

Fidel Castro. Between Crosshairs, a Man, and His Revolution

By [Stephen Joseph Scott](#)

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Imperial proprietorship over the small Caribbean Island of Cuba, from the United States’ perspective, has been from its earliest founding understood as a foredrawn conclusion, a predetermined inexorable; a geographical inevitable.

Heads of State, from **Thomas Jefferson** to **James Monroe** to **John Quincy Adams** *et al.* shared a similar conviction, “[that Cuba’s] proximity did indeed seem to suggest destiny, a destiny unanimously assumed to be manifest.”ⁱ Through the mid 19th century, US opinion toward Cuba was made jingoistically evident by Secretary of State John Clayton, “This Government,” he advised, “is resolutely determined that the island of Cuba, shall never be ceded by Spain to any other power than the United States.”ⁱⁱ

The Secretary went on to define his nation’s hardened and inalterable commitment to the possession of the island, “The news of the cession of Cuba to any foreign power would, in the United States, be the instant signal for war.”ⁱⁱⁱ

These assertions were now foundational, as reiterated by Indiana Senator (and historian) **Albert J. Beveridge** in 1901,

“Cuba ‘[is] an object of transcendent importance to the political and commercial interests of our Union’ and ‘[is] indispensable to the continuance and integrity of the Union itself,’”^{iv} sentiments that were (later) codified into the Cuban Constitution by the US (after the Spanish/American war of 1898) in the form of the [Platt Amendment](#)^v ratified in 1903.

Which Louis A. Perez soberly describes as, “[An] Amendment [that] deprived the [Cuban] republic of the essential properties of sovereignty while preserving its appearance, permitting self-government but precluding self-determination,”^{vi} in contradiction to (Cuba’s

heroic bard of national emancipation) José Martí's 19th century grand-vision of a truly liberated and self-governing island nation.



In fact, this historic outlook permeates US strategy toward Cuba for the next century; merged in a complex web of amicable approbation combined with antagonistic condemnation, defiance, resentment, and ruin – all converging at a flashpoint called the Cuban Revolution of 1959, which not only shocked and bewildered US policymakers, but, for the first time, challenged their historic preconceptions of US hegemonic (i.e., imperial hemispheric) dominance. One man stood at the center of their bewilderment, criticism, disdain, and resentment: **Fidel Alejandro Castro Ruz**. Thus, US policy then directed at Cuba, by the early 1960s, was designed to punish this man, the small island nation, and its people, for his disobedience and defiance; and, as such, was intentionally aimed at destabilizing all efforts of rapprochement, as long as he (Castro) remained alive.

Although US intelligence (throughout the 1950s) provided the Eisenhower administration with a thorough history delineating the dangers of instability looming throughout the island, commanded by then military despot and “strong-man” **Fulgencio Batista** (who seized his return to power in an army-coup in 1952), the US foolishly continued to provide economic, logistical and materiel support to the unpopular and graft-driven dictatorship.^{vii}

US intelligence understood the potential danger posed by “[this] young reformist leader”^{viii} Fidel Castro and his band of revolutionaries. Castro and the 26th of July movement were a defiant response to what they considered a foreign controlled reactionary government.^{ix}

This response stood as a direct threat to the natural order of things, i.e., the US’s historic prohibition (beyond legalistic euphemisms and platitudes)^x of any genuine vestige of national sovereignty and self-determination by the Cuban people – which undergirded a belief that, like most Latin American states, the Cuban people were innately “child-like,” incapable of true self-governance.^{xi} Beyond that, after the ousting of Batista, and “flush with victory,” a young Fidel Castro, on January 2, 1959 (in Santiago de Cuba), assertively threw down the gauntlet, “this time, fortunately for Cuba, the revolution will not be thwarted. It won’t be as in 1895, when the Americans came in at the last hour ‘and made themselves masters of the country.’”^{xii}

Hence, as Jeffery J. Safford makes evident, this existential risk, in the minds of US policymakers, would have to be dealt with, embraced, evaluated, and analyzed (at least initially)^{xiii} in order to maintain the desired outcome – i.e., evading Communist influence and maintaining economic “stability” through the protection of US interests on the island of Cuba no matter the cost.

In March of 1960, while naively underestimating Castro's success and support on the island, "the Eisenhower administration secretly made a formal decision to re-conquer Cuba ... with a proviso: it had to be done in such a way that the US hand would not be evident."^{xiv}

Ultimately, US policymakers wanted to avoid a broader "backlash of instability" throughout the hemisphere by overtly invading the small island nation. That said, Castro and his revolutionaries understood the stark realities and nefarious possibilities cast over them, given the US's history of flagrant regime change throughout the region. Castro's accusations as presented at the United Nations, on 26 September 1960, which declared that US leaders were (intending if not) preparing to invade Cuba, were dismissed by the *New York Times* as "shrill with ... anti-American propaganda."^{xv}

Furthermore, Castro was ridiculed, by US representative James J. Wadsworth, as having "Alice in Wonderland fantasies"^{xvi} of an invasion. But Castro's committed revolutionary coterie knew better, "In Guatemala in 1954 [Ernesto 'Che' Guevara witnessed] the first U.S. Cold War intervention [in the region] as U.S.-trained and backed counter-revolutionary forces overthrew the democratically elected government of **Jacobo Arbenz**..."^{xvii}

In fact, similarly, the imminent Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) orchestrated assault, known as the Bay of Pigs (BOPs) invasion, under the Kennedy administration in April 1961, was heavily reliant upon anti-revolutionary factions, the Cuban people, and the military, rising up to join the invaders^{xviii} - which as history proves, and journalist/author David Talbot underscores, did not come to pass:

To avoid Arbenz's fate, Castro and Guevara would do everything he had not: put the hard-cored thugs of the old regime up against a wall, run the CIA's agents out of the country, purge the armed forces, and mobilize the Cuban people ... Fidel and Che became an audacious threat to the American empire. They represented the most dangerous revolutionary idea of all - the one that refused to be crushed.^{xix}

This became an epic ideological battle in the myopic mind of US officials: the possible proliferation of an assortment of "despotic" Communist controlled fiefdoms vs. the-free-world! Indeed, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., special aide and historian to President John F. Kennedy in 1961-63, ominously warned the Executive, that "[the spread of the Castro idea of taking matters into one's own hands](#),"^{xx} had great appeal in Cuba (and throughout Latin America), i.e., everywhere that, "[distribution of land and other forms of national wealth greatly favor\[ed\] the propertied classes ... \[thus\] the poor and underprivileged, stimulated by the example of the Cuban revolution, \[were\] now demanding opportunities for a decent living](#)."^{xxi}

This was the urgent and fundamental threat (or challenge) Fidel Castro and his movement posed to US hemispheric rule.

[US media focused](#) heavily on the plight of the "majority middleclass" Cuban exiles, that chose to leave the island as a result of the revolution's redistributive policies.^{xxii}

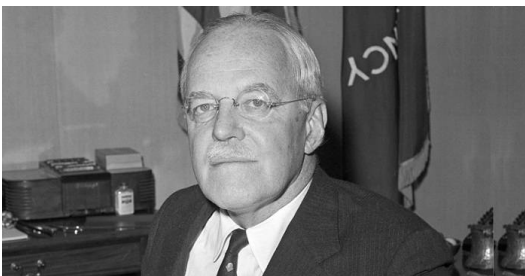
Cubans, particularly the initial waves, were dispossessed of substantial wealth and position and often arrived Stateside in chiefly worse conditions.^{xxiii} But *the essential question* as to, "why the [majority of] Cuban people [stood] by the Castro 'dictatorship'?",^{xxiv} as Michael

Parenti contends, was ignored by public officials and the press alike:

Not a word appeared in the U.S. press about the advances made by ordinary Cubans under the Revolution, the millions who for the first time had access to education, literacy, medical care, decent housing [and] jobs ... offering a better life than the free-market misery endured under the U.S.-Batista ancient régime.^{xxv}

Castro's revolutionary ideals based on José Martí's patriotic theme of national sovereignty and self-determination, effectively armed the Cuban people through a stratagem of socialist ideology and wealth redistribution meshed in a formula of land reform and social services (i.e., education, healthcare, jobs and housing) which included the nationalization of foreign owned businesses; as such, [US policymakers believed](#), "His continued presence within the hemispheric community as a dangerously effective exponent of 'Communism' and Anti-Americanism constitutes a real menace capable of eventually overthrowing the elected governments in any one or more 'weak' Latin American republics."^{xxvi} Fidel Castro was thus wantonly placed within the crosshairs of US covert-action.

American officials assumed that the elimination of Castro was central to the suppression of his socialist principles, as Alan McPherson demonstrates, "In fall 1961, after the [BOPs] disaster, [JFK] gave the order to resume covert plans to get rid of Castro, if not explicitly to assassinate him."^{xxvii}



Earlier in 1960, then CIA director, Allen Dulles' hardline that Castro was a devoted Communist and threat to US security "mirrored [those] of the business world such as, William Pawley, the globetrotting millionaire entrepreneur whose major investments in Cuban sugar plantations and Havana's municipal transportation system were wiped out by Castro's revolution."^{xxviii}

Thus, US officials, the Security State and US business-interests were unified, "After Fidel rode into Havana on a tank in January 1959, Pawley [a capitalist scion] who was gripped by what Eisenhower called a 'pathological hatred for Castro,' even volunteered to pay for his assassination."^{xxix}

Countless attempts followed, thus, killing Castro became vital to the idea of US hemispheric "stability," i.e., capitalist economic and ideological control; and as such, Intelligence Services believed, "[The] political vulnerability of the regime lies in the person of Castro himself..."^{xxx}

Hence, the purging of Fidel Castro and the cessation of his ideas, through the punishment of the Cuban people, became not only the strategy of choice for the US, but its incessant authoritative doctrine. Accordingly, as longtime US diplomat to Cuba, Wayne Smith verifies, the US's two overarching obsessive qualms which it believed required the eradication of Fidel Castro were: the long-term influence of his revolutionary socialist ideals in Latin

America and beyond; and, the possible establishment of a successful Communist state on the island which would diminish US security, stature, image, influence and prestige in the hemisphere; and, in the eyes of the world.^{xxxii}

Through 1960-64, Castro had good reason to be on guard, "...the fact that the Kennedy administration was acutely embarrassed by the unmitigated defeat [at the BOPs] -indeed because of it- a campaign of smaller-scale attacks upon Cuba was initiated almost immediately."^{xxxiii}

Then Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy stated unequivocally, as Schlesinger reveals, that his goal, "was to bring the terrors of the Earth to Cuba."^{xxxiii}

RFK went on to emphasize the point that the eradication of the Castro "regime" was the US's central policy concern,

"He informed the CIA that the Cuban problem carries, '...top priority in the United States Government -all else is secondary- no time, no effort, or manpower is to be spared.'^{xxxiv}

Beyond the multifaceted covert actions directed at Cuba under Operation Mongoose, RFK and the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, aided by the CIA *et al.*, implemented a long-term multi-pronged plan of punishment, focused on Cuba through Latin America, which included disinformation campaigns, subversion and sabotage (they called hemispheric-defense-policies) that comprised a Military Assistance Program (MAP), which included economic support, subversive tactical training and materiel, devised to terminate "the threat" (i.e., Castro and his ideas) by establishing an Inter-American-Security-Force (of obedient states) under US control.^{xxxv}

With Cuba now in the crosshairs, in the early 1960s, "the CIA ... played savior to the [anti-Castro] émigrés, building a massive training station in Miami, known as JMWave, that became the agency's second largest after Langley, Virginia. In fact, it coordinated the training of what became known as the disastrous landing ... in 1961."^{xxxvi}

Conversely, historian Daniel A. Sjursen focuses more on JFK (than the CIA) as the culprit behind the heightened tensions amongst the three principal players. By 1962, with Cuba in the middle, both superpowers (the US and the USSR) stood at a standstill amid the very real possibility of a global conflagration which, Sjursen states, was primarily due to US bravado on behalf of a "military obsessed" young President, "In preparing for a May 1961 summit meeting with Khrushchev [Kennedy stated] 'I'll have to show him that we can be as though as he is....'^{xxxvii}

Sjursen argues,

"This flawed and simplistic thinking grounded just about every Kennedy decision in world affairs from 1961 to 1963 ... and would eventually bring the world to the brink of destruction with the Cuban Missile Crisis; and, suck the US military into a disastrous unwinnable war in Vietnam."^{xxxviii}

And yet, as Smith contends, Kennedy was certainly not without bravado, but ultimately, did

make attempts to “defuse” the situation. Kennedy, Smith discloses, ruffled-feathers within the Security State by,

1) his desire to end the Cold War,

2) his starting of a rapprochement with Castro (who was desirous of such — even if indirectly) and, 3) his goal to pull-out of Vietnam.^{xxxix}



In fact, with the Kennedy-Khrushchev negotiations finalized by JFK’s promise not to invade Cuba if Soviet warheads were removed from the island – Khrushchev acquiesced, to Castro’s dismay, but tensions did diminish.^{xi}

Be that as it may, Philip Brenner maintains, the crisis did not go-away on 28 October 1962 for either the US or the USSR. The Kennedy-Khrushchev arrangements had to be implemented. On 20 November, the US Strategic Air Command was still on high alert: full readiness for war – with the naval quarantine (i.e., blockade) firmly in place.^{xii}

As a result, Castro stayed open to negotiations with the US, but at the same time purposefully cautious.

“At this point Castro, like Kennedy and Khrushchev, was circumventing his own more bellicose government in order to dialog with the enemy. Castro, too, was struggling, [but willing,] to transcend his Cold War ideology for the sake of peace. Like Kennedy and Khrushchev both, [he knew,] he had to walk softly.”^{xiii}

Nevertheless, Castro stressed the fact that the Soviet Union had no right to negotiate with the US per inspections or the return of the bombers, “Instead, he announced, Cuba would be willing to comply based on [specific] demands: that the United States end the economic embargo; stop subversive activities ... cease violations of Cuban airspace; and, return Guantanamo Naval Base.”^{xiii} Of course, the United States security apparatus was arrogantly steadfast in its refusal to agree or even negotiate the matter.^{xiv}

In spite of that, a reproachment (devised by Kennedy diplomat, William Attwood, and, Castro representative to the UN Carlos Lechuga) was surreptitiously endeavored through a liaison, journalist Jean Daniel of the *New Republic*, who stated that, Kennedy, retrospectively, criticized the pro-Batista policies of the fifties for “economic colonization,

humiliation and exploitation” of the island and added that, “we shall have to pay for those sins....”^{xlv} Which may be considered one of the most brazenly honest statements, regarding the island, on behalf of an American President, in the long and complex history of US/Cuban relations.

Daniel then wrote, “I could see plainly that John Kennedy had doubts [about the government’s policies toward Cuba] and was seeking a way out.”^{xlvi}

In spite of JFK’s pugnacious rhetoric directed at Cuba, during his 1960 Presidential campaign, Castro remained open and accommodating, he understood the forces arrayed upon the President, in fact, he saw Kennedy’s position as an unenviable one:

I don’t think a President of the United States is ever really free ... and I also believe he now understands the extent to which he has been misled.^{xlvii} ...I know that for Khrushchev, Kennedy is a man you can talk with....^{xlviii}

While in the middle of (an Attwood arranged and Kennedy sanctioned) clandestine meeting with Castro, Daniel reported, that (at 2pm Cuban-time) the news arrived that JFK was dead (shot in Dallas, Texas, on that very same day, 22 November 1963, at 12:30pm), “Castro stood-up , looked at me [dismayed], and said ‘Everything is going to change,...’”^{xlix} and he was spot-on. Consequently, with (newly sworn-in) President Lyndon Baines Johnson mindful of the fact that Lee Harvey Oswald was “proclaimed” a Castro devotee, accommodations with the Cuban government would be much more difficult. As such, the Attwood-Lechuga connection was terminated. Julian Borger, journalist for the [Guardian](#), maintains that “Castro saw Kennedy’s killing as a setback, [he] tried to restart a dialogue with the next administration, but LBJ was ... too concerned [with] appearing soft on communism,”^{li} meaning opinion polls, and their consequences, trumped keeping channels of communication open with the Cuban government. Which obliquely implies the notion that relations with Cuba might have been different if JFK had not been murdered.

With the Johnson administration bogged down in an “unwinnable war” in Southeast Asia and Civil Rights battles occurring on the streets of the US, Cuba and its revolution began to fall off the radar. By 1964, the Johnson administration, concerned with public opinion, as mentioned, took swift and immediate action to stop the deliberate terror perpetrated on the Cuban people. LBJ, in April of that year, called for a cessation of sabotage attacks. Johnson openly admitted, “we had been operating a damned Murder, Inc., in the Caribbean.”^{lii}

Nonetheless, the national security apparatus (i.e., the CIA, the Joint-Chiefs and military intelligence) along with US policymakers (and US based exile groups), remained obstinate, steadfast and consistent in their goal – to punish (if not kill) Fidel Castro and his revolution, by maintaining a punitive program of economic strangulation with the hopes that Castro would be, not only isolated on the world stage, but condemned by his own people who would rise up and eradicate the man and his socialist regime – which did not occur. Of course, the termination of hostilities directive ordered by Johnson did not include economic enmity – which persisted throughout the 1960s and beyond. In fact, a CIA field-agent appointed to anti-Castro operations detailed the agency’s sadistic objectives as expressed through author John Marks, by explaining:

Agency officials reasoned, ... that it would be easier to overthrow Castro if Cubans could be made unhappy with their standard of living. 'We wanted to keep bread out of the stores so people were hungry ... We wanted to keep rationing in effect....'”^{liii}

The purpose of the economic blockade remained fixed from the early 60s onward: to contain, defame, discredit and destroy Castro and his experimentation with, what the US considered, subversive Communist ideals.

Finally, the US's belligerent, if not insidious, hardline-stance toward this small island nation reignited at the end of the 1960s, which included not only an economic strangle-hold, but full-blown underground sabotage operations. The 37th president of the United States, Richard M. “Nixon's first acts in office in 1969 was to direct the CIA to intensify its covert [Hybrid War] operations against Cuba.”^{liv} Nixon and his then National Security Advisor, Henry Kissinger, still believed, callously, that military aggression, violence, brutality and intimidation (coalesced by vicious economic sanctions) were the answers to America's woes abroad.

US policy toward Cuba for more than sixty-years is reminiscent of a famous quote often attributed to Albert Einstein: “Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again, but expecting a different result.” Hence, Castro's Cuba (not only America's nemesis, but also the model of an uncompromising US global order) was the consequence of an even longer and persistent imperial US foreign policy: If the United States had not impeded Cuba's push for national sovereignty and self-determination in the initial part of the 20th century; if it had not sustained a sequence of tyrannical despots on the island; and, if it had not been complicit in the termination and manipulation of the 1952 election, an ineradicable character such as the young reformist, and socialist,

Fidel Castro may never have materialized.^{lv} Ultimately, the headstrong US stratagem of assassination and suffocation of Castro and his socialist revolution failed, not only by bolstering his image on the island, but abroad as well. Ironically, the US helped to create its own oppositional exemplar of resistance, in the image of Fidel Castro, Che Guevara and the Cuban people, i.e., the revolution - two men and a small island nation that stood up defiantly to the US led global-capitalist-order and would not relent. The US feared the Revolution of 1959's challenge to class-power, colonialization; and, its popularity with the multitudes - thus, it had to be forcefully restricted through malicious policies of trade-embargoes, threats of violence and ideological-isolation.

In fact, the Cuban rebellion courageously and tenaciously stood up to, and resisted, specific contrivances (or designs) by which the US had customarily, boastfully and self-admiringly delineated its dominant status through the forceful protection of its exploitative-business-practices (aka, the “Yankee boot”) on the backs of the Cuban people, for which, Fidel Castro and his bottom-up-populist-crusade were held ominously, insidiously and interminably responsible....

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Stephen Joseph Scott is an essayist associated with *The University of Edinburgh, School*

of History; a singer/songwriter, humanist/activist – a self-taught musician, and performer. As a musician, he uses American Roots Music to illustrate the current American social and political landscape.

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