

Political Legacies of the Cuban Missile Crisis

BY IKE NAHEM

Author's Note: This is updated and re-edited from an October 22, 2012 essay on the Cuban Missile Crisis.

The last two weeks of October 1962, 55 years ago, was the closest the world has come so far to a widespread nuclear exchange in what has become known as the "Cuban Missile Crisis."



The First Use of Nuclear Weapons

In August 1945, the United States government, having, at that moment, a monopoly on the "atom bomb," *unilaterally* dropped nuclear explosives, successively, on the *civilian* inhabitants of the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. At the time of this clear war crime Japanese imperialism's conquests and vast expansion in China, the Pacific Rim, and Southeast Asia, that began in the 1930s, had shrunk sharply. The Japanese rulers were utterly alone and isolated politically; their German Nazi ally was defeated, smashed, and under occupation. Japanese imperialism was in headlong retreat under intense attack from, on the one hand, rival colonial powers and imperialists fighting to

get their colonial territories back, and indigenous independence forces in the remaining lands they occupied on the other. The latter was a mass upsurge for national independence and included resistance to Japanese aggression in parts of Manchuria in China, as well as Korea, Vietnam, and the “Dutch East Indies,” now Indonesia. At the time the decision to explode the nukes on Japanese cities was made, the Japanese navy was incapable of any operations and the Japanese merchant fleet was destroyed. The Japanese government had begun to send out “peace feelers,” fully aware of its hopeless situation. Washington’s utterly ruthless action – rationalized as necessary to prevent mass casualties for US soldiers in a ground invasion of Japan – finalized the defeat and prostration of the Japanese Empire in the Asian-Pacific “theater” of World War II...and sent an unmistakable shock and signal to the world for all time.



Hiroshima, August 1945

Cuba In the Eye of the Storm

The young leaders of the Cuban Revolution, now holding governmental power, were in the very eye of the storm during those last two October weeks of 1962. In the end the diffusing and resolution of the Missile Crisis – in the sense of reversing and ending the momentum toward imminent nuclear exchange between the United States and the Soviet Union – came when Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev gave way to US President John Kennedy’s demands and agreed to halt further naval shipments of nuclear missiles to Cuba and withdraw those already in Cuban territory. Khrushchev further agreed to the removal of Soviet medium-range conventional bombers, very useful to the Cubans

for defending their coastlines, and a near-complete withdrawal of Soviet combat brigades.

For his part, Kennedy made a semi-public conditional formulation that the US government would not invade Cuba (this was not legally binding or attached to any signed legal or written document). Kennedy also agreed, in a secret protocol, to withdraw US nuclear missiles from Turkey that bordered the Soviet Union.

The Cuban government, which had, at great political risk, acceded to the Soviet proposal to deploy Soviet nuclear missiles on the island, was not consulted, or even informed, by the Soviet government, at any stage of the unfolding crisis, of the unfolding US-Soviet negotiations. With Cuban representatives completely excluded, the *five points* Cuba wanted to see addressed and included in any overall agreement coming out of the crisis were ignored altogether under US insistence and Soviet acquiescence. The entire experience was both politically shocking and eye-opening for the Cuban revolutionaries. They came out of it acutely conscious of their vulnerability and angered over their exclusion.

[Footnote 1: *In a public statement on October 28, presenting the five points, Fidel Castro said, "With relation to the pronouncement made by the President of the United States, John F. Kennedy, in a letter sent to the premier of the Soviet Union, Nikita Khrushchev, to the effect that the United States would agree, after the establishment of adequate arrangements through the United Nations, to eliminate the measures of blockade in existence and give guarantees against any invasion of Cuba, and in relation to the decision announced by Premier Khrushchev of withdrawing the installation of arms of strategic defense from Cuba territory, the revolutionary government of Cuba declares that the guarantees of which President Kennedy speaks—that there will be no aggression against Cuba—will not exist unless, in addition to the elimination of the naval blockade he promises, the following measures among others are to be adopted: 1) Cessation of the economic blockade and all the measures of commercial and economic pressure which the United States exercises in all parts of the world against our country; 2) Cessation of all subversive activities, launching and landing of arms and explosives by air and sea, the organization of mercenary invasions, infiltration of spies and saboteurs, all of which actions are carried out from the territory of the United States and some other accomplice countries; 3) Cessation of the pirate attacks which are being carried out from bases existing in the United States and Puerto Rico; 4) Cessation of all the violations of our air and naval space by North American war planes and ships; and 5) Withdrawal of naval base of Guantanamo and the return of the Cuban territory by the United States."*]

Washington Plans Direct Invasion

By April 20, 1961, the revolutionary Cuban armed forces, led by Fidel Castro, was victoriously mopping up on the coastal battlefields and detaining survivors from the routed counter-revolutionary Cuban exile “army.” An army organized by the US government and its Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to invade Cuba at the Bay of Pigs (Playa Giron to the Cubans). This major operation to overthrow the “Castro” government and destroy the Cuban Revolution had been devised by the Dwight Eisenhower White House and carried out by the new Kennedy Administration in its third month after taking office.

At the time of their April 1961 victory at the Bay of Pigs over the counter-revolutionary exiles, Fidel Castro declared that the Cuban Revolution was a *socialist revolution* and that he was a “Marxist-Leninist.” Castro’s declaration corresponded to the social and economic deeds and policies being implemented by the revolutionary government (and to the profound internationalism of the Cuban leadership team). By 1962 the major domestic and foreign privately-owned major means of production in utilities, transportation, heavy and light industry, manufacturing, mining, and oil refining had been nationalized (mostly with fair compensation) by the workers and farmers government.

[Footnote 2: *The private owners of nationalized foreign enterprises in Cuba, with their governments, negotiated satisfactory compensation with the revolutionary Cuban government, in accordance with international law. The US government, at the time, was already planning and organizing for the overthrow of the “Castro” government and was therefore in contemptuous rejection of any negotiations for compensation to US owners of Cuban assets being nationalized. This was a large swath of the Cuban economy, which was dominated by US capital]*

Concurrent with this, the revolutionary government established a state monopoly of foreign trade and the first shoots of central economic planning began which would supersede the old neo-colonial capitalist market. With all its flaws and contradictions, pressures and counter-pressures, a qualitative class transformation of the Cuban state had been realized in a dynamic way. Certainly, bipartisan Washington and the entire bourgeois political spectrum in the US from left to right had no illusions in this regard. The hostility of the US Democratic and Republican parties to “Castro’s Revolution” was monolithic and poised for aggression at that time.

Playa Giron was as humiliating and unacceptable for Washington as it had built confidence and was invigorating for the Cuban revolutionaries. It was certainly no secret to anyone paying the slightest attention that not even a nanosecond passed between Washington’s debacle at the Bay of Pigs and the planning for a new invasion.

But this time it would be directly by US forces without the proxy agency of the mercenary “troops” of the former ruling classes of Cuba, who were by then ensconced in southern Florida. Since October 1961 the Pentagon officers assigned to prepare for the US invasion of Cuba had been revising, updating, and “polishing” the concrete details. These “operational plans” were continually reviewed with President Kennedy.

Cuba faced an imminent, violent one-two punch: intensive aerial bombardment followed by large-scale invasion on multiple fronts. It was less than ten years since the last major US war in Korea, a former Japanese colony artificially divided in the aftermath of World War II. The impact of US bombing on the northern Korean state and its capital of Pyongyang, could not have been encouraging to the Cuban leadership. Virtually the entire city was flattened by US carpet bombings. According to the Australian journalist and eyewitness to the carnage Wilfred Burchett, “There were only two buildings left standing in Pyongyang.”



Pyongyang, Korea in 1953. US saturation bombing flattened 18 of North Korea's 22 cities, an unequaled level of destruction in modern wars

All in all Washington dropped some 635,000 tons of bombs (plus over 30,000 tons of napalm) on northern Korea. This compares to 503,000 tons of bombs dropped in the entire Pacific Theater during World War II by all sides.

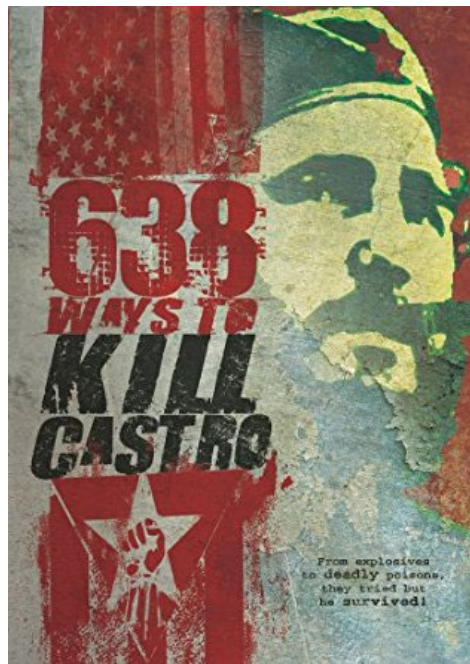
While the numbers of civilian deaths from the US bombing assaults in Korea are inexact, well over 1 million Koreans in the north died, some 12-15% of the total population by conservative estimates. If you add injuries and missing the figure reaches

3 million. (For a comprehensive, classic account of the origins and development of the Korean War see *The Hidden History of the Korean War* by legendary US journalist I.F. Stone first published by Monthly Review Press in 1952. It can also be downloaded at the Amazon Kindle Store.)

The 2017 Kennedy Assassination Files

At the end of October 2017, amid some hoopla, the Donald Trump White House allowed the release of nearly 2900 previously “classified” US government files and documents pertinent to the November 22, 1963 assassination of President John Kennedy. Other files and documents were held back for now.

A number of these documents reference US violent plots against Cuba, including assassination attempts against Fidel Castro and other revolutionary leaders by the Kennedy Administration. These reconfirm what has long been known on the massive military force Washington was planning to employ to invade and occupy Cuba and crush the revolutionary government after the fiasco at the Bay of Pigs in April 1961.



One document, a memo from August 8, 1962 – over two months before the discovery of Soviet nuclear missiles on Cuban territory – states, “In order to seize control of key strategic areas in Cuba within 10-15 days with minimum casualties to both sides [an absurd throwaway line regarding what could only have been horrific slaughter and massive dead and wounded] about 261,000 US military personnel would participate in the operation.” The memo was addressed to a “Special Group” within the Kennedy

White House that was coordinating intensifying US efforts to eliminate the revolutionary government led by Fidel Castro. The October 30, 2017 *USA Today* writes, "While this and other documents had nothing to do with the actual assassination, it was included in the files because of the connection between Kennedy's desire to remove Castro from power, his support of Cuban exiles to help him, and the affinity of assassin Lee Harvey Oswald for the Castro government."

The "operational plans" for the US invasion of Cuba were to involve the initial dispatching of 90,000 troops and was projected to reach the 261,000 figure. This for a country of six million people. (For comparison, the population of Vietnam was around 40 million during the years of the US war in the 1960s and early 1970s. US troop levels reached over 500,000. Massive US military operations, in the air and on the ground, killed millions of Vietnamese, perhaps 10% of the Vietnamese population).

There is no question that once "the dogs of war" were unleashed against Cuba, with the accompanying propaganda onslaught, Washington would wage a war of annihilation under the rote cover of "democratic" and even "humanitarian" verbiage. Cuban resistance would be fierce. Mounting US casualties would, in the initial period, feed war fever and US aggression. In short: Cuba faced unheard of death and destruction...and the clock was ticking.

Operation Mongoose

By this time President Kennedy's "Operation Mongoose" was in effect. "Mongoose" was essentially a large-scale terrorist campaign and US intervention *inside* Cuba employing sabotage, bombings, murder, and so-called "psychological warfare." Kennedy's cynical purpose was to undertake and carry out any means deemed necessary to disrupt and demoralize Cuban society through constant, incessant violent attacks and economic sabotage to the point where the social and political conditions would be created for a full-scale US invasion.

But Kennedy and his civilian and military "advisors" continued to underestimate both the caliber of the revolutionary leadership and the capacities of the Cuban working people and youth they were terrorizing, as well as the Revolution's determination and competence to organize their defenses.

Above all, the US rulers were not used to facing such a politically savvy enemy. The young Cuban revolutionary government, with the indefatigable Fidel Castro as its main spokesperson, was adept and quick on its feet in effectively exposing to world public opinion Washington's anti-Cuba campaign through a vigorous, public, and factually

accurate counter-offensive based on telling the truth about what the Revolution was actually doing and what the US government was actually doing.

The logic behind "Operation Mongoose" was bluntly laid out in an internal memorandum of April 6, 1960 by L.D. Mallory, a US State Department senior official: "The majority of Cubans support Castro ... the only foreseeable means of alienating internal support is through disenchantment and disaffection based on economic dissatisfaction and hardship. ... every possible means should be undertaken promptly to weaken the economic life of Cuba." Mallory proposed "a line of action that makes the greatest inroads in denying money and supplies to Cuba, to decrease monetary and real wages, to bring about hunger, desperation and the overthrow of the government."

On July 26, 1961 – the national holiday declared by the revolutionary government commemorating the July 26, 1953 attack led by Fidel Castro and Abel Santamaria on the Moncada Barracks in Santiago de Cuba – the CIA attempted to assassinate Fidel Castro, Raul Castro, and Che Guevara during the celebrations. The CIA plan was, if the murders were "successful," to stage a provocation against the US base at Guantanamo and make it appear to be Cuban revenge for the murder of their top leaders. This would then be the pretext for a full-scale US invasion. Here on full display is the cynical mendacity operating at the top of the US government in the drive to bring back the power of the landowners, rich playboys, segregationists, gangsters, and pimps – the full flower of "democracy" to the benighted Cuban masses suffering under literacy drives, free medical care, desegregated public facilities, and the crushing of the US Mafia.



Raul Castro and Che Guevara

During the next month of August 1961, the CIA organized one of its most pernicious campaigns against the revolutionary government. Its agents spread lies through a built-up rumor bill that there was a Cuban government *policy* to take all children away from their parents by force and raise them in "state institutions." Some 15,000 Cuban families, overwhelmingly from middle- and upper classes full of prejudice and hostility

to the Revolution, panicked and sent their children mostly to the US in response to a Big Lie, under the CIA's infamous "Operation Peter Pan."



CIA-hatched "Operation Peter Pan"

The Revolution Advances Its Social Program

So, while all this criminal activity was going on, the Cuban Revolution advanced its program of social justice and human liberation for the oppressed and exploited *majority* as the most effective counterforce to the *Yanqui* aggression. On February 26, 1962 Cuba's now fully legal and rejuvenated labor unions provided the people power for the campaign of Cuba's Ministry of Foreign Health to carry out a nationwide drive for vaccination against polio. By the end of the year the disease was completely wiped out on the island. It took the United Nation's World Health Organization, then far more subject to pressure from Washington than now, 43 years to finally recognize that Cuba was the first nation in the Americas to accomplish this.

Things like this, and the full array of revolutionary advances taking place in the face of Washington's mounting terrorist campaign, convinced General Maxwell Taylor, who oversaw Operation Mongoose with Attorney General Robert Kennedy at the White House, that the terrorist operation "mak[ing] maximum use of indigenous resources," could not and would not do the job of overthrowing the revolutionary government. "Final success," Taylor explained in a March 1962 report to President Kennedy, "will require decisive US military intervention." US spies inside Cuba, at most, could help "prepare and justify this intervention and thereafter facilitate and support it." With the

Bay of Pigs debacle still fresh in his mind, and without some of the blinders of more gung-ho invasion advocates, Kennedy hesitated to give a green light to the invasion plans he himself had ordered up. It remained yellow-lighted however, and Kennedy directed that Mongoose terrorism continue and step up.

The terrorist anti-Cuba campaign was not limited to Cuban territory. On April 28, 1962 the New York offices of the Cuban Press Agency *Prensa Latina* was attacked in New York, injuring three staff members.

More seriously, from May 8-18, 1962 a “practice run” for the US invasion of Cuba took place. The full-scale “military exercise” was code named “Operation Whip Lash” and sent an unmistakable signal of intimidation from the US military colossus to the six million people of Cuba.

All this mounting imperialist intervention had only one possible ending point – short of a Cuban surrender, which would never come. Events were coming to a head in Washington, Moscow, and Havana. Events that ineluctably posed and placed the nuclear question in the equation.

While the Cuban government and overwhelming popular majority were mobilized, armed to the teeth, and prepared to fight to the death, they wanted to live in peace and to enjoy the fruits of building a new society after a hard-fought revolutionary triumph. The Cuban leadership fully understood that a US invasion would kill many hundreds of thousands and destroy the Cuban infrastructure and economy. *How to stop the coming US invasion was the burning question for the revolutionary government.*

Khrushchev Rolls the Dice

Meanwhile in the Soviet Union, the Soviet leadership was facing a decidedly negative nuclear relationship of forces vis-à-vis Washington. This position of inequality (in the framework of the aptly acronymed Mutually Assured Destruction – aka MAD – nuclear doctrine) was perceived in Moscow as an impediment to carrying out political negotiations and maneuvering with Washington and the NATO powers, and defending Soviet interests in the “geopolitical” Cold War arena.

By April 1962 fifteen US Jupiter nuclear missiles had been installed and were “operational” in Turkey on the border of the Soviet Union. “Operational” meant *ready to launch at any moment*. Each missile was armed with a 1.45 megaton warhead, with ninety-seven times the firepower of the atom bomb dropped on Hiroshima. The official estimate of the “fatality projection” for each missile was *one million* Soviet civilians.



The Jupiter deployment in Turkey added to the overwhelming US superiority in quantity and quality in the “nuclear arms race” between Washington and Moscow. According to Anatoly Gribkov of the Red Army General Staff (cited in the television program *DEFCON-2* shown on the *US Military Channel*), “The United States had about 5000 [nuclear] warheads, the Soviet Union 300. And of those [300] only two or three dozen that could hit the United States.” Khrushchev decided to alleviate this “imbalance” by placing missiles on the Cuban island if he succeeded in selling the idea to the Cuban leadership.

[Footnote 3: *In the 1960 Presidential election, the liberal Democrat John Kennedy shamelessly promoted as an important campaign issue a supposed “missile gap” – in the Soviet Union’s favor – between Washington and Moscow, a conscious fabrication. Kennedy also postured to the right of his Republican opponent, Eisenhower’s Vice-President Richard Nixon, on “getting tough with Castro.” On this, Nixon had the disadvantage, as Kennedy was no doubt aware, of being unable to publicly tout the Eisenhower White House’s already advanced plans for the mercenary invasion at the Bay of Pigs, which Kennedy carried out three months after his Inauguration.*]

Sometime in the spring (April-May) of 1962 the Khrushchev government of the Soviet Union proposed to the Cuban government that Cuba receive nuclear-tipped missiles on Cuban territory. In no other country (including none of its “Warsaw Pact” allies, who were all politically subordinate to the Soviet government) had the Soviet government located nuclear missiles outside of Soviet territory.

Washington, by contrast, had openly placed nuclear missiles in numerous western European countries as well as Turkey and secretly in Okinawa, Japan, aimed at China. (The United Kingdom and France, both US allies, also had nuclear arsenals by that time. China detonated its first nuclear bomb in an October 1964 “test.”) Additionally, US “strategic” nuclear armed aircraft were in the air ready for attack orders 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. US nuclear submarines were in similar mode, and even more difficult to detect.

While Soviet capabilities undoubtedly lagged behind the US, it was not so much so as to preclude inevitable reciprocal attack in response to any US "first strike." Soviet missiles in Cuba would theoretically be a further deterrent to any US "first strike" threat. Placing the missiles in Cuba was clearly seen by the Soviet government as a bargaining piece to advance Soviet strategic interests in the nuclear chessboard that animated US-Soviet "diplomatic" maneuvers and intrigue and political objectives on both sides.

Khrushchev evidently presumed that, faced with a *fait accompli*, Washington would redress the imbalance to the benefit of the Soviet Union. The Soviet missiles, upon being fully operational, would be able to strike major population centers and whole geographic regions of the US, roughly equivalent to the potential death-dealing capacity Washington had through its missiles in Europe surrounding and targeted on the Soviet Union. Of course, the big "if" in all of this reasoning was getting to the *accompli*. Given US technical proficiency this was a fantasy.

Cuba Accepts the Soviet Proposal

At the end of May 1962 the first direct presentation of the Soviet proposal was delivered to Fidel Castro and Raul Castro in Cuba by a Soviet delegation led by an alternate member of the Soviet Presidium (an executive decision-making body). The Soviet officials revealed to the Cuban leaders that their "intelligence" told them conclusively that a US invasion was being seriously prepared, to be implemented at any time over the next months. Of course, the Soviets were not telling the Cubans anything they did not already know in general, but there were new specific facts and details. The now-concrete proposal that measures to fortify Cuban defenses would include the deployment of Soviet nuclear missiles on the island naturally led to intense consultations within the top Cuban leadership. The chief government ministers involved were Fidel Castro, Raul Castro, Che Guevara, Osvaldo Dorticos, Carlos Rafael Rodriguez, and Blas Roca. The day after the proposal was received the Cuban leadership told the Soviet delegation that the nuclear deployment was acceptable in principle.

In extensive discussions with European journalist Ignacio Ramonet (which became the book *My Life: A Spoken Autobiography* by Fidel Castro, published in 2006 by Scribner) Fidel Castro referred to the discussions within the Cuban central leadership. He said that besides Khrushchev and the Soviet leadership's "sincere desire to prevent an attack against Cuba...they were hoping to improve the balance of strategic forces...I added that it would be inconsistent of us to expect the maximum support from the USSR and the rest of the Socialist camp should we be attacked by the United States and yet refuse

to face the political risks and the possible damage to our reputation when they needed us. That ethical and revolutionary point of view was accepted unanimously.”

In a speech many years earlier in 1992 Fidel Castro had said, “We really didn’t like the missiles. If it had been a matter only of our own defense, we would not have accepted the deployment of the missiles. But not because we were afraid of the dangers that might follow the deployment of the missiles here; rather, it was because this would damage the image of the revolution, and we were very zealous in protecting the image of the revolution in the rest of Latin America. The presence of the missiles would in fact turn us into a Soviet military base, and that entailed a high political cost for the image of our country, an image we so highly valued.” (cited in *October 1962 The ‘Missile’ Crisis As Seen From Cuba* by Tomas Diez Acosta, Pathfinder Press)

Legality, Secrecy, and Lies: Losing the Moral High Ground

Having agreed in principle, Fidel Castro, Raul Castro, and Che Guevara, repeatedly argued with the Soviet leadership that the deployment should be open and public. The fact was that there was nothing in the Soviet-Cuban agreement to deploy the missiles that contravened any existing international law. In any case, the Cuban leaders were certain that it would be virtually impossible for the shipment, site construction, and land deployment to remain concealed from the highly sophisticated US surveillance technology. Furthermore, that, on the face of it, given the US missiles in Turkey and Italy surrounding the Soviet Union, and with practically open US plans to invade Cuba, *open and transparent* was the way to go politically and morally. All of this was rejected out of hand by the Khrushchev leadership. The Cuban leaders chose not to push the point and deferred.

In the book with Ramonet, Fidel Castro speaks of the “strange, Byzantine discussion” over whether Soviet arms shipments to Cuba were offensive or defensive. “Khrushchev, in fact, insisted they were defensive, not on any technical grounds, but rather because of the defensive purposes for which they’d been installed in Cuba... [We felt there was] no need to go into those explanations. What Cuba and the USSR were doing was perfectly legal and in strict conformity with international law.”

Castro continued, “We didn’t like the course the public debate was taking. I sent Che...to explain my view of the situation to Khrushchev, including the need to immediately publish the military agreement [on deploying the nuclear missiles in Cuba] the USSR and Cuba had signed. But I couldn’t manage to persuade him...For us, for the Cuban leaders, the USSR was a powerful, experienced government. We had no

other arguments to use to persuade them that their strategy for managing the situation should be changed, so we had no alternative but to trust them.”

For the Cuban revolutionaries, the economic, military, and political ties forged with the Soviet Union had been a decisive, irreplaceable factor in their survival from the period after the January 1959 triumph of the Revolution through the April 1961 Playa Giron defeat of the US-organized mercenary invasion. Nevertheless, the unfolding of the Missile Crisis, and its ultimate resolution, left the Cuban leadership feeling vulnerable, bypassed, and insulted by the perceived highhanded behavior of the Soviet government led by Nikita Khrushchev.

Fidel Castro’s Secret Speech

In a major speech over two days to a closed meeting of the Central Committee of the Cuban Communist Party (PCC) on January 25-26, 1968 Fidel Castro reviewed the entire Missile Crisis. (The entire speech, previously unpublished in any public medium, was printed in 2002 with an official Cuban Council of State English translation, in the book *Sad and Luminous Days: Cuba’s Struggle with the Superpowers after the Missile Crisis* by James Blight and Philip Brenner published by Bowman and Littlefield Publishers.) Combining great emotion with sharp, cool logic Castro detailed how the “Missile Crisis” unfolded and how Cuba’s relations with the Soviet Union emerged out of the crisis different from what they had been before.

Castro stated that Cuba’s revolutionary leadership looked to the Soviet Union for, “...measures that would guarantee the country’s safety. In that period, we had tremendous faith in the Soviet Union. I think perhaps too much.” Furthermore, “I am sincerely convinced that the Soviet Party bears great responsibility in what happened and acted in a totally disloyal manner in its relations with us.” Referring to the continuing terrorist attacks against Cuba that never stopped after Soviet missiles, planes, and combat troops were removed from Cuba at the “end” of the October Crisis, Castro stated, “Together with the pirate attacks and the U-2 flights, incidents began to flare up at the Guantanamo base [The US military base on Guantanamo Bay was ceded to the US government in the notorious neo-colonial Platt Amendment of 1901 passed by the US Congress and has been maintained to this day against the demands for its return to Cuban sovereignty.] The same Guantanamo base which, we are certain, would have been dismantled had there been a modicum of serenity and firmness during the October crisis. Had they had the presence of mind to have posed and demand correctly from a principled standpoint, had they said that they would withdraw the missiles if satisfactory guarantees were given to Cuba, had they let Cuba negotiate, the crisis might even have turned into a political victory...All the rest are euphemisms of

different kinds: Cuba was saved, Cuba lives. But Cuba had been alive and Cuba had been living, and Cuba did not want to live at the expense of humiliation or surrender; for that you do not have to be a revolutionary. Revolutionaries are not just concerned with living, but how one lives, living most of all with dignity, living with a cause, living for a cause...Cuba did not agree with the way the issue was handled; it stated the need to approach the problem from different, more drastic, more revolutionary and even more legal positions; and it totally disagreed with the way in which the situation was terminated."

"[Around July] we saw that the United States was creating an atmosphere of hysteria and aggression," Castro bluntly spoke, "and it was a campaign that was being carried out with all impunity. In the light of this we thought the correct thing to do was to adopt a different position, not to get into that policy of lies: 'we are sending Cuba defensive weapons.' And in response to the imperialist's position, the second weakness (or the first weakness) was not to stand up and respond that Cuba had every right to own whatever weapons it saw fit...but rather to adopt a policy of concessions, claiming that the weapons were defensive. In other words, to lie, to resort to lies which in effect meant to wave a basic right and principle."

Decades later, in the Ramonet book, Castro returned to this crucial *political* approach, which is much more powerful than the usual technical cast of events when things had reached the stage of the actual nuclear standoff: "There was nothing illegal about our agreement with the Soviets, given that the Americans had missiles in Turkey and in Italy, too, and no one ever threatened to bomb or invade those countries. The problem wasn't the legality of the agreement – everything was absolutely legal – but rather Khrushchev's mistaken political handling of the situation, when even though both Cuba and the USSR had the legitimate right, he started spinning theories about offensive and non-offensive weapons. In a political battle, you can't afford to lose the high moral ground by employing ruses and lies and half-truths."

The missile transport was the largest sea-borne operation in Soviet history. By the time of the detection of the missiles, and Khrushchev's decision to remove them under US pressure, there were already 134 nuclear warheads in place and on the ground in Cuba. All three of the SS-4 missile regiments were operational even as Soviet ships stopped moving towards Cuba.

The January 25-26, 1968 speech went into scathing detail on how shocking, given the Soviet insistence on secrecy, the lack of discretion on the Soviet side was in the actual deployment of the missiles, crossing into outright recklessness.

“Uncontrolled Forces”

At the height of the crisis, the central Cuban leadership was certain that a full-scale invasion of the island was imminent. As the latest batch of 2017 declassified Kennedy-assassination related documents reconfirm, preparations – “contingency plans” – for such an invasion had been in place for many months prior to the secret installation of the Soviet missiles. This was the only conceivable basis for Khrushchev to make the missile proposal to the Cuban leaders and expect their agreement. In fact, a US invasion of Cuba was on the hair-trigger of being ordered at several concrete junctures in the course of the crisis.

The decision to actually carry out a direct, large-scale US military assault was being furiously debated within the Kennedy Administration and the narrow circle of bipartisan Congressional leadership that was privy to the deliberations at the top. As President and Commander-in-Chief, Kennedy had to choose whether to give the order to invade – again, everything was already in place for the execution of an invasion – the island where many nuclear warheads were already in place, targeting US territory and where Cuban armed resistance to the invading troops was certain to be massive, highly motivated, well-led, and creative. For the immense majority of the Cuban population, having just experienced a profound social revolution, drawing millions into revolutionary struggle and consciousness, Cuba would be fighting from their own territory against a foreign invasion force and massive bombing assaults. Thousands of Cuban civilians would have been instantly killed in these air strikes.

The *political consequences* of this carnage – against a sovereign people with the gall to make a Revolution, throw out a venal dictator, institute land reform, literacy campaigns, rent reduction, abolishing Jim Crow-segregation, etc. etc. – would certainly have been devastating for Washington even if nuclear warheads were never launched on either side, a dubious prospect at best. Washington would lose the “moral high ground,” so crucial in concrete questions of world politics. Cuba would regain what had been eroded by the secretive, clumsy adventurism of Khrushchev’s “initiative” and its incompetent implementation.

The question of the nuclear weapons that were already on the island and the more that were *en route* would likely have been rendered *secondary* and the question of Cuba’s right to self-determination would have again risen to the fore. Kennedy was politically savvy enough to realize all of this and finally rebuffed the advocates of launching an invasion.

Uppermost in Kennedy's considerations were the physical presence of thousands of Soviet combat troops and military personnel (there were some 40,000 Soviet mechanized combat divisions in Cuba, although the Kennedy Administration seems to have counted less than half the actual number). This fact posed the question that Soviet casualties would be inevitable, further sharply posing the question of questions...would the US invasion inexorably lead to nuclear exchanges? Who actually would – in a hair-trigger political atmosphere – fire first becomes almost a moot, secondary question in the framework of such a political confrontation.

US "intelligence" estimates were that 18,500 US casualties would take place in the first period after a US invasion, according to declassified material obtained by the National Security Archive. The presence of Soviet nuclear warheads and large numbers of Soviet military personnel, fighter jets, anti-aircraft gun emplacements, and so on, was another major factor leading Kennedy to repeatedly postpone the invasion plans and opt for a naval blockade (labeled a "quarantine" for legalistic purposes) surrounding Cuba, and the drama of a relatively slow showdown unfolding over days in the Atlantic while negotiations between Washington and Moscow intensified, negotiations that excluded the Cuban government...as if Cuba had nothing to do with what was happening.

As is always the case *when war and combat is actually joined*, the "law of unintended consequences" comes into dynamic play. Or, as the historic revolutionary leader of the working-class movement, Frederick Engels, put it, "Those who unleash controlled forces, also unleash uncontrolled forces."

The Letters

On October 26, 1962 Fidel Castro – at the most intense, dangerous point of the entire crisis – wrote a letter to Nikita Khrushchev, which stated:

"Given the analysis of the situation and the reports which have reached us, [I] consider an attack to be almost imminent—within the next 24 to 72 hours. There are two possible variants: the first and most probable one is an air attack against certain objectives with the limited aim of destroying them; the second, and though less probable, still possible, is a full invasion. This would require a large force and is the most repugnant form of aggression, which might restrain them.

"You can be sure that we will resist with determination, whatever the case. The Cuban people's morale is extremely high and the people will confront aggression heroically.

"I would like to briefly express my own personal opinion. If the second variant takes place and the imperialists invade Cuba with the aim of occupying it, the dangers of their aggressive policy are so great that after such an invasion the Soviet Union must never allow circumstances in which the imperialists could carry out a nuclear first strike against it.

"I tell you this because I believe that the imperialists' aggressiveness makes them extremely dangerous, and that if they manage to carry out an invasion of Cuba—a brutal act in violation of universal and moral law—then that would be the moment to eliminate this danger forever, in an act of the most legitimate self-defense. However harsh and terrible the solution, there would be no other."

Khrushchev responded, in a second round of letters with Castro that:

"In your cable of October 27 you proposed that we be the first to carry out a nuclear strike against the enemy's territory. Naturally you understand where that would lead us. It would not be a simple strike, but the start of a thermonuclear world war.

"Dear Comrade Fidel Castro, I find your proposal to be wrong, even though I understand your reasons.

"... As far as Cuba is concerned, it would be difficult to say even in general terms what this would have meant for them. In the first place, Cuba would have been burned in the fire of war....

"Now, as a result of the measures taken, we reached the goal sought when we agreed with you to send the missiles to Cuba. We have wrested from the United States the commitment not to invade Cuba and not to permit their Latin American allies to do so. We have we wrested all this from them without a nuclear strike.

"We consider that we must take advantage of all the possibilities to defend Cuba, strengthen its independence and sovereignty, defeat military aggression and prevent a nuclear world war in our time. And we have accomplished that.

"Of course, we made concessions, accepted a commitment, action according to the principle that a concession on one side is answered by a concession on the other side. The United States also made a concession. It made the commitment before all the world not to attack Cuba.

"That's why when we compare aggression on the part of the United States and thermonuclear war with the commitment of a concession in exchange for concession, the upholding of the inviolability of the Republic of Cuba and the prevention of a world war, I think that the total outcome of this reckoning, of this comparison, is perfectly clear."

Castro then responded:

"I realized when I wrote them that the words contained in my letter could be misinterpreted by you and that was what happened, perhaps because you didn't read them carefully, perhaps because of the translation, perhaps because I meant to say so much in too few lines. However, I didn't hesitate to do it...

"We knew, and do not presume that we ignored it, that we would have been annihilated, as you insinuate in your letter, in the event of nuclear war. However, that didn't prompt us to ask you to withdraw the missiles, that didn't prompt us to ask you to yield. Do you believe that we wanted that war? But how could we prevent it if the invasion finally took place? The fact is that this event was possible, that imperialism was obstructing every solution and that its demands were, from our point of view, impossible for the USSR and Cuba to accept.

“And if war had broken out, what could we do with the insane people who unleashed the war? You yourself have said that under current conditions such a war would inevitably have escalated quickly into a nuclear war.

I understand that once aggression is unleashed, one shouldn’t concede to the aggressor the privilege of deciding, moreover, when to use nuclear weapons. The destructive power of this weaponry is so great and the speed of its delivery so great that the aggressor would have a considerable initial advantage.

“And I did not suggest to you, Comrade Khrushchev, that the USSR should be the aggressor, because that would be more than incorrect, it would be immoral and contemptible on my part. But from the instant the imperialists attack Cuba and while there are Soviet armed forces stationed in Cuba to help in our defense in case of an attack from abroad, the imperialists would by this act become aggressors against Cuba and against the USSR, and we would respond with a strike that would annihilate them.

“Everyone has his own opinions and I maintain mine about the dangerousness of the aggressive circles in the Pentagon and their preference for a preventive strike. I did not suggest, Comrade Khrushchev, that in the midst of this crisis the Soviet Union should attack, which is what your letter seems to say; rather, that following an imperialist attack, the USSR should act without vacillation and should never make the mistake of allowing circumstances to develop in which the enemy makes the first nuclear strike against the USSR. And in this sense, Comrade Khrushchev, I maintain my point of view, because I understand it to be a true and just evaluation of a specific situation. You may be able to convince me that I am wrong, but you can’t tell me that I am wrong without convincing me.”

Fidel Castro’s exchange of letters with Khrushchev assumes that given the forces in play and in motion – *300,000 Cuban combatants with 40,000 Soviet military personnel, the bulk in mechanized combat brigades, on the ground in Cuba on one side, confronting a US invasion force projected to quickly reach hundreds of thousands, all coming head-to-head while massive US air strikes and countering Cuban-Soviet anti-aircraft fire are unleashed, with enormous naval forces, many armed with nuclear weapons, including torpedoes in combat action* – that the US invasion, which he considered inevitable and imminent, would inexorably go nuclear. Following this undoubtedly correct assumption, Fidel Castro’s logic and formulations in his initial letters became necessarily more abstract and algebraic. He presents, in the rush and incredible heat and speed of events, a post-invasion scenario where Soviet forces *could* strike, in a *limited “tactical”* use (although those terms are not specifically used), the US forces *before* the US could strike the Soviet forces. The same technical, military logic of “pre-emption” would, of course, dominate the US side which had a clear superiority in both quantity and quality of nuclear weapons deliverance at that point, the full extent of which the Cuban leadership was not likely aware of the extent of.

The MAD doctrine was based on each side’s nuclear arsenal countermanding the others. The seemingly absurd stockpiling of nuclear warheads and delivery system locations had the “rational” kernel of logic that after a “first strike” or pre-emptive launch of warheads the “other side” would still have enough of an atomic arsenal left to

deliver a crushing response. The idea, developed by “Dr. Strangelove” US theorists like Herman Kahn, and accepted by their Soviet equivalents, was to build up and protect a “second strike” capacity in order to obviate a “first strike.” Of course, Washington continued – and continues to this day – to develop a “decisive” first-strike capability, largely through anti-ballistic and “Star Wars” systems to intercept and eliminate the other sides “second strike” (or first, or any strike) giving the US a credible “first strike.”



The *fact* of a US invasion – that is, its actual occurrence – of Cuba would have set in motion a dynamic that would have rendered moot, useless, and even ridiculous the question of who *would* “fire” the “first” nuclear weapon, if that *could* even be determined after the event (if indeed the word *after* would have any content). Dozens and dozens of ships, planes, and launch sites on the ground, under the control of dozens and dozens of military officers subject to “orders” in what would have been unimaginable chaos and breakdown inevitable in *the first nuclear exchange in world history*. Would anyone have even known who struck first? The key point – the only determinant fact – in whether nuclear holocaust would be unleashed to an unknown degree was *whether the US would invade Cuba*.

New Facts

What is now known about the Missile Crisis is that a situation existed where, at the height of the confrontation, from October 25-28, literally dozens and dozens of military officers well below the executive political “decision makers” in a theoretical chain of

command, on both the Soviet and US side, had the capacity and even the authority to push the nuclear button and pull the nuclear trigger.

We certainly know this to be true in the first-hand accounts by Soviet and US military officers and personnel on the ground, on the oceans, and in the air that have become public and from “classified” government documents on both sides. (see (Noam Chomsky’s “Cuban Missile Crisis: How the US Played Russian Roulette with Nuclear War” <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2012/oct/15/cuban-missile-crisis-russian-roulette>) in the October 15 *Guardian* newspaper, which cites several harrowing moments of near disaster.)

The author Michael Dobbs in an October 18, 2012 *New York Times* op-ed piece (“The Price of a 50-Year Old Myth”) wrote, “While the risk of war in October 1962 was very high (Kennedy estimated it variously at between 1 in 5 and 1 in 2), it was not caused by a clash of wills. The real dangers arose from “the fog of war.” As the two superpowers geared up for a nuclear war, the chances of something going terribly wrong increased exponentially...By Saturday, Oct. 27, the two leaders were no longer in full control of their gigantic military machines, which were moving forward under their own momentum. Soviet troops on Cuba targeted Guantánamo with tactical nuclear weapons and shot down an American U-2 spy plane. Another U-2, on a “routine” air sampling mission to the North Pole, got lost over the Soviet Union. The Soviets sent MiG fighters into the air to try to shoot down the American intruder, and in response, Alaska Air Defense Command scrambled F-102 interceptors armed with tactical nuclear missiles. In the Caribbean, a frazzled Soviet submarine commander was dissuaded by his subordinates from using his nuclear torpedo against American destroyers that were trying to force him to the surface.”

In his *Guardian* piece cited above Noam Chomsky, referring to the October 26, 1962 letter of Fidel Castro, writes, “As this was happening and Washington was debating and Kennedy was poised to decide on a US invasion, Fidel Castro wrote a letter to Nikita Khrushchev which has been interpreted, over Castro’s sharp objection, as *advocating* a Soviet nuclear attack – a so-called ‘first strike’ against US territory if the US invasion were to actually occur. Khrushchev himself took the necessarily and purposely algebraic and highly cautious words of Castro as such a call, and used Castro’s wording as practically a cover to carry out the retreat and concessions to Kennedy that diffused the crisis and reverse the momentum towards purposeful or accidental nuclear exchanges.”

An Extraordinary Gathering

The special January 24-26, 1968 meeting of the PCC Central Committee meeting where Fidel Castro gave his extraordinary speech was in no way fortuitous. It took place at what was perhaps the nadir of the downward spiral of Cuban-Soviet relations set in motion by the October Crisis of 1962. It was held just 107 days after the death of Ernesto Che Guevara and the defeat of his guerrilla forces based in Bolivia.

This on-the-ground fact was a real blow to the Cuban revolutionaries and the perspective of building a continental revolutionary army to take on and overturn the military regimes backed by the ruling oligarchies. These regimes of the Latin American ruling classes were themselves allied with, dependent on, and conjoined with the dominant US power in the Hemisphere. This new objective reality necessarily raised many challenges in the development and direction of Cuba's revolutionary foreign policy.

Fidel Castro and the Cuban leadership placed an important part of the responsibility for the defeat of Che's *guerrilla* on the top leadership of the Bolivian Communist Party which supported the program and perspective of the Soviet leadership in Latin America and opposed the armed-struggle campaign under Che Guevara's leadership in Bolivia (which was seen as the initial base for a multi-front continental revolutionary movement against the military dictatorships and oligarchies) reneging on previously given commitments. The Cuban revolutionary line in Latin America was opposed – with varying degrees of vehemence – by virtually all of the Latin American Communist Parties that looked to the Soviet Union for political direction and orientation. What the Cuban revolutionary leadership considered betrayal in Bolivia, disrupted and undermined the formation and development of urban resistance forces crucial to supplement the rural-based guerrilla struggle under Che's command, leaving the guerrillas exposed, vulnerable, and politically isolated. (See Fidel Castro's "A Necessary Introduction" in *Bolivian Diary* by Ernesto Che Guevara, Pathfinder Press, 1994 for Fidel's description of the factor of betrayal in the defeat of Che's guerrilla forces.)

The Escalante Affair

Prior to Fidel Castro's speech, the Central Committee gathering had heard an extensive presentation by Raul Castro, then Chairman of the Revolutionary Armed Forces and the President of the Cuban Council of State since 2006. The report was a damning indictment of a secret faction inside the PCC led by Anibal Escalante. Escalante's faction, which was composed of former leaders, like himself, and cadres of the Popular Socialist Party (PSP). Before the Revolution the PSP, which had a base in the industrial working class and trade unions, was connected to the dominant currents in the "world Communist movement" and Latin American Communist Parties that looked to the

Soviet Union for political direction and program. (In 1968 the Cuban publisher Instituto Del Libro, Ediciones Politicas, printed a 160-page book, "Information from the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Cuba on Microfaction Activities," which includes Raul Castro's report and other important documents. It is an exceedingly important document, which illuminates that historical and political period and gives great insight into the caliber and character of the Cuban revolutionary leadership.)

[Footnote 4: *Some thirty-five members of the so-called "microfaction" were expelled from the PCC and received prison sentences from two to fifteen years. The most serious charges involved secret activity aimed at forging ties between the "microfaction" and government officials and Communist Party leaders in the Soviet Union, the German Democratic Republic (East Germany), and Czechoslovakia in their common opposition to the revolutionary line of the PCC, and the large majority of PCC members, in Latin America and on Cuba's domestic and foreign policies in general. This went as far as to urge Soviet economic pressure on Cuba, for which they were charged with treason. Escalante's grouping never argued for their political positions openly within the structures and procedures of the PCC, which was their right. In their secret functioning inside Cuba and intrigues with Soviet and Eastern European officials and diplomats, the portrayed Che Guevara as a "Trotskyite adventurer" and the Castro leadership as "petty bourgeois elements" that seized control of the Revolution and who held the working class in contempt. Moreover, the Cuban revolutionary leadership was "anti-Soviet" and did not support Soviet "hegemony."]*

The PSP initially opposed the July 26th Movement (M-26-J) led by Fidel Castro, but by early 1958 they had endorsed the anti-Batista struggle and M-26-J leadership. Joint political and military collaboration was carried out in the last period before the revolutionary triumph. Over the next few years the majority of PSP cadres were successfully integrated into what became the Cuban Communist Party (PCC) in 1965. In 1962 Escalante, who had been the top functionary of the Integrated Revolutionary Organization, an initial formation bringing together the currents supporting the Revolution, had come under fierce public criticism by Fidel Castro for "sectarianism" and "bureaucratism" in March 1962 (<http://www.walterlippmann.com/fc-03-26-1962.html>).

Soviet-Cuban tensions escalated in this mid-1960s period, although never to the point of a public break. Nevertheless, sharp, concrete political and theoretical differences were registered between the Soviet and Cuban leaderships in this period over the US escalation in Vietnam and serious political divergence in Latin America. In several speeches in 1966 and 1967 Fidel Castro publicly excoriated the Soviet government for its economic and political relations with Latin American repressive and reactionary regimes.

The betrayal and execution of Che in 1967 sharpened the existing tensions and was followed by the Escalante intrigue and covert plotting against the revolutionary government. In terms of the economic relations and exchange between Cuba and the Soviet Union during these clashes, there was limited but noticeable Soviet measures affecting the struggling Cuban economy which was being whipped by the US economic blockade, particularly in the Americas. In this period, the first decade of the Cuban Revolution, Cuba struggled with diplomatic isolation in the Western Hemisphere under US pressure, with only Canada and Mexico maintaining formal diplomatic ties.

In the decade following Che's defeat in Bolivia, all other allied Latin American guerrilla movements into the early 1970s had been crushed, most notably Argentina and Uruguay. At the same time there was a revival of mass urban and rural working-class and popular struggles in a number of Latin American countries, including Bolivia, which pushed open some democratic and political space, including for revolutionaries. In Chile, in 1970, in a byproduct of mounting class and popular struggles, the Popular Unity electoral coalition by two mass workers parties, the Socialist Party and Communist Party, won a plurality of the vote and Salvador Allende, head of the Socialist Party became President. Diplomatic relations were soon reestablished between Chile and Cuba.

The September 11, 1973 US-backed bloody military coup against the Popular Unity government pulverized all democratic rights and political space for many year and was extended by the mid-1970s as military rule was consolidated in Argentina (1976) and in Uruguay after 1973.

Aftermath

The Cuban Missile Crisis was hugely traumatic in world public opinion. Its resolution led to increased propaganda for "peace" and "reconciliation" in both Moscow and Washington, with accompanying worldwide diplomatic maneuvering. This culminated in the actual signing by the governments of the United States, United Kingdom, and the Soviet Union of the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (formally the Treaty Banning Nuclear Weapon Tests in the Atmosphere, in Outer Space and Under Water, which was strongly welcomed in world public opinion when it went into effect in October 1963, one year to the month from the political drama and trauma of the Missile Crisis. (The treaty did not ban "underground" nuclear tests which could also lead to radioactive releases into the atmosphere as well ground water. The treaty put no limits on the production of nuclear

warheads and their fitting onto missiles.) All of this took place as Washington steadily and sharply escalated its military intervention and aggression in Vietnam.

John Kennedy was assassinated in November 1963 and Nikita Khrushchev's leadership in the Soviet Communist Party and Soviet state came to an ignominious end in October 1964 as he was pensioned off and replaced by Leonid Brezhnev and Alexi Kosygin. The new Lyndon Johnson White House abided by Kennedy's verbal "pledge" and invasion plans were put in mothballs, although covert action, terrorism, and containment continued. Primary focus and attention shifted to Indochina where Johnson maintained continuity with Kennedy's intervention and deepened it.

Formal and definite improvements in Cuba's relations with the Soviet Union began after 1968 (despite tensions over the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia and other questions), particularly in economic exchange, through the 1970s and 1980s until the soviet government collapsed in 1991, setting off a huge economic depression and crisis in Cuba. In this period fundamental contradictions and sharp policy differences emerged over Soviet policies in Africa, military tactics in Angola, and the soviet invasion of Afghanistan, which Cuba opposed.

The immediate threat of US-Soviet nuclear exchange and war receded on October 28, 1962 with the announcement that Soviet ships had stopped advancing and that Soviet missiles would be withdrawn. But for Cuba the crisis and the pressure intensified.

Not even two weeks after the supposed resolution of the crisis the world's "sigh of relief, 400 Cuban workers were killed when a Cuban exile counter-revolutionary sabotage team, dispatched from the US, blew up a Cuban industrial facility. Right up until his assassination Kennedy was approving terrorist attacks against Cuba. US intervention by proxy never stopped and became systematic. US armed and trained counter-revolutionaries were finally defeated in the Escambray mountains in central Cuba in a campaign from 1963-65.

After a pause and renewal in the late 1960s, Cuba's revolutionary internationalist foreign policy – in the spirit of Che – reached glorious new internationalist achievements in southern Africa after the great acceleration of events ushered in after the overturn of the hollowed-out Salazarist dictatorship in Portugal in 1974 and the final collapse of the Portuguese Empire in Angola, Mozambique, Guinea-Bassau, and the Cape Verde Islands. Cuban troops stopped the apartheid South African invasion at the gates of the capital Luanda in November 1975 aiming to topple the newly independent Angolan government. Cuba's revolutionary action and solidarity over the next nearly two decades was decisive in the defending the independence of Angola,

winning the independence of Namibia, and in the retreat and unraveling of the South African apartheid state. (See the amazing history of Cuba's internationalist foreign policies in Africa and southern Africa in the two volumes of the great scholar Piero Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions* and *Visions of Freedom*, University of North Carolina Press.)

Fidel's Last Thoughts

On October 22, 2012 Fidel Castro addressed the Missile Crisis on its 50th Anniversary:

"A few days ago, very close to the 50th anniversary of the October Crisis, news agencies pointed to three guilty parties: Kennedy, having recently become the leader of the empire, Khrushchev and Castro. Cuba did not have anything to do with nuclear weapons, nor with the unnecessary slaughter of Hiroshima and Nagasaki perpetrated by the president of the United States, Harry S. Truman, thus establishing the tyranny of nuclear weapons. Cuba was defending its right to independence and social justice.

"When we accepted Soviet aid in weapons, oil, foodstuffs and other resources, it was to defend ourselves from *yanqui* plans to invade our homeland, subjected to a dirty and bloody war which that capitalist country imposed on us from the very first months, which left thousands of Cubans dead and maimed.

"When Khrushchev proposed the installation here of medium range missiles similar to those the United States had in Turkey – far closer to the USSR than Cuba to the United States – as a solidarity necessity, Cuba did not hesitate to agree to such a risk. Our conduct was ethically irreproachable. We will never apologize to anyone for what we did. The fact is that half a century has gone by, and here we still are with our heads held high."

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