

Myths of the Day: Did the United States Drive Castro Into the Hands of the Soviet Union?

By Nevin Gussack

Despite the revisionist history propagated by left-progressive activists and academics, Fidel Castro and his comrades were anti-American to the core even before January 1959. Contrary to the leftist mythology of elements of American academia (such as C. Wright Mills and William Appleman Williams), Fidel and Raul Castro and their comrades were hardened communists and opponents of the United States well before the revolution of January 1959. High level Cuban Communists and left-extremist *Fidelistas* purposely crafted the image of the 26th of July Movement and the Castro regime as native revolutionaries committed to a healthy nationalism and social reform. Previously unpublished sources revealed this strategy. In 1954, Fidel Castro instructed his comrade Melba Hernandez that *"We cannot for a second abandon propaganda... Propaganda is vital—propaganda is the heart of our struggle."* Ernesto "Che" Guevara wrote in his diaries that *"Foreign reporters, preferably American, were much more valuable to us than any military victory. Much more valuable than rural recruits for our guerrilla force, were American media recruits to export our propaganda."*¹

The Cuban revolutionaries dreamed of the day when the downfall of the United States would occur. In 1965, Juanita Castro pointed out that *"Well, Fidel's feelings of hatred for this country in particular cannot even be imagined by Americans. His intention, his obsession, to destroy this country is one of his main interests and objectives."*² Former Castro official and defector Teresa Casuso reported that Castro's speech to the UN would galvanize opposition to the Eisenhower Administration, overthrow the US President, and place Castro in the White House. Former Cuban Minister of Finance in Cuba Lopez Fresquet noted that Castro was a *"megalomaniac"* who told his colleagues after the Bay of Pigs attempted liberation in 1961 *"that he will one day be sitting in the White House in Washington."*³ Castro stated in a letter to confidante Celia Sanchez that *"I have sworn to myself that Americans are going to pay dearly for what they are doing. When this war is over, a much wider and bigger war will begin for me, the war I am going to wage against them. I realize that is going to be my true destiny."* In a 1959 meeting with military officers, Castro further revealed his intentions against the United States: *"No, the war is just beginning, because this is*

¹ Perdue, Jon B. The War of All the People: The Nexus of Latin American Radicalism and Middle Eastern Terrorism (Potomac Books, Inc., 2012) page 118.

² Committee on Un-American Activities. Testimony of Juanita Castro Ruz Committee on Un-American Activities (Government Printing Office Washington DC 1965) Accessed From: https://archive.org/stream/testimonyofjuani00unit/testimonyofjuani00unit_djvu.txt

³ Gonzalez, Servando. The Secret Fidel Castro (InteliBooks 2001) page 68.

*going to end in a war against the United States.*⁴ Cuba would be an ideal jumping off point for a Soviet/Russian and Chinese attack on the United States, given the militant anti-American nature of the Castro brothers and their comrades.

Contrary to the leftist notion of the US driving Castro into the arms of the USSR, the evidence illustrated that the 26th of July Movement had close ties to the Cuban Communist Party. The planting of such false history was an early example of a successful joint Cuban-Soviet disinformation operation. Former DGI officer Andres Alfaya Torrado recalled how he and his fellow agents were trained by Soviet KGB officers in disinformation and agitation in 1959. Arnaud de Borchgrave noted: *“Mr. Alfaya told me that one of the most brilliant disinformation campaigns launched at that time was to make world opinion believe that it was U.S. hostility that was pushing Cuba into the Soviet embrace.”*⁵ Castro himself admitted that he lied to the West in the late 1950s and 1960, when he presented himself and the Cuban Revolution as an effort to merely restore the Cuban Constitution of 1940. Castro declared to the French Le Figaro magazine: *“The United States wanted us to make a strategic and tactical error and proclaim a doctrine as a communist movement. In fact, I was a communist...I think that a good Marxist-Leninist would not have proclaimed a socialist revolution in the conditions that existed in Cuba in 1959. I think I was a good Marxist-Leninist in not doing that, and when we did not make known our underlying beliefs. What the United States wanted was to judge, to know what we thought, and we did not want to allow ourselves to be maneuvered or manipulated by it. I think it was an excellent thing that we did not proclaim the Marxist-Leninist or socialist nature of the revolution at the time.”*⁶ In a 1987 book review entitled Cuba and Its Critics, Saul Landau noted that *“Fidel Castro in 1968 explained to me that he had become a Marxist from the very time that he read the Communist Manifesto in his student days, (emphasis added) and a Leninist from the period when he read Lenin while in prison on the Isle of Pines in 1954.”* Fidel Castro wrote a letter to one of his comrades, Abelardo Adan Garcia, who was being trained in sabotage in Czechoslovakia: *“Our friend has told me that he is keeping me in reserve for greater endeavors and that I should not get ‘burned’ by traveling now. They have a plan in which I will be the axis that will be implemented very soon. It is possible that we will see each other then without fear of Yankee imperialism...”*⁷ During Castro’s infamous admission that he was a Marxist-Leninist in December 1961, he also admitted his movement’s strategy of deceiving the Cuban public: *“If, while we were on Turquino Peak (in the Sierra Maestra of Eastern Oriente Province), at a time when we were ‘cautro gatos’ (a Cuban idiomatic expression meaning, when we were nothing), we had said ‘we are Marxist-Leninists,’ it is possible that we would never have been able to*

⁴ Betancourt, Ernesto F. “Is Castro Preparing for a Gotterdammerung?” CubaNet November 9, 1999 Accessed <http://www.cubanet.org/opi/11099902.htm>

⁵ “Did We Turn Castro Red?” AIM Report October A 1985 Accessed From: http://www.aim.org/publications/aim_report/1985/10a.html#6

⁶ Mauro, Ryan. “Liberating Cuba From Communism” Accessed From: <http://www.hspig.org/phpbb/viewtopic.php?f=10&t=11127&view=previous&sid=3d5b3580e55f24a8b5601aba6a997429>

⁷ Diaz-Verson, Salvador. When Castro Became a Communist (Institute for U.S.-Cuba Relations 1997) Accessed From: <http://www.latinamericanstudies.org/diaz-verson.htm>

descend to the lowlands from Turquino Peak...So...we called it something else...We did not present that theme. We presented others which people were able to easily understand.”⁸

The biggest victory Castro and his comrades received was the US abandonment of Batista as a result of disinformation and propaganda that emanated from the State Department and elements within the American Embassy in Havana. Castro’s sympathizers pressured the State Department and also infiltrated the Cuban exile community and Batista’s Embassy in Washington. The reports of journalist Herbert Matthews played a huge role in delegitimizing the Batista dictatorship. Former US Ambassador to Cuba Arthur Gardner remarked in Congressional testimony that *“I feel it very strongly, that the State Department was influenced, first, by those stories by Herbert Matthews, and then it became kind of a fetish with them.”* Ambassador Gardner also charged that the pro-Castro Assistant Secretary of State for Latin America Roy Rubottom had an arms shipment destined for the Batista army halted in the Port of New York.

Ambassador Earl E.T. Smith also testified that another pro-Castro State Department official, William Wieland, the Director of the Caribbean Division and Mexico, ordered the new ambassador to get briefed about Cuba by pro-Castro New York Times journalist Herbert L. Matthews. Ambassador Smith noted that the Batista regime was a corrupt authoritarian dictatorship, while Fidel Castro’s forces ultimately represented communism. Smith testified that *“the Batista regime was disintegrating from within. It was becoming more corrupt, and as a result, was losing strength. The Castro forces themselves never won a military victory. The best military victory they ever won was through capturing Cuban guardhouses and military skirmishes, but they never actually won a military victory. The Batista government was overthrown because of the corruption, disintegration from within, and because of the United States and the various agencies of the United States who directly and indirectly aided the overthrow of the Batista government and brought into power Fidel Castro.”* Smith specified that these American government agencies that were sympathetic to Castro included *“influential sources in the State Department, lower down echelons in the CIA. I would say representatives of the majority of the U.S. Government agencies which have anything to do with the Embassy.”*

Smith also remarked that *“I would say that when we refused to sell arms to the Cuban Government and also by what I termed intervening by innuendo (which was persuading other friendly governments not to sell arms to Cuba) that these actions had a moral, psychological effect upon the Cuban armed forces which was demoralizing to the nth degree. The reverse, it built up the morale of the revolutionary forces. Obviously when we refused to sell arms to a friendly government, the existing government, the people of Cuba and the armed forces knew that the United States no longer would support Batista’s government.”*

Smith also thought *“that Roy Rubottom was under terrific pressure from segments of the press, from certain Members of Congress, from the avalanche of Castro sympathizers and revolutionary sympathizers who daily descended upon the*

⁸ “Castro Declares He Was Communist in War Times” The Galveston Daily News December 23, 1961 page 1.

State Department, also their official representative, Betancourt, and Rubottom may have taken the line of least resistance.” Smith reported that the Chief of the Political Section, John Topping, and the Chief of the CIA Section at the American Embassy in Cuba provided encouragement to the Castro forces.

The Americans also cut off weapons shipments to the Cuban Army of Batista. The United States also refused to sell 15 training planes to Cuba under Batista. Also *“revolutionary sympathizers in New York and in Washington”* also brought pressure to bear on the State Department to halt a shipment of nearly 2,000 M-1 Garand rifles for the Cuban Army in March 1958. These rifles were paid for by the Batista regime and were still at the New York Docks ready to be shipped to Cuba.⁹

Also, the Cuban government developed ties with the USSR, China, and the other communist bloc countries well before the 1961 severance of diplomatic relations with the United States. According to former American Communist Nathaniel Weyl, a former close collaborator with Fidel Castro noted that *“Once, Carlos Rafael Rodriguez, an active member of the Communist party in Cuba, arrived with a dozen men loaded with money. It came to \$800,000 and Fidel hugged him and shouted ‘Now we’re ready to win the war.’”* Reportedly, that same Cuban source informed Weyl that Raul Castro traveled to the Soviet Union and thence to Red China to fight alongside Mao’s People’s Liberation Army (PLA) during the Korean War. Raul gained practical military experience as a result of fighting alongside the PLA. Raul Castro’s units also received Soviet and Czechoslovakian-made weapons during the latter stages of the Cuban Civil War against Batista. Raul also was allegedly trained at the Anti-Col (Anti-Colonialism) School for international cadres in Melnik Czechoslovakia. Raul also reportedly traveled to Moscow and met with high-level Soviet Communist Boris Ponomarev.¹⁰ While in Mexico, Fidel Castro and other members of the 26th of July Movement turned to KGB contacts to procure firearms from the Soviet Union. The Soviets provided weapons to Castro’s guerrillas that were absolutely untraceable, which would prevent American suspicion.¹¹

Even open communist sources admitted by the end of the late 1950s their support for the Castro rebellion. A 1959 pamphlet of the American Communist Party wrote of the *“strong contingent of party members and sympathizers (which) belonged to the rebel forces” and the ‘mass actions’ in support of Castro organized by the Cuban C.P.”* In April 1959, Politburo member Carlos Rafael Rodriguez bragged that *“We the Cuban Communists have done our part in the Cuban revolution to overthrow the bloody tyranny of Batista which served as the instrument of imperialistic interests and was supported by imperialism.”*¹²

It was also apparent from high-level defecting Castroite military officers and officials that Fidel Castro worked with old-line Cuban Communist Party bigwigs and hard-core leftist *Fidelistas* to impose a totalitarian regime. Cuban Air Force defector

⁹ Committee on the Judiciary. Communist Threat to the United States Through the Caribbean GPO August 27, 1960 Accessed From: <http://www.latinamericanstudies.org/us-cuba/gardner-smith.htm>

¹⁰ Weyl, Nathaniel. *Red Star Over Cuba* (Devin-Adair, 1960) pages 94-95 and 141.

¹¹ Magee, J.J. *Indictment: For the Murder of John F. Kennedy* (AuthorHouse 2013) page 32.

¹² Weyl, Nathaniel. *Red Star Over Cuba* (Devin Adair 1960) page 177.

Major Pedro Diaz Lanz noted that Fidel Castro admitted to him in 1959 *"I am going to introduce in Cuba a system like the Russians had; even better than the Russian system...I am going to take now the land from the people who was with the former government. Later on I am going to take the land of everybody...Well, someday the banks will disappear."*¹³

In the spring of 1959, Dr. Manuel Artime was an Agrarian Reform Institute (IRNA) Deputy Chief for Zone 0-22 in Oriente Province. Dr. Artime recalled the conversations held with top Cuban Communists during his many trips to the heavily guarded IRNA skyscraper in Havana. Cuban officials could enter the IRNA offices only with a special pass. Artime recalled that the Cuban Communist Nunez Jimenez stated that *"Nothing said or discussed here must pass beyond the walls of this room. We are concerned here with the true objectives of the revolution and these involve many things which the people are not yet ready to assimilate."* Fidel Castro stated at the meeting that the state will control the entire economy. He noted further *"Let us see who dares to oppose us when we are confronted with a hungry population! This is something that Karl Marx never dreamed of. Hunger will be the midwife attending the birth of a socialist state in Cuba."* The Cuban *guajiros* (peasants) became restless over the land reforms/collectivization imposed by the Castro dictatorship. Nunez Jimenez cynically remarked that the land reform effort would be a public relations ploy: *"We will do nothing about that, except in a few cases where the guajiros become too insistent. Then we will divide up a little land, take photographs of the presentation, make much publicity. That ought to keep them quiet for a time!"* Fidel Castro stated *"The land must belong to the state, not to the people. But you can't tell the guajiros that or they will become violent...He must be taught the spirit of cooperation. He must lose what individualism he has and also this stupid passion for private property."*¹⁴

The privileges for high level Cuban Communist Party, Revolutionary Government, and Armed Forces and intelligence commanders became very apparent in the early days of Castro's takeover. The former Communist/*Fidelista* editor of the newspaper Revolucion Carlos Franqui recalled how the Castro rebels began to *"requisition"* cars and *"the houses of the rich."* Raul Castro commented to Franqui: *"Now there's a great idea...the barbudos¹⁵ living in the mansions of the rich."* The brutal, psychopathic Cuban Communist Felix Torres maintained a harem of peasant girls for his sexual pleasure. By April 1961, Cuban Security moved commandants, ministers, and other VIPs into confiscated homes and mansions. These houses formerly belonged to the middle class in Cuba. Some of the rebel leaders wanted to *"profane"* or move into

¹³ US Senate Committee on the Judiciary. Communist Threat to the United States Through the Caribbean July 14, 1959 Accessed From: <http://www.latinamericanstudies.org/us-cuba/diaz-lanz-hearing.htm>

¹⁴ Monahan, James and Gilmore, Kenneth. The Great Deception (Farrar, Straus, 1963) pages 46-51.

¹⁵ *Barbudos* refer to the *"bearded ones"* who were revolutionaries of the 26th of July Movement.

these houses. These houses had 24 hour guard service, swimming pools, books, nice furniture, gardens, air conditioning, and other luxuries.¹⁶

A number of mansions were taken over by high ranking army commanders in 1959 and 1960. When Castro found that there was a surplus of mansions relative to number of occupants, he created the “*zonas congeladas*” or “*frozen zones*.” The “*zonas congeladas*” were sealed off from average Cubans. Up and coming officials in Castro’s favor would receive the mansions located in the “*zonas congeladas*” as a gift from Castro.¹⁷

By 1961, it was reported that grocery stores in Cuba were divided into ones open to the general public and those at the disposal of party members and foreign visitors. One Cuban exile noted that “*How utterly frustrating it was to drive past stores bulging with delicacies not even itemized in the manual! Transparent glass panes made it possible to savor from a distance everything from roasts to imported champagne and caviar...After Castro’s take-over all but party members and government officials seemed to suffer from some degree of deprivation and want.*”¹⁸

The Castro-Communist regime also had a profound disrespect for the personal property of all Cubans. In 1960, Cubans who intended to flee their homeland had to have police permission. They were forbidden to take money with them. Airline tickets had to be purchased in the United States with dollars. The government seized cars, table silver, and other valuables. Cuban G-2 (intelligence) agents assessed the value of watches and wedding rings at airports. These valuables were seized on the spot by agents of the G-2. Cuban block committee (CDR) members invaded abandoned homes and confiscated furniture, paintings, linens, clocks, and watches. The CDR agents then turned them over to the government. The Cuban government then furnished the homes of Soviet and Eastern Bloc personnel with these confiscated items. Towards the end of 1959, the government revealed that it distributed \$354 million in confiscated American properties and assets and split it up. \$30 million was earmarked for “*tourism*” and \$3 million for the “*movie industry*.” The alleged tourist money was placed into the “*general purpose*” budget in the Office of the Prime Minister and then delivered to guerrilla training camps. In reality, the “*movie industry*” was actually a cover for *Prensa Latina*, the espionage and propaganda agency. Castro was given a personal checking account from the Institute for Agrarian Reform (INRA) totaling \$20 million of these confiscated funds.¹⁹

Castro also sought to injure the United States directly, even during the period of active Cuban-American diplomatic and economic relations. Cuban Consulate officials based in Miami and New Orleans were expelled from the United States in June 1960 for espionage; provoking racial conflict between whites and blacks; and illegal arms

¹⁶ Franqui, Carlos. Family Portrait With Fidel (Random House Incorporated 1984) pages 117-118.

¹⁷ Gonzalez, Servando. The Secret Fidel Castro (InteliNet/InteliBooks, 2001) pages 138-139.

¹⁸ Del Mar, Marcia. A Cuban Story (J. F. Blair, 1979) page 30.

¹⁹ Bethel, Paul D. The Losers (Arlington House, 1969)

shipments to Cuba.²⁰ Former Cuban Army Captain Angel Saavedra Correa reported that Cuban intelligence (G-2) agents who served undercover at their Embassy in Washington DC passed data to both the Soviets and Chinese. He served as the Cuban Embassy's Air and Military Attaché until his defection in early 1960.²¹ Ernesto Betancourt witnessed the subversive operations against the United States while serving at the Cuban Embassy in Washington DC: *"At the same time Castro approached the Soviets in 1959, he started preparations for his covert war against the US in its own territory by promoting unrest among minorities. In the summer of 1959, we had one of our regular weekly luncheons of the economic team with Castro at Cuba's Central Bank and one of the American guests he had invited asked to go to the rest room. Out of the rest room came a man dressed as a full-fledged American Indian Chief, with feathers and all. Castro was already trying to promote unrest among Native Americans. As I was getting ready to leave Cuba, in February 1960, a friend of mine in Cuba's Foreign Office informed me that they were sending money through Cuba's consulates in the U.S. to finance civil rights movement sit-ins. Similar relations were developed with Puerto Rico's 'independentistas.'"*²² Cuba also provided aid and comfort to American traitors/defectors from the intelligence community before the break in relations and the imposition of the American embargo. Two NSA code clerks Bernon F. Mitchell and William H. Martin defected to the USSR via Cuba in September 1960. They were picked up at a Cuban port by a Soviet fishing trawler.²³

East Germany reported that Cuban emissaries approached the ruling Socialist Unity Party (SED) in East Berlin with a request to manufacture spare parts for Cuba's American-made industrial and agricultural machinery. The East Germans organized special production lines to manufacture copied American parts which were then exported to Cuba.²⁴

The Soviets sought coordinated Cuban civilian and military institutions under hard-line communist control. An *"interpreter"* within a Soviet labor delegation was KGB official Vadim Kotchergin. He served under the guise of Vadim Listov. He spent time with Major Manuel Pineiro and Ramiro Valdez of the G-2 and helped tame the CTC. This occurred in May 1959. Since May 1959, Soviet trade union officials were responsible for repressing the anti-communist elements within the Cuban Confederation of Workers (CTC).²⁵

The nucleus of the Cuban communist movement also proved to be Soviet assets early on. The underground units of the communist Popular Socialist Party (PSP) of Cuba penetrated Batista's intelligence services and penetrated CPUSA front groups in the United States. These operations helped undermine the Batista regime and secure

²⁰ Morriss, John D. "2 Aides of Castro Expelled by US: Spying Is Charged" New York Times June 19, 1960 page 1.

²¹ May, Donald. "Cuban Spy Activity in US Aired" Cedar Rapids Gazette January 7, 1961 page 1.

²² Betancourt, Ernesto. "Castro's War against the US" January 1, 2001 Accessed From: <http://www.futurodecuba.org/Castro'sTerroristConnection.htm>

²³ Bethel, Paul D. The Losers (Arlington House, 1969) page 242.

²⁴ "Castro Needs Spare Parts for Industry" Hays Daily News October 19, 1960 page 1.

²⁵ Bethel, Paul D. The Losers (Arlington House, 1969) page 174.

material support for the 26th of July Movement from sympathizers in the United States. Many PSP agents were trained by the KGB. They were absorbed into the Castro intelligence apparatus. The Rebel Army also developed an intelligence service in the later stages of the struggle against Batista. In early 1959, these elements were merged into the Investigations Department of the Rebel Army (DIER) or G-2. After mid-1960, the USSR provided advisers to the DIER. After early 1961, the Czechoslovaks and East Germans also assisted the Cuban intelligence apparatus. At this time, Paris, Berlin, Prague, and Madrid became important Cuban intelligence stations.²⁶

Cuban Air Force defector Major Pedro Diaz Lanz reported in 1959 that at least four uniformed Soviets arrived in Santiago and Havana. In Matanzas Province, several Soviets took a lot of pictures of the textile industry there, while other Soviets were stationed at La Cabana Prison. At least five other Soviets were sent to Cuba through East Germany.²⁷

Communist strategic involvement with the Castro regime in its early years was confirmed by Major Jan Sejna who was a high-level military-strategic planning official for the Czechoslovak Communists and the Warsaw Pact. In early 1959, Sejna reported that Castro approached Czechoslovakia for assistance for the new Cuban army. Czechoslovakia was ordered by the Soviets to provide this assistance, thus paving the way for Soviet control of Cuba. According to Khrushchev, using the Czechoslovaks would avoid alarming the United States. Czechoslovak military personnel were sent to Cuba, while Cuban army officers were sent to Czechoslovakia. Cuba also became a base for Czechoslovak military intelligence against Latin and North America. Cuba was also tasked to become a "*revolutionary center*." These meetings occurred in 1960. Weapons started to arrive *en masse* in the fall of 1960. In 1962, a Cuban Operation Plan was developed as a corollary to the main Soviet plan: general war with the United States.²⁸ The East German Stasi also dispatched agents and advisers to Cuba shortly after February 1960. High-level Stasi official General Erich Mielke dispatched a number of officers of the Main Intelligence Directorate (HVA) to Cuba. This advisory mission to Cuba was led by HVA Colonel Siegfried Fiedler, who improved the quality of the Cuban intelligence and secret police.²⁹ In July 1959, Major Ramiro Valdes chief of the G-2 met with Soviet Ambassador to Mexico Vladimir Bazikin in Mexico City. The Cuban envoy to Mexico Salvador Massip met with Bazikin on a regular basis for conferences. These conferences coordinated the transfer of Soviet agents and funds to Cuba. Soviet

²⁶ Blight, James G. and Welch, David A. Intelligence and the Cuban Missile Crisis (Frank Cass Publishers England 1998) pages 90-119.

²⁷ US Senate Committee on the Judiciary. Communist Threat to the United States Through the Caribbean July 14, 1959 Accessed From: <http://www.latinamericanstudies.org/us-cuba/diaz-lanz-hearing.htm>

²⁸ Sejna, Jan. Decision-Making in Communist Countries: An Inside View (Pergamon-Brassey's, 1986) pages 72-75.

²⁹ Koehler, John O. Stasi: The Untold Story of the East German Secret Police (Westview Press: Boulder CO 1999) page 297.

General Consul P. Yatskov traveled secretly to Havana on at least one occasion.³⁰ In May 1959, Chinese intelligence experts secretly entered Cuba.³¹

In 1960, the buildup of Soviet and Warsaw Pact troops and advisers commenced in Cuba, well before the official rupture in diplomatic relations with Washington. In August 1960 the USSR dispatched 700 “*technicians*” to Santiago. With them came huge crates and boxes containing MIG fighters and parts for ballistic missiles. Other boxes and crates were unloaded by Soviet crews in Mariel, Matanzas, and Bahia Honda. Cuban dock workers were not allowed to unload these cargoes. Soviet military personnel reportedly appeared in Santiago wearing green, red, or blue sports shirts. The red signified artillery troops; blue for missile technicians; and green for military engineers. Soviet personnel also landed at the Rancho Boyeros Airport near Havana in the summer of 1960. Customs inspections were waived by the government of Cuba and the foreign communist troops were transported in official Cuban government cars. In August 1960, Czechs, Hungarians, and Soviets appeared in other Cuban cities. Hundreds of Warsaw Pact personnel explored the interior of the island. Groups of Soviet personnel were also accompanied by Cuban Army personnel during expeditions in the deep water Bay of Nipe in Oriente Province. Soviets also appeared in and around caves in Pinar del Rio, Matanzas, and Oriente Provinces. Former US Ambassador to Cuba Robert C. Hill noted that “*Agents coming from Moscow and some from China go back and forth between the Soviet Embassies in Mexico and Cuba.*”³² In the fall of 1960, Associated Press reporter Robert Berrellez witnessed Soviet military engineers working with Cuban personnel in caves in Soroa and Tapaste. Paul Bethel of the US Embassy reported that the Cuban Army cordoned off the Soroa caves in Pinar del Rio Province. As a cover, INIT (the National Tourism Institute) took over these areas for improvements.³³ Elements of the 56th Division of the Chinese PLA was located in the vicinity Tacajo sugar mill in Oriente Province.³⁴

Well before the rupture with the United States, Cuba developed relations with revolutionary leftists, communist parties, and guerrilla movements. Soviet and Chinese officers trained these terrorist movements and communist activists at camps based in Cuba. By the end of 1959, Cuba’s guerrilla training camps were manned with Soviet “*technical advisers.*” Red Chinese officers were stationed at the Minas del Frio camp. Former leftist Spanish Republican officers and cadres appeared in Cuba at the end of 1959. All of these Spanish Republicans and their children were trained at Soviet military institutions such as the Frunze Academy. These Spanish Republicans and their children were tasked to be used in the Soviet wars for conquest in the years to come. In November 1959, a young Spanish man who was dressed in a Rebel Army uniform visited the home of Nelly Inchaustegui. He spoke with a strange Spanish accent. It transpired that this young Spanish man was taken to the USSR from Spain at the end of the Spanish Civil War and trained as an agent. This young Spanish man was sent to Cuba by the USSR in the summer of 1959. He then found out that he had relatives in

³⁰ Bethel, Paul D. The Losers (Arlington House, 1969) pages 174-175.

³¹ Bethel, Paul D. The Losers (Arlington House, 1969) page 174.

³² Bethel, Paul D. The Losers (Arlington House, 1969) pages 250-253.

³³ Bethel, Paul D. The Losers (Arlington House, 1969) pages 362-363.

³⁴ Bethel, Paul D. The Losers (Arlington House, 1969) page 420.

Cuba including Nelly Inchaustegui.³⁵ Spanish Republican General Alberto Bayo established guerrilla training schools in Cuba.³⁶

Spanish Republican General Enrique Lister advised Castro on how to create the spy committees called the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (CDRs). He also ran the guerrilla training camp in Minas del Frio to train Latin American Communists. Former Castro Foreign Affairs Ministry official and Cuban delegate to the OAS Dr. Nicolas Rivero noted that Castro was advised by KGB official Alexei Alekseyev to purge the Cuban Foreign Ministry of professionals and replace them with unknown Cuban Communists. Rivero recalled that the Cuban Foreign Ministry was tasked to promote subversion in Latin America: "*We were already exporting it, and we had been exporting it very efficiently ever since Mikoyen's visit in February.*" Cuban Ambassador to Peru Alonso Fernandez provided an accounting of grants denominated in American dollars to the Communist Party of Peru, Peruvian newspapermen, labor leaders, congressmen, and 34 politicians in 8 political parties. It was noted in captured³⁷ Cuban Embassy documents that "...*Peru must be considered the strategic center of the assault on capitalism, because of its geographic location, and the economic, political, and social conflicts we can exploit...technical advisers of the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China have great hopes for the work we are doing in Peru.*"³⁸ In July 1960, the Salvadoran government expelled two Cuban diplomats named Armando Velastaez Fernandez and Jose M Valdez for fomenting labor unrest and distributing propaganda.³⁹ As of March 1960, it was reported that the Cuban and Egyptian embassies in Panama City established friendly cooperative relations with anti-US elements in Panama. These Cuban supported leftwing nationalist Panamanians included individuals who were involved in riots in the Canal Zone.⁴⁰ As of March 1960, Cuban diplomats in Central America were involved in efforts to exploit liberal and leftist organizations in those countries to subvert their native governments. Also, university student organizations were also manipulated by the Cuban Embassy officials located in Central American countries. In Mexico, Cuban subversion efforts were carried out through Havana's embassy, native communist groups, and the Soviet Embassy. The Cuban Ambassador to Honduras was also active in stirring up students at the National University and in forming the Society of Friends of the Cuban Revolution. Cuban friendship clubs were established in Managua Nicaragua. In El Salvador, a Society of Friends of Cuba was also established.⁴¹ In 1960, Paulo de Castro of the Rio de Janeiro branch of *Prensa Latina*, defected and admitted that the agency maintained a division or spying purposes.

³⁵Bethel, Paul D. The Losers (Arlington House, 1969) pages 208-209.

³⁶ Bethel, Paul D. The Losers (Arlington House, 1969) page 174.

³⁷ These documents were captured by anti-Castro intruders.

³⁸ Monahan, James and Gilmore, Kenneth. The Great Deception (Farrar, Straus, 1963) pages 87-91.

³⁹ "Cubans Ordered Out" New York Times July 3, 1960 page 5.

⁴⁰ Baldwin, Hanson W. "Cuban and Arab Active in Panama" New York Times March 13, 1960 page 1.

⁴¹ Kennedy, Paul P. "Cuban Aides Woo Central America" New York Times March 20, 1960 page 14.

One operative of *Prensa Latina* admitted to de Castro that his employer “was engaged in espionage and subversion.”⁴²

Although Cuban-US trade tapered off significantly by late 1960, the entire economic relationship between Cuba and the United States was not fully abrogated until 1962. In that year, the OAS imposed a full embargo on trade with Cuba. After 1962, Mexico and Canada were Havana’s only economic partners on the American continent. From January to August 1959, American exports to Cuba totaled \$282.8 million. From January to July 1960, American exports to Cuba totaled \$177.7 million. While this was a fall in trade worth over \$100 million, it should also be noted that American-Cuban commerce was not abolished despite Castro’s hostile actions against American interests. In October 1960, it was reported that Cuba purchased tinsplate from the United States and West Germany for Cuban industrial machinery.⁴³ The \$60 million in American food and medicines bartered in exchange for the Brigade 2506 POWs was diverted to the Soviet Union. Even the American embargo exempted food and medicine shipments to Cuba.⁴⁴

With the halting of American military shipments to Batista’s Cuba in 1958, Castro sought to procure weapons and spare parts for the American equipped Cuban armed forces soon after he took power. In 1961, the Cuban Revolutionary Armed Forces possessed US-made B-26 bombers and a few US-made T-33 armed jets, along with US-made frigates, escort, and patrol vessels.⁴⁵ In April 1960, it was reported that Cuba established an underground smuggling network within the United States to break the US arms embargo. In one case, Cuban agents bought 8 B-26 bombers in Tucson, Arizona and secretly flew them to Aeropuerto Santa Julia in Pinar Del Rio Province. Cuban agents also purchased ammunition from the Tamiami Gun Shop (Miami), National Gun Traders (Miami), and Hunters Lodge (Alexandria, Virginia).⁴⁶

The Cubans also used the “free” trade system to occasionally undermine American industries. In September 1960, the Cuban Embassy in the US secretly bought 280 pounds of tobacco seed which would have produced 50 million pounds of tobacco. The tobacco purchased by the Cubans was then supposed to be re-exported back to the US in order to disrupt the US export market of tobacco. This tobacco was sold at a cost substantially lower than the American market price. It was shipped by the Cuban Embassy through Idlewild Airport in New York.⁴⁷

Even after the United States reduced trade with Cuba in late 1960, Castro’s Communists were able to procure goods from various channels, including some NATO countries. In May 1961, Havana radio reported that Cuba imported spare parts for US-

⁴² Bethel, Paul D. *The Losers* (Arlington House, 1969) page 243.

⁴³ “Embargo May Present Cuba With Severe Shortages of Spare Parts, Chemicals” *Wall Street Journal* October 20, 1960 page 3.

⁴⁴ Bethel, Paul D. *The Losers* (Arlington House, 1969) page 412.

⁴⁵ *Statesmen’s Yearbook* (St. Martin’s Press 1962) page 901.

⁴⁶ Anderson, Jack. “Air Force Sells Warplanes to Castro” *The Constitution Tribune* April 2, 1960 page 4.

⁴⁷ “US Foils Cuba Plot to Get Tobacco Seed” *New York Times* September 16, 1960 page 12.

made cars via Europe.⁴⁸ The defecting commercial representative for the Cuban Embassy in Mexico Pedro Roig Ortega stated in 1962 that Castro \$125,000 per month for American-made small arms, light machinery, tractor and bus tires, and auto parts through front companies in Mexico.⁴⁹ In 1959 and 1960, Cuba also acquired 22,500 FN FAL rifles from Belgium and Browning High Power pistols which were used by the Revolutionary Armed Forces (FAR) and the Havana Police Battalion. They, along with some Israeli-made Uzis were subsequently used in FAR training exercises and for Cuban infiltration teams in Nicaragua, El Salvador, Chile, and Venezuela in support of communist terrorists in those countries.⁵⁰ Radio Havana received \$35 million worth of transmitter equipment from Czechoslovakia and Switzerland. These 100,000 watt transmitters beamed communist propaganda to Latin America.⁵¹

In December 1960, a Cuban delegation headed by Cuban Minister of Economics Regino Boti visited Canada to increase trade. Canadian Minister of Trade George Hees noted that the Cubans “*are wonderful customers. You can’t do business with better businessmen anywhere.*” Boti reported that Canadian companies and Canadian subsidiaries of US corporations were willing to do business with Cuba. Products to be exported to Cuba included spare parts, caustic soda, tractors, and parts for sugar mills.⁵²

Even after the vast reduction in US-Cuba trade in late 1960, Havana still maintained direct sources of American dollars to help feed its economy. In 1962, Castro collected \$10 million from the Guantanamo Bay Base workers who were Cuban nationals. Castro also generated \$1 million in the sale of airline tickets to Cuban citizens lucky enough to flee their homeland.⁵³ In 1961, Cuba earned \$70 million per year from sales of molasses, tobacco, fruits, and vegetables to the United States. This money was believed to have funded Cuban anti-US campaigns and Soviet bloc weapons.⁵⁴ The profits garnered from Cuban exports to the United States and other capitalist countries were harnessed to help build up Havana’s armed forces and its subversive network. Senator George Smathers (D-FL) noted in 1960 that the American dollars collected from Cuban sales of sugar to the United States were utilized to build airbases for jet fighters.⁵⁵ Captain Manuel Villafana, the former Cuban Military Attache to Mexico, defected in April 1960. He revealed that Cuba’s dollar exchange was used to fund Cuban Embassies, which then transferred the money to leftwing and communist groups

⁴⁸ “Cuba Gets Parts Via Europe” New York Times May 15, 1961 page 10.

⁴⁹ “Ex-Aide Says Cuba Gets US Products” New York Times June 14, 1962 page 15.

⁵⁰ Gonzalez, Servando. The Secret Fidel Castro (InteliNet/InteliBooks, 2001) page 93.

⁵¹ Monahan, James and Gilmore, Kenneth. The Great Deception (Farrar, Straus, 1963) page 178.

⁵² “Cuba Seeks to Step Up Buying From Canada To Offset U.S. Embargo” Wall Street Journal December 12, 1960 page 26.

⁵³ “President Orders a Total Embargo on Cuban Imports” New York Times February 4, 1962 page 1.

⁵⁴ Lotto, Jack. “US Dollars Still Go To Cuba” San Antonio Light April 28, 1961 page 19.

⁵⁵ “Claims Reds Building Air Bases In Cuba” The Post (Frederick Maryland) June 6, 1960 page 8.

in Latin America in an effort to bring them under Soviet control.⁵⁶ As of 1963, Cuba officially held \$33 million worth of assets and deposits in the United States. American dollars and banking channels were used to fund Cuban operations in Latin America. One Kennedy Administration official commented “*Dollars have shown up in the possession of saboteurs and terrorists in Latin America.*”⁵⁷ Various American-based pro-Castro front groups and regular businesses also engaged in underground trade with Cuba. They were merely slapped on the wrist for engaging in commerce with Cuba. In late 1960 and early 1961, two US corporations Sidcap Laboratories and Kemworth Laboratories sold blood plasma to Cuba and made a profit of \$10,000.⁵⁸ In April 1962, the Medical Aid for Cuba Committee shipped \$15,000 worth of medical supplies to Cuba via Pan-Am Airways.⁵⁹

In conclusion, it is quite clear that the United States pursued a partly conciliatory policy aimed at Cuba. Alongside the trade and diplomatic engagements with Havana, Castro and the Cuban Communists pursued close military, covert political, and intelligence ties with the Soviets and their allies. Furthermore, Castro deceived the West and the United States into believing that his 26th of July Movement represented a group of social reformers who desired a mere restoration of the 1940 Constitution and free elections. Behind closed doors, Castro revealed to his confidants that he intended to construct a Marxist-Leninist state. Beginning in 1959, Cuban Embassies and Consulates in the United States and Latin America became staging grounds for Havana’s support for leftist and communist revolutionaries. Despite the covert CIA support for ex-Castro revolutionaries, the American government of President Eisenhower never fully severed all trade and diplomatic ties until January 1961. American policy towards Cuba was at first conciliatory in 1959 and early 1960 and thereafter became inconsistent. Finally, in 1962 most trade ties were severed after the Soviets placed ballistic missiles in Cuba. The evidence presented in this essay clearly challenges the leftist and even libertarian view that American foreign policy pushed Castro into the arms of the Soviet Union.

⁵⁶ “Defector Ties Castro, Reds” Palm Beach Post April 16, 1960 page 1.

⁵⁷ Smith, Hedrick. “U.S. Freezes Cuban Assets In Move to Bar Subversion” New York Times July 9, 1963 page 1.

⁵⁸ Ranzal, Edward. “3 Blood Processors Convicted Of Selling Unfit Plasma to Cuba” New York Times July 2, 1963 page 15.

⁵⁹ “Group Here Flying Medicines to Cuba” New York Times April 3, 1962 page 19.