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From “This Revolution is Neither Communist nor Capitalist!”

to “Long Live the Socialist Revolution:”

The Deterioration of U.S.-Cuban Relations from 1958-1961

An Honors Paper for the Department of History

By Julia Lyne

Bowdoin College, 2023

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Introduction

American Unexceptionalism

And we must face the fact that the United States is neither omnipotent or omniscient - that we are only six percent of the world's population - that we cannot impose our will upon the other ninety-four percent of mankind - that we cannot right every wrong or reverse each adversity - and that therefore there cannot be an American solution to every world problem.¹

On November 16, 1961, President John F. Kennedy (J.F.K.) took to the stage in Seattle, Washington, to deliver a speech. In this address, he acknowledged American exceptionalism and its national limitations. However, instead of feeding into the typical Cold War rhetoric of extreme patriotism, J.F.K. acknowledged that “the United States is neither omnipotent or omniscient” and suggested that, unlike previously claimed, “there cannot be an American solution to every world problem.”² The United States (U.S.) was no longer considered a utopic location; instead, J.F.K. and his administration realized it needed to reevaluate its approach to foreign policy.

Just a few months prior, the United States had been publicly embarrassed by a foiled invasion at the Bay of Pigs. A covert plan backed by Dwight Eisenhower, John F. Kennedy, and the Central Intelligence Agency (C.I.A.), the Bay of Pigs invasion was supposed to overthrow Fidel Castro, the “communist” anti-American leader of Cuba. However, it was a massive failure, practically gifting Castro’s enemies to him. In many ways, this invasion was one of the first significant foreign policy losses experienced by the modern United States, and the U.S. government was unsure how to handle it. Not only had the United States gone against its public promises of non-interventionism within Cuba, but it had done so and lost. The United States

¹ John F Kennedy, “John F. Kennedy Quotations | JFK Library,” JFK Library, accessed April 28, 2023, <https://www.jfklibrary.org/learn/about-jfk/life-of-john-f-kennedy/john-f-kennedy-quotations#>.

² Kennedy, 11/16/1961.

could have overlooked this change in political approach had the Bay of Pigs succeeded; however, it did not, and the entire world noticed. Described by Trumbull Higgins, a military historian, as the “perfect failure,” this catastrophic event forced people within the United States to reconcile with its military presence and foreign involvement.³

In 1961, the Bay of Pigs was an event with global ramifications; however, two years prior, the United States’ support of the invasion of Cuba and attempted overthrow of Fidel Castro would have seemed like a distant impossibility. When Castro took power in 1959, the United States wanted to work with him and his regime to understand the new, emerging Cuba. This tentative support or acceptance of Castro lasted for the next year as both sides tried to find a compromise. However, roughly two years later, in April 1961, the United States supported the invasion and attempted to overthrow Fidel Castro. This paradox is the problem that this analysis will resolve, as it looks into how J.F.K. ended up apologizing for American interventionism and just how and why U.S.-Cuban relations deteriorated so rapidly.

Historiography and Methodology

Throughout this analysis, I add nuance to the understanding of how U.S.-Cuban relations declined. More than just understanding what went wrong, I also examine what went right and work to add complexity to the knowledge of U.S.-Cuban relations during the Cold War. This analysis is not a black-and-white or linear narrative. The United States was not always the capitalist enemy of a communist Cuba. Instead, there were times and moments of compromise and collaboration between both sides. Therefore, I pay particular attention to the speed at which the United States government pivoted its approach toward Castro. I also explore the factors that led to the rapid deterioration of U.S.-Cuban relations and ultimately suggest that there were a

³ Trumbull Higgins, *The Perfect Failure: Kennedy, Eisenhower, and the CIA at the Bay of Pigs*, First (Ontario, Canada: Penguin Books Canada Ltd., 1987).

variety of economic and political factors and tensions that led to this deterioration of relations. It was not just a matter of communism versus capitalism; rather, sugar and oil industry realities and incompatibilities, public slander attacks by both sides, and many other tensions that arose within the span of two and a half years that contributed to this breakdown. Therefore, it was not just one factor; instead, it was a plurality of factors, contributing in a non-hierarchical way, that built upon each other and highlighted the innate incompatibilities that were emerging between the United States and Cuba.

While I did not write this analysis with a particular historiographic approach or framework in mind, there is value in recognizing the limitations of the traditionalist and revisionist approaches to this specific history. Traditionalist, or orthodox, historians reflect a strongly pro-America, anti-Communist narrative and form a clear distinction between the “Soviet” and the “American.”⁴ Officials of the period, such as Robert Kennedy, frequently used this approach, as did respected historians such as Herbert Feis, Arnold Horelick, or Myron Rush.⁵ Written decisively from the American perspective, this approach often omits complexity and details due to its lack of a Soviet perspective. In contrast, the revisionist perspective is one of criticism towards the United States government.⁶ Taken by historians such as T.G. Peterson, this approach works to find fault in American policy and stands in opposition to traditionalist history.⁷ While not written to precisely emulate any historiographic approach, my analysis most closely aligns with a post-revisionist strategy, a third method. This approach, popularized by John Lewis Gaddis for Cold War historiography, works to understand both perspectives and to

⁴ Réachbha FitzGerald, “Review Article,” *Irish Studies in International Affairs* 18 (2007): 191–203.

⁵ FitzGerald, “Review Article,” 193.

⁶ FitzGerald, “Review Article,” 194.

⁷ FitzGerald, “Review Article,” 195.

formulate a new vision of the complexity of history.⁸ By looking at both sides, post-revisionist historians such as Gaddis offer a deeper analysis of the period. While my research most closely relates to and follows this method, my methodology and primary source material stand out as an alternative approach to post-revisionist historiography.

Written based mainly on primary sources from the U.S. government, this analysis explores how governmental communication reveals the untold history of U.S.-Cuban relations from 1958-1961. Most sources are primary sources from the National archives that follow the diplomatic exchanges between the American Embassy and Consulate in Cuba and the Department of State. There is an inherent limitation within this methodology, as I cannot offer the exact Cuban sources; however, I employ a variety of Cuban press releases, speeches, and public appearances to best ascertain the stance of the Cuban government at the time.

The Cuban government utilized the press as a vehicle for propaganda and censure for both the Batista and the Castro administrations. Consequently, the press served as one of the most foundational sources for the American officials stationed in Cuba and is a large part of the source base for this analysis. For instance, Philip Bonsal, the American Ambassador to Cuba from 1959-1960, frequently cited sources such as *La revolución*, *El mundo*, and other Cuban newspapers, crediting them as official government spokesmen.⁹ In a telegram to the Department of State in 1959, he argued that the U.S. government should utilize public press (newspapers, radio, television appearances, public speeches) to understand the current stance of the Cuban government.¹⁰ Therefore, I offer an alternative view of this history through a combination of primary sources of the United States government and analyses of the Cuban press. Instead of

⁸ John Lewis Gaddis, *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History* (New York, New York: Oxford University Press Inc., 1997).

⁹ Philip Bonsal to Secretary of State, "69, July 9, 6 p.m.," Telegram, July 9, 1959, National Archives at College Park.

¹⁰ Bonsal to Secretary of State, "69, July 9, 6 p.m.," 07/09/1959.

providing an inherently pro-American or anti-American perspective, I work to reflect and create a more complex perspective that acknowledges the limitations of the United States and Cuba.

Overview of the Project

The U.S. government, as defined by the Presidential Administrations and cabinets of Dwight Eisenhower and John F. Kennedy, drastically transformed its approach to Cuba and the Castro regime within a matter of years. As part of the Cold War, many expect communism to be the primary source of disagreement for the rupture of relations. I argue instead that while communism was a significant factor, a variety of other political and economic factors more heavily influenced the official break of U.S.-Cuban relations in 1961. It was not just a matter of communism; instead, by analyzing the specific development of U.S.-Cuban relations between 1958 and 1961, it is possible to understand the complexities of this relationship, its rise, and its ultimate fall. Within each chapter, I write to pose an alternative interpretation of this well-studied history and suggest that the actions taken by the American and Cuban governments in the early years of Castro's regime reveal that both sides wanted a positive relationship. It was only after the breakdown of economic ties that this was impossible.

In Chapter One, I argue that the 1959 overthrow of Fulgencio Batista by Fidel Castro represented a form of soft American acceptance or ambivalence towards the rise of Fidel Castro. Rather than directly wishing for either leader to control Cuba, the United States and its officials looked for the leader that best supported American interests and stability within the region. When Fulgencio Batista could no longer provide stability, the United States broke its support of Batista, began to look elsewhere, and settled on the rise of Fidel Castro. In Chapter Two, I argue that both the United States and Cuba hoped to maintain and improve relations in 1959. There were exceptions within both governments, and as the year developed, more conflicts arose;

however, for Castro's regime's first year in power, neither side was willing to relinquish U.S.-Cuban relations completely. Finally, in Chapter Three, I detail the end of U.S.-Cuban relations and argue that, instead of the formal rupture of relations in January 1961, two significant fractures occurred between the United States and Cuba, establishing irreparable conditions for U.S.-Cuban relations. First, I argue that President Eisenhower's covert approval of a plan to overthrow Fidel Castro effectively but privately ended political ties between the two. Second, I propose that various economic conflicts surrounding the oil and sugar trade in Cuba led to the breakdown of economic relations between the two. While capitalism and communism were areas of interest for both sides during the breakdown of relations, ultimately, they were not the sole factors in the formation or destruction of U.S.-Cuban relations in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

Background

In the global Cold War context, Cuba rapidly transformed into one of the most critical conflict areas between the United States and the Soviet Union. However, even before the effects of the Cold War hit Cuba, it was an island heavily shaped and affected by imperialist powers. "Discovered" (despite the existence of the indigenous Taínos) through Christopher Columbus' expedition in 1492, Cuba was a Spanish colony until 1898 and the Spanish American War.¹¹ As a Spanish colony, Spain exploited Cuba for its sugar and Indigenous people; consequently, Cuba quickly grew in economic importance.¹²

In 1898, Cuba's official political status changed from a Spanish colony to an American protectorate, effectively passing itself from one colonial power to another. However, after both domestic and global momentum pushed against its imperialism, the United States government

¹¹ Patricia Galeana de Valadés, ed., *Cronología iberoamericana, 1803-1992*, 1. ed, Colección Tierra firme (México, D.F: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1993).

¹² Ada Ferrer, *Cuba: An American History*, First Scribner hardcover edition (New York: Scribner, 2021), 185-193.

changed its treatment of Cuba and made it formally “independent.”¹³ With this independence came a caveat: the Platt Amendment. The Platt Amendment granted the United States the power to involve itself via the military in any economic or political affair in Cuba.¹⁴ The Platt Amendment reinforced paternalism between the United States and Cuba and normalized (from an American perspective) an unnecessarily involved United States government within Cuba. The U.S. government used this Amendment liberally to excuse intrusiveness in internal affairs that built upon American power in Cuba.¹⁵ This context of American political control and influence continued throughout the early twentieth century, shaping and influencing many young and growing leaders such as Fulgencio Batista or Fidel Castro.

Cuba in the twentieth century did not exist in a vacuum. While Cuba stood as an independent nation, the United States frequently thought that all foreign policy in Latin America was the same. Particularly of concern for the U.S. government was the Mexican Revolution of 1910, the Guatemalan coup of 1954, and overall trends of nationalism and independence.¹⁶ The Mexican Revolution shook regional political understandings when the powerful, wealthy upper class lost its political control, prompting the end of a dictatorship and the beginning of a long period of volatility and change.¹⁷ Another major event that drastically shaped the United States government’s approach to Cuba was the Guatemalan issue of the 1950s. In 1954, the United States C.I.A. supported a coup against the democratically elected Jacobo Árbenz, a political leader in Guatemala who had begun to nationalize against the efforts of the United Fruit

¹³ Galeana de Valadés, *Cronología iberoamericana, 1803-1992*, 113

¹⁴ Galeana de Valadés, *Cronología iberoamericana, 1803-1992*, 113.

¹⁵ Victor Bulmer-Thomas, *The Economic History of Latin America since Independence*, 3rd ed., Cambridge Latin American Studies (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139208710>.

¹⁶ *Historia General de América Latina* ([Madrid]: París: Editorial Trotta; Ediciones UNESCO, 1999).

¹⁷ *Historia General de América Latina*, 389-418.

Company (U.F.C.).¹⁸ This coup represented a significant shift within U.S. interventionism in Latin America and radicalized Che Guevara (a future Castro ally), who had been present in Guatemala and working alongside the Árbenz forces.¹⁹

Overall, the United States' approach towards Latin America in the early twentieth century was defined, at least officially, by President Franklin D. Roosevelt's "Good Neighbor Policy." Starting in the 1930s, this approach described (from a public and official standpoint) U.S. action and involvement in Latin America. The "Good Neighbor Policy" preached non-interventionism and encouraged the United States to stay removed from internal Latin American events, pushing the government to learn from its failed interventions in the Mexican Revolution.²⁰ This policy of non-interventionism stood in tandem with the centuries-long belief that countries in Latin America were inherently tied, suggesting that if one fell to communism, they all could. Therefore, all eyes were on Cuba and the Cuban Revolution as the United States government worked to tentatively ascertain whether this new government could align with its goals while still maintaining its policy of non-interventionism.

Furthermore, in the post-war twentieth century, the United States and the Soviet Union (U.S.S.R.) fought in a global Cold War, a geopolitical conflict between the capitalist U.S. and the communist U.S.S.R. for global political influence. Characterized by proxy battles, the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. fought against each other's models and worked to develop their own blocs worldwide. For the United States, this meant spreading capitalism, free trade, and pro-American governments. For the Soviet Union, this meant the spread of communism and a state-led

¹⁸ Leslie Bethell, ed., *The Cambridge History of Latin America* (Cambridge [England] ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

¹⁹ Aviva Chomsky, *A History of the Cuban Revolution, Viewpoints/Puntos de Vista : Themes and Interpretations in Latin American History* (Chichester, West Sussex, U.K. ; Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011).

²⁰ Ferrer, *Cuba: An American History*, 241.

organized economy. There are many notable moments of tension between the two countries due to this Cold War; however, one of the most compelling is that of Cuba.

Batista's Early Years

To understand Fidel Castro's rise to power and the Cuban Revolution of 1959, it is necessary to understand the political context in which he grew up and the leader he deposed. In the years leading up to 1952, Cuba underwent a period of political turmoil with a few different political leaders.²¹ One was Fulgencio Batista, who later served as the president of Cuba from 1940 to 1944 and again starting in 1952.²² Batista was confusing for many due to his impermanent political relations with the United States. In the 1930s, Batista worked to grow Cuba internally and took issue with its dependency on economic policies catered to the United States.²³ This lack of support for American intervention and relations continued through his first election cycle. He ran for the presidency in the 1940s and allied with the Cuban Communists, a decision made to improve his chances of winning.²⁴

Batista's political ambiguity towards the United States further developed in the 1940s, when his policy continued to have contradictory moments concerning his approach to Cuban development, communism, and the United States. In the 1940s, he had widespread initiatives that targeted public sectors and education; however, his administration also had rampant corruption.²⁵ This corruption did not garner support among the Cubans, and Batista began to lose the help of the majority of the country.²⁶ In desperation to maintain political control, he turned to the United

²¹ Ferrer, *Cuba: An American History*, 241.

²² Frank Argote-Freyre, *Fulgencio Batista: The Making of a Dictator* (Piscataway, UNITED STATES: Rutgers University Press, 2006), <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/bowdoin-ebooks/detail.action?docID=1021846>.

²³ Argote-Freyre, *Fulgencio Batista: The Making of a Dictator*, xi.

²⁴ Argote-Freyre, *Fulgencio Batista: The Making of a Dictator*, xi.

²⁵ Thomas M. Leonard, *Fidel Castro: A Biography*, Greenwood Biographies (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 2004).

²⁶ Leonard, *Fidel Castro: A Biography*, 7.

States to regain support.²⁷ However, he also supported the Cuban Communist Party and gave recognition to the Soviet Union, a politically polarizing decision wherein he demonstrated his lack of connection to either capitalism or socialism.²⁸ Throughout Batista's various political careers, his approach to the economy, the United States, communism, and general Cuban rule changed drastically. Through each change, consequently, was a young Fidel Castro, growing up while learning from Batista's mistakes.

²⁷ Leonard, *Fidel Castro: A Biography*, 7.

²⁸ Leonard, *Fidel Castro: A Biography*, 7.

Chapter One: The Rise of Fidel Castro (1953-1958)

Introduction:

The primary focus of this chapter details the rise of Fidel Castro alongside the simultaneous fall of Fulgencio Batista. These two events are inseparable from the perspective of the United States government. Fidel Castro came to power not because he was the perfect ruler for Cuba but because he was the best option at the time. However, notably, in contrast to any other leader coming to power, is the United States government's relative acceptance of Castro coming to power, despite his lack of connection to American ideals. In the eyes of the U.S. government, a good ruler of Cuba offered stability, economic relations, and, in the ideal world, a non-communist front within the Western Hemisphere. Therefore, despite years of patronage and connection with Batista, when he could no longer support the economic, political, or military needs of the United States, the U.S. government pivoted and looked elsewhere, fundamentally altering U.S.-Cuban relations.

While the U.S. government was never a major proponent of Castro and his forces, it knew it needed to stop supporting Batista. Consequently, this chapter will cover Castro's rise to power by looking briefly at his childhood and political background, his role during the Batista years, and how he came to lead the Revolution of 1959. Alongside the discussion of the rise of Castro will be the necessary discussion of the fall of Batista. While these two stories are distinct, they are inherently interwoven through their mutual effects and contributions to the political climate of the 1950s and 1960s. At the time of Castro coming to power, U.S.-Cuban relations remained not only open but also hopeful of a better, more connected future. Therefore, to understand how U.S.-Cuban relations broke down so drastically within a few years, it is necessary first to establish the context that relations were positive at one point.

Understanding U.S. Preliminary Support of Batista in 1952

When Batista took power in 1952, U.S. officials were initially concerned with his previous ties to communism. In a secret memorandum from Secretary of State Dean Acheson to President Harry Truman, the Secretary of State's office acknowledged that "Batista when President of Cuba in the early '40s tolerated communist domination of the Cuban Confederation of Workers."²⁹ However, the Secretary of State believed the Cold War would have altered Batista's treatment of communists.³⁰ He wrote, "the world situation with regard to international communism has radically changed since that time [the 30s and 40s], and we have no reason to believe that Batista will not be strongly anti-communist."³¹ This appraisal of Batista's anti-communism suggested that Secretary Acheson was confident in the influence of the U.S. in the Western Hemisphere and that Batista would likely side with the U.S. on matters of communism. With this understanding came the implication that a Batista-led Cuba could emerge as a political ally for the United States and serve as an anti-communist force within the Western hemisphere.³²

On March 24, 1952, Secretary Acheson formally wrote to President Truman and suggested "the continuation of diplomatic relations with the Batista government in Cuba" and the formal recognition of the Batista regime.³³ He stated that while "Batista's revolution came as a complete surprise [it] was carried out with remarkable ease and over virtually no resistance."³⁴ Furthermore, he argued that Batista, unlike his previous terms in power, had promised to remain

²⁹ Acheson and Miller, "Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952–1954, The American Republics, Volume IV - Memorandum by the Secretary of State to the President," Office of the Historian, accessed December 9, 2022, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1952-54v04/d327>.

³⁰ Acheson and Miller, "Memorandum by the Secretary of State to the President," 03/24/1952.

³¹ Acheson and Miller, "Memorandum by the Secretary of State to the President" 03/24/1952.

³² *Secretary Acheson Recommends the Continuation of Diplomatic Relations with the Batista Government* (United States: Department Of State, 1952), <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CK2349210524/GDCS?sid=bookmark-GDCS&xid=35ca3f1a&pg=1>.

³³ *Secretary Acheson Recommends the Continuation of Diplomatic Relations with the Batista Government*, 1952.

³⁴ *Secretary Acheson Recommends the Continuation of Diplomatic Relations with the Batista Government*, 1952.

“anti-communist” and work with the United States.³⁵ Acheson wrote that Batista “requested formal recognition” from the United States but also had “made satisfactory public and private statements about Cuban intention to fulfill its international obligations; its attitude towards private capital; and its intention to take steps to curtail international communist activity in Cuba,” suggesting that Batista would work with the United States to improve the economy of Cuba.³⁶ Of interest to Acheson and the U.S. government were the economic promises made to protect “private capital” and foreign investment in Cuba, as many influential American business people were relying on the Cuban economy for trade. These promises, to Acheson, spoke of a political shift in Batista and Cuba, allowing for a new form of relations to develop between the two.

In order to advocate for the recognition of the Batista regime, Secretary Acheson had to demonstrate that Batista was acting in an anti-communist manner. In the eyes of Acheson, Batista’s decision to deny Russian courier entrance to Cuba and his promise to act in an “anti-communist” manner granted Batista sufficient credibility to be recognized as an anti-communist leader.³⁷ While this was the official advice given to the White House, and hence central to the discussion of the U.S. government’s perception of Cuba, it is important to note that many critics fought against the official recognition of Batista, arguing that the practice of recognizing a coup unleashed a dangerous precedent.³⁸ In response to this critique, Acheson clarified that “the Department of State naturally deplores how the Batista coup was brought about” and was aware and weary of the precedent it could set in Latin America.³⁹ However, to Acheson, the potential

³⁵ *Secretary Acheson Recommends the Continuation of Diplomatic Relations with the Batista Government*, 1952.

³⁶ *Secretary Acheson Recommends the Continuation of Diplomatic Relations with the Batista Government*, 1952.

³⁷ *Secretary Acheson Recommends the Continuation of Diplomatic Relations with the Batista Government*, 1952.

³⁸ *Secretary Acheson Recommends the Continuation of Diplomatic Relations with the Batista Government*, 1952.

³⁹ *Secretary Acheson Recommends the Continuation of Diplomatic Relations with the Batista Government*, 1952.

economic benefits of Batista's continued support of private American capital and Batista's status as an anti-communist force outweighed the risks of the spread of revolution.⁴⁰

Further complicating the fear of the spread of revolution was the historical understanding of the region as a powder keg of revolution.⁴¹ Historically, the U.S. government's treatment of the Latin American and Caribbean was a one-size-fits-all approach to foreign relations. This notion centers around the idea that one country's change in political affairs would change most, if not all, other countries in this region, an approach frequently called the "Domino Theory."⁴² Acheson clearly stated his "apprehension" surrounding the precedent that backing Batista might create; however, despite this issue, he still officially recommended supporting the Batista regime.⁴³ Once again, he believed that the potential economic and political benefits of working alongside the Batista regime outweighed the risk of revolution or, at the bare minimum, was the least bad choice to move forward.

In his response to the fear of revolution in Latin America, Secretary Acheson suggested that the United States follow other countries' examples and grant recognition to the Batista government. Acheson wrote that "at least ten countries of Latin America have already announced the continuation of diplomatic relations with Batista" and highlighted other countries, such as Spain and China, as having also recognized Batista.⁴⁴ Acheson's inclusion of other countries was critical to his recommendation: it bolstered the legitimacy of the acknowledgment and also recognized the need for the United States to do so to maintain a robust political positioning in the

⁴⁰ *Secretary Acheson Recommends the Continuation of Diplomatic Relations with the Batista Government*, 1952.

⁴¹ Nicolás Prados Ortiz de Solórzano, *Cuba in the Caribbean Cold War: Exiles, Revolutionaries and Tyrants, 1952-1959*, St Antony's Series (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020).

⁴² Hayley Tyson, "The United States' Severance from Fulgencio Batista," *THE CHICO HISTORIAN*, n.d., 30.

⁴³ *Secretary Acheson Recommends the Continuation of Diplomatic Relations with the Batista Government*, 1952.

⁴⁴ *Secretary Acheson Recommends the Continuation of Diplomatic Relations with the Batista Government*, 1952.

region.⁴⁵ Acheson further clarified that other major European powers, such as the United Kingdom, wanted to be told the United States' decision on whether it would formally recognize Batista, further highlighting the importance of this decision in global politics.⁴⁶ Ultimately, the decision to support Batista was not just because of his anti-communist promises but also to establish the precedent that stability and influence in economic matters were the most essential aspects of a Cuban leader for the United States government.

The Sugar Industry: A Politicized Economy

Further complicating American interests in Cuba was the role of the sugar industry. While Cuba was not the sole provider of sugar for the United States, its proximity, historical ties, and 'malleable' economy promoted trade between the two nations. In many ways, sugar was the link between the economy of the United States and Cuba. After the Sugar Act of 1951, which worked to establish set trade quotas that ensured the continued business of the sugar industry from Cuba to the United States, a proposed change was made to decrease the United States' dependency on domestic producers and other sources of sugar.⁴⁷ In June 1954, Secretary of State John F. Dulles wrote to the President to articulate the importance of the Cuban sugar market in the United States and Cuba, suggesting that if the United States accepted the proposal to increase its sugar quotas and take away business from Cuba, it would "seriously injure the Cuban economy [and would also] be inevitably followed by decreased United States agricultural and

⁴⁵ Also of note is the reference of Spain and China, as Spain had recently undergone a Civil War (1936-1939) and was led by Francisco Franco, an authoritarian anti-fascist and anti-communist, and China, who, just three year's priors had been transformed into the People's Republic of China and led by the communist Mao Zedong. Further scholarship that explores these themes can be seen in Wayne Bowen's *Truman, Franco's Spain, and the Cold War* and Jian Chen's *Mao's China and the Cold War*. The connection to these countries exceeds the parameters of this analysis but provides critical background to the understanding of the influence of global politics within Cuba.

⁴⁶ *Secretary Acheson Recommends the Continuation of Diplomatic Relations with the Batista Government*, 1952.

⁴⁷ John Dulles, "The Secretary of State to the Secretary of Agriculture (Benson) - Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954, The American Republics, Volume IV - Historical Documents," Office of the Historian, accessed December 9, 2022, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1952-54v04/d342>.

industrial exports.”⁴⁸ This linkage of the two economies stands out for its recognition of the impact and influence of the sugar industry on both countries, suggesting that a loss of this trade could prove detrimental to both the United States and Cuba.

As Arthur MacEwan highlighted in his book *Revolution and Economic Development in Cuba*, prior to the Revolution, the sugar industry by itself was 5% of Cuba’s GDP, adding to a massive dependency on agriculture in general.⁴⁹ Furthermore, sugar cane comprised 60-70% of cultivated land and around 40% of farming income in the country.⁵⁰ Therefore, the importance of this industry cannot be understated. However, alongside this boom in the development of the sugar industry came the increasing presence and investment of the United States in Cuba and its sugar industry. In 1929, the United States had invested 575 million USD in agriculture and 7.5 billion USD total in Cuba in general; however, by 1958, the year before Castro seized power, these numbers had changed to 265 million USD in agriculture and over 29.7 billion USD overall.⁵¹ The upper class largely maintained this wealth and industry, with 28 total (most foreign and a few domestic) companies controlling 20% of all available farmland on the eve of the Revolution.⁵² While the overall amount of money spent on sugar decreased, American involvement throughout Cuba rapidly increased. Moreover, the decrease in investment towards sugar was not due to a lack of sugar usage but, rather, a reflection of other countries’ improved abilities to produce sugar.⁵³

This argument of a political disadvantage to both the United States and Cuba demonstrated a clear economic connection between the two and suggested the United States and

⁴⁸ Dulles, “The Secretary of State to the Secretary of Agriculture,” 06/04/1954.

⁴⁹ Arthur MacEwan, *Revolution and Economic Development in Cuba* (Springer, 1981).

⁵⁰ MacEwan, *Revolution and Economic Development in Cuba*, 6.

⁵¹ MacEwan, *Revolution and Economic Development in Cuba*, 13.

⁵² MacEwan, *Revolution and Economic Development in Cuba*, 15.

⁵³ MacEwan, *Revolution and Economic Development in Cuba*, 13.

Cuba needed to maintain the sugar trade through any regime change in the latter country. Dulles continued to write that “Cuba has been a reliable expansion source of sugar in both war and peace,” something that “should not be jeopardized.”⁵⁴ In this argument, Dulles suggested that the sugar industry trumped political changes, proving its value to Cuba and suggesting that Batista’s regime would continue maintaining the industry, a leading priority for the United States.

Sugar was critically important to both the United States and Cuba, and throughout the Batista administration (and the rise of Fidel Castro), it became increasingly apparent just how vital sugar was. However, a major criticism of Batista’s dictatorship was that his economic system, while increasing the role of the United States, did not best maximize sugar production for Cuba.⁵⁵ Due to his reliance on the United States, Batista relied on historical systems of large estates and capitalist exploitation of the land, and therefore was not using the land or the sugar in its most productive form, and some usable land remained untouched.⁵⁶ Thus, although the United States government appreciated the economically advantageous situation regarding the sugar trade in Cuba, it also recognized that a different system might allow for increased profit and exportations. From a foreign relations standpoint, this critical clarification surrounding Batista’s support, but also inadequate control of the sugar industry, suggested that the United States government would have likely needed to turn to a new leader or take more control over sugar production in Cuba, as Batista was not maximizing his production capabilities.

One year after Batista’s rise to power, in 1953, Cuba was responsible for 33.3% of total U.S. consumption of sugar, and, just five years later, in 1958, it was responsible for 37.9% of

⁵⁴ Dulles, “The Secretary of State to the Secretary of Agriculture,” 06/04/1954.

⁵⁵ MacEwan, *Revolution and Economic Development in Cuba*, 17.

⁵⁶ MacEwan, *Revolution and Economic Development in Cuba*, 17.

total U.S. consumption of sugar.⁵⁷ This increase was despite overall American investment in the sugar industry decreasing, suggesting that the trade had grown within Cuba. Yet, at the same time, it was not maximized to its fullest potential, despite Cuban leaders' wishes to do so. Therefore, a compelling contradiction emerged: the wish of U.S. political and economic leaders to satisfy the domestic demand for sugar alongside the Cuban leaders' desires to maximize its sugar exports. In the end, this contradiction was one of the first reasons the U.S. government began to take away its support of his regime.

The Early Years of Fidel Castro: 1926-1953

As Batista's administration began to develop in Cuba, its decisions and actions heavily affected many young Cubans. One such youth was Fidel Castro, born in 1926 to a wealthy farming family.⁵⁸ Despite a non-politically engaged childhood, many biographers suggest that Castro's political awakening came while studying law at the University of Havana, where he joined revolutionary groups and learned more about radical, left-leaning political ideologies.⁵⁹ For instance, two years after Batista first served as President, Castro joined the *Unión Insurreccional Revolucionaria*.⁶⁰ This group exposed him to political events and pushed him to help found the *Partido del Pueblo Cubano (Los Ortodoxos)*, or the Cuban People's Party, and began his exposure to the left wing.⁶¹ During his studies at University, he actively critiqued the government and became convinced that the only way to create real political change within Cuba was through "mass movement."⁶² He continued this attitude and went into law, primarily

⁵⁷ Alan Dye and Richard Sicotte, "The U.S. Sugar Program and the Cuban Revolution," *The Journal of Economic History* 64, no. 3 (2004): 673–704.

⁵⁸ Leonard, *Fidel Castro*.

⁵⁹ Michael Taber, ed., *Fidel Castro's Speeches*, 1st ed. (New York, N.Y: Pathfinder Press, 1981).

⁶⁰ Taber, *Fidel Castro's Speeches*, 5.

⁶¹ Taber, *Fidel Castro's Speeches*, 5.

⁶² Leonard, *Fidel Castro*, 13.

focusing on serving underprivileged people without great success.⁶³ However, despite his lack of courtroom wins, his politically motivated sentiments against the rich and corruption continued to grow, and his work on behalf of the poor satisfied him.⁶⁴

Castro maintained his stagnant legal career until the election of 1952 and Batista's subsequent coup d'état, which catalyzed Castro's actual commitment to political activism in Cuba.⁶⁵ Allied with the Ortodoxos Party, Castro was firmly against the coup and Batista's seizure of power, suggesting it was against the Constitution. In contrast, the United States, as seen through Secretary Acheson's letter to President Truman, supported Batista's claim to power and coup d'état. This conflicting support between Castro and the United States marked one of the first ruptures of interest between the two; however, it also provides the necessary background to understanding how the United States acquiesced to Castro's eventual seizure of power in 1959. On paper, Castro's pro-democracy and pro-Constitution criticisms would have established the possibility of future relations with the United States. By arguing against Batista on counts of democracy and constitutionality, Castro created the image of a politically engaged but democratic individual.⁶⁶

The distance between Batista and Castro grew from this initial rejection of the Batista regime. Despite meeting after the coup, the two could not establish common goals, causing further political animosity.⁶⁷ At the time, Castro was still widely regarded as a student leader, allowing both Batista and the United States to downplay his relevancy within the political sphere

⁶³ Leonard, *Fidel Castro*, 14.

⁶⁴ Leonard, *Fidel Castro*, 14.

⁶⁵ Leonard, *Fidel Castro*, 18.

⁶⁶ Antoni Kapcia, *A Short History of Revolutionary Cuba: Power, Authority and the State since 1959*, Short Histories (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021).

⁶⁷ Leonard, *Fidel Castro*, 15.

of Cuba.⁶⁸ This treatment of Castro as an inconsequential leader continued until July 26, 1953, when everything changed with his attacks on the barracks in Moncada, Cuba.⁶⁹

Batista and Castro: Intertwined Histories

Following Batista's coup, Fidel Castro focused on forming oppositional forces against Batista and his regime. At this point, Castro remained relatively unknown to the United States government but was growing in importance within Cuba. Castro began to develop a network of like-minded revolutionary people in Cuba that wanted to fight off the corruption increasingly rampant in the Batista administration.⁷⁰ Castro also increased his political network by supporting the publication of *El acusador*, a "combatant" newspaper published for the University that was considered "void of Marxist rhetoric."⁷¹ While the groups and the readership of *El acusador* were primarily politically left-leaning, Castro was not writing nor advocating for communism.⁷² This reality is a critical distinction to understanding Castro's seizure of power. In his earliest years of political involvement, Castro was not communist; instead, he was just against Batista. Just as he established himself as pro-democracy by going against the coup, so too did he show himself personally as not overtly communist nor Marxist.

On July 26, 1953, he took direct action against Batista's regime by attacking the barracks at Moncada. A rebellion led by student forces, this attack proved unsuccessful in gaining military ground, its original goal.⁷³ This attack was unsuccessful, losing about a third of its forces; however, it did mark a huge turning point for both Castro and anti-Batista sentiments.⁷⁴ It

⁶⁸ Luis Martínez-Fernández, *Revolutionary Cuba: A History* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2014).

⁶⁹ Antonio Rafael De la Cova, *The Moncada Attack: Birth of the Cuban Revolution* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2007).

⁷⁰ De la Cova, *The Moncada Attack: Birth of the Cuban Revolution*, 33-35.

⁷¹ De la Cova, *The Moncada Attack: Birth of the Cuban Revolution*, 35.

⁷² De la Cova, *The Moncada Attack: Birth of the Cuban Revolution*, 37.

⁷³ Ada Ferrer, *Cuba: An American History*, First Scribner hardcover edition (New York: Scribner, 2021), 278-283.

⁷⁴ Martínez-Fernández, *Revolutionary Cuba*, 2014.

launched the official creation of *Movimiento 26 de Julio*, the revolutionary group led by Fidel Castro, and also began a multi-year, widely spread process to depose Batista.⁷⁵ The *Movimiento 26 de Julio* rebels were primarily members of the *Ortodoxos* political group and university students, none of whom had any real military background, leading to a complete loss to the Cuban armed forces.⁷⁶

There were consequences for these failed attacks from within and outside Cuba. Internally, the effects were significant: many died in battle or were tortured and killed later.⁷⁷ Fidel and his brother, Raúl Castro, were both sent to prison for their roles in the planning. Externally, these attacks gathered enough press coverage that the United States government learned of the guerilla, revolutionary forces within Cuba. In a conversation between John L. Topping from the Office of Middle American Affairs (a department responsible for managing internal developments in “Middle America” or the central and Latin American regions) and Aurelio F. Concheso, the Ambassador of Cuba, Topping lauded Batista’s regime for its success in shutting down the revolutionary forces of the attack.⁷⁸ Topping argued that “the attempted revolution at Santiago de Cuba on July 16, 1953, had strengthened the Government’s position since it had shown that the armed forces are solidly behind the Government, which would handle promptly and efficiently any attempted revolution.”⁷⁹ To Topping and the U.S. government, these attacks were not a demonstration of the strength of Castro; instead, they were a demonstration of the power of Batista and his backing in Cuba.

⁷⁵ Martínez-Fernández, *Revolutionary Cuba*, 1.

⁷⁶ Martínez-Fernández, *Revolutionary Cuba*, 24.

⁷⁷ Martínez-Fernández, *Revolutionary Cuba*, 24.

⁷⁸ John Topping, “Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952–1954, The American Republics, Volume IV - Memorandum of Conversation,” Office of the Historian, accessed December 9, 2022, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1952-54v04/d340>.

⁷⁹ Topping, “Memorandum of Conversation,” 1953.

Notably, in this very same memorandum, Topping criticized the Batista regime for its restriction of constitutional guarantees, a decision made by Batista in hopes of limiting counter-insurgencies in the immediate aftermath of the coup.⁸⁰ Topping clarified that the “Cuban government [now felt] sufficiently secure to undertake a return to constitutional government,” “the Ambassador stated that constitutional guarantees would be restored,” and there were plans for elections in 1954.⁸¹ As Batista’s regime went on, one of the most public criticisms from the U.S. government of its actions was its lack of fair elections and its obstruction of constitutional rights. While the United States government did not particularly care about the actual execution of fair elections in Cuba, it could not look like it was supporting an anti-democratic force within the context of the Cold War.

During the trials for these attacks, Castro delivered one of his most important speeches, solidifying his role in Cuban history and rebellion and marking him as a dangerous figure for the United States. In a speech titled “History Will Absolve Me (*Historia me absolverá*),” in which he argued against the Batista regime, Castro suggested that Cubans under the Batista regime were “living in worse conditions than were the Indians Columbus discovered” and pushed for a new form of democracy and agrarian reform.⁸² However, despite his criticisms of Batista, Castro did not criticize the United States during this speech.⁸³ This lack of criticism is not for a lack of understanding of the close relationship between Batista and the United States; rather, it implies Castro’s extensive knowledge of the complicated history of U.S.-Cuban relations and demonstrates a possible wish for an alliance in the future.⁸⁴ Therefore, this speech, although

⁸⁰ Topping, “Memorandum of Conversation,” 1953.

⁸¹ Topping, “Memorandum of Conversation,” 1953.

⁸² “History Will Absolve Me,” accessed November 13, 2022, <https://www.marxists.org/history/cuba/archive/castro/1953/10/16.htm>.

⁸³ Martínez-Fernández, *Revolutionary Cuba*, 24.

⁸⁴ Martínez-Fernández, *Revolutionary Cuba*, 24.

inflammatory, was not a reflection against the United States but rather against the Batista regime. Thus, the attacks of 1953 demonstrate the beginning of a movement away from Batista and, in some ways, towards Castro and his forces.

Outside of internal Cuban politics, the attack on the barracks at Moncada cemented Castro's status as a revolutionary leader in Cuba. As a loyal follower wrote after the failed attacks, "I don't remember anything else with certainty, but I remember that from this moment on I thought of no one else, I just thought of Fidel. We thought of Fidel. Of the Fidel that could not die. Of the Fidel that had to be living to make the revolution."⁸⁵ This quote highlights a clear point developed throughout many Cuban scholars' pieces on the Cuban Revolution and the Cold War: while jail may have physically separated Castro from his followers, it only helped him grow a more loyal support network that viewed his jail time as a service to the Revolution.

The attack in Moncada also served as the beginning of the international public's conception of Fidel Castro. In a short blurb in the *New York Times* regarding the release of Castro, his brother, and some of their supporters from prison, the *New York Times* highlighted Fidel Castro as "a young Havana lawyer and student leader who headed [the attacks at Moncada]."⁸⁶ Although brief, this mention suggested that the American public (and consequently the U.S. government) were becoming increasingly aware of Fidel Castro and his revolutionary forces. However, as there were few meaningful exchanges regarding Castro and his powers within the Presidential Administration, Castro was not a concern for U.S. security.

⁸⁵ Fidel Castro et al., *Todo Empezó En El Moncada*, 3q ed. (Mexico: Editorial Diogeneses, 1980).

⁸⁶ Special to The New York Times., "CUBA FREEING PRISONERS: MEN COVERED BY AMNESTY LAW TO BE RELEASED TOMORROW," *New York Times* (1923-), May 15, 1955, 113422797, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times.

After his release from prison, Batista exiled Castro and his brother Raúl to Mexico in 1955.⁸⁷ There, they met Ernesto “Che” Guevara, an Argentine Marxist.⁸⁸ Radicalized by the influence of significant events like the overthrow of Jacobo Árbenz in Guatemala, Che was a traveling Marxist revolutionary. However, despite his proximity to Marxism and a close confidant who was communist, Castro believed he stood separate in his political leanings. When asked about Guevara’s communist political affiliation by Homer Bigart, a journalist for the *New York Times*, in 1958, Castro responded that “he [Castro] was the supreme commander of the movement. Hence, he added, it made little difference what Guevara’s political beliefs were since Castro determined policy.”⁸⁹ Therefore, even years after their first meeting, Castro maintained that he was not a communist and that his alliance with Guevara, a Marxist, did not impact his political decisions.

While in Mexico, Castro began organizing forces to return to Cuba and fight back against Batista, mainly using guerrilla warfare tactics.⁹⁰ He returned to Cuba in December 1956 and took refuge in the mountainous Sierra Maestra region while waiting for more forces and people to join them.⁹¹ In the Sierra Maestra, he formed his base and organized his revolutionary forces, weapons, and resources. This region was notoriously difficult for the Batista regime, as its geography made it “difficult to obtain current and accurate information on activities there,” allowing for the growth of revolutionary activities.⁹² Despite these challenges, Topping noted

⁸⁷ Marc Becker, *Contemporary Latin American Revolutions*, Second edition, Latin American Perspectives in the Classroom (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2021).

⁸⁸ Becker, *Contemporary Latin American Revolutions*, 14.

⁸⁹ John Topping, “Foreign Relations of the United States, 1958–1960, Cuba, Volume VI - Dispatch From the Embassy in Cuba to the Department of State,” Office of the Historian, accessed December 9, 2022, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1958-60v06/d25>.

⁹⁰ Becker, *Contemporary Latin American Revolutions*, 14.

⁹¹ Becker, *Contemporary Latin American Revolutions*, 14.

⁹² John Topping, “Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955–1957, American Republics: Multilateral; Mexico; Caribbean, Volume VI - Dispatch From the Ambassador in Cuba (Smith) to the Department of State,” Office of the Historian, accessed December 9, 2022, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1955-57v06/d295>.

that Castro “and his armed followers” were now “adequately armed with small arms and light machine guns” and were increasingly prepared to mount an offensive against Batista.⁹³

The End of Batista and the Rise of Castro

In order to understand the U.S. government’s reasoning for its acceptance of Castro’s seizure of power in 1959, it is necessary to understand how the Batista administration lost the support of the United States. Despite starting his career with help in Cuba and the United States, Batista had lost support by the end of his career.⁹⁴ Through widespread economic and political corruption; electoral and constitutional flaws; and an ultimate lack of proof that Castro was a communist, Batista, once considered a right-hand man to the U.S. government, slowly proved to be the unstable choice for political power in Cuba. As Batista fell in political and economic relevancy, so began the meteoric rise of Fidel Castro, the *Movimiento de Julio 26*, and revolutionary forces throughout Cuba.

Initially, the U.S. government viewed Batista’s modernization efforts favorably and took advantage of his willingness to trade. Under Batista, “American capital dominated the economy,” including support for some public initiatives.⁹⁵ Alongside the sugar industry, this economic growth was seen mainly in the tourism industry, which became a major component of Batista’s financial plan for growth in the 1950s.⁹⁶ This economic relationship between the two formed a system of dependency on the United States within Cuba. Batista and American leaders argued that they were modernizing Cuba.⁹⁷ This relationship reaffirmed pre-existing notions of the paternalism of the United States within Cuba while furthering the influence of foreign

⁹³ Topping, "Dispatch From the Ambassador in Cuba (Smith) to the Department of State," 1956.

⁹⁴ Frank Argote-Freyre, *Fulgencio Batista: The Making of a Dictator* (Piscataway, UNITED STATES: Rutgers University Press, 2006), <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/bowdoin-ebooks/detail.action?docID=1021846>.

⁹⁵ David Bernell, *Constructing US Foreign Policy: The Curious Case of Cuba*, Routledge Studies in US Foreign Policy (London ; New York: Routledge, 2011).

⁹⁶ Bernell, *Constructing US Foreign Policy: The Curious Case of Cuba*, 43.

⁹⁷ Bernell, *Constructing US Foreign Policy: The Curious Case of Cuba*, 43.

markets within Cuba. While the tourism and sugar industries both grew under Batista, so did corruption, a source of criticism for Castro and his forces.⁹⁸ Particular embarrassment stemmed from the inclusion of the American mob within the Cuban economy, as U.S. leaders were worried that it made the government seem weak for supporting a Mob-led economy and viewed the mob as public evidence of Batista's corruption.⁹⁹

Throughout Batista's rule in the 1950s, economic and social disparities grew within Cuba, and, towards the end of the decade, the United States knew that Batista could no longer serve as a stable, reliable leader. From a geopolitical standpoint, the leaders of the U.S. government were tired of appearing weak in reference to Batista and his regime's actions.¹⁰⁰ Not only did it not want to support the American mob actively; however, but the U.S. government also worked to ensure that its public image supported democracy, values not represented through Batista's use of censorship or restriction of elections.¹⁰¹

For example, another major U.S. government critique of the Batista administration centered on Batista's failure to promise free elections and his hesitancy to restore full constitutional rights within Cuba. Throughout 1958, as Castro continued to gain influence and Batista continued to decline in power, American officials began to pressure Batista about the elections and constitutional rights, questions that he had been dodging since taking control in 1952. This lack of response resulted in a widespread feeling of doubt that he would "hold honest elections," suggesting that another leader needed to emerge to the stability of the political

⁹⁸ Tyson, "The United States' Severance from Fulgencio Batista," 36.

⁹⁹ T. J. English, *Havana Nocturne: How the Mob Owned Cuba-- and Then Lost It to the Revolution* / T.J. English, 1st U.S. ed (New York: William Morrow, 2008).

¹⁰⁰ Hugh Thomas, "Cuba: The United States and Batista, 1952-58 Dealing with Dictators in Decline," *World Affairs* 149, no. 4 (1987 1986): 169-76.

¹⁰¹ Argote-Freyre, *Fulgencio Batista*, 206.

climate in Cuba.¹⁰² This clarification does not indicate that American officials believed that elections would completely solve the volatility within Cuba. In a telegram from the Embassy in Cuba to the Department of State in February 1958, the American officials acknowledged that they did not believe that elections would solve political problems; however, they believed they were the only path forward.”¹⁰³ This telegram clarified three significant aspects of U.S.-Cuban relations regarding elections. First, the United States did not believe Batista could offer fair elections. Second, the U.S. did not think elections would completely solve major political issues in Cuba. Third, and most importantly, the U.S. felt that elections (and a new leader) were the only path forward.

Alongside Batista’s refusal to support elections, the United States also took issue with the restriction of constitutional rights in Cuba. After the return of Castro to Cuba in 1956, Batista restricted certain rights (such as freedom of the press) in hopes of limiting Castro’s forces. The United States government was against this decision and repeatedly asked about the return of these rights.¹⁰⁴ This problem persisted throughout his regime. For example, in a telegram from the Embassy in Cuba to the Department of State in March 1958, the ambassadors acknowledged not only that “Batista believes it will be necessary again to suspend constitutional guarantees to preserve order” but that the “U.S. would be disappointed” to learn that they were not restored nor promised.¹⁰⁵ Despite consistent communication of the necessity to return constitutional rights, the U.S. government grew frustrated at the lack of response by the Batista administration, a significant factor in his overall fall from American graces.

¹⁰² Smith, "Telegram From the Embassy in Cuba to the Department of State," 1958.

¹⁰³ Smith, "Telegram From the Embassy in Cuba to the Department of State," 1958.

¹⁰⁴ Acheson and Miller, "Memorandum by the Secretary of State to the President," 03/24/1952.

¹⁰⁵ Earl Smith, "Foreign Relations of the United States, 1958–1960, Cuba, Volume VI - Telegram From the Embassy in Cuba to the Department of State," Office of the Historian, accessed December 9, 2022, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1958-60v06/d31>.

However, it is essential to note that while the U.S. government was publicly concerned with the democratic nature of elections and rights in Cuba, it was most concerned with Batista's inability to stabilize the region. Historically, the United States had consistently prioritized economic or ideological matters over democratically or popularly supported officials. In Guatemala in 1954, the CIA overthrew the democratically elected President Árbenz on behalf of the United Fruit Company.¹⁰⁶ Outside the Caribbean region, the United States overthrew Mohammed Mossadegh in Iran, the elected Prime Minister who had begun to nationalize foreign-owned oil facilities and work against U.S. oil interests.¹⁰⁷ These precedents, although varying in their context, prove that the United States government did not honestly care about democratic matters within other countries. Instead, the United States cared about protecting its economic interests, such as those of the United Fruit Company in Guatemala or the oil tycoons in Iran. In Cuba, therefore, the United States government prioritized the interests of wealthy American business people involved in the sugar and oil trade. Thus, while the United States government may have been publicly campaigning for the restoration of constitutional rights and the permittance of free elections, it was most concerned with the effects of these decisions on Batista's ability to protect its interests. By losing the people's support (through rights restrictions and a lack of elections), Batista no longer served as a completely stable option in Cuba.¹⁰⁸

In 1958, as the Cold War tensions continued to escalate in the world, there was increasing pressure for Cuba to have a non-communist leader that would support U.S. economic interests. While Fidel Castro never championed the United States and had communists closely related to him, at the time of his coming to power, there was no evidence that he, Castro himself, was a

¹⁰⁶ Prados Ortiz de Solórzano, *Cuba in the Caribbean Cold War*, 28.

¹⁰⁷ Steve Marsh, "Continuity and Change," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 7, no. 3 (2005): 79–123.

¹⁰⁸ Smith, "Foreign Relations of the United States, 1958–1960, Cuba, Volume VI - Telegram From the Embassy in Cuba to the Department of State."

communist. U.S. officials looked into his ties to communism but found insufficient evidence to equate and directly tie Castro as a leader to communism. Furthermore, there was a Cuban Communist Party; however, Castro chose not to ally and work directly with them, instead opting to make his own party. These discussions continued as the U.S. government grappled with whether or not it should support Castro coming to power and the extent of his connection to communism. In a memorandum to President Eisenhower, the Department of State wrote, “we also know that the Communists are utilizing the Castro movement to some extent, as would be expected, but there is insufficient evidence on which to base a charge that the rebels are communist-dominated.”¹⁰⁹ The message was clear: Castro may be surrounded by communists or radicals, but he was not communist nor were his forces. In findings from the CIA in April of 1958, “no evidence [had] been uncovered of direct Communist inspiration or support for the Castro revolt.”¹¹⁰

The issue of Raúl Castro and Che Guevara remained. In a memorandum of conversation in the Department of State in December 1958, an American official wrote that “Raúl Castro visited behind the Iron Curtain and [was] accused of communist sympathies,” but that there are “reports that he went there not as a delegate but as an anti-Communist private citizen, at his own expense, and while there made a speech critical of communism.”¹¹¹ Therefore, coverage of this trip suggests that, although Raúl was willing to travel to the Soviet Union, he publicly had yet to commit his loyalty or support to Soviet communism. Through this distinction, a lack of direct

¹⁰⁹ Christian Herter, “Foreign Relations of the United States, 1958–1960, Cuba, Volume VI - Memorandum From the Acting Secretary of State to the President,” Office of the Historian, accessed December 9, 2022, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1958-60v06/d189>.

¹¹⁰ John Dulles, “51. Editorial Note - Foreign Relations of the United States, 1958–1960, Cuba, Volume VI - Historical Documents - Editorial Note,” Office of the Historian, accessed December 9, 2022, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1958-60v06/d51>.

¹¹¹ Stevenson, “Foreign Relations of the United States, 1958–1960, Cuba, Volume VI - Memorandum of a Conversation, Department of State, Washington, December 23, 1958,” Office of the Historian, accessed December 9, 2022, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1958-60v06/d190>.

evidence of Castro's own communism, and an overall need for a new leader in the region, Castro increasingly became the next best option to lead Cuba in the eyes of the United States. In some ways, it appears as though the United States government was so desperate for new economic stability in the region that it was able to overlook strong ties to communism, such as Raúl Castro's visit to the Soviet Union, in hopes of returning to its ultimate goal for Cuba: economic stability.

The Last Looks at Batista

On October 22, 1958, just two months before Castro seized power, Ambassador to Cuba Earl T. Smith wrote to the Department of State and described the current objectives for the U.S. government's approach to Cuba and the Batista regime. He broke down the objectives into main categories: political, military, economic, and information and related activities goals.¹¹² Within the political category, the main focuses were the "support of U.S. World Policies," a "Democratic, Representative Government," and "Destroying or Neutralizing Communist Influence in the Area."¹¹³ This political objective breakdown is essential to understand Castro's seizure of power and the subsequent U.S. political response. In the telegram, Smith acknowledged that for years, Batista had been able to serve U.S. interests; however, now he was no longer able to, and, therefore, a change was necessary. Smith argued that there was no evidence of Cuban international treatment of the United States changing; however, "a continuation of [U.S. support of Batista] might lead to a lessening of the spirit of cooperation."¹¹⁴ This potential loss of collaboration was a risk that the United States could not take, as it could

¹¹² Earl Smith to Department of State, "Revision of Operations Plan for Latin America," Telegram, October 22, 1958, National Archives at College Park.

¹¹³ Smith to Department of State, "Revision of Operations Plan for Latin America," 10/22/1958.

¹¹⁴ Smith to Department of State, "Revision of Operations Plan for Latin America," 10/22/1958.

not lose its relationship with Cuba. Therefore, U.S. government officials began to look for a solution elsewhere, a leader besides Batista.

Overall, it became clear that the United States officials focused on creating an environment that permitted political change. As stated in a telegram from October 22, 1958, from the Ambassador to Cuba Earl Smith to the Department of State, one of the United States' main priorities was to create a "democratic, representative government" in Cuba.¹¹⁵ Smith believed that, under Batista, it "was exceptionally difficult [for the United States] to implement [this objective], with regard to the encouragement of the democratic, representative government, in Cuba."¹¹⁶ He argued that Batista's government was "autocratic" and dependent on the armed forces and "organized labor to continue in power."¹¹⁷ This is an interesting distinction: to rely upon "organized labor" suggests power in the masses, a characteristic commonly associated with communism and socialism.¹¹⁸ This is not to suggest that Batista was communist; however, it does prove his further political separation from the United States. Therefore, Smith's suggestion became apparent: the United States needed to support a complete overhaul of the current system in order to establish a representative, democratic government. This proposed overhaul meant the removal of Batista from power and the support of a stronger candidate to rule.

A tertiary political concern Smith highlighted was the need to "destroy" or "neutralize" communism within the area.¹¹⁹ After establishing the need for political change and a Cuban regime that would once again ally with American interests, Smith acknowledged the impact and effect of the Cold War within this specific relationship. He wrote, "Communism has not been

¹¹⁵ Smith to Department of State, "Revision of Operations Plan for Latin America," 10/22/1958.

¹¹⁶ Smith to Department of State, "Revision of Operations Plan for Latin America," 10/22/1958.

¹¹⁷ Smith to Department of State, "Revision of Operations Plan for Latin America," 10/22/1958.

¹¹⁸ Smith to Department of State, "Revision of Operations Plan for Latin America," 10/22/1958.

¹¹⁹ Smith to Department of State, "Revision of Operations Plan for Latin America," 10/22/1958.

recently a serious threat in Cuba,” but acknowledged that “there is Communist influence and infiltration in the revolutionary movement, which the Communist party has openly supported.”¹²⁰ This apparent contradiction regarding the level of communism within Cuba was critical to Castro coming to power and Batista leaving Cuba. Smith suggested continued attention on this matter but ultimately argued that Batista supporters would claim the revolutionary forces to be “Communist inspired” in an attempt to “lessen the support which the revolutionary movement might receive internationally, particularly within the United States.”¹²¹ That is to say, as of October 1958, Ambassador Smith did not strongly relate communism as an ideology central revolutionary forces or Castro. Instead, he believed it was a tool the Batista regime was wielding against the revolutionaries.

Castro Takes Power

Ultimately, it was not that Castro was the U.S. government’s first choice to rule Cuba. Ideally, there would have been an alternative option that prioritized the economic influence of the United States while simultaneously aligning with its public goals of democracy and freedom; however, no such option existed. In many ways, Castro was just the least bad option available. He rose to power within Cuba at the same time Batista fell from grace with the United States, allowing for the relative acceptance of his claim to power in January 1959. As historian Geoffrey Warner astutely summarizes, “American unhappiness about Batista did not signify enthusiasm for Castro.”¹²² This “unhappiness” came into full effect with an arms embargo against Cuba in 1958 and the denial of Batista’s request to flee to the United States.¹²³ In December 1958, Batista

¹²⁰ Smith to Department of State, “Revision of Operations Plan for Latin America,” 10/22/1958.

¹²¹ Smith to Department of State, “Revision of Operations Plan for Latin America,” 10/22/1958.

¹²² Geoffrey Warner, “Eisenhower and Castro: U.S.-Cuban Relations 1958-60,” *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)* 75, no. 4 (1999): 803–17.

¹²³ Leonard, *Fidel Castro*, 42.

and Ambassador Earl Smith spoke, and Smith conveyed that he was not allowed to “mediate” on behalf of the United States.¹²⁴ Instead, he suggested that Batista leave Cuba as quickly as possible and return to his residence in Spain, not the United States as he had done before.¹²⁵ This conversation served as the final breaking point between Batista and U.S. government relations and officially created the space for Fidel Castro to rise as the leader of Cuba, one with the potential to be backed by the United States.

When Castro arrived in Havana on January 8, 1959, Cuba and the United States both appeared ready to accept his rule. Gone were the days of supporting Batista, and instead, the United States looked to create a more beneficial and positive relationship between the USA and Fidel Castro. It is within this context, one of hope yet uncertainty, that Chapter Two explores how Castro and the United States both worked throughout 1959 to establish diplomatic relations, contrary to the accepted and widely shared narratives of today.

¹²⁴ Earl Smith, “Foreign Relations of the United States, 1958–1960, Cuba, Volume VI - Editorial Note,” Office of the Historian, accessed December 9, 2022, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1958-60v06/d185>.

¹²⁵ Smith, “Foreign Relations of the United States, 1958–1960, Cuba, Volume VI - Editorial Note,” 1958.

Chapter Two: 1959, a Year of Uncertainty

Introduction:

On January 1, 1959, Fidel Castro and his forces entered Havana, Cuba's capital, and took control. Having fled from power just hours before, Fulgencio Batista fled to the Dominican Republic, hoping to find safety from the new Cuban revolutionary forces. At the same time, the world stood and watched as Fidel Castro and his troops, including Ernesto "Che" Guevara and Raúl Castro, took power and created a new nation. The implications of this seizure of power were tremendous. Gone was the "American lackey" dictator Batista, and in was a new revolutionary, not yet understood on the volatile global stage. Manuel Urrutía Lleó served as President, Fidel Castro served as Premier of Cuba (Prime Minister), his brother, Raúl, became increasingly involved with the troops, and Che Guevara eventually became the head of the National Bank.¹

After Fidel Castro took power, the United States government and the Eisenhower administration faced the dilemma of establishing new U.S.-Cuban relations with a revolutionary government. While the United States government prioritized rebuilding its relationship with Cuba and Fidel Castro, many other factors shaped U.S.-Cuban relations during this period, such as economic relations and private business protection, the role of Cuba within Latin America, and the global spread of communism. Despite these factors during his first year in power, I suggest that Castro and Cuba were willing to work with the United States, even as far as wanting to ally with the United States, and it is only Castro's lack of willingness to commit to economic dependency on the U.S. that truly began a rupture of relations.

The Aftermath: Castro in Power

¹ Ada Ferrer, *Cuba: An American History*, First Scribner hardcover edition (New York: Scribner, 2021).

While the U.S. government may have been distancing itself from Batista and his regime, the transition to Castro was not without issues. In the immediate aftermath of Castro taking control, the U.S. government's Joint Chiefs of Staff began preparing for the worst. On January 2, 1959, the Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces of the Atlantic (CINCLANT) wrote to the Joint Chiefs of Staff and detailed the readiness of American forces, if needed, to help Americans evacuate Cuba.² In the report, the CINCLANT described how "three destroyers" were on standby, with submarine tenders going to join their forces.³ However, there is an important distinction between these preventative measures and the calling of the U.S. troops to prepare for a war against Cuba. This report largely served as a precaution, in which the CINCLANT detailed the preemptive measures the American forces took to protect its citizens in Cuba. Nonetheless, it demonstrated the lack of complete U.S. support received by Castro and his new regime in the early days of his coming to power.

Furthermore, just as the U.S. prepared for the potential to take military action against the new Cuban regime, they also were working to coordinate the evacuation of non-essential American citizens. On January 1, the Embassy in Havana asked for the support of the evacuation of more than 200 Americans, all of whom were deemed non-official and non-essential to American relations in Cuba.⁴ This request demonstrated the volatility of the current regime change and the political situation in Cuba. At the same time, however, it suggested a degree of cooperation between the American armed forces and Cuba, where they could quickly enter and

² "Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964–1968, Volume XIX, Arab-Israeli Crisis and War, 1967 - Office of the Historian," accessed January 28, 2023, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v19/terms#:~:text=CIA%2C%20Central%20Intelligence%20Agency,in%20Chief%2C%20Armed%20Forces%2C%20Atlantic.>

³ CINCLANT to Joint Chiefs of Staff, "02 Jan 1959," Telegram, January 2, 1959, National Archives at College Park.

⁴ "212. Editorial Note - Foreign Relations of the United States, 1958–1960, Cuba, Volume VI - Historical Documents - Office of the Historian," accessed January 28, 2023, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1958-60v06/d212.>

support the opt-in evacuation of these citizens. In short, while there was a danger to these American citizens, prompting their swift and immediate departure from Cuba, there was also a level of cooperation between the two governments and their shared common interests.

On January 13, 1959, the Minister-Counsel of the Havana Embassy, Daniel Braddock, wrote to the Secretary of State and described his meeting with Cuban Minister of State Roberto Agramonte.⁵ At the time, Braddock served as the interim Chargé d' Affaires for the American Embassy in Havana. In this meeting, Braddock "expressed the desire of the U.S. Government to establish as quickly as possible close, friendly relations with the new government" of Cuba.⁶ In this exchange between two influential representatives of the two nations, the U.S. government and President Eisenhower demonstrated their wish to create a new relationship with Castro's Cuba. In reply, Agramonte claimed he also wanted relations with the United States.⁷ This correspondence, although brief, demonstrates how in the immediate aftermath of Castro's coming into power, both the United States and Cuban governments were already soliciting each other in hopes of working together.

While this level of cooperation represented a significant pivot from the preventative measures the CINCLANT took to prepare for a potential evacuation, it also strongly connected to Ambassador Smith's earlier telegram of October 1958. This telegram suggested that the U.S. government cared most about protecting its own interests (such as establishing a democratic government; and minimizing the influence of communism within Cuba).⁸ In many ways, Castro coming to power offered the United States opportunities to act upon these interests. Within this

⁵ Daniel Braddock to Secretary of State, "864, January 20, 5 p.m.," Telegram, January 20, 1959, National Archives at College Park.

⁶ Braddock to Secretary of State, "864, January 20, 5 p.m.," 01/20/1959.

⁷ Braddock to Secretary of State, "864, January 20, 5 p.m.," 01/20/1959.

⁸ Smith to Department of State, "Revision of Operations Plan for Latin America," 10/22/1958.

telegram, Braddock also detailed how the United States government was working to support aspects of the Castro regime. For instance, Braddock described relief coordinated and authorized for Castro's hometown province of the Oriente.⁹ By offering aid to a central location for Castro and his rise to power, the United States government was indirectly showing its support for Castro and demonstrating its wish to better relations with Castro.

Minister Agramonte further reciprocated this tone and described that the Cuban government had a list of well-connected Americans it wanted to invite to visit Cuba.¹⁰ This list directly revealed that, at this point in the Revolution, Castro's Cuba and Eisenhower's United States were not only conversing with each other but also had hoped to collaborate.¹¹ While there were concerning factors such as the role of communism in the Revolution and the effect of the Revolution on American business interests, both sides were willing to establish beneficial and cooperative relationships. In short, this diplomatic exchange between Agramonte and Braddock proved that less than two weeks after the Revolution, Cuba and the United States had not lost their relationship.

Castro's Friendliness and Unfriendliness

On February 21, 1959, Daniel Braddock wrote to the Department of State describing the current "Cuban attitude towards the U.S." and gave his advice surrounding the situation.¹² In this dispatch, he told how, despite recent public outbursts against the United States, Braddock still believed that Castro wanted to work with the United States and maintain relations. Braddock argued that Castro would find it most advantageous to himself and Cuba to foster relations with

⁹ Braddock to Secretary of State, "864, January 20, 5 p.m," 01/20/1959.

¹⁰ Braddock to Secretary of State, "864, January 20, 5 p.m," 01/20/1959.

¹¹ Braddock to Secretary of State, "864, January 20, 5 p.m," 01/20/1959.

¹² Daniel Braddock to Department of State, "Cuban Attitude toward U.S., Outlook, and Recommendation," Telegram, February 21, 1959, National Archives at College Park.

the United States.¹³ Braddock asserted that he believed these changes in feeling towards the United States were “not generally unfriendly;” instead, they critiqued the United States government’s historical support of Batista and a lack thereof to Castro.¹⁴ In Castro’s eyes, “the United States gave moral support to the Batista Government when it should have been moral support to the revolutionary movement, and it should have ceased arms shipments to Batista much sooner than it did.”¹⁵ In many ways, this criticism was consistent with the U.S. government’s criticism of its alliance with Batista. The United States began to move away from Batista’s regime in 1958 and 1959 but, in Castro’s opinion, should have stopped supporting Batista earlier. Moreover, Castro believed that his revolutionary ideals were more aligned with the U.S. government than the ideals of the Batista government and argued that the Revolution should have received U.S. support, not Batista.

Braddock continued in the dispatch to describe one of the significant verbal attacks from Castro against the United States. He highlighted how Castro had commented to an American reporter that “If the United States tried to intervene by sending Marines to Cuba, there would be ‘200,000 dead gringos,’ in the streets.”¹⁶ However, in his analysis of this situation, Braddock downplayed the severity of these words and this threat. Instead, he argued that Castro backtracked against his own words, suggesting a willingness on Castro’s part to rectify his misspoken language and to improve relations with the United States.¹⁷ He demonstrated how Castro “attempted to soften [this statement] by making another one almost equally unfortunate, that if the United States intervened in Cuba, it would have to kill six million Cubans first.”¹⁸ This

¹³ Braddock to Department of State, “Cuban Attitude toward U.S., Outlook, and Recommendation,” 02/21/1959.

¹⁴ Braddock to Department of State, “Cuban Attitude toward U.S., Outlook, and Recommendation,” 02/21/1959.

¹⁵ Braddock to Department of State, “Cuban Attitude toward U.S., Outlook, and Recommendation,” 02/21/1959.

¹⁶ Braddock to Department of State, “Cuban Attitude toward U.S., Outlook, and Recommendation,” 02/21/1959.

¹⁷ Braddock to Department of State, “Cuban Attitude toward U.S., Outlook, and Recommendation,” 02/21/1959.

¹⁸ Braddock to Department of State, “Cuban Attitude toward U.S., Outlook, and Recommendation,” 02/21/1959.

counterclaim, while perhaps not quite the soft, relationship-oriented statement that Braddock interpreted it to be, did reveal that Castro understood the likelihood of mutual destruction if the United States and Cuba were to involve armed forces. Moreover, it permitted Braddock to analyze Castro as an orator and suggested that, at times, Castro's own words could create more significant problems than he anticipated.

Braddock argued that "Castro was impetuous and emotional, and his worst enemy was his tongue, which he himself often acknowledged and then promptly forgot."¹⁹ This peculiarity of Castro as a leader was an important one. His apparent lack of forethought when giving official announcements or speeches could both strengthen and worsen U.S.-Cuban relations. If interpreted as an intentional slight, U.S. officials could read Castro's speeches as direct, inflammatory language against the United States. However, if interpreted as a product of the moment, U.S. officials could write Castro off as a naïve leader who did not completely understand the weight of his words. For example, Braddock described how "there had not been a single public speech by Castro since the triumph of the Revolution in which he had not shown some feeling against the United States;" however, in his ramblings, "he had also had a few kind words for the American public as a whole, for the United States Government, and specific individuals in the United States."²⁰ By drawing this comparison of both praise of and attacks against the United States, Braddock made clear that Castro was not attempting to actively rupture relations or sever ties.

Instead, Braddock argued, his lack of control while speaking was just a limit of Castro as a leader. Moreover, he stated that "there was some reason to believe that Castro was not as anti-American as he sounded in his public pronouncements," instead, Braddock argued that Castro

¹⁹ Braddock to Department of State, "Cuban Attitude toward U.S., Outlook, and Recommendation," 02/21/1959.

²⁰ Braddock to Department of State, "Cuban Attitude toward U.S., Outlook, and Recommendation," 02/21/1959.

might “often resort to this kind of nationalistic demagoguery because of its popular appeal” within Cuba.²¹ To substantiate this claim, he argued that Castro always made time for American reporters, proving that Castro focused on maintaining “good relations with the United States” as it was a “political and economic necessity for Cuba.”²² This belief reflects a tone of complacency on behalf of Braddock, wherein he assumed that, due to Castro’s wish to maintain good relations with the U.S. publicly, he would consequently comply with U.S. policy, a major over assumption.

Braddock concluded this dispatch by shifting focus away from Fidel Castro himself and instead highlighting the efforts made by Castro’s administration to maintain cooperation and relations with the United States. In particular, he applauded the cooperation of the Cuban Minister of State Agramonte, the Minister of Agriculture, and the Minister of Education.²³ However, he also acknowledged that the Cuban Military was unwilling to cooperate with the United States. Braddock wrote, “it is in the Revolutionary Army that the prejudice against the United States has been strongest,” but suggested that it was not a result of Fidel Castro’s leadership, but rather, Raúl Castro’s presence and influence as Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces.²⁴ This clarification is critical to understanding the changing nature of U.S.-Cuban relations in 1959. While the United States did not have evidence that Fidel Castro was communist, Raúl Castro and Che Guevara, his two advisors, were known for their “leftist sympathies.”²⁵ In his description of Raúl Castro, Braddock argued that he had not “shown any noticeable friendliness towards the United States,” but Braddock still held on to the belief that it

²¹ Braddock to Department of State, “Cuban Attitude toward U.S., Outlook, and Recommendation,” 02/21/1959.

²² Braddock to Department of State, “Cuban Attitude toward U.S., Outlook, and Recommendation,” 02/21/1959.

²³ Braddock to Department of State, “Cuban Attitude toward U.S., Outlook, and Recommendation,” 02/21/1959.

²⁴ Braddock to Department of State, “Cuban Attitude toward U.S., Outlook, and Recommendation,” 02/21/1959.

²⁵ Braddock to Department of State, “Cuban Attitude toward U.S., Outlook, and Recommendation,” 02/21/1959.

“may prove possible in time to establish good relations with Raúl Castro, but [acknowledged that] for the moment the prospect was not promising.”²⁶ Che Guevara further complicated this lack of good relations with Raúl Castro, as Guevara was “believed to be definitely anti-American and is acting like a Communist,” highlighting the challenge of creating diplomatic ties between Cuba and the United States.²⁷

Within this one dispatch, Braddock articulates the issue of complete alliance with the Castro regime. While Castro may not have been publicly communist or anti-American, his two closest allies were. Nevertheless, he concluded his dispatch to the Department of State by suggesting that “the resentment of Fidel Castro against the United States would take a while to cool off, that in time a fully friendly relationship could be established between the United States and the new Cuba.”²⁸ This clarification was to suggest that, in time, Castro and his administration would cease their public attacks on the United States but, in the interim, that Castro’s verbal attacks should not be viewed as incendiary. Instead, Braddock argued that the U.S. could “count on continued good support from Cuba in issues between the free world and the communist world, even though at home the Revolutionary Government will probably not take as strong action against the local Communists [the U.S. government] might like to see.”²⁹ While he didn’t expect anti-communist policies in Cuba, Braddock believed Cuba would ally with the United States in the Cold War, allowing for further relations.

This issue of indirect political conflict continued throughout the early months of 1959 and culminated with Fidel Castro’s April trip to the United States. While the United States government gave Castro proper courtesies and measures of security for his trip, neither President

²⁶ Braddock to Department of State, “Cuban Attitude toward U.S., Outlook, and Recommendation,” 02/21/1959.

²⁷ Braddock to Department of State, “Cuban Attitude toward U.S., Outlook, and Recommendation,” 02/21/1959.

²⁸ Braddock to Department of State, “Cuban Attitude toward U.S., Outlook, and Recommendation,” 02/21/1959.

²⁹ Braddock to Department of State, “Cuban Attitude toward U.S., Outlook, and Recommendation,” 02/21/1959.

Eisenhower nor any cabinet member invited Castro to visit, a major slight against any political leader. Instead, as articulated in a dispatch from Braddock to the Department of State on March 9, 1959, he accepted the invitation from the American Society of Newspaper Editors for an unofficial visit to the United States.³⁰ This invitation was revelatory for a variety of reasons. First, it reinforced the importance of newspapers and mass media at this time and during this conflict. Second, while in the United States, despite being a nation's leader, Castro never met directly with President Eisenhower.³¹ Instead, he met with Vice President Richard Nixon in late April 1959.³² In the memorandum describing this conversation, Nixon noted that Castro appeared "somewhat nervous and tense" and suggested that Castro had been worried about his perception in American media.³³ This revelation indicates that, despite the political slight of not meeting with President Eisenhower himself, Castro was still engaged and preoccupied with ensuring a positive reception within the United States.

The conversation between Nixon and Castro covered various aspects of Castro's regime, from elections to agrarian reform. Nixon argued that Castro did not reveal any new information surrounding his policies towards the United States but did further bear down on some of his statements for protecting Cuban interests in business rather than American interests.³⁴ They discussed how Cuba could foster more significant investments but differed on Castro's belief that "Cuba primarily needed and what he wanted was not private capital but [Cuban] government capital" involved in the economy.³⁵ Nixon tried to contextualize this financial strategy with the

³⁰ Philip Bonsal to Department of State, "Call on Minister of State," Telegram, March 9, 1959, National Archives at College Park.

³¹ Ferrer, *Cuba: An American History*, 327.

³² Frank Devine to Roy Rubottom, "Memo of Conversation between Vice President Nixon and Fidel Castro," Telegram, April 29, 1959, National Archives at College Park.

³³ Devine to Rubottom, "Memo of Conversation between Vice President Nixon and Fidel Castro," 04/29/1959.

³⁴ Devine to Rubottom, "Memo of Conversation between Vice President Nixon and Fidel Castro," 04/29/1959.

³⁵ Devine to Rubottom, "Memo of Conversation between Vice President Nixon and Fidel Castro," 04/29/1959.

competition for capital in the Latin American and Caribbean region, but Castro further supported his objective of government-backed money in Cuba.³⁶ One such way that Castro believed this economic change could affect Cuba was through agrarian reform that limited the maximum amount of land held by an individual, a plan that American private business people hated.³⁷ He argued that “Cuba needed more people who were able to buy the goods produced within the country and that it would make no sense to produce more in factories unless the amount of money in the hands of consumers was increased.”³⁸ This point reveals the beginnings of Castro’s significant pushes for agrarian reform and overhaul within Cuba. After centuries of economic control and heavy influence by Spain and then the United States, Castro wanted to build the Cuban economy from within. However, this wish to make a robust and domestic economy posed a risk to the U.S. government’s economic interests in Cuba, creating a space for future conflict.

At the end of this discussion, Nixon re-focused on communism and Fidel Castro. Famously, he described that Castro was either “incredibly naïve about Communism or under Communist discipline” but believed that it was just naivety, and, as a result of this naivety, the United States had “no choice but at least to try to orient him in the right direction.”³⁹ In this conclusion, Nixon reinforced the narrative Braddock originally wrote in describing the lack of validity behind Castro’s verbal attacks. To American officials, Castro was not to be taken as a threat. Not only was he not publicly communist, but in Nixon’s eyes, he was a leader led by naivety and not actual strength. This description connects to Eisenhower’s refusal to meet directly with Castro and further imposes the idea that Castro was not yet worth enough to meet

³⁶ Devine to Rubottom, “Memo of Conversation between Vice President Nixon and Fidel Castro,” 04/29/1959.

³⁷ Fidel Castro, *Fidel Castro Reader*, ed. David Deutschmann and Deborah Shnookal (Melbourne, Australia: Ocean Press, 2007).

³⁸ Devine to Rubottom, “Memo of Conversation between Vice President Nixon and Fidel Castro,” 04/29/1959.

³⁹ Devine to Rubottom, “Memo of Conversation between Vice President Nixon and Fidel Castro,” 04/29/1959.

with the President himself or be taken seriously by the Vice President. Ultimately, Castro's visit to the United States further solidified the understanding that while the U.S. and Cuba could maintain U.S.-Cuban relations, it was not easy.

Economic Affairs and Interests

American political interests in Cuba were heavily affected and shaped by U.S. economic interests in Cuba. The 1950s had seen a surge of U.S. economic activity, mainly through tourism, in Cuba due to Batista's economic policies and initiatives to incentivize foreign-owned businesses.⁴⁰ A significant aspect of Castro's campaign called for ending this financially dependent relationship between the United States and Cuba, as Castro believed that too much of the profits ended up in foreign hands.⁴¹ Therefore, when he came to power, American private business people were concerned and let their representatives know. Countless letters were sent to representatives, members of Congress, and ambassadors, imploring for more detail and a better understanding of how this changing Cuban political sphere would affect their private investments in Cuba.⁴²

For example, in a letter addressed to Ambassador Bonsal, Joseph Elías, a leading American businessman in Cuba, argued that the revolutionary actions of Fidel Castro and his forces were just a front for Soviet expansion and a departure from American capitalism within Cuba.⁴³ He wrote that he had "a strong suspicion, and in this, I do not stand alone, that the revolutionary movement itself is a Russian offensive toward its reported central goal: to separate the continent from the 'capitalistic' bloc, e.g., the United States."⁴⁴ Although articulated to an

⁴⁰ T. J. English, *Havana Nocturne: How the Mob Owned Cuba-- and Then Lost It to the Revolution* / T.J. English, 1st U.S. ed (New York: William Morrow, 2008).

⁴¹ Devine to Rubottom, "Memo of Conversation between Vice President Nixon and Fidel Castro," April 29, 1959.

⁴² Daniel Braddock to Department of State, "Views of an American Businessman on Cuban Situation," Telegram, March 30, 1959, 2472, National Archives at College Park.

⁴³ Braddock to Department of State, "Views of an American Businessman on Cuban Situation," 03/30/1959.

⁴⁴ Braddock to Department of State, "Views of an American Businessman on Cuban Situation," 03/30/1959.

extreme by Elías, many business people shared these worries and were concerned about the potential loss of investment and business in Cuba. These repeated calls created pressure for the Eisenhower administration and the U.S. government to figure out how to ensure the longevity or protection of American economic interests. While this analysis is not centered on the role of private business people or citizens in developing U.S.-Cuban relations, it would be oversimplistic to minimize the part of influential, wealthy business people and their effects on American political decision-making.

Besides protecting other economic interests, such as tourism, the sugar industry was a considerable financial concern for the U.S. government. This industry was an established market for centuries, and for the last five decades, the United States had been uniquely benefitting from its rewards.⁴⁵ Before the Cuban Revolution, the United States had received 57.6% of all sugar exports from Cuba.⁴⁶ As G.B. Hagelberg summarizes, before the Revolution, Cuba had the largest quota of any foreign country selling to the United States. From 1955 to 1959, it furnished, on average, 2,870,000 metric tons, raw value, of centrifugal sugar annually” and also supplied items such as “molasses and liquid sugar.”⁴⁷ Cuba and the United States established a robust relationship in the sugar industry, with the United States receiving large amounts of sugar at lower prices. This market also proved to be a significant concern for the Castro regime.

Within a few months of coming into power, Castro was negotiating new rates and trade standards for the Cuban sugar industry.⁴⁸ On June 5, in a telegram to Secretary of State Agriculture Ezra Taft Benson, Castro offered to “sell the United States eight million tons of

⁴⁵ Ferrer, *Cuba: An American History*, 65.

⁴⁶ Martin Weinstein and Institute for the Study of Human Issues, eds., *Revolutionary Cuba in the World Arena* (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1979).

⁴⁷ Weinstein and Institute for the Study of Human Issues, *Revolutionary Cuba in the World Arena*, 39.

⁴⁸ Roy Rubottom to Acting Secretary, “Reply to Fidel Castro’s Telegram of June 5,” Memorandum, June 9, 1959, National Archives at College Park.

sugar in 1961 at 4¢ a pound.”⁴⁹ To Castro, this meant the start of a new U.S.-Cuban relationship in the sugar industry, one defined by co-dependency, not just Cuban dependency on the United States. However, this rate and amount of sugar proved to be irrational in the eyes of the Department of Agriculture. Not only did the United States not support the purchasing of sugar through “government channels” and instead wanted sugar to be “sold through private” channels, but also, the United States did not want eight million tons of sugar from Cuba.⁵⁰ Therefore, this compromise could not be agreed upon, as it represented and described unnecessary terms for Cuba and the United States.

From Castro’s perspective, this sugar solution was a necessary but mutually beneficial solution to a common problem. Castro was aware of the rising fear among American business people and political leaders surrounding the future of the Cuban economy and their investments. In his cablegram to the Department of Agriculture, Castro acknowledged this fear, particularly the fear of agrarian reform that would detrimentally affect the robust sugar industry. In his cablegram, he suggested the departure from a reliance on other sources of sugar, even going so far as to advocate for a reduction of domestic sugar production.⁵¹ Castro argued that the U.S. did not need to tax its domestic producers with sugar production; instead, Cuba could “produce total sugar consumption of the United States thus saving the American consumer about \$300 million.”⁵² In this statement, Castro made a bold offer and pushed for solely relying on Cuba for sugar in the United States. This offer was an unprecedented move on Castro’s part. Not only did the United States rely on various sources to support its sugar need and usage fully, but this new trade agreement would force the United States to depend heavily on the continuation of good

⁴⁹ Rubottom to Acting Secretary, “Reply to Fidel Castro’s Telegram of June 5,” 06/09/1959.

⁵⁰ Rubottom to Acting Secretary, “Reply to Fidel Castro’s Telegram of June 5,” 06/09/1959.

⁵¹ Rubottom to Acting Secretary, “Reply to Fidel Castro’s Telegram of June 5,” 06/09/1959.

⁵² Rubottom to Acting Secretary, “Reply to Fidel Castro’s Telegram of June 5,” 06/09/1959.

diplomatic relations with Cuba. Otherwise, the United States would have no sugar source if U.S.-Cuban relations soured.

There was a level of mistrust and disagreement on how to proceed on both sides. As Castro wanted to move forward in his initiatives and prioritize keeping wealth inside Cuba and with Cubans, American private business people were concerned about losing their investments. This concern subsequently resulted in a large amount of pressure on U.S. officials to charter new economic terms that allowed for relations with Cuba and American private business in Cuba. The United States' refusal of Castro's proposition was not due to a lack of willingness to work with Castro; instead, the terms of the conditions were just not realistic for the time or the U.S. economic system. As highlighted in the Department of Agriculture's response to Castro, the United States did not want to limit its domestic production.⁵³

Assistant Secretary of State Roy Richard Rubottom and the Cuban Minister of State Paul Roa continued this conversation in a meeting, and Rubottom directly highlighted the Cuban Agrarian Reform Law issue. As told in the official Memorandum of Conversation of this meeting, Rubottom expressed that he worried the Agrarian Reform Law could be detrimental to both the United States and Cuba.⁵⁴ Rubottom argued that the American companies had contributed enough to the Cuban society and economy that their interests should also be protected.⁵⁵ In response to this claim, Roa argued that "the revolution in Cuba [had] no desire or intent to change the bases of the U.S.-Cuban relationship—rather it anticipated only changes in superstructure necessary so that the Cuban economy may grow and the Cuban people achieve a

⁵³ Rubottom to Acting Secretary, "Reply to Fidel Castro's Telegram of June 5," 06/09/1959.

⁵⁴ Roy Rubottom to Secretary of State and American Embassy in Havana, "Matters Discussed at Assistant Secretary Rubottom's Luncheon in Honor of Cuban Minister of State Raul Roa," Memorandum, June 20, 1959, National Archives at College Park.

⁵⁵ Rubottom to Secretary of State and American Embassy in Havana, "Matters Discussed at Assistant Secretary Rubottom's Luncheon in Honor of Cuban Minister of State Raul Roa," 06/20/1959.

higher standard of living.”⁵⁶ In this response, Castro made his economic priorities clear. The Cuban government hoped to continue to foster American financial involvement in Cuba; however, ultimately, the priority will be given to the economic growth of Cuba and its people.

By equating the success of the Revolution with the success of industrialization, Roa implied that the Revolution was tied to the advancement of the Cuban economy. Roa acknowledged that Cuba needed some foreign investment to permit industrialization, “an essential factor if the economy is to grow with sufficient speed—and if the revolution was to succeed.”⁵⁷ Ultimately, by the end of this conversation, it was clear that Cuba would hold U.S.-Cuban economic relations, but Cuba and Castro would give a new priority to the transformation of wealth within Cuba into creating an economy that benefitted Cuba first and investors second.

This paradox between the necessity for foreign investment but also the need for domestic development continued throughout 1959. In a letter from the American Embassy in Cuba on July 17, Ambassador Bonsal summarized Roa’s appearance on Cuban television and the updates given on the U.S.-Cuban relationship. Bonsal described Roa as saying that “relations between Cuba and the U.S. [were] excellent, [but the] only problems were economic, principally in connection to agrarian reform.”⁵⁸ However, even within this acknowledgment of the economic conflict between the two nations, Roa argued that “Cuba would not change, but would continue to discuss the matter” and further supported the claim that both governments wanted to improve relations and build an economic relationship, while not giving up its interests.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Rubottom to Secretary of State and American Embassy in Havana, “Matters Discussed at Assistant Secretary Rubottom’s Luncheon in Honor of Cuban Minister of State Raul Roa,” 06/20/1959.

⁵⁷ Rubottom to Secretary of State and American Embassy in Havana, “Matters Discussed at Assistant Secretary Rubottom’s Luncheon in Honor of Cuban Minister of State Raul Roa,” 06/20/1959.

⁵⁸ Philip Bonsal to Secretary of State, “150, July 17,” Telegram, July 17, 1959, National Archives at College Park.

⁵⁹ Bonsal to Secretary of State, “150, July 17,” 07/17/1959.

However, despite the willingness present in both countries to develop better diplomatic relations, more political and economic conflicts emerged as the year progressed. The Eisenhower administration renewed its efforts to understand communist infiltration within the Castro regime. At the same time, Ambassador Bonsal continued advocating for American business people's and the United States' interests within Cuba. At the same time, it remained acutely aware of the threat of losing Cuba as an ally both in economic and political affairs. In the following months of 1959, political relations began to sour between the United States and Cuba, yet a spirit of hope remained for reconciliation between the two countries.

In late July of 1959, Ambassador Bonsal continued his efforts to work with the Castro regime while also advocating for the interests of the United States government. This approach meant direct and continued conversation with Roa. On July 23, 1959, the two met to discuss the current status of affairs between the two countries. In a telegram to the Secretary of State describing the experience, Bonsal articulated that Roa "strongly expressed anti-communist views" and that Roa believed that the "communist influence in government [was] non-existent and that the aims and ideals of government [were] contrary to communist ideology."⁶⁰ The message was clear: not only was Roa, as the Minister of State, personally anti-communist, but so was the new Cuban government. In this same conversation, however, Bonsal also reminded Roa of the attention that the Eisenhower Administration would continue to place on Che Guevara and Raúl Castro, particularly on the potential implications of their spread of communism throughout the Castro regime.⁶¹ In a return to the rhetoric used early in 1959 to form initial support of Castro's regime, Bonsal also advocated for the "general sympathy in the United States for the

⁶⁰ Philip Bonsal to Department of State, "Conversation with Cuban Minister of State Regarding Cuban-American Relations," Telegram, July 23, 1959, National Archives at College Park.

⁶¹ Bonsal to Department of State, "Conversation with Cuban Minister of State Regarding Cuban-American Relations," 07/23/1959.

objectives of the Cuban Revolution,” suggesting that the U.S. government wanted to re-engage its public profile as a democracy-supporting nation.⁶²

Three days later, on July 26, the Secretary of State received a short, simple, and powerful message from the Embassy of Havana. In Ambassador Bonsal’s words, “Fidel Castro just made a televised statement in English to N.B.C. representative that Cuban government wanted only best of relations with the U.S.”⁶³ This summary, although short, revealed various critical facts to understanding the current status of U.S.-Cuban relations. First, as this report was given to a news outlet, Castro reinforced the importance of the news outlets and media in this role and suggested that he wanted his actions to be seen globally. Second, this willingness to use an American network, N.B.C., and speak in English connected to his earlier wishes to communicate with the American public. Third, this statement reiterated that Cuba and Castro wanted to maintain relations with the United States.

However, just eight days later, Castro’s close advisor and ally, Ernesto “Che” Guevara, began a slander campaign against the United States. In a telegram from Braddock addressed to the Department of State, Braddock described how Guevara argued that “as a government, the United States had committed an aggression in the international field” as, in his eyes, the U.S. officials had mishandled a minor case of a deserter, surpassing Cuban judicial processes and slighting their value.⁶⁴ Furthermore, in this accusation against the United States, Guevara argued that the “United Fruit Company was playing the same role in Cuba as in Guatemala” and returned to the argument that the United States was an imperial force exploiting

⁶² Bonsal to Department of State, “Conversation with Cuban Minister of State Regarding Cuban-American Relations,” 07/23/1959.

⁶³ Philip Bonsal to Secretary of State, “236, July 26,” Telegram, July 26, 1959, National Archives at College Park.

⁶⁴ Daniel Braddock to Department of State, “Ernesto ‘Che’ Guevara Accuses United States of Aggression Against Cuba,” Telegram, July 31, 1959, National Archives at College Park.

the working classes of Latin America.⁶⁵ This comparison between Guatemala and the United Fruit Company represented a slightly different narrative than that of Castro or Roa. Guevara was the most directly against the United States and, subsequently, was the most direct in calling out the problem of American involvement in Cuba. Instead of the apparent willingness of Castro or Roa to compromise, Guevara believed that the U.S. was an unwarranted foreign presence involved in internal Cuban affairs. However, notably, Guevara was not against all foreign presence in Cuba; instead, he was just specifically against the involvement of the United States in Cuba.⁶⁶

The Beginning of the End

As the year developed, the conflict between American economic and political interests and the goals of the Cuban Revolution continued to clash, yet both sides attempted to form a compromise. In a telegram to the Secretary of State on September 4, 1959, Ambassador Bonsal described his conversation with Fidel Castro and Paul Roa from the day before. Within this conversation, the three covered a variety of subjects, including the issue of the representation of Cuba in the American press and vice versa. Bonsal highlighted the U.S. government's "deep concern at the practically continuous barrage of anti-American statements from Cuban officials and press, radio of July 26th Movement, and [the] belief that this attitude was having a profound effect on American public opinion."⁶⁷ In reply to this claim, Castro responded that the American press was also actively writing against Cuba and explained his fears that the "anti-Cuban campaign of influential organs would eventually turn 90 percent of American people against

⁶⁵ Braddock to Department of State, "Ernesto 'Che' Guevara Accuses United States of Aggression Against Cuba," 07/31/1959.

⁶⁶ Braddock to Department of State, "Ernesto 'Che' Guevara Accuses United States of Aggression Against Cuba," 07/31/1959.

⁶⁷ Philip Bonsal to Secretary of State, "571, September 4, 5 p.m.," Telegram, September 4, 1959, National Archives at College Park.

Cuba.”⁶⁸ The American public opinion, which Castro had been so concerned about during his visit in April 1959, had begun to take notice of the constant verbal attacks against the United States, and resentment began to grow among the patriotic elite in the United States.

Both countries highlighting the effect of news outlets’ opinions and public perception of the other country describes an integral part of understanding this stage of U.S.-Cuban relations: despite both governments’ best attempts at figuring out a path to reconciliation and a new form of relationship, both public and private people were taking notice of the disagreement and degradation of their country in the foreign press. However, the leaders of this conversation, Bonsal, Castro, and Roa, appeared to maintain their willingness and hope for the repair of relations. In response to these claims surrounding the issue of anti-American sentiments being shared in the press and by Cuban government officials, Castro described that he had his own regret towards his initial inflammatory statements towards the United States and that he “had been to some extent unaware of anti-American activities of July 26 Movement press.”⁶⁹ While it was unlikely that Castro was separated entirely from the newspapers and opinions of his own movement, the public denouncement of his own words and the separation from the actions of his campaign did help to show that, as of September 4, 1959, Castro still wanted to work with the United States.

Within this conversation, Bonsal returned to the issue of communism and pushed to understand better Castro’s beliefs surrounding communism and its role in Cuba. Initially, Castro stated that he paid little attention to the role of communism both within Cuba and on a global scale.⁷⁰ This claim may have been an attempt to push away Bonsal’s concern; however, Castro

⁶⁸ Bonsal to Secretary of State, “571, September 4, 5 p.m,” 09/04/1959.

⁶⁹ Bonsal to Secretary of State, “571, September 4, 5 p.m,” 09/04/1959.

⁷⁰ Bonsal to Secretary of State, “571, September 4, 5 p.m,” 09/04/1959.

also appeared to believe in his own form of ideology, which stood separate from communism. This lack of awareness of the ongoings of communism was not necessarily due to a lack of interest; instead, Castro argued that he prioritized his efforts and time toward the agrarian reform and economic transformations he had planned for Cuba.⁷¹ When pushed further on the actual aspects of communism as an ideology compared to his own goals, Castro described that he believed Cuba, in many ways, had surpassed the boundaries of communism and was now within its own unique form of politics.⁷² Bonsal wrote

Castro's views on matter of communism are of course strongly influenced by his stated conviction that Cuba under his leadership is breaking new ground in social and economic theory and does not need involve itself unduly in struggle between ideologies which he evidently considers inferior to his own.⁷³

This point made by Castro revealed an apparent unwillingness to involve Cuba in the Cold War. Instead of submitting itself to American capitalism or Soviet communism, Castro believed that Cuba had found its own ideology, one superior to the others, that would uniquely benefit Cuba and allow for its development.

On the night of September 30, Roa echoed the claims that the "Cuban international position was already defined. [Stating, Cuba] 'is with neither the Soviets nor capitalism.'" ⁷⁴ Roa's statement demonstrated that Cuban politics and economy represented an alternative path within the dual-natured Cold War of capitalism versus communism. While the United States was relieved to hear that Castro was not allying with the Soviet Union, some also viewed these

⁷¹ Bonsal to Secretary of State, "571, September 4, 5 p.m.," 09/04/1959.

⁷² Bonsal to Secretary of State, "571, September 4, 5 p.m.," 09/04/1959.

⁷³ Bonsal to Secretary of State, "571, September 4, 5 p.m.," 09/04/1959.

⁷⁴ Daniel Braddock to Secretary of State, "741, October 1," Telegram, October 1, 1959, National Archives at College Park.

statements as a political slight against the United States and its form of capitalism, as Castro suggested that he was “superior” to both the Soviet Union and the United States.⁷⁵

This appearance continued to spiral, with Castro speaking out against American private businesses. While Castro maintained that he was willing to support foreign investment and American business in Cuba, he did not back down from the claims that he was hostile toward these investors and created unfavorable conditions for their businesses.⁷⁶ Bonsal described that Castro agreed that American private interests “had made important contributions to the country’s economy and were [therefore] entitled to decent treatment. He was, however, definitely determined to continue action against many of these companies.”⁷⁷ Specifically, he “expressed particular hostility” toward “other Batista concession [such as tax incentives and price reductions] to American private interests would come under review.”⁷⁸ While Castro never promised protection or support of Batista’s economy, he had been decisively more pro-American investment and business in Cuba months prior. This statement, therefore, represented an apparent change from earlier rhetoric surrounding the potential for U.S.-Cuban economic collaboration; however, by placing the blame on Batista and not the United States itself, Castro still allowed for the possibility of reconciliation between the two.

American Diplomacy in Question

On September 15, 1959, following rising questions surrounding the role of communism in Cuba and the successful rollout of the Agrarian Reform Law, the Department of State released an information and instructional report on the official “United States Information Policy Towards

⁷⁵ Bonsal to Secretary of State, “571, September 4, 5 p.m,” 09/04/1959.

⁷⁶ Bonsal to Secretary of State, “571, September 4, 5 p.m,” 09/04/1959.

⁷⁷ Bonsal to Secretary of State, “571, September 4, 5 p.m,” 09/04/1959.

⁷⁸ Bonsal to Secretary of State, “571, September 4, 5 p.m,” 09/04/1959.

the Castro Regime in Cuba.”⁷⁹ In this report, shared with all American diplomatic and consular posts, the United States government described how, despite initial attempts to “avoid any impression that the United States [was] hostile to the regime of Prime Minister Fidel Castro or unsympathetic to the achievement within Cuba of the proclaimed humanitarian objectives of the Revolution,” that it could no longer grant the same level of public support and politeness to Castro and his regime.⁸⁰ Secretary of State Christian Herter argued that, despite its revolutionary beginnings, Castro was rapidly taking on “characteristics which were suspiciously like those of a dictatorship itself,” such as a lack of elections, a lack of fair trials, government control of media, and the involvement of himself as a figurehead.⁸¹ Furthermore, Herter highlighted the fear of the U.S. government surrounding the potential for the “export of the Cuban Revolution” throughout Latin America and the Caribbean.⁸² The expansion of Cuban Revolution ideals throughout the region would represent a significant loss to American political and economic interests and was not a risk that the United States government was willing to take.

Finally, Herter highlighted the role of communism as understood at that moment in the Cuban Revolution. He wrote, “largely through the efforts of the press, there had been increasing awareness throughout the hemisphere [and world] that there existed a real problem in the attitudes of Castro and his Revolutionary leadership towards communism.”⁸³ In particular, he highlighted the risk of the Cuban Revolution within the area, connecting the Cuban situation with Chile, Venezuela, Peru, and Costa Rica, and arguing that the Cuban Revolution could become a dangerous precedent should its ideology continue to spread.⁸⁴ In response to this

⁷⁹ Christian Herter, “United States Information Policy Towards the Castro Regime in Cuba,” Department of State Instruction, September 15, 1959, National Archives at College Park.

⁸⁰ Herter, “United States Information Policy Towards the Castro Regime in Cuba,” 09/15/1959.

⁸¹ Herter, “United States Information Policy Towards the Castro Regime in Cuba,” 09/15/1959.

⁸² Herter, “United States Information Policy Towards the Castro Regime in Cuba,” 09/15/1959.

⁸³ Herter, “United States Information Policy Towards the Castro Regime in Cuba,” 09/15/1959.

⁸⁴ Herter, “United States Information Policy Towards the Castro Regime in Cuba,” 09/15/1959.

danger, he concluded that the U.S. government should begin to question Castro more deeply on “the issues of dictatorship, intervention, and communism” to understand the region’s risk better.⁸⁵ While he was calling for the vigilance of the issues of communism in the area and Cuba, Herter was not advocating for the rupture of relations with Cuba or Castro. Instead, for the first time in a shared statement, he argued that Castro and his regime could no longer be considered a democracy, and the U.S. government officially understood them to be approaching dictatorship.⁸⁶

However, political relations continued to decline as the year ended. On October 23, 1959, Ambassador Bonsal wrote a three-page telegram to the Department of State describing the rapid and current deterioration of U.S.-Cuban relations within Havana. In his opening line, he wrote, “the situation has deteriorated considerably past week” due to a variety of factors such as fake narratives publicly shared in the Cuban press that accused the U.S. of stopping Cuba from receiving supplies, of plans for a potential reduction in the Cuban sugar quota, and the alleged involvement of the United States on bombings in Cuba.⁸⁷ While he continued to dispute these claims, he urged that “something be done urgently to set the record straight.”⁸⁸ He suggested that either President Eisenhower reach out to settle the situation, Herter reaches out to Roa, or Bonsal himself speak on Cuban television.⁸⁹ To Bonsal, despite these fictitious stories, the threats behind these claims were credible and genuine. Bonsal understood that if the United States government could not regain control of the narrative, then U.S.-Cuban relations would continue to worsen.

⁸⁵ Herter, “United States Information Policy Towards the Castro Regime in Cuba,” 09/15/1959.

⁸⁶ Herter, “United States Information Policy Towards the Castro Regime in Cuba,” 09/15/1959.

⁸⁷ Philip Bonsal to Secretary of State, “912, October 23, 7 p.m.,” October 23, 1959, National Archives at College Park.

⁸⁸ Bonsal to Secretary of State, “912, October 23, 7 p.m.,” 10/23/1959.

⁸⁹ Bonsal to Secretary of State, “912, October 23, 7 p.m.,” 10/23/1959.

In response to this message, Secretary Herter approved Ambassador Bonsal to meet with President Osvaldo Dorticos Torrado, who, following Urrutia's departure in July, acted as President for Castro's regime. In this discussion, Bonsal reminded President Dorticos that it was the "sincere desire of the government and people of the United States that the relations between this country and Cuba should continue to be based on friendship, mutual respect, and mutual interests" that have historically connected the two.⁹⁰ However, he also reminded President Dorticos that the U.S. was worried about "what seemed to be deliberate and concerted efforts in Cuba to replace the traditional friendship between the Cuban and American people with distrust and hostility which are alien to the expressed desire of both governments."⁹¹ This reminder was critical to the conversation: while Bonsal was there to repair the damage and deterioration due to false rumors within Cuba, he also reminded Dorticos that the Cuban government had not been upholding their support for diplomacy and friendship in the public arena.

One week later, the update from Ambassador Bonsal was no less promising. Writing to the Department of State on October 30, Bonsal described how public anti-Americanism was now rampant throughout even the highest levels of government.⁹² Furthermore, more Americans began feeling unsafe within Cuba, with reports of "molestation and taunts" from Cubans.⁹³ He also highlighted that Fidel Castro appeared to now be in full support of the extremism of Raúl Castro and Che Guevara; however, he had not publicly declared his forces or himself communist.⁹⁴ However, a more worrying change occurred within the Castro regime. In this telegram, Bonsal highlighted how Castro's opposition was now centered almost entirely within

⁹⁰ Christian Herter to American Embassy in Havana, "Response to 10/23 Telegram," Telegram, October 24, 1959, National Archives at College Park.

⁹¹ Herter to American Embassy in Havana, "Response to 10/23 Telegram," 10/24/1959.

⁹² Philip Bonsal to Secretary of State, "977, October 30, Noon.," Telegram, October 30, 1959, National Archives at College Park.

⁹³ Bonsal to Secretary of State, "977, October 30, Noon.," 10/30/1959.

⁹⁴ Bonsal to Secretary of State, "977, October 30, Noon.," 10/30/1959.

the lower classes and had no real resources or ability to fight against Castro.⁹⁵ In short, Castro no longer faced effective political opposition from within Cuba and stood alone as a dictator in Bonsal's eyes. This belief prompted Secretary Herter to prepare a memorandum for the President immediately to update him on the situation in Cuba.

In this memorandum and policy guidance on October 31, 1959, Secretary Herter suggested that President Eisenhower should now actively work to encourage opposition to Castro, marking a turning point in Eisenhower's approach towards Castro.⁹⁶ Not only did Herter advocate for the increase of opposition within Cuba, but he also articulated the need for the resistance elsewhere in Latin America to grow and counter possible anti-American threats or alliances with Castro.⁹⁷ However, Herter advocated avoiding the "impression of direct pressure or intervention against Castro, except where the defense of legitimate United States interest was involved."⁹⁸ He clarified his position and stated that the Department of State believed "that the time was now past when it could be reasonably be hoped that Castro would adopt policies and attitudes consistent with minimum United States security requirements and policy interests" and that there was a "continuing danger that regimes responsive to or modeled on the Castro regime may be installed elsewhere in the Caribbean."⁹⁹ In this memorandum, Herter made himself clear: Herter and the Department of State no longer believed that reconciliation of the United States

⁹⁵ Bonsal to Secretary of State, "977, October 30, Noon.," 10/30/1959.

⁹⁶ Christian Herter and Dwight Eisenhower, "Memorandum for the President: Current Basic United States Policy Toward Cuba," Memorandum, October 31, 1959, National Archives at College Park.

⁹⁷ Herter and Eisenhower, "Memorandum for the President: Current Basic United States Policy Toward Cuba," 10/31/1959.

⁹⁸ Herter and Eisenhower, "Memorandum for the President: Current Basic United States Policy Toward Cuba," 10/31/1959.

⁹⁹ Herter and Eisenhower, "Memorandum for the President: Current Basic United States Policy Toward Cuba," 10/31/1959.

and Cuba was possible and that there was a risk of this revolutionary, anti-American ideology spreading throughout the region.¹⁰⁰

An Unpromising End to the Year

By November of 1959, the prospects of a non-communist and pro-American Cuba steadily decreased, yet the U.S. government had not completely given up hope. Statements from Bonsal on November 6 revealed that the U.S. government's "bitter enemies, Raúl Castro and Che Guevara were very much in the saddle," and the U.S. government expected them to not only radicalize agrarian reform but also work to bring down other American industries in Cuba such as mining by forcing out foreign investors and businesses.¹⁰¹ Relations continued to worsen, and on November 16, Bonsal argued that Castro had begun to transform himself in the eyes of the Cuban public and change how the Cuban public looked at the Revolution. He wrote, "Castro and his more extreme followers are pursuing a familiar tactic of creating a popular belief that heroic, all-deserving Cuban people are surrounded by powerful unscrupulous enemies principally foreign (American)."¹⁰² To characterize the United States as an enemy was a significant shift in public rhetoric, one which was not well received in the United States.

Failed attempts to reconcile due to a lack of common interests characterized the remainder of 1959. On December 28, 1959, President Dorticos appeared on Cuban national television and updated the country on the current status of U.S.-Cuban relations. According to Bonsal, in a telegram to the Secretary of State, Dorticos, when asked about the "present status of Cuban-US relations," described that the Cuban government was "firm in its position" and that while its

¹⁰⁰ Herter and Eisenhower, "Memorandum for the President: Current Basic United States Policy Toward Cuba," 10/31/1959.

¹⁰¹ Philip Bonsal to Secretary of State, "1043, November 6, 4 p.m.," Telegram, November 6, 1959, National Archives at College Park.

¹⁰² Philip Bonsal to Secretary of State, "1122, November 16, 3 p.m.," Telegram, November 16, 1959, National Archives at College Park.

“measures were not designed to affect American interests, national necessities required [Cuba] to adopt measures taken to defend its economy.”¹⁰³ This distinction was clear: American and Cuban national interests no longer aligned, and the Cuban government was no longer willing to give up on its own needs to better support the American national interests. Furthermore, he continued to state that the Cuban government was not targeting the United States with any form of aggression; instead, he argued the U.S.A. had been targeting Cuba.¹⁰⁴

The End of 1959 and the Beginning of 1960

By the end of the year, U.S.-Cuban relations had been completely transformed. No longer was either country trying to meet the other country’s economic needs. Castro was no longer willing to make less-than-ideal trade agreements with the United States to ensure its business, and the United States was not pleased about Cuba’s path towards communism. Instead, while both countries remained committed to finding some resolution, neither was willing to sacrifice its own needs. For the U.S. government, these needs and interests were simple: protecting American private business interests; maintaining the sugar trade; reversing the anti-American rhetoric prevalent in the Cuban government; and separating Cuba from communism. For the Cuban government, it prioritized its own development as a country; keeping its wealth inside Cuba through agrarian reform; fighting back against unfair Batista-era concessions; and, for the extremists in the government, the beginning of the spread of communism and dictatorship throughout the Cuban government. Relations and diplomatic exchanges may have still existed between the two countries, but the relations frayed, and both sides were at a loss navigating these non-common interests. Therefore, by the end of 1959, a lack of common interests and significant

¹⁰³ Daniel Braddock to Secretary of State, “1514, December 29,” Telegram, December 29, 1959, National Archives at College Park.

¹⁰⁴ Braddock to Secretary of State, “1514, December 29,” 12/29/1959.

levels of distrust and dislike towards the other governments proved to have highly detrimental effects on maintaining U.S.-Cuban relations. Neither side had given up yet, but as every day passed, the chances of reconciliation moved further and further away. This uncertainty continued into the year 1960, when, for the first time in early January, Ambassador Bonsal was called back to the United States for consultation and to figure out if the continuation of U.S.-Cuban relations was even possible.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁵ Christian Herter to American Embassy in Havana, "Department of State on Recall for Consultation," Telegram, January 22, 1960, National Archives at College Park.

Chapter Three: 1960-1961: The End of Relations

An Overview: 1960-1961

At the beginning of 1960, Castro consolidated power amongst his allies, pushing the Cuban government towards a stronghold of left-leaning political leaders. Through a public arrest and subsequent trial of Huber Matos, a former ally during the Revolution, Castro began solidifying his power amongst ideological allies starting in October 1959.¹⁰⁶ This arrest led to a wave of resignations and cabinet changes, as many others involved in Castro's regime also opposed communism and consequently were removed from power or left after seeing the public trial of Matos.¹⁰⁷ Consequently, Castro became increasingly surrounded by like-minded, radical, and politically left-leaning individuals. Therefore, at the beginning of 1960, Castro consolidated his administration and cabinet: Che Guevara, Head of the National Bank; Raúl Castro, Minister of Defense; Osvaldo Dorticos, President of Cuba; and himself: the Premier.¹⁰⁸

After a year of economic barriers restricting Cuba's ability to sell sugar to the United States, Cuba needed to look elsewhere. In his memoir, Nikita Khrushchev of the Soviet Union stated that, at the beginning of the Revolution, the Soviet Union was unaware of Castro's political allegiance and had not paid close attention to the Revolution.¹⁰⁹ While some Guevara and the Cuban Revolution biographers suggest that this tone of apathy towards the Revolution may have oversimplified the dynamic, many agree that Soviet interest in Cuba increased when the United States was no longer meeting its sugar export needs.¹¹⁰ As the United States was unwilling to trade at the standards set by the new government, Castro and his regime turned

¹⁰⁶ Ada Ferrer, *Cuba: An American History*, First Scribner hardcover edition (New York: Scribner, 2021).

¹⁰⁷ Ferrer, *Cuba: An American History*, 336.

¹⁰⁸ Ferrer, *Cuba: An American History*, 332.

¹⁰⁹ Nikita Sergeevich Khrushchev, Edward Crankshaw, and Strobe Talbott, *Khrushchev Remembers* (London: Deutsch, 1971).

¹¹⁰ Richard Gott, *Cuba: A New History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004).

elsewhere and toward the Soviet Union.¹¹¹ This economic market change worked in tandem with the consolidation of communist leaders in the Castro regime to suggest that Cuba, as a nation, was moving away from the United States. Ultimately, the combination of these two forms of change, both political and economic, resulted in the rupture of relations between Cuba and the United States. If 1959 had been a year of uncertainty, 1960 and 1961 represented the end of relations, culminating in the invasion of the Bay of Pigs in April 1961.

In this chapter, I argue that there were three forms of rupture of U.S.-Cuban relations. The first is the rupture of political relations in March 1960, with the covert planning of an invasion to overthrow Castro. The second is the rupture of economic relations in the summer of 1960 in response to the nationalization efforts of Fidel Castro. The third is the public and official rupture of diplomatic relations between the United States and Cuba in January 1961. However, I believe this public decision only reiterates and publicizes public decisions and actions made months before and therefore does not constitute the actual rupture of relations, contrary to mainstream historical narratives.

January and February: Small Cracks

At the end of 1959 and the beginning of 1960, the Cuban government and Castro's regime still hoped to reach a resolution with the United States. However, as time passed, this reality became increasingly unlikely. For example, the American consul wrote to the Department of State and described that an American sugar official, Daymond Elmore, had been forced to leave Cuba and his sugar business.¹¹² Per Elmore's account, "local communist elements" demanded Elmore leave after his lack of support for communism in the local Union.¹¹³ While a

¹¹¹ Gott, *Cuba: A New History*, 183.

¹¹² Park Wollam to Department of State, "Events in the Oriente Province January 7-13, 1960," Telegram, January 13, 1960, 1600, National Archives at College Park.

¹¹³ Wollam to Department of State, "Events in the Oriente Province January 7-13, 1960," 01/13/1960.

small example of a more significant problem, Elmore's departure at the threat of violence by local communists suggests a more substantial issue of the rising forces against American exploitation of sugar in Cuba.¹¹⁴ A public appearance by Fidel Castro on January 19 furthered this sentiment when he spoke out against American imperialism in the area.¹¹⁵ He called the United States' actions in Cuba "threatening" and suggested that revolutionary efforts in Cuba had now become synonymous with patriotism and anti-imperialism.¹¹⁶ In response to this appearance, Ambassador Bonsal said, "Castro [appeared] to be stepping up his policy of attacking the United States as a traditional and continuing enemy of Cuban people."¹¹⁷ This change in tone from his willingness to work with the United States in 1959 demonstrates a complete shift in economic priorities for Cuba and Castro.

On January 21, 1960, Ambassador Bonsal was temporarily called back to Washington D.C. under the guise of official consultation on Cuba.¹¹⁸ The Department of State cleared Bonsal to tell the Cuban public that his "return for consultation [was,] of course, in connection with an unfortunate steady deterioration between the United States and Cuba."¹¹⁹ This statement was one of the first major public announcements on behalf of the United States that addressed the decline of U.S.-American relations. The Department of State also asked Bonsal that his "departure be associated with clear cut issue of communism as well as protests against [him,] the Vice President, and the U.S.G."¹²⁰ This request represented a change from earlier behavior that

¹¹⁴ Wollam to Department of State, "Events in the Oriente Province January 7-13, 1960," 01/13/1960.

¹¹⁵ Philip Bonsal to Department of State, "Description of Castro's Appearance," Telegram, January 19, 1960, 1600, National Archives at College Park.

¹¹⁶ Bonsal to Department of State, "Description of Castro's Appearance," 01/19/1960.

¹¹⁷ Bonsal to Department of State, "Description of Castro's Appearance," 01/19/1960.

¹¹⁸ Christian Herter to American Embassy in Havana, "Recall of Ambassador Bonsal," Telegram, January 21, 1960, 1600, National Archives at College Park.

¹¹⁹ Herter to American Embassy in Havana, "Recall of Ambassador Bonsal," 01/21/1960.

¹²⁰ Herter to American Embassy in Havana, "Recall of Ambassador Bonsal," 01/21/1960.

ignored major political slights. Nonetheless, this stay in the United States was not permanent, and Bonsal returned to Cuba in early March.¹²¹

On January 26, 1960, President Eisenhower gave a press conference on the status of relations with Cuba.¹²² In this press conference, he reminded the world of the U.S. government's official policy of "Non-Interventionism" in Cuba and promised to support American claims of illegally seizing economic resources.¹²³ Non-interventionism was still the public, official goal of the United States; however, Eisenhower also highlighted how the United States would not stand for the continued verbal attacks on the U.S. and its government.¹²⁴ To Eisenhower, these baseless claims, made on prominent stages and by the country's leaders, only further harmed relations between the two. Finally, he finished this conference with a statement of belief in the Cuban people and their ability to "recognize and defeat the intrigues of international communism which are aimed at destroying democratic institutions in Cuba and the traditional and mutually beneficial friendship" of the United States and Cuba.¹²⁵ This call to the people to turn away from Soviet communism speaks to his willingness to tap into the people as a power base and the acknowledgment that the Cold War rapidly appeared in Cuban matters.

This press conference was met with extreme pushback within Cuba, both from the government and the people. Two leading publications, *Sierra Maestra* and *Revolución*, publicly bashed Eisenhower's claims and suggested that he was lying about the status of relations and actions of the Cuban government.¹²⁶ While run by the people, the *Sierra Maestra* and *Revolución*

¹²¹ American Embassy in Havana to Secretary of State, "2396, March 16, 3:00 p.m.," March 16, 1960, 1222, National Archives at College Park.

¹²² Christian Herter to American Embassy in Havana, "1058," January 25, 1960, 1222, National Archives at College Park.

¹²³ Herter to American Embassy in Habana, "1058," 01/25/1960.

¹²⁴ Herter to American Embassy in Habana, "1058," 01/25/1960.

¹²⁵ Herter to American Embassy in Habana, "1058," 01/25/1960.

¹²⁶ Park Wollam to Department of State, "Events in the Oriente Province, January 27, 1960," Telegram, January 27, 1960, 1222, National Archives at College Park.

had long since been considered the unofficial voices of the Castro regime.¹²⁷ Moreover, on January 28, President Dorticos made a public statement in response to Eisenhower's press conference. In this statement, he argued that "[his] government laments the progressive worsening of relations with the government of the United States, but it understands that this is the direct consequence of the lack of understanding shown with respect to the development and objectives of the Cuban Revolution" by the United States government.¹²⁸ Therefore, from Dorticos' perspective, the failure of U.S.-Cuban relations was not due to the rising influence of communism within Cuba or the Castro regime; rather, it was a result of the lack of support for the revolutionary ideals by the United States.

That same day in Washington DC, leading representatives of American businesses in Cuba met with officials from the Department of State. Representatives from firms such as the United Fruit Company and a variety of sugar executives met with members of the Department of State, such as Assistant Secretary Rubottom and Ambassador Bonsal.¹²⁹ In this meeting, the Department of State representatives explained the legality behind the Cuban Agrarian Reform Laws.¹³⁰ The Agrarian Reforms Laws were a series of programs beginning in 1959 that Castro developed to restrict the amount of land held by one entity, particularly a foreign individual or firm, and a program that remodeled how agricultural and cultivated land were used in Cuba.¹³¹ Through this conversation, they worked to establish a clearer understanding of the rights of

¹²⁷ Daniel Braddock to Department of State, "Anti-American Campaign in Cuban Governmental Press," February 2, 1960, 1222, National Archives at College Park.

¹²⁸ Daniel Braddock to Department of State, "1790, January 28," Telegram, January 28, 1960, 1222, National Archives at College Park.

¹²⁹ "Conference with Representatives of American Property Owners Faced with Expropriation Under the Cuban Agrarian Reform Law" (January 28, 1960), 1600, National Archives at College Park.

¹³⁰ "Conference with Representatives of American Property Owners Faced with Expropriation Under the Cuban Agrarian Reform Law," 01/28/1960.

¹³¹ Castro, *Fidel Castro Reader*, 6.

American businesses in Cuba.¹³² The business owners argued that the compensation they received from Cuba in response to these reforms was “neither prompt nor effective” and did not “meet the requirements of international law in any respect.”¹³³ While they did not resolve the issue of property seizure within this conference, the actual conference itself (and its makeup of leading American business people and highly ranked State Department officials) reveals the priorities of the U.S. government concerning its policy and actions in Cuba. Not only did these wealthy business people have a solid connection to the U.S. Government, but the U.S. government was still actively concerned with matters surrounding private business and sugar in Cuba.

On February 20, Assistant Secretary Rubottom wrote to the Secretary of State Herter and described evidence of reconciliatory efforts by Castro’s governments since Eisenhower’s press conference of January 26. In this letter, he highlighted the decrease in public verbal attacks by Cuban officials; however, he noted that the newspapers had continued their attack on the U.S., even if Castro and other government officials had stopped.¹³⁴ Furthermore, Rubottom demonstrated how Castro’s conciliatory efforts were based on language, not action.¹³⁵ This description suggests that Rubottom did not honestly believe that there had been a fundamental change towards the United States, instead thinking that this public change of tone connected to other incentives of the Cuban government, such as improving its reputation within Latin

¹³² “Conference with Representatives of American Property Owners Faced with Expropriation Under the Cuban Agrarian Reform Law,” 01/28/1960.

¹³³ “Conference with Representatives of American Property Owners Faced with Expropriation Under the Cuban Agrarian Reform Law,” 01/28/1960.

¹³⁴ Roy Rubottom to Christian Herter, “Evidence of a More Conciliatory Attitude Toward the U.S. by Castro and Government of Cuba Since the President’s Statement of January 26th.,” February 20, 1960, 1600, National Archives at College Park.

¹³⁵ Rubottom to Herter, “Evidence of a More Conciliatory Attitude Toward the U.S. by Castro and Government of Cuba Since the President’s Statement of January 26th.,” 02/20/1960.

America.¹³⁶ However, he did believe that the Cuban government did “genuinely [desire] the return of Ambassador Bonsal and a return to normal relations,” even if its actions had not yet demonstrated this wish.¹³⁷

March 1960: *Le Coubre* and the Approval of the Bay of Pigs

The first weeks of March 1960 played a critical role in the deterioration of U.S.-Cuban relations. On March 4, *Le Coubre*, a French freighter, exploded in the harbor of Havana.¹³⁸ While the U.S. government denied any connection to the explosion of *Le Coubre*, its discourse and the accusations surrounding its circumstances directly influenced previous disagreements regarding Cuban public anti-American speeches. Thirteen days later, on March 17, President Eisenhower covertly approved the plans to invade the Bay of Pigs in Cuba.¹³⁹ These two events, one on the public stage and one behind the scenes, paved the way for U.S.-Cuban relations moving forward.

A freighter with munition from Belgium, *Le Coubre* exploded twice: once as the crew unloaded grenades and once as rescuers rushed to save the wounded.¹⁴⁰ Over two hundred people were injured, and seventy-five died.¹⁴¹ Immediately after, the Cuban government blamed the United States.¹⁴² This event became a global tragedy, and many attended the funeral, drawing in sympathizers worldwide. Here, Fidel Castro and Che Guevara cemented their roles as public figures: Castro as a fierce Cuban nationalist and Che as *El Guerrillero Heróico*, or the Heroic

¹³⁶ Rubottom to Herter, “Evidence of a More Conciliatory Attitude Toward the U.S. by Castro and Government of Cuba Since the President’s Statement of January 26th.,” 02/20/1960.

¹³⁷ Rubottom to Herter, “Evidence of a More Conciliatory Attitude Toward the U.S. by Castro and Government of Cuba Since the President’s Statement of January 26th.,” 02/20/1960.

¹³⁸ Ferrer, *Cuba: An American History*, 342.

¹³⁹ “OFFICIAL HISTORY OF THE BAY OF PIGS OPERATION - VOLUME 1 - PART 1 | CIA FOIA (Foia.Cia.Gov),” accessed February 16, 2023, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/5076ddc4993247d4d82b58d9>.

¹⁴⁰ Ferrer, *Cuba: An American History*, 342.

¹⁴¹ Ferrer, *Cuba: An American History*, 342.

¹⁴² Ferrer, *Cuba: An American History*, 343.

Guerrilla.¹⁴³ After the funeral, Fidel Castro delivered one of his most famous and incendiary speeches, “*Patria o Muerte*,” which dismantled the theory that this explosion was an accident and implied the United States caused the explosion.¹⁴⁴

In the speech, Castro surmised that since the United States had gone to war with Spain over the 1898 explosion of the *U.S.S Maine*, it could have contrived the *Le Coubre* explosion.¹⁴⁵ He made it clear that he was not directly accusing the United States, as Castro believed he did not have enough evidence to do so.¹⁴⁶ Still, by disproving why it couldn’t have been anyone else and demonstrating how it would have been within the capabilities of the U.S., Castro left the listener with the message that the culprit was the United States.¹⁴⁷

However, this speech stands out for more than just anti-American rhetoric. There were also moments of extreme patriotism and a call out to the Cuban people. In one of his most famous parts, Castro described,

We believe not only that we will know how to resist aggression, but that we will know how to overcome any aggression, and that again we would have no other dilemma than that with which we began the revolutionary struggle: that of freedom or death. Only that freedom now means something else: freedom means homeland. And our dilemma would now be homeland or death.¹⁴⁸

In this discourse, Castro directly refers to Cuban revolutionary efforts, suggesting that the Revolution gave Cuba life and that pre-revolutionary Cuba was dead. Now that Cuba tasted

¹⁴³ Ferrer, *Cuba: An American History*, 343.

¹⁴⁴ “Palabras Pronunciadas En Las Honras Fúnebres de Las Víctimas de La Explosión Del Barco ‘La Coubre’ | Fidel Soldado de Las Ideas,” accessed February 16, 2023, <http://www.fidelcastro.cu/es/discursos/palabras-pronunciadas-en-las-honras-funebres-de-las-victimas-de-la-explosion-del-barco-la>.

¹⁴⁵ “Palabras Pronunciadas En Las Honras Fúnebres de Las Víctimas de La Explosión Del Barco ‘La Coubre’ | Fidel Soldado de Las Ideas.”

¹⁴⁶ “Palabras Pronunciadas En Las Honras Fúnebres de Las Víctimas de La Explosión Del Barco ‘La Coubre’ | Fidel Soldado de Las Ideas.”

¹⁴⁷ “Palabras Pronunciadas En Las Honras Fúnebres de Las Víctimas de La Explosión Del Barco ‘La Coubre’ | Fidel Soldado de Las Ideas.”

¹⁴⁸ “Palabras Pronunciadas En Las Honras Fúnebres de Las Víctimas de La Explosión Del Barco ‘La Coubre’ | Fidel Soldado de Las Ideas.”

freedom, a homeland without liberty would be comparable to death. This speech was a powerful, galvanizing statement that turned both Cubans toward Castro and Americans away from Castro. For many, this was a slight against U.S. democracy, revealing the faults of its system and demonstrating its inequities, all aspects of the United States that many wished to overlook.

Castro and his government continued to claim that the United States was responsible for the *Le Coubre* explosion throughout 1960 and 1961. On a diplomatic trip to Uruguay, President Dorticos blamed the “lies and deceit” of the United States as the responsible party for the explosion of *Le Coubre*, a theory supported by Fidel Castro during his appearances in Cuba.¹⁴⁹ The sharing of this theory by President Dorticos represented more than just a political offense against the United States: it demonstrated that Cuban anti-Americanism was beginning to be shared throughout Latin and South America. Throughout the Cold War, but particularly in the 1960s, the United States government was highly concerned with its reputation and presence in various countries worldwide, particularly the Latin American, Caribbean, and South American regions. Therefore, the U.S. government would not have taken this political slight lightly.

Unbeknownst to Fidel Castro or anyone in his government, the United States was also working to develop “A Program of Covert Action against the Castro Regime” with the Central Intelligence Association (C.I.A.) to cause regime change in Cuba.¹⁵⁰ In this highly classified document, the C.I.A. developed a program to “bring about the replacement of the Castro regime with one more devoted to the true interests of the Cuban people and more acceptable to the U. S. in such a manner as to avoid any appearance of U.S. intervention.”¹⁵¹ This objective makes clear

¹⁴⁹ Roy Rubottom to Christian Herter, “Cuban Propaganda Distributed to U.S. Members on Delegation to the Council of Organization of American States,” Letter, June 2, 1960, 1223, National Archives at College Park.

¹⁵⁰ “OFFICIAL HISTORY OF THE BAY OF PIGS OPERATION - VOLUME 1 - PART 1 | CIA FOIA (Foia.Cia.Gov).”

¹⁵¹ “OFFICIAL HISTORY OF THE BAY OF PIGS OPERATION - VOLUME 1 - PART 2 | CIA FOIA (Foia.Cia.Gov),” accessed February 17, 2023, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/5076ddc4993247d4d82b58da>.

that Eisenhower and his administration argued they were working on behalf of the “Cuban people” and secondarily supporting the interests of the United States.¹⁵² Eisenhower was determined to keep this plan a secret and the United States’ non-interventionism policy within the public sphere. However, as of March 17, American policy towards Cuba and Castro was shifting. I interject here to argue that, with this decision to develop a covert program to overthrow the Castro regime, Eisenhower privately ended political relations with Cuba, even if the public rupture didn’t come until months later. Once Eisenhower and the C.I.A. developed this program and put it into effect, there was no turning back: the United States and Cuba were now enemies. However, while this marked the point of no return for a political alliance between Cuba and the United States, the economic rupture between Cuba and the U.S. government came later in 1960, but before the official end of relations in January 1961.

Within this program, there were four main objectives. The first was concerned with creating a feasible anti-Castro force based outside of Cuba; the second focused on creating new communication that would allow for U.S.-approved propaganda in Cuba; the third worked to develop a covert organization within Cuba to support the anti-Castro movement; and, finally, the fourth focused on the development of a paramilitary force that could overthrow Castro.¹⁵³ The slogan “Restore the Revolution” was chosen to tie this unsanctioned invasion back to the ideals of American democracy.¹⁵⁴ Of note, however, is that the United States recognized the Cuban Revolution and its government; consequently, the language “Restore the Revolution” speaks to a historical inaccuracy or ambiguity, as it is unclear if the U.S. meant before Castro, before Batista,

¹⁵² “OFFICIAL HISTORY OF THE BAY OF PIGS OPERATION - VOLUME 1 - PART 2 | CIA FOIA (Foia.Cia.Gov).”

¹⁵³ “OFFICIAL HISTORY OF THE BAY OF PIGS OPERATION - VOLUME 1 - PART 2 | CIA FOIA (Foia.Cia.Gov).”

¹⁵⁴ “OFFICIAL HISTORY OF THE BAY OF PIGS OPERATION - VOLUME 1 - PART 2 | CIA FOIA (Foia.Cia.Gov).”

or another period. Eisenhower and his administration clarified that there should be no public connection to the United States or public backing throughout this program. However, despite its attempts to keep it covert, with this program and a pledge of almost five million dollars (around forty-five million in 2023 U.S.D.), the Eisenhower Administration resolutely pushed U.S.-Cuban relations towards rupture. When President John F. Kennedy (J.F.K.) took power in 1961, he was made aware of these covert plans and continued and executed the invasion of the Bay of Pigs in April 1961.¹⁵⁵

In sum, the month of March 1960 was a pivotal one for U.S.-Cuban relations. First, the leaders of Cuba, such as Fidel Castro and President Dorticos, publicly denounced and accused the United States of involvement with the explosion of *Le Coubre*. Second, President Eisenhower also signed off on a covert program to overthrow Castro's regime in Cuba. Therefore, while the U.S. and Cuba severed public relations in January 1961, I argue that March 1960 was the point of no return for U.S.-Cuban political relations. Cuban leaders no longer held restraint in public spheres, and the United States officials prepared to intervene covertly, two decisions with irreparable outcomes. Evidence suggests that this month did not mark the end of relations, as evidenced by Ambassador Bonsal's return to Cuba on March 16, 1960.¹⁵⁶ However, I believe that, despite public continuance and maintenance of relations, March 1960 prompted the unofficial end of political relations from the perspective of the U.S. government and established the grounds for a public rupture.

The Deterioration of Economic Relations: Oil and Sugar

¹⁵⁵ "OFFICIAL HISTORY OF THE BAY OF PIGS OPERATION - VOLUME 1 - PART 1 | CIA FOIA (Foia.Cia.Gov)."

¹⁵⁶ American Embassy in Havana to Secretary of State, "2396, March 16, 3:00 p.m.," March 16, 1960, 16.

In the late spring and early summer of 1960, Castro began nationalizing the oil and sugar industry. In April of 1960, Castro started importing Soviet oil as part of a trade agreement for sugar.¹⁵⁷ However, conflict arose when the Cuban government asked American-owned refineries like Shell, Standard Oil, and Texaco to work on the crude oil.¹⁵⁸ The U.S. government requested that the companies not refine the Soviet oil, and, in turn, they refused to do so, prompting Castro's eventual decision to nationalize American refineries in June of 1960.¹⁵⁹ Before the seizure of refineries, U.S. government officials were already concerned with the issue of Soviet oil in Cuba and the necessity (or lack thereof) for American involvement in the oil affairs of Cuba. In a letter to Secretary Herter, Assistant Secretary Rubottom detailed that, as of June 1960, "in order to supply present Cuban needs of 80-90,000 barrels per day approximately ½ of the Russian tanker capacity [would] be required," and implied that the Soviet oil risk, while substantial in its connections to the spread of the Soviet bloc, had its own infeasibilities.¹⁶⁰

In response to this disparity of oil availability, Rubottom suggested that the oil companies expected "at a minimum that their representative governments [would] protest vigorously should their refineries be seized" instead of offering full support behind American companies who fought against Soviet competitors or clients in Cuba,¹⁶¹ Later that same month after Castro seized the refineries, there was no reaction or response from the Eisenhower administration. However, this seizure of refineries marked the beginning of a long process of nationalization by Castro as he looked to increase or expand the independence of the Cuban economy and restrict the

¹⁵⁷ Gott, *Cuba*, 183.

¹⁵⁸ Gott, *Cuba*, 183.

¹⁵⁹ Gott, *Cuba*, 183.

¹⁶⁰ Roy Rubottom to Christian Herter, "United States Policy Towards Cuba," June 27, 1960, 1223, National Archives at College Park.

¹⁶¹ Rubottom to Herter, "United States Policy Towards Cuba," 06/27/1960.

corruption and exploitation of private American businesses. In contrast, at the same time, he was also actively embarking on new trade agreements with the Soviet Union.

Mainly in response to these economic changes, on June 27, Assistant Secretary Rubottom wrote to Secretary of State Herter and described the current understanding and approach towards American policy in Cuba. Within this seventeen-page correspondence, Rubottom detailed various aspects of the current knowledge of Cuba, such as economic problems, anti-Castro elements, political factors, the position of the Organization of the American States (O.A.S.), and more. Within this letter, Rubottom acknowledged that the State Department and C.I.A. had decided that “it would be impossible to carry on friendly relations with Castro Government in Cuba” and that overthrow was needed.¹⁶² As such, he highlighted various specific factors within the Castro regime that made cooperation between the two states impossible. Rubottom cited the “predisposition” present in many of Castro’s advisors for communism but did not state that this predisposition included Castro.¹⁶³ However, within this introduction to the letter, Rubottom built upon Eisenhower’s points from his secret program of March and suggested that Cuban exiles needed to be the ones to overthrow Castro, not only to allow for the continued official public policy of American non-interventionism but also to create the perception of a people-led Revolution.¹⁶⁴

While returning to the issue of sugar and Cuba, Rubottom suggested that the U.S. could apply economic pressure via the sugar market to change political realities. He wrote, “as of June 24, the Cubans had certified a total of 2,180,000 short tons of their present U.S. quota of 3,120,000 short tons. Only by reducing the present quota by the remaining balance would serious

¹⁶² Rubottom to Herter, “United States Policy Towards Cuba,” 06/27/1960.

¹⁶³ Rubottom to Herter, “United States Policy Towards Cuba,” 06/27/1960.

¹⁶⁴ Rubottom to Herter, “United States Policy Towards Cuba,” 06/27/1960.

pressure be exerted on the Cuban economy through quota legislation.”¹⁶⁵ This argument highlights the intrinsic tie between economic and political affairs at the time. Rubottom understood the significance of the sugar industry in Cuba and the United States. By suggesting that the U.S. change its current quota standards to apply pressure and cause change, he was willing to risk high consumer prices of sugar to apply pressure to bring political change in Cuba. In response to the need to exert economic pressure on the sugar industry, particularly in response to the nationalization of oil refineries, Rubottom placed the sugar industry as a space of conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union. Just as the Soviet Union could weaponize oil to counter the United States and ally with Cuba, so too could it wield its economic influence of the sugar industry to counter Soviet influence in Cuba.

The Cuban turn towards the Soviet Union economically caused a diplomatic issue for the United States. Although the United States heavily utilized Cuban sugar, it could no longer overlook the increasing role of the Soviet Union in Cuba. In many ways, at this point in the Cold War (summer of 1960), it did not matter if Castro or his forces were completely communist. Communism wasn't clearly defined or understood and represented a complex issue for American leaders and the public. For some, all it took to be considered communist was an economic alliance with the Soviet Union. Therefore, in consideration of this oil issue, for many, the role of the Soviet Union proved that the United States had lost Cuba to communism. However, it remained unclear if Castro himself was a communist. It appears as though these specifics did not matter, as, when it boiled down, the Soviets had something that the Americans could not provide: the ability to let Cuba set the terms and the support of nationalizing tendencies. Therefore, as

¹⁶⁵ Rubottom to Herter, “United States Policy Towards Cuba,” 06/27/1960.

Cuba needed to sell sugar to rebuild its national economy, it went to the next market and customer: the Soviet Union.

However, more than just a consumer of Cuban sugar, in 1960, Soviet-Cuban relations began to transform. In February of 1960, Soviet Vice-Premier Anastas Mikoyan visited Cuba, beginning initial trade between the Soviet Union and Cuba.¹⁶⁶ Months later, in response to the American company's refusal to refine the oil and the subsequent Cuban seizure of the refineries, the U.S. government suspended Cuba's sugar quota on July 6, 1960.¹⁶⁷ In response to this suspension, Cuba and Castro began to sell sugar to the Soviet Union at 4.9¢ per pound, which readily accepted it.¹⁶⁸ This development, in turn, created a cycle of the U.S.S.R. purchasing sugar from Cuba and Cuba purchasing oil from the U.S.S.R. This economic dependency further enraged the U.S. government, which continued to push back economically through an embargo on trade on August 28.¹⁶⁹ Simultaneously, the Soviet Union also began to offer loans to Cuba, enabling it to have economic power through trade and industry and loans and savings.¹⁷⁰ Therefore, Castro's decision to simultaneously nationalize almost all American businesses in Cuba while increasingly allying with the Soviet Union solidified the end of economic relations between the two countries. Therefore, by the end of 1960, there was no remaining economic exchange between the United States and Cuba.

Soviet Support of Cuba

Although political relations were ruptured covertly from the background politics of the United States and its political and economic relations, the Cuban movement towards an alliance

¹⁶⁶ Castro, *Fidel Castro Reader*, 7.

¹⁶⁷ Castro, *Fidel Castro Reader*, 7.

¹⁶⁸ Jorge F. Perez-Lopez, "Cuban-Soviet Sugar Trade: Price and Subsidy Issues," *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 7, no. 1 (1988), <https://doi.org/10.2307/3338444>.

¹⁶⁹ Castro, *Fidel Castro Reader*, 7.

¹⁷⁰ Weinstein and Institute for the Study of Human Issues, *Revolutionary Cuba in the World Arena*, 58.

with the Soviet Union prompted changes in global understandings of U.S.-Cuban relations. Concurrent political changes were occurring within Cuba as Castro worked to nationalize and change its economy. At the beginning of 1960, the Cuban government was primarily composed of radicals, communists, and left-leaning politicians and had just finished a wave of consolidatory efforts that removed any anti-communists from political positions. Throughout the year, the U.S.S.R. and Cuba established official diplomatic relations. In Mikoyan's February visit, he praised its leaders and people.¹⁷¹ Although this visit was not considered a form of official relations or alliance with the Soviet Union, it was not taken lightly by the U.S. government and strongly contributed to Eisenhower's decision to approve the plans to depose Castro one month later.¹⁷² Later that year, on June 11, on national television, Castro invited Khrushchev to travel to Cuba.¹⁷³ In Ambassador Bonsal's summary of the event, he highlighted how "Castro had praise for Russia, Czechoslovakia, and Red China" and that the United States should "no longer [expect Cuba to] raise hand whenever the United States did in international forums," as its political allegiance no longer lay entirely with the United States.¹⁷⁴ In this invitation on a national and public forum, Castro clarified that political allegiance had officially begun to support Communist countries, no longer capitalist, economic adversaries like the United States.

This support appeared to extend mutually between Cuba and the Soviet Union. In a CIA-created "Curriculum Digest" and update from July 11, 1960, on the current state of affairs

¹⁷¹ "Anastas Mikoyan Toast at the Reception at the Cuban Embassy, Moscow | National Security Archive," accessed March 20, 2023, <https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/document/29392-document-2-anastas-mikoyan-toast-reception-cuban-embassy-moscow>.

¹⁷² "OFFICIAL HISTORY OF THE BAY OF PIGS OPERATION - VOLUME 1 - PART 1 | CIA FOIA (Foia.Cia.Gov)."

¹⁷³ Philip Bonsal to Christian Herter, "3557, June 11, Noon," Telegram, June 11, 1960, 1223, National Archives at College Park.

¹⁷⁴ Bonsal to Herter, "3557, June 11, Noon," 06/11/1960.

between the United States and Cuba, the C.I.A. highlighted that Soviet support enabled further advances and development of anti-US rhetoric within Cuba.¹⁷⁵ Three days later, Khrushchev publicly supported Castro and Cuba, stating that the United States had committed economic aggression and had planned for armed intervention.¹⁷⁶ Khrushchev argued that “figuratively speaking, Soviet artillery [could] with their rocket firepower support the Cuban people if the aggressive forces in the Pentagon dare begin intervention against Cuba.”¹⁷⁷ While this was not a direct promise of military support or aggression against the United States, the policy was clear. If Cuba needed military defense, the Soviet Union would come to its aid.

Within Cuba, this message was both celebrated and critiqued. On July 10, Che Guevara publicly stated, “Cuba [is now] a glorious island defended by rockets of the greatest military power in history. [Suggesting that they were] practically the arbiters of world peace.”¹⁷⁸ Che, publicly a Marxist, basked in the support of the Soviet Union. However, Castro interjected a day later and stated that he appreciated Khrushchev’s “spontaneous” support, but “Cuba [did] not depend for the defense of its sovereignty and independence on Soviet rockets, but rather on its

¹⁷⁵ *Excerpt of a “Current Intelligence Digest” Article (Pages 12 and 13) Regarding Cuban Rhetoric against the U.S., Which Has Become Emboldened by Soviet Support of the Cuban Regime of Premier Fidel Castro* (United States: Central Intelligence Agency, 1960),

<https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CK2349634913/USDD?u=brun62796&sid=bookmark-USDD&xid=2e2ca528&pg=1>.

¹⁷⁶ *Excerpt of an Article in the “Current Intelligence Weekly Review, Part I - Of Immediate Interest” (Pages 1 to 4) with Regard to Soviet General Chairman Nikita Khrushchev’s Promise of Support in the Event of Any U.S. Aggression against Cuba. Followers of Cuban Premier Fidel Castro Are Enthusiastic over Khrushchev’s Statements* (United States: Central Intelligence Agency, 1960),

<https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CK2349639097/USDD?sid=bookmark-USDD&xid=893c7d22&pg=1>.

¹⁷⁷ *Excerpt of an Article in the “Current Intelligence Weekly Review, Part I - Of Immediate Interest” (Pages 1 to 4) with Regard to Soviet General Chairman Nikita Khrushchev’s Promise of Support in the Event of Any U.S. Aggression against Cuba. Followers of Cuban Premier Fidel Castro Are Enthusiastic over Khrushchev’s Statements.*

¹⁷⁸ *Excerpt of an Article in the “Current Intelligence Weekly Review, Part I - Of Immediate Interest” (Pages 1 to 4) with Regard to Soviet General Chairman Nikita Khrushchev’s Promise of Support in the Event of Any U.S. Aggression against Cuba. Followers of Cuban Premier Fidel Castro Are Enthusiastic over Khrushchev’s Statements.*

reason and justice of its cause.”¹⁷⁹ This clarification, although contradictory to Guevara’s celebration of the decision, revealed both Castro’s wish that Cuba would be able to solve its problems independently and his underlying appreciation for the support of the Soviets. Furthermore, to make clear their gratitude to the Soviet Union, President Dorticos also publicly celebrated the Soviet’s willingness to support the Cuban sugar industry, particularly after the departure of the United States.¹⁸⁰ Therefore, although Cuban officials’ responses to this Soviet declaration of support were not heterogenous, the overall global impression was a celebration of Soviet aid and alliance.

Final Deliberations and the Official Rupture of Relations

While there had been discontent surrounding the Castro regime for over a year, in December 1960, the Department of State and the White House renewed efforts to break political relations with Cuba publicly.¹⁸¹ In a telegram, Consul Braddock argued that many Cuban exiles in the United States made it an eventual inevitability of their exile’s overthrow of the Castro regime and suggested that it was better to work with these forces rather than risk domestic troubles.¹⁸² Furthermore, he highlighted that since these exiles were already rumored to be backed and supported by the U.S. government, there was the possibility that “a situation [could arise] that may prove embarrassing to the United States as long as diplomatic relations are

¹⁷⁹ *Excerpt of an Article in the “Current Intelligence Weekly Review, Part I - Of Immediate Interest” (Pages 1 to 4) with Regard to Soviet General Chairman Nikita Khrushchev’s Promise of Support in the Event of Any U.S. Aggression against Cuba. Followers of Cuban Premier Fidel Castro Are Enthusiastic over Khrushchev’s Statements.*

¹⁸⁰ *Excerpt of an Article in the “Current Intelligence Weekly Review, Part I - Of Immediate Interest” (Pages 1 to 4) with Regard to Soviet General Chairman Nikita Khrushchev’s Promise of Support in the Event of Any U.S. Aggression against Cuba. Followers of Cuban Premier Fidel Castro Are Enthusiastic over Khrushchev’s Statements.*

¹⁸¹ Daniel Braddock to Department of State, “Examination of Advantages of Rupture of Diplomatic Relations with Cuba,” Telegram, December 5, 1960, 1223, National Archives at College Park.

¹⁸² Braddock to Department of State, “Examination of Advantages of Rupture of Diplomatic Relations with Cuba,” 12/05/1960.

maintained with the Castro government,” such as public embarrassment for failed overthrow attempts or incorrect connections to the United States.¹⁸³

However, he also argued for reasons past potential embarrassment or domestic strife. Braddock pushed for the treatment of Cuba as similar to that of China and to place a relative “quarantine” on its goods and imports.¹⁸⁴ By restricting what goods entered Cuba, Braddock argued, it would be easier for the United States to address the rising problem of communism within Cuba and its influence in the region.¹⁸⁵ To treat Cuba as China, a country publicly communist, suggests that the United States government had officially accepted Cuba’s embracing of communism. Furthermore, Braddock described that “most Latin American Embassies in Havana would recommend support of a U.S. initiative to break relations” and that Haiti, Dominican Republic, Guatemala, and Nicaragua already had no established relations with Cuba.¹⁸⁶ This claim situated the issue of rupture of relations within the larger context of the political volatility of Latin America and advocated on behalf of rupturing associations. Finally, from a practical standpoint, he argued that officials that worked for the United States in Cuba were not treated well and should be given other opportunities.¹⁸⁷ All in told, Braddock advocated for various practical and political reasons that the United States should break relations with Cuba.

¹⁸³ Braddock to Department of State, “Examination of Advantages of Rupture of Diplomatic Relations with Cuba,” 12/05/1960.

¹⁸⁴ Braddock to Department of State, “Examination of Advantages of Rupture of Diplomatic Relations with Cuba,” 12/05/1960.

¹⁸⁵ Braddock to Department of State, “Examination of Advantages of Rupture of Diplomatic Relations with Cuba,” 12/05/1960.

¹⁸⁶ Braddock to Department of State, “Examination of Advantages of Rupture of Diplomatic Relations with Cuba,” 12/05/1960.

¹⁸⁷ Braddock to Department of State, “Examination of Advantages of Rupture of Diplomatic Relations with Cuba,” 12/05/1960.

On January 3, 1961, President Eisenhower formally broke relations with Cuba and the Castro regime in his last month as president. The final factor that prompted the government to act was not one directly related to communism or the economy; instead, the Cuban government approached the American Embassy and Consulate and requested that the total of all American officials living in Cuba not exceed eleven.¹⁸⁸ Castro's regime made this request at 1:20 AM, and Cuban officials gave a 48-hour window for American personnel to evacuate Cuba.¹⁸⁹ The execution and proposal of this request were taken as a major offense against the United States that restricted its ability to work diplomatically in Cuba. Secretary Herter wrote in his telegram to the Embassy that "this unwarranted action by the Government of Cuba places crippling limitations on the ability of the United States Mission to carry on its normal diplomatic and consular functions."¹⁹⁰ Herter concluded that the restriction was "designed to achieve an effective termination of diplomatic and consular relations between the government of Cuba and the government of the United States."¹⁹¹ In short, he did not believe there was no political or diplomatic viability of relations within Cuba with only eleven representatives of the U.S. in Cuba.

The United States government officially severed ties with Cuba in response to this request. In a statement, President Eisenhower described that in response to the slight, he "instructed the Secretary of State to deliver to the Charge d'Affaires ad interim of Cuba in Washington... and state that the Government of the United States is hereby formally terminating

¹⁸⁸ Armado Flórez-Ibarra and Edwin Vallon to Roy Rubottom, "Break in Diplomatic and Consular Relations between Cuba and the United States," Memorandum, January 3, 1961, 3075, National Archives at College Park.

¹⁸⁹ Christian Herter to American Embassy in Havana, "Break in Diplomatic and Consular Relations between Cuba and the United States," Telegram, January 3, 1961, National Archives at College Park.

¹⁹⁰ Herter to American Embassy in Havana, "Break in Diplomatic and Consular Relations between Cuba and the United States," 01/03/1961.

¹⁹¹ Herter to American Embassy in Havana, "Break in Diplomatic and Consular Relations between Cuba and the United States," 01/03/1961.

diplomatic and consular relations with the Government of Cuba.”¹⁹² Eisenhower further doubled down and suggested that “this calculated action on the part of the Castro Government [was] only the latest of a long series of harassment, baseless accusations, and slander. There [was] a limit to what the United States in self respect can endure.”¹⁹³ In this statement, Eisenhower and his administration attempted to blame the rupture of relations entirely on Cuba, suggesting that it was Castro’s fault that the relations had deteriorated so far and that the United States had given his regime a chance to better relations, to no avail.

Next, Eisenhower addressed the Cuban people and suggested that the United States and his administration still backed and supported the Cuban people. He wrote that their “friendship with the Cuban people had not been affected. [He clarified that it was] his hope and conviction that in the not too distant future, it will be possible for the historic friendship [to return.]”¹⁹⁴ In this distinction, Eisenhower returned to earlier claims of connection to the Cuban people, to the idea of a “true” Revolution, and once again faulted the Castro government. He admitted no fault and no outward threats. Less than 24 hours after Cuba demanded a reduction of diplomatic staff, diplomatic and consular relations were officially broken between the United States and Cuba.

In response to the rupture of diplomatic relations, the Cuban *Ministerio de las Relaciones Exteriores* (Ministry of Foreign Affairs) wrote back to the American Embassy in Havana, supporting its decision to leave and providing details of their evacuation from Washington, DC. The Minister of Foreign Affairs, Raúl Roa García wrote,”

At the same time, we reiterate the utmost safety for all American citizens in Cuba, whether diplomatic and consulate officers, or

¹⁹² Herter to American Embassy in Havana, “Break in Diplomatic and Consular Relations between Cuba and the United States,” 01/03/1961.

¹⁹³ Herter to American Embassy in Havana, “Break in Diplomatic and Consular Relations between Cuba and the United States,” 01/03/1961.

¹⁹⁴ Herter to American Embassy in Havana, “Break in Diplomatic and Consular Relations between Cuba and the United States,” 01/03/1961.

citizens and tourists. The Cuban personnel in our own Embassy in Washington and our diplomatic staff in the U.S. will also be withdrawn as soon as possible.¹⁹⁵

This response makes it clear: both the United States and Cuba knew that relations were irreparable. There was no lingering resentment or pushback to try and maintain relations; instead, both sides knew it was time to close diplomatic relations. However, it is critical to acknowledge that the Cuban government did keep its promises to ensure a diplomatic and protected departure of all Americans in Cuba, demonstrating that relations between the two, while imperfect, were not at the level of violence or war on either side. Within the context of the Cold War, the rupture of relations between the United States and Cuba was a major one. Countries in Latin America and elsewhere looked towards the possible fallout of this decision and possible Soviet involvement in the Western hemisphere.

Therefore, by the end of 1960 and the beginning of 1961, both sides publicly and privately damaged U.S.-Cuban relations. Through the development of the covert program to overthrow Castro, political relations were effectively ruptured in private. A few months later, Castro effectively cut off Cuba's sugar and oil industries from the United States, cutting economic relations. However, public rupture of relations could only come in response to public movements by Cuba or Castro. As such, they arrived at the end of an increasingly public alliance with the Soviet Union and a request that effectively cut off all functionality of American diplomats in Cuba. In sum, when President John F. Kennedy came into power, there was no hope nor turning back for U.S.-Cuban relations.

¹⁹⁵ Raúl Roa Garcia to American Embassy in Havana, "2692, January 4," Letter, January 4, 1961, 3075, National Archives at College Park.

Conclusion

J.F.K. in Power

President Kennedy came into power on January 20, 1961.¹ Five days later, when asked if he would consider reopening relations with Cuba, he stated that his administration was instead interested in “movements in Latin America and Central America, and the Caribbean, which provide a better life for the people,” implying that he had no plans to reopen relations.² Further explaining this problem, he suggested that the U.S. government would support future governments within Latin America to benefit the people and that “American policy will be directed towards that end.”³ This thinly veiled critique implied that the Castro government was not for the betterment of the people, and, for that reason alone, the United States was not willing to publicly reignite relations with Cuba.⁴

A few months later, on April 12, 1961, when asked if there had been a decision “on how far this country would be willing to go in helping an anti-Castro uprising or invasion in Cuba,” J.F.K. reaffirmed previous promises of public non-interventionism.⁵ Kennedy clearly stated, “there will not be, under any conditions, an intervention in Cuba by United States armed forces, and this government will do everything it possibly can... to make sure there are no Americans involved in any actions inside Cuba.”⁶ To J.F.K., non-interventionism in Cuba meant a lack of direct usage of American armed forces inside Cuba. He argued that their recent indictment of a

¹ “The Bay of Pigs | JFK Library,” accessed March 3, 2023, <https://www.jfklibrary.org/learn/about-jfk/jfk-in-history/the-bay-of-pigs>.

² “25 January 1961 | JFK Library,” accessed March 3, 2023, <https://www.jfklibrary.org/asset-viewer/archives/JFKPOF/054/JFKPOF-054-001>.

³ “The President’s News Conference of January 25, 1961 [Version 2] | JFK Library,” accessed March 5, 2023, <https://www.jfklibrary.org/asset-viewer/archives/USG/USG-01-25-2/USG-01-25-2>.

⁴ “The President’s News Conference of January 25, 1961 [Version 2] | JFK Library.”

⁵ “News Conference 9, April 12, 1961 | JFK Library,” accessed March 5, 2023, <https://www.jfklibrary.org/archives/other-resources/john-f-kennedy-press-conferences/news-conference-9>.

⁶ “News Conference 9, April 12, 1961 | JFK Library.”

Cuban exile in Florida who had been planning an invasion to “establish a Batista-like regime” proved that the United States did not want to concern itself with the internal politics of Cuba.⁷ Later in the press conference, when asked if he would “oppose any attempt to mount an offensive against Castro” from the U.S., he replied, “if [the] phrase is ‘to mount an offensive, as [he understood] it, [he] would be opposed to mounting an offensive.’”⁸ This statement was disproven a mere five days later, with the beginning of the invasion of the Bay of Pigs and the breaking of the promise of non-interventionism.

Of note, however, is J.F.K.’s continuing unwillingness to classify Castro as a communist. Even at this point in 1961, after the official rupture of relations, J.F.K still would not directly name him as a communist. He stated that Castro had “indicated his admiration on many occasions for the Communist revolution. He [had] appointed a great many of Communists to high positions.”⁹ While he acknowledged Castro’s support for communist figures, he still stated J.F.K. would “not want to characterize Mr. Castro, except to say that by Castro’s own words, he has indicated his hostility to democratic rule in this hemisphere... and has associated himself most intimately with the Sino-Soviet bloc” instead of the American bloc.¹⁰ Therefore, although President Kennedy was unwilling to claim that Castro was a communist publicly, he was willing to recognize Castro’s general inclination towards the communist bloc of the Cold War.

Bay of Pigs, April 1961

Throughout the spring of 1961, Eisenhower’s covert program continued to develop under the Kennedy Administration. Despite public promises of American non-interventionism within Cuba, ultimately, President Kennedy signed off on a plan that included air strikes on April 15,

⁷ “News Conference 9, April 12, 1961 | JFK Library.”

⁸ “News Conference 9, April 12, 1961 | JFK Library.”

⁹ “News Conference 9, April 12, 1961 | JFK Library.”

¹⁰ “News Conference 9, April 12, 1961 | JFK Library.”

followed by an aquatic invasion through a beach on the 17th.¹¹ However, the forces did not precisely execute this plan, as the planning process was highly disorganized and disconnected, something that contemporary and modern historians attribute to its failure.¹² For example, as of March 29, less than a month before the official Bay of Pigs invasion, there was no agreed-upon plan to depose Castro, demonstrating a lack of communication.¹³ A memorandum in Kennedy's private collection from March 29, 1961, revealed that two options were still viable at the time: the first being "to overthrow the Castro regime," and the second being "toleration of the Castro regime, combined with efforts to isolate it and to insulate the rest of Latin America from it."¹⁴ Just three weeks before the invasion, the U.S. government hadn't even decided if it wanted to invade, thereby resulting in a lack of proper training and planning.¹⁵

Put forth by Eisenhower's "Program of Covert Action against the Castro Regime," the presidential administrations and the C.I.A. worked together to train Cuban exiles and political opponents in Guatemala to support their invasion at the Bay of Pigs.¹⁶ This plan primarily built on the past success of overthrowing Árbenz in Guatemala, demonstrated by the training of the forces in Guatemala, which suggested that the U.S. government expected this to be an easy operation. However, this proved to be far more complex than they had imagined. There were various problems with the execution; from the last-minute reduction of air to insufficiently trained and supplied troops, the invasion was a spectacular failure.¹⁷ The subsequent Cuban response killed over 100 men and resulted in Castro's forces capturing almost 1200 insurgents,

¹¹ Ada Ferrer, *Cuba: An American History*, First Scribner hardcover edition (New York: Scribner, 2021), 362.

¹² Trumbull Higgins, *The Perfect Failure: Kennedy, Eisenhower, and the CIA at the Bay of Pigs*, First (Ontario, Canada: Penguin Books Canada Ltd., 1987), 154.

¹³ "Cuba: General, 1961: January-March | JFK Library," accessed March 3, 2023, <https://www.jfklibrary.org/asset-viewer/archives/JFKPOF/114a/JFKPOF-114a-007>.

¹⁴ "Cuba: General, 1961: January-March | JFK Library."

¹⁵ "Cuba: General, 1961: January-March | JFK Library."

¹⁶ "Bay of Pigs Chronology," accessed March 3, 2023, <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/bayofpigs/chron.html>.

¹⁷ Ferrer, *Cuba: An American History*, 364.

resulting in not only Kennedy's first major public failure as a leader but also a further consolidation of power in the Castro regime, as Castro was able to capture a large portion of his adversaries.¹⁸ Ultimately, only Castro, the very person that this program had been designed to overthrow, emerged unharmed and victorious. Not only had the United States failed, but it had done so on an extremely public stage, thus starting a new era of U.S.-Cuban relations, one defined by power on both sides.

The Aftermath

On April 20, President Kennedy gave a speech to the American Society of Newspapers Editors and addressed the lessons of the failed invasion of the Bay of Pigs. In this speech, he worked to move the United States away from the failure of or responsibility for this invasion and instead highlighted that these forces were not "mercenaries" but loyal citizens of Cuba.¹⁹ In this speech, he argued that Cuba was an "unhappy island" on which a fight occurred between "Cuban patriots against a Cuban dictator."²⁰ This rhetoric implied that these C.I.A.-trained invaders were patriots fighting against tyranny and working to restore Cuba without Castro.²¹ In order to justify the involvement of the United States, J.F.K. argued that "any unilateral American intervention, in the absence of an external attack upon ourselves or an ally, would have been contrary to our traditions and our international obligations. But let the record show that our restraint is not inexhaustible," and suggested that the harm to Cuban democracy and the slights against American democracy were too much to overlook, prompting U.S. involvement.

¹⁸ Peter Wyden, *Bay of Pigs: The Untold Story* (New York, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979).

¹⁹ "Address to American Society of Newspaper Editors, 20 April 1961 | JFK Library," accessed March 3, 2023, <https://www.jfklibrary.org/asset-viewer/archives/JFKPOF/034/JFKPOF-034-018>.

²⁰ "Address to American Society of Newspaper Editors, 20 April 1961 | JFK Library."

²¹ "Address to American Society of Newspaper Editors, 20 April 1961 | JFK Library."

Furthermore, J.F.K. argued that the United States was acting within the context of the global Cold War, connecting the Bay of Pigs to Laos, Korea, Vietnam, and other areas of international conflict and suggesting that the failed invasion was excusable.²² He said, “no greater task faces this country or this administration. No other challenge is more deserving of our every effort and energy” than stopping the spread of communism to new areas in the world, like Cuba.²³ To Kennedy, the guiding principle of all American interventionism and action moving forward must be to preserve, restore, and fight for democracy worldwide.

Kennedy ended the address by stating that the United States intended “to profit from this lesson..., to reexamine and reorient our forces of all [sic] tactics and our institutions here in this community..., [and] to intensify our efforts for a struggle in many ways more difficult than war.”²⁴ In this quote, Kennedy acknowledged that the United States needed to learn from its mistakes at the Bay of Pigs; however, he still ended by suggesting that it would learn, grow, and continue to support regimes throughout the world to reach democracy. This statement was a claim that he would later relatively backtrack in his address in November of 1961, wherein he acknowledged the limitations of the “American solution” and the faults of the United States.²⁵

A Socialist Revolution

A day after the first attack on the Bay of Pigs, on April 16, Castro formally and officially declared his revolution a socialist revolution. Speaking outside the cemetery, Fidel Castro gave a public and inflammatory speech recognizing the loss of life. However, it was also a speech dedicated to calling out the hypocrisy of the United States in bombing Cuba after Pearl Harbor.²⁶

²² “Address to American Society of Newspaper Editors, 20 April 1961 | JFK Library.”

²³ “Address to American Society of Newspaper Editors, 20 April 1961 | JFK Library.”

²⁴ “Address to American Society of Newspaper Editors, 20 April 1961 | JFK Library.”

²⁵ Kennedy, “John F. Kennedy Quotations | JFK Library.”

²⁶ Fidel Castro, *Fidel Castro Reader*, ed. David Deutschmann and Deborah Shnookal (Melbourne, Australia: Ocean Press, 2007), 188.

He continued to bash the United States, highlighting its history of imperialism, and claimed that “what imperialists can’t forgive is that we are here, and what these imperialists can’t forgive is the dignity, the firmness, the courage, the ideological integrity, the spirit of sacrifice and the revolutionary spirit of the Cuban people.”²⁷ This claim directly reflects Castro’s unwillingness to work with the United States, as he believes that the United States would never recognize the value of the Cuban Revolution at its core. However, more than that, he believes that the success and very existence of Cubans challenged the United States’ political and economic goals.

Therefore, in a complete change from his earlier rhetoric, he argued that “what they can’t forgive, the fact that we are here right under their very noses and that we have brought about a socialist revolution right under the nose of the United States.”²⁸ This speech was the first time Castro publicly referred to his movement as a “socialist revolution.”²⁹ Not only did this completely solidify his alliance with the Soviets and against the United States, but it also represented a significant change from his earlier rhetoric. During his rise to power and initial first two years in power, Castro refused to characterize himself or his politics as communist or socialist. Now, two years after taking control and one failed invasion by the United States later; he proudly and loudly claimed that his revolution had always been socialist.

Castro continued to describe the extent of socialism within his movement and began to utilize language connected to Marxism. He stated, “compañeros, workers, and peasants: this is a socialist and democratic revolution of the humble, by the humble, for the humble.”³⁰ By directly calling to the working classes, he harkened to language from Marxism and pushed the narrative that his forces and followers had always been socialist. He finished this speech with the loud

²⁷ Castro, *Fidel Castro Reader*, 188.

²⁸ Castro, *Fidel Castro Reader*, 188.

²⁹ Castro, *Fidel Castro Reader*, 188.

³⁰ Castro, *Fidel Castro Reader*, 189.

proclamation, “Long live the socialist revolution! Long live a free Cuba! Homeland or death! [*Patria o Muerte*] We will win.”³¹ He ended this speech on a patriotic note, calling back to the importance of the freedom of the homeland from the speech delivered after the explosion of the *Le Coubre*. In some ways, this roots his words within a more extended context of the time; however, despite his attempt to place the vision of socialism throughout the entire revolution, this represented a significant pivot from earlier attempts at staying clear of socialism.

Therefore, I argue that the United States government may have accelerated or pushed Fidel Castro toward communism. While he was always radical, relatively anti-foreigner, and tended to be left leaning, for years, Castro had sworn that he was not communist or socialist. He even backed this claim by separating his movement and forces from the Cuban Communist Party. Castro also actively worked to separate his politics from his brother or Che Guevara, further examples of a lack of historic socialism or communism in the earlier stages of his revolution. However, after the complete loss of relations with the United States and the support of the Soviet Union, Castro attempted to turn back time and rewrite history to claim that he had always been socialist.

Therefore, in some ways, it can be understood that the United States government catalyzed Castro towards communism and the Soviet Union. When the U.S. disagreed with financial standards regarding the sugar trade between the United States and Cuba, Cuba was forced to find another buyer and turned towards the Soviet Union. From there, the animosity between Cuba and the United States grew, and Cuba increasingly turned to the Soviet Union for guidance, support, or resources, such as the loan in 1960. Then, this accelerated political radicalization was sealed with the failed attack to depose Castro: The Bay of Pigs. At this point,

³¹ Castro, *Fidel Castro Reader*, 189.

economic and political relations had completely soured both privately and, following the Bay of Pigs, publicly. While impossible to know, it is interesting to consider if there ever would have been an economically feasible option for the capitalist United States to cooperate and work with the newly independent Cuba. Castro's goals for a more self-sufficient Cuba would likely have never aligned with the economic incentives of the U.S. government. Still, it is compelling to look back and reflect upon the two years when both sides attempted to work together.

I interject again here to clarify that I am not implying that Castro himself was never communist or socialist before this speech. Many aspects of Castro's decisions as a leader, speeches as a leader, and aspects of agrarian reform speak to connections to socialism. Moreover, communism is a matter inherently tied to all issues of the Cold War, including this breakdown of relations. However, I am arguing that despite Castro likely having strong, if not complete communist influence over him, in many ways, the United States rapidly accelerated his turn to communism and the U.S.S.R. due to an unwillingness and inability to cooperate with his vision economically. While the United States did not force Castro to become communist, their reluctance to work with Castro may have pushed Castro towards socialism.

A Reflection

To state it simply: U.S.-Cuban relations in the 1950s and 1960s were complicated. It was not just a matter of capitalism versus communism. Communism was a factor; however, it was not the sole factor. Castro did not declare himself or his movement as Communist until after the Bay of Pigs, yet the United States government understood Castro and his regime as communist months before.³² It was also not as black-and-white as the United States against Fidel Castro. Instead, as I argued throughout this analysis, this relationship was nuanced.

³² Taber, Michael, ed. *Fidel Castro's Speeches*. 1st ed. New York, N.Y: Pathfinder Press, 1981.

In Chapter One, I argued that contrary to popular belief, when Castro initially seized power in Cuba, he was met with relative acceptance by the United States. The U.S. and Castro were not enemies from the start; rather, due to the political fall from the grace of Batista and his inability to provide stability for American business interests, the United States first attempted to work with Castro and his forces. Chapter Two was a close analysis of this attempt at collaboration, in which I argued that both Castro and the United States wished to find common ground. Neither side was willing to give up on the other completely; however, economic and political unalignment resulted in reoccurring fractures. These little fractures built up in force in 1960, as explored in Chapter Three, resulting in the complete rupture of political relations, economic relations, and public diplomacy within a year.

While political and economic complexities allowed for the relative backing of Fidel Castro's seizure of power by the United States, so too did they prompt the eventual deterioration of relations (both publicly and privately), transforming Cuba into one of the most impactful hotspots for the Cold War and the global fight of capitalism versus communism.

So, when looking back at the deterioration of relations, it is interesting to question what this analysis has gained and has lost from deviating from the typical framework of Cold War analyses. As stated in the introduction, the sources were primarily from the U.S. government perspective, restricting some potential understanding of the Cuban or Soviet sides. However, at the same time, this allowed for a more in-depth analysis of the rapid destruction of U.S.-Cuban relations. Moreover, it enabled a deeper understanding of why Cuba was able to be such an extraordinary case within the Cold War. Yes, there was a large degree of geographical proximity and a fear of communism expanding into the Western hemisphere; however, at the same time, historical connections through the sugar and oil markets enabled the U.S. government to have a

more collaborative approach toward political relations. This, in turn, enabled Castro to collaborate with the United States and form this unique partnership relationship destroyed by a lack of mutual interests.

Overall, this approach and analysis pushes the boundaries of common Cold War thinking and works to form an alternative approach to understanding this history. As President John F. Kennedy said in a speech in 1963, “A nation reveals itself not only by the [people] it produces but also by the [people] it honors, the [people] it remembers.”³³ This quote perfectly encapsulates the spirit and significance of this project and the difference in historical memory between the people that a nation “honors” and “remembers.”³⁴ While some may look at Cuba in the Cold War and think only of the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962 or the Bay of Pigs, there is value in returning to the sources and understanding the more minor aspects of this history. Through this intentionality, it is possible to better understand complex historical situations, such as the deteriorations of U.S.-Cuban relations during the Cold War. By pushing to look at new information, new evidence, new “people” to remember, it became possible to understand how it was not just communism that led to the deterioration of U.S.-Cuban relations; instead, it was a variety of economic and political tensions, in no particular order, that proved that these two countries were incompatible in the visions of progress. Furthermore, by taking this approach, it was possible to suggest that the United States even catalyzed Fidel Castro’s turn to communism, suggesting that it may have been the only path available to him, while also acknowledging his own left leaning tendencies prior to U.S. involvement. In conclusion, this analysis and this approach to this very specific history allows for the development of nuance to a very well-studied history, details that do not directly contradict all other historical narratives regarding this

³³ Kennedy, “John F. Kennedy Quotations | JFK Library.”

³⁴ Kennedy, “John F. Kennedy Quotations | JFK Library.”

time. Instead, these details and this level of nuance seeks to complicate the understanding of the deterioration of relations and demonstrate the many ways in which it was not just communism that ultimately led to the breakdown of U.S.-Cuban relations from 1958-1961.

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