Håkan Karlsson & Tomás Diez Acosta, *The Missile Crisis from a Cuban Perspective: Historical, Archaeological and Anthropological Reflections*. London: Routledge, 2019. xiv + 158 pp. (Cloth US\$149.95)

The twin purposes of this intriguing little volume are to provide “a historical overview that explains the background and prelude to the [Cuban missile] crisis from a Cuban perspective” and “an archaeological and anthropological investigation of the material and immaterial remains of the crisis located at the former Soviet strategic nuclear missile bases and among people living in their surroundings in the Cuban countryside”—two “themes and dimensions” of the crisis that “have seldom—or never—been presented before” (p. ix). The former, the subject of Part One, was obviously the primary task of Tomás Diez Acosta, a prominent Cuban historian. The second, treated in Part Two, was evidently the chief responsibility of Håkan Karlsson, Professor of Archaeology at the University of Gothenburg in Sweden. Their collaboration in this volume presents “a summary of the work carried out so far” in a project entitled “World Crisis from Below” (p. 138), whose admirable task is to help correct the great-power-centric and overwhelmingly political or strategic accounts of what is arguably the most dangerous episode in human history by foregrounding subaltern perspectives.

Part One (six chapters) offers a businesslike, efficient, though occasionally overly terse historical summary. It faithfully presents what has become the standard Cuban story of the crisis—one that has indeed “seldom” been presented before. For the most part, however, it is not new, hewing quite closely to the more detailed presentation and analysis in James G. Blight et al., *Cuba on the Brink: Castro, the Missile Crisis, and the Soviet Collapse* (2nd ed., 2002). Indeed, Chapter 6, “Fidel Castro’s Reflections on the Missile Crisis”—is virtually a verbatim reprinting of parts of the conference transcript that forms the heart of that earlier book. While Karlsson and Diez cite this work extensively, they do not draw on other works in which the Cuban perspective is presented in extensive detail, such as Thomas G. Weiss & James G. Blight (eds.), *The Suffering Grass: Superpowers and Regional Conflict in Southern Africa and the Caribbean* (1992) and James G. Blight & Philip Brenner, *Sad and Luminous Days: Cuba’s Struggle with the Superpowers After the Missile Crisis* (2002). Perhaps most unfortunately, Karlsson and Diez entirely overlook the only extant first-hand account of Cuban intelligence during the crisis: Domingo Amuchastegui, “Cuban Intelligence and the October Crisis” (in *Intelligence and National Security*, 2008). Part One does include some new information—for example, on Cuban mobilization plans in anticipation of President John F. Kennedy’s televised announcement of the discovery of Soviet missiles in Cuba on October 22, 1960—but it is not free of factual errors. Most notably, it repeats the widely

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held but incorrect belief in Cuba that “with missiles or without them, Cuba would have been attacked in October 1962” (p. 10). Finally, in keeping with the standard Cuban story of the crisis, Karlsson and Diez’s account is self-congratulatory and unself-critical. In this telling of the tale, Cuba in general—and Fidel Castro in particular—perform flawlessly.

The archaeological and anthropological discussion in Part Two (four chapters) is indeed unprecedented and breaks new ground. Historians and other scholars of the crisis will enjoy the color that it adds to an oft-told tale. Here we learn much about the infrastructure the Soviets brought to or built in Cuba, uses to which it has since been put, and various traces and artifacts that have been left behind. Particularly fascinating are the oral histories presented in Chapter 9, in which ten eyewitnesses recall their beliefs, impressions, emotions, and interactions with Soviets in the period leading up to and during the crisis. Notably, not all Cubans experienced the kind of fear one might have expected for those living helplessly at ground zero of a potential World War III. Equally notably, they overwhelmingly recall their interactions with Soviets with fondness. This material provides a fascinating contrast with, for example, Alice George’s *Awaiting Armageddon: How Americans Faced the Cuban Missile Crisis* (2003).

Striking and occasionally moving as the archaeological and anthropological material in this volume may be, it does not fundamentally change our understanding of the dynamics of the crisis. But this would have been an unrealistic expectation in any case. The Cuban missile crisis is one of the most closely studied historical events of all time. At this point, we must be grateful for anything new.

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