

# The Cuban Missile Crisis and US Terrorist Campaigns Against Cuba

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*Perhaps the most serious revelation to have emerged from the Cuban Missile Crisis of October 1962, is **President John F. Kennedy**'s willingness to knowingly increase the possibility of nuclear war by up to 50%.*

**US General David Burchinal**, then a high-ranking planner on the Pentagon staff, recalled how JFK took Soviet leader **Nikita Khrushchev** "right to the brink of nuclear war and he looked over the edge and had no stomach for it".

In Khrushchev's critically important correspondence to JFK, which the latter received at 6pm on 26 October 1962, the US president rebuffed complying with its key suggestions. The experienced American author **Noam Chomsky** noted that,

"Kennedy nonetheless refused Khrushchev's proposal for public withdrawal of the missiles from Cuba and Turkey; only the withdrawal from Cuba could be public, so as to protect the US right to place missiles on Russia's borders or anywhere else it chose". (1)

As the missile crisis was peaking, JFK declared the highest nuclear alert short of launch, DEFCON 2. According to the Harvard University strategic analyst, **Graham Allison**, president Kennedy authorised "NATO aircraft with Turkish pilots" or of other nationalities "to take off, fly to Moscow, and drop a bomb".

Allison highlighted that Kennedy "ordered actions that he knew would increase the risk not only of conventional war but also of nuclear war". Allison estimates that the possible 50% figure is a realistic evaluation pertaining to the increased chance of nuclear war erupting, because of JFK's hegemonic actions during the missile crisis. His willingness to gamble with the fate of the world, in order to maintain US imperialist goals, has been dispatched to oblivion by the institutions of power.

One of the pivotal factors resulting in the missile crisis was, quite clearly, the major terrorist war launched by the Kennedy administration against revolutionary Cuba, titled Operation Mongoose. This campaign of subversion and terror had the strong backing of Kennedy. He endorsed it in late November 1961 (2). The terrorist attacks on Cuba are euphemistically described as "clandestine operations" or "covert actions", when in fact they constituted murderous assaults over a sustained period of time.

JFK placed his younger brother, the **Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy**, in charge of directing Operation Mongoose. RFK pushed ahead vigorously with the plans, assisted by Air Force officer **Edward Lansdale**. Operation Mongoose included introducing "the terrors of

the earth” to Cuba and its leader **Fidel Castro**, a phrase used by Robert Kennedy’s biographer, **Arthur Schlesinger**, who was also JFK’s Latin American advisor.

Early in 1962, Robert Kennedy informed CIA and Pentagon officials that ousting Castro “is the top priority of the United States government – all else is secondary – no time, money, effort, or manpower is to be spared”. (3)

The terrors of the earth were brought home through various actions: the bombing of Cuban petrochemical plants and other industrial installations, the sinking of her vessels, poisoning of food crops and livestock, etc.

The Kennedy administration escalated the terrorist assaults against Cuba in August 1962, two months before the missile crisis. On August 23rd, JFK issued National Security Action Memorandum (NSAM) No. 181: “a directive to engineer an internal revolt that would be followed by US military intervention” involving “significant US military plans, maneuvers, and movement of forces and equipment” against Cuba. (4)

The day after Kennedy’s directive, August 24th, exile terrorists based in Miami executed a speedboat machine gun attack on a Cuban seaside hotel, killing a number of Cubans and Russians inside. This latest rampage incensed not only the Cuban government, but undoubtedly those in the Kremlin. Also in August 1962, CIA agents contaminated a large Cuban sugar shipment destined for the Soviet Union. Tainting of Cuba’s sugar exports here was not an isolated affair.

More terrorist attacks took place during September 1962, including targeted raids on two Cuban cargo ships and, somewhat incredibly, an attack on a British cargo vessel. The vast majority of these acts were carried out freely from Miami, by right-wing Cuban exile groups.



Castro said of the early assaults against Cuba that,

“Well in the first few days and months those terrorist activities were organised by [Fulgencio] Batista elements really – former police officers and Batista people mixed in with some counter-revolutionaries. But even then the US

administration, using those elements, was working intensely against Cuba... Cuba has had to face more terrorism than practically any other country on earth". (5)

Among those engaged in the attacks from almost the beginning, were the Cuban-born mercenaries **Luis Posada Carriles** and **Orlando Bosch**. These men would quickly become two of the most notorious international terrorists in the Western hemisphere, perpetrating outrages not only upon Cuba, but across Latin America, even including assaults on embassies and diplomats. Posada and Bosch were arch-enemies of Castro personally, and the Cuban leader described the pair as "the most bloodthirsty exponents of imperialist terrorism against our nation".

Bosch fled to Miami in July 1960 with his wife and four children, following the failure of an anti-communist rebellion he helped to organise from the Escambray Mountains, in central Cuba.

Posada joined Bosch in Miami shortly thereafter in February 1961. From the early 1960s, Miami was becoming one of the biggest bases for terrorist planning operations anywhere in the world. Over previous months, Posada had been implementing terror and sabotage acts within Cuba itself, enjoying CIA assistance, as confirmed by him in interviews. Posada said,

"the CIA taught us everything... they taught us explosives, they taught us how to kill, bomb, trained us in sabotage". (6)

Posada worked as a CIA agent for a number of years from the mid-1960s, as well as being an informant (7). He relocated to Venezuela, spending extensive periods in the South American country, including jail time. Bosch was in contact with the CIA in Miami from January 1962, as declassified files show, and late the following year he met a CIA agent twice in New York City (8). Bosch followed quickly on Posada's heels, before the former moved to Chile in December 1974, where he (Bosch) received protection from the far-right US-supported dictator, Augusto Pinochet.

Regarding Posada, Chomsky wrote that his "subsequent operations in the 1960s were directed by the CIA. When he later joined Venezuelan intelligence with CIA help, he was able to arrange for Orlando Bosch, an associate from his CIA days who had been convicted in the US for a bomb attack on a Cuba-bound freighter, to join him in Venezuela to organize further attacks against Cuba". (9)

Just two months after Castro's assumption to power, in March 1959 the US National Security Council (NSC), under president **Dwight D. Eisenhower**, was formulating designs to overthrow the new Cuban government. By May 1959, the CIA was already arming anti-communist individuals inside Cuba, including Posada who was still present in his birth country at this point.

Posada remembered how the CIA provided him with "time-bomb pencils, fuses, detonator cords, and everything necessary for acts of sabotage" in Cuba (10). Posada's early activities were smoked out by the Cuban government and he just evaded capture.

Through 1959, the CIA was supervising bombing and incendiary air raids on Cuba, which increased in frequency during the winter of 1959-1960. In March 1960, the Eisenhower

administration made a formal decision in secret to overthrow Castro as soon as possible. Eisenhower would not succeed. In January 1961 his two-term presidency ended, and now the plans would be left for Kennedy to advance.

On 17 April 1961, Kennedy sanctioned a US-run invasion at the Bay of Pigs in western Cuba, which was originally concocted by Eisenhower. Posada himself was involved in organising the Bay of Pigs attack, but he would not be present at the disembarkation point. Posada, though already a terrorist, then had no military experience. He would not receive proper training in arms until 1963 at Fort Benning, the US Army post straddling the Georgia-Alabama border.

Castro, who was present in the frontline at the Bay of Pigs, said of the invasion that, “within about 60 hours, between dawn on the 17th and 6pm on the 19th we defeated them, after a terrible battle in which we lost more than 150 men and had hundreds of wounded. The battle was fought within sight of American ships offshore. We took about 1,200 mercenaries prisoner, almost all of the enemy forces who had been in battle, the exceptions being, of course, the dead”. (11)

The Bay of Pigs invasion was enacted in an atmosphere of “hysteria” relating to Cuba in the White House, as testified to by former Secretary of Defence, Robert McNamara, in July 1975 before the US Senate’s Church Committee. The mood in Washington immediately following the failed attack degenerated further, and was “almost savage” according to Chester Bowles, a veteran US politician.

Bowles revealed “there was an almost frantic reaction for an action program which people would grab onto” (12). This became the terrorist campaign that was Operation Mongoose. At a National Security Council meeting shortly after, Bowles found the atmosphere “almost as emotional” and he noticed “the great lack of moral integrity” on display.

The Bay of Pigs defeat was not terribly surprising. JFK, with some influence over its implementation, was a military novice who saw intermittent action in the US Navy during World War II. He was honourably discharged before war’s end due to “physical disability”. For reasons such as these, Kennedy was held in contempt by the US Joint Chiefs of Staff – and especially by General Curtis LeMay, the hawkish Air Force commander.

The situation was different in Cuba. By 1961 Castro was an experienced commander of forces in the field, and his authority was unquestioned. For much of the 1950s, he and his units pursued combat primarily through the execution of guerrilla warfare, and often against significantly larger enemy numbers.

Guerrilla tactics require high levels of organisation, planning and imagination. Castro’s guerrillas proved themselves capable of meeting the challenging demands, borne out by their toppling of the tyrant Fulgencio Batista in early 1959, someone who had been propped up by the world’s most powerful country. From the early 1950s, through operations and other campaigns across Cuba, Castro had also acquired an intimate knowledge of the Cuban terrain. His attention to detail was strengthened by having a photographic memory, noticed by those close to him and written about in future decades by historians. (13)

Castro’s knowledge and expertise as a military commander, combined with his familiarity of the Cuban landmass, would prove invaluable in the anticipation of, and reaction to, the Bay of Pigs invasion – and in responding more broadly to other threats later on.

Of president Kennedy, the actual record shows that he was a firm proponent in waging both terrorist campaigns and aggression to attain his ends. These grim realities are overlooked or unknown by delusional admirers glorifying his legacy. In early 1962, JFK requested the Joint Chiefs of Staff to attack South Vietnam by sending US aircraft to bomb villages there, which stood as a clear invasion, and that included among other things chemical warfare usage. (14)

In the Caribbean JFK's terrorist war against Cuba was, as stated, a central factor which resulted in the missile crisis occurring from mid-October 1962. It was hoped that these attacks would undermine Castro's popularity, before another planned US invasion that was scheduled for October 1962 – as the Cubans and Russians most likely knew, an element behind Khrushchev's shipping of nuclear missiles to Cuba.

During the years leading up to the missile crisis, from March 1955 until October 1960 Washington had stationed over 3,000 nuclear weapons across Europe, in half a dozen NATO countries (15). The nuclear arsenals were placed there with Moscow in mind, and it was initially implemented during the Eisenhower presidency. Yet by the time the missile crisis was unfolding under Kennedy, there were almost 5,000 US nuclear devices scattered across Europe. The Soviets did not station nuclear-armed weaponry outside their borders, until Khrushchev dispatched his missiles to Cuba in 1962.

The Kennedy presidency swiftly renewed terrorist operations against Cuba, after the missile crisis had officially concluded on 28 October 1962. During 8 November 1962, an exile team sent from America destroyed a Cuban industrial plant, an attack which the Castro government claimed led to the deaths of 400 workers. Ten days before Kennedy was assassinated, the US president approved a CIA plan for “destruction operations” on Cuba by US-backed proxies “against a large oil refinery and storage facilities, a large electric plant, sugar refineries, railroad bridges, harbor facilities, and underwater demolition of docks and ships”. (16)

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## Notes

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