

**BEING SUCCESSFULLY NASTY:  
THE UNITED STATES, CUBA AND STATE  
SPONSORED TERRORISM, 1959-1976**

by

ROBERT G. DOUGLAS

B.A., University of Victoria, 2005

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT  
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

in the Department of History

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## **Abstract**

Despite being the global leader in the “war on terror,” the United States has been accused of sponsoring terrorism against Cuba. The following study assesses these charges. After establishing a definition of terrorism, it examines U.S.-Cuban relations from 1808 to 1958, arguing that the United States has historically employed violence in its efforts to control Cuba. U.S. leaders maintained this approach even after the Cuban Revolution: months after Fidel Castro’s guerrilla army took power, Washington began organizing Cuban exiles to carry out terrorist attacks against the island, and continued to support and tolerate such activities until the 1970s, culminating in what was the hemisphere’s most lethal act of airline terrorism before 9/11. Since then, the United States has maintained contact with well-known anti-Castro terrorists, in many cases employing and harbouring them, despite its claims to be fighting an international campaign against terrorism.

**“The C.I.A. taught us everything – everything...they taught us explosives, how to kill, bomb, trained us in acts of sabotage. When the Cubans were working for the C.I.A. they were called patriots...now they call it terrorism. The times have changed.”**

-Luis Posada Carriles,  
*New York Times*, 13 July 1998.

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# **INTRODUCTION**

During the past three decades the United States has twice declared a war on terrorism. Ronald Reagan did so immediately after taking office, proclaiming his administration would combat the “the evil scourge of terrorism,” while George W. Bush resurrected the campaign after the 9/11 attacks, pledging to “rid the world of the evil-doers.” In launching these offensives the world’s dominant power has portrayed itself, and has generally been treated by both the press and the academic world, as the leader in the international efforts against terrorism.<sup>1</sup>

Many critics of these policies, however, have questioned Washington’s ability to fight terrorism. These detractors, who include numerous scholars, human rights groups, and heads of state, argue the United States cannot be waging a war against terrorism because it has itself long been a prominent sponsor of terrorist activities. They cite instances of U.S.-sponsored terrorism in East Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America. Washington’s attempt to overthrow the Sandinista government in Nicaragua during the 1980s is often treated as one of the most obvious examples of such support: critics of the U.S.-led “wars on terror” refer to the fact that in 1986 the International Court of Justice (World Court) found the United States guilty of breaking international law in directing attacks on civilian targets, and ordered Washington to pay reparations to the government of Nicaragua. Though it had previously signed a treaty binding it to the court’s jurisdiction, the United States ignored the judgment.<sup>2</sup>

These skeptics have also accused Washington of complicity in terrorist attacks against Cuba. Cuban officials claim the United States orchestrated assaults on the island

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<sup>1</sup> *New York Times*, 18 October 1985 and 17 September 2001.

<sup>2</sup> For a broad survey of instances of alleged U.S.-sponsored terror see Alexander George, ed. *Western State Terrorism* (New York: Routledge, 1991). On U.S. aggression towards Nicaragua see Frederick Gareau, *State Terrorism and the United States* (London: Zed Books, 2004), 166-7, and Noam Chomsky, *Hegemony or Survival* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2003), 95-108.

over a period spanning from the 1950s to the 1990s. In 1999, the Cuban government launched a \$181 billion lawsuit against Washington for alleged damages, including 3,478 killed and 2,099 injured, as a result of forty years of U.S.-directed “sabotage bombings and other terrorist acts.” Then, in 2003, Cuba’s United Nations ambassador stated to the General Assembly that any initiatives to mitigate terrorism would have to acknowledge Washington’s involvement in such crimes, especially in providing safe haven to known anti-Castro terrorists.<sup>3</sup>

Cuba’s charges may seem strange to most North Americans, because the United States has long accused Havana of supporting international terrorism. In 1982, the U.S. Department of State removed Iraq from its list of state-sponsors of terrorism and added Cuba, pointing to its links to Colombian guerrilla organizations and separatist groups in Spain. Cuba has, since that time, remained on the list.<sup>4</sup>

Washington’s claims have been echoed in the scholarship on terrorism. Walter Laqueur, for instance, has frequently referred to Cuba in his works on the subject, but always as a sponsor, and never as a victim, of such activities. Like many other experts in the field, Laqueur argues that terrorism has taken place “almost exclusively in democratic or relatively democratic societies,” while “the more oppressive regimes of the world,” such as Cuba, “are not only free from terror, they have helped launch it against more permissive societies.” Though he has produced a wealth of material on terrorism over the last three decades, Laqueur has not once mentioned Cuba’s allegations of U.S.-backed

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<sup>3</sup> Salim Lamrani, ed., *Superpower Principles: U.S. Terrorism Against Cuba* (Maine: Common Courage Press, 2005); *New York Times*, 6 July 1999; U.N. General Assembly, *Ad Hoc Committee on Terrorism Opens Seventh Session*. 31 March 2003. (Press Release L/3028). (<http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2003/L3028.doc.htm>). (date accessed: 1 July 2008).

<sup>4</sup>U.S. Department of State, *State Sponsors of Terrorism*. (<http://www.state.gov/s/ct/c14151.htm>). (date accessed: 1 July 2008).



terror; it appears outside of his imagination to even consider the United States a sponsor of such activity. Noted scholar Paul Wilkinson takes a similar position. Cuba, he maintains, has worked closely with terrorist groups in Africa, the Middle East, and the Americas as part of a “terrorist proxy war” against the democratic nations of the world. Though he does mention the fact that many anti-Castro groups trained by the United States have carried out acts of terrorism, he insists these activities took place only after their involvement with Washington had come to an end.<sup>5</sup>

These mutual accusations raise important questions. Is the United States really leading a war on terrorism, or does it only oppose certain terrorist groups, while supporting others? Are scholars such as Laqueur and Wilkinson correct in arguing that the “oppressive regimes of the world” are free from terror? Does the United States reject the use of terror - or does it rely on terror - in its efforts to destabilize enemy governments?

Washington’s alleged support of terrorism also gives rise to questions regarding U.S. policies towards Cuba. While scholars acknowledge that the United States has long engaged in subversive activities against the Castro regime, there is no consensus as to whether such activities fall under the category of state-sponsored terrorism. Are Cuba’s claims simply political propaganda, or can they be substantiated with historical evidence? Have Washington’s attempts to overthrow the Cuban government in fact involved support for terrorist activities?

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<sup>5</sup> Walter Laqueur, *The Age of Terrorism* (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1987), 8, 21-22, 91-92, 106, 139, 141, 166, 170, 204, 215, 218, 232, 268-9, 291-92, 296-97, 300-3, 310, 321-22; Paul Wilkinson, *Terrorism and the Liberal State* (London: MacMillan, 1986), 215, 130-131.

The literature on U.S.-directed terror against Cuba is sparse, as only a handful of North American scholars have explored the subject. Among the most prominent is Noam Chomsky, who has long maintained that Washington has been guilty of conducting a “campaign of international terrorism,” beginning under the administration of Dwight Eisenhower and continuing at least until that of Richard Nixon. Though Chomsky offers some detail on Cuba, and carefully defines terrorism before applying it to U.S. policies, his work is limited, occupying only a small portion of his broader studies of U.S. foreign policy. Economist Edward Herman has also examined Cuba’s allegations, arguing that during the 1960s and 1970s the United States was “the manager and sponsor” of the “terroristic assault on Cuba.” Like Chomsky, however, Herman focuses only a minor part of his analysis on Cuba, and directs most of it towards the larger issues surrounding the media’s portrayal of the United States and terrorism. In addition, a number of historians of U.S.-Cuban relations have discussed this topic. Louis Pérez, for example, contends that under the administrations of John Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson “the United States engaged in acts that today would be understood as state-sponsored terrorism,” while Jorge Domínguez argues the Kennedy administration pursued a “policy of terrorism against Cuba.” Stephen Rabe takes the same position, characterizing Kennedy’s efforts to overthrow Castro a “campaign of terrorism and sabotage.” Although each of these historians provides a more comprehensive analysis of Washington’s anti-Castro operations than either Chomsky or Herman, they spend no more than a few words discussing terrorism, while limiting their focus to the 1960s.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Chomsky, “International Terrorism: Image and Reality,” in *Western State Terrorism*, 13-14, 22-23; Chomsky, *Hegemony or Survival*, 80-90, 188-91; Edward Herman, *The Real Terror Network* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1982), 62-9; Louis Pérez, “Fear and Loathing of Fidel Castro: Sources of US Policy Towards Cuba,” *Journal of Latin American Studies* Volume 34 (May 2002): 243-44; Jorge Domínguez,

The following study will expand on the existing scholarship by providing a more thorough assessment of Cuba's accusations of U.S.-backed terrorism, while also considering a broader time period. Applying the U.S. Criminal Code's definition of terrorism, it will dispute the claim by commentators such as Laqueur that terrorism rarely occurs outside the democratic nations of the world by arguing that over the 1959-1976 period Washington repeatedly organized and supported acts of terrorism against Cuba. While many historians have explored the early years of this period, the Cuban policies of the Johnson, Nixon, and Ford administrations have received surprisingly little treatment. In fact, very few scholars have even considered whether these three administrations supported terrorist activity. The following inquiry will attempt to fill that gap. In doing so, it will draw upon the insights of experts on terrorism and U.S.-Cuban relations alike.

The analysis is organized into four chapters. The first offers a definition of terrorism, establishing how the concept will be applied in this study. The second concentrates on the historical context of U.S.-Cuban relations from the early nineteenth century until the 1950s. The purpose here is to demonstrate that for two centuries the United States desired control of Cuba - and regularly employed violence to achieve that goal - while most Cubans resisted these efforts because they sought national independence. Chapter three examines Washington's response to the Cuban Revolution. Here it is argued that the United States began sponsoring terrorism against the island shortly after Fidel Castro came to power, and continued to do so until the mid-1970s, as

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"The @#\$%& Missile Crisis: (Or, What Was 'Cuban' about U.S. Decisions During the Cuban Missile Crisis?)," *Diplomatic History* Volume 24, Issue 2 (Spring 2000): 310-11; Stephen Rabe, "After the Missile Crisis: John F. Kennedy and Cuba, November 1962 to November 1963," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* Volume 30, Number 4 (December 2000): 714, 724. Several Cuban scholars have discussed U.S.-backed terrorism against their homeland. These include Tomás Díez Acosta, *La Guerra encubierta contra Cuba* (Havana, 1997), and Roberto Orihuela, *Terrorismo made in USA* (Havana, 2000). This study, however, focuses solely on the North American literature.

part of a policy aimed at overthrowing the revolutionary government. The epilogue focuses on Washington's ties to militant, anti-Castro leaders from the late 1970s until the present. While this concluding section does not contend that the United States continued sponsoring terrorism against Cuba, it does argue that U.S. leaders supported and gave refuge to individuals known to have carried out acts of terror against the island, while claiming to be conducting a global campaign against terrorism. By investigating Washington's long history of bringing terror to the people of Cuba, this study will show the United States cannot legitimately be leading a war on terrorism.

**CHAPTER I**  
**THE DEFINITION OF TERRORISM**

Before exploring the topic of U.S.-sponsored terror against Cuba, this study first defines the concept of terrorism. Much of the public discussion of terrorism - in the mass media, scholarship, and among state officials - fails to do this, and as a result there is often a great deal of confusion as to what exactly terrorism is. A number of respected scholars have added to this confusion by arguing that there is no common definition. Walter Laqueur insists there are over one hundred definitions of the term, and that “it can be predicted with confidence that the disputes about a...definition of terrorism will continue for a long time, and that they will not result in a consensus, and that they will make no noticeable contribution towards the understanding of terrorism,” while British sociologist Philip Schlesinger contends that “no commonly agreed upon definition can...be reached, because the very process of definition is in itself part of a wider contestation over ideologies or political objectives.” Also contributing to this uncertainty is the fact the United Nations has been unable to agree on a legally binding definition.<sup>7</sup>

These difficulties in establishing a common definition, however, appear to be rooted in the politics of terrorism. “[T]he problem of finding consensus on a universal definition,” explains terrorism expert Alex P. Schmid, “is, at this stage, more a political than a legal or semantic problem.” Several nations have refused to ratify proposed U.N. definitions, Schmid tells us, because they want a definition that excludes the actions of states, and only includes those of individuals and groups. With such a definition, these states could protect themselves from being accused of committing terrorist acts. Others have rejected the U.N.’s proposals because they want a definition that distinguishes terrorism from struggles for national liberation against foreign occupation. Nearly sixty

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<sup>7</sup> Walter Laqueur, *The New Terrorism: Fanaticism and the Arms of Mass Destruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 5-6; Alex P. Schmid, “Terrorism – The Definition Problem,” *Case Western Reserve Journal of International Law* Volume 36, Issue 2 (Spring 2004): 378, 396.

member states – all of which contain large Muslim populations - recently turned down a proposed U.N. definition because it would have included violence against Israel’s occupation of Palestinian land as terrorism. According to Schmid, these two issues – “state terrorism” and “national liberation” - are the principal barriers blocking the U.N. from agreeing on a universal definition.<sup>8</sup>

Like Schmid’s work, this study disputes the claim that there can be no common definition of terrorism. While it acknowledges that none of the various definitions employed by international bodies, governments, and academics are identical to one another, it nevertheless argues that the most widely used definitions of terrorism share certain basic components: they agree terrorism involves carrying out of violent acts against civilian targets, and that the objective of such acts is to produce fear within a target population in order to influence the conduct of a particular government or international body.

One can see these attributes, for example, in the definitions employed by the United Nations. According to the U.N.’s International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism (1999), a terrorist act is one “intended to cause death or serious bodily injury to a civilian, or to any other person not taking an active part in the hostilities in a situation of armed conflict.” The purpose of such an act “is to intimidate a population, or to compel a government or an international organization to do or abstain from doing an act.” This U.N. definition also refers to numerous other international treaties on terrorism, which identify specific criminal acts that fall under the category of terrorism. These include acts of hijacking, aviation sabotage, crimes against state officials, hostage taking, terrorist bombings, as well as the funding of front organizations

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<sup>8</sup> Schmid, “Terrorism – The Definition Problem,” 381-2, 403-9.

acting as financial conduits for terrorist organizations. Since its introduction, this U.N. convention on terrorism has been ratified by over two-thirds of the organization's member states.<sup>9</sup>

Other U.N. definitions that have since been proposed are nearly identical. In 2004, the U.N. Security Council put forward Resolution 1566, which stated that an act falls under terrorism if it is “against civilians, committed with the intent to cause death or serious bodily injury, or taking hostages, with the purpose to provoke a state of terror in the general public or in a group of persons or particular persons, intimidate a population or compel a government or an international organization to do or abstain from doing any act.” The 2004 U.N. High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges, and Change produced an additional definition with barely even a change in wording from Resolution 1566.<sup>10</sup>

There is, moreover, a widely accepted scholarly definition of terrorism, which contains the same basic elements as the U.N. definitions. During the 1980s, Schmid - who went on to become head of the U.N. Terrorism Prevention Branch from 1999-2005 - drafted an “Academic Consensus Definition of Terrorism.” He first sent out a questionnaire to several terrorism experts, then, on the basis of their feedback, formulated a definition of terrorism. This definition was subsequently forwarded to over fifty scholars of terrorism for review. Incorporating their suggestions for improvement, Schmid finally produced his “Academic Consensus Definition” in 1988. It reads as follows:

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<sup>9</sup> U.N. General Assembly, 54<sup>th</sup> Session. 6<sup>th</sup> Committee. *Resolution 109* (1999). [International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism]. 1999. United Nations Official Document System (ODS). (9 December 1999).

<sup>10</sup> U.N. Security Council, 5053<sup>rd</sup> Meeting. *Resolution 1566* (2004). [Action With Respect to Threats to the Peace, Breaches of the Peace, and Acts of Aggression]. 2004. United Nations Official Document System (ODS). (8 October 2004); *Report of the Secretary-General's High-Level Panel*. U.N. General Assembly, 59<sup>th</sup> Session, Agenda Item 55. United Nations Official Document System (ODS). (2 December 2004).



Terrorism is an anxiety-inspiring method of repeated violent action, employed by (semi-) clandestine individual, group, or state actors, for idiosyncratic, criminal, or political reasons, whereby – in contrast to assassination – the direct targets of violence are generally chosen randomly (targets of opportunity) or selectively (representative or symbolic targets) from a target population, and serve as message generators. Threat- and violence-based communication processes between terrorist (organization), (imperiled) victims, and main targets are used to manipulate the main target (audience(s)), turning into a large *target of terror*, a *target of demands*, or a *target of attention*, depending on whether intimidation, coercion, or propaganda is primarily sought.<sup>11</sup>

The United States has presented several definitions of terrorism that are very similar to those offered by the U.N. and the academic experts. The U.S. Department of State, for example, defines terrorism as “premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against noncombatant targets by subnational groups or clandestine agents, usually intended to influence an audience.” The U.S. Department of Defense, on the other hand, characterizes terrorism as “the calculated use of violence or threat of violence to inculcate fear; intended to coerce or to intimidate governments or societies in the pursuit of goals that are generally political, religious or ideological.” Curiously, though, this definition does though not mention the role of civilians.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, the U.S. Criminal Code defines terrorism as:

[A]ctivities that – (A) involve violent acts or acts dangerous to human life that are a violation of the criminal laws of the United States or any State, or that would be a criminal violation if committed within the jurisdiction of the United States or of any State; (B) appear to be intended (i) to intimidate or coerce a civilian population; (ii) to influence the policy of a government by intimidation or coercion; or (iii) to affect the conduct of a government by mass destruction, assassination, or kidnapping.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Schmid, “Terrorism – The Definition Problem,” 381-382 (emphasis in original).

<sup>12</sup> Schmid, “Terrorism – The Definition Problem,” 377.

<sup>13</sup> United States Code, *Title 18: Crimes and Criminal Procedure, Part 1: Crimes, Chapter 113B: Terrorism, Section 2331: Definitions*. U.S. Government Printing Office. ([frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=browse\\_usc&docid=Cite:+18USC2331](http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=browse_usc&docid=Cite:+18USC2331)). (date accessed: 1 July 2008)

Though any of these definitions would be adequate in evaluating the allegations of Washington-backed terrorism against Cuba, this inquiry will rely on the definition presented in the U.S. Criminal Code. Accusing the United States of sponsoring terrorism is a very controversial claim, and this study does not want to be accused of using a definition of terrorism with an anti-U.S. bias. In addition, referring to all the various definitions throughout the analysis would be tedious and confusing. Although they all contain the same fundamental traits, they are not identical. The U.S. Code's definition, moreover, is more comprehensive than any of the others employed within the United States or the United Nations, while at the same time it is simpler and more straightforward than the scholarly definition suggested by Schmid.

In using such a definition, the following study will discuss political assassinations as a form of terrorism, but will mostly focus on the role of civilians in terrorist acts. Did Washington policymakers support the violent activities of anti-Castro groups because they wanted to inflict suffering on Cubans for supporting a regime that threatened U.S. interests, or were the civilian casualties an unintended consequence? Were U.S. leaders trying to help the Cuban people rebel against an unpopular and tyrannical dictatorship? Or, did they organize attacks against the island in order to create hardship among its population, and, consequently, to undermine support for Castro? This inquiry will posit answers to these questions, while at the same time shedding light on the wider context of U.S. policies towards Cuba. As will become clear, Washington deliberately sponsored the terrorist activities of Castro's opponents because U.S. officials believed such a strategy would generate widespread disaffection among Cubans and ultimately lead to the overthrow of the revolutionary regime.

**CHAPTER II**  
**UNITED STATES-CUBAN RELATIONS, 1808-1958**

## II.i. THE RIPE FRUIT POLICY

The United States has long sought to control Cuba. Over the course of the nineteenth century U.S. leaders from Thomas Jefferson to William McKinley, believing it inevitable that their nation would one day annex the island, plotted and conspired to conquer it. In 1808, Jefferson sent a representative to Cuba to convince Spanish authorities there to defy Madrid and join the North American Union. This scheme, like numerous others after it, ultimately failed. Then, in 1809, a retired Jefferson urged his successor, James Madison, to arrange an agreement with Napoleon in which the emperor of France would be permitted to conquer Spanish America free from U.S. interference, while in return the United States would receive Cuba. “That would be a price,” he explained to Madison, “that I would immediately erect a column on the southernmost limit of Cuba, and inscribe on it a *ne plus ultra* as to us in that direction.”<sup>14</sup>

There were a number of reasons why the United States desired Cuba. Control of the island would protect important trading routes, while at the same time strengthening the defenses of the southern frontier. Furthermore, Washington policymakers feared the consequences of another power – one stronger than Spain, such as Britain – possessing the island. This was especially the case after the Florida acquisition of 1819, by which time Cuba was only ninety miles off the U.S. shore.<sup>15</sup>

The country’s leaders also believed that annexing Cuba would protect the institution of slavery. Southern U.S. slaveowners were haunted by the thought that the island’s large population of black slaves might rebel, abolish slavery, and establish a black republic, as had occurred in Haiti. A nation of free blacks, they argued, would

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<sup>14</sup> Philip S. Foner, *A History of Cuba and its Relations with the United States* (New York: International Publishers, 1962), I, 124-6.

<sup>15</sup> Louis Pérez, *Cuba: Between Reform and Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 9, 80.

constitute a threat to the slave system of the U.S. South. The influential slaveholder John Calhoun, while he was Secretary of War in the Monroe administration, lobbied for the takeover of Cuba even if it meant war with Britain, as he saw it as necessary to preserve the practice of slavery in his own nation.<sup>16</sup>

The United States was prevented from taking Cuba, however, because of Britain. While influential figures such as Jefferson and Calhoun were willing to risk war over the Caribbean island, U.S. presidents from Madison to Grover Cleveland were aware that while the United States would be able to occupy Cuba, it would not be able to hold it if confronted by the superior British navy.<sup>17</sup>

As a result, Washington adopted what has commonly been referred to as the “ripe fruit” policy. U.S. leaders decided it was in the Union’s best interests to uphold Spanish sovereignty over the island until circumstances were more favorable to acquisition, including the removal of the British deterrent. As part of this policy, Washington made clear it would forcefully prevent any power other than Spain from controlling Cuba.<sup>18</sup> As Secretary of State, John Quincy Adams wrote in 1823:

There are laws of political as well as physical gravitation; if an apple severed...from its native tree cannot but chose to fall to the ground, Cuba, forcibly disjoined from its unnatural connection with Spain, and incapable of self-support, can gravitate only towards the North American Union which by the same law of nature cannot cast her off from its bosom.<sup>19</sup>

U.S. backing of Spanish rule meant opposing Cuban independence. When Washington officials asserted that no third party would be allowed to control the island,

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<sup>16</sup> Foner, *A History of Cuba*, I, 139-40, 142-3, 153-4, 163-5.

<sup>17</sup> Lester D. Langley, *Struggle for the American Mediterranean* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1976), 39-46, 105, 146-7, 166-7, 170.

<sup>18</sup> Pérez, *Between Reform*, 80-1.

<sup>19</sup> Worthington Ford, ed. *The Writings of John Quincy Adams* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1968), VII, 373.

they included the Cubans themselves. Cuba, it was argued, was not capable of self-government: its population included too many blacks and people of mixed races, who were incompetent to manage their own affairs. Influential voices in the United States claimed that an independent Cuba would be as disastrous as liberated Haiti. “If Cuba were to declare itself independent,” insisted Secretary of State Henry Clay in 1825, “the amount and character of its population render it improbable that it could maintain its independence. Such a premature declaration might bring about a renewal of those shocking scenes of which a neighboring island [Haiti] was the afflicted scene.”<sup>20</sup>

While respecting Spanish sovereignty over Cuba, Washington made numerous attempts to acquire the island from Madrid. In 1848, for instance, the administration of James Polk offered Spain \$100,000,000 for the colony but was rejected. Six years later, the administration of Franklin Pierce raised the offer to \$130,000,000, but it was also turned down. Though the United States preferred to procure Cuba through purchase, its policymakers made clear they would do so by force if necessary. In 1854, following Pierce’s failed attempt to buy the island, the U.S. ambassadors to Spain, France, and Britain met in Belgium, and, under the direction of James Buchanan, then ambassador to Britain, drafted the so-called “Ostend Manifesto”: it urged Washington to continue in its efforts to purchase Cuba, because of its great importance to U.S. security, including the protection of slavery. If such moves were unsuccessful, it declared, “by every law human and Divine, we shall be justified in wresting it from Spain.”<sup>21</sup>

In their conspiracies to acquire Cuba, influential leaders in the United States also supported filibustering expeditions against the island. Though Washington did not

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<sup>20</sup> Jules Benjamin, *The United States and the Origins of the Cuban Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 8-9.

<sup>21</sup> Pérez, *Between Reform*, 81-2; Foner, *A History of Cuba*, II, 100.

endorse these activities, southern slaveowners did. The goal of these private expeditions was to spark an insurrection within Cuba, leading to the popular overthrow of the Spanish authorities, and finally, to the island applying to join the Union as a slaveholding state. These slaveowners looked particularly to Narciso López, a Spanish general from Cuba, to carry out their aims. López, who had acquired fame fighting in the counter-revolution against the army of Simón Bolívar in Venezuela, organized four expeditions from the United States between 1848-1851, all with substantial aid - including money, guns, ships, and manpower - from southern leaders. López's main sponsor, in fact, was John Quitman, then governor of Mississippi. These campaigns eventually came to an end when López's 1851 expedition was quickly suppressed by the colonial government of Cuba, and its participants, including the general himself, were captured and executed.<sup>22</sup>

One could certainly view these filibustering expeditions as acts of terrorism, at least from a Cuban perspective. While those leading these private armies believed they were liberating the colony from Spain, and hoped to gain the support of the island's civilian population rather than to terrorize it, it is clear that most Cubans saw things differently. In their eyes, filibustering brought fear and violence, rather than freedom, to the island. That was because López's followers were not liberators. On the contrary, they were mercenaries: most of them were non-Cubans, comprising mainly of U.S. citizens from the southern states, as well as Hungarian and Polish exiles, who joined these campaigns not out of altruistic motivations but for monetary reasons. Moreover, upon landing in Cuba, the filibusterers intimidated the local population, as they took civilian hostages, while forcefully seizing wagons, livestock, and food from the peasantry

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<sup>22</sup> Robert Granville Caldwell, *The Lopez Expeditions to Cuba, 1848-1851* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1915); Hugh Thomas, *Cuba: The Pursuit of Freedom* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 212-7; Tom Chaffin, *Fatal Glory* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996).

in order to satisfy their needs. Not surprisingly, during both cases in which his expeditions actually made it to Cuban soil, López was unsuccessful in recruiting locals.<sup>23</sup>

As tension between northern and southern U.S. states increased, the nation's leaders began developing more sophisticated schemes to acquire Cuba: in 1859 James Buchanan, now the U.S. president, convinced several prominent European bankers, of whom the Spanish government owed substantial debt, to pressure Madrid to sell the island to the United States. Sectional conflict, however, prevented the execution of Buchanan's plan. Influential elements in the northern states increasingly viewed annexation as a scheme of southern elites to both expand slavery and to strengthen their power within the Union, and therefore blocked efforts to acquire the island.<sup>24</sup>

With the end of the U.S. Civil War, Washington again devised new strategies to control Cuba. North American leaders no longer saw outright annexation as the only route to dominate the island, and began considering more informal ways to command its political and economic affairs. The nation's policymakers grew more concerned over absorbing the island's large black and mulatto population, whom they saw as racially inferior. Furthermore, the growth of Cuban nationalism made clear that the local population might resist a U.S. takeover of the island.

These changing attitudes were reflected in Washington's response to the Ten Years War (1868-1878), a struggle in which Cuban revolutionaries attempted to dismantle the institution of slavery and free the island from Spain. Though Washington refused to recognize the rebels, Hamilton Fish, the U.S. Secretary of State, proposed to buy the colony's liberty from Spain using bonds provided by the United States, which

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<sup>23</sup> Chaffin, *Fatal Glory*, 72-139, 184-216.

<sup>24</sup> Thomas, *Pursuit*, 213-4, 228-9; Benjamin, *United States and Origins*, 11; Foner, *A History of Cuba*, II, 122-3.



would be secured by Cuban custom duties. Fish also included terms in the treaty that ensured Washington would be able to hold power over both the Cuban government and economy: it stipulated that an independent Cuba would be forbidden from erecting duties that hurt U.S. exports, and that any other new custom duties would first require Washington's approval. Spain considered the offer, but it was eventually rejected.<sup>25</sup>

## **II.ii. THE RIPE FRUIT FALLS**

The United States was finally able to take Cuba during the island's last war of independence against Spain. Cuban revolutionaries launched a rebellion against the colonial authorities in 1895, and over the next year-and-a-half spread the insurrection across the entire length of the island, while also forming a provisional government. Though previous Cuban uprisings had aimed mainly at expelling the colonial government, by 1895 the island's independence movement had developed more radical goals: the redistribution of Cuba's wealth from the propertied classes to its lower classes, which included the island's large Afro-Cuban population, became one of its primary concerns. As a result of this revolutionary shift, Cuban nationalists became as opposed to the creole elite as they were to Spanish rule.<sup>26</sup>

These insurgents were inspired by Jose Martí, the most influential voice of the independence movement. Martí had been expelled from Cuba during the Ten Years War for opposing Spanish rule, eventually relocating to the United States, where he began organizing Cuban expatriates to launch an armed struggle against the colonial government. A free Cuba, insisted Martí, required not only independence from foreign

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<sup>25</sup> Benjamin, *United States and Origins*, 14-18.

<sup>26</sup> Pérez, *Between Reform*, 120-5, 134-6; Philip Foner, *The Spanish-Cuban-American War and the Birth of American Imperialism, 1895-1902* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972), I, 23-4, 42-44, 98-100.

control, but also social revolution: he called for a more equitable distribution of the island's wealth, as well as an end to its racial oppression.

Furthermore, when Martí spoke of an emancipated Cuba, he meant one independent from both Spain and the United States. His time spent in North America had made him aware of Washington's longstanding ambitions to acquire the island. The United States, he said, had "never looked upon Cuba as anything but an appetizing possession with no drawbacks other than its quarrelsome, weak, and unworthy population." For that reason, Martí stressed the need for a highly organized war of independence: he saw it as the only way to ensure a quick victory. Otherwise, Cubans would become trapped in a long, drawn out war, which would in all likelihood lead to U.S. intervention, then conquest. He warned that "annexation might become a fact that perhaps it may be our fate to have a skillful neighbor let us bleed ourselves on his threshold until finally he can take whatever is left in his hostile, selfish, and irreverent hands."<sup>27</sup> Though Martí died in battle during the first year of the rebellion, the revolutionary army continued to gain momentum, while the colonial government suffered numerous defeats. By 1898, the rebels held most of the island, and looked to be on the brink of forcing Spain's withdrawal. The United States, however, prevented such a development.

Washington opposed Cuban independence because it threatened U.S. interests. As previously explained, the country's leaders had long believed the United States was fated to succeed Spain in possessing Cuba, and were determined to prevent any other government, including that of the Cubans themselves, from sabotaging that ambition. Moreover, U.S. officials saw the revolutionary ideology of the insurgents as a threat to

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<sup>27</sup> Pérez, *Between Reform*, 109-112; Foner, *Spanish-Cuban-American War*, I, xxviii-xxix.

North American private investment on the island, which had become very substantial over the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>28</sup>

For these reasons, the United States, under the administration of William McKinley, intervened in the Cuban conflict in 1898. Its aim was not to aid the Cubans, as has often been claimed, but was to preempt both parties' claims to sovereignty over the island. As President McKinley explained in his message to Congress, the objective of the intervention was "to take measures to secure a full and final termination of hostilities between the Government of Spain and the people of Cuba, and to secure in the island the establishment of a stable government, capable of maintaining order and observing its international obligations."<sup>29</sup>

Though the United States quickly defeated Spain, it was unable to annex Cuba. While many influential elites called for such action, Congress forced the Teller Amendment on the McKinley administration, a compromise which prohibited the acquisition of the Caribbean island. There were a number of reasons for the amendment. On the one hand, many North Americans were opposed to the idea of adding a mixed-race, Catholic population to the Union. Additionally, popular opinion was on the side of the Cuban rebels, as the bulk of the U.S. population wanted to see Spain's former colony become independent. By 1898, moreover, the United States had developed a considerable beet sugar industry, and growers were afraid that if the island joined the United States, then Cuban sugar would undermine their own product. In fact, the

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<sup>28</sup>Pérez, *Between Reform*, 136; William Appleman Williams, *The United States, Cuba, and Castro*, 6.

<sup>29</sup>Louis Pérez, *The War of 1898: The United States & Cuba in History and Historiography* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 18-9.

amendment's sponsor, Senator Henry Teller, represented Colorado, one of the major beet sugar states.<sup>30</sup>

Despite the Teller Amendment, Washington was able to prevent Cuba from becoming fully independent. In 1899, the United States established a military occupation government, justified in typical colonial terms. Cubans were not fit for self-government, U.S. officials claimed, and could only become so under North American instruction. "The insurgents are a lot of degenerates, absolutely devoid of honor or gratitude," and "are no more capable of self-government than the savages of Africa," declared one U.S. general. According to another U.S. military official, Cubans "are stupid, given to lying and doing all things in the wrong way...Under our supervision, and with firm and honest care for the future, the people of Cuba may become a useful race and a credit to the world; but to set them afloat as a nation during this generation would be a great mistake."<sup>31</sup>

Aware that the majority of Cubans desired complete independence, Washington arranged for the pro-U.S. minority to take power after the occupation. This minority was made up of the propertied classes - the Spanish and creole elite - who had backed the U.S. intervention because it neutralized the revolutionary aims of the insurgents. Washington's plans were unsuccessful, however, as the proponents of nationalism won the 1901 elections to the constituent assembly, despite stringent voter requirements which limited the electorate to five-percent of the population. "The men whom I had hoped to see take leadership have been forced into the background by the absolutely irresponsible and unreliable element," complained the U.S. military governor of Cuba, Leonard Wood.

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<sup>30</sup> Louis Pérez, *Cuba Between Empires, 1878-1902* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1983), 185-7; Williams, *The United States, Cuba, and Castro*, 7.

<sup>31</sup> Pérez, *Between Reform*, 138-9.

“I do not mean that the people are not capable of good government,” he went on, “but I do mean to say, and emphasize it, that the class who we must look for the stable government in Cuba are not as yet sufficiently well prepared to give us that security and confidence which we desire.”<sup>32</sup>

In response to these developments, the United States imposed the Platt Amendment on Cuba. Though allowing self-government, this measure severely limited Cuban independence, as it ensured Washington would be able to dominate the island’s affairs for the foreseeable future. The amendment gave the United States the “right to intervene” in order to sustain “a government adequate for the protection of life, property and individual liberty.” Furthermore, it prohibited the new Cuban republic from signing “any treaty or other compact with a foreign power or powers” without U.S. permission, while also placing severe restrictions on its ability to accumulate debt. Finally, the amendment stated that Cuba would cede land to the United States for the purpose of constructing naval bases. Though Cuban opposition to the Platt Amendment was widespread, the constituent assembly was forced to incorporate it into the nation’s new constitution in return for an end to U.S. occupation. By 1903, the provisions of the amendment had been ratified in a series of treaties between the two countries, and the United States had erected a naval station in Guantánamo Bay.<sup>33</sup>

While the U.S. occupation, then the Platt Amendment, allowed Washington to securely establish its political influence over the island, it also helped North American investors expand their ownership over the Cuban economy. U.S. capital was able to take control of every key sector, including land, sugar production, tobacco growing, cigar

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 141.

<sup>33</sup> Pérez, *The War of 1898*, 33-4.

manufacturing, mining, transportation, utilities, and banking. By 1905, roughly sixty-percent of Cuba's rural property was owned by U.S. capital, with fifteen-percent in the hands of Spanish residents of the island, and a mere twenty-five percent belonging to Cubans. Within six years, North American corporations and individuals owned over \$200 million of the Cuban economy, dwarfing the combined total of European investments.<sup>34</sup>

In order to protect these increasingly important economic interests, Washington repeatedly exercised its powers under the Platt Amendment. During the first two decades of the Cuban republic, the United States launched three armed interventions in response to popular rebellions, which were seen as threats to North American private investment in the island. In 1906, the U.S. military began a three-year occupation, while governing Cuba through a provisional government. Then, in 1912, as the Cuban government suppressed a revolt launched by the island's Afro-Cuban population, Washington deployed troops to guard U.S.-owned property. A final intervention, in which the United States again governed Cuba, lasted from 1917-1922. For the remainder of the decade, U.S. influence only grew.<sup>35</sup>

### **II.iii. THE REVOLUTION OF 1933**

By the early 1930s, however, new challenges to U.S. domination had appeared. As Cubans suffered under an economic depression, social unrest and nationalist opposition to the Washington-backed dictatorship of Gerardo Machado swelled across the island. By 1933, Cuba was engulfed in widespread violence and labour strikes, and, as a result, the Machado regime collapsed. A rebellion within the Cuban army soon led

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<sup>34</sup> Pérez, *Between Reform*, 149-53.

<sup>35</sup> Thomas, *Pursuit*, 530-31, 533.

to the formation of a provisional government that aimed to drastically reshape the country's relationship with the United States. This change came when a number of disgruntled sergeants, led by Fulgencio Batista, carried out a mutiny against the officer corps and took control of the army. They quickly began working with the anti-Machado groups, and soon formed a new government headed by Dr. Ramón Grau, a Cuban physician and university professor.<sup>36</sup>

This provisional government was nationalist and reformist but not revolutionary. It was also the first government of the republic created without U.S.-approval. Though only governing Cuba for three months, it enacted a wide array of reforms, which included dissolving the traditional political parties, reducing utility and interest rates, allowing university autonomy, granting women the vote, as well as numerous other laws designed to give the island's working classes more power. In what was perhaps its boldest move, the new Cuban government declared an end to the Platt Amendment, without even consulting the United States.<sup>37</sup>

Washington officials viewed the Grau regime as a threat to U.S. interests. "It is...within the bounds of possibility, that the social revolution which is under way cannot be checked," complained the U.S. ambassador. "American properties and interests are being gravely prejudiced...and the material damage to such properties will in all probability be great." "Our commercial and export interests in Cuba," he concluded, "cannot be revived under this government."<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Irwin F. Gellman, *Roosevelt and Batista* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1973), 8-46.

<sup>37</sup> Pérez, *Between Reform*, 204.

<sup>38</sup> Louis Pérez, *Cuba and the United States: Ties of Singular Intimacy* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2003), 195-201.

Though the United States had long used military intervention as a tool to enforce its presence in Cuba, it had, by this time, moved away from such actions. Under Franklin Roosevelt's presidency, Washington formally adopted the "Good Neighbor Policy," which stated that the United States would no longer use force in Central America and the Caribbean. Government officials had by that point come to the realization that armed interventions in the region had tended to contribute to, rather than alleviate, political instability and anti-U.S. sentiment in Latin America. Moreover, Washington policymakers believed they could maintain their nation's hegemony in the hemisphere – especially in Cuba - through diplomatic and economic pressure, rather than by forceful intervention.<sup>39</sup>

With this new policy in mind, Washington set to work weakening Cuba's nationalist government. Diplomatic recognition was denied, which effectively guaranteed the Grau regime's demise. By the early 1930s, Cuba had become dependent on the U.S. market for its considerable sugar exports, and without U.S. recognition, the new government would have been unable to negotiate a new sugar purchasing contract with the United States. Such a development would have assured the worsening of the economic depression and, consequently, the social unrest on the island. In order to justify non-recognition, Washington portrayed the Grau regime as unpopular. Secretary of State Cordell Hull stated to the press that the United States would "welcome any government representing the will of the people and capable of maintaining law and order throughout the island." Privately, however, U.S. officials could see that the new government was widely backed by the Cuban population. The problem was that it did not represent those social classes that shared North American interests on the island. A

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<sup>39</sup> Walter LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1984), 78-83.



high-level U.S. official complained of the “inefficiency, ineptitude, and unpopularity with all the better classes in the country of the de facto [Grau] government. It is supported only by the army and ignorant masses who has been misled by utopian promises.” “The fact must not be lost sight of,” this same official noted, “that, in numbers, the ignorant masses of Cuba reach a very high figure.”<sup>40</sup>

The United States broke the Grau regime from within. The U.S. ambassador invited Batista to form a new government, explaining to Cuba’s military leader that he was admired by “the very majority of the commercial and financial interests in Cuba who are looking for protection and who could only find such protection in himself.” By January 1934, Batista - having realized that Washington would never recognize the Grau government - had transferred his support to a coalition organized by the U.S. ambassador and headed by a pro-U.S. opposition politician. Within one week, this new government was officially recognized by the United States. Cuban independence would have to wait another day.<sup>41</sup>

#### **II.iv. WASHINGTON’S MAN IN HAVANA**

For the next twenty-five years, Cuba was run by politicians closely allied with Washington. Though no longer intervening directly in the island’s affairs, the United States continued to wield considerable influence over Cuban leaders. Until the mid-1940s, Batista ruled the country with Washington’s support, initially behind several military-controlled puppet governments, then as elected president. Although the Platt Amendment was revoked during this period, a number of trade agreements between the two nations ensured that U.S. economic power remained firmly in place. “[T]he marines

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<sup>40</sup>David Green, *The Containment of Latin America* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1971), 13-18.

<sup>41</sup> Pérez, *Ties of Singular*, 200-1.

would never come again,” writes scholar Jules Benjamin, “[s]till, the White House, Capitol Hill, and the dollar set firm limits to Cuban independence.” Batista was followed by successive elected presidents who, although speaking the rhetoric of nationalism, took little action to liberate the island from U.S. control. Political corruption became rampant, while Cubans grew increasingly disillusioned with their leaders.<sup>42</sup>

By 1952, Batista had re-established military control by overthrowing an elected government. Although there is no evidence Washington played a role in the takeover, the U.S. ambassador did grant diplomatic recognition to the new regime - and quickly - despite the fact Batista had arrested labor leaders and opposition politicians, suspended civil liberties, and disbanded congress. U.S. policymakers approved of Batista’s dictatorship because they believed it would be able to maintain order and stability, and therefore, protect North American interests on the island.<sup>43</sup> With that goal in mind, Washington provided the island’s strongman with lavish military aid for the next seven years. In 1953, Cuba received over \$400,000 worth of U.S. weapons and military goods, in both sales and grants; from 1954-1956, military assistance went up from \$1,100,000 to \$1,700,000. Then, during 1957 and 1958, the peak years of an anti-Batista rebellion, the United States shipped \$5,000,000 in arms to the Caribbean nation.<sup>44</sup>

Washington supported Batista, in part, because he opened the island to U.S. capital. Over the period 1953-1958, investment from the United States rose from just under \$700,000,000 to almost \$1,000,000,000. By 1958, Batista’s final year in power, U.S.-based firms owned over 90 percent of the country’s electrical and telephone

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<sup>42</sup> Pérez, *Between Reform*, 187-219; Benjamin, *United States and Origins*, 93.

<sup>43</sup> Benjamin, *United States and Origins*, 121; U.S. State Department, *Foreign Relations of the United States: The American Republics, 1952-1954* (Washington DC, 1991), 867-72.

<sup>44</sup> Thomas G. Paterson, *Contesting Castro* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 58-9.

services, more than 80 percent of its railways, and roughly 40 percent of its sugar industry. In addition, two North American companies – Texaco and Standard Oil of New Jersey – produced and distributed nearly 75 percent of the country’s petroleum. Even the U.S. government became involved: by the late 1950s, it owned over \$200,000 in Cuban mines. Batista also gave organized crime from the United States a free reign in the island’s capital city, allowing Havana to become overrun with drug trafficking, gambling casinos, pornographic theatres, and prostitution. Cubans, well aware of Washington’s support for the regime, blamed their northern neighbor for these problems. “I was enchanted by Havana – and appalled by the way that lovely city was being debased into a great casino and brothel for American businessmen,” recalled Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. “One wondered how any Cuban – on the basis of this evidence – could regard the United States with anything but hatred.”<sup>45</sup>

A young lawyer named Fidel Castro capitalized on this Cuban resentment, and quickly established himself as Batista’s most formidable opponent. As a nationalist, his primary aims were to overthrow the dictatorship, replace it with a popular government, and make Cuba fully independent, though he understood these actions would require eliminating Washington’s historic dominance over the island; in short, Fidel’s struggle was as much against the United States as it was against Batista. On 26 July 1953, Castro took action, leading over one-hundred men in a bold attack on the Moncada military barracks in Santiago de Cuba, hoping to begin an island-wide rebellion against the regime. Although unsuccessful, the act solidified his reputation as one of the country’s most prominent anti-Batista leaders. Within three years, Castro had regrouped,

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<sup>45</sup> Pérez, *Ties of Singular*, 218-25; Paterson, *Contesting*, 34-45, 54; Morris Morley, *Imperial State and Revolution* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 48-54; Thomas, *Pursuit*, 1057-9, 1182-88; Benjamin, *United States and Origins*, 125.

organizing a revolutionary group called the 26<sup>th</sup> of July Movement, and launching a guerilla war against Batista. Based in the Sierra Maestra, the mountains of southeastern Cuba, Castro's rebel army began small, but gradually expanded, attracting hundreds of volunteers until it had grown into the island's principal revolutionary force and pushed the Batista government to the brink of collapse.<sup>46</sup>

Washington responded to these events by withdrawing support for its client. U.S. officials agreed Batista's regime was too fragile to last, and decided he would have to transfer power to one of his opponents. In March 1959, an arms embargo was put in place: it succeeded in crippling the Cuban government. "The fact that the United States was no longer supporting Batista," U.S. ambassador Earl E. T. Smith (1957-1958) wrote in his memoirs, "had a devastating psychological effect upon the armed forces," and "went a long way in bringing about his downfall." By the end of the year, Washington had sent wealthy businessman William D. Pawley to convince Cuba's dictator to leave office and retire in Florida. The United States wanted Batista "to capitulate to a caretaker government unfriendly to him, but satisfactory to us," Pawley later explained, "whom we would immediately recognize and give military assistance to in order that Fidel Castro not come to power." Washington "would make an effort to stop Fidel Castro from coming into power," Pawley told Batista during their meeting, "but that the caretaker government would be men who were enemies of his, otherwise it would not work anyway, and Fidel Castro would otherwise have to lay down his arms or admit he was a

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<sup>46</sup>Ronaldo E. Bonachea and Nelson P. Valdés, eds., *Revolutionary Struggle, 1947-1958: Volume I of the Selected Works of Fidel Castro* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1972), 257; Robert Taber, *M-26, Biography of a Revolution* (New York: Lyle Stewart, 1961), 32-68; Thomas, *Pursuit*, 835-44, 876-908.

revolutionary fighting against everybody only because he wanted power, not because he was against Batista.” Batista followed U.S. instructions, fleeing the island shortly after.<sup>47</sup>

While disapproving of Castro, the United States did not believe he was a Communist. Although government policymakers constantly looked for signs that he was somehow connected to the Soviet Union or to Cuba’s Communist Party, they found none. “Most U.S. officials,” explains historian Thomas Paterson, “judged Castro’s ideas fuzzy and undeveloped – nationalistic and anti-American to be sure, but not communistic or pro-Soviet.” Their assessments were correct. The Cuban Communist Party, which had worked closely with Batista’s governments during the 1930s and 1940s, had criticized Castro’s attack on the Moncada barracks as a “desperate form of adventurism, typical of bourgeois circles lacking in principle and implicated in gangsterism.” Following Moscow’s orders, it had similarly denounced his decision to begin a guerilla insurrection for failing to understand that political conditions in Cuba made a socialist revolution impossible.<sup>48</sup>

Washington opposed Castro because he threatened U.S. interests in Cuba specifically, and in Latin America more generally. “The [State] Department clearly does not want to see Castro succeed to the leadership of the [Cuban] Government,” wrote Acting Secretary of State Christian Herter only a week before Batista’s departure. On the one hand, the United States was aware the guerrilla leader intended to reduce the U.S. economic presence on the island by nationalizing North American holdings, while redistributing land to the peasant population. Furthermore, Castro’s dominant personality

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<sup>47</sup> Earl Smith, *The Fourth Floor* (New York: Random House, 1962), 48, 107; Benjamin, *United States and Origins*, 152-3; Pérez, *Ties of Singular*, 235-7.

<sup>48</sup> Paterson, *Contesting*, 11, 27-8, 185; Stephen Rabe, *Eisenhower and Latin America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 118-9.

convinced Washington policymakers they would have difficulty maintaining U.S. influence over Cuba's political affairs. Most importantly, these officials feared the wider repercussions of a Castro victory in the region. He had publicly declared his support for various insurrections against dictatorships, many of whom, such as the Dominican Republic's Rafael Trujillo and Venezuela's Marcos Pérez, were important U.S.-allies.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States: Cuba, 1958-1960* (Washington, DC, 1997), 304-7 (Hereinafter cited as *FRUS: 1958-60*; Paterson, *Contesting*, 121; Rabe, *Eisenhower*, 121-22).

## **CHAPTER III**

### **ALLEGED U.S.-SPONSORED TERRORISM AGAINST CUBA, 1959-1976**

### **III.i. IF THEY ARE HUNGRY THEY WILL THROW CASTRO OUT**

Castro's guerilla army took control of Cuba in January 1959, creating a provisional government that aimed to bring revolutionary change to the island. The United States initially worked with the new regime, but by the end of the year had begun plans to overthrow Castro and dismantle the Cuban Revolution. Here it is argued that, according to the U.S. Criminal Code, Washington's subversive activities in Cuba involved support for terrorism. U.S. officials, well aware that Castro enjoyed tremendous popular support among the Cuban people, sponsored assassination attempts on the revolutionary leader, while also organizing paramilitary attacks against the island, as part of a larger program designed to generate hardship among Cuba's civilian population, and as a result cause an anti-government rebellion.

While there are several studies of U.S. covert operations against Cuba during the early years of the revolution, few consider whether these activities fall under the category of terrorism. Among those that have, the focus has traditionally been limited to the policies of the Kennedy administration, and even those studies have only grazed the surface, focusing mainly on the covert action program known as Operation Mongoose. This chapter will provide a far more extensive analysis of Washington's support for terrorism during the Eisenhower administration than anything previously published, and will expand on the existing work on the Kennedy years. It will then explore U.S.-backed terror under the Johnson, Nixon, and Ford administrations, covering the 1963-1976 period. The analysis will draw upon numerous secondary studies, but will be based



primarily on de-classified U.S. documents, most of which have only been made public during the last decade.<sup>50</sup>

Washington's hostility to the revolutionary government began when Castro started asserting the island's political and economic independence. Cubans desired radical change, and the new regime met these demands with a sweeping program of reform that was directed as much at raising Cuban living standards as it was at eliminating U.S. influence. In May 1959, an agrarian reform law was enacted, prohibiting foreign ownership of plantations and drastically reducing private ownership of land. Over 2,500,000 acres of land was confiscated, the majority of which was owned by North Americans. The Eisenhower administration protested, but to no avail. Other reforms included rent reductions, cuts to utility rates, the renegotiation of labor contracts, increased wages, provisions for unemployment assistance, as well as government programs for health and education. Like the Agrarian Reform Law, most of these decrees sought primarily to reduce U.S. economic power in Cuba by redistributing wealth from North American firms and investors to the island's working classes. Furthermore, the old army - which had enjoyed close ties to Washington since the beginning of the century - was disbanded, and the victorious guerillas replaced it with a new military force dedicated to defending the gains of the Cuban Revolution.<sup>51</sup>

The United States responded to Castro's reforms with plans to depose his regime. "In April [1959] a downward trend in U.S.-Cuban relations had been evident," wrote a

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<sup>50</sup> Studies of Washington's clandestine operations against Cuba during the 1960s and 1970s include Warren Hinckle and William Turner, *The Fish is Red* (New York: Harper & Row, 1981); Taylor Branch and George Crile, III, "The Kennedy Vendetta: How the CIA Waged A Silent War Against Cuba," *Harper's* (August 1975): 19-63; William B. Breuer, *Vendetta! Fidel Castro and the Kennedy Brothers* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1997); Bradley Ayers, *The War That Never Was* (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1976).

<sup>51</sup> Rabe, *Eisenhower*, 132; Benjamin, *United States and Origins*, 170-1.

high official in the Eisenhower administration, and “in June we had reached a decision that it was not possible to achieve our objectives with Castro in power.” The U.S. State Department then started working with the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), explained another government official, and in July and August began developing a program “to accelerate an opposition in Cuba which would bring a change in the Cuban government, resulting in a new government favorable to U.S. interests.”<sup>52</sup>

As the United States moved to “accelerate an opposition in Cuba,” anti-Castro groups led attacks against the island. In October, three raids from planes that had taken off from Florida resulted in the bombings of sugar mills in the Camaguey and Pinar del Río provinces. During the same month, a Miami-based exile flew over Havana dropping anti-Castro leaflets; as Cuban forces attempted to shoot down the plane, counterrevolutionaries took advantage of the situation and exploded several bombs in the city, while at the same time “cars of terrorists,” reported the *New York Times*, “sped through the crowded streets firing in every direction and tossing hand grenades.” As a consequence of this “terroristic attack,” two persons were killed and more than forty-five wounded. Another raid took place the following day, as a plane that had probably taken off from Florida fired upon a passenger train in the Las Villas province. Though it is not known if Washington sponsored these attacks, the likelihood of U.S. involvement is high. As noted earlier, government officials had decided, as early as July 1959, to bolster Castro’s opposition, and, by the fall of that year, the CIA had already begun sending arms to anti-government groups within Cuba.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> *FRUS:1958-60*, 742; Benjamin, *United States and Origins*, 179-82; Richard Welch, *Response to Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 36-7; Pérez, *Ties of Singular*, 240.

<sup>53</sup> *New York Times*, 22-24 October 1959; Jane Franklin, *Cuba and the United States: A Chronological History* (New York: Ocean Press, 1997), 23; Thomas, *Pursuit*, 1243-5; Benjamin, *United States and*

Among Castro's early opponents was Luis Posada Carriles, who is now widely regarded as one of Latin America's most notorious terrorists. He carried out numerous bombings in the months following Batista's overthrow, and did so with the help of the CIA. The Agency, he has stated, supplied him with "time-bomb pencils, fuses, detonator cords, and everything necessary for acts of sabotage." Whether he was involved in the October 1959 bombings that rocked Havana is unclear. Because Posada worked for a U.S.-based company, he was able to travel back and forth between Miami and Cuba, routinely bringing "war materials" to the island. These operations continued until 1961, when one of Posada's plots was uncovered by Cuban authorities, forcing him to flee to Miami, where he resumed his counterrevolutionary activities.<sup>54</sup>

By using the U.S. Criminal Code's definition of terrorism, it is clear that these assaults on Cuba were acts of terrorism, as the revolutionary leadership then labeled them. The bomb explosions in Havana and the cars of militants shooting and throwing grenades at crowds were obviously "violent acts" intended "to intimidate" and "coerce a civilian population" (the Cuban people), in order "to influence the policy of a government" (the Castro regime). The sugar mill raids, though, could be treated differently. It might be argued that their objective was to simply disrupt the island's economy, rather than to intimidate or coerce civilians. It will be shown below, however, that Washington supported sabotage against the Cuban economy, which included attacks on the country's sugar industry, precisely because U.S. leaders wanted to inflict suffering

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*Origins*, 188; Tad Szulc, *Fidel: A Critical Portrait* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1986), 482.

<sup>54</sup> Ann Louise Bardach, "Twilight of the Assassins," *Atlantic Monthly* (November 2006): 92; *New York Times*, 13 July 1998.

on Cubans: they believed such a development would weaken popular support for Castro and ultimately cause his downfall, although that was never stated publicly.

Rather than undermining the Cuban government, such attacks seemed to radicalize the revolution. During the second half of 1959, Fidel Castro began working more closely with the Cuban Communist Party. The regime's early reforms had alienated its more moderate members, forcing Cuba's revolutionary leaders to turn to the PSP – long one of the country's most organized and popular organizations – for political support: its members soon began occupying important positions in both civil administration and the armed forces. The Communist Party, Castro later explained, “had men who were truly revolutionary, loyal, honest and trained. I needed them.”<sup>55</sup>

As Communist participation increased, Washington expanded its plans to remove the island's government. “On October 31 [1959], in agreement with CIA, the [State] Department had recommended to the president approval of a program,” recounted a U.S. official, that “authorized us to support elements in Cuba opposed to the Castro Government while making Castro's downfall seem to be the result of his own mistakes.”<sup>56</sup> By January 1960, the CIA had submitted to Eisenhower an additional proposal that called for the training of Cuban exiles so that they could carry out the “sabotage of sugar refineries in Cuba.” Though the president “didn't object to such an undertaking and, indeed, thought something like this was timely,” he maintained that “any program should be much more ambitious, and it was probably now the time to move against Castro in a positive and aggressive way which went beyond mere harassment. He

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<sup>55</sup> Pérez, *Between Reform*, 245-6; Welch, *Response*, 16-8.

<sup>56</sup> *FRUS:1958-60*, 742-3.

asked Mr. Dulles to come back with an enlarged plan.”<sup>57</sup> Within two months, the CIA had completed this “enlarged plan.” It suggested the formation of a private army of Cuban exiles, the organizing of Castro’s political opposition, and the implementation of sabotage missions against the island’s economic facilities. Pleased with the more comprehensive program, Eisenhower gave the CIA full authorization to act on it. The Agency subsequently began training three-hundred Cuban exiles in guerrilla tactics within the United States and the Panama Canal Zone, before moving operations to Guatemala.<sup>58</sup>

While backing Castro’s opponents, the United States also plotted his assassination – an act of terrorism, according to the U.S. Criminal Code. It was hoped that Castro’s death would lead to the collapse of the revolutionary regime, and thus prevent other Latin American nations from following the Cuban example. In December 1959, a top CIA official sent a memorandum to the Agency’s director, Allen Dulles, warning that a “far left” dictatorship had been established in Cuba, which, if “permitted to stand,” would “encourage similar actions against U.S. holdings in other Latin American countries.” Among his “recommended actions” was the “elimination of Fidel Castro.” Neither Fidel’s “brother Raul nor his companion Che Guevara, have the same appeal to the masses,” argued this official, and “many informed people believe that the disappearance of Fidel would greatly accelerate the fall of the present Government.” After reading the memo, Dulles gave approval to the recommendations, despite the fact that the Agency’s

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<sup>57</sup> Benjamin, *United States and Origins*, 188-9; Piero Gleijeses, “Ships in the Night: The CIA, the White House and the Bay of Pigs,” *Journal of Latin American Studies* 27 (February 1995): 3-4; Rabe, *Eisenhower*, 128.

<sup>58</sup> *FRUS:1958-60*, 850-1; Rabe, *Eisenhower*, 129-30; Gleijeses, “Ships in the Night,” 4-5.

head of covert operations had recently reported that “in the Gallup Poll sense, Castro probably enjoyed tremendous popularity, especially in the countryside.”<sup>59</sup>

Furthermore, the Eisenhower administration was, by this time, devising more overt strategies to put economic pressure on the revolutionary regime. U.S. policymakers were well aware of Castro’s popularity, and sought to increase disaffection among the island’s population in order to destabilize his government. They hoped that trade sanctions, when combined with covert operations, would accomplish that goal. Cuban civilians were seen as legitimate targets. A “quarantine” of the Caribbean nation was suggested by Eisenhower, who reasoned that “if they (the Cuban people) are hungry, they will throw Castro out.” The CIA agreed. “[A] change in the sentiment of the lower classes,” argued Dulles, “would only occur over a long period of time and as a result of economic difficulties.”<sup>60</sup>

As the United States made plans to overthrow the Cuban government, its revolutionary leaders established ties with the Soviet Union. This decision was largely made in response to U.S. actions: the Castro regime was aware of Washington’s ambitions, and sought closer relations with the Soviet Union as a way to guarantee the survival of the revolution. In February 1960, Soviet officials arrived in Havana and signed a significant trade agreement with Cuba: it was agreed that the Soviet Union would purchase nearly five-million tons of sugar over the next five years, while also providing technical assistance, \$100,000,000 in low-interest credits, as well as crude and refined oil. Two months later, Soviet officials expanded the agreement, pledging to sell

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<sup>59</sup> U.S. Congress, Senate, Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities, *Alleged Assassination Plots Involving Foreign Leaders* (Amsterdam: Fredonia Books, 1975), 92; *FRUS:1958-60*, 699.

<sup>60</sup> *FRUS:1958-60*, 764, 896.

the island petroleum at below the international rate. By May, the Castro regime had resumed diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union, suspended by Batista shortly after his 1952 coup.

Cuba's oil agreement with the Soviet Union resulted in an economic war with the United States. In May 1960, U.S. firms Texaco and Standard Oil - under pressure from the Eisenhower administration - defied orders from the Cuban government and refused to process Soviet petroleum. The Castro regime reacted the following month by expropriating all foreign-owned companies; as tension with Washington increased, Cuba's revolution took a more radical course. In response, the United States reduced the island's sugar quota to zero for the remainder of 1960. Though Eisenhower publicly justified this move as a way to loosen Castro's grip on power, it is clear that the real motive was to punish the Cuban population for supporting Castro. "[O]ur primary objective is to establish conditions which will bring home to the Cuban people the cost of Castro's policies," wrote Eisenhower, adding, "I anticipate that, as the situation unfolds, we shall be obliged to take further economic measures which will have the effect of impressing on the Cuban people the cost of this communist orientation."<sup>61</sup>

Washington erected trade sanctions for the same reason it sponsored sabotage attacks. Both of these policies were integral parts of a larger U.S. program aimed at undermining the island's economy in order to provoke unrest among Cubans and bring about Castro's downfall. They were not planned separately from one another, nor were they guided by different objectives. Rather, sanctions and sabotage were meant to reinforce each other, and accelerate Cuba's economic difficulties. Therefore,

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<sup>61</sup> *FRUS:1958-1960*, 1003; Thomas, *Pursuit*, 1265-6, 1284, 1288, 1289; Benjamin, *United States and Origins*, 195; Welch, *Response*, 6, 21-2, 50-3.

understanding why U.S. leaders implemented the one allows us to understand why they supported the other. When Eisenhower spoke of the need to enact sanctions in order to “bring home to the Cuban people the cost of Castro’s policies,” it can be inferred that his administration organized sabotage attacks with the same goal in mind.<sup>62</sup>

While Cuba moved closer to the Soviet Union, bombing raids and other acts of sabotage continued. On 12 January 1960, a plane that Cuban officials alleged was registered in the United States dropped incendiary material in the Havana province, burning over ten tons of sugar cane. The attack was “criminal sabotage,” claimed the leader of the country’s sugar workers’ union, “sponsored by North American imperialism to hinder the agrarian reform.” Nine days later - as CIA director Allen Dulles was working on an “enlarged plan” to remove the island’s government - four 100-pound bombs were unloaded from a plane over the city of Havana, then, on January 28, a plane raid against a mill in Pinar del Río resulted in the destruction of 250,000 tons of sugar. Additional attacks were carried out in neighboring provinces on the same day, as five sugar cane fields were burned in Camaguey, and three others in the Oriente.<sup>63</sup>

Cubans blamed the United States for these incidents. Describing the “incursions of unidentified aircraft,” and “particularly those raids in which incendiaries have been dropped resulting in [the] burning of sizable quantities of sugar cane,” the U.S. embassy in Cuba alerted Washington that a “large portion” of the Cuban public were “becoming aroused,” as they were convinced these attacks were “from the US or are part of a counterrevolutionary plan masterminded in the US.”<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Pérez, “Fear and Loathing,” 241-2.

<sup>63</sup> *New York Times*, 24 January and 29 January 1960; Franklin, *Chronological History*, 24.

<sup>64</sup> *FRUS:1958-60*, 778-9.



Evidence indicating U.S. complicity in these raids was soon discovered. On February 18, a plane that had taken off from Florida exploded while bombing a sugar mill in the Matanzas province. The island's authorities quickly found evidence in the wreckage showing the pilot was a U.S. citizen, that he had attacked Cuban sugar mills on three previous occasions, and that he had taken off from an air field situated between two U.S. military bases in Florida. "Cuba is the only country in the world today that is being attacked from a foreign country," said Fidel Castro, as he accused Washington of culpability in the incident. The following week saw further attacks, as planes bombed sugar mills in Matanzas and Las Villas. De-classified U.S. documents support Castro's charges of U.S. involvement in these assaults. It is now known that by January 1960 the CIA had submitted plans to the White House for the training of Cuban exiles so that they could sabotage sites of sugar production, and that by February 1960 the Agency had already been arming Castro's opposition for more than six months.<sup>65</sup>

In supporting attacks on Cuba, Washington was sponsoring terrorism. Taken alone, it could be argued that the Cuban exile raids did not result in any immediate civilian casualties, and, therefore, should not fall under the category of terrorism. If one examines U.S. motivations in crippling the Cuban economy, however, it is plain to see that government policymakers - in Eisenhower's own words - wanted to "impress on the Cuban people" the "cost" of supporting Castro. Though Eisenhower referred to economic sanctions, he and other U.S. leaders evidently supported sabotage operations for the same reasons. As previously explained, sanctions and subversion were key components of a broader program intended to ruin the Cuban economy. "Economic sanctions were designed in conjunction with covert action," explains historian Louis

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<sup>65</sup> *New York Times*, 19 February 1960.

Pérez, as the “pairing” of the two “was designed to foster economic disarray, disrupt production systems, and increase domestic distress...as a way to generate popular discontent with Fidel Castro.” By making sense of U.S. motives in restricting trade with the island, we can, at the same time, grasp why Washington sponsored violence against the Cuban economy.<sup>66</sup>

Sabotage operations against Cuba – both real and apparent - persisted during the spring of 1960. In March, a French freighter carrying Belgian arms and ammunition exploded in Havana harbor, killing 100 people and wounding more than 300 others. “We have reason to believe that this act of sabotage,” asserted Cuba’s premier, “was the work of those who do not wish us to receive arms for our defense.” Castro referred to the fact that Washington had pressured the Belgian government to forbid the arms sale, and on several previous occasions had prevented other European governments from allowing weapons to be sold to Cuba. Whether his claims were supported by evidence or were simply political propaganda is still unclear. The Havana harbor explosion came only a week after a report from the U.S. Navy urged President Eisenhower to “covertly support the Cuban opposition,” because, “although the revolution still has the support of the masses, the resulting government of Cuba is following the path of international communism.”<sup>67</sup>

This period also saw additional bombing raids against the island. On March 7-8, two separate attacks on sugar plantations in Pinar del Río resulted in the burning 3,000 and 3,800 tons of sugar cane, respectively. Then, on April 4, a plane flying out from the U.S. naval base at Guantánamo Bay dropped explosives on targets in the Oriente

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<sup>66</sup> Pérez, “Fear and Loathing,” 243-4.

<sup>67</sup> *New York Times*, 6 March 1960; Thomas, *Pursuit*, 1269-70; *FRUS: 1958-60*, 818-9; Rabe, *Eisenhower*, 132-3.

province. While there is no evidence Washington supported these specific assaults, it is known that the CIA was, at that time, arming Castro's opponents, while sneaking them in and out of the island to carry out sabotage attacks. The Agency program presented to Eisenhower in March 1960 revealed that "a limited air capability for resupply and for infiltration and exfiltration already exists under CIA control and can be rather easily expanded if and when the situation requires."<sup>68</sup>

The United States sponsored acts of economic sabotage in order to slow down the country's economy, and, consequently, to generate widespread suffering among Cubans. Government policymakers believed if the island's inhabitants were hungry, they would rebel against the Castro regime. Intimidation through fear and violence, which the U.S. Criminal Code treats as terrorism, was seen as the most effective strategy to ensure a new government took power in Cuba. U.S. planners, however, did not see attacks on the Cuban economy as sufficient to accomplish that task: only when combined with trade sanctions would sabotage create enough discontent to jeopardize the government's hold on power. "The majority of Cubans support Castro (the lowest estimate I have seen is 50 percent)," wrote a top U.S. official in an April 1960 memorandum. Because there was "no effective political opposition," he explained, "the only foreseeable means of alienating internal support is through disenchantment and disaffection based on economic disaffection and hardship." He urged that "every possible means should be undertaken promptly to weaken the economic life of Cuba...such a policy...should be the result of...a line of action which, while as adroit and inconspicuous as possible, makes the greatest inroads in denying money and supplies to Cuba, to decrease monetary and real

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<sup>68</sup> *New York Times*, 9 March 1960; Franklin, *Chronological History*, 26; *FRUS:1958-60*, 851.

wages, to bring about hunger, desperation, and overthrow of government.” The U.S.

Assistant Secretary of State agreed, as he wrote only months later that:

[f]or all practical purposes, we are now in virtual open conflict with the Castro Government. We have gone as far as we can in trying to distinguish between the Cuban people and their present government, much as we sympathize with the plight and what we believe to be the great majority of Cubans...the Cuban ‘people’ have allowed themselves to be hoodwinked and out-maneuvered.<sup>69</sup>

The economic struggle between Cuba and the United States continued over the summer and fall of 1960. In August and September, the Castro regime responded to the U.S.-cancellation of the Cuban sugar quota by expropriating a number of North American enterprises on the island, including over thirty sugar mills, two utilities, and all of the Cuban branches of U.S. banks. Washington quickly retaliated, enacting an economic embargo against the island in October, which prohibited all U.S. exports, except medicines and certain foods. The goal of the embargo, wrote a high-level U.S. policymaker, was to “exert a serious pressure on the Cuban economy and contribute to the growing disaffection and unrest in the country. It will also bolster the morale of the opposition groups now active in Cuba and elsewhere.” The Castro government reacted to the embargo by eliminating all North American investment in Cuba. Nearly six-hundred private businesses, most of which were U.S.-owned, were nationalized. These included hotels, casinos, tobacco factories, food processing plants, chemical enterprises, and insurance companies. After six decades, U.S. dominance of the island’s economy was finally over. By January 1961, shortly before Eisenhower left office, Washington had cut diplomatic ties with the Cuban government.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> *FRUS:1958-60*, 885, 977.

<sup>70</sup> *FRUS:1958-60*, 1091; Thomas, *Pursuit*, 1291, 1297; Pérez, *Between Reform*, 247-8.

The revolutionary regime's seizure of U.S. property severely weakened its domestic opponents. The island's middle classes had long supported the North American economic presence, as over 150,000 Cubans held professional and managerial positions in foreign-owned enterprises. When the government took control of these firms, however, many middle-class Cubans who had opposed its reforms were dismissed from their jobs and replaced by Castro-supporters. With the loss of employment, these Cubans lacked the economic means to sustain an organized opposition to the regime, and so fled to the United States. In 1960 alone, over 60,000 elite and middle-class Cubans emigrated from the island. Though their departure strengthened the revolution, it also ensured that for the next several decades the government's main opposition came from the United States, rather than from within Cuba.<sup>71</sup>

At the same time Cuba was nationalizing North American assets, Washington began implementing plans to eliminate the island's revolutionary leadership. By U.S. standards, this policy constituted the sponsoring of terrorism. In July 1960, the CIA organized an assassination attempt on Raúl Castro. A Cuban who was gathering intelligence for the Agency was promised \$100,000 and a "college education" for his sons "in the event of his death" if he could kill Raúl while making it look to be the result of "an accident." In the end, the attempt failed, as the Cuban "had not had an opportunity to arrange the accident." During the following month, poison cigars were developed to assassinate Fidel Castro. A CIA official "was given a box of Castro's favorite cigars with instructions to treat them with lethal poison." He contaminated them with a "botulinum toxin so potent that a person would die after putting one in his mouth." By October 1960,

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<sup>71</sup> Pérez, *Between Reform*, 250, 254-6; Richard R. Fagen, Richard A. Brody, and Thomas J. O'Leary, *Cubans in Exile* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1968).

the cigars were ready for use, and, four months later, were passed on to an “unidentified person.”<sup>72</sup>

The CIA also enlisted members of organized crime in these terrorist operations. In August 1960, the Agency asked Robert Maheu - an aide to billionaire Howard Hughes, and a former agent of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) – to locate suitable underworld figures to “dispose” of Castro. By September, Maheu had recruited well-known criminal Johnny Roselli into the project. Roselli then contacted Momo Salvatore Giancana, “a Chicago-based gangster,” and Santos Trafficante, Jr., “the Cosa Nostra chieftain in Cuba,” both of whom were on the U.S. Attorney General’s ten-most-wanted criminals list, to aid him in finding Cubans that would carry out the assassination. The CIA initially wanted these underworld leaders to arrange a “gang-land style killing” in which “Castro would be gunned down.” It was eventually decided, however, that poison pills would be more effective. In February 1961, the pills were given to Roselli and then passed on to the Cuban assassins. Over the next several months, two attempts were made on Fidel Castro’s life with the poison pills. Both, however, were unsuccessful.<sup>73</sup>

As U.S.-Cuban relations deteriorated during Eisenhower’s final months in office, anti-Castro groups continued to bring violence to the island. Their attacks were unmistakable acts of terrorism, as they targeted Cuban civilians – including women and children – in order to destabilize the revolutionary government. On September 28, while Fidel Castro was speaking before an audience at the Revolution Plaza in Havana, four bombs exploded nearby. Then, on October 29, nine counterrevolutionaries hijacked a commercial plane between two of Cuba’s cities, killing one soldier, while wounding the

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<sup>72</sup> U.S. Congress, *Assassination Plots*, 72-3

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 74-82, 91-99, 108-115

pilot and a fourteen-year-old boy. In the final week of December, additional attacks were carried out: a Havana cafeteria bombing resulted in fourteen people, mostly women and children, being wounded, while a bomb explosion at the Cuban Electric Company's main plant led to three people being injured; yet another bombing, on a motion picture theatre in Havana, left six men and a thirteen-year old girl wounded. By January 1961 - Eisenhower's last month as president - an eighteen-year-old volunteer teacher had been assassinated in the Las Villas province.

The Cuban government repeatedly accused the United States of involvement in these attacks. Though its charges were dismissed as lies by the Eisenhower administration, the fact remains that the CIA was, during that time, arming militant Castro opponents, while training Cuban exiles to carry out sabotage missions against the island. On December 30, Cuban authorities arrested seventeen people for committing acts of terrorism, and seized three "bomb factories." The group was charged with working "in compliance with instructions from the American Embassy," and of "being paid by Yankee imperialism." In the following month, the government arrested sixteen more individuals on similar charges, as they were found to be in possession of "explosives of North American origin, du Pont's brand...furnished by agents of the United States Central Intelligence Agency."<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>74</sup>Franklin, *Chronological History*, 29-35; *New York Times*, 28 December, 31 December 1960 and 7-9 January 1961.

### III.ii. THE TERRORS OF THE EARTH

The administration of John Kennedy continued a confrontational U.S. policy towards Cuba. The trade embargo was tightened, while greater efforts were made to isolate the island, both diplomatically and economically, from the international community. Furthermore, the new president launched a multi-billion dollar aid program for Latin America – known as the Alliance for Progress – in order to ensure “new Castros” did not “rise across the continent.” Kennedy officials believed that the economic development and social reform proposed in this program would prevent other nationalist revolutionaries from gaining power, and would, consequently, sustain U.S. hegemony in the hemisphere.<sup>75</sup>

Kennedy also authorized the CIA to expand its subversion in Cuba. During the administration’s first three months in power, the Agency was permitted to secretly arm Castro’s underground opposition, while infiltrating sabotage teams into the Caribbean nation. Bombings and other acts of terrorism were frequent during this period. February 1961 saw three bomb explosions in Havana, one in Santa Clara, as well as the destruction of a tobacco warehouse by arson, and the assassination of a young volunteer teacher. On 4 March 1961, anti-Castro terrorists shot into a large crowd commemorating the one-year anniversary of the Havana harbor explosion, killing two civilians and wounding three others, including a child. Hours later, reported the *New York Times*, “a bomb exploded in the underground garage of the Habana Libre hotel, formerly the Habana Hilton.” Within the same week, members of the *Movimiento de Recuperacion Revolucion* (MRR) – an opposition group then working closely with the CIA – carried out several acts of sabotage

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<sup>75</sup> Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., *A Thousand Days* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1965), 185-205; LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions*, 148-55; Stephen Rabe, *The Most Dangerous Area in the World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 8, 19-22.



in the Oriente Province, setting a gas station on fire, vandalizing property at a nationalized Coca-Cola plant, and setting off a bomb in an electrical facility. By March 12, an exile group led by CIA operatives had launched a raid on a Texaco oil refinery in Santiago de Cuba, causing significant property damage and killing a Cuban sailor. During the following weeks, bombs continued to rock Havana, while saboteurs set fire to the island's largest sugar mill, and in doing so obliterated over 4,000,000 tons of sugar marked for export.<sup>76</sup>

As the terror grew, Kennedy approved a CIA-plan for a proxy invasion of the island. Its ultimate goal was to re-impose U.S. dominance in Cuba. According to this proposal, a private army of Cuban exiles – to be trained, financed, and armed by the Agency - would seize a beachhead on Cuban soil and then establish a provisional government. CIA officials believed that upon hearing of these developments, Cuba's counterrevolutionary forces would launch anti-government uprisings across the island, creating "a set of affairs describable as continuing civil war." Such a rebellion might "topple the Castro regime within a period of weeks," the Agency claimed, but if that did not occur, then U.S. intervention would be necessary. Washington would grant recognition to the provisional government, to be followed by "overt military assistance." "The way would then be paved for United States military intervention aimed at [the] pacification of Cuba," read the CIA plan, "and this will result in the prompt overthrow of

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<sup>76</sup> U.S. State Department, *Foreign Relations of the United States: Cuba, 1961-1963* (Washington, DC, 1997), 61-3. (Hereinafter cited as *FRUS:1961-63*); Peter Kornbluh, ed., *Bay of Pigs Declassified* (New York: New Press, 1998), 35-6, 286, 292; Franklin, *Chronological History*, 37, 39; Thomas, *Pursuit*, 1275; *New York Times*, 5 March, 13 March, 15 March, and 26 April 1961.

the Castro Government.” How many Cuban lives would be taken to achieve this “pacification” was not discussed.<sup>77</sup>

The United States created the provisional government called for in the Agency’s proposal. CIA officials, frustrated that the various exile groups were unable to form a unified body on their own, forced them to amalgamate into the Cuban Revolutionary Council (CRC) in March 1961. From its foundation, this organization remained firmly under Washington’s control. Its leader was selected from a U.S.-approved list, while its manifesto was written by North Americans. The organization’s initial declaration of principles was rejected by Washington officials for being “too overwrought in tone and sterile in thought...filled with impassioned appeals to the foreign investor, the private banker, [and] the dispossessed property owner,” so White House aide Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. - working with a CIA official and two Harvard academics - re-wrote the manifesto so that the Council would have a “sensible and progressive platform,” which would “reassure” Cubans that “it had no intention of destroying the social and economic gains of the last two years.” Perhaps he meant to “fool” Cubans.<sup>78</sup>

Among the CRC’s members were the MRR and the *Movimiento Revolucionario del Pueblo* (MRP), perhaps the two most violent Cuban exile groups. The MRR was led by Manuel Artime, who had previously been a high official in the revolutionary regime before defecting in 1959. By mid-1960, his organization was the most organized of the anti-Castro groups, and the CIA’s main hope in overthrowing the island’s government, leading many to label Artime the Agency’s “Golden Boy.” The MRP, conversely, was founded by Manuel Ray, formerly Castro’s minister of public works. Disillusioned with

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<sup>77</sup> *FRUS:1961-1963*, 55-6; Gleijeses, “Ships in the Night,” 17-18.

<sup>78</sup> Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, 259-60.

the revolution's radical turn, he began organizing underground sabotage attacks while still in Cuba, before finally fleeing to Miami in 1960. Ray and his group were criticized by the exile community's more conservative elements for pursuing too radical of a program, as they were accused him of advocating "*Fidelismo sin Fidel* - Castroism without Castro."<sup>79</sup>

Days before the planned invasion, anti-Castro groups unleashed a wave of terror across Cuba. The United States probably sponsored these attacks: only weeks earlier, Kennedy had approved plans to expand sabotage operations against the island. On April 13, a fire set by saboteurs destroyed *El Encanto*, Havana's largest department store. As a result of the incident, a Cuban civilian was killed, while twenty-three others were injured. Phillip Agee, at the time a CIA agent, later claimed the Agency had loaded several dolls shelved in the back of the store with explosives. Additional fires were set the same night at a paper warehouse in Havana, a textile wholesale house in Santiago de Cuba, and a government sugar cane cooperative in Pinar del Río. In the most gruesome of these assaults, a fire set at a sugar mill in the Camaguey province led to four workers being burned to death.<sup>80</sup> Counterrevolutionaries also carried out a series of air raids against Cuban military bases, as they hoped to "soften up" the island before the scheduled invasion. Eight B-26's painted with the markings of the Cuban air force were flown out of Nicaragua by U.S.-trained pilots under orders from the CIA to "knock out some of Castro's air force." Although these attacks inflicted only minor damage on the regime's military aircraft, they caused considerable bloodshed among the Cuban population, as seven people were killed, and forty-four others - including two children - were wounded.

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<sup>79</sup> Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, 227-231; Maria Cristina Garcia, *Havana USA* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 124-5.

<sup>80</sup> *New York Times*, 15 April 1961; Franklin, *Chronological History*, 39.

One of the pilots subsequently flew to Miami then repeated a cover-story created by the CIA, claiming he had defected from the Cuban air force along with two other pilots. Within hours, however, the pilot's story was exposed as a lie, and Washington's role in this terrorist assault became a public embarrassment.<sup>81</sup>

The ensuing invasion of Cuba proved to be a catastrophe for the United States. Within three days of landing on the beaches of the *Bahía de Cochinos* (Bay of Pigs), on the southwestern coast of the island, the 1,400 Cuban exiles – accompanied by several CIA operatives – were crushed by the revolutionary regime's military and militia forces. Like Narciso López's filibustering expeditions a century earlier, anticipated popular support for the invaders never materialized. Moreover, these invaders, like their predecessors, brought widespread violence to the very people they claimed to be liberating. While the bulk of the refugee army was captured (1,200) and only 114 killed, losses to local Cubans were severe. It is estimated that perhaps as many as 1,700 were killed as a result of the attack, and an additional 2,000 wounded. How many of these were civilians, and how many were combatants, is still unknown. It is therefore impossible to determine whether or not the Bay of Pigs invasion involved the committing of terrorist acts. Aimed at toppling the Castro government, the invasion had the opposite effect. Cuba's premier was able to expand his authority at home, while also improving his international reputation, especially in Latin America. "Castro's position is stronger than before the invasion attempt," concluded a CIA report on 28 April 1961. Fidel's "hard-core supporters are more heavily armed and more enthusiastic in his behalf, and the

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<sup>81</sup> *New York Times*, 16 April 1961; Thomas, *Pursuit*, 1355-7; Peter Wyden, *Bay of Pigs: The Untold Story* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979), 184-5; Kornbluh, *Pigs Declassified*, 37-8.

widespread support which he has received abroad has probably increased his stature among many Cubans.”<sup>82</sup>

U.S. leaders saw the Bay of Pigs debacle as a national humiliation. Blaming Castro, officials in the Kennedy administration became obsessed with avenging the defeat, adopting what several scholars have referred to as a “vendetta.” Only a week after the Cuban victory, the U.S. National Security Council declared it would continue “all kinds of harassment to punish Castro for the humiliation he has brought to our door.” Overthrowing the revolutionary regime became the central focus of the administration’s foreign policy. “[A] solution to the Cuban problem carries the top priority in the United States government” declared a White House task force, meeting several months after the failed invasion. “All else is secondary – no time, money, effort, or manpower is to be spared.”<sup>83</sup>

Washington decided to punish Cuba with a new covert program known as Operation Mongoose. Launched in late 1961, the program called for a number of terrorist operations against the island that were aimed at disrupting the Cuban economy. U.S. planners believed these activities would cause widespread suffering among Cubans, and as a result lead to a mass uprising against the Castro government. The ensuing disorder would then be used as a pretext for a military occupation. “In undertaking the overthrow of the target government,” read the guidelines of Operation Mongoose, the United States “recognizes that final success will require decisive U.S. military intervention.” Kennedy blamed the CIA for the Bay of Pigs disaster, and put the operation under the command of General Edward Lansdale, who was respected among

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<sup>82</sup> Kornbluh, *Pigs Declassified*, 3; Thomas, *Pursuit*, 1357-71.

<sup>83</sup> Branch and Crile, “The Kennedy Vendetta,” 19-63; Breuer, *Vendetta!*; *FRUS: 1961-63*, 397, 719-20.

U.S. leaders for his role in suppressing revolutionary movements in the Philippines and Vietnam. The program called for a wide array of activities to terrorize the island's population. Lansdale, for instance, proposed to "incapacitate Cuban sugar workers during harvest season through "chemical warfare means." The chemicals, he reasoned, would "sicken Cubans temporarily and keep them away from the field for a 24-28 hour period." Additional schemes called for an "operational schedule for sabotage actions," and for collaboration with "gangster elements," who would be used to carry out attacks on Cuban police.<sup>84</sup>

Though no longer in charge of covert operations against Cuba, the CIA was still heavily involved. As part of Operation Mongoose, the Agency established a station in Miami to coordinate anti-Castro activities – the largest CIA base in the world during that time - while operating on a yearly budget exceeding \$50,000,000, and employing over three-hundred U.S. citizens, as well as several thousand Cuban émigrés. It also ran numerous paramilitary bases in the Florida Keys, possessed various planes, in addition to several hundred boats that were used in commando raids against the island.<sup>85</sup>

Undermining the Cuban economy was a crucial component of Mongoose. U.S. leaders hoped that subjecting the country to both trade sanctions and economic sabotage would lead to "rising discomfort among hungry Cubans," and, consequently, spark an anti-government rebellion. With this goal in mind, the Kennedy administration expanded the trade embargo in February 1962, while also escalating sabotage operations against the country's export and import trade. Shipments of Cuban sugar were frequently contaminated, while machinery on its way to the Caribbean nation was damaged. In

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<sup>84</sup> *FRUS: 1961-63*, 771-2; U.S. Congress, *Assassination Plots*, 139-48.

<sup>85</sup> Branch and Crile, "The Kennedy Vendetta," 51-2; Hinckle and Turner, *Fish is Red*, 18-20.

several cases, manufacturers were pressured to sell the Cuban government faulty products. “One of the more sophisticated operations was convincing a ball-bearing manufacturer in Frankfurt, Germany to produce a shipment of ball bearings off center,” a CIA official later explained. “Another was to get a manufacturer to do the same with some balanced wheel gears.” Attacks on economic facilities within Cuba continued as well. In December 1961, for instance, a seven-man sabotage team “blew up a railroad bridge and watched a train run off the ruptured tracks,” one of the culprits recounted. Soon after, the team set fire to a sugar warehouse, before finally leaving the island on a boat driven by CIA operatives. How many innocents died as a result of these assaults is unknown.<sup>86</sup>

Paramilitary raids were an important part of Washington’s clandestine program against the island. As part of Mongoose, exile groups operating out of Miami and the Florida Keys were recruited, funded, trained, and armed by the CIA to carry out these acts of terror. Often they were accompanied in their missions by North American mercenaries hired on contract by the Agency. U.S. control of these groups, however, was not always complete. In many cases it was unclear whether a raid had been orchestrated by the CIA or done independently by Cuban exiles. Adding to the confusion, the U.S. government consistently denied involvement in such attacks, while exile groups tended to downplay their dependence on the CIA. One such incident took place on 12 May 1962, when a ship manned by an anti-Castro group assailed a Cuban Navy patrol boat, killing three crewmen and wounding five others. Whether the United States was involved in this

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<sup>86</sup> Branch and Crile, “The Kennedy Vendetta,” 52-8; Thomas Paterson, “Fixation With Cuba,” in *Kennedy’s Quest For Victory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 138-9; Theodore Sorensen, *Kennedy* (Harper & Row: New York, 1965), 722.

incident is not known. Considering the extent of the CIA's activity in the exile community, however, it would be surprising if the Agency was not somehow implicated.

Cuba suffered further attacks during the ensuing months. On August 24, twenty-three members of the Miami-based Student Revolutionary Directorate (DRE) – all of whom had been trained by the CIA and were then working within Operation Mongoose – departed the Florida Keys on two speedboats before shelling a seaside hotel and theater in Havana. Roughly twenty Cubans and Russians were killed. On September 10, the exile group Alpha 66 attacked two Cuban cargo ships and a British freighter in a Cuban port, then, in October, laid siege to a Cuban military base, taking the lives of another twenty Cubans and Russians. Acts of sabotage were also carried out in Alpha 66's October raid, as the group dynamited a railway switchboard, a commissary, and an arsenal. Within two days, the Commando Mambises, an organization then collaborating with the CIA, led an assault on a Cuban boat near the port of Cárdenas, machine-gunning the vessel until it sunk.<sup>87</sup> In some of these raids, the attackers deliberately mutilated their victims. Ramón Orozco, an exile commando who participated in several assaults on the Caribbean nation, later described one of these incidents. A CIA operative offered him \$50 to bring back a human ear from one of his missions. "I brought him back two," explained Orozco, "and he laughed and said, 'You're crazy,' but he paid me \$100 and took us [Orozco's commando team] to his house for a turkey dinner." It is unclear whether the ears belonged to a combatant or a civilian.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> *New York Times*, 14 May, 26 August, 12 September and 11 October 1962; Raymond Garthoff, *Reflections on the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1987), 16; Franklin, *Chronological History*, 54; Branch and Crile, "The Kennedy Vendetta," 60; Hinckle and Turner, *Fish is Red*, 131-33, 155; Garcia, *Havana USA*, 126-30.

<sup>88</sup> Branch and Crile, "The Kennedy Vendetta," 58.



During the Mongoose period, Washington continued to see Cuba as a dangerous example to other nations in the hemisphere. U.S. leaders feared other Latin American countries would follow the revolutionary path, and as a result challenge Washington's dominance in the region. "As long as Castro thrives," noted a report presented to the U.S. National Security Council, "his major threat – the example and stimulus of a working communist revolution – will persist." Castro has been successful in "identifying his regime with the cause of economic and social progress," the report continued, and as he "moves forward economically his example will become more attractive" because he has "provided a rallying point and a source of ideological support for communists everywhere; and often for left-wing nationalist movements" by appealing "to widespread anti-American feeling, a feeling often shared by non-communists." Moreover, Castro's survival "in the face of persistent U.S. efforts to unseat him, has unquestionably lowered the prestige of the United States."<sup>89</sup>

Despite U.S. efforts to increase internal opposition to the Castro government, the island's revolutionary leadership remained popular among Cubans. "Fidel Castro and the Revolution retain the positive support of a substantial proportion of the Cuban people," observed a March 1962 U.S. National Intelligence Estimate. "There are substantial numbers of Cubans who care nothing for ideology, but are still under the spell of Fidel Castro's magnetic personal leadership...who feel a surge of nationalistic pride in revolutionary Cuba, and who attribute all present short-comings to the implacable malevolence of Yankee imperialism." Washington's plans to topple Castro, as such observations make clear, were not motivated by a desire to help Cubans rebel against an unpopular tyrant, as government officials publicly claimed, but were driven by its need to

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<sup>89</sup> *FRUS: 1961-1963*, 460, 463.

protect U.S. interests in Latin America, even if that meant denying Cuban self-determination.<sup>90</sup>

While numerous sabotage operations were carried out under Operation Mongoose, U.S. leaders complained that not enough was being done. Robert Kennedy, for example, wanted “the terrors of the earth” brought to Cuba, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. later explained. During a meeting in early October 1962, the U.S. Attorney General grumbled over the program’s “meager results, especially in the sabotage field.” The U.S. President, he explained, was “dissatisfied” with the “lack of action in the sabotage field” and wanted “more priority” given to such operations. In response, General Lansdale guaranteed that “another attempt will be made against the major target [a large copper mine in the Pinar del Río province] which has been the object of three unsuccessful missions.”<sup>91</sup>

Washington also sponsored assassination attempts on Cuba’s revolutionary leaders during the Mongoose period. In order to execute these acts of terrorism, U.S. officials again enlisted the services of organized crime. In April 1962, a CIA official handed a new batch of poison pills to Mafia figure Johnny Roselli, who then passed them on to a Cuban assassin. The pills were intended to kill not only Fidel Castro, but also his brother Raúl and Che Guevara. As payment, the CIA furnished the Cuban with explosives, detonators, rifles, handguns, radios, and a boat radar worth over \$5,000. Like previous assassination plots, however, this one failed, and by February 1963 the Agency had cancelled the mission.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., *Robert Kennedy and His Times* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1978), 480; Piero Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 17.

<sup>91</sup> Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions*, 17.

<sup>92</sup> U.S. Congress, *Assassination Plots*, 83-5.

It was in this context of ongoing terrorist attacks that Fidel Castro requested the stationing of Soviet missiles in Cuba in the spring of 1962. Cubans feared a U.S. invasion, and justifiably so, as many Washington officials later admitted. “We have no doubt that Castro, and probably the Soviets too, were increasingly worried in the late winter and spring of 1962 about the possibility of a new US invasion attempt,” noted a December 1963 report from the U.S. State Department. Top policymakers within the administration agreed, at least in retrospect. “If I had been a Cuban and read the evidence of covert American action against their government,” Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara explained several decades after the event, “I would be quite ready to believe the U.S. intended to mount an invasion.”<sup>93</sup>

Washington’s discovery of missiles in Cuba led U.S. leaders to suspend Operation Mongoose. The assaults on Cuba, however, continued. In early October – before the crisis began - the Agency infiltrated three separate six-man sabotage teams into the island, but quickly lost contact with these groups and was thus unable to recall them. One of the teams was captured by Cuban authorities on October 25 – during “one of the most dangerous moments in human history,” Schlesinger later wrote – while trying to destroy a large copper mine in the Pinar del Río Province. Moreover, by November 8, less than two weeks after the U.S.-Soviet agreement to remove the missiles, one of these groups had accomplished its mission by blowing up a Cuban industrial facility, and according to a letter Castro sent to the U.N. Secretary General, “provoking the deaths of four hundred workers.” Luckily, Cuban and Soviet leaders did not retaliate.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>93</sup>Glejeses *Conflicting Missions*, 18-9; Domínguez, “The @#\$%& Missile Crisis,” 312.

<sup>94</sup> Garthoff, *Reflections on the Cuban Missile Crisis*, 78-9; *Washington Post*, 22 October 2002; U.S. State Department, *Foreign Relations of the United States: Cuban Missile Crisis and Aftermath, 1961-1963* (Washington, DC, 1997), 75. (Hereinafter cited as *FRUS: Missile Crisis*).

As part of his settlement with Khrushchev, Kennedy promised there would be no U.S. invasion of Cuba. But less than a month later, his administration was again drawing up plans for such a move. In a meeting with the Executive Committee of the National Security Council on 21 November 1962, Kennedy “proposed the no-invasion assurances were too hard.” He maintained that Washington’s “objective is to preserve [the] right to invade Cuba in the event of civil war, if there were guerrilla activities in other Latin American countries or if offensive weapons were re-introduced to Cuba.” “We do not want to build up Castro,” he reasoned, “by means of a no-invasion guarantee.” Then, in a February 1963 meeting with the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Kennedy “expressed particular interest in the possibility of getting some troops into Cuba in the event of a general uprising.”<sup>95</sup>

Many Cuban exiles believed such an invasion was imminent, and enlisted in the U.S. Army for that reason. While the majority of these Cubans received regular military training, an elite group comprising two-hundred-and-twelve men was sent to the officer candidate school at Fort Benning, Georgia, where they received instruction in demolition, clandestine operations, intelligence, and propaganda. Among these select few were Jorge Mas Canosa, Félix Rodríguez, and Luis Posada Carriles – all of whom went on to become prominent anti-Castro leaders. Posada, in fact, is now viewed by many observers as one of the hemisphere’s most infamous terrorists.<sup>96</sup>

Although Mongoose was disbanded following the missile crisis, U.S. covert operations against Cuba continued. Washington officials, even after the threat of nuclear war, continued to terrorize the island. In December 1962, the administration reaffirmed

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<sup>95</sup> *FRUS: Missile Crisis*, 504, 712.

<sup>96</sup> Ann Louise Bardach, *Cuba Confidential* (New York, Random House, 2002), 136, 171, 180-1; Garcia, *Havana USA*, 241 n.19; *New York Times*, 13 July 1998.

its commitment to deposing Cuba's revolutionary government through subversion. "Our ultimate objective with respect to Cuba," wrote McGeorge Bundy, Kennedy's National Security Adviser, "remains the overthrow of the Castro regime and its replacement by one sharing the aims of the Free World." To accomplish these goals, U.S. policymakers urged the resumption of sabotage operations, including "using selected Cuban exiles to sabotage key Cuban installations in such a manner that the action can plausibly be attributed to Cubans in Cuba," and causing "sabotage [to] Cuban cargo and shipping, and [Soviet] Bloc cargo and shipping to Cuba."<sup>97</sup>

Attacks on Soviet shipping soon followed. On 17 March 1963, paramilitaries belonging to the exile organizations Alpha 66 and the Second National Front of the Escambray carried out speedboat assaults on a Soviet military encampment and a Soviet merchant ship in the Cuban sugar port of Isabela de Sagua, wounding twelve Russians. Their purpose, the raiders explained, "was to wage psychological warfare against the Government of Fidel Castro." One week later, the exile group Commandos L assaulted a Soviet freighter in the same port, causing considerable damage. The United States publicly denied any connection to either incident. Although he had authorized such attacks only three months earlier, Kennedy openly criticized the raids for serving "no useful purpose" and for strengthening "the Russian position in Cuba and Communist control there." Within a month, however, the administration was planning further acts of violence against the Caribbean nation, as the CIA was given approval to carry out the sabotage of a railway bridge, some petroleum facilities, and a molasses storage vessel.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> *FRUS: Missile Crisis*, 587-9, 761.

<sup>98</sup> *New York Times*, 20-21 March and 28 March 1963; Garcia, *Havana USA*, 129.

Soon after, the United States initiated yet another clandestine program to remove the Castro regime. In June 1963, Kennedy endorsed the “Integrated Program of Action towards Cuba.” Intended to replace Operation Mongoose, it called for the “liquidation of the Castro/Communist entourage,” through “sabotage and harassment,” support for anti-Castro groups, as well as various other courses of action. Sabotage operations targeted four sectors of the island’s economy. These included “A. *Electrical Power*,” “B. *Petroleum, Oil and Lubricants*,” “C. *Transportation*” and “D. *Production Processing*.” Like Mongoose, this program aimed to bring distress to Cuba’s civilian population in order to weaken the Castro government. Attacks were urged on “the myriad industries associated with the provision of food, clothing and shelter, which are worthwhile targets in that stopping or lessening their output will weaken the economy and breed discontent against the regime.” Other actions included the “sabotage of Cuban ships,” which the proposal explained had already been “approved and implemented.”<sup>99</sup>

The ensuing months witnessed numerous raids against Cuba. On August 15, members of the Miami-based Revolutionary Recovery Insurrectional Movement (MIRR) led plane strikes on a nationalized Esso oil refinery in Havana’s harbor and on a sugar mill in the Camaguey province. Among the attackers was Dr. Orlando Bosch, whom the FBI later designated “Miami’s number one terrorist.” Bosch had previously been a pediatrician in Cuba, had fought in the insurrection against Batista, and was subsequently made a provincial governor under the revolutionary government. By 1960, however, he had turned against Castro, relocated to Florida, and begun launching raids on the island. During 1962-1963, he did so while in contact with CIA: one of his training facilities was,

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<sup>99</sup> *FRUS: Missile Crisis*, 828-34.

in fact, funded by the Agency.<sup>100</sup> Within days of Bosch's raid, a plane fired rockets into an oil facility on the south coast of the island, puncturing a large storage tank and setting fire to a tank car containing over 8,000 gallons of crude petroleum, while two gunboats shelled an industrial plant on Cuba's north coast. By September, a plane had bombed the city of Santa Clara, killing one person and wounding several others. Though it is not known if Washington sponsored these specific attacks, there is evidence the United States was orchestrating acts of sabotage against the island during this period. In November 1963, for instance, the CIA reported four successful missions against a sawmill, an oil refinery, a power plant, and a floating crane in one of the country's harbors."<sup>101</sup>

U.S.-backed assassination plots on Cuban leaders also stretched into the post-missile crisis period. Some of these plans were both ridiculous and disturbing. In early 1963, the CIA devised two separate schemes to kill Fidel Castro: in one case, Agency officials made plans to create "an exotic seashell, rigged to explode," which would then be deposited in "an area where Castro commonly goes skin diving." Surprisingly, the idea was eventually abandoned as "impractical." In another plan, the CIA intended for a U.S. diplomat then negotiating the release of the Bay of Pigs prisoners to present Castro a contaminated diving suit as a gift. With this goal in mind, the Agency purchased a diving suit then "dusted the inside with a fungus that would produce a chronic skin disease (Madura foot), and contaminated the breathing apparatus with a tubercule bacillus." The

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<sup>100</sup> *Washington Post*, 17 August 1963; Bardach, *Cuba Confidential*, 183; CIA, Secret Memorandum to the FBI, "Information Regarding Anti-Castro Figures Possibly Involved in Neutrality or Other Violations of Federal Law," 9 December 1976. National Security Archive, Washington, D.C. (<http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB157/index.htm>). (date accessed: 1 July 2008). (Hereinafter cited as NSA).

<sup>101</sup> *New York Times*, 20 August 1963 and 14 May 1964; *FRUS: Missile Crisis*, 887; Bardach, "Twilight of the Assassins," 95.

plot was subsequently terminated, however, because the diplomat “gave Castro a different diving suit on his own initiative.”<sup>102</sup>

Further attempts to eliminate the island’s leadership were made over the following months. In the fall of 1963, the CIA began providing Rolando Cubela – an official in the Castro government – with the arms necessary to kill Fidel Castro and launch a coup against the revolutionary regime. Cubela requested hand grenades and “a high-powered rifle with telescopic sights that could be used to kill Castro from a distance.” Soon after, the Agency made plans to deliver the cache. Moreover, in November CIA officials secretly met with Cubela in Paris and gave him a ball-point pen equipped with a poison-tipped hypodermic needle. The meeting had an ironic twist. “It is very likely,” the CIA inspector general later noted, “that at the very moment President Kennedy was shot a CIA officer was meeting with a Cuban agent...and giving him an assassination device for use against Castro.”<sup>103</sup>

### **III.iii. GOING HARD**

While there is a great deal of literature on Kennedy’s attempts to overthrow Castro, scholars have written very little on U.S. covert operations against Cuba under Lyndon Johnson. The existing material tends to emphasize how Castro ceased to be a central focus of U.S. foreign policy while Johnson was in office, and how, as a result, the CIA’s counterrevolutionary operations were drastically reduced. This study departs from the existing scholarship by placing a greater emphasis on U.S. subversion in Cuba during the mid- and late-1960s. Though it recognizes covert operations were scaled back during

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<sup>102</sup> U.S. Congress, *Assassination Plots*, 85-6.

<sup>103</sup> U.S. Congress, *Assassination Plots*, 88-91; Hinckle and Turner, *Fish is Red*, 191-3, 219



this period, it argues these activities were still substantial during the administration's first two years in power. Relying mainly on de-classified U.S. documents, it puts these policies in the wider context of U.S.-sponsored terrorism against the Caribbean nation. Besides a few sentences from such scholars Louis Pérez, Noam Chomsky, and Edward Herman, Johnson's support for terrorist activity has, thus far, been absent from the both the scholarship on terrorism and U.S.-Cuban relations.<sup>104</sup>

The Johnson administration continued U.S. efforts to weaken the Castro government, and terrorism remained an important weapon in accomplishing that goal. Although there was discussion in the White House of accommodating the revolutionary government, these ideas were quickly laid to rest. While "Kennedy could have accommodated with Castro and gotten away with it with a minimum of domestic heat," observed a top U.S. official, "a new President who has no background of being successfully nasty to Castro and the Communists" would probably be accused of "going soft." Johnson officials therefore went hard, as they pursued policies that aimed to generate widespread misery among the Cuban population, and, eventually, cause the downfall of the Castro regime. "The ultimate U.S. objective is the replacement of the present government in Cuba by one more compatible with the goals of the United States," read an inter-agency report in January 1964. "To attain this objective," it continued, "we are trying, by exerting maximum pressure through all means short of military force, to create a degree of disorganization, uncertainty and discontent in Cuba."<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> For studies that discuss U.S. covert operations against Cuba under Johnson, though only briefly, see Garcia, *Havana USA*; Hinckle and Turner, *Fish is Red*; Ayers, *The War That Never Was*.

<sup>105</sup> *FRUS: Missile Crisis*, 890; U.S. State Department, *Foreign Relations of the United States: Dominican Republic; Cuba; Haiti; Guyana, 1964-68* (Washington, DC, 2005), 552. (Hereinafter cited as *FRUS: 1964-68*).

To meet these aims, Johnson maintained U.S.-support for militant Cuban exile groups. During 1964-1965, CIA officials worked closely with Manuel Artime's MRR and Manuel Ray's new organization, the *Junta Revolucionario Cubana* (JURE), supplying them with money, intelligence information, and equipment. Artime had been captured during the Bay of Pigs invasion, and upon his release had moved the MRR's operations to Central America. Soon after, his organization began launching attacks on Cuba as part of Kennedy's June 1963 program. Lavish CIA-funding allowed the MRR to pay its members monthly stipends, to run five bases in Costa Rica and Nicaragua, and to purchase four boats as well as several planes. Artime, in short, was still the Agency's "Golden Boy." The JURE, on the other hand, had been formed in Puerto Rico in 1962 after the dissolution of Ray's previous organization, the MRP. Among the JURE's members was Luis Posada Carriles, who had left the U.S. Army in March of 1964, before relocating to Miami. Because of his expertise in demolitions, Posada was made the JURE's main paramilitary instructor, providing terrorist training at its Florida bases. Like earlier Castro opponents, these organizations continued to be dependent on Washington, and would have probably collapsed had U.S. leaders cut off funding. "[O]ur only real leverage on them is through our financial support," noted a CIA official, "but withdrawal of this support would probably be fatal to their operations in time."<sup>106</sup>

The spring of 1964 saw the resumption of terrorist raids against Cuba. On May 13, the MRR briefly captured the Port of Pilon, on the southern coast of the Oriente province, while carrying out the sabotage and demolition of a nearby sugar mill. The attackers wounded several members of the island's militia forces, and destroyed roughly 70,000 tons of sugar. "[T]his is just the sort of thing that evokes a highly emotional

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<sup>106</sup> Garcia, *Havana USA*, 132-33; *FRUS: Missile Crisis*, 906-7; Bardach, *Cuba Confidential*, 181.

response from Castro,” wrote a top U.S. official only a day after the attack. “As things stand, he seems convinced that we are tied into the raids – as indeed we are.” An additional raid was carried out on June 19, as a plane dropped three bombs on a sugar mill in the Las Villas province before it was finally shot down by the Cuban army. Whether this attack was executed by the MRR or another exile group is unclear. It is known, however, that in June 1964 the CIA reported that Artime’s group was planning two separate raids to be completed within the month. In the fall of 1964, MRR commandos launched a speedboat assault on a ship they believed was the *Sierra Maestra* - the centerpiece of the Cuban merchant fleet - shelling the boat until its captain, second mate, and engineer were dead, and seventeen sailors wounded, only to later discover the vessel was actually the *Sierra Aranzazu*, a Spanish freighter transporting toys and foodstuffs to Cuba. Despite committing this atrocity, Artime’s organization continued to receive CIA-backing.<sup>107</sup>

Although the Johnson presidency authorized the CIA to finance exile raids, it quickly discontinued the Agency’s program of sending its own sabotage teams into the island. The CIA completed its last “hit-and-run” operation in December 1963. One month later, U.S. leaders suspended these actions. Their objections were not based on moral grounds: no mention was made of the fact that Cuban innocents were killed. On the contrary, they feared the attacks were hurting larger U.S. objectives. “In terms of purely Cuban policy, the raids have had a net positive effect,” read a 1965 report prepared by the State Department. “The decision to suspend was taken on essentially broader grounds, including concern about disturbing the emerging détente between the

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<sup>107</sup>FRUS: 1964-68, 654, 657, 688; Hinckle and Turner, *Fish is Red*, 238-9; *New York Times*, 14 May and 19 June 1964.

US and the Soviets...the desire to avoid measures which might prevent or delay Soviet troop withdrawals from Cuba...and the belief that other less costly measures, particularly economic, would be effective.”<sup>108</sup>

CIA-sponsored assassination attempts, however, persisted until at least 1965. Agency officials maintained discussions with Cuban official Rolando Cubela, who still had plans to kill Fidel Castro in order to facilitate a military coup against the revolutionary government. In March and June 1964, the CIA arranged for two arms caches to be delivered to the island so that Cubela could carry out this act of terrorism. Then, in January 1965, the Agency put Cubela in contact with their “Golden Boy,” Manuel Artime. It was hoped that the exile leader could provide Cubela with additional weapons to take Castro’s life, while also launching commando raids against Cuba during the month leading up to the assassination attempt as a way to “prepare the public and raise the morale and resistance spirit of the people,” in Cubela’s own words. The two men promptly drew up a plan: following Castro’s death, Artime was to invade Cuba with 750 paramilitaries, take control of one of the island’s provinces, establish a military junta, and gain “recognition from at least five other American countries.” The plan was quickly set in motion, as a CIA-furnished silencer and a number of small explosives were given to Artime, then passed on to Cubela. In the end, this plot - like so many before it - accomplished nothing. By February 1966, Cuban authorities had uncovered it, and Cubela was arrested.<sup>109</sup>

While orchestrating these terrorist assaults on Cuba, Washington continued to suffocate the island’s foreign trade. U.S. officials took steps to deny Cubans access to

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<sup>108</sup> *FRUS: 1964-68*, 720.

<sup>109</sup> U.S. Congress, *Assassination Plots*, 89-90; Hinckle and Turner, *Fish is Red*, 239-42.

commodities crucial to the country's economy, to prevent ships based in Japan, Europe and Latin America from trading in Cuban ports, and to restrict U.S. economic and military aid to nations trading with the Castro government. Furthermore, Washington applied political pressure on countries to reduce and eventually eliminate their diplomatic ties with Cuba. This open program of isolation was to be bolstered by clandestine operations. "[O]ur covert economic denial programs are designed to reinforce and be reinforced by our overt measures of economic pressure," explained an inter-agency report in January 1964. "Both types of activities directed against the economy are intended to aggravate existing economic difficulties and thus to increase the level of disaffection not only in the popular mass but particularly in the power centers of the regime." By July 1964, the United States had successfully convinced the majority of its Latin American neighbors into supporting Organization of American States (OAS)-trade sanctions against Cuba. Within months, all OAS members – excluding Mexico - had caved under U.S. pressure, and broken diplomatic and economic ties with the island.<sup>110</sup>

Cuba became less of a concern in Washington during the spring of 1965, and, as a result, the Johnson administration began phasing out covert operations against the Caribbean nation at a much more rapid pace. U.S. leaders had grown increasingly focused on Southeast Asia, while at the same time, they had started questioning the effectiveness of anti-Castro paramilitary raids. Support for these activities had to be scaled back, policymakers argued, because "the damage to our broad interests, especially our relations with the USSR and the Vietnamese situation, would be disproportionate to

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<sup>110</sup> *FRUS: 1964-68, 552-7, 675, Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions*, 93*

the benefits which we might obtain in terms of our Cuban policy... moreover, there were, in practice, very limited benefits.”<sup>111</sup>

Despite dwindling U.S.-support, Cuban exile terrorism continued. This was primarily because of the efforts of millionaire José “Pepín” Bosch of the Bacardi Company in unifying the émigré community. In 1964, he created the *Representación Cubana del Exilio* (RECE), which quickly became the most powerful anti-Castro organization. Partly funded by the CIA, this new exile front sponsored propaganda campaigns and paramilitary attacks against Cuba, often in collaboration with other counterrevolutionary groups. Jorge Mas Canosa, who had left the U.S. Army in 1964 and had subsequently begun working for the Agency, was made one of RECE’s leaders. By mid-1965, Mas Canosa’s group was launching commando raids on Cuba. Among its targets was Havana’s Hotel Riviera - where Soviet officials often stayed - and the home of Cuban president Osvaldo Dorticós. Other attacks were directed at countries associated with the Castro government. “[I]n May, 1965, one of RECE’s agents had placed a bomb in the Soviet Library in Mexico City, which... exploded and caused a furor,” the FBI reported in July 1965. “On this agent’s return to Miami, he was not bothered by U.S. authorities, although his activities were common knowledge in exile circles. Mas [Canosa] interpreted this to mean U.S. tacit approval to the operation.” Then, in June 1965, stated the same FBI report, “Jorge Mas Canosa, an official of the RECE” proposed to a “demolition expert that he travel to Spain, Mexico, and other Latin American countries at RECE’s expense and place bombs in Communist installations such as embassies and information service libraries.” U.S. officials made no effort to notify

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<sup>111</sup> Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions*, 223; Garcia, *Havana USA*, 134; Ayers, *The War That Never Was*, 188-9; Seymour M. Hersh, *The Price of Power* (New York: Summit Books, 1983), 251; William Bundy, *A Tangled Web* (New York, Hill and Wang, 1998), 197.

Cuban authorities of these developments, although they could have done so without difficulty.<sup>112</sup>

Although the CIA had reduced its anti-Castro operations, it continued recruiting Cuban exiles. Many of these men provided the Agency and the FBI important intelligence on exile activities in Florida. One such informant was Luis Posada Carriles, who became a CIA operative in April 1965, and remained an Agency asset until 1974. The CIA was deeply involved in his exploits over this period, supplying him with money, explosives, and guidance. According to a 1966 FBI report, Posada was “receiving approximately \$300 per month from the CIA.” Whether he received these payments for the duration of his CIA years is not clear. De-classified documents also portray Posada as being firmly under the Agency’s control during this period. According to one document from the fall of 1966, Posada went as far as asking the CIA “whether he should be allowed to purchase [a] 25’ boat.” Officials ultimately denied his request, believing it would hurt his cover.<sup>113</sup>

While employed by the CIA, Posada plotted terrorist attacks on Cuba and its allies. He did so alongside Jorge Mas Canosa, who was then emerging as a powerful figure in the exile community. The two had maintained contact after leaving the U.S. Army, and by the summer of 1965 they were organizing a campaign of violence against the revolutionary regime. An FBI report from July 1965 described how “Jorge Mas Canosa of the RECE has paid [Posada] \$5,000 to cover expenses of a demolition

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<sup>112</sup> Bardach, *Cuba Confidential*, 136-7, 182; Garcia, *Havana USA*, 135-6; FBI, 13 July 1965, “Cuban Representation in Exile (RECE)” NSA.

(<http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB202/index.htm>). (date accessed: 1 July 2008).

<sup>113</sup> House Select Committee on Assassinations, LUIS POSADA CARRILES, ca. 1978. NSA.

(<http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB202/index.htm>). (date accessed: 1 July 2008).

FBI, 18 July 1966, Cuba. NSA. (<http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB153/index.htm>). (date accessed: 1 July 2008).

operation in Mexico. Posada said he was planning to place limpet mines on either a Cuban or Soviet vessel in the harbor of Veracruz, Mexico and had 100 pounds of C-4 explosives and detonators.” Within two weeks, the CIA was reporting “Posada completed [sic] two 101 pound bombs for RECE.” By 1966, Posada had been appointed head of the RECE’s military wing, and held that position for the following year – a period when the group executed numerous raids on Cuba. The CIA was well aware of these activities, but nevertheless allowed him to remain an asset.<sup>114</sup>

Posada’s relationship with the Agency eventually began to strain during the late 1960s. The CIA’s Miami station was on the verge of being shut down, while Agency officials had become increasingly concerned over Posada’s “unreported association with gangster elements” and his “thefts from the CIA.” By 1967, Posada had abruptly left Miami and relocated to Caracas. There he used his CIA contacts to secure employment in DISIP, Venezuela’s secret police. Within two years Posada had climbed to the highest ranks of the country’s intelligence service, as he was made DISIP’s chief of operations – all the while remaining an agent for the CIA.<sup>115</sup>

### **III.iv. JUMPSTARTING THE TERRORIST CAMPAIGN**

While terrorist attacks on Cuba declined under Johnson, they skyrocketed during the administration of Richard Nixon. To a large extent, this was the result of increased U.S.-support: soon after taking office, the new president ordered the CIA to expand its anti-Castro program. Nixon was determined to pursue an aggressive policy towards

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<sup>114</sup> Bardach, *Cuba Confidential*, 137-8, 181-3; FBI, 13 July 1965, Cuban Representation in Exile (RECE). NSA. (<http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB153/index.htm>). (date accessed: 1 July 2008); FBI, 18 July 1966, Cuba. NSA. (<http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB153/index.htm>). (date accessed: 1 July 2008); House Select Committee on Assassinations, LUIS POSADA CARRILES, ca. 1978. NSA. (<http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB202/index.htm>). (date accessed: 1 July 2008).

<sup>115</sup> Bardach, *Cuba Confidential*, 183-4; *New York Times*, 13 July 1998.



Cuba, as he was convinced he had lost the 1960 presidential election, as well as his 1962 bid for the governorship of California, for not appearing tougher on Castro than his opponents. “The first thing the administration wanted us to do was double our operations against Cuba,” recounted a CIA program analyst. “We couldn’t believe it – we thought the American people had matured more than that.” It is unclear, however, if these operations involved sending CIA sabotage teams into Cuba, or simply funding and arming anti-Castro groups. Although there is an abundance of de-classified documents on CIA programs against Cuba under Eisenhower and Kennedy, the de-classified record of the Johnson administration is sparse, and the documents of the Nixon era have not yet been made public. Furthermore, there are only a handful of secondary sources that even mention Washington’s policies towards Cuba over the 1969-1974 period, and even those studies are very limited, focusing almost exclusively on the “Cienfuegos Crisis” of 1970, when Nixon officials feared the Soviet Union was constructing a submarine base in Cuba. Moreover, except for a few words from Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman, none of the existing studies consider whether U.S. covert operations under Nixon involved the sponsoring of terrorism. Even among leading terrorism experts, such as Walter Laqueur and Claire Sterling, the subject of U.S.-backed violence against Cuba is surprisingly absent from their studies of 1970s terrorism. By piecing together various primary and secondary sources, this study sheds light on a topic that has, up until this point, been neglected in both the fields of U.S.-Cuban relations and terrorism.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Hersh, *Price of Power*, 211-2, 250-58; Bundy, *Tangled Web*, 191-98; Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions*, 223; Henry Kissinger, *White House Years* (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1979), 632-52; Claire Sterling, *The Terror Network* (New York: Holt, Reinhart, and Winston, 1981); Laqueur, *The Age of Terrorism*.

During Nixon's five-and-a-half years in power, Cuban exiles waged war against their homeland. They continued to employ terrorist tactics, as they believed crippling the island's economy would generate discontent among Cubans and ultimately cause an anti-government rebellion. With this goal in mind, exiles infiltrated sabotage teams into Cuba. Most of these commandos, however, were captured before they could complete their missions. Over the course of 1969, the revolutionary government arrested saboteurs on three separate occasions, in each case blaming Washington. Rather than responding with violence, Cuba's leaders went to the United Nations for help, sending the Secretary General a letter stating that they knew of "steps taken by the Central Intelligence Agency to set up new mercenary training camps in Guatemala, Panama, and Nicaragua," and of the Agency's program of sending "small groups of Cuban mercenaries to make...raids" against the island while "relying on the protection of the United States authorities." Observers must have felt a sense of *déjà vu* after hearing Cuba's claims, as they sounded nearly identical to Castro's accusations in the months leading up to the Bay of Pigs invasion. Those, too, were denied by Washington.<sup>117</sup>

Despite Cuba's complaints, attacks persisted. In April 1970, thirteen paramilitaries belonging to the Miami-based Alpha 66 – a group supported by the CIA during the 1960s - landed in the Oriente province, armed with automatic weapons and plastic explosives. They survived only one week. After killing five Cuban soldiers and wounding two others, the saboteurs were hunted down and captured by military forces personally led by Fidel Castro. The Cuban premier accused the Nixon administration of complicity in the incident. The "landing of mercenaries," stated Castro, had been part of

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<sup>117</sup> Garcia, *Havana USA*, 137-40; Franklin, *Chronological History*, 90-2; *New York Times*, 29 August and 30 August 1969

Washington's "imperialist plans to obstruct and hinder the [1970 sugar] harvest." Furthermore, he claimed the U.S. President had "assigned the Pentagon the task to organize and recruit mercenaries" for "new aggressive plans against our country." Whether Castro's charges were simply political propaganda or were supported by evidence is unclear. Considering the Nixon administration's hostile policy towards Cuba, its close ties to the exile community, and the CIA's long history of supporting counterrevolutionary groups, it would be surprising if the United States did not play some role in these activities.<sup>118</sup>

For the remainder of Nixon's term in office, sabotage teams continued to land on the island, and Cubans continued to hold Washington responsible. In May 1970, Castro opponents destroyed a sugar warehouse in the Las Villas province by setting it afire; then, in October, a four-man sabotage team was apprehended in eastern Cuba; in July 1971, Miami-based exiles damaged a railroad in Guantánamo, causing the deaths of four civilians and the injury of seventeen others; in October 1972, two exiles, whom the Cuban government accused of being CIA agents, were arrested as they tried to infiltrate the Oriente province. This attack came only weeks after Nixon had told National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger to prepare a report on "[w]hat the CIA can do to support *any* kind of action which will irritate Castro," and asked other top U.S. officials to prepare "contingency plans for...the removal of all restraints on the Cuban exile community." Infiltrations carried on into Nixon's final week in power, as three émigrés armed with sabotage equipment were captured by Cuban authorities and subsequently charged with working for the Agency.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> *New York Times*, 20 April, 21 April and 28 April 1970.

<sup>119</sup> Franklin, *Chronological History*, 92, 94, 96, 101, 109; Kissinger, *White House Years*, 642-3.

Exile terrorism also targeted Cuban fishermen: innocents were regularly kidnapped, wounded, and killed. While it has not been proven Washington supported these attacks, the likelihood is high. In May 1970, Alpha 66 commandos led by longtime CIA agent Ramón Orozco sank two Cuban fishing vessels and captured the eleven men aboard. They were held as prisoners on a Bahamian islet for eleven days, before finally being released. Fidel Castro saw this incident as another example of CIA-backed violence. “The government of Cuba...will reject fully and totally blackmail by the C.I.A. and its agents,” Castro stated after rejecting Alpha 66’s offer to exchange the fishermen for exile prisoners inside Cuba. He may well have been correct, as Alpha 66’s leader later claimed he had worked closely with the CIA during the early 1970s. An additional attack took place in October 1971, as a boat machine-gunned the fishing village of Boca de Samá in the Oriente province, killing two Cubans and wounding four others, including a teenage girl who later had her leg amputated. The *New York Times* later revealed the *Aquarias II*, a merchant ship based in Miami and owned by a Cuban exile, carried out the attack. Raids continued into October 1972, as two gunboats blew up Cuban fishing vessels the *Aguya* and the *Platforma IV*, wounding a fisherman and leaving the others to drown. Then, three months later, an anti-Castro speedboat assailed a group of Cuban fishermen, wounding one of them. Yet another raid was completed in October 1973, when two Cuban boats were strafed in international waters, leaving one fisherman dead and the others stranded on rubber rafts.<sup>120</sup>

The early 1970s also saw anti-Castro groups launch a campaign of terror against Cuban targets abroad: embassies and consulates across the Americas and Europe were

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<sup>120</sup> *New York Times*, 14 May 1970, 15 October 1971 and 16 April 1972; *Wall Street Journal*, 13 April 1972; Franklin, *Chronological History*, 93, 97, 101, 103, 105; Hinckle and Turner, *Fish is Red*, 293; Bardach, “Twilight of the Assassins,” 94.

bombed. In April 1972, two bombs exploded inside the Cuban Trade Commission in Montreal, killing a Cuban official. Over a four-month period in 1973, the Cuban Embassy in Santiago de Chile - and the homes of Cuban diplomats there - were bombed a total of six times. The last of these attacks came just days before a U.S.-backed military coup violently overthrew the government of Salvador Allende. Although Washington had long accused the Cuban Embassy of smuggling arms into the country for pro-Allende groups, there is no evidence U.S. officials organized the Santiago bombings to prevent such activity. In January 1974, a bomb exploded in the Cuban embassy in Mexico City, then, in February, a letter bomb exploded in the Cuban embassy in Peru, seriously burning a government official. A month later, several bombs were thrown into the Cuban embassy in Jamaica, followed by a bomb explosion that destroyed the Cuban embassy in Madrid. In May, bombs went off at the Cuban embassy in London, and the Cuban consulate in Mérida, Mexico, then, two months later, a bomb exploded at the entrance of the Cuban embassy in Paris.<sup>121</sup>

CIA-backed attempts to assassinate Fidel Castro also resumed while Nixon was president. Some came very close to succeeding. In November 1971, the Agency enlisted Antonio Veciana - the founder of Alpha 66, a terrorist group long funded by the CIA - and Luis Posada Carriles - head of the Venezuelan secret police and a CIA agent - to kill Cuba's premier while he made a state visit to Chile. Veciana promptly hired two Cuban exiles to carry out the act. They were to disguise themselves as news reporters, and shoot Fidel with a hidden weapon. "We had TV cameras with machine guns mounted inside to kill Castro during his speech," Veciana recalled, "but one agent had an appendicitis

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<sup>121</sup> *Washington Post*, 6 April 1972; Franklin, *Chronological History*, 104-7; Henry Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval* (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1982), 383, 392.

attack and we had to get him to the hospital. The other agent said he wouldn't do it alone." The CIA's assassins were undeterred, and quickly organized another attempt. Aware that Castro was going to tour a copper mine in northern Chile, they rigged a car with four-hundred pounds of dynamite and parked it in the middle of the narrow road leading to the site. Though Castro and his entourage drove up to the trap, a faulty detonator prevented an explosion. Despite these setbacks, Castro's enemies were unwilling to quit, and made an additional attempt to take out the Cuban premier when he landed at the Lima airport on an official stop in Peru. According to the plan, Veciana's men were to machine-gun Castro as he stepped out of his private jet. When the Cuban leader landed in a highly secure section of the airport, however, this terrorist plot was ruined. A fourth and final attempt was made when Castro landed in Ecuador. Luis Posada, frustrated from the repeated failures, decided to kill the revolutionary leader himself. Holding a sniper rifle with a silencer, he hid in an elevated alcove several hundred yards away from the Quito airport where the premier was supposed to land. To the dismay of this determined terrorist, Fidel changed his arrival to a military base, and ended any opportunity Posada might have had to assassinate him.<sup>122</sup>

It has also been claimed that the Nixon administration pursued biological warfare against Cuba's population, though this has never been officially confirmed. A former CIA agent told the North American press that in March 1970 he transferred a vial of African swine fever from a CIA training facility in the U.S. Panama Canal Zone to members of the exile terrorist group Omega 7, who then smuggled it into the island and caused a major outbreak of swine fever – the first ever recorded in the Western Hemisphere. Over 500,000 pigs – one of Cuba's main food sources – were subsequently

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<sup>122</sup> Bardach, "Twilight of the Assassins," 94; Hinckle and Turner, *Fish is Red*, 293-4.

slaughtered in order to prevent the epidemic from spreading further. It came as such a shock that the U.N. Food and Agricultural Organization named it the “most alarming event” of the year, and quickly took steps to uncover “how the disease had been transmitted.” If this plot did indeed take place, then it would certainly constitute an example of terrorism, as the perpetrators clearly sought to foment unrest among Cubans through mass starvation, and used a biological weapon to do so.<sup>123</sup>

### **III.v. A BUS WITH 73 DOGS WENT OFF A CLIFF AND GOT KILLED**

During Gerald Ford’s term in office, exiles stepped up their campaign against the Castro government. Not surprisingly, Cuban leaders blamed Washington. Florida-based commando groups repeatedly kidnapped and murdered Cuban civilians, while bombing Cuban embassies and consulates across Latin America and Europe. These activities peaked in 1976, when militants completed over a dozen attacks, including the hemisphere’s most deadly act of airline terrorism prior to 9/11. On 6 October 1976, two bombs exploded inside a Cuban civilian jet, sending it to the bottom of the Caribbean ocean and killing all seventy-three passengers. Among the casualties were six exchange students and a young family from Guyana, five North Koreans, and fifty-seven Cubans, including the national fencing team, many of whom were teenagers. The Cuban government held the CIA responsible. “At the beginning we had doubts as to whether the CIA had directly organized the sabotage or had carefully elaborated it through its cover organizations made up of Cuban counterrevolutionaries,” Fidel Castro told a crowd of one million Cubans gathered in Havana nine days after the attack. “We are now

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<sup>123</sup> *Newsday*, 6 January 1977; Rafael Hernández, “Frozen Relations: Washington and Cuba After the Cold War,” *NACLA: Report on the Americas XXXV* (January to February 2002), 21-26.

decidedly inclined toward the first. The CIA participated directly in the destruction of the Cubana Airlines plane in Barbados.”<sup>124</sup>

A Cuban exile group publicly declared it had carried out the attack. Within hours of the plane’s explosion, the *Coordinación de Organizaciones Revolucionarias Unidas* (CORU), an umbrella organization comprised of five anti-Castro paramilitary groups, admitted to the act in a communiqué released in Miami. The airliner, CORU claimed, was a “military plane camouflaged as a civilian DC-8 aircraft.” No remorse was shown for the victims, whom it referred to as “57 Cuban Communists [and] 5 North Korean Communists.” Two Cuban émigrés were subsequently arrested in Trinidad on suspicion of committing the crime. Authorities soon discovered that both men lived in Venezuela, worked for a security company owned by Luis Posada, and were aboard the Cubana airliner when it left Caracas, before they disembarked in Barbados – the plane’s last stop before it was destroyed. The suspects quickly confessed to the bombing, claiming that Posada and his associate Orlando Bosch had contrived the attack and paid them to execute it. In fact, one of the suspects told investigators he had telephoned Bosch shortly after the bombing, telling him that “a bus with 73 dogs went off a cliff and all got killed.” Soon after, Venezuelan police searched the Caracas home of Luis Posada, discovered incriminating evidence – including the schedules of Cubana flights – and promptly arrested both Posada and Bosch on charges of conspiring to sabotage the plane.<sup>125</sup>

When he was taken into custody, Bosch was a convicted terrorist and a fugitive from U.S. authorities. During the 1960s, he had led numerous attacks against Cuba, until

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<sup>124</sup> Garcia, *Havana USA*, 140-141; *New York Times*, 7 October and 16 October 1976; Bardach, “Twilight of the Assassins,” 90.

<sup>125</sup> *New York Times*, 19 October 1976; FBI, Letter to Kissinger [Regarding Ricardo Morales Navarette], 5 November 5 1976. NSA. (<http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB202/index.htm>). (date accessed: 1 July 2008).



he was finally arrested and convicted for firing a 57mm bazooka at a Polish freighter docked in the Port of Miami. The ship was a legitimate target, argued Bosch, because it had been guilty of trading with the Castro government. Though he was given a ten-year sentence in a U.S. federal prison, he served only four years, as politicians and influential exiles in Florida successfully lobbied for his early release. He violated his parole, however, and fled to Latin America. By 1976, he had settled in Venezuela after making an arrangement with top government officials: Bosch could organize bombings and other attacks against the Castro government and its allies, they told him, so long as his targets remained outside of Venezuela. To help him organize such activities, Venezuelan officials gave him a national passport, a DISIP identity card, and a Caracas hotel suite.<sup>126</sup>

While Bosch was violating his parole, Luis Posada's longstanding ties with the CIA were becoming tense. The Agency had grown increasingly uncomfortable with his criminal activities and had begun to distance itself. By early 1976, he had been terminated as an agent. "Posada may be involved in smuggling cocaine from Colombia through Venezuela to Miami, also in counterfeit U.S. money in Venezuela," read a CIA cable from February 1973. Two months later, an Agency memo stated "it seems true Posada involved in narcotics drug trafficking – seen with known big time drug trafficker." At the same time, Posada was falling out of favor with Venezuela's leaders, and by 1974 had been dismissed from his post in the country's secret police. It did not take him long to recover, however, as he promptly opened an industrial security and

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<sup>126</sup> State Department, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, 18 October 1976, Memorandum, "Castro's Allegations." NSA. (<http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB153/index.htm>). (date accessed: 1 July 2008); Bardach, "Twilight of the Assassins," 94-6.

detective company - which he later claimed was one of “the largest in Venezuela” - while also plotting anti-Castro activities with fellow exile Orlando Bosch.<sup>127</sup>

Though strained, Posada’s seventeen-year relationship with the CIA was not over. While no longer an agent, he nonetheless continued to serve as a paid informant. He desperately wanted U.S. visas for his wife and himself, and therefore gave the Agency valuable information on the activities of Bosch and other militant Cuban exiles, hoping to receive a favor in return. Nine months before the airline bombing, he reported that Bosch and other anti-Castro leaders were plotting to kill Salvador Allende’s nephew, while also making plans to assassinate Henry Kissinger during an official visit to Costa Rica.<sup>128</sup>

Posada and Bosch had, in fact, created the organization that took responsibility for the Cubana bombing. In June 1976, only months before their arrests, the two men had met with a number of other Cuban exile leaders in the Dominican Republic at the home of a former senator in the Batista government, where they united several anti-Castro commando organizations under the banner of CORU. “These groups agreed to jointly participate in planning, financing, and carrying out terrorist operations and attacks against Cuba,” reported an FBI source. “Bosch stated that his group was concentrating its efforts against the Government of Cuba and its allies.” A campaign of terror was launched soon after: over the next several months, CORU publicly admitted to executing fifty bombings, kidnappings, and murders across the United States and Latin America.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> House Select Committee on Assassinations, LUIS POSADA CARRILES, ca. 1978. NSA. (<http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB202/index.htm>). (date accessed: 1 July 2008). Bardach, *Cuba Confidential*, 184-5.

<sup>128</sup> House Select Committee on Assassinations, LUIS POSADA CARRILES, ca. 1978. NSA. (<http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB202/index.htm>). (date accessed: 1 July 2008).

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.; FBI, Intelligence Report, “Accion Cubana (Cuban Action) Internal Security – Cuba,” 29 June 1976. NSA. (<http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB157/index.htm>). (date accessed: 1 July 2008); Bardach, “Twilight of the Assassins,” 95; Bardach, *Cuba Confidential*, 184.

Washington certainly had reason to believe Luis Posada and Orlando Bosch were guilty of organizing the attack on the Cubana airliner. The FBI listed Bosch as “a known terrorist,” and described CORU as an “anti-Castro terrorist organization” which had “publicly accepted responsibility for numerous acts of terrorism, including murders and bombings.” Moreover, FBI and CIA informants reported Posada and Bosch had orchestrated the plot. In late October 1976, the FBI told U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger that “a confidential source abroad who has reported reliable information in the past...has all but admitted that Posada and Bosch engineered the bombing of the Cubana aircraft.” In addition, a CIA informer who owned a restaurant in Miami told the Agency that “Posada [is] responsible for [the] plane bombing,” while another informant recounted how he had “attended a meeting of anti-Castro exiles” in the Dominican Republic during 1976 “when [Orlando] Bosch and others discussed terrorist acts such as the placing of bombs on Cuban aircraft.” The “participants of [the] meeting,” he said, “included ...Luis Posada.” Another CIA source, this one a Venezuelan official described as “usually reliable,” reported that only days before the attack he overheard Posada say “we are going to hit a Cuban airplane,” and that “Orlando has the details.”<sup>130</sup>

Though nearly three decades have passed since the Cubana bombing, many questions remain. Was Washington implicated, as Castro has repeatedly claimed, or was the Cuban government simply blaming the United States for political purposes? Was

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<sup>130</sup> House Select Committee on Assassinations, LUIS POSADA CARRILES, ca. 1978. NSA. (<http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB202/index.htm>). (date accessed: 1 July 2008); CIA, Secret Intelligence Report, “Activities of Cuban Exile Leader Orlando Bosch During His Stay in Venezuela,” 14 October 1976. NSA. (<http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB157/index.htm>). (date accessed: 1 July 2008); FBI, Letter to Kissinger [Regarding Special Agent Leo], 20 October 1976. NSA. (<http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB202/index.htm>). (date accessed: 1 July 2008); FBI, 2 November 1976, Secret Intelligence Report, “Bombing of Cubana Airlines DC-8 Near Barbados, West Indies, October 6, 1976.” NSA. (<http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB202/index.htm>). (date accessed: 1 July 2008).

CORU working independently of Washington, or was it coordinating its activities with the CIA, as militant exiles had done in previous years? Did U.S. officials know the attack was going to take place and hold that information from Cuban authorities, as Cuban and Venezuelan leaders have claimed? In recent years the United States has de-classified a number documents relating to the 1976 airline bombing. Rather than answering the questions surrounding the attack, however, they have raised new ones. It is now known that Luis Posada resumed his employment with the CIA during the 1980s as part of U.S. efforts to overthrow the government of Nicaragua, although the Agency, as well as the U.S. State Department and the FBI, strongly suspected he was involved in the Cubana bombing. Moreover, the fact that the administration of George W. Bush refuses to de-classify hundreds of additional pages of CIA and FBI documents has led many to suspect Washington is hiding something.<sup>131</sup>

Although there is still no evidence the United States orchestrated the attack on the civilian airliner, it has been confirmed the CIA had advance knowledge Cuban exiles were planning the crime. Agency officials, however, made no effort to pass this information on to Cuban authorities, which certainly implies complicity. A CIA memo from June 1976 – which was forwarded to a number of government agencies, including the State Department, FBI, Joint Chiefs of Staff, Army, and Navy – described how “a businessman with close ties to the Cuban exile community” had reported that “a Cuban exile extremist group, of which Orlando Bosch is a leader, plans to place a bomb on a Cubana Airline flight travelling between Panama and Havana.” One can only imagine

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<sup>131</sup> Bardach, “Twilight of the Assassins,” 90, 96.

what the U.S. reaction would have been if it was revealed the Cuban government had prior intelligence that al-Qaeda was going to carry out the terrorist attacks of 2001.<sup>132</sup>

In addition, recently de-classified documents show the FBI's legal attaché in Caracas may have facilitated the plot against the Cubana jet. Whether this was deliberate or simply a result of negligence is not yet clear. As part of the plan devised by Posada and Bosch, Hernán Ricardo Lozano – one of the two men arrested in Trinidad after the attack – was to travel to the United States after disembarking the Cubana flight during its Barbados stop. Ricardo, however, needed a U.S. visa. Only five days before this young Cuban exile placed C-4 explosives inside the Cuban airliner, the FBI's legal attaché, Joseph Leo, helped him acquire a visa, although he suspected Ricardo was involved in terrorist activities. An FBI report stated that during a previous meeting between the two, Ricardo had complained of the presence of Cuban intelligence officers in the Cuban embassy in Venezuela, before suggesting that Leo “might wish to make some suggestions regarding courses of action that might be taken against the Cuban embassy...by an anti-Castro group which he formed part.” Although Leo told Ricardo he “personally abhorred terrorist activities,” the FBI official took no action against him. In fact, Leo met with Ricardo on friendly terms during several subsequent occasions. Moreover, while examining Ricardo's passport several days before the Cubana attack, Leo noticed he had been in Trinidad on the same day the Guyanese consulate there was bombed, and “wondered in view of Ricardo's association with Luis Posada, if his presence there during that period was a coincidence.” Despite these suspicions, Leo allowed the visa application to go forward. Had he withheld the endorsement, or launched an

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<sup>132</sup> Peter Kornbluh, “The Posada File,” *The Nation* (6 June 2005): 4-6; CIA, 22 June 1976, Report, “Possible Plans of Cuban Exile Extremists to Blow Up a Cubana Airliner.” NSA. (<http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB153/index.htm>). (date accessed: 1 July 2008).

investigation into Ricardo's role in the bombing of the Guyanese consulate, then the plot against the civilian airliner likely would have been prevented.<sup>133</sup>

While this new evidence certainly does not prove Washington played any part in planning the Cubana bombing, it does make clear U.S. officials made no effort to prevent Castro's opponents from taking action, although they could have easily done so. The Ford administration may well have ended U.S.-support for exile terrorism, but it clearly did not abandon Washington's longstanding tolerance for such activity.

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<sup>133</sup> Anti-Castro terrorists frequently targeted Guyana during the 1970s because of its friendly relations with Cuba. FBI, 9 October 1976, "Unknown Subjects; Suspected Bombing of Cubana Airlines DC-8 Near Barbados, West Indies, October 6, 1976." NSA. (<http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB153/index.htm>). (date accessed: 1 July 2008); FBI, Letter to Kissinger, [Regarding Special Agent Leo], 20 October 1976. NSA. (<http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB202/index.htm>). (date accessed: 1 July 2008).

## **Epilogue**

Cuba's relations with the United States improved while Jimmy Carter was president. His administration eased travel restrictions between the two nations, while also establishing limited diplomatic ties. Nevertheless, Cuban exile terrorism continued, although it does not appear Washington backed it in any way. Most of these attacks, in fact, took place within the United States, as anti-Castro groups frequently targeted Cuba's U.N. mission, while also bombing businesses and other organizations collaborating with the Castro government.<sup>134</sup>

Ronald Reagan, on the other hand, returned to a more confrontational approach. His administration not only tightened the trade embargo, but threatened military action against the island. While anti-Castro terrorism did decline during Reagan's time in office, the Cuban exile community managed to become more politically organized. In 1981, several wealthy Miami businessmen - with the help of top U.S. officials - formed the Cuban-American National Foundation (CANF), a new front dedicated to deposing the revolutionary government. After opening its head office in Washington D.C., CANF quickly became the most powerful exile lobby group in the United States, using lavish campaign contributions to influence politicians to support tough policies against Cuba. Its chairman, Jorge Mas Canosa, worked closely with the Reagan administration, and backed U.S. efforts to overthrow the Marxist-oriented Sandinista government in Nicaragua, including funding the pro-Washington guerilla forces known as the Contras.<sup>135</sup>

During this period, Mas Canosa and other CANF leaders also financed the prison escape of one of the hemisphere's most notorious terrorists. In 1985, Luis Posada, who

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<sup>134</sup> Pérez, *Ties of Singular*, 260; Franklin, *Chronological History*, 138-156.

<sup>135</sup> Garcia, *Havana USA*, 146-56; Bardach, *Cuba Confidential*, 139-43, 191-9; Bardach, "Twilight of the Assassins," 98.



had been detained by the Venezuelan government without conviction for almost nine years, bribed prison officials to set him free with \$50,000 provided by his friends in Miami. He quickly made his way to El Salvador, where he was put in contact with fellow exile Félix Rodríguez, with whom he had served in the U.S. Army and the CIA. Rodríguez – well-known among Castro’s opponents for his involvement in the 1967 execution of Che Guevara – had been hired by White House officials to coordinate Washington’s covert military assistance to the Contras. He promptly appointed Posada his deputy, provided him with a Salvadorian passport and a fake identity, then put him in charge of organizing resupply flights from secret bases in El Salvador to the rebels in the Nicaraguan jungle. The United States generously rewarded its former CIA agent for his services. “Posada was paid \$3,000 a month and he also received housekeeping, a car, maid service, food and other expenses,” stated a 1992 FBI interview with the terrorist leader. “In addition, Posada flew on some of the resupply flights and he earned the \$750 for each of those flights,” wrote the FBI agents, adding, he “flew on a lot of missions and probably averaged between \$6,000 and \$7,000 a month.” U.S. leaders were well aware of Posada’s role in the Contra operations, and undoubtedly knew of his previous involvement in terrorist activity, but nonetheless allowed him to stay, despite the fact the Reagan administration had, only four years earlier, announced its “war on terror.” In April 1986, Posada personally met with Lieutenant Colonel Oliver North, the National Security Council staff member who headed the administration’s program of arming the Contras, to discuss plans to use U.S. pilots to make supply drops for the guerrillas. Within months of this meeting, however, the Iran-Contra operation had become a major scandal for the Reagan administration, and Posada was suddenly out of work.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Bardach, *Cuba Confidential*, 190-99; *New York Times*, 13 July 1998; Office of the Independent Counsel,

While Washington was funding the Contras, Orlando Bosch was acquitted of masterminding the 1976 Cubana bombing and released from prison. Most observers credited this development to a combination of corruption in the Venezuelan justice system and the lobbying efforts of the new U.S. ambassador in Caracas, Otto Reich. Soon after assuming his post, Reich began pressuring the U.S. State Department to secure Bosch's release. Several weeks later his efforts bore fruit, as Bosch was set free. Reich - a Cuban exile himself - then made several unsuccessful attempts to obtain him a U.S. residency, before Bosch finally flew to Miami in December 1987, where he was immediately arrested by U.S. authorities for illegal entry and parole violation. Though Bosch had all but admitted to committing what was then the hemisphere's worst act of airline terrorism, stating shortly after his acquittal that the jet "was a war plane, because Cuban airlines are not tourist lines," influential members in the émigré community - including CANF chairman Mas Canosa - nevertheless launched a campaign demanding their "freedom fighter" be liberated. Congressional candidate Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, in fact, made Bosch a central issue of her 1988 campaign, portraying him as "a hero in the war against Fidel Castro," while raising over \$200,000 for his legal defense. Ros-Lehtinen had little difficulty attracting the White House's attention, as her campaign manager was the Vice-President's son - and the future governor of Florida - Jeb Bush.<sup>137</sup>

The U.S. Justice Department, apparently taking Washington's "war on terror" more seriously, continued to treat Bosch as a terrorist and lobbied for his deportation. "My colleagues and I in Miami conducted exhaustive investigations of Bosch," stated

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Lawrence Walsh, Secret, "Record of Interview with Luis Posada Carriles," 7 February 1992. NSA. (<http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB157/index.htm>). (date accessed: 1 July 2008).

<sup>137</sup> *Washington Post*, 5 August, 8 August 1987, and 18 February 1988; *New York Times*, 16 August 1989; Bardach, *Cuba Confidential*, 199-202; Bardach, "Twilight of the Assassins," 98-99.

one FBI agent in a letter to the U.S. Secretary of State. “He was regarded by the FBI and other law enforcement agencies as Miami’s number one terrorist.” The U.S. Attorney General’s office agreed, as it rejected Bosch’s application for residency while recommending he be expelled from the country. “Orlando Bosch has for thirty years been resolute and unwavering in his advocacy of terrorist violence,” stated the Associate Attorney General in his decision against Bosch. He “has advocated, encouraged, organized and participated in terrorist violence in this country as well as various other countries. He has repeatedly expressed and demonstrated a willingness to cause indiscriminate injury and death.” The Cuban airline bombing, he continued, “was a CORU operation under the direction of Bosch....CORU is the name of Bosch’s terrorist outfit.”<sup>138</sup>

The new president, George H. W. Bush, shocked many observers by ignoring the advice of his own Justice Department and approving the release of one of Latin America’s most well-known terrorists. This came only months after Jeb Bush had organized a meeting between his father and Ros-Lehtinen to discuss Bosch’s case. By 1992, President Bush had gone a step further by granting “Miami’s number one terrorist” permanent residence in the United States. Bosch wasted little time, quickly resuming his anti-Castro activities, while ignoring a legal agreement he had signed shortly before where he had declared his renunciation of “terrorism in any form whatsoever as a means of political action and as a means to free Cuba from communism.” While never actually confessing to the airline bombing, Bosch continued to praise it as a “legitimate action of war” because “Castro’s aviation has always been military.” He showed no remorse for

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<sup>138</sup>*Washington Post*, 9 November 1989 and January 29 1990; *New York Times*, 1 August 1990 and 15 December 2002; Bardach, *Cuba Confidential*, 202-3.

the victims, many of whom were teenagers, calling them “fencers serving the regime.” Bosch still lives in Miami, even though the George W. Bush administration has been ostensibly conducting a “war on terrorism” for the last seven years. As recently as 2006, Bosch defended the Cubana attack while speaking on a Miami television station: “The war we wage against the tyrant, you have to down planes, you have to sink ships. You have to attack anything that is within reach,” he stated. “Who was on board that plane? Members of the Communist Party, *chico!* Our enemies.”<sup>139</sup>

While Bosch was gaining his freedom, Luis Posada was renewing his terrorist campaign against Cuba. Over April-October 1997, Salvadorian mercenaries hired by the former CIA agent smuggled bombs into the island then detonated them in hotels, nightclubs, and restaurants in Havana, killing an Italian man and injuring eleven others, including seven foreign tourists. The goal of the bombing spree, Posada explained in a 1998 interview with the *New York Times*, was to undermine the country’s tourism, cause economic hardship among Cubans, and ultimately provoke an anti-government rebellion. “It is the only way to create an uprising there,” Posada said. “There are several ways to make a revolution and I have been working on some... we just wanted to make a big scandal so that the tourists don’t come anymore” because “[w]e don’t want anymore foreign investment in Cuba.” When asked about the casualties of the attacks, Posada claimed they were unintentional, but that he still “sleeps with a clean conscience. It is sad that someone died, but we can’t stop,” he told the newspaper reporter. “That Italian was sitting in the wrong place at the wrong time.”<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> *New York Times*, 18 July and 20 July 1990; Bardach, *Cuba Confidential*, 203; Bardach, “Twilight of the Assassins,” 91.

<sup>140</sup> *New York Times*, 13 October 1997, 12-13 July 1998, 15 January and 24 March 1999.

Posada's assault on the island's tourist industry was financed by Cuban exile leaders, including CANF chairman Jorge Mas Canosa. While successfully lobbying the Clinton administration to tighten the Cuba embargo, Mas Canosa, who had long insisted CANF rejected violence as a way to overthrow the Castro government, was secretly funding Posada's terrorist network. "Everything went to Jorge. Jorge is the one who managed everything," Posada confessed to the *New York Times*. "All my contact was through Jorge. Jorge managed everything...[w]henver I needed money, Jorge said 'give me \$5,000, give me \$10,000, give me \$15,000,' and they sent it to me."<sup>141</sup>

The Havana hotel bombings coincided with a plot to kill Fidel Castro; just as they had done in the 1960s and 1970s, counterrevolutionaries relied on a combination of economic sabotage and political assassination in their efforts to overthrow the government of Cuba. In October 1997, the U.S. Coast Guard arrested four Cuban exiles sailing a boat off the coast of Puerto Rico, and found them to be possession of a substantial arms cache, including several boxes of ammunition, two high-powered rifles worth nearly \$7,000 each, portable radios, satellite telephones, and night-vision goggles. One of the men, in fact, quickly confessed he was on a mission to kill the Cuban premier. Evidence soon emerged showing that Miami-based Cuban exile leaders were implicated, as the boat was owned by a member of CANF's board of directors, while one of the sniper rifles was registered to the Foundation's president. By August 1998, seven Cuban émigrés, including the four assassins and a top CANF official, had been indicted in a U.S. court on charges of conspiring to murder Fidel Castro while he visited Venezuela's Margarita Island during a meeting with Latin American political leaders. While there was no proof Posada was involved, the FBI was, nonetheless, convinced he played a role.

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<sup>141</sup> *New York Times*, 12 July 1998; Bardach, *Cuba Confidential*, 210.

“It would have been impossible for the [conspirators] to have organized that attempt on Castro without Posada,” insisted an FBI agent who worked on the case. “There is no doubt that the safe house on Margarita Island was arranged by Posada,” he said, “because Posada had been the head of DISIP [Venezuela’s secret police], which runs all its operations out of Margarita Island.”<sup>142</sup>

It took three years for Castro’s opponents to organize another attempt on his life. The plan was for a group of militant Cuban exiles, including Luis Posada and three others, to kill the revolutionary leader while he visited Panama for a meeting of heads of state during November 2000. The plot, however, was uncovered by Castro’s security forces, and soon after Panamanian police arrested Posada’s group, while seizing over thirty pounds of C-4 explosives in their possession. Although the assassins were later convicted for conspiracy to murder, they only served small portions of their sentences. In 2004, Panama’s outgoing president, Mireya Moscoso - a close political ally of both George W. Bush and Florida’s exile leaders - inexplicably pardoned the terrorist group. Moscoso argued she had no choice because her successor would have allowed them to be executed. “I knew that if these men stayed here,” she told reporters, “they would be extradited to Cuba or Venezuela, and there they were surely going to kill them.” Posada’s accomplices, who had all been involved in numerous murders, kidnappings, and other terrorist attacks prior to 2000, were immediately flown to Miami, where they were able to enjoy their freedom.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> *Miami Herald*, 31 October, 20 December 1997 and 27 August 1998; Bardach, *Cuba Confidential*, 211-16.

<sup>143</sup> *New York Times*, 19 November 2000; *Washington Post*, 27 August 2004; Peter Kornbluh, “Terror and the Counterterrorists,” *The Nation* (14 May 2006), 20; Baradach, *Cuba Confidential*, 220-22.

Little was heard of Posada until 2005, when he resurfaced in Florida demanding political asylum – as his close friend Bosch had successfully done a decade earlier. U.S. authorities, however, arrested him for illegal entry, and he spent the next two years detained in a Texas prison. Meanwhile, Venezuelan leader Hugo Chavez continued to push for his extradition to stand trial for the 1976 Cubana bombing. But a U.S. court rejected Chavez’s demands, arguing Posada would be tortured there, despite the fact the two countries had previously signed an extradition treaty. One might have expected the Bush administration to intervene in this case and send Posada back to Venezuela, considering how it had, only a few years before, launched an international campaign against terrorism. But that has, thus far, not happened. Securing the Cuban exile vote of Florida appears to be of far greater importance to the administration than prosecuting one of the hemisphere’s leading terrorists. By 2007, an immigration judge had dropped all criminal charges against Posada, stating that U.S. authorities had taken improper procedures in their investigation. As a result, a man who the Justice Department recently described as “an unrepentant criminal and admitted mastermind of terrorist plots,” presently lives freely in South Florida.<sup>144</sup>

Posada’s case has raised many questions about the Bush administration’s commitment to waging a “war on terror.” Are U.S. leaders truly intent on combating terrorism, or are they willing to allow certain terrorists to roam freely? Are the close ties with militant, anti-Castro groups a thing of the past, or have they been maintained by George W. Bush? His administration has been widely criticized for pursuing a double standard on terrorism by allowing a man who the FBI saw as a prime suspect in the 1976 airliner plot, and who confessed to the Havana hotel bombings of 1997, to reside

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<sup>144</sup> *New York Times*, 9 May and 18 May 2005; *Miami Herald*, 29 May 2007.

comfortably in the United States, rather than prosecuting him under the provisions of the U.S. Patriot Act. By Bush's own standards, such arguments are certainly true. As the U.S. president famously stated in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, "America has a message for the nations of the world. If you harbor terrorists, you are terrorists. If you train or arm a terrorist, you are a terrorist. If you feed a terrorist or fund a terrorist, you're a terrorist...and you will be held accountable." Bush's definition of terrorism may be debatable, but his claim of accountability clearly is not. If the frequent incidents of U.S.-sponsored terror against Cuba during the last half-century have shown anything, it is that the perpetrators of such crimes have rarely been held accountable, while the victims have consistently been denied any possibility of justice.<sup>145</sup>

Washington's willingness to bring violence to Cuba, as this study has argued, actually goes back much further than the terrorist assault launched after Fidel Castro's rise to power. Since the nineteenth century, U.S. leaders believed their nation was entitled to control of the island, and, until 1898, made frequent efforts to purchase what was then a Spanish colony, while making clear they would take it by force if necessary. Meanwhile, influential southerners organized numerous filibustering expeditions against the island, hoping to overthrow the Spanish authority and then to bring it into the North American Union as a slave state. When Cuba was finally on the brink of claiming victory in its war of independence, the United States occupied it, and neutralized Cuban claims to sovereignty. What followed was over six decades of foreign dominance: North American investment took over nearly every sector of the Cuban economy, the United States regularly occupied the island, international criminal syndicates ruled Havana,

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<sup>145</sup> *New York Times*, 22 November 2001; Liz Holloran, "Reheating the Cold War," *U.S. News & World Report* (14 May 2007) Vol.142, Issue 17: 50-52.



while Cuban political leaders pursued policies aimed more at satisfying the needs of U.S. investors than of Cubans. By the 1950s, the Caribbean nation was ruled by a brutal and unpopular dictatorship that was only able to stay in power because of its close ties to Washington.

In 1959, however, Cuba became truly independent. A popular revolution, led by the guerrilla army of Fidel Castro, overthrew the Batista regime and created a nationalist government determined to challenge U.S. power: it quickly ushered in a program of radical change, while at the same time ending the island's subordination to its northern neighbor.

Predictably, Washington responded with violence. U.S. leaders feared Cuba might inspire other Latin American nations to take the revolutionary path, and moved to crush the bad example. From 1959 until 1961, the Eisenhower administration trained, funded and organized militant Cuban exiles to carry out attacks on their homeland as part of a wider program aimed at terrorizing Cuba's civilian population as punishment for supporting the Castro government. Government policymakers believed that by generating disaffection across the island they could cause a popular revolt, which would be used as a pretext for a military intervention, and ultimately, the re-establishment of U.S. hegemony. The Kennedy administration expanded these terrorist activities, provoking Castro to request the stationing of Soviet missiles in Cuba, and, as a result, bringing the world closer to nuclear war than it had ever been before. Successive presidential administrations continued hostile Cuban policies. Support for anti-Castro groups was scaled back - but never ended - during the late 1960s, then, briefly increased in the early 1970s. While it is not known if the United States was still sponsoring Cuban

exile violence after Nixon left office, there is evidence U.S. officials tolerated such activity, even withholding intelligence from Cuban authorities that would have likely prevented one of the hemisphere's most horrific acts of airline terrorism.

By exploring Washington's long history of bringing violence to Cuba, this study has shown that Havana's claims of U.S.-sponsored terrorism are not simply political propaganda, but are supported by historical evidence. In shedding light on this subject, it has also challenged the leading scholarship on terrorism, which has traditionally ignored the hundreds of terrorist acts committed against Cuba. Moreover, this inquiry has tried to answer some of the larger questions surrounding the Bush administration's "war on terror." While there is no doubt the United States has been conducting a global campaign against certain terrorist networks since the 9/11 attacks, its longstanding support for terrorist activity against Cuba, and its recent protection of confessed anti-Castro terrorists, make clear Washington does not actually oppose terrorism and therefore cannot really be leading a war against it.

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