position. Public fascination with Cuba remained high as the US Government continued with its standard, ongoing response. Psychological operations continued targeting the island, and attempts at assassinating Fidel Castro continued unabated.⁵³ A continued lack of success provoked a new line of thinking out of Washington, resulting in the creation of a plan known as Operation

⁵⁰ Dick Goodwin, "Memorandum for the President: Conversation with Comandante Ernesto Guevara of Cuba." August 22, 1961. George Washington University National Security Archives <https://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB269/doc01.pdf>

⁵¹ Bissell, *Cold Warrior*, 151

⁵² U.S. Senate, "Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities," *Alleged Assassination Plots Involving Foreign Leaders*, 142. U.S. Senate Select Committee on Intelligence. <http://www.intelligence.senate.gov/pdfs94th/94465.pdf>

⁵³ Estimates of attempts on Fidel Castro's life by CIA operatives numbered in the hundreds according to Castro's former bodyguard and intelligence officer Fabian Escalante.

Northwoods. Although never acted upon, the language of Northwoods demonstrates the extreme obsessive mentality of America's highest ranking officials in regards to Cuba.

Submitted to the Chief of Operations for the United States Government's Cuba Project, Operation Northwoods was a comprehensive plan created in order to generate national and international sympathies for a full-scale military invasion into Cuba. The proposal was created in a similar vein to the suggestions given to President Kennedy by advisor Arthur Schlesinger prior to the Bay of Pigs fiasco. In order to provoke a Cuban response – or to simply create the appearance of Cuban aggression – the Joint Chiefs hoped to sway the members of Congress and the international community into giving their blessing for an invasion. The document was assembled by the Joint Chiefs of Staff at the highest level of secrecy, and presented for consideration on March 13th, 1962.⁵⁴

According to the language of the proposal, the Joint Chiefs were not the only members of government working to produce a justification for full-scale military intervention. The author of the document, L.L. Lemnitzer, “assumed that there [would] be similar submissions from other agencies” but insisted that the responsibility for “both overt and covert military operations be assigned [to] the Joint Chiefs of Staff” exclusively.⁵⁵ This language suggests both an aversion to allowing the CIA to take charge after its failures the year prior, and that some amount of competition existed within the US Government for the right to regain Cuba. The obsession for regime change in Cuba had reached a fever pitch by this time in 1962, with various groups within the US Government vying for the opportunity to act.

The goal of this new strategy in Cuba was to serve as a precursor to a full-scale US military invasion. The author of the document understood that any action to reverse the tide in Cuba would require both the full force of the US military and a blessing from Congress to send them. Furthermore, Lemnitzer recognized that consent from Congress would only arise from “a period of heightened US-Cuban tensions which placed the United States in the position of suffering justifiable grievances.”⁵⁶ While popular US support was seen as a necessity, a favorable international attitude was also seen as important for the prospective invasion of Cuba. The actions of Operation Northwoods were meant to characterize Cuba “as rash and irresponsible, and as an alarming and unpredictable threat to the peace of the Western Hemisphere.”⁵⁷

The basic idea of the proposal was to portray Cuba in an extremely negative and antagonistic light to the rest of the world. The Joint Chiefs proposed a well-coordinated strategy of “harassment plus deceptive actions to convince the Cubans of imminent invasion would be emphasized.”⁵⁸ By maintaining a heightened military posture throughout the execution of Northwoods, the US Government would be able to immediately transition from a stance of military exercise to invasion. To accomplish this task, the Northwoods plan “would enable a logical build-up of incidents to be combined with other seemingly unrelated events to camouflage the ultimate objective and create the necessary impression of Cuban rashness and irresponsibility on a large scale, directed at other countries as well as the United States.”⁵⁹ This campaign would begin on the island

⁵⁴ L.L. Lemnitzer, "Memorandum for Secretary of Defense: Justification for US Military Intervention in Cuba." March 13, 1962. George Washington University National Security Archives <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/news/20010430/northwoods.pdf>

⁵⁵ Ibid, 1

⁵⁶ Ibid, 5

⁵⁷ Ibid

⁵⁸ Ibid

⁵⁹ Ibid, 6

of Cuba itself, and include staged attacks on Guantanamo Bay using Cuban exiles in Cuban military uniforms in order to maintain deniability if the plan went awry.⁶⁰

The next steps in the plan included the destruction of American ships near the coast of Cuba. These actions were to be conducted completely by US forces, but again done under the guise of aggression by the Cuban military. The suggestion to commit this action in view of either Santiago or Havana was also proposed. Sinking US ships in sight of Cuba's major population centers "would add credibility especially to those that might have heard the blast or seen the fire."⁶¹ Military planners suspected that after such an attack Cuban ships and planes would investigate the occurrence, allowing the US to claim it was the Cuban military who initiated the engagement. The most egregious part of this proposal included false funerals for mock victims, and "casualty lists in US newspapers [that would] cause a helpful wave of national indignation."⁶² Although deceiving the US citizenry into believing a large number of its nation's finest had died at the hands of Fidel Castro was extreme, further suggestions reveal an obsession with Cuba bordering on the absurd.

To assist in selling the idea of a truly dangerous Cuba within the United States, a large section of the Operation Northwoods proposal was directed at targets on or around the American mainland. In order to strike fear into the hearts of its own citizens, the US Government suggested developing a "Communist Cuban terror campaign in the Miami area, in other Florida cities and even in Washington."⁶³ The proposals called mainly for action against Cuban refugees, which included killing "a boatload of Cubans en route to Florida" or fostering "attempts on lives of Cuban refugees in the United States even to the extent of wounding in instances to be widely publicized."⁶⁴ This section of the Northwoods document also proposed detonating plastic explosives in different areas around the United States and then arresting Cuban agents to sell the acts of terror to the American public.⁶⁵ Finally, plans called for the destruction of American civilian aircraft by US planes painted to look like Soviet MIG fighters. The proposed air attacks were to be carried out against American flagged civilian planes loaded with a "group of college students off on a holiday."⁶⁶ Although the students would be removed prior to the flight, "carefully prepared aliases" would be used in order to convince the United States citizenry and the world that Cuba had just destroyed a plane full of defenseless American college students.⁶⁷

The planners of Operation Northwoods firmly believed that the ends justified the means in an eventual invasion of Cuba. The mentality of being able to do anything, to anyone, anywhere in the world was prevalent at the highest levels of the United States government. These actions were not only designed to justify what would have been another unnecessary war, but were created with the intention of duping the citizens of the United States and the world at large into believing that a war was entirely warranted. Killing innocent Cuban refugees, bombing American cities, and making the world believe Fidel Castro had just murdered hundreds of American students are evidence of this radical mindset.

Although the plans created for Operation Northwoods were never realized, the fact that they were even created demonstrates the extent of America's strange obsession over Cuba. These plans were assembled by some of the most powerful figures in the government at the time, and

⁶⁰ Ibid

⁶¹ Ibid, 8

⁶² Ibid, 8

⁶³ Ibid, 8

⁶⁴ Ibid

⁶⁵ Ibid

⁶⁶ Ibid

⁶⁷ Ibid

likely would have been acted upon were it not for the events of the Cuban Missile Crisis just seven months later. Even more telling of the United States' dangerous obsession with Communism overall is the fact that similar plans were recycled just two years later in the Gulf of Tonkin in August of 1964. The US government has never confirmed the specifics of the incident, but it is widely believed that the attack on the USS Maddox was fabricated in order to generate public sympathy for military action in Vietnam. Whether true or false, the events at the Gulf of Tonkin resulted in immediate approval and a resolution from Congress for any and all military action deemed necessary in Southeast Asia.

The inability to formulate any foreign policy strategy outside of clandestine governmental manipulation or military action is one of the US Government's most serious failures during the Cold War. In Cuba, as in Vietnam just two years later, the combined attitude of hubris and obsession led to disastrous results. The failure in planning towards Cuba may not have produced an extremely costly, decade long war, but it did bring the world to the brink of nuclear destruction.

The results of the US Government's poor decision-making and obsession with Cuba ended with one of the most dangerous standoffs in the history of the world. Tensions remained high between Havana and Washington as a result of the Bay of Pigs and extensive covert action against Castro. Even more dangerous, however, was the rapidly deteriorating American-Soviet relationship.

The major destabilizing factor between the US and the USSR at this time in Cold War history was the emplacement of medium range nuclear tipped ballistic missiles in Western Europe on the part of the United States. In 1961, after being rebuffed by the French government for placement within their borders, the United States called on Turkey and Italy to accept Jupiter missile sites within their borders. Nuclear and ballistic missile technology rapidly proliferated during the 1950s and 60s with both the Soviet Union and the United States scrambling to achieve superiority. The emplacement of Jupiter missiles in Western Europe gave the United States dramatically increased first strike capability against the USSR and put the Soviets on the defensive. Luckily for Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev, Fidel Castro was actively searching for a way to deter any further US aggression against his country.

With Castro firmly committed to a Soviet relationship after the Bay of Pigs, the next step was to establish military ties between the two nations. Fidel Castro needed a way to prevent any further US meddling in Cuba, and the Soviet Union needed to achieve parity with US nuclear missile capability. The result of US actions against Cuba created a scenario of unimaginably dangerous proportions. Over the span of several months Cuba transitioned from a small agrarian island into a nuclear power.

In March of 1962 American intelligence had concluded that no official military agreements were in place between the Soviet Union and Cuba. Furthermore, American officials were confident that the Soviets had not "established Soviet bases in Cuba in the pattern of US bases in Western Europe."⁶⁸ These estimates proved to be shortsighted, and by September US reconnaissance aircraft were producing evidence of Soviet military technology arriving in Cuba by the boatload. Evidence produced by CIA U2 aircraft proved the existence of Soviet military buildup on the island and set the stage for the Cuban Missile Crisis.

Between October 1st and 4th, US clandestine agencies met in Washington to discuss strategies for Cuba. Even with the threat of Soviet retaliation looming, planners suggested the exact same approaches to the Cuba problem that had failed previously. The men present at the meeting concluded that there "should be considerably more sabotage" within Cuba, and that "all efforts should be made to develop imaginative approaches to the possibility of getting rid of the Castro

⁶⁸ Ibid, 3

regime.”⁶⁹ The plans also called for the mining of Cuban waters to prevent further Soviet deliveries. At this same time, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara conducted meetings with the Joint Chiefs of Staff to prepare the US military for action in Cuba. McNamara told the Joint Chiefs to prepare for the “institution of a blockade against Cuba” but also to ready the military equipment and personnel necessary to execute an airstrike plan.⁷⁰ If the airstrike option was decided upon, the US Government concluded that it would follow up with a full-scale invasion of the island “using one of two US invasion plans known as OPLAN 314 and OPLAN 316.”⁷¹

With tensions rising and the world’s attention fixed on the small Caribbean nation, Cuban President Dorticos addressed the United Nations on October 8th, 1962. Preempting the American government’s suspicion that nuclear weapons were being delivered to the island, President Dorticos announced that Cuba was prepared to defend itself using any means necessary. His speech concluded by asserting that “if we are attacked, we will defend ourselves [...] We have sufficient means with which to defend ourselves; we have indeed our inevitable weapons, the weapons which we would have preferred not to acquire and which we do not wish to employ.”⁷² Although President Dorticos did not confirm the existence of nuclear weapons on the island, CIA reconnaissance established this fact just six days later.

Aerial reconnaissance of Soviet activities had already produced hundreds of photos detailing the breadth and weight of Soviet military buildup prior to Dorticos’ speech. Photographs of container ships in September of 1962 revealed the importation of nuclear capable Il-28 jet bomber fuselages, surface-to-surface cruise missiles, Komar guided missile patrol boats – designed as anti-ship and anti-submarine vessels – as well as the construction of surface-to-air missile sites around Cuba.⁷³⁷⁴ By September of 1962, these Soviet anti-aircraft batteries were almost operational in Cuba, and construction on nuclear missile platforms was underway.⁷⁶ On October 14th, American U2 spy planes confirmed the presence of Soviet medium range ballistic missiles at San Cristobal, Cuba in near operational status.⁷⁷

Over the course of the next several days planning for action against Cuba reached a fever pitch. Options of all kinds were laid out on the table for the President to consider, including both surgical and massive airstrikes, blockades of the island, and even a nuclear bombardment.⁷⁸ Both President Kennedy and Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara supported the idea of blockade, believing that more extreme measures would provoke a Soviet response in Berlin and other parts of Europe.⁷⁹ Military planners and several members of Congress who were made aware of the situation advocated for stronger action against Cuba and the Soviet Union, but Kennedy’s choice won out in the end.

⁶⁹ Thomas A. Parrott, “Memorandum for Record: Minutes of Meeting of the Special Group (Augmented) on Operation MONGOOSE.” October 4, 1962. George Washington University National Security Archives http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/nsa/cuba_mis_cri/621004%20Minutes%20of%20Meeting%20of%20Special.pdf

⁷⁰ Laurence Chang and Peter Kornbluh. “The Cuban Missile Crisis, 1962.” National Security Archive; Chronologies of the Crisis. January 1, 1992.

http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nsa/cuba_mis_cri/620928_621025%20Chronology%201.pdf

⁷¹ Ibid

⁷² Ibid

⁷³ “Kasimov with IL-28 Fuselage Crates Enroute to Cuba.” September 28, 1962. Photograph

⁷⁴ “Crateology” - Photographs of Crates Holding Komar Guided-Missile Patrol Boats on Their Way to Cuba.” September 1, 1962. Photograph

⁷⁵ “Completed SA-2 Missile Site Showing Characteristic Star of David Pattern.” September 1, 1962. Photograph

⁷⁶ “SSM Missile Launch Area, Banes, Cuba.” September 26, 1962. Photograph

⁷⁷ “Military Encampment (Missile) Los Palacios, Cuba.” October 15, 1962. Photograph

⁷⁸ Chang and Kornbluh, “Chronologies of the Crisis,” 364

⁷⁹ Ibid, 364

The clock was quickly ticking for a decision to be made, as media outlets had become aware of the situation in Cuba and were ready to publish their findings. A call from both Kennedy and McNamara to the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and the *New York Herald Tribune* staved off publication of the crisis until President Kennedy could announce its existence to the world.⁸⁰ On October 22nd, 1962 President Kennedy addressed the nation in a seventeen minute televised speech revealing the extent of the crisis in Cuba. During the course of the speech, Kennedy revealed irrefutable evidence that the Soviet Union had placed medium and intermediate range ballistic missiles as well as nuclear capable aircraft throughout Cuba. His speech detailed his plan for a quarantine of the island and warned the USSR that the United States would “regard any nuclear missile launched from Cuba against any nation in the Western Hemisphere as an attack by the Soviet Union on the United States, requiring a full retaliatory response against the Soviet Union.”⁸¹ In a Soviet cable sent on the very same day, Soviet Defense Minister Marshal Malinovsky ordered the Soviet general in charge of Russia’s Cuban forces to prepare for the likely invasion of the island.⁸²

Choosing a naval quarantine of the island allowed President Kennedy to buy more time and put Khrushchev on the offensive. President Kennedy knew that the quarantine represented only a first step in the process, and knew that even if the action was 100 percent effective, “missile sites [would] go on being constructed.”⁸³ Although further action against Cuba was expected, initially choosing this calmer approach proved to be a deciding factor in the avoidance of nuclear war.

With the eyes of the world fixated on the small island nation of Cuba, tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union continued to rise. Premier Khrushchev threatened to run the blockade and sink any American ship standing in the way, while President Kennedy increased the US military’s preparedness for a possible showdown in Cuba and abroad. In the span of several days Cuba had gained a status far and above its diminutive size. In the span of just three years Castro’s Cuba had become the center of international fear and the knife’s edge on which the future of the human race balanced.

Before any invasion could be ordered or nuclear missiles released, the two most powerful men in the world came to their senses over Cuba. In a letter from Khrushchev to Kennedy on October 26th, Khrushchev explained his wishes for the easing of tensions between the two powers. He called on Kennedy not to tighten the knot of conflict “and thereby doom the world to the catastrophe of thermonuclear war.”⁸⁴ Tensions mounted with the destruction of an American U2 spy plane by Soviet anti-aircraft batteries and a sudden request from Moscow for the removal of Jupiter missiles from Italy and Turkey. On the edge of war, President Kennedy and Premier Khrushchev finally agreed to terms ending the hostilities over Cuba on October 28th. For its part, America pledged to never invade Cuba in return for the Soviet Union’s removal of all offensive weapons from the island. In a less public compromise, the United States removed its nuclear missiles from Turkey and Italy, returning the US and the USSR to a more even nuclear footing.

The tensions between the United States, Cuba, and the Soviet Union eased after the conclusion of the Cuban Missile Crisis, but the relationship by no means returned to normal. The war between ideologies shifted to other battlefields in other parts of the world, and Cuba remained

⁸⁰ Ibid

⁸¹ John F. Kennedy. "Radio and Television Report to the American People on the Soviet Arms Buildup in Cuba, October 22, 1962." John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum.

⁸² A.I. Gribkov, *On the Brink of the Nuclear Abyss*, Moscow: Gregory Page, 1998, 363

⁸³ Ernest R. May, *The Kennedy Tapes: Inside the White House During the Cuban Missile Crisis*. "Friday October 26 10:00 AM," Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1997. 455,

⁸⁴ Nikita Khrushchev. "Department of State Telegram Transmitting Letter from Chairman Khrushchev to President Kennedy, October 26, 1962." John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum.

firmly outside of America's good graces. Efforts were made throughout the Cold War to try to end the hostile relationship, but stubbornness on the part of both the US and Cuban governments precluded any such victory. Cuba's attempts to export revolutionary ideals around the globe and America's pledge to halt Communist activity left the two nations locked at odds.

The failure of US policy in Cuba created one of the most strange and dangerous inter-country relationships in American history. Recycled strategies from other parts of the world failed miserably in Cuba, and the US Government's refusal to change them only produced additional failure. America's unwillingness to attempt other foreign policy strategies turned a potential ally into a contrived enemy almost overnight. Over the course of a single year, Cuba transformed from a small, agrarian island to the United States' public enemy number one.

Poor foreign policy decisions in Cuba produced a public spectacle much larger than the nation's small stature warranted. After all of America's anti-Communist successes, the Bay of Pigs disaster showed the world that America was not the invincible power it was once thought to be. Instead of sending US government officials back to the drawing board in search of better strategies, the loss at the Bay of Pigs only hardened their resolve towards Communism around the world. The failure to secure a small beachhead became the first in a long line of much more costly mistakes for the United States.

Without the aforementioned disaster one can only speculate how the conflict in Vietnam would have played out. It is known that John F. Kennedy was unsure of sending more troops to the region prior to the failures in Cuba. The events at the Bay of Pigs hardened his opposition to North Vietnamese forces and likely played a role in securing America's fate in Southeast Asia for the next decade. Without the failure in Cuba, it is possible that Vietnam would have never occurred on the scale that it did.

In addition to creating the impetus for an increased determination in Vietnam, the strategies developed for Cuba also assisted in generating justification for full-scale military action in Southeast Asia. The strategy of deceiving one's own nation into demanding a war may not have begun with Operation Northwoods, but the ideas presented in the document certainly aided in its development. Just two years after the top-secret Northwoods document was developed, a similar strategy at the Gulf of Tonkin led the United States to war in Vietnam.

It is impossible to tell how the US-Cuban relationship would have evolved without the foreign policy failures of the Cold War. The implementation of other suggested strategies may have avoided the potentially world ending standoff that was the Cuban Missile Crisis, and changed the course of the relationship dramatically. While endeavoring to stop the spread of Communism in Cuba may have seemed necessary in the grand scheme, the poorly thought-out and executed operations produced disastrous results for both nations. America's failures 90 miles off its coast lent themselves directly to the war in Vietnam, and Cuba still remains under one of the strictest embargos ever levied on a nation.

What resulted from the repeated losses in Cuba was the transformation of a minor island nation into the geopolitical center of the world. Over the course of three short years, Fidel Castro went from directing a small group of revolutionaries to dictating the foreign policy decisions of the most powerful nation on the planet. To this day, no other nation has brought the world so close to the brink of nuclear annihilation, nor fixed the world's attention as Cuba did during the height of the Cold War.

References

A.I. Gribkov, *On the Brink of the Nuclear Abyss*, Moscow: Gregory Page, 1998, 363

- Address of the President of the United States, President Harry S. Truman, 80th Congress, 1st Session, *Recommendation for Assistance to Greece and Turkey*, March 12, 1947
- Bissell, Richard M., and Jonathan E. Lewis. *Reflections of a Cold Warrior: From Yalta to the Bay of Pigs*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996.
- "CBC Digital Archives - Great Interviews - Fidel Castro: After the Revolution." CBCnews. CBC/Radio Canada <<http://www.cbc.ca/archives/discover/great-interviews/revolution-in-cuba-1.html>>. (Accessed October 3, 2014).
- "Chronology of Specific Events Relating to the Military Buildup in Cuba." George Washington University National Security Archives. December 4, 1962. http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nsa/cuba_mis (Accessed October 3, 2014).
- "Completed SA-2 Missile Site Showing Characteristic Star of David Pattern." September 1, 1962. Photograph. http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nsa/cuba_mis_cri/4.jpg. (Accessed November 6, 2014)
- "Crateology" - Photographs of Crates Holding Komar Guided-Missile Patrol Boats on Their Way to Cuba. "September 1, 1962. Photograph. http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nsa/cuba_mis_cri/9.jpg. (Accessed October 5, 2014).
- Dulles, Allen. "Special National Intelligence Estimate Number 85-58, The Situation in Cuba." November 26th, 1958. http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document_conversions/89801/DOC_0000027105.pdf (accessed November 1, 2014)
- Escalante, Fabian. *The Cuba Project: CIA Covert Operations Against Cuba 1959-62*. New ed. Melbourne: Ocean Press, 2004.
- "Fidel Castro Interview on the Ed Sullivan Show." The Official Ed Sullivan Site. SOFA Entertainment , n.d. <<http://www.edsullivan.com/fidel-castro-interview-on-the-ed-sullivan-show/>>. (Accessed October 3, 2014).
- Goodwin, Dick. "Memorandum for the President: Conversation with Commandante Ernersto Guevara of Cuba." August 22, 1961 <https://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB269/doc01.pdf> (accessed October 5, 2014)
- Haines, Gerald K. "CIA and Guatemala Assassination Proposals 1952-1954." June 1, 1995. <https://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB4/docs/doc01.pdf>. (Accessed October 13, 2014.)
- Hugh Thomas. "American Heritage." *The U.S. And Castro, 1959-1962*. October 1, 1978. <http://www.americanheritage.com/content/us-and-castro-1959-1962?page=2>. (Accessed October 6, 2014.)
- Inaugural Address of the President of the United States, John F. Kennedy, January 20, 1961. *John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum* <http://www.jfklibrary.org/Asset-Viewer/BqXIEM9F4024ntFl7SVAjA.aspx> (Accessed November 7, 2014)
- "Kasimov with IL-28 Fuselage Crates Enroute to Cuba." September 28, 1962. Photograph http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nsa/cuba_mis_cri/13.jpg. (Accessed November 6, 2014)
- Kennedy, John F. "Radio and Television Report to the American People on the Soviet Arms Buildup in Cuba, October 22, 1962." John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum. October 22, 1962. <http://www.jfklibrary.org/Asset-Viewer/sUvMCh-sB0moLfrBcaHaSg.aspx> (Accessed November 13, 2014).
- Kennedy, John F. "Speech at Democratic Party Dinner." Cincinnati, Ohio, October 6, 1960 <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=25660> (Accessed November 6, 2014).

- Kent, Sherman, "Memorandum for the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency: Why the Cuban Revolution of 1958 Led to Cuba's Alignment with the USSR." February 21, 1961. http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document_conversions/89801/DOC_0000132656.pdf (accessed November 1, 2014)
- Khrushchev, Nikita. "Department of State Telegram Transmitting Letter from Chairman Khrushchev to President Kennedy, October 26, 1962." John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum. <http://microsites.jfklibrary.org/cmc/oct26/doc4.html>. (Accessed November 6, 2014).
- Laurence Chang and Peter Kornbluh. "The Cuban Missile Crisis, 1962." National Security Archive; Chronologies of the Crisis. January 1, 1992. http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nsa/cuba_mis_cri/620928_621025%20Chronology%201.pdf (Accessed October 18, 2014)
- Lemnitzer, L.L., "Memorandum for Secretary of Defense: Justification for US Military Intervention in Cuba." March 13, 1962. <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/news/20010430/northwoods.pdf> (accessed October 1, 2014)
- May, Ernest R. *The Kennedy Tapes: Inside the White House During the Cuban Missile Crisis*. "Friday October 26 10:00 AM," Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1997. 455
- "Military Encampment (Missile) Los Palacios, Cuba." October 15, 1962. Photograph http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nsa/cuba_mis_cri/14.jpg. (Accessed December 6, 2014).
- Parrott, Thomas A., "Memorandum for Record: Minutes of Meeting of the Special Group (Augmented) on Operation MONGOOSE." October 4, 1962. http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/nsa/cuba_mis_cri/621004%20Minutes%20of%20Meeting%20of%20Special.pdf (Accessed December 1, 2014)
- Rostow, W.W., "Memorandum To: The Secretary of State, Secretary of Defense, Director of Central Intelligence: Notes on Cuba Policy." April 24, 1961. Office of the Secretary of Defense and Joint Staff Freedom of Information Act Requester Service center. http://www.dod.gov/pubs/foi/International_security_affairs/cuba/828.pdf
- Schlesinger Jr., Arthur. "Memorandum for the President," February 11, 1961. <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v10/d43> (Accessed November 3, 2014)
- "SSM Missile Launch Area, Banes, Cuba." September 26, 1962. Photograph. http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nsa/cuba_mis_cri/11.jpg. (Accessed November 6, 2014).
- "Reds Pledge Aid to Cuba, Assail U.S.; Kennedy Warns Soviet to Keep Out." The Wall Street Journal Article Archive. April 19, 1961. [http://pqasb.pqarchiver.com/wsj/doc/132700369.html?FMT=ABS&FMTS=ABS:AI&date=Apr+19,+1961&author=&pub=Wall+Street+Journal+\(1923+-+Current+file\)&edition=&startpage=&type=&desc=Reds+Pledge+Aid+to+Cuba,+Assail+U.S.:+Kennedy+Warns+Soviet+to+Keep+Out.](http://pqasb.pqarchiver.com/wsj/doc/132700369.html?FMT=ABS&FMTS=ABS:AI&date=Apr+19,+1961&author=&pub=Wall+Street+Journal+(1923+-+Current+file)&edition=&startpage=&type=&desc=Reds+Pledge+Aid+to+Cuba,+Assail+U.S.:+Kennedy+Warns+Soviet+to+Keep+Out.) (Accessed November 11, 2014).
- U.S. Senate, "Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities." *Alleged Assassination Plots Involving Foreign Leaders*, 142. <http://www.intelligence.senate.gov/pdfs94th/94465.pdf> (Accessed October 5, 2014)