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SECURITY, INSECURITY, AND THE U.S. PRESENCE IN
THE CARIBBEAN

Bay of Pigs Declassified: The Secret CIA Report on the Invasion of Cuba. PETER KORNBLUH (ed.). New York: The New Press, 1998. viii + 339 pp. (Paper US\$ 17.95)

Psywar on Cuba: The Declassified History of U.S. Anti-Castro Propaganda. JON ELLISTON (ed.). Melbourne: Ocean Press, 1999. 320 pp. (Paper US\$ 21.95)

Intelligence and the Cuban Missile Crisis. JAMES G. BLIGHT & DAVID A. WELCH (eds.). London: Frank Cass, 1998. x + 234 pp. (Cloth US\$ 47.50)

Live by the Sword: The Secret War Against Castro and the Death of JFK. GUS RUSSO. Baltimore MD: Bancroft Press, 1998. xvi + 619 pp. (Cloth US\$ 26.95)

From Pirates to Drug Lords: The Post-Cold War Caribbean Security Environment. MICHAEL C. DESCH, JORGE I. DOMÍNGUEZ & ANDRÉS SERBIN (eds.). Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998. viii + 161 pp. (Paper US\$ 19.95)

Cuba, the Caribbean, and the United States have been frequently and intimately linked for more than a century. Because of the status of the United States as a global power, viewing their common histories from the vantage point of the United States is understandable. Such a perspective consigns the Caribbean, and to a lesser extent Cuba, to the role of passive actors in the making of much of their own histories. Several recent publications, though written for very different purposes, permit us to ask whether Cuba and the Caribbean have not been more active participants in their recent histories than U.S. predominance in the region would seem to allow.

Four of the books under review here deal with the United States and Cuba mostly in the early years of the era of Fidel Castro and the Cuban Revolution. *Bay of Pigs Declassified* and *Psywar on Cuba* present selected declassified documents that broaden what is already known about how the United States sought to compromise Castro's stature among the people of Cuba and, indeed, tried time and again to remove him from power by means ranging from ridicule to assassination. Those efforts, the author of *Live by the Sword* contends, moved Lee Harvey Oswald to take the life of President John F. Kennedy. The Blight and Welch book on intelligence and the Cuban missile crisis makes an important contribution to the literature on the missile crisis.

Peter Kornbluh's *Bay of Pigs Declassified* makes accessible two internal Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) documents that were written shortly after the fact in order to evaluate the Agency's role in the failure at the Bay of Pigs in April 1961. The first document, a report on the Bay of Pigs by Inspector General Lyman Kirkpatrick, offers a stinging critique of how the Agency planned and implemented the operation. Completed in October 1961, the report asserts that the fundamental problem with Operation Zapata was that it evolved from a covert, relatively small operation into a larger and, hence, unwieldy military exercise. Knowledge about the operation could not be confined either to a limited number of people within the Agency or to its participants in south Florida and beyond. Kirkpatrick laments, "The Agency failed to recognize that when the project advanced beyond the stage of plausible denial, it was going beyond the area of Agency responsibility as well as Agency capability" (p. 99). Means were therefore not commensurate with changing ends. The Agency, he further charges, "failed to keep the national policy-makers adequately and realistically informed of the conditions considered essential for success" (p. 99).

In Kornbluh's second important document, Deputy Director for Plans Richard M. Bissell, Jr. responds in January 1962 that Kirkpatrick's analysis "gives a black picture of the Agency's role" in the ill-fated operation (p. 133). Fearing the consequences of the Inspector General's report for the future of clandestine activities, Bissell blames the failure in Cuba not on the CIA, but on the contradictory goals of the Kennedy administration. The dilemma was how to overthrow, if not eliminate Castro without impairing "the political and moral posture of the United States before the world at large" (p. 141).

Bissell, who along with other key Agency personnel was a holdover from the 1950s, charged the Kennedy White House with conducting an operation "without having also made the decision to use whatever force is needed to achieve success" (pp. 145-46). Why, he wondered, was the operation not called off if the president entertained doubts about the prospects for success? Bissell's criticism of the White House reflected much more than a bureaucratic struggle, though it did that as well. Bissell recognized that covert operations could have world-shaking consequences whatever their outcome. It

was therefore important to ask who held ultimate responsibility for failure. What would failure mean for the CIA's role as something more than an intelligence-gathering entity?

Kennedy aide Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., has long held the Agency responsible for failing to apprise Kennedy that a catastrophe was at hand in April 1961. Jacob Esterline, chief of the Cuba Task Force which ran the operation, admitted that the president needed more time to study the plan before implementing it. Why he did not have enough time apparently was Bissell's fault. "I put that [idea] forward to Bissell in writing and I got nowhere," Esterline told Kornbluh in October 1996 (p. 261). At the end of the interview Esterline seemed to contradict himself: Operation Zapata "failed, I guess, primarily because starting at the top of government nobody wanted to do it so badly that they were prepared to take the steps to ensure success" (p. 266). Failure ultimately would therefore rest with Kennedy, not with Dulles, Bissell, and their compatriots at the Agency.

We know that the operation had been compromised in many ways by planners and participants, as a Cuban state historian, Juan Carlos Rodríguez, recalls (1999). In a volatile environment in which control of information was critical, propaganda played an exceptionally important role. How important it was to Washington's ideological conflict with Castro's Cuba is the subject of Jon Elliston's *Psywar on Cuba*, published by Ocean Press, a publisher sympathetic to the Cuban Revolution. Elliston's collection of documents makes for interesting reading. One key document is illustrative of the Schlesinger-CIA dispute. Schlesinger observed on the eve of the invasion of Cuba that "nothing should be done to jeopardize" Kennedy's "character and repute," that when "lies must be told, they should be told by subordinate officials" (p. 42). Presumably, the CIA would form part of this protective umbrella. If that was the case, Bissell's defense of the Agency becomes more explicable. The U.S. government was not just engaged in a war with Cuba; it was at odds with itself.

Psywar on Cuba has limited utility for readers who might want to examine the selections in greater detail. Elliston tried "to track down every publicly available document on anti-Castro propaganda operations" (p. 4), but this collection would have been more useful if he had provided sources for its fifty-two documents, which range from the late 1950s through the mid-1990s. Despite this, the book is sometimes riveting, particularly when it evokes the obsession of the United States with Fidel Castro and Cuba. "The purpose of the program outlined herein," intones one document, "is to bring about the replacement of the Castro regime with one more devoted to the true interests of the Cuban people and more acceptable to the U.S. in such a manner as to avoid any appearance of U.S. intervention" (p. 16). Who did the CIA and the White House think should receive credit if Castro were to fall from power? Even more important, who should take the blame if an anti-Castro operation

failed? If the answer, particularly to the latter question, pointed to the exile community located primarily in Miami and New Orleans in the early 1960s, the cynicism inherent in superpower politics is exposed. Neither the documents nor the annotations adequately address the question of blame. Nor does Elliston really explain the reduction in virulence of U.S. psychological warfare that came about after the mid-1960s.

Washington's psychological warfare against Cuba may have had an unexpected consequence at a crucial time in world history, October 1962. Whether consciously or not, propaganda plays a significant role in creating perceptions between and among adversaries. In times of crisis, information, in the form of intelligence, can mean the difference between life and death. James Blight and David Welch's *Intelligence and the Cuban Missile Crisis* examines the strengths and weaknesses of intelligence collection and its usage by U.S., Soviet, and Cuban analysts during the crisis. One contributor to the volume, Beth A. Fischer, finds that all intelligence systems are susceptible to error: mistakes "may well have been rooted in perfectly normal decision-making processes" (p. 166). It is the "needs and motives" of officials that lead to errors of perception and policy. For the United States, the need to employ propaganda against Castro in the early 1960s led "political leaders ... more ... than professional intelligence analysts to commit motivated errors" (p. 167). Thus, it is possible that the U.S. intelligence community operated effectively in the fall of 1962, even as the world neared the nuclear precipice.

But did intelligence-gathering result in sound policy? The Soviet system was inherently limited because of its marginal participation in the policy process. The chapter by Aleksandr Fursenko and Timothy Naftali concludes that Soviet analysts were predisposed to do no more than convey information, because "Nikita Khrushchev was his own intelligence analyst" (p. 65). Domingo Amuchastegui contends that "Cuban intelligence was for the most part able to collect the information necessary to help Cuban leaders make sound political decisions" at the time of the missile crisis (p. 89). How well that information was used is another question altogether. Castro's own perceptions of U.S. objectives and Soviet interests emerge as key factors in that regard. Cuban analysts, in the eighteen months following the Bay of Pigs, doubted that a second invasion would occur. Their Soviet counterparts, however, concluded otherwise "so as to increase the likelihood that Castro would agree to a nuclear deployment whose primary purpose was to challenge American nuclear supremacy, not to deter an American invasion of Cuba" (p. 109). Raymond L. Garthoff argues that, in the case of the United States, "full intelligence information [about the presence of nuclear weapons in Cuba] could have made resolution of the crisis much more difficult" (p. 53). Kennedy might not have had sufficient time to make life-and-death decisions. In other words, intelligence – the collection and analysis of which is always

less than ideal – is only as good as the motivations of the officials who put it to use. How well intelligence serves policy is accordingly difficult to judge.

Like propaganda, intelligence collection and dissemination is never free from political pressures. The intensity of the early efforts to displace Castro, which made intelligence and its usage indistinguishable from propaganda, makes Russo's book, *Live by the Sword*, impossible to put down. The statutory activities of the CIA served the interests of John and Robert Kennedy by getting the Agency to participate in the crusade against Fidel Castro. Accordingly, the Agency could not refuse to go after Castro when Robert Kennedy's desire to vanquish the threat posed by Castro to U.S. interests became an Ahab-like obsession. The tragic result, Russo deduces, was that Lee Harvey Oswald beat the Kennedys and the CIA at their own game. In November 1963 he dramatically eliminated the greatest thorn in the side of the Cuban Revolution.

Whether Oswald did so at the behest of the Cuban government is another question, one that available sources may never be able to answer with certainty. Russo believes that Castro would have found it difficult to discourage an effort to kill the U.S. president. The Cuban leader's fingerprints would have been far enough removed from the act so as to give him plausible deniability, precisely what Schlesinger and others had sought for Kennedy during the Bay of Pigs.

It is clear that Russo wants somehow to hold Castro culpable for Oswald's action. He argues at one point that if, as suspected, Castro knew as early as October 1963 about Oswald's intentions, he "allowed Oswald to proceed without warning U.S. authorities" (p. 224). Given what Castro had endured at the hands of the United States for four years, one wonders what the inducement to sound the alarm would have been. In failing to address that question, Russo partly vitiates the value of his meticulous investigation and judicious conclusions. For Russo, not only is Castro a villain for not wanting to prevent the assassination, so, too, is the CIA suspect for trying to downplay the degree to which it got caught up, however unwillingly, in the Kennedy brothers' obsession with Cuba. It seems fair to ask Schlesinger and other defenders of the Kennedy legacy what choice the CIA had other than to follow the wishes of the president and attorney general.

The U.S. focus on Castro and Cuba as a potential security threat in the Americas continued in a less intense form as a propaganda battle for decades following the death of Kennedy and the 1964 order by Johnson to end the attempts on Castro's life. One of the objectives of that endeavor was to prevent the rise elsewhere of Castro-like or Castro-influenced challenges to U.S. dominance. *From Pirates to Drug Lords* provides a brief, though insightful analysis of some of the security-related issues in the Caribbean since the end of the cold war.

Jorge I. Domínguez observes that the “most common sources of insecurity in the Caribbean affect the quotidian experiences of ordinary people” (p. 2). That is true whether the issue at hand is environmental health, the value and volume of trade, the political capacity of Caribbean leaders, or the role of the region in global activities such as drug trafficking. James N. Rosenau, admittedly not an expert on the region, asserts that despite being composed of ostensibly small, weak states, the Caribbean has not easily or entirely fallen prey to outside influences because they cannot “erase the grip that culture and habit have over its peoples” (p. 13). As true as that observation may be, Anthony T. Bryan is surely right in concluding that in recent years “the vulnerability of Caribbean states [and their people] has increased” (p. 34). The uncertainty of democracy as a reliable process and the continuation of extensive migration into and out of the region reflect that vulnerability.

Andrés Serbin rightly questions whether the creation in 1994 of the Association of Caribbean States (ACS) was an effective response “to the aspirations of the Caribbean societies” (p. 62). The prevalence of drug trafficking in the region, to take one example, suggests the existence of competing, illegal ways to meet those aspirations. As Ivelaw L. Griffith notes, “Most of the structures and networks [involved in trafficking and money laundering] could not exist without the collusion of people in government and private agencies ... especially in places with poor salaries specifically or economic deprivation generally” (p. 114). Who then will provide for security in the post-cold war Caribbean? Richard J. Bloomfield, longtime director of the World Peace Foundation, observes that collective security may be difficult to achieve in the region. Nevertheless, a security regime built on the idea of defending democracy might be possible, particularly since proximity to the United States and “interpenetration” of North America and the region “means that continuing U.S. involvement in the affairs of those countries is inevitable” (p. 131).

We now return to a question raised at the outset of this essay: Is U.S. hegemony and its shadow as certain as Bloomfield suggests for the Caribbean (and Cuba) in the future? The books under review here make it possible to imagine less one-sided configurations of power than those that have existed in the past. Four of them would never have appeared were it not for the strength of the Cuban Revolution. Additional testimony to Cuba’s importance as a historical actor was evident at a conference held there to mark the fortieth anniversary of the Bay of Pigs invasion.¹ If Cuba’s struggle to shape history on its own terms is better known than similar efforts throughout the

1. Some documents from the conference are located on the National Security Archive website (<http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/bayofpigs/>).

Caribbean, events and developments of the last decade there demonstrate that the making of Caribbean regional history is not necessarily a U.S. dominated enterprise.

REFERENCE

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