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### Real Potemkin Villages : Pokazukha and Propaganda in the Soviet-Cuban Connection

Michael Thomas Westrate

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This thesis submitted by Michael T. Westrate in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of Master of Arts  
approved by the thesis evaluation committee

REAL POTEMKIN VILLAGES: *POKAZUKHA* AND PROPAGANDA

IN THE SOVIET-CUBAN CONNECTION

by

Michael T. Westrate

B.A., Hillsdale College, 1995

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty

of

St. Cloud State University

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree

Master of Arts

St. Cloud, Minnesota

August, 2007

Dean

School of Graduate Studies

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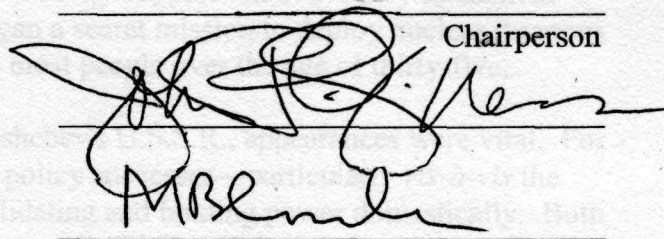


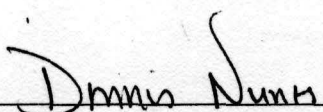
This thesis submitted by Michael T. Westrate in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts at St. Cloud State University is hereby approved by the final evaluation committee.

In the middle of the twentieth century, a series of events occurred that brought the world's largest country into an intimate connection with one of the world's smallest nations. A globe apart, the Soviet superpower and powerless Cuba embarked themselves in a common goal—preventing a burgeoning Marxist-Leninist revolution from what the leaders in both countries saw as historically preordained interference by the United States. When the two solidified their close connections in the late 1950s and early 1960s, no one could have predicted that their relationship would bring the world to the brink of nuclear war, or that the Revolution in Cuba would enrage Communist rule in the Soviet Union by more than fifteen years.

The story of the Soviet-Cuban union is long and complex. Although only providing minimal support until the latter 1950s, the Soviet Union began to offer assistance to Castro's Cuba in 1958. In 1959, the U.S.S.R. turned both open economic support and clandestine military aid to the Cuban Revolution on their side. In early 1962, the Soviets began to send nuclear missiles to Cuba on Cuban soil—with results familiar to all.

In both Castro's Cuba and Khrushchev's Soviet Union, the use of both leaders, in different ways, foreign policy and domestic politics toward the United States—were essential in establishing their political union. Both men used Espionage and propaganda to accomplish their political ends. Such political use of facades has a long history in Russia and an intense, if shorter, history in Cuba. By the mid-1950s, the leaders of these nations were both relying on facade-building and Soviet propaganda practices. Such strategies worked extraordinarily well for both leaders until the early 1960s, when the U.S. finally exposed Khrushchev's bluff for what it was—a Potemkin village. Even so, Khrushchev was able to ensure that Castro was safe from intervention by the U.S.

  
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School of Graduate Studies

REAL POTEKIN VILLAGES: *POKAZUKHA* AND PROPAGANDA  
IN THE SOVIET-CUBAN CONNECTION

Michael T. Westrate

In the middle of the twentieth century, a series of events occurred that brought the world's largest country into an intimate connection with one of the world's smaller nations. A globe apart, the Soviet superpower and powerless Cuba connected themselves in a common goal—protecting a burgeoning Marxist-Leninist revolution from what the leaders in both countries saw as historically preordained interference by the United States. When the two solidified their close connections in the late 1950s and early 1960s, no one could have predicted that their relationship would bring the world to the brink of nuclear war, or that the Revolution in Cuba would outlast Communist rule in the Soviet Union by more than fifteen years.


The story of the Soviet-Cuban union is long and complex. Although only providing minimal support until the latter 1950s, the Soviet Union began to offer assistance to Castro's Cuba in 1958. In 1959, the leaders of the U.S.S.R. started both open economic support and clandestine military support. In 1960, they intensified their aid. In early 1962, the Soviets began a secret mission to deploy nuclear weapons on Cuban soil—with results familiar to most people over the age of thirty-five.

In both Castro's Cuba and Khrushchev's U.S.S.R., appearances were vital. For both leaders, in different ways, foreign policy successes—particularly *vis-à-vis* the United States—were essential in consolidating and holding power domestically. Both men used façades and propaganda to accomplish their political ends. Such political use of façades has a long history in Russia and an intense, if shorter, history in Cuba. By the mid-1950s, the leaders of these nations were both relying on façade-building and Soviet propaganda practices. Such strategies worked extraordinarily well for both leaders until the early 1960s, when the U.S. finally exposed Khrushchev's bluff for what it was—a Potemkin village. Even so, Khrushchev was able to ensure that Castro was safe from intervention by the U.S.

By retelling the story of the Soviet-Cuban connection, this project seeks to accomplish three main goals: First, it revises our understanding of Castro's success—and why he chose Bolshevism as his *modus operandi*. Second, it details the historical complexity of the Soviet-Cuban relationship and the impetus behind that association. Third, it explores the migration of Leninist propaganda and its counterpart—Russian *pokazukha*—from Russian Eurasia to the Cuban Caribbean.

July 30 2007  
Month      Year

Approved by Research Committee:

  
Richard Lewis      Chairperson

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<sup>1</sup> Fidel Castro, quoted in Aleksandr Fursenko and Timothy Naftali, *"One Hell of a Gamble": Khrushchev, Castro, and Kennedy, 1958-1964* (New York: Norton, 1997), 29.

## Chapter I

### INTRODUCTION

You know what Lenin said, in order to bring any kind of idea to life, you have to fling it to the masses. You suggest a slogan to the masses, and the masses should become possessed of it.

—Fidel Castro<sup>1</sup>

In the middle of the twentieth century, a series of events occurred that brought the world's largest country into an intimate connection with one of the world's smaller nations. A globe apart geographically, economically, culturally and politically, the Soviet superpower and powerless Cuba connected themselves in a common goal—protecting a burgeoning Caribbean Marxist-Leninist revolution from what the leaders in both countries saw as historically preordained interference by the United States. When the two solidified their close connections in the late 1950s and early 1960s, no one could have predicted that their relationship would bring the world to the brink of nuclear war, or that the Revolution in Cuba would outlast Communist rule in the Soviet Union by more than fifteen years.

The story of the Soviet-Cuban union is long and complex. The Communist Party of Cuba participated in the Soviet-led Communist International (Comintern)

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<sup>1</sup>Fidel Castro, quoted in Aleksandr Fursenko and Timothy Naftali, *"One Hell of a Gamble": Khrushchev, Castro, and Kennedy, 1958-1964* (New York: Norton, 1997), 29.

until that organization's collapse in 1943.<sup>2</sup> Communists held important posts in Fulgencio Batista's second government.<sup>3</sup> The writings of Marx, Lenin, Stalin and others were printed and circulated in Cuba throughout the early part of the 1900s using money sent from the U.S.S.R.<sup>4</sup> Raul Castro, Fidel's younger brother and heir-apparent to the Castro regime, openly declared himself a Communist in the early 1950s, while he was still in college.<sup>5</sup> On December 1, 1961, Castro declared, "I am a Marxist-Leninist, and I will be one until the last days of my life."<sup>6</sup> The Soviet Union began to support Castro's movement in 1958.<sup>7</sup> In 1959, the leaders of the U.S.S.R. started both open economic support and clandestine military support. In 1960, they intensified their aid. In early 1962, the Soviets began a secret mission to deploy nuclear weapons on Cuban soil—with results familiar to every Cuban, North American, and former Soviet citizen over the age of thirty-five.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Manuel Caballero, *Latin America and the Comintern 1919-1943* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 48-9.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 127-9.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 24-6.

<sup>5</sup> Lionel Martin, *The Early Fidel: The Roots of Castro's Communism* (Secaucus, NJ: Lyle Stuart, 1978), 79.

<sup>6</sup> F. Castro, quoted in Nestor T. Carbonell, *And the Russians Stayed: The Sovietization of Cuba, A Personal Portrait by Nestor T. Carbonell* (New York: William Morrow, 1989), 202-3. See also Robert E. Quirk, *Fidel Castro* (New York: Norton, 1993), 395.

<sup>7</sup> Jacques Levesque, *The USSR and the Cuban Revolution: Soviet Ideological and Strategic Perspectives, 1959-77* (New York: Praeger, 1978), 8-20.

<sup>8</sup> Fursenko and Naftali, *One Hell of a Gamble*, 11-19, 170-200.



In both Cuba and the U.S.S.R., appearances were vital to their leaders. For both Castro and Khrushchev, in different ways, foreign policy successes—particularly *vis-à-vis* the United States—were essential in consolidating and holding power domestically. Both men used façades and propaganda to accomplish their political ends. Such political use of façades has a long history in Russia and an intense, if shorter, history in Cuba. By the mid-1950s, the leaders of both nations were heavily affected by the Soviet version of façade building—called *pokazukha* by the Russians—as well as the propagandist ideology and practices of the Russian Revolution.<sup>9</sup>

What could motivate a superpower to support a shaky revolution on the other side of the world? What could cause the independent-minded leaders of the Cuban Revolution to ask for such support? How did Fidel Castro come to power in Cuba, despite the presence of an interventionist superpower just off his country's coast? Why did he then put on the mantle of Bolshevik Communism? Why was Nikita Khrushchev willing to risk so much by supporting an erratic Latin revolutionary? Through a study of specific events, this thesis project offers possible answers to these questions. It reexamines the complex relationship between Cuba and the Soviet Union, focusing on how and why the building of 'Potemkin villages' was such an important aspect of policy in both countries.

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<sup>9</sup> *Pokazukha*, roughly translated, means "showing off to achieve a desired effect" or "putting on with a goal in mind." This term is used in contemporary Russia to succinctly describe Russian-style deceptive façade-building in the tradition of Prince Potemkin of "Potemkin village" fame. Both *pokazukha* and its companion propaganda will be discussed further in Chapter III.

By retelling the story of the Soviet-Cuban connection in this way, this thesis project attempts to accomplish three main goals: First, it will revise our understanding of the Castro's resounding initial popularity—and why he chose Bolshevik Communism as his *modus operandi*. Second, it will detail the historical complexity behind the Soviet-Cuban relationship and the impetus behind their mid-twentieth-century union. Third, it will explore the migration of Leninist propaganda and its counterpart—Russian *pokazukha*—from Russian Eurasia to the Cuban Caribbean.

### Historiography

There is no shortage of studies on the Cuban missile crisis.<sup>10</sup> Several biographers have written about Castro's life, including one that focuses entirely on discovering the origins of Fidel's socialism.<sup>11</sup> Khrushchev's life has enjoyed almost as much scrutiny.<sup>12</sup> Several experts have put out treatments of the Cold War since its

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<sup>10</sup> See, for example, James G. Blight, Bruce J. Allyn, and David A. Welch, *Cuba on the Brink: Castro, the Missile Crisis, and the Soviet Collapse* (New York: Pantheon, 1993); Aleksandr Fursenko and Timothy Naftali, *"One Hell of a Gamble": Khrushchev, Castro, and Kennedy, 1958-1964* (New York: Norton, 1997); David Detzer, *The Brink: Cuban Missile Crisis, 1962* (New York: Thomas Crowell, 1970); and Max Frankel, *High Noon in the Cold War: Kennedy, Khrushchev, and the Cuban Missile Crisis* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2004).

<sup>11</sup> For general biographies, see Robert E. Quirk, *Fidel Castro* (New York: Norton, 1993); Peter G. Bourne, *Fidel: A Biography of Fidel Castro* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1986); Georgie Anne Geyer, *Guerrilla Prince: The Untold Story of Fidel Castro* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1991); and John J. Vail, *Fidel Castro* (New York: Chelsea House, 1986). For Fidel's communism, see Lionel Martin, *The Early Fidel: The Roots of Castro's Communism* (Senacus, NJ: Lyle Stewart, 1978).

<sup>12</sup> For an excellent biography of Khrushchev, see William Taubman, *Khrushchev: The Man and His Era* (New York: Norton, 2003).

end.<sup>13</sup> Various accounts of the Soviet connection with Latin America grace the library shelves.<sup>14</sup> One book even discusses the 'deception' perpetrated by a 'Red' Castro upon the 'innocent' people of Cuba and the United States.<sup>15</sup> Why, then, did this thesis need to be written?

The answer lies in the flaws of each of the above categories of works. The studies of the Cuban missile crisis are overwhelmingly concerned with U.S. interests and the role of its leaders; when they do treat the motivations of the Cubans and Soviets, it is with a broad brush and very few pages. Fidel's biographers are either so sympathetic with his life and politics as to be unacceptably biased, or they side-step the issue of his ideological convictions altogether by simply labeling him a 'revolutionary'. Khrushchev's biographers spend much less time examining the Cuba connection than it deserves. Books about the Soviet-Cuban relationship tend to either vilify or glorify the actors—and do so from two well-defined camps which are clearly in conscious opposition to each other. The general treatments of the Cold War include

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<sup>13</sup> See, for example, John Lewis Gaddis, *The Cold War: A New History* (New York: Penguin Press, 2005); and Vladislav Zubok and Constantine Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War: From Stalin to Khrushchev* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996).

<sup>14</sup> See, for example, Nicola Miller, *Soviet Relations with Latin America: 1959-1987* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Manuel Caballero, *Latin America and the Comintern 1919-1943* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986). For Soviet-Cuban connection, see W. Raymond Duncan, *The Soviet Union and Cuba: Interests and Influence* (New York: Praeger, 1985); Jacques Levesque, *The USSR and the Cuban Revolution: Soviet Ideological and Strategic Perspectives, 1959-77* (New York: Praeger, 1978); and D. Bruce Jackson, *Castro, the Kremlin, and Communism in Latin America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1969).

<sup>15</sup> James Monahan and Kenneth O. Gilmore, *The Great Deception: The Inside Story of How the Kremlin Took Over Cuba* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Co., 1963).



the Soviet-Cuban connection only as it pertains to the missile crisis, the non-aligned movement, or the war in Angola.

The vast majority of all of these works were written during or shortly after the Cold War, and many are therefore affected both by the obvious ideological and political biases of their authors as well as a severe lack of Soviet source material.

Those authors that published after the end of the Cold War—and were therefore able to use the archives of the former Soviet Union—have focused primarily on the Soviet role and thus left the issues of Castro's involvement to the books that came before.<sup>16</sup>

In the areas of *pokazukha* and propaganda, this project draws from many works in Russian and Soviet history. It utilizes much of the research done on imposture; it pulls ideas from the vast literature on Russian and Soviet identity.<sup>17</sup> Several Cold War era studies of propaganda have also been useful.<sup>18</sup> However, this project recasts the work that came before, using the corpus of Russian and Soviet historiography to deal precisely with the operation of *pokazukha* in the Soviet-Cuban connection.

Other disciplines also have much to tell us about *pokazukha*—at least tangentially. Numerous articles and books from professors of Russian language and literature refer to the Russian and Soviet predilection for illusion, and are helpful in

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<sup>16</sup> See Gaddis, *Cold War* and Zubok and Pleshakov, *Kremlin's Cold War*.

<sup>17</sup> On identity, see for example Geoffrey A. Hosking, *Rulers and Victims: the Russians in the Soviet Union* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2006).

<sup>18</sup> For a good example of this type of examination, see Frederick C. Barghoorn, *Soviet Foreign Propaganda* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1964).

fully exploring the prevalence of *pokazukha* and propaganda.<sup>19</sup> Cold War studies in the political science literature hold a mine of examples, and a group of works on deception produced by psychiatrists and psychologists helped to clarify the 'slippery' nature of a concept like *pokazukha*.<sup>20</sup> This thesis incorporates pertinent aspects from all of these categories of secondary sources, juxtaposing arguments and analyses to accomplish its key goals in such a way that the primary source materials—and their authors—speak in a clearer voice.

### Framework

Chapter II of this project, entitled, "The Long Shadow of the United States", surveys the history of Cuba with particular emphasis on the role of its North American neighbor. It shows how, beyond U.S. intervention in Guatemala, the contemporary actions of the Eisenhower administration in the 1950s had little to do with the initial forging of the Soviet-Cuban bond. Much more important was what the leaders in both socialist countries *perceived* as historically preordained interference by the United States. Rather than diplomatic actions of the moment, the geographic and historical shadow of the United States played the primary North American role in the Soviet-Cuban relationship prior to 1960.

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<sup>19</sup> In particular, see Thomas Seifrid, "Illusion and Its Workings in Modern Russian Culture," *The Slavic and East European Journal* 45, no. 2 (2001).

<sup>20</sup> For an example of the literature in psychology, see Daniel Goleman, *Vital Lies, Simple Truths: The Psychology of Self-Deception* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1985).

Scholars are unsure of the degree of Communist and Soviet influence, both in Cuban history generally and with Fidel Castro in particular. Chapter III, entitled "Communist Cuba: Communist Castro", explores the background behind that influence, and suggests that Fidel was drawn to Marxist-Leninism because of a combination of his understanding of Cuba's history as well as his personal revolutionary tendencies. Most works written on the subject to date have suggested that one or the other motivated Castro to become a Bolshevik—either his interpretation of the historical exploitation of his country, or his dreams of becoming a dictator. In reality, his motivations were complex, and changed over time.

Chapter IV, entitled "Potemkin Villages," investigates Russian *pokazukha* and Soviet propaganda, and suggests some reasons why the seeds of these practices, planted by the Bolsheviks in the early twentieth century, found such fertile ground in Castro's Cuba. The chapter will briefly tell the story of Catherine the Great's Tauride Tour, out of which originated the term "Potemkin village," then will define Russian-style *pokazukha*. The chapter will conclude by exploring how such practices were incorporated into Bolshevik ideology to be exported to the rest of the globe—including Cuba.

Mid-twentieth-century Cuba was a nation struggling to reinvent itself, to break free from the historical and colonial place it had occupied. The Cuban people were used to deception in politics; the regimes following the 1940 constitution were all corrupt and fraudulent governments. Dishonesty was regularly covered by deception, including some amateurish propaganda—however, the Cuban dictators that came

before Castro did not successfully apply propaganda and façades, and the people of Cuba were therefore quite aware of their corruption. Castro had but to offer a well-packaged alternative. Once he did, the Cuban—and North American—people were happy to give him a chance at changing Cuba. Chapter V, "Pokazukha in Cuba," tells the story of how Castro used the lessons of Russian-style façade-building and Soviet propaganda to offer a well-packaged alternative to the corrupt Batista regime, thereby destroying his enemy and conquering his country without having to fight on any major battlefields. By manipulating Herbert Matthews and the U.S. press corps, and using them to help portray his movement as a powerful and unaligned (non-Communist) alternative to Fulgencio Batista's regime, Castro was able to take and consolidate power in Havana.

Chapter VI, "The U.S.S.R. and Khrushchev," explores the role of the Soviet Union in Latin America prior to 1960, and how Nikita Khrushchev's Potemkin-like foreign policy caused the Communist superpower to be so easily bound up with a revolutionary movement half a world away. Prior to Castro's revolution, Latin America was very much on the periphery of Moscow's vision; Castro's socialism focused the Kremlin's attention squarely on that part of the world. Geopolitically and ideologically, unaligned Cuba offered a potential propaganda tool and a promising disruption of U.S. primacy in the Western hemisphere.

Chapter VII, entitled "Up to the Brink," explores the preliminary steps the Cubans and Soviets took toward alliance. Initially, The Soviet-Cuban connection was tentative, driven by a mutual need for the appearance of success against a common

enemy, the 'imperialist' United States. Verifiable success against the U.S. was important to neither Castro nor Khrushchev—rather, the façade, which was much easier to construct, took the place of real success in both of their countries. This chapter first details how, through fits and starts, the bond between the Soviets and Cubans solidified. This is followed by a discussion of how Castro and Khrushchev's Potemkin-like policies converged in 1960, with Castro using the U.S.S.R. to thwart United States intervention and Khrushchev using Castro's Cuba as the poster-child of global socialist revolution. Both men were happy to fill the role the other asked of them.

However, With Soviet support assured, Castro no longer needed to hide his Communist sympathies from Washington. Castro's Cuba fully embraced its job as poster-child of the anti-imperialist Third World, while simultaneously capitalizing on both Khrushchev's public commitment and his desire to retain leadership of the socialist camp. The Bay of Pigs failure, executed as it was in a lackadaisical manner, served only to fuel the propagandistic fires burning in the Potemkin villages of Moscow and Havana. Simultaneously, however, the U.S. was finishing a successful effort to dismantle the Soviet façade of missile superiority. Once that Potemkin village was pulled down, the primacy of Soviet propaganda was irrevocably lost. In a brash bid to retain that position, Khrushchev sent nuclear missiles to Cuba, but it was already too late. Chapter VIII, entitled "Pigs and Hedgehogs", investigates these topics.

Throughout, the paper explores how both Castro and Khrushchev used tactics drawn from the traditions of Russian *pokazukha* and Soviet propaganda. Castro used



them to overcome Batista's censorship, to gull the people of the United States into thinking he was no threat to North American interests, and to convince his own people that he was the man who would deliver them into a bright new future. Khrushchev used them to sustain his mantle of leadership in the global revolution, and maintaining Castro's façades became an important part of the Kremlin's overall foreign policy strategy. Using that fabricated status to his advantage, Castro made sure that the Soviet-Cuban connection was on equal terms, regardless of the economic and geopolitical inequality between the two countries. Eventually, the maintenance of the Cuban façade helped the ones built in Khrushchev's Soviet Union to crumble. However, those erected in Castro's Cuba still stand as a testament to the legacy of Potemkin, Lenin, Stalin, and Khrushchev.

<sup>21</sup> F. Castro, interview by unknown correspondent, CNN, March 1991. <http://www.cnn.com/SPECIALS/cold.war/episodes/18/interviews/castro>

<sup>22</sup> N. Khrushchev, *Khrushchev Remembers: The Glasnost Tapes*, trans. and ed. by Jerrold L. Schecter and Vyscheslav V. Lushchey (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1990), 170.

## Chapter II

### THE LONG SHADOW OF THE UNITED STATES

Look, the only way to prevent a direct U.S. aggression is for the United States to realize that an invasion against Cuba would be tantamount to a war against the Soviet Union.

—Fidel Castro, to Soviet Emissaries, March 1962<sup>21</sup>

I was haunted by the knowledge that the Americans could not stomach having Castro's Cuba right next to them. They would do something. They have the strength, and they have the means...Our aim was to strengthen and to reinforce Cuba.

—Nikita Khrushchev<sup>22</sup>

Understanding Cuban history is essential to understanding both the support for Castro in Cuba and Fidel's motivations in engaging the help of the U.S.S.R. History influenced the decisions Castro and his deputies were to make throughout the early years of the Revolution. The history of Cuba is a history of colonial rule from abroad and turbulent attempts at independence—punctuated by interference from the United States. Spain ruled Cuba for the four hundred years leading up to 1898. However, Spanish governance was disrupted both by intrusion from outside and by revolt from within. From 1739-1763, the British navy deliberately caused trouble for the Spanish Empire using Cuban territory. Occupying Guantanamo Bay and Havana at different

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<sup>21</sup> F. Castro, interview by unknown correspondent, *CNN*, March 1998, <http://www.cnn.com/SPECIALS/cold.war/episodes/10/interviews/castro>

<sup>22</sup> N. Khrushchev, *Khrushchev Remembers: The Glasnost Tapes*, trans. and ed. by Jerrold L. Schecter and Vyacheslav V. Luchkov (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1990), 170.

points during this period, and spurring both the sugarcane monoculture and the mass importation of African slaves, the British left their mark on Cuba, both militarily and economically.<sup>23</sup>

The history of North American interference in Cuban affairs is as long as the history of the United States itself. North American colonials were among the British soldiers that took Guantanamo and Havana in the mid-1700s. Although they were unable to do so, during the Revolutionary War members of the colonial army leadership wished to take Cuba as a strategic military post in the Caribbean. However, it was not until 1898, when economic interests combined with strategic interests, that the United States would officially begin to meddle in Cuban affairs. When those interests became evident, the leaders in Washington quickly established official, interventionist policies. Over time, both the policies and their use increased until many of the people of Cuba deeply resented their North American neighbor.

### Cuba Coveted

We must have the Floridas and Cuba.

—Thomas Jefferson, 1809<sup>24</sup>

In the years following the independence of the United States, there was a great migration westward. The newly formed settlements of the American West had no outlet for their goods to compare with that of the trade route down the Mississippi

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<sup>23</sup> Richard Gott, *Cuba: A New History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004), 40-4.

<sup>24</sup> Thomas Jefferson, quoted in Charles E. Chapman, *A History of the Cuban Republic: A Study in Hispanic American Politics* (New York: Macmillan, 1927), 48.

River to New Orleans and the Gulf of Mexico. The acquisition of New Orleans in the Louisiana Purchase of 1803 improved matters for the United States, but the route was still at the mercy of any power that held Florida or Cuba. The French invasion of Spain in 1808 caused anxiety in the young United States that Napoleon would cause complications in Spanish America.<sup>25</sup> Governor Claiborne of Louisiana presented the Western attitude about Cuba in a letter to the Secretary of State in 1810:

There is nothing I so much desire as to see the flag of my Country reared on the Moro Castle. Cuba is the real mouth of the Mississippi, and the nation possessing it, can at any time command the trade of the Western States. Give us Cuba and the American Union is placed beyond the reach of change.<sup>26</sup>

Over the next century, numerous leaders of the United States expressed the same wish. "It was not so much that they desired Cuba for itself, as they were afraid some European power, as [James] Madison put it, 'might make a fulcrum of that position against the commerce and security of the United States.'"<sup>27</sup> This fear was one of the primary motivating factors leading to the adoption of the Monroe Doctrine, a policy that the United States has followed—in one form or another—right up to the present day.

Written by John Quincy Adams and presented by President James Monroe during a "State of the Union" address in 1823, the policy originally had three main components: First, it stated that the United States would no longer allow European

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<sup>25</sup> Chapman, *Cuban Republic*, 47-8.

<sup>26</sup> Governor Claiborne, quoted in Chapman, *Cuban Republic*, 48.

<sup>27</sup> Chapman, *Cuban Republic*, 49.

countries to colonize in the Western hemisphere. Second, it reinforced President George Washington's isolationist rule of foreign policy, in which the U.S. would only get involved in European affairs if American interests were disturbed. Third, it stated, in no uncertain terms, that the U.S. would consider any attempt at colonization in the Western hemisphere a threat to its national security.<sup>28</sup> Just a few months prior to writing the Monroe Doctrine, John Quincy Adams wrote a letter to the minister of the United States in Spain in which he claimed: "Cuba, almost in sight of our shores, from a multitude of considerations, has become an object of transcendent importance to the commercial and political interests of our Union."<sup>29</sup> The opinion of the succeeding leaders in the United States capital did not stray from this conviction—nor did they fail to act upon it.

The Cuban struggle for independence from Spain spanned thirty years and involved three main wars and a number of smaller revolts. Beginning in 1868, the struggle waxed and waned until 1895, when several important Cuban freedom fighters, including the famous revolutionary Jose Marti, landed on Cuba. Marti was soon killed, but others fought on, defeating the Spanish Governor. As the war wore on, the major limitation to Cuban success was the lack of arms and ammunition. Although the majority of weapons and funding came from Cuban patriots inside the

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<sup>28</sup> Paul Boyer, *American Nation* (Austin, TX: Holt, 2000), 229-30.

<sup>29</sup> John Quincy Adams, quoted in Chapman, *Cuban Republic*, 55.



United States, the supply operation violated American laws enforced by the U.S. Coast Guard. Few supply ships slipped through their net.<sup>30</sup>

In late 1897 and early 1898, riots in Havana by rowdy pro-Spanish "Voluntarios" gave the United States an excuse to interfere further in Cuban affairs. The McKinley administration sent in the U.S.S. Maine to "protect American interests" in January 1898. With American attention focused on Cuba, Spanish atrocities began to inspire sympathy among the people of the United States. Pushed by popular opinion, President McKinley demanded reforms for Cuba. When the U.S.S. Maine exploded, killing 274 Americans in February 1898, tensions escalated and the U.S. would no longer accept Spanish promises of eventual reform.<sup>31</sup>

Thus, in April 1898, as Cuban freedom fighters began to win major victories and were on their way to defeating the Spanish, the U.S. 'hijacked' the Caribbean war for independence by declaring war on Spain.<sup>32</sup> Up against a modern, well-equipped army and navy, the Spanish mustered only a nominal defense and U.S. military forces were quickly successful. The Spanish surrendered in July. In December 1898, Spanish leaders signed the Treaty of Paris, recognizing Cuban independence. The U.S. Army, led by Minnesota judge Charles Magoon, took over the island on a temporary basis and began several major programs, including a massive public health initiative and a complex modernization program of infrastructural improvements. In

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<sup>30</sup> Gott, *Cuba: A New History*, 93-7.

<sup>31</sup> Keen and Haynes, *History of Latin America*, 428-30.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

1902, the United States handed control over to a Cuban government, but only after insuring that the new Cuban constitution, written late the previous year, included provisions implementing the requirements of the Platt Amendment.<sup>33</sup>

Those requirements were a serious infringement of Cuban sovereignty, and included the following: ceding to the United States the naval base in Cuba (Guantanamo Bay); stipulating that Cuba would not transfer Cuban land to any power other than the United States; mandating that Cuba would contract no foreign debt without guarantees that the interest could be paid from ordinary revenues; and prohibiting Cuba from negotiating treaties with any country other than the United States "which will impair or tend to impair the independence of Cuba." Cuba would not be allowed to "permit any foreign power or powers to obtain...lodgement in or control over any portion" of Cuba. The new Cuban government was forced to agree to a formal treaty detailing all the foregoing provisions. Most importantly, the United States declared the right to intervene militarily any time its leaders suspected that any of the above requirements was violated.<sup>34</sup> In the words of one revolutionary Cuban leader: "The Platt Amendment has reduced the independence and sovereignty of the Cuban republic to a myth."<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Jaime Suchlicki, *Cuba: From Columbus to Castro* (New York: Scribner's, 1974), 87-96.

<sup>34</sup> "The Platt Amendment," in *Treaties and Other International Agreements of the United States of America, 1776-1949*, vol. 8, ed. C.I. Bevans (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1971): 1116-7.

<sup>35</sup> General Juan Gualberto Gomez, quoted in Suchlicki, *Cuba*, 97-98.

Over the next few years, American investors acquired much of the land destroyed by the war, enabling the United States by 1920 to control roughly three-quarters of Cuban sugar production, the foundation of the Cuban economy. From 1902 to 1905, the Cuban population recovered political power and formed a republic under President Tomas Palma. Under his administration, Cuba enacted civil rights and anti-discrimination legislation, years ahead of the North Americans. Most historians agree that the Cuban Republic under Palma was peaceful and progressive.<sup>36</sup> However, during the same period, the United States declared further rights for itself in Latin America. Articulated in 1904, the "Roosevelt Corollary" was a substantial alteration of the Monroe Doctrine by President Theodore Roosevelt. Essentially, he extended the doctrine to include the 'right' of the United States to intervene to stabilize the economic affairs of small nations in Latin America if they were unable to pay their international debts. The Monroe Doctrine (as modified by Roosevelt) and the Platt Amendment would lend themselves well to America's new policy of 'containment' during the Cold War.

In 1906, the United States interfered once more in the Caribbean when negotiations led by Undersecretary of War William Taft ended a successful Cuban revolt.<sup>37</sup> The United States again sent in Magoon, who assumed temporary control until 1909. Yet again, in 1920, the United States intervened in Cuba to settle disputes among ruling elites, with President Woodrow Wilson sending in Sumner Welles to

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<sup>36</sup> Chapman, *Cuban Republic*, 152-3.

<sup>37</sup> Gott, *Cuba: A New History*, 111-120.



negotiate a settlement.<sup>38</sup> Cuba also became a major tourist destination in the 1920s, and by the end of the decade, it was festooned with casinos and nightclubs catering to foreign clientele.<sup>39</sup>

Then, in September 1933, the lower ranks of the Cuban Army revolted, together with student revolutionaries, successfully taking power on the island. A key figure in the process was Fulgencio Batista, originally an army sergeant, who gradually assumed total control of the country. To consolidate power, Batista brutally suppressed a series of revolts. With encouragement from U.S. Ambassador Welles, he separated the Cuban military from the student-labor component of the new revolutionary government. This was necessary in order to cut the anti-American students off from the power of the military. As Army Chief of Staff, Batista became the country's de facto leader behind a series of puppet presidents.<sup>40</sup>

In 1940, Batista was elected President in his own right, while the Cuban leadership passed a remarkable new constitution. The Cuban Constitution of 1940 is widely considered one of the most progressive constitutions in existence at the time.

A significant achievement in statecraft, this constitution provided for land reform, public education, a minimum wage, and other liberal ideas. Sadly, the provisions of the document were not well implemented or enforced, either by Batista or by the

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 134-7.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 137-46.

dishonest leaders who followed him. Batista lost the election in 1944, left office, and was succeeded by two liberal, but horribly corrupt, presidents.<sup>41</sup>

As Cuba began this period of dishonest governance, the United States and the Soviet Union emerged from WWII to find themselves locked in a new kind of war—a Cold War. In Washington, D.C., 'containment' became the operating foreign policy. Articulated by George F. Kennan in 1946 and first put into force by President Harry S. Truman, the policy of containment fully incorporated many of the same assumptions that were held by the leaders of the Soviet Union during the same period, particularly that the world was divided into two 'camps', one capitalist, the other Communist. The leaders of the U.S. decided that the spread of Communism from the Soviet center must be contained at all costs. The leadership in Washington adopted a policy of intervention in the Third World, one major element of which was "long-term, patient but firm and vigilant containment of Russian expansive tendencies."<sup>42</sup> By 1950, events in Europe and Asia spurred U.S. decision makers to use the containment policy as a guiding principle in foreign policy worldwide.

### CIA Incursion

Up to that point [U.S. intervention in Guatemala] he used to say, he was merely a sniper, criticizing from a theoretical point of view the political panorama of our America. From here on he was convinced

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<sup>41</sup> Carbonell, *And the Russian Stayed*, 92-3. See also Keen and Haynes, *History of Latin America*, 437-9.

<sup>42</sup> George F. Kennan, "The Sources of Soviet Conduct", originally published in 1947 under the pseudonym "X", *Foreign Affairs* 65, no. 4 (1987), 861.

that the struggle against the oligarchic system and the main enemy, Yankee imperialism, must be an armed one, supported by the people.

—Hilda Gadea, Ernesto 'Che' Guevara's first wife<sup>43</sup>

In the wake of WWII, the Soviets saw the nations emerging from imperial rule as potential allies while the United States saw them as potential threats. As those in Moscow hoped that anti-imperialist feelings would turn these countries toward socialism, those in Washington knew that "the United States could not detach itself from its British, French, Dutch, and Portuguese allies...the risk that 'third world' nationalists would associate the Americans with imperialism was therefore high."<sup>44</sup> Although formal U.S. foreign policy of the time was in fact anti-imperialist, its leadership in NATO and its affiliation and support of that organization's empires caused it to be easily lumped in with the empires railed against by mid-twentieth century Marxist-Leninists. Even the Latin American policies articulated in the Platt Amendment and the Monroe Doctrine were perceived by the leaders of the United States as *anti-imperialist*, rather than imperialist. Those policies were written to keep European imperialism from interfering with American interests. However, in practice, the United States was rampantly interventionist in the Western hemisphere, particularly in Cuba. Using the stigma of the empires the U.S. was now sworn to protect, as well as the history of U.S. intervention, Soviet and other Marxist-Leninist propagandists pushed an image of the United States as an imperial power, and many

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<sup>43</sup> Hilda Gaeda, quoted in William Blum, *Killing Hope: U.S. Military and CIA Interventions since World War II* (Monroe, ME: Courage Press, 1995), 79.

<sup>44</sup> Gaddis, *Cold War*, 123.

people in the emerging states were swayed by this image. The propaganda component of the early Cold War was vital for both superpowers, as the leaders in both suspected that the choices newly independent states made could yet tip the balance of power in the Cold War.

In the Soviet Union of the mid-1950s, this possibility was greeted with ebullient optimism; in the United States, it was met with caution. Under these circumstances, allowing even an undeveloped country to fall under Communist control could shake the confidence of the non-Communist world. This was what Eisenhower had in mind when, in April, 1954, he invoked the famous Cold War metaphor: "You have a row of dominos set up, you knock over the first one, and...the last one...will go over very quickly. So you could have...a disintegration that would have the most profound influences."<sup>45</sup>

Just one month later, in May 1954, the United States did something that would seriously retard the early growth of the Soviet-Cuban connection five years later—they intervened in Guatemala. There, the Monroe Doctrine combined with the policy of containment to produce an extraordinary intervention in Latin American affairs. Although the United States intruded in numerous countries around the world during this period, usually through the auspices of the CIA, the case of Guatemala was particularly important for the future of Cuba.

After his election in 1951, President Jacobo Arbenz of Guatemala instituted a number of new policies, including an agrarian reform law that expropriated and

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<sup>45</sup> Dwight D. Eisenhower, quoted in Gaddis, *Cold War*, 123.

redistributed land. His labor and industrialization policies seemed to threaten U.S. interests in his country, particularly those of the United Fruit Company (UFCO). The UFCO had large stakes in Guatemala's old order (in addition to their huge Cuban holdings), and lobbied various levels of the U.S. government for action against Arbenz. Concurrently, the U.S. intelligence community deemed Arbenz's reforms to be Communist in nature, fueling fear that Guatemala would become what CIA Director Allen Dulles called a "Soviet beachhead in the western hemisphere."<sup>46</sup>

Allen Dulles and his brother, John Foster Dulles (then U.S. Secretary of State) had both been partners in the UFCO's law firm prior to acquiring their government posts. Historians have accused both men of deep involvement in a U.S. conspiracy against Arbenz, along with Assistant Secretary of State for Latin America John Moors Cabot and his brother Henry Cabot Lodge, U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. The second set of brothers were stockholders in the UFCO at the time of the Guatemala intrusion.<sup>47</sup>

The CIA operation, codenamed PBSUCCESS (Presidential Board Success), ran from 1952 to 1954. The CIA armed and trained a "Liberation Army" of about 400 fighters under the command of a then exiled Guatemalan army officer, Colonel Carlos Castillo Armas. In 1954, the arrival in Guatemala of a Czech arms shipment (the U.S. had previously imposed an arms embargo on Guatemala) gave the CIA the pretext to

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<sup>46</sup> Alan Dulles, quoted in Nick Cullather, *Secret History: The CIA's Classified Account of its Operations in Guatemala, 1952-1954* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 17.

<sup>47</sup> Keen and Haynes, *History of Latin America*, 462-3.



invade. Armas' 'army' advanced six miles into Guatemala from the Honduran border, and waited for his U.S. allies to do the rest. A phony "Liberation Air Force", consisting of U.S. pilots flying CIA airplanes, commenced dropping propaganda leaflets and incendiary bombs on the capital. Guatemalan army officers refused either to fight or to arm people willing to do so. They also pressured Arbenz to resign, turning the government over to a three-man junta.<sup>48</sup>

However, the United States insisted on the installation of Armas as "President." In July, Armas was flown to the capital on a U.S. embassy plane. He promptly launched a campaign of terror against his opponents. According to one estimate, eight thousand people were executed. Arbenz's land reform was revoked, the UFCO and other landholders regained their holdings, and Armas surrounded himself with a gang of "grafters and cut-throats."<sup>49</sup> During the coup, the CIA carried out a complex and largely experimental diplomatic, economic, and propaganda campaign. PBSUCCESS employed ideas and methods that were relatively new to U.S. practice at the time. The success of the operation led to PBSUCCESS becoming the model for the overthrow or destabilization of any potential "domino" country, including the abortive Bay of Pigs invasion in Cuba.<sup>50</sup>

It was with this recent U.S. exploit very much in mind that both the Cuban leaders of the Cuban revolution and the Russian leaders of the Soviet Union embarked

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Cullather, *Secret History*.

upon tentative relations in 1959. Ernesto 'Che' Guevara, one of Fidel's closest allies until his death, had actually been in Guatemala City at the time of the coup, and he would never forget the experience.<sup>51</sup> In the Soviet Union, the leaders of global Communism had learned an important lesson. According to the official history textbook of the KGB (used in intelligence training academies): "American imperialism is the most dangerous enemy. It requires constant alertness on the part of the government and its services."<sup>52</sup> The policy of Containment and the Domino Theory, combined with the Monroe Doctrine and the Roosevelt Corollary, meant that aiding left-leaning governments in the Western hemisphere was no easy task.<sup>53</sup>

Besides the political importance of the United States in Cuban affairs, by 1959 Cuba was profoundly connected to the U.S. in the economic realm. With pressure from North American investors, sugar had become the country's principal crop, and Cuba's growers sold between 2.5 and 3 million metric tons (50-60 percent of total production) to the U.S. every year at a subsidized price. Subsidiaries of North American companies employed 10 percent of all Cuban workers, and U.S. interests owned the island's utilities and most of its oil refineries. Along with other U.S. corporations, the United Fruit Company (with its political connections in Washington)

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<sup>51</sup> Quirk, *Fidel Castro*, 94-5.

<sup>52</sup> V.M Chebrikov, G.F. Grigorenko, N.A. Dushin, F.D. Bobkov, TOP SECRET, *история органов обороны положения* [History of the Organs of State Security], *School of the KGB*, Special Department no. 9. (Moscow, 1977), 597. Cold War Studies at Harvard University. <http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~hpcws/documents.htm> Although a KGB training manual may not reflect the opinions of the top Soviet leadership, it does represent the official party line on this issue of foreign policy.

<sup>53</sup> Levesque, *USSR*, 8-10.

still owned most of Cuba's major sugar plantations.<sup>54</sup> The invasion of Guatemala had proven that economic interests such as these, along with ideological interests and security issues, were primary motivators in American foreign policy.

Taken together, the political and economic preeminence of the U.S. in Cuban affairs stood as a major obstacle for the rise of any openly Communist leader in Cuba, and made a strong connection between the Soviet Union and any Latin American country seem an impossibility.

We were indeed socialists, we had had indeed the opportunity of...  
Actually, it can be said that the revolutionary process of Cuba is the extraordinary force of the ideas of Marx, Engels, and Lenin. I wish to assert here that the Cuban revolution—an event that appeared difficult, an event that for many was impossible—would have been impossible to conceive and apply had it not been for the essential ideas and principles of Marxism.

Fidel Castro<sup>55</sup>

Scholars disagree about the importance of Communist influence, both in Cuban history generally and with Castro in particular. However, most scholars agree upon the basic factual outline of Communism's history in Cuba. In the case of Fidel Castro, opinions vary widely, but, as this chapter will show, the historical record seems to support Castro's own dating of his conversion to Marxist-Leninism while he was at the University of Havana in the early 1950s.

From the early twentieth century on, Bolshevik Communism offered an alternative to the policies and ideology that the European and North American rulers had historically forced upon the Cuban people. Communist sympathizers in Western academe are correct in this analysis.<sup>56</sup> Marxist-Leninism also offered a successful

<sup>54</sup> F. Castro, "Speech at Charles University," *Prague Radio Press*, June 24, 1972. Castro  
speeches, <http://www.cuba/castro/1972/19720624>

<sup>55</sup> Fursenko and Naftali, *One Hell of a Gamble*, 8.

<sup>56</sup> See Keen and Haynes, *History of Latin America*.



revolutionary template for any would-be dictator that might desire to utilize it. Cold War scholars are just as correct when they claim this as Castro's motivation.<sup>55</sup> In reality, both motivations combined to inspire the use of Bolshevik tactics and ideology in Castro's move.

### Chapter III

## COMMUNIST CUBA; COMMUNIST CASTRO

Cuba's We were indeed socialists, we had had indeed the opportunity of studying the fundamental works of Marx, Engels, and Lenin.

Actually, it can be said that the revolutionary process of Cuba is the confirmation of the extraordinary force of the ideas of Marx, Engels, and Lenin. I wish to assert here that the Cuban revolution—an event that appeared difficult, an event that for many was impossible—would have been impossible to conceive and apply had it not been for the essential ideas and principles of Marxism.

—Fidel Castro<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> F. Castro, "Speech at Charles University," *Prague Rude Pravo*, June 24, 1972. Castro Speech Database, <http://lanic.utexas.edu/la/cb/cuba/castro/1972/19720624>

<sup>56</sup> See Keen and Haynes, *History of Latin America*.

revolutionary template for any would-be dictator that might decide to utilize it. 'Cold Warrior' scholars are just as correct when they claim this as Castro's motivation.<sup>57</sup> In reality, both motivations combined to inspire the use of Bolshevik tactics and ideology in Castro's movement.

### Cuba's Communism

The advantages of socialism are truly tremendous if one wants to take advantage of them [pounds on table].

—Fidel Castro<sup>58</sup>

Communism's history in Cuba began with George Weeth, a friend and student of Karl Marx. Expelled from his native Germany, Weeth immigrated to Cuba and lived there until his death in 1854. One of Weeth's Cuban disciples, Pablo Lafargue, studied in Paris, married Marx's daughter and became an important member of the Socialist Internationals. Lafargue's close friend Carlos Balino joined the charismatic student leaders Blas Roca and Julio Antonio Mella to found the Communist Party of Cuba in 1925.<sup>59</sup> Under the tutelage of Polish immigrant Fabio Grobart, the Cuban national party quickly joined the Comintern, the organization of world Communism directed from Moscow.

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<sup>57</sup> See Monahan and Gilmore, *Great Deception*.

<sup>58</sup> F. Castro, "Interview at ANPP on Advantages of Socialism," *Havana Radio Rebelde Network*, July 19, 1989. Castro Speech Database, <http://lanic.utexas.edu/la/cb/cuba/castro/1989/19890719>

<sup>59</sup> Carbonell, *And the Russians Stayed*, 33. See also Caballero, *Latin America*, 35-6.

Most historical accounts agree that Grobart (aliases Abraham Sinovich, Antonio Blanco, and Fabio Grovat, real name Yunger Semjovich) came to Cuba as an agent of the Comintern in 1922 or 1923, and assisted the Party's formation in Cuba. Grobart helped lead the Cuban Communist Party, in one capacity or another, until his death in 1994. In 1943, a FBI "Survey of Communist Activities in Cuba" called him "the real chief and dictator of the Cuban Communist Party."<sup>60</sup> Although Grobart worked primarily behind the scenes, he and his followers formed local "soviets," penetrated and converted labor unions, and worked diligently to foment Communist revolution in Cuba. Under Grobart's leadership, the Communists became an important force in Cuban politics. Although they won few elections themselves, Communists did compose important elements of several Cuban administrations, including those led by Machado and Batista.<sup>61</sup>

However, until 1959, the Cuban Communists, Grobart included, were only on the periphery of Moscow's vision. The leaders of the U.S.S.R. believed, following Marx and Lenin, that revolution would occur in Europe first, then in Asia, followed by the rest of the globe. The countries of Latin America, including Cuba, were not far enough along the predetermined path to global socialism for them to be any kind of

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<sup>60</sup> FBI "Survey of Communist Activities in Cuba" (1943), quoted in Caballero, *Latin America*, 157-8.

<sup>61</sup> Caballero, *Latin America*, 157-8. See also Carbonell, *And the Russians Stayed*, 33; and Gott, *Cuba: A New History*, 130.

focus of the international movement.<sup>62</sup> Therefore, beyond the role of men such as Grobart and monetary support for the printing of ideological and propaganda texts, Moscow allowed the Cuban Communist Party to control its own domestic affairs. As for major positions on international policy, Cuban Communists toed the line drawn by Moscow.

For example, from the beginning of their organizations, both the Comintern and the Cuban Communist Party declared the United States an imperialist power. However, after the U.S. allied with the Soviets against the Nazis, Communists everywhere, including those in Cuba, suddenly considered the United States an ally.<sup>63</sup> The exigencies of World War II required a "United Front" against Nazism, and capitalist and socialist alike found themselves on the same side of what the Communist Third International called, "a deep dividing line between those countries which fell under the Hitlerite tyranny and those freedom-loving peoples who have united in a powerful anti-Hitlerite coalition."<sup>64</sup> Thus were the particular interests of the Cuban Communists regularly sublimated to the will of Moscow.

In late 1920s and early 1930s Cuba, the Party's membership was made up mostly of university students who saw themselves as the representatives of national will and heirs to Jose Marti's legacy. Among others in the younger generation, they

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<sup>62</sup> Caballero, *Latin America*, 149-55. Moscow's motivations will be discussed further in later chapters.

<sup>63</sup> Caballero, *Latin America*, 134-48.

<sup>64</sup> The dissolution document of the Third International, quoted in Caballero, *Latin America*, 135.



believed it was their duty to carry on the revolution that the United States had frustrated in 1898. They opposed the United State's supervision of the island, and saw the Platt Amendment's provisions as humiliating. This student Communist Party instigated the general strike that brought down the Gerardo Machado dictatorship in August 1933, even though the Party reversed itself and began to support Machado just prior to his fall, fearing another intervention by the North Americans. Despite late Communist support of Machado, that intervention occurred when Sumner Welles appointed a new U.S.-friendly president, Carlos Manuel de Cespedes, in September. In response, the students (led by the Communist Party leadership) joined forces with the lower echelons of the military and deposed the North-American appointee.<sup>65</sup> As the story of this event illustrates, the Communists were quite powerful in Cuba, even if they won few elections themselves.

At first, Batista and the military representatives of the new government allowed the students to choose the provisional president, and they decided upon Dr. Ramon Grau San Martin, a popular professor at the University of Havana. The United States refused to recognize the Grau presidency, and the military component of the new government conspired to take power. Led by Batista and encouraged by the United States, the army contingent purged members of the Communist Party, the National Confederation of Labor, and the Anti-Imperialist League from government positions. In January, 1934, Batista forced Grau to resign. After a two-day rule by engineer Carlos Hevia, Batista appointed Carlos Mendieta as provisional President.

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<sup>65</sup> Suchlicki, *Cuba*, 116-25.



Five days later, the United States recognized Cuba's new government. Under pressure from the United States, Batista's organization had swept the student Communists from power.<sup>66</sup>

The next six years were chaotic times for Cuba, and the Communist Party vacillated between advocating strikes and supporting the current regime. However, after Batista became the first president elected under the new 1940 constitution, he gave the Communists complete freedom of operation. He also promoted several Communists into key posts in his government, and Communists in Cuba enjoyed a period of peace and influence.

Following the end of WWII, Cuba was again plunged into a period of upheaval and revolt, leading to Batista's second period of rule. In 1952, Eduardo Chibas, the leader of the liberal Orthodox Party, was widely expected to win the Presidential election by running on a platform of anticorruption. Chibas committed suicide before he could win the presidency, and the party was left without its primary leader. Taking advantage of this vacuum, Batista, who was again running for President but was only expected to get a fraction of the necessary votes, seized power three months before the election was to take place. Almost immediately, Batista suspended the 1940 Constitution. Due in part to the corruption of the previous two administrations, the general public's reaction to the coup was slow. In 1954, Batista was again elected President, though the elections were almost certainly fraudulent. His democratic title

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 125-30.

was only for show, since Batista ruled as a dictator until Castro's movement caused him to flee the country in 1959.<sup>67</sup>

Although Batista had again purged the Communists from his government in 1947, the Communist response to the dictator's 1952 coup was ambiguous. The Communist Party was increasingly disconnected from other revolutionary groups. Eusebio Mujal, former Communist and high-profile labor leader, made this situation worse by collaborating with the Batista regime. By 1957, the Party publicly opposed Batista's dictatorship, but refused to support armed insurrection, including that led by Fidel Castro. By then, their complacency had so far distanced them from mainstream public opinion in Cuba that their proclamations had little impact domestically.

However, Communism had already made its impact on Castro's revolutionaries. Fidel's younger brother Raul, along with their longtime friend and ally Che Guevara, were open Marxist-Leninists from the 1950s on. The leaders of the Castro revolution used Communist ideology and Leninist strategies from the very beginnings of their revolt. In 1958, during their time in the Sierra Maestra Mountains, the leaders of Castro's band made "a pact" with Carlos Rafael Rodriguez, propaganda chief of the Cuban Communist Party. This was later confirmed by Nino Diaz, a high-ranking officer in Castro's movement:

[Rodriguez's] Communist 'recruits' began to come in droves. They were not good soldiers, but it soon became obvious that they weren't supposed to fight. Their job was to spread out among the troops and work as political indoctrinators. With Raul Castro's permission, they

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<sup>67</sup> Keen and Haynes, *History of Latin America*, 439-42.

even went out and organized Marxist study groups among the local peasants who were loyal supporters of the revolution.<sup>68</sup>

Although Fidel and the official Cuban Communist Party publicly distanced themselves from each other from 1957 to 1961, this internal conversion of Castro's peasant revolutionaries continued apace. In 1961, before his public declaration of Marxist-Leninism, Fidel reversed the official Communist Party's status. In July of that year, the Integrated Revolutionary Organizations Party (ORI) was formed by the merger of the People's Socialist Party (the original Cuban Communist Party) led by Blas Roca, the 26<sup>th</sup> of July Movement (discussed in detail below), led by Castro, and the Revolutionary Directory of March 13<sup>th</sup>, led by Faure Chamon. Blas Roca and Fabio Grobart were the only members of the old Communist leadership to survive the purges, ordered by Fidel, which surrounded the formation of the new organization. In March 1962, the ORI became the United Party of the Cuban Socialist Revolution (PURSC). PURSC then officially became "The Communist Party of Cuba" in October 1965.<sup>69</sup> Since 1965, the Communist Party has been the only recognized political party in Cuba. Other parties, though not technically illegal, are unable to campaign or conduct any activities in the country that could be deemed "counter-revolutionary."<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Nino Diaz, quoted in Monahan and Gilmore, *Great Deception*, 12.

<sup>69</sup> For the purposes of clarity, this thesis project uses the label "Communist Party of Cuba" to describe the organization from its 1925 beginning until the present day.

<sup>70</sup> Gott, *Cuba: A New History*, 199-204.

### Castro's Communism

If Ulysses was captivated by the songs of the siren; I was captivated by the incontestable verities of the Marxist literature.

—Fidel Castro<sup>71</sup>

Entire books have been written about when, and why, Fidel Castro became a Communist.<sup>72</sup> Although scholars are still unsure of Fidel Castro's earliest exposure to Marxist-Leninist ideology, some have suggested that he read many of the ideology's seminal works during his adolescent years.<sup>73</sup> Whether or not that is true, many historians now agree with Fidel's own post-1961 stance on his ideological conversion—that by the time he left the University of Havana in 1950, he was already a convicted Marxist-Leninist. Thus, despite his revolutionary-era statements to the contrary, Castro was likely a Communist at least nine years before the victory of the Revolution and twelve years before he publicly announced that Cuba would become a Communist country.<sup>74</sup>

There are several reasons for this conclusion. First, since 1961, Castro himself has consistently used the 1950 dating. Second, several witnesses have disclosed that it was Fidel who gave his brother Raul his first Communist literature—and Raul publicly declared himself a Communist in 1950. Third, Castro played a role in the riots in Bogota, Columbia in 1948—riots probably instigated by Communists. Fourth,

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<sup>71</sup> F. Castro, quoted in Szulc, *Fidel*, 142.

<sup>72</sup> See Martin, *Early Fidel*.

<sup>73</sup> Carbonell, *And the Russians Stayed*, 31.

<sup>74</sup> Martin, *Early Fidel*, 15.



as we have seen, Communist indoctrination was begun among the soldiers of Castro's army while it was still little more than a small guerilla band huddled in the Sierra Maestra Mountains. Sixth, an examination of Castro's pre-Revolution speeches, letters, manifestos, and articles has illuminated a Marxist-Leninist conviction dating from at least as far back as his university days.<sup>75</sup> However, the timing of Castro's full conversion will probably never be determined precisely. Regardless of the exact date of his 'conviction' to Communist principles, Fidel's early life was full of both encounters with Communist ideology and exposures to the power of public opinion.

Castro was born on April 13, 1926, on his father's sugar plantation near the coast of Cuba's Oriente province. His father, Angel Castro, had been born in Northwest Spain and had come to Cuba with the Spanish army during the Spanish-American War. After the U.S. victory, Angel had acquired a large sugarcane plantation. Angel's first marriage to a Cuban schoolteacher ended with her death. He then married his cook, with whom he had an affair during his first marriage. She had already given birth to three children by him prior to their marriage, including Fidel.<sup>76</sup>

Castro led an easy early existence as the son of a wealthy landowner; at age six, he went to La Salle boarding school. As an adult, Castro has said repeatedly that his idea of social consciousness first sprouted at this school. While at La Salle, Castro once barricaded himself in a classroom with other student supporters to resist

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 1-127. See also Quirk, *Fidel Castro*, 26-8; Carbonell, *And the Russians Stayed*, 30-42; and Monahan and Gilmore, *Great Deception*, 11-26.

<sup>76</sup> Herbert L. Matthews, *Revolution in Cuba: An Essay in Understanding* (New York: Scribner's, 1975), 21.



punishment for not having memorized a poem. When he was only thirteen, he attempted to organize a strike of his own father's plantation workers.<sup>77</sup>

In 1942, at age sixteen, Castro began high school in Havana at the Jesuit-run Belen Preparatory School. At this school, Castro played baseball, soccer, basketball and jai alai. He was a good student and an excellent debater. He was voted Cuba's best high school athlete in 1944. He was also a good student of history, especially of the life and writings of the revolutionaries Jose Marti and Vladimir Lenin.<sup>78</sup> The note under his senior yearbook photo read. "We do not doubt that he will fill the book of his life with brilliant pages."<sup>79</sup>

In 1945, Castro entered the University of Havana Law School, where he began to involve himself in school and national politics. Despite inattention to his studies, Castro was a good student. In 1947, however, a combination of national political groups and university students were organizing an expedition, called the Cayo Confites expedition, to invade the Dominican Republic and overthrow its hated—and U.S.-supported—dictator. Castro left school to join up. He was well aware of the strategic and economic importance of the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, and Cuba to the United States. Like many other Cubans, he was disaffected with North

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<sup>77</sup> Carbonell, *And the Russians Stayed*, 31.

<sup>78</sup> See Quirk, *Fidel Castro*, 26-8; Carbonell, *And the Russians Stayed*, 30-42; and Monahan and Gilmore, *Great Deception*, 11-26. Jose Marti had been the leader of a failed revolution in Cuba in 1895. He was a vibrant man and a brilliant revolutionary writer, and every Cuban political movement since his death has tried to legitimize itself by making a figurative or literal tie to Marti. Castro was not the first or the last to do so, but he was probably the most successful at linking Marti's beliefs with his own.

<sup>79</sup> F. Castro's senior yearbook, quoted in Vail, *Fidel Castro*, 18.

American influence in the Caribbean—here was a chance for him to make a name for himself and strike back against the 'aggressors'. Cuban police stopped the expedition before it began, arresting those involved; Castro escaped arrest by jumping ship and swimming to shore.<sup>80</sup>

Castro went back to school, periodically organizing political demonstrations. During this time, Castro began to understand how important propaganda is to any cause, and how he could use it. Dr. Richard Martinez Ferrer, a doctor in residency at the hospital of the University of Havana, later recalled:

One night there was a knock on my door, and suddenly Fidel appeared with a huge bandage on his head. . . He said he needed help. I told him to come in, and he responded immediately: 'About two hours ago, I went to the newspaper office and the police attacked me, and I had to go to the emergency room and a doctor bandaged me.'<sup>81</sup>

The next morning, Castro asked Martinez to bring him a copy of the *Prensa Libre* newspaper. On the front page, a banner headline read: "Student Leader Assaulted by Police". In the upper right-hand corner was a picture of Castro with the bandage on his head. Martinez continued:

I returned to the room with the paper...I opened the door. Fidel was supposed to be there, waiting for me...He was there, but without the bandage. I was amazed. 'What happened to you?' I asked him. And he replied that nothing had happened, that he had had to do this to get front page on the paper.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Vail, *Fidel Castro*, 20.

<sup>81</sup> Doctor Richard Martinez Ferrer, quoted in Geyer, *Guerrilla Prince*, 65.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

In 1949, another incident occurred that serves as a good example of Castro's intelligence and talents in utilizing propaganda. A small group of drunken and rowdy U.S. Marines clambered discourteously atop the statue of Jose Marti in Havana's central park. One of them urinated on it, defaming the sacred memory of Marti. It was as if Fidel had been waiting for an event like this. Immediately, he formed an honor guard, which flanked the statue all night. The next day, he led an angry protest demonstration at the U.S. embassy. Fidel's group moved on the building, equipped with rocks in their pockets. When they were about half a block away, they began throwing them at the windows, creating an uproar. They then ran to a restaurant down the street, where they watched the police cars rushing to the embassy, their sirens blaring. This was the first time that Castro's name appeared in the Cuban press in an important way. "It was also proof, if any more were needed, that the young leader knew not only how to use events to his advantage but also how to create events of his own."<sup>83</sup>

In 1951, one of Fidel's political mentors, Senator Eduardo Chibas, shot himself in the abdomen during his weekly radio program, thereby committing public suicide. His last words, which sadly for him did not go out over the airwaves (he had run past the hour and his microphone had been cut) were: "This is my last gunshot to awaken the civic consciousness of the Cuban people."<sup>84</sup> It has been suggested that Chibas did not intend a fatal wound—that instead of martyrdom, he was seeking a propaganda

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 66.

<sup>84</sup> Senator Eduardo Chibas, quoted in Quirk, *Fidel Castro*, 33.

coup for his cause, as a shot to the head or heart is the usual method of suicide-by-firearm.<sup>85</sup> Whether or not that suggestion is true, this episode is a good example of the poorly executed propaganda-type political maneuvering that existed in Cuba prior to the late 1950s.

Chibas had founded and lead the Orthodox Party, of which Castro was a member. A charismatic man committed to the legal route to power, Chibas believed that the *Orthodoxos* were the true heirs to the revolutionary heritage of Marti. Recognizing the power of Chibas' revolutionary message, Castro joined the Orthodox Party in 1947. Fidel campaigned with Chibas across the country when he ran for senator, and again during his Presidential campaign. After Chibas' death, Castro played up his mentor's martyrdom.

Fidel spoke longer than anyone else, from prepared statements, to the microphones that radio stations had set up in Havana to record words of condolence from Chibas' mourners. Castro also lobbied the man in charge of Chibas' funeral arrangements to move his body to the Presidential palace, "to take advantage of the gigantic outpouring of public grief...so we can seize power."<sup>86</sup> Although he did not succeed in capitalizing on the funeral, Castro did take on the mantle of Chibas and use his dead mentor's political following to get elected to the House of Representatives. Castro's campaign progressed well, and by March of 1952, he had little doubt that he would win—but he did not. The elections were never held, for Batista staged his coup

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> F. Castro, quoted in Quirk, *Fidel Castro*, 33.

just prior to the elections. Batista's illegal coup had a profound effect on Fidel, who realized that legal political avenues were much less powerful than public opinion or military might.<sup>87</sup>

This realization about the power of public opinion was one of the reasons why Castro publicly denied his Marxist-Leninist ideological sympathies from 1952 until 1961. Fidel is an incredibly shrewd politician with a good grasp of his country's history, and he knew that declaring himself a Communist would evaporate the good will he had garnered in the United States (discussed in detail below) and seriously erode the popularity he had in his own country. He was extremely sensitive to the anti-Communist atmosphere that surrounded him, and was content to work under other guises until he could take and consolidate his rule.<sup>88</sup> Not until he had taken power in Havana through the support of the Cuban people could he allow them to know he was a Communist; not until he had the support of the world's only other superpower could he afford to resist the one ninety miles off his country's coast.

It is clear that Fidel was heavily affected by his reading of Soviet Communist literature, particularly relating to practical methods of establishing and consolidating rule. According to several classmates, even during high school Castro read avidly and recited excerpts from the political manifestos and speeches of famous Marxist revolutionaries, including Lenin.<sup>89</sup> When he arrived at college, from the very

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<sup>87</sup> Quirk, *Fidel Castro*, 33-39.

<sup>88</sup> Martin, *Early Fidel*, 121.

<sup>89</sup> Carbonell, *And the Russians Stayed*, 31.



beginning Fidel had many Communist friends. Castro does not attribute his conversion to his friends, however. He has said that Marx and Engel's Communist Manifesto had "an almost apocalyptic influence" on his thinking.<sup>90</sup> "For me it was a revelation...It was so persuasive that I was absolutely amazed. I was converted to those ideas."<sup>91</sup> Castro also read Lenin's *Selected Works* during this time, which included "What is to be Done?", the essay that laid out the principles of official Soviet propaganda (discussed in detail below).<sup>92</sup>

One episode is particularly illuminating of both Castro's adherence to Communist ideology and his exposure to Soviet principles of propaganda. In July 1953, shortly before the Moncada incident (for which Fidel and Raul would both earn a prison sentence, discussed below), Castro made one of many trips to the Communist bookshop in Havana, which was the storefront to the Communist Party offices. Among the books he purchased that day were several dealing with the Russian Revolution and Soviet activities against the Nazis.<sup>93</sup> While at the bookstore, Castro met with Carlos Rafael Rodriguez, then propaganda chief of the Cuban Communist Party and an expert on Bolshevik agitation and propaganda. "While [at the bookshop],

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<sup>90</sup> Martin, *Early Fidel*, 38.

<sup>91</sup> F. Castro (speech in Chile), December 19, 1971. Castro Speech Database, <http://lanic.utexas.edu/la/cb/cuba/castro/1971/19711219.1>

<sup>92</sup> Martin, *Early Fidel*, 119.

<sup>93</sup> Martin, *Early Fidel*, 122. Martin has verified this visit with documentary evidence. He has seen the slip signed by Luis Mas Martin, a Cuban Communist Party functionary, guaranteeing the debt Fidel incurred by buying the books.

Castro came up to the propaganda department," Rodriguez later recalled, "We had a long conversation about the national situation...The conversation was that of two leaders, two revolutionaries, speaking about the struggle."<sup>94</sup> As has already been mentioned, Rodriguez would later head up the indoctrination of Castro's soldiers during their time in the Sierra Maestras.

What did Castro take away from reading Soviet materials on 'the dictatorship of the proletariat'? What did he learn from meetings with men like Rodriguez? Since Fidel is an inveterate liar, and since historians cannot read minds, we are only able to speculate. However, the next two chapters will investigate first what Castro *could* have learned from the Soviets (by examining Russian political culture and Soviet ideology), then will move on to how Castro put those principles into action in his own country.

The Cuban people were used to deception; the regimes following the 1940 constitution were all corrupt governments, using deceit to clumsily cover their shortcomings. Castro had but to offer a well-packaged alternative to those regimes, Russian-style *potemkin*, in the form of Potemkin villages like his "Guerrilla-theater" and supported by Soviet-style propaganda distributed through North American journalists (discussed below), became keys to Castro's success.

What exactly is a "Potemkin village"? What is *potemkin*? How has the practice of building Potemkin-like facades, and legitimating them with propaganda, become a recurrent practice in Russian political history? How did Lenin adapt such

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<sup>94</sup> Carlos Rafael Rodriguez, interview by Lionel Martin, September 27, 1972, quoted in Martin, *Early Fidel*, 122.

## Chapter IV

### POTEMKIN VILLAGES

Russians fear the truth, that is, we do not fear it, if you wish, but constantly regard the truth as something far too tedious and prosaic, insufficiently poetic, too commonplace, and in this way, by constantly avoiding it, we finally made it one of the most unusual and rare things in the Russian world.

—Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky<sup>95</sup>

Russian-style deception allowed Castro to destroy his enemies and conquer his country without having to fight on any major battlefields. Cuba was a nation struggling to reinvent itself, to break free from the historical and colonial place it had occupied. The Cuban people were used to deception; the regimes following the 1940 constitution were all corrupt governments, using deceit to clumsily cover their shortcomings. Castro had but to offer a well-packaged alternative to those regimes. Russian-style *pokazukha*, in the form of Potemkin villages like his "Guerilla-theater" and supported by Soviet-style propaganda distributed through North American journalists (discussed below), became keys to Castro's success.

What exactly is a "Potemkin village"? What is *pokazukha*? How has the practice of building Potemkin-like façades, and legitimating them with propaganda, become a recurrent practice in Russian political history? How did Lenin adapt such

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<sup>95</sup> Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky, *Diary of a Writer*, trans. Boris Brasol (New York: G. Braziller, 1954), 164.

concepts, fusing them with Marxist principles to create Bolshevik ideology and practice? Section one of this chapter will briefly tell the story of Catherine the Great's Tauride Tour, out of which originated the term "Potemkin village". Section two will define Russian-style *pokazukha*; section three will explore how such practices were incorporated into Bolshevik ideology and technologies of power to be exported to the rest of the globe—including Cuba.

### Potemkin's Posturing

One was under the impression of seeing villages in the distance, but these were only houses and church steeples painted on boards. Villages close to the river, just built, seemed to be inhabited. But the villagers had been forced to come from as far as forty miles away. They had to leave their houses each evening and rush to other villages, which they then inhabited for a few hours, as long as the Empress was passing by.

—Georg Helbig, 1798<sup>96</sup>

Prince Grigory Aleksandrovich Potemkin was a Russian general, leader, and favorite of Catherine II, Tsarina of Russia (Catherine the Great). History remembers him primarily for his leadership in the Russian colonization of southern Ukraine and the Crimea—and, of course, for his famous villages. In 1783, he initiated and carried out the project of annexing the Crimea to the Russian Empire. Four years later, as both the regional ruler of Ukraine and a primary shaper of the Empire's foreign policy, he organized Catherine's 'Tauride Tour' of the southern provinces.<sup>97</sup> The grandest

<sup>96</sup> Georg Adolf Wilhelm von Helbig, *Minerva*, May 1798, quoted in Ebon, *The Soviet Propaganda Machine*, 6.

<sup>97</sup> 'Taurica' was the ancient Greek name for the Crimea. It was adopted by Potemkin and Catherine to name this trip because they felt it lent a certain mystique and grandeur to the tour. See footnote 98 for sources.



spectacle of her reign, the trip was carefully planned by Potemkin to legitimate Catherine's Russia in the minds of Western rulers and provoke a response from her Ottoman enemies.<sup>98</sup>

A year before, accounts had been deliberately published that the Tsarina would be crowned "sovereign of her new possessions" in the most magnificent style. The trip was to cost seven million rubles at a time when a loaf of bread was only a few *kopeks* [pennies]. In eight months of travel, Catherine covered more than 6,000 kilometers over both land and water. Her journey was a theatrical procession purposefully designed both to acquaint the Tsarina with her new dominions and to highlight Russia's presence on the Black Sea to "l'Europe étonnée."<sup>99</sup> Additionally, during the voyage both Potemkin and Catherine wished to intimidate Russia's Ottoman enemies by a grandiose show of power and wealth.<sup>100</sup>

Potemkin's preparations, which he started more than three years before, were lavish in the extreme. The party set out across the Russian snow of January in one hundred and seventy-eight gilt carriages mounted on runners, several of which were

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<sup>98</sup> Since no account of the 'Tauride Tour' agrees completely with any other, what follows is a distillation of several accounts. They include: Simon Sebag Montefiore, *Potemkin: Catherine the Great's Imperial Partner* (New York: Vintage, 2005); Sara Dickinson, "Russia's First 'Orient': Characterizing the Crimea in 1787," *Kritika* 3, no.1 (2002); John T. Alexander, *Catherine the Great: Life and Legend* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); Isabel de Madariaga, *Russia in the Age of Catherine the Great* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1981); and George Soloveytschik, *Potemkin: Soldier, Statesman, Lover and Consort of Catherine of Russia* (New York: Norton, 1947).

<sup>99</sup> "l'Europe étonnée" translates as "Astonished Europe" in English. Belgian Prince Ligne to Catherine II, 1 August 1784, *Figures du Temps passé*, 126, quoted in Dickinson, "Russia's First 'Orient,'" 5.

<sup>100</sup> *Sbornik imperatorskogo russkogo istoricheskogo obshchestva* [The Imperial Collection of the Russian Historical Society], quoted in Alexander, *Catherine the Great*, 256.



the size of houses and pulled by thirty horses each. The Tsarina's personal sledge had a drawing-room, study, library and bedroom on board. At each rural stop, five hundred and sixty replacement horses waited. The retinue traveling with Catherine included a large portion of the Russian court, as well as all of the foreign dignitaries stationed in Petersburg.

Upon arriving in Kiev, the first major urban stop for the party, each of the foreign diplomats was provided with a separate palace with its own servants, private coaches, and grooms wearing the livery of that diplomat's sovereign.<sup>101</sup> The city was festooned with decorations, and for the next ten weeks, city-wide festivities entertained Catherine and her guests. While at Kiev, Catherine met with numerous dignitaries, including the German-French Prince Charles de Nassau-Siegen. Catherine also met the Spaniard Francisco de Miranda, who sought to enlist Catherine's aid in the liberation of Cuba and the rest of Latin America. From Kiev, Catherine ordered the minting of a special medal commemorating her Tauride Tour. It depicted her portrait on one side and her itinerary on the other, encircled by the motto "The Way to Benefit."<sup>102</sup> It was clear that she did not want anyone to forget the opulent nature of her journey—or of its importance.

Although her itinerary included extended stopovers in Kiev and Moscow, Catherine's ultimate destination was Russia's recently acquired territories in southern Ukraine and the Crimea. Therefore, in Kiev, the procession switched to travel on the

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<sup>101</sup> Soloveytchik, *Potemkin*, 267-275.

<sup>102</sup> Alexander, *Catherine*, 258.

Dnieper River, in a style even more extravagant than the participants had enjoyed while traveling on land. Seven huge Roman-style galleys, painted red and gold, headed the convoy, followed by seventy-three others of varying sizes. In all, a flotilla of eighty boats accompanied the sovereign, with more than 3,000 flamboyantly uniformed sailors attending (and protecting) the Tsarina and her retinue. Each of the seven galleys was equipped like a palace, even down to its own small orchestra that struck up a tune every time a guest embarked or debarked. The famous maestro Giuseppe Sarti conducted the orchestra on Catherine's galley.<sup>103</sup>

All along the river, the shores were crowded with peasants cheering and taking in the spectacle. At each stop, special temporary buildings, triumphal arches, and floral and other decorations met the Tsarina and her retinue. Every village and city was prepared beforehand, with new coats of paint on the houses and buildings. The streets were clean and illuminated, the beggars run out of town, and the poorer areas hidden behind brightly painted, temporary fences.<sup>104</sup> At the major stops, grand fireworks displays delighted peasants and ambassadors alike. When Catherine reached the new city of Kherson, Potemkin launched two fresh ships of the line, adding to the Black Sea fleet he had recently created. One of those ships was christened Joseph II, which gratified Catherine's important Austrian ally and travel companion.

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<sup>103</sup> Soloveytchik, *Potemkin*, 276.

<sup>104</sup> De Madariaga, *Russia*, 371.

In Sevastopol, Potemkin's entertainments reached their apex, with a fireworks display that involved over 20,000 rockets—delighting Catherine, Joseph, and the entourage while simultaneously terrifying the local Tatar spectators.<sup>105</sup> Also in Sevastopol, Potemkin surprised the Tsarina with a battalion of 'Amazons.' This group was made up of one hundred musket-bearing Greek women dressed in crimson skirts and gold-trimmed jackets, topped by gold-spangled turbans complete with ostrich feathers. Joseph II greeted the female commander with a kiss.<sup>106</sup> Although Potemkin's extravagances drew large audiences of the local Russian, Ukrainian, and Tatar peoples to view these demonstrations of Russian power, his goals for the procession could not have been accomplished without Western witnesses to report back to their countries on the greatness of Catherine's power and holdings. Therefore, her entourage included numerous foreign diplomats. Catherine's foreign guests provided an important propaganda connection to various groups and leaders abroad. While traveling, she spoke with them regularly about their impressions of the trip and about foreign perceptions of herself and her government. Since these courtiers and correspondents strove to articulate and repeat what the Tsarina wanted to hear, their versions of the trip were thoroughly intertwined with her own.<sup>107</sup> This too was by design—Potemkin and Catherine wanted their tour to be remembered *their* way.

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<sup>105</sup> Alexander, *Catherine*, 260.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Dickinson, "Russia's First 'Orient,'" 7.

Catherine's most prominent companion was Joseph II, the Hapsburg sovereign of the Holy Roman Empire. His involvement underscored the political and military implications of the Tsarina's expedition, since Austria was Russia's principal ally against the Ottomans. The extraordinary mobilization of soldiers and arms that accompanied the joint parade of 'the two empires' along the Black Sea coast increased tensions with the Ottoman state. Potemkin carefully orchestrated these tensions at Catherine's behest. To one of her advisors Catherine confidently proclaimed, "we can start it ourselves."<sup>108</sup> This provocation, as planned, culminated in the outbreak of war with the Turks shortly after Catherine's return to Petersburg.

Although Potemkin's detractors later claimed that the crowds were slaves, the houses were made of cardboard, and that Potemkin's minions created entire façades of villages along the route, there is no evidence to support these assertions.<sup>109</sup> The term "Potemkin village" was apparently coined by a German detractor of Potemkin's named Helbig, who is quoted at the beginning of this section. It is through Helbig's efforts that the term has come to mean "sham" in Western languages. However, though the Russian language has no such idiomatic referent, Potemkin is legendary in Russia for his marvelous demonstrations of *pokazukha*—or "showing off for effect."

<sup>108</sup> Sergei Nicholaiovich Zolotko, interview by author, Kiev, Ukraine, September 10, 2006.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 5. The term "Potemkin village" has a definition in most Western-language dictionaries. They all read like the following: "Something that appears elaborate and impressive but is actual false." Alexander, *Catherine*, 258-259; Soloveytschik, *Potemkin*, 276-278; De Madariaga, *Russia*, 370-373.



### Russian Pokazukha

Pokazukha, propaganda—what's the difference? It's all bullshit, but often it's all we Russians have. Potemkin? Sure, I know who he was. But he's nothing special. All us [former] Soviets do this stuff at one time or another. It's in our blood—haven't you figured that out by now?

—Sergei Zolotko<sup>110</sup>

Prince Potemkin's villages are legendary—not just because of the efforts of his enemies, but because he was a master at producing the hallmarks of wealth and power, even if they were not exactly as he made them appear. Through his well-planned displays, he succeed in making the Tauride Tour a spectacle the likes of which the world had never before seen—thereby legitimizing Catherine in Western Europe and goading her Ottoman enemies.

The endurance of Potemkin's legend tells us something of this culture that is useful and essential to fully understanding Russian and Soviet history. In most Western-language dictionaries, the definition of "Potemkin village" includes several different aspects: façades, 'smoke and mirrors,' and sloganeering, just to name a few.<sup>111</sup> For most Westerners, these concepts all imply falsity in their definition. In practice, in Western societies, they are either idealistic constructs or sinister falsehoods. Whether good or bad, they are representative, not reality. This is not so in

<sup>110</sup> Sergei Nicholaievich Zolotko, interview by author, Kiev, Ukraine, September 10, 2006.

<sup>111</sup> Whether it is "Potemkinsche dörfer," "aldeas del Potemkin," "villages de Potemkin," or "villaggi di Potemkin," the term "Potemkin village" has a definition in most Western-language dictionaries. They all read like the following: "Something that appears elaborate and impressive but in actual fact lacks substance." From *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, Fourth Edition. Houghton Mifflin, 2004, [http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/potemkin village](http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/potemkin%20village).



Russia. As the story of Catherine's Tauride Tour exemplifies, there is something productive in the Russian application of this practice. In fact, the term "Potemkin village" does not exist in the Russian dictionary. Instead, the Russians have a very specific word that incorporates all of the meanings of the Western term, plus a productive aspect that the Western definition of "Potemkin village" does not include.

The Russian noun *pokazukha* [показыха], directly translated, means "it's all put on, just for show."<sup>112</sup> In daily Russian usage, it implies much more. It is a slang word, a common word, a base word. The adjective form is *pokaznoi* [показной], which is "ostentatious, for show, done for effect." The related verb is *pokazivat* [показывать], which means literally "to show." At the root of these words is *pokaz* [показ], which translates as "the demonstration," the process by which "the moon appears from behind clouds." *Pokazukha* is that which operates to "reveal" with an ulterior motive, to make a moon appear at noon. It is the eclipse of the truth with something created. It is deception as art, illusion as reality. Someone practicing *pokazukha* is building more than a façade, he is constructing his own particular edifice of the real. *Pokazukha* can best be understood as a set of practices that, through constant propaganda transmission and reiteration, has become a lasting politico-cultural trend.

Asking a Russian for clarifying connotations of the word *pokazukha* will get you a myriad of responses. To a child of the Soviet 1980s, it is cleaning only the halls and rooms of your school that you know the inspector will visit, leaving the rest in

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<sup>112</sup> Unless otherwise noted, the translations in this project are from *Lingvo*, a CD-based Russian-English dictionary produced by the ABBYY software company, Russia.

dishevelment and disrepair.<sup>113</sup> To certain Russian émigrés, it is the self-promotion of the Oligarchs in contemporary Russia that allows murderers to seem like legitimate businessmen.<sup>114</sup> For Peter the Great, it was façades of the West built in the East. For the contemporary Russian writer Victor Pelevin it is the creation of reality in the studios of the society builders, a place where advertising does more than affect reality—for Pelevin's characters, the *pokazukha* of advertising *is* reality.<sup>115</sup> These various connotations have some commonalities. Beyond deception and ostentation is an implied complicity on the part of both the deceiver and the deceived—a complicity that lends reality to the illusion being created. The actions that constitute *pokazukha* have some reality without the belief of the audience, but audience participation is necessary when the desired effect is dependent upon the *pokazukha* being taken for truth—as in politics. In that situation, when the *pokazukha* is exposed, all of its power immediately disappears.

To be sure, façade-building and trends of deceit are concepts not confined to Russian culture, especially since the intentional export of Soviet ideology and practice. In Communist countries influenced by Soviet ideology, however, 'showing off' and 'putting on' are more than just deceptive façade-building. For the Soviets and their adherents, illusion is an important part of the process of *becoming*. As such, it is just as much productive as it is destructive. Although the manufacture of façades has often

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<sup>113</sup> Sergei Nicholaievich Zolotko, interview by author, Kiev, Ukraine, September 10, 2006.

<sup>114</sup> Mikhail Sergeyevich Blinnikov, interview by author, St. Cloud, Minnesota, April 3, 2006.

<sup>115</sup> See Victor Pelevin, *Generation P* (Moscow: Vagrius Publishing House, 2000).

been negative, the core of this practice often contains something unexpectedly positive. Russia's modern identity has been characterized by the fact that it has tended to define itself as a country that *intends* to be something else. However, despite the dismal historical record and the cynical responses it has provoked, what one finds ultimately in Russia's prolific construction of simulacra is not a sham culture suspended over an absence. Instead, through *pokazukha*, Russians actively cycle, respond to, and transform into hard cultural currency what they appropriate from abroad.<sup>116</sup> As this thesis suggests, Castro's *pokazukha*, in turn, was appropriated from the Soviets.

Although *pokazukha* goes hand-in-hand with propaganda, one is not reducible to the other. At the beginning of the Soviet era, the term '*propaganda*' [пропаганда] in the Russian language did not bear any negative meaning. It simply meant "dissemination of ideas." However, as printed propaganda consistently glossed over the gloomy reality of Soviet life, the Soviet people increasingly assigned a negative set of connotations to the term. *Pokazukha* went through a similar progression. By the end of the Soviet era, both terms referred to the process of revealing something that was not there. However, *pokazukha* has some substantiality, while propaganda has none of its own. *Pokazukha* builds a façade of what is or should be (and is not) and propaganda tells its readers about those glorious façades, giving them substantiality in the minds of the public.

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<sup>116</sup> Seifrid, "Illusion," 214.

Prince Potemkin's practices during the Tauride Tour incorporated both of these trends—making façades and propagandizing them. In twentieth-century verbal usage, *pokazukha* and propaganda were essentially opposite sides of a single coin. Prior to the late Soviet period, when propaganda took on its negative connotations, "pokazukha" was the term used to describe Potemkin-like façade building if one wanted to denigrate the process, undermining its reality; propaganda was the term used if one wanted to glorify the façade and give it substance in the minds of the public.

#### Bolshevik Agitprop

Now the new delegates were beginning to arrive. They were royally welcomed and feted. They were taken to show schools, children's homes, colonies, and model factories. It was the traditional Potemkin villages that were shown the visitors. They were graciously received and 'talked to' by Lenin and Trotsky, treated to theatres, concerts, ballets, excursions, and military parades. In short, nothing was left undone to put the delegates into a frame of mind favorable to the great plan that was to be revealed to them at the Red Trade Union and the Third International Congresses.

—Emma Goldman, 1920<sup>117</sup>

In the twentieth century, both before and after the Revolution of 1917, Russian *pokazukha* and propaganda were codified as part of the new Marxist-Leninist strategy of world revolution. The leaders of the Russian Revolution utilized concepts from the traditions of both *pokazukha* and propaganda, fusing them together to form the

<sup>117</sup> Emma Goldman, "Travelling Salesmen of the Revolution," in *My Disillusionment in Russia* (New York: Doubleday, 1923), Chapter XIX. Marxists Internet Archive, <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/goldman/works/1920s/disillusionment/index.htm>



strategies of Soviet "Agitprop." The term was a shortened form of a phrase pioneered by Georgi Plekhanov, one of the first leaders of the Russian Communist movement.

In 1883, Plekhanov wrote:

As Heine said, 'New time needs a new garment/For the job it's got to do'...The industrial workers, who are more developed and have higher requirements and a broader outlook than the peasantry, will join our revolutionary intelligentsia in its struggle against absolutism, and when they have won political freedom they will organize into a workers' socialist party whose task will be to begin systematic propaganda of socialism among the peasantry. We say *systematic propaganda* because isolated opportunities of propaganda must not be missed...[systematic propaganda] is the diversified work of propaganda and agitation.<sup>118</sup>

Thus, in revolutionary Russia, the concepts encompassed by the phrase *agitatsii i propagandy* [агитации и пропаганды], which translates simply as "agitation and propaganda", became the word "agitprop"—the official, positive word for *pokazukha*. Agitprop was systematized by the leaders of the Communist movement—most importantly by Vladimir Lenin. An examination of Lenin's early writings on the instrumentalities of politics exposes what the Bolsheviks would later turn into a powerful branch of the Soviet government.<sup>119</sup> In one of his first major printed works, "What is to be Done?" (1902), Lenin asserted (although he never used the negative term in his writings) that to be a revolutionary was to practice *pokazukha*:

To be fully prepared for his task, the worker-revolutionary must likewise become a professional revolutionary...[This] must in Russia

<sup>118</sup> Georgi Plekhanov, 1883, *Georgi Plekhanov: Selected Philosophical Works*, vol. 1 (New York: Progress Publishers, 1974), 484. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>119</sup> Lenin's earlier works are important keys to understanding later Bolshevik practices, for they laid out tactics and strategies in clear, concise terms. In contrast, later Bolshevik writings were affected by the burdens and risks of power; many were also warped by propagandist tendencies.

be done deliberately and systematically by our organizations...the working-class masses [must] promote from their ranks not only an increasing number of talented agitators, but also talented organizers, propagandists, and 'practical workers' in the best sense of the term.<sup>120</sup>

To differentiate agitation from propaganda, Lenin wrote the following:

[We think] (with Plekhanov, and with all the leaders of the international working class movement) that the propagandist, dealing with, say, the question of unemployment, must explain the capitalistic nature of crises, the cause of their inevitability in modern society, the necessity for the transformation of this society into a socialist society, etc. In a word, he must present 'many ideas', so many, indeed, that they will be understood as an integral whole only by a (comparatively) few persons. The agitator, however, speaking on the same subject, will take as an illustration a fact that is most glaring and most widely known to his audience, say, the death of an unemployed worker's family from starvation, the growing impoverishment, etc., and, utilizing this fact, known to all, will direct his efforts to presenting a single idea to the 'masses', e.g., the senselessness of the contradiction between the increase of wealth and the increase of poverty; he will strive to rouse discontent and indignation among the masses against this crying injustice, leaving a more complete explanation of this contradiction to the propagandist.<sup>121</sup>

In support of the mission of Communist agitprop in Russia, Lenin concluded "What is to be Done?" with a strong argument for the establishment of a Revolutionary propaganda newspaper. He wrote:

This newspaper would become part of an enormous pair of smith's bellows that would fan every spark of the class struggle and of popular indignation into a general conflagration. Around what is in itself still a very innocuous and very small, but regular and common, effort, in the full sense of the word, a regular army of tried fighters would systematically gather and receive their training. On the ladders and scaffolding of this general organizational structure there would soon

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<sup>120</sup> Vladimir Ilyich Ulianov-Lenin, "What is to be Done?" in *Lenin: Collected Works*, vol. 5 (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1961), 452-453.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 398-399.

develop and come to the fore Social-Democratic [champions] from among our revolutionaries and Russian [heroes] from among our workers, who would take their place at the head of the mobilized army and rouse the whole people to settle accounts with the shame and the curse of Russia. That is what we should dream of!<sup>122</sup>

The Russian Communists established several newspapers in the decades following, but none survived Tsarist intervention until Leon Trotsky established *Pravda* in 1908. Until the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, the editors and writers of *Pravda* did their best to make Lenin's propagandist dream a reality.<sup>123</sup> During Tsarist censorship, *Pravda* survived because it was published abroad and smuggled into the country—a tactic Castro would later adapt and employ when he used U.S. journalists to overcome Batista's censorship.

Agitprop techniques, based on the early writings of Lenin and modified by Bolshevik political needs during the Russian civil war, were solidified in the 1920s. Prior to 1920, agitprop activities included public spectacles, parades, monuments, kiosks, posters, films, and agit-stations. The agit-stations, located at major railroad stations, boasted libraries of propaganda material, lecture halls, and theaters. During the civil war, agitprop was disseminated to rural Russians, provincial cities, and national republics by agit-trains and agit-ships. These trains and ships functioned like moving posters with exterior decorations of heroic figures and folk art motifs accompanied by simple slogans. They brought revolutionary books, pamphlets, newspapers, posters, newsreels, and short propaganda films, along with skilled

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 498.

<sup>123</sup> *Pravda*, "About Us," <http://english.pravda.ru/about/>

agitators.<sup>124</sup> Agitprop in practice definitely followed the *pokazukha* tradition of Prince

Potemkin. As one commentator put it:

All of it recalled the Potemkin villages... This propagandistic campaign, in all its manifold expressions, was designed to establish a double façade, at home and abroad, behind which the horrors and deprivation of the civil war could remain unnoticed, or at least be diminished. Abroad, the image of Soviet Russia as a socialist utopia was disseminated by the Comintern; at home, the concept of a Leninist salvation was advanced with missionary fervor.<sup>125</sup>

At the Second Congress of the Comintern in 1920, Lenin advocated for worldwide propagandistic utilization of the "consciousness, will, passions and imagination" of "dozens of millions who have been whipped into action by the fiercest of class struggle." Linking agitprop to "the main tasks faced by contemporary communism in Western Europe and America," Lenin asked that "the interests of the revolution—propagandistic, agitational, organizational" be "gauged realistically," reacting to local conditions. Responding to criticism of his desire to export agitprop worldwide, he said:

Even if the situation is non-revolutionary, the Second International is in error and carries a heavy responsibility if it is really unwilling to organize revolutionary propaganda and agitation, since, as has been proved by the entire history of the Bolshevik Party, revolutionary propaganda can and should be conducted even in a situation that is not revolutionary. The difference between the socialists and the

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<sup>124</sup> Nina Tumarkin, *Lenin Lives! The Lenin Cult in Soviet Russia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983). See also Peter Kenez, *The Birth of the Propaganda State: Soviet Methods of Mass Mobilization, 1917-1929* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985); and Richard Stites, *Russian Popular Culture: Entertainment and Society since 1900* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

<sup>125</sup> Martin Ebon, *The Soviet Propaganda Machine* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1987), 24, 22.



Communists consists in the former refusing to act in the way *we* act in any situation, i.e., conduct revolutionary work.<sup>126</sup>

The Bolshevik leadership printed and distributed works on agitprop that circulated the world over—including Cuba—during the next several decades. It was from these works and the example of the Russian revolution that Castro learned the agitprop methods he would later put to use in his own revolution.

In August of 1920, the Bolsheviks created a powerful branch of the Soviet Communist Party, officially called the Department for Agitation and Propaganda, which would carry out Bolshevik strategies of agitation and propaganda and coordinate the propaganda work of all Soviet institutions. The department was originally divided into five subsections, the two most important being the agitation subsections, which directed propaganda campaigns and supervised the local press.

The political education subsection developed curriculum for Party schools. The three remaining subsections published Central Committee works, addressed problems with the distribution of propaganda in literature, and coordinated work among the parties of national minorities. The structure of the department reveals that:

By way of contrast with western usage, Soviet writers, nurtured in a tradition of what one might call political messianism, have tended to use the term 'propaganda' in a highly positive sense, as more or less equivalent to education.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Lenin, "The Verbatim Report of the Second Congress of the Communist International," in *Lenin: Collected Works*, vol. 31 (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1961), 213-263. Emphasis added.

<sup>127</sup> Barghoorn, *Soviet Foreign Propaganda*, 10.

After the civil war, and throughout the Soviet period, Moscow continued to export propaganda to the countryside via radio, traveling exhibitions, posters, literature, and film. Like other Central Committee sections, the agitprop department's organization stabilized by 1948, and remained so until the collapse of the Soviet Union. However, in a government that became rigid and unresponsive in many ways, the agitprop department stayed remarkably flexible and responsive to the political needs of the moment. The propagandists seemed to have internalized Lenin's 1920 admonition "to link the strictest devotion to the ideas of communism with the ability to effect all the necessary practical compromises, tacks, conciliatory maneuvers, zigzags, retreats and so on."<sup>128</sup> As a consequence of its flexibility (and therefore its continuing effectiveness), the Soviet agitprop department passed through several clearly defined periods of tactical adjustments.

In 1921, Soviet domestic issues, particularly a severe grain shortage, led the Kremlin to seek economic and diplomatic support in 'capitalist' countries. At the same time, however, the agitprop department intensified its activity in those same countries, sending agitators like Fabio Grobart (the Comintern's agent to Cuba, discussed above), into countries all over the world. These Comintern agents were invariably supported by Soviet funds and propaganda. In a bold Potemkin-like stance, Lenin's Commissar for Foreign Affairs attempted to maintain the fiction that the government of the

<sup>129</sup> Eban, *The Soviet Propaganda Machine*, 10.

<sup>130</sup> George F. Kennan, *Russian and the West under Lenin and Stalin* (Boston: Signet, 1960).

<sup>128</sup> Lenin, "Left Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder," in *Lenin: Collected Works*, vol. 31 (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1961), 116-117.

U.S.S.R. could not be held responsible for the machinations of Comintern agitators.<sup>129</sup>

This is what George F. Kennan would later call:

that ambiguity and contradictoriness of Soviet policy which has endured to the present day [1960]: the combination of the doctrine of co-existence—the claim, that is, to the right to have normal outward relations with capitalist countries—with the most determined effort behind the scenes to destroy the western governments and the social and political systems supporting them.<sup>130</sup>

Fidel Castro would later make good use of this same strategy, visiting the United States on a propaganda tour in 1959 while he simultaneously—and secretly—cemented a relationship with its arch-nemesis, the U.S.S.R. (Fidel's "Operation Truth", described below). After Lenin's death, agitprop took on a new dimension abroad, with the Soviets developing front organizations and cultural conduits like the World Youth Congress (discussed below), organizations which enlisted the services of well-meaning supporters for seemingly uncontroversial charitable and politico-cultural aims. In reality, they were elaborate façades for the continued work of Soviet agitprop.<sup>131</sup>

When Stalin announced the first Five Year Plan in 1928, the agitprop machinery changed gears to support "socialism in one country", and the goal was to build a façade of success and prosperity. Worldwide depression, hidden in the U.S.S.R. but very much in the open everywhere else, made the illusion of success in

<sup>129</sup> Ebon, *The Soviet Propaganda Machine*, 10.

<sup>130</sup> George F. Kennan, *Russian and the West under Lenin and Stalin* (Boston: Signet, 1960), 166.

<sup>131</sup> Ebon, *The Soviet Propaganda Machine*, 10.

the Soviet Union easier to maintain. Thus, Soviet agitprop made impressive inroads among western intellectuals in the 1930s.<sup>132</sup>

Stalin's actions in the late 1930s and the issues surrounding WWII caused dizzying shifts and contradictions in Soviet agitprop. During this time, what was portrayed as the 'stable and powerful' Communist leadership executed most of its heroes. Nazi Germany was portrayed as a horrible threat, then as an anti-imperialist intermediary, and finally as 'enemy number one'. Britain and the United States went from first-enemy status, to first-allies, and finally back to enemy status. Through it all, however, agitprop was always ready to assist in creating the façades of the new party line—whatever that happened to be. In fact, not every shift or demand caused serious issues for the agitprop department—old methods often worked on new problems. For example, after falling out of use in the 1930s, agit-trains were reinstituted during World War II to convey propaganda to forces at the front.<sup>133</sup>

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, many of the 'underdeveloped' countries of the world were still held firmly within the sphere of European or North American economic, political, and ideological influence. The continued Communist demand for total power, and the complicated and unfamiliar ideology in which it was expressed (especially in the Stalinist period), compounded the difficulties Soviet agitprop faced in access to, and impact on, the world audience. "It is also probably true that the conspiratorial Stalin, given more to the use of physical force than to the arts of

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 11-12.

<sup>133</sup> Stites, *Russian Popular Culture*, 37-63.



persuasion, was considerably inferior both to Lenin and to Khrushchev as a propagandist."<sup>134</sup>

However, Stalin did develop certain innovative agitprop techniques that laid the groundwork for the achievements of his successors, including Khrushchev and Castro. Stalin systematically exploited exchange programs for propaganda purposes, inviting countless delegations from all over the world—and sending agitprop agents to the countries agreeing to exchange. For Stalin, such exchanges were "the best, most forceful and active propaganda for the Soviet system against the capitalist system."<sup>135</sup> Such a program solidified Soviet influence over Raul Castro (discussed below). Stalin also pioneered the use of interviews with foreign correspondents as an instrument of Soviet agitprop. By skillful timing and prudence in granting interviews, Stalin often succeeded in dominating the headlines in Paris, London, New York, and around the world.<sup>136</sup> It was this propaganda technique, inherited from Stalin, that Fidel Castro would use in 1959 to overcome Batista's censorship and project his own heroic image to the world (discussed below).

From Lenin to Khrushchev, the leaders of the Soviet Union and their disciples abroad utilized concepts from the Russian traditions of both *pokazukha* and propaganda, fusing them together to form the official strategies of agitprop. Even if

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<sup>134</sup> Barghoorn, *Soviet Foreign Propaganda*, 25.

<sup>135</sup> Josef V. Stalin, *Сочинения* [Writings] vol. 7 (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1947), 291-292.

<sup>136</sup> Barghoorn, *Soviet Foreign Propaganda*, 25.

Castro did not read Lenin's works (and this would be contrary to what Castro himself claims and many historians and witnesses corroborate), including "What is to be Done," prior to 1958, many of the Cuban's agitprop techniques so closely resemble those of the Soviets that it is difficult to argue that he was not affected by the Soviet example. Indeed, this thesis argues that he was profoundly affected.

Although deception was commonplace in Cuban politics prior to Fidel, it was amateurish and unsophisticated, as the examples above illustrate. Cuba did not have the tradition of *pokazukha* that Russia possessed. Fidel and his cohorts were the first to fully utilize organized agitprop on Cuban soil. Robert E. Quirk, expert on Latin American history, wrote the most in-depth biography of Fidel Castro to date. He is not alone in his opinion that, "Fidel Castro may have been a quick learner, but he was never an original, creative thinker."<sup>137</sup> However, Fidel did masterfully use the techniques of agitprop. Examples of Soviet-style Cuban *pokazukha* are discussed in the next chapter.

When Castro's campaign for power was reduced to its lowest point, in 1958, his rebellion's success seemed nearly impossible. He was cut off from the Cuban people by government censorship of the press. The world thought he was dead, his

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<sup>137</sup> Quirk, *Fidel Castro*, 21. See also Jose Luis Llovio-Menendez, *Insider: My Hidden Life as a Revolutionary in Cuba* (Toronto: Bantam Books, 1988), 56.

## Chapter V

### POKAZUKHA IN CUBA

Those who thought we were just ordinary guerrillas, those who thought we knew nothing but the use of firearms, those who thought that after our military victories they would crush us in the field of information, and crush us in the field of public opinion, have found that the Cuban revolution also knows how to fight and win battles in that field.

—Fidel Castro, January 21, 1959<sup>138</sup>

Castro's rise to power in Cuba, which he carried out against all odds, has been a matter of much speculation. However, Fidel Castro brilliantly employed Russian-style *pokazukha*—in his own country and abroad—to achieve his goals. His use of propaganda, especially as magnified by the U.S. media, was undoubtedly one of the most important components of the extraordinary campaign that propelled Castro from an obscure existence as a rebel hiding in the mountains to the 'Maximum Leader' of the Cuban people. His use of *pokazukha* allowed him to both manipulate members of the foreign press and to maintain an anti-Communist façade long enough to stave off North American interference until he could garner support from the Soviet Union.

When Castro's campaign for power was reduced to its lowest point, in 1958, his rebellion's success seemed nearly impossible. He was cut off from the Cuban people by government censorship of the press. The world thought he was dead, his

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<sup>138</sup> F. Castro, "Speech to Havana Rally," Jan. 21, 1959. Castro Speech Database, <http://lanic.utexas.edu/la/cb/cuba/castro/1959/19590121>

rebellion quelled; this was when Castro drew on his propaganda training and sent for a foreign journalist. Castro and his men then used *pokazukha* to convince the reporter of their revolutionary *bona-fides*. After interviewing Castro and appraising the chances of the rebellion, the reporter wrote a series of articles for the *New York Times*—one of the most well-read and respected newspapers in the world—which proved that Castro was alive, broke the censorship of his adversary, and showed that a rebellion truly did exist. After his takeover of the Cuban government, Castro then embarked on a tour of North America that the Cubans mockingly called "Operation Truth." It was similar in many ways to Catherine's Tauride Tour. The goal of the operation was to conquer public opinion in the United States until Castro's lieutenants could secure the help of the Soviet Union.

The reporter who helped propel Castro to power was Herbert L. Matthews, and his printed interviews with Fidel—that which Matthews called "The Cuban Story"—changed history. In the words of Matthews himself,

Journalists rarely make history. This is not our function. We are the chroniclers of our times; at least we provide the material for history.

It was an accident that my interview with Fidel Castro in the Sierra Maestra...should have proved so important. There was a story to be got, a censorship to be broken. I got it and did it—and it so happens that neither Cuba nor the United States is going to be the same again.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> Herbert L. Matthews, *The Cuban Story* (New York: George Braziller, 1961), 1.



This paper does not need to prove that Matthew's story was important to Castro's rebellion.<sup>140</sup> Instead, it will treat more formidable—and more controversial—questions.

First to be discussed will be the actions and motivations of the principle characters—Castro and Matthews—which gave rise to the story. Much dispute has arisen over the circumstances surrounding Matthews' interview. Did Castro intend to deceive Matthews? Was Matthews deceived? The answer to these questions is simple: Castro intended to deceive Matthews, and the reporter was deceived because he wanted to be—he wanted Castro to be a good leader with a powerful army. If he had reported about a tiny, bedraggled little band headed by a Communist radical, his story would not have made the headlines and Matthews would not have achieved international notoriety. As is usually the case, *pokazukha* and propaganda work best when they have a willing audience.

Second, we will discover the significance of Castro's manipulation of Matthews. Although all historians of the Cuban Revolution recognize the prominence of Matthew's story, they do so because it disproved statements of Castro's death and broke Batista's censorship. While the article was certainly influential in these ways, it had other, more substantial effects. Matthew's article did more than break Batista's censorship; it shattered his credibility. For a short time, Castro, Matthews and the *New York Times* waged their own private propaganda battle against Batista. He lost that battle, and, partially because of that loss, he lost the war. The most important of

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<sup>140</sup> This fact is widely accepted by scholars of the Cuban Revolution.

all of "The Cuban Story's" effects was that, through Castro's shrewd *pokazukha* and Matthew's willing dissemination of it in the form of propaganda, the legend of Castro was born—a legend that still serves the aging dictator today, almost fifty years later. Before treating the above points, it is necessary to include some additional background on Cuba, Fulgencio Batista, Fidel Castro, and the Cuban Revolution.

### Fulgencio and Fidel

This time, luckily for Cuba, the Revolution will truly arrive at its goal. It will not be like '98, when the Americans came in and made themselves the owners here. It will not be like '33, when the people began to believe a revolution was in the making and Batista came and betrayed it, took power, and installed a ferocious dictatorship. It will not be like '44, when the multitudes ardently believed that at last the people had taken power, but those who had taken power were the crooks.

Neither crooks, nor traitors, no interventionists. This time, yes, it is a revolution!

—Fidel Castro, January 1959<sup>141</sup>

Cuba in the 1950's was ready for rebellion. Ruled by the cruel dictator Fulgencio Batista, many of the people of Cuba wanted change. They had endured decades of governmental tyranny and corruption, and unrest was coming to a head. The Cuban republic combined ineffectiveness with corruption. During the first half of the twentieth century, one leader after another entered the Presidential office with promises on his lips, only to leave a few years later with money in his pockets. Some of these men were brutal; some were not. All grew fat on bribes while their nation

<sup>141</sup> F. Castro, speech in Santiago, January 2, 1959, quoted in Martin, *Early Fidel*, 234.

languished. All were supported, in one way or another, by the North Americans. The last of these politicians was Fulgencio Batista.<sup>142</sup>

As has been mentioned, Batista took over the Cuban government, this time as a dictator, in 1952. Easily overthrowing the old regime, Batista immediately began working towards a political situation that would give him respectability and stabilize the political order through a broad consensus.<sup>143</sup> He found this to be an impossible task; for, although he had no trouble finding people to work directly for his government, he was disappointed by how few *respected* citizens were willing to enter electoral politics under his control—for to do so would render them puppets. He would later write how what he called the "intolerance of the opposition political organizations" had been a major factor in his government's ineffectiveness.<sup>144</sup>

As a result of the opposition to his brutal and corrupt policies, Batista had few respectable political leaders working with him during his second reign. Instead, he ruled by force. Partially as a result of Batista's violent repression of his political antagonists, partially due to his almost complete lack of effective public relations or propaganda, he never succeeded in establishing a sense of respectable legality for himself and his government.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> Detzer, *The Brink*, 19.

<sup>143</sup> Philip W. Bonsal, *Cuba, Castro, and the United States* (Pittsburg: University of Pittsburg Press, 1971), 11.

<sup>144</sup> Fulgencio Batista, *The Growth and Decline of the Cuban Republic* (Greenwich, CT: Devin-Adair, 1964), 39.

<sup>145</sup> Bonsal, *Cuba, Castro*, 11.

His political opponents, who were tending more towards armed insurrection than peaceful compromise, plagued Batista. As a thinly veiled propaganda stunt, Batista held elections on November 1, 1954. Since he ran unopposed, he was inaugurated as President in 1955. Later that year, in another inept public relations maneuver, Batista signed a general amnesty for all political prisoners, including Fidel Castro, who had been imprisoned after the Moncada incident (described below).<sup>146</sup>

Batista's regime was decadent, his power unstable. He ruled with the bureaucracy, the army, and with the support of his own people in office, not through popular support. His government came apart in the latter part of the fifties. Few countries were headed by so greedy or cruel a dictator. During his second time as ruler, Batista's base of popular support was surprisingly small. Cuba boasted, by Latin American standards, an increasingly sophisticated urban middle class that became more and more intolerant of corruption as time wore on. That Batista's government was crooked and of dubious loyalty was known both in Havana and in Washington.<sup>147</sup>

One important facet of Batista's government was that he worked with the North American mob, who themselves had a large stake in Cuban politics. Batista established lasting relationships with numerous members of organized crime from the United States, including Frank Costello, Vito Genovese, Santo Trafficante Jr., Moe Dalitz, and Meyer Lansky. During Batista's reign, Havana became known as "the

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 11-13.

<sup>147</sup> David Halberstam, *The Fifties* (New York: Villard Books, 1993), 714.



Latin Las Vegas." The casinos, brothels, and clubs that the mafia operated in Havana were an important source of income both for Cuba and for themselves. Batista was quick to get in on these profits, setting up a network of secret police, military officers, and bagmen, who all helped to make transactions of mob money easy and safe.

Batista rewarded many with large bonuses and punished many with torture or death.

His regime "resembled the organization of a large criminal mob more than it did a traditional government."<sup>148</sup>

Batista himself resembled a mafia boss, for he was a man from the lower classes who had risen to incredible wealth through brutal manipulation of his society's weaknesses. Batista survived as long as he retained the support of powerful mobsters and 'respectable' executives like those who ran the United Fruit Company. Under their auspices, the U.S. continued unqualified support of Batista's regime until 1957, when officials in Washington began to push for a more liberal and democratic government for Havana. A House Foreign Affairs subcommittee finally made a recommendation to stop military aid to Latin America. "The use by a regime of United States-supplied armaments in civil strife has garnered us the wrath of people (not only in the country affected but throughout Latin America) who tend to equate our armaments with the regime using them."<sup>149</sup> The termination of North American aid, coming as it did in mid-1957, weakened Batista's defenses just as Castro prepared to attack them. This

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> Paul H. Nitze, "'Impossible' Job of Secretary of State," *New York Times*, February 24, 1957: 12.

was another propaganda battle that Batista fought and lost before he even engaged his true enemy—Fidel Castro.

On the morning of March 10, 1952, just after Fulgencio Batista staged his coup, seizing power and forcing the former President to escape in disguise, Fidel Castro composed and distributed his first real political treatise, entitled "Revolucion, No Zarpazo!" [Not Revolution, a Clean Sweep!]. It was a clear challenge to Batista and ended with these words, taken from the Cuban national anthem, "To live in chains is to live in shame." It was written in the romantic style of Marti and was an indication that Castro was "already thinking in a very Cuban tradition that his own destiny might be to give his life in a heroic youthful struggle."<sup>150</sup>

Several passages from this treatise are recognizable or suggestive of Marxist-Leninist themes. "Fulgencio Batista!" Castro wrote, "You speak of progress, and yet you align yourself with powerful Cuban and foreign interests... You are a faithful dog of imperialism." Castro went on to parrot the Marxist dictum that when ideas take possession of the masses, they become a material force: "For those who have blind faith in the masses, for those who believe in the irreducible force of great ideas, the indecision of leaders will not be reason for weakness or loss of heart, because the vacuum will soon be filled by the uncorrupted that arise from the ranks."<sup>151</sup>

During the next few months, Fidel was active not only in the Orthodox Party but also in other revolutionary activities, including those sponsored by the Communist

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<sup>150</sup> Bourne, *Fidel*, 65.

<sup>151</sup> F. Castro, quoted in Martin, *Early Fidel*, 106-7.

Party. In February of 1953, his brother Raul Castro took part in the Soviet-sponsored World Youth Congress in Vienna and then visited Romania and Czechoslovakia. Upon his return in June, Raul joined the *Juventud Socialista*, the youth wing of the Cuban Communist Party. That same month, the Castro brothers began to make plans for an attack on Batista's government. Since their group needed weapons, they decided to target the Moncada barracks in the city of Santiago (Oriente Province's capital), which housed varied armaments.

Even if it ended in failure, Fidel knew the attack would have symbolic and heroic value (*pokazukha* value) because of the province's historical importance. Santiago, called "Cuba" by the people of Oriente, was steeped in the history of the island—especially its myths and legends. It was one of the most revered cities in the Americas. Jose Marti and Antonio Maceo had both fought there. Independence from Spain was consummated in Santiago. "Castro recognized the importance of symbols, and he was prepared to create more for his revolution...It was his Santiago, his history. They would be his myths."<sup>152</sup>

Castro gathered his troops the night before the attack and uttered these stirring words:

Comrades, tomorrow we may win or we may lose, but in the end this movement will triumph. If we win, tomorrow will fulfill what Marti aspired to. If we don't, the gesture will have to set an example for the people of Cuba.<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> Quirk, *Fidel Castro*, 51-52.

<sup>153</sup> F. Castro, quoted in Carlos Franqui, *Diary of the Cuban Revolution* (New York: Viking Press, 1976), 57.

The attack on Moncada failed miserably.<sup>154</sup> Castro escaped, but was captured on August first and placed in a civil prison where he remained until the general amnesty of 1955. Haydee Santamaria, one of the two women to take part in the Moncada attack and later an upper-level member of Castro's movement, recorded her feelings after the incident:

We had been neither dead nor alive. Now we broke free of that thing—you must experience it to know it—that is neither life nor death. And from that moment the question whether we lived or died no longer mattered. Fidel was alive. Moncada lived! I was a prisoner, shackled and manacled, and I felt stronger and freer than those in the robes of justice who were going to judge me...As to the transformation that came over me from the moment I accepted his leadership, it was because Fidel was Fidel, Fidel, Fidel!<sup>155</sup>

Santamaria's thoughts and actions were typical of the *Fidelistas*. Their group was now called the 26th of July Movement (after the date of the failed Moncada attempt), and it was gaining force countrywide. Castro was sent to prison on the Isle of Pines, and although his time in prison was uneventful for him personally, it was not an unimportant time for his revolution. The most significant event that occurred during his imprisonment was the publication of the speech Castro gave before the court that sentenced him to nineteen years because of the Moncada attack. A masterful piece of propaganda, it began:

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<sup>154</sup> Geyer, *Guerrilla Prince*, 117.

<sup>155</sup> Haydee Santamaria, *Moncada* (Senacus, NJ: Lyle Staurt, 1980), 61, 94.



Honorable Judges: Never has a lawyer had to practice his profession under such difficult conditions; never has such an overwhelming accumulation of irregularities been committed against the accused.<sup>156</sup>

He went on to give his interpretation of the events of Moncada and of the atrocities of the Batista regime that prompted the attack. The speech ended with these powerful words,

As for me, I know that jail will be as hard as it has ever been for anyone, filled with threats, with vileness, as I do not fear the fury of the miserable tyrant who snuffed out the life of seventy brothers of mine. Condemn me, it does not matter. History will absolve me!<sup>157</sup>

Although Castro was convicted, he was not idle during his imprisonment. He wrote his speech down using onion and lime juice as invisible ink between the lines of ordinary letters, which the recipients heated until the lines were visible. His followers—primarily Haydee Santamaria—had them printed in the form of a propaganda pamphlet in the Leninist style, and distributed them.<sup>158</sup> The ideas put forth in this pamphlet were much more significant to the July 26th Movement than the relatively short time that Castro spent in prison. "The ideological basis of the movement remained the ideas articulated in 'History Will Absolve Me.'"<sup>159</sup> Several leading Cuban Communists were arrested for distributing this pamphlet and charged

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<sup>156</sup> F. Castro, *The Selected Works of Fidel Castro*, Rolando E. Bonachea and Nelson P. Valdes, eds., vol.1, *Revolutionary Struggle, 1947-1958* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1972), 164-221.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

<sup>158</sup> Santamaria, *Moncada*, 74-77.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid., 90.

with circulating "malicious propaganda".<sup>160</sup> As a military campaign, Moncada was a failure; as a propaganda campaign, it was a resounding success. For the first time in his life, Fidel Castro had expanded his reputation beyond the city of Havana. People began to recognize his name from one end of the republic to the other.<sup>161</sup>

After his release on May 15, 1955, Castro immersed himself in opposition activities, but found them disorganized and disheartening. He was harried by Batista's men and feared assassination. On July 7, 1955, he left Cuba for Mexico. He gave reporters an ominous declaration at the airport:

I am leaving Cuba because all doors of peaceful struggle have been closed to me...I believe the hour has come to take our rights and not to beg for them, to fight instead of pleading for them...From trips such as this, one does not return, or else one returns with the tyranny beheaded at one's feet.<sup>162</sup>

Once in Mexico, Castro met up with his brother Raul and some other *Fidelistas* who "were already engaged in preparing to invade Cuba from Mexican territory."<sup>163</sup> The group continued to practice militarily, doing drills while Fidel, in good agitprop tradition, "scoured Miami, New York, and Chicago raising money from other exiled compatriots."<sup>164</sup> After several setbacks caused by the Mexican police, Castro managed to get a boat and arms for his men. The yacht was named *Granma*;

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<sup>160</sup> Quirk, *Fidel Castro*, 56.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

<sup>162</sup> F. Castro, quoted in Martin, *Early Fidel*, 157-172.

<sup>163</sup> Enrique Meneses, *Fidel Castro* (New York: Norton, 1993), 41-42.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

and, though its manufacturer intended it to comfortably accommodate only ten to twelve people, he stripped it of comforts and dangerously loaded it with more than eighty rebels and their ammunition. On November 25, 1956, they set sail for Cuba's shores, arriving on December second seven miles from their intended landing point.

Che Guevara, a leading figure of the revolution in Cuba and close personal friend of both Fidel and Raul Castro, was one of the men on *Granma*. He later wrote that:

We had reached Cuba after a seven-day voyage across the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean Sea, without food, plagued by seasickness and aboard a vessel far from seaworthy...The experience had left a deep mark upon our troop of rookies who did not know the meaning of combat.<sup>165</sup>

The bedraggled "rookies" then had to begin the long trek to the Sierra Maestra Mountains. Thanks to the efforts of a spy, Batista's men knew of their location. On December fifth, Batista's army ambushed Castro's little band in an area called Alegria de Pio, only twenty-two miles from their landing point. During this altercation, Batista's army either killed or took prisoner all but seventeen of Castro's men. Of the handful that escaped, many were wounded. Even worse, they were split into three groups, each heading in a different direction. Among the wounded was Guevara, who wrote of the attack:

I cannot remember exactly what happened. I felt the bitterness of defeat and I was sure I was going to die. We walked until darkness made it impossible to go on, when we decided to go to sleep, huddled together in a heap. We were starved and thirsty and the mosquitoes

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<sup>165</sup> Ernesto Che Guevara, *Episodes of the Revolutionary War* (New York: International Publishers, 1968), 13.

increased our misery. This was our baptism of fire on December 5, 1956. It was the beginning of what would later become the Rebel Army.<sup>166</sup>

From this devastating beginning followed a series of small victories and narrow escapes. The remaining men were reunited with Castro in the Sierra Maestra later that month through the help of peasant sympathizers. They spent the holidays in hiding, moving from house to house gaining strength and nerve, and slowly adding new recruits. By the middle of January, 1957, the "Rebel Army" had grown to thirty-three members. Fidel decided the time had come for them to see some more action, and so he led them back down to the coast to attack the small government garrison at La Plata. The battle was a success, and the rebels gained much-needed ammunition and weapons. Guevara wrote, "Our victory had an electrifying effect. It was like a clarion call announcing that the Rebel Army really existed and was ready to fight."<sup>167</sup> At this point, Fidel and his group were little more than bandits, and Guevara's commentary is an excellent example of *pokazukha*.

Batista's forces struck back repeatedly. Two weeks after La Plata, the rebels were hit with a surprise air attack that nearly killed them all. Then, just a week later, there was another surprise attack that claimed several more rebel lives. Following these defeats, Castro decided to retreat to the highest reaches of the mountains—the El Lomon region—to settle and regroup. The movement had once again shrunk in numbers. In the words of Guevara, "There were then 18 of us. This was the Re-

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<sup>166</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid., 17.



unified Revolutionary Army on February 12, 1957."<sup>168</sup> The group settled "in a thicket of woods near a stream, on a plantation...The little thicket of woods was the scene of...interesting events. For the first time we were to be interviewed by a reporter, and a foreign reporter at that. This man was Herbert Matthews."<sup>169</sup>

After the Moncada incident, Batista heavily censored the press. *Diario de la Marina*, a Cuban newspaper, published the following, "As a consequence of Sunday's tragic events, the government has begun to apply the law on Public Order which imposes censorship of the press."<sup>170</sup> The law on Public Order provided for two years imprisonment for those who disseminated, published, or transmitted rumors that were seen as degrading to the peace, public order, the stability of the powers of state or the reputation of the nation or government. Batista's censorship proceeded under these auspices. This tyrannical censorship drove Castro to use the foreign press. One contemporary newspaper editorial described the situation:

The government and the armed forces have hung a curtain of fire and censorship between the zone of operations and the Cuban people. No journalist has been able to pass through it...The Cuban press, which has so wisely and responsibly confronted these unfortunate circumstances, does not deserve this.<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., 36-37.

<sup>170</sup> *Diario de la Marina* (Havana), July 28, 1953, 1, quoted in Carlos Ripoll, "The Press in Cuba, 1952-1960: Autocratic and Totalitarian Censorship," in William E. Ratliff, ed., *The Selling of Fidel Castro: The Media and the Cuban Revolution* (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1987), 88-89.

<sup>171</sup> *Bohemia* (Havana), December 16, 1956, 106, quoted in Ripoll, "The Press in Cuba," in Ratliff, *Fidel Castro*, 91.

In early January of 1957, government officials announced that the rebels had been vanquished and Castro slain. Left unchallenged, this lie could have destroyed the 26th of July Movement. The movement was centered on the person of Fidel—his death would have been a major blow. However, in a brilliant move, Castro sent for a foreign journalist, knowing that the truth, printed in a United States newspaper, would eventually reach the Cuban public. This was an historic decision. Fidel had learned from Stalin's example that interviews with foreign journalists could be quite powerful. In "What is to be Done?" Lenin had emphasized how vital the press was to revolutionary movements. As we have seen, Castro had likely read Lenin's text in college, and had become a journalist (of sorts) himself.

In the late 1940's he wrote articles under his middle name, Alejandro. At the University of Havana Law School, he was the co-editor of *La Accion*, a strongly anti-Batista newspaper. He had even contributed articles to *Bohemia*, the most respected periodical in Cuba. From the beginning, Castro knew how to play the press organ and play it well. The influence of the media on the perception of public figures has never been greater than in the case of revolutionary Cuba. If the role of the reporter is 'to get everybody' as has been advanced by the profession of journalism, then there was a singular lack of interest in 'getting' Mr. Castro. "In fact, the media have allowed themselves to be manipulated in Castro's case."<sup>172</sup> Certainly, the journalists involved in this manipulation were catering to America's fondness for 'underdogs'. However, in at least one case, a journalist allowed himself to be used. Through the efforts of

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<sup>172</sup> John R. Silber, quoted in Ratliff, *Fidel Castro*, 152.

Herbert Matthews, the *pokazukha* developed by Castro and his men was amplified, reaching audiences worldwide and helping to make a rebel into a dictator.

### Herbert and Fidel

His brown eyes flash; his intense face is pushed close to the listener, and the whispering voice, as in a stage play, lends a vivid sense of drama.

—Herbert Matthews<sup>173</sup>

In February 1957, Castro sent one of his most trusted men, Faustino Perez, to bring back a foreign journalist. Disguised as a farmer, he walked out of the Sierra Maestra and made his way to Havana, where he went directly to the home of Javier Pazos, the leader of the revolution in Havana at that time. Castro sent no details on how to set up an interview, for his position in the Sierra Maestra was a dangerous one, forcing him to do a lot of moving around. Since Fidel gave no clear instructions, Pazos went to his own father Felipe, asking him if he knew any foreign correspondents. There was only one that his father knew personally, Mrs. R. Hart (Ruby) Phillips of the *New York Times*. Faustino went to see her and explained his mission. Ruby immediately recognized that this job had to be done by an outsider, a person who would come in to get the story and go out to write it. Neither she nor any of the *Times* staff in Cuba fit the bill. This is where Herbert Matthews came in.<sup>174</sup>

<sup>173</sup> Herbert L. Matthews, *A World in Revolution: A Newspaperman's Memoir* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971), 3-4.

<sup>173</sup> Herbert L. Matthews, "Cuban Rebel is visited in Hideout," *New York Times*, February 24, 1957: 1.

<sup>174</sup> Matthews, *Cuban Story*, 1-21.

Matthews had led a life almost as interesting as that of Castro himself. Born in New York City on January 10, 1900, he grew up loving what he then considered to be "the glory" of war. When he was nine years old, his mother gave him a copy of Richard Harding Davis' *Soldiers of Fortune*, a book written by "one of the greatest war correspondents in American journalistic history."

I am not suggesting that my parents had me tagged for a future newspaperman, or that my mother could have foreseen what my career would be. The copy of *Soldiers of Fortune*, which I still possess, is nevertheless a symbol to me—or if I wanted to believe it, a freakish sign from Mercury that I was to be under his rule.<sup>175</sup>

At age eighteen, Matthews signed up for the U.S. Army and went off to join the forces battling in World War I, "to seek what is bombastically called glory, to fulfill all youthful dreams, to emulate in some modest way the heroes of old that I had been reading about all my life, to win the respect of others, not for any scholarly achievement, but for physical prowess—to be, in short, everything I had not been."<sup>176</sup>

None of these dreams were fated to come true, for Matthews arrived in France as the peace was being settled, "just too late to see any action."<sup>177</sup> After five months in France, Matthews returned home, was discharged from the army, and matriculated at Columbia University, where he earned a degree in Romance Languages. After his graduation in 1922, he answered a want ad signed "Publisher", hoping that it was a

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<sup>175</sup> Herbert L. Matthews, *A World in Revolution: A Newspaperman's Memoir* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971), 3-4.

<sup>176</sup> Herbert L. Matthews, *The Education of a Correspondent* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1946), 6.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.



book publisher. Much to his surprise, it was the publisher of the *New York Times*, and he found himself a secretary in the business department of the famous newspaper. "I got kicked into journalism through the back door, or entered it like a child who is tossed into the water and has no choice but to learn to swim."<sup>178</sup>

Matthews spent three "miserable" years in the business and accounting departments of the *Times*, and then he switched over to night work so he could return to Columbia University for a postgraduate course. He then won a fellowship that took him to Italy in 1925-1926. There he studied Dante, medieval history, and philosophy. Upon returning to the *Times*, Matthews was put into the news department as a secretary. Then, in 1929, he was sent on a five-month junket for newspaper reporters to Japan, sponsored by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.<sup>179</sup>

After his return from Asia, Matthews began to write as a full-fledged reporter for the *Times*. His first assignment was in Paris, covering foreign affairs. He was there from 1931 to 1935, when he was sent to cover the Italian attack on Abyssinia (in present-day Ethiopia)—his first assignment as a war correspondent. In Abyssinia, he witnessed his first action and reported on the battle of Amba Aradam.

Matthew's next assignment for the *Times* was as a war correspondent covering the Spanish Civil War. He arrived in Madrid in November of 1936 and was 'on the spot' until the end of the war. He wrote numerous articles at this time, and among his friends and colleagues were such legendary journalists as Ernest Hemingway. It was

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<sup>178</sup> Ibid., 6,4. *World in Revolution*, 222.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid., 15. *Cuban Story*, 10.

in Spain that Matthews learned firsthand the power a journalist can wield. Along with Ernest Hemingway and Sefton Delmer of the *London Daily Express*, he was instrumental in garnering world support for the anti-nationalist movement there.<sup>180</sup>

Matthews was then sent to cover World War II from Italy and then from India. Upon his return to the states in 1943, he continued to write about Indian and European affairs for the *Times* until 1950, when he began to write about Latin America. "From 1950 to 1967 almost every editorial in the *New York Times* relating to Latin America was written by me...I wrote many news articles, some books, and made innumerable lectures on the region."<sup>181</sup> During his time as the *Times* Latin America expert, Matthews covered events in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Columbia, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Haiti, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Peru, and Venezuela.

Before his visit to Cuba in 1957, Matthews had written countless articles and editorials, six books, and several scholarly articles. He had already had a remarkable career. However, his life was slowing and he felt that he needed a "scoop".<sup>182</sup> The Castro-Matthews connection was a marriage made in a reporter's heaven. The fact is that Matthews needed Castro as much as the Cuban needed him. The *Times* correspondent was nearing the end of his career. According to his colleagues, he

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<sup>180</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>181</sup> Matthews, *World in Revolution*, 222.

<sup>182</sup> Matthews, *Cuban Story*, 16.

believed that he never got the credit he deserved. "Here was the chance to get the scoop of a lifetime."<sup>183</sup>

In his book *The Cuban Story*, Matthews wrote:

I had been getting reports of considerable ferment and discontent, and was intrigued by the mystery of Fidel Castro, whose name kept cropping up in persistent reports that he was not dead, as the government announced and everybody seemed to believe.<sup>184</sup>

Whether this is true or not, Phillips decided that Matthews was the man for the job. On the day of his arrival, February 15, 1957, the reporter met with Felipe Pazos and his son. During that meeting, when Matthews asked about Castro's death, even Felipe was inclined to believe the reports, as they had been circulated by respectable news agencies like the United Press. However, Matthews believed what Perez had told the younger Pazos, and preparations were made for Matthews to meet with Castro. He would travel as an American tourist. His wife, Nancie, would go along to complete this disguise. Faustino Perez and a young woman named Liliam Mesa would guide the pair. At his hotel, after buying suitable clothes for fishing, Matthews told the desk that he was going on a fishing trip. All Matthews knew when they set out was that the interview with Fidel had been fixed for midnight of the next night.<sup>185</sup>

Their trip to the Sierra Maestra went smoothly, and they arrived at the first checkpoint early the next morning. Mrs. Matthews wrote an account of the trip for the

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<sup>183</sup> John P. Wallach, "Fidel Castro and the United States Press," in Ratliff, *Fidel Castro*, 149.

<sup>184</sup> Matthews, *Cuban Story*, 20-21.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*, 21-24.

*New York Times* house organ, called *Times Talk*, in March 1957. She finished it with these words:

I dare not give too many details, but after an agonizing hunt, we located the preliminary rendezvous. We found ourselves surrounded by the kind of men and women you might meet at any Cuban tea party. Incongruously, someone asked me in English if I wanted my dress pressed.<sup>186</sup>

Meanwhile, in the forest above the rendezvous point, Castro and his men were in a sorry state. Reduced in number to eighteen men, they had few rifles and almost no ammunition. Their clothes were ragged, their supplies scarce. In the words of Che Guevara, "When Ciro announced that Matthews had arrived, Fidel told us to look sharp, like soldiers. I looked at myself, then at the others: shoes falling apart, tied together with wire; we were covered with filth."<sup>187</sup> Regardless of the reality, Castro was determined to make his little band seem like an army, and he told his men to make the jungle clearing look as much like a "busy command post" as possible.<sup>188</sup> Such fabrication to cover dismal reality was truly in the tradition of Potemkin, Lenin, and Stalin.

The Matthews stayed overnight at the "preliminary rendezvous"—a small mountain village named Manzanillo. From there they traveled by jeep, and then by foot, up into the Sierra Maestras to Castro's secret hideout. Fidel was not at the clearing when they arrived; Matthews was told that Castro would arrive in two hours,

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<sup>186</sup> *Times Talk*, March 26, 1957: 1.

<sup>187</sup> Guevara, quoted in Franqui, *Cuban Revolution*, 139.

<sup>188</sup> Matthews, *Cuban Story*, 175.



after an important meeting with his "general staff". In reality, the guerrilla leader was just a few hundred yards away, taking a nap.

It must have been a good rest, for it is obvious how affected Matthews was—or wanted to be—by his first sight of the rebel leader:

Taking him, as one would at first, by his physique and personality, this was quite a man—a powerful six-footer, olive-skinned, full-faced, with a straggly beard. He was dressed in a olive-gray fatigue uniform and carried a rifle with a telescope sight, of which he was very proud...It seems his men had something more than fifty of these and he said the soldiers feared them. The personality of the man is overpowering. It is easy to see that his men adored him and also to see why he has caught the imagination of the youth of Cuba all over the island. Here was an educated, dedicated, fanatic, a man of ideals, of courage, and of remarkable qualities of leadership. As the story unfolded of how he had at first gathered the few remnants of the Eighty-two around him; kept the government troops at bay while youths came in from other parts of Oriente as General Batista's counter-terrorism aroused them; got arms and supplies and then began the series of raids and counter-attacks of guerrilla warfare, one got a feeling that he is now invincible...His brown eyes flash; his intense face is pushed close to the listener, and the whispering voice, as in a stage play, lends a vivid sense of drama.<sup>189</sup>

Castro's act may not have been totally contrived, but it was indeed a "stage play" which he was putting on, following the practices of agitprop he had learned from the Bolsheviks. Matthews was a willing audience, and this magnified the effect, as it invariably does with the practice of *pokazukha*. The actions that constitute *pokazukha* have some reality without the belief of the audience, but audience participation is necessary when the desired effect is dependent upon the *pokazukha* being taken for reality—as in the case of a handful of bedraggled bandits being taken for a vibrant revolution.

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<sup>189</sup> Matthews, "Cuban Rebel," 1.

Che Guevara later wrote, "We put on an act; we filed off in step with me in the lead."<sup>190</sup> In 1979, the newspaper *Granma* (named after the overloaded boat and then an agitprop organ of the Cuban government under Castro) ran an official account of the war in the Sierra Maestra. In that account, the authors explained the lengths to which the rebels went to carry off their act:

Before entering the camp, Fidel had given instructions to his companions to adopt martial airs...for some it took a lot of labor to reconcile the martial air required by Fidel with the condition of their clothes and their general appearance...Manuel Fajardo, for example, had no back on his shirt, torn to shreds by his knapsack harness. During the time the journalist remained in the camp, Fajardo was obliged to walk sideways...Finally, the journalist believed he had counted some forty fighters where there were no more than twenty and...that the group he had seen was part of a much larger force.<sup>191</sup>

At one point, a man was brought in, simply to say to Castro, "Commandante, the liaison from column number two has arrived," to which Fidel replied, "Wait until I'm finished." The *Granma* articles clearly describe the rebel's purpose: "to impress Matthews about the total numbers of the guerrilla army, without openly telling a lie."<sup>192</sup> The story was printed in the *Times* on Sunday, February 24, 1957. The front-page headline read, "Cuban Rebel is visited in Hideout"; the subhead read, "Castro is Still Alive and Still Fighting in Mountains." The story began with this dramatic paragraph:

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<sup>190</sup> Guevara, quoted in Franqui, *Cuban Revolution*, 139.

<sup>191</sup> Pedro Alvarez Tabio and Otto Hernandez, "Official Account of the Sierra War," *Granma* (Havana), January 3, January 17, February 23, February 27, 1979, quoted in Szulc, *Fidel*, 448.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid.

Fidel Castro, the rebel leader of Cuba's youth, is alive and fighting hard and successfully in the rugged, almost impenetrable vastness of the Sierra Maestra, at the southern tip of the island...[Castro is] the most dangerous enemy General Batista has yet faced in a long and adventurous career as a Cuban leader and dictator. This is the first sureness that Fidel Castro is still alive...No one connected with the outside world, let alone with the press, has seen Senor Castro except this writer.

Having thus assured his exclusivity, Matthews went on to write:

They have had many fights, and inflicted many losses, Senor Castro said. Government planes came over and bombed every day; in fact, at nine sharp a plane did fly over. The troops took up positions; a man in a white shirt was hastily covered up. But the plane went on to bomb higher in the mountains...'We have been fighting for seventy-nine days now and are stronger than ever,' Senor Castro said, 'The soldiers are fighting badly; their moral is low and ours could not be higher. We are killing many.' This account, among other things, will break the tightest censorship in the history of the Cuban Republic...Fidel Castro and his 26th of July Movement are the flaming symbol of the opposition to the regime...formed of youths of all kinds...radical, democratic, and therefore anti-communist...From the looks of things, General Batista cannot possibly hope to suppress the Castro revolt.<sup>193</sup>

Matthew's article is filled with half-truths and blatant falsities. Before this article, Castro was not "the rebel leader of Cuba's youth". At the time, he was far from "the most dangerous enemy General Batista has yet faced". He and his little group were not "the flaming symbol of the opposition to the regime," it was not "formed of youths of all kinds," nor was it "anti-communist". Government planes did not "bomb every day". Castro's band was not "stronger than ever," and it was certainly not "killing many".

<sup>193</sup> Matthews, "Cuban Rebel," 1.

The first to call Matthew's article into question was Batista himself, but the Cuban leader went too far. He responded by publicly insisting that his troops had killed Castro, and that they had squashed the revolution. Batista's credibility dissolved when the *Times* then ran a photograph of Matthews and Castro together in the Sierras. Three columns wide by four columns high, the picture forever dashed Batista's hopes that the people would believe Castro dead. Batista later recalled his mistake in *Cuba Betrayed*, which he wrote from exile in 1962:

A representative of The United Press, Francis L. McCarthy [Batista's friend], reported that Castro was dead and buried. There was no official confirmation of this report, and it was secretly suspected that the rebel leader had taken refuge in the highest mountainous region of the Sierra Maestra. Gen. Diaz Tamayo, Chief of the military territory, and Col. Barrera, Chief of operations, helped reinforce the belief of the General Staff that the group which had landed Dec. 2 had given up the struggle. In this climate of doubt, Herbert L. Matthews, reporter for the *New York Times*, published an interview with Fidel Castro. To prove his statements he produced an unclear photograph of Castro. The military chiefs of the province told the General Staff so emphatically that no such interview had taken place, that the minister of defense publicly denied it had occurred. And even I, influenced by the reports of the General Staff, doubted it. The interview had, in fact, taken place and its publication was of considerable propaganda value to the rebels.<sup>194</sup>

Matthew's story affected more than just Batista's integrity. After Matthew's articles, other journalists made their way to the mountains. Andrew St. George of *Coronet* magazine visited five times. Robert Taber of CBS did a piece on Castro that was broadcast on television and radio and appeared in the pages of *Life* magazine.<sup>195</sup>

<sup>194</sup> Fulgencio Batista, *Cuba Betrayed* (New York: Vantage Press, 1962), 52.

<sup>195</sup> Mario Llerena, *The Unsuspected Revolution: The Birth and Rise of Castroism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), 104-108.



"Indeed, the Sierra was becoming so crowded that one big newspaper correspondent on his way up was crestfallen to discover a reporter from *Boy's Life* on his way down."<sup>196</sup> After Matthews' articles, disillusioned Cubans flocked to the mountains to meet the extraordinary man they had read about in the *Times*. In the making of Fidel's legend, Matthews' stories played a crucial role. There was something exceptionally romantic about the young leader leaving his advantaged life, going into the mountains with a few men, and vowing never to return until he could walk into Havana with his revolution.

It was a timeless myth, part-Robin Hood, part-Mao, and given the excesses of Batista, it found wide acceptance. Fidel Castro might have been hundreds of miles away in the distant mountains, but with those articles...he lived.<sup>197</sup>

Matthews later wrote in his book *The Cuban Story*,

In this interview were all the elements out of which the insurrection grew to its ultimate triumph...Add these up and one can argue that *The Times* certainly helped to overthrow General Batista...[the Cubans] were and still are very grateful to me and to the *New York Times* for the role we played.<sup>198</sup>

Castro did not fail to show his gratitude. On Sunday, April 19, 1959, the following appeared in the *New York Times*:

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<sup>196</sup> Geyer, *Guerrilla Prince*, 170. *Boy's Life* is the official magazine of the Boy Scouts of America.

<sup>197</sup> Halberstam, *Fifties*, 719.

<sup>198</sup> Matthews, *Cuban Story*, 82.

Premier Fidel Castro of Cuba awarded medals tonight to United States newsmen who interviewed him when he was leading the revolution. They were: Herbert L. Matthews of the *New York Times*...<sup>199</sup>

Matthews again proclaimed his historic role in making Castro a legend in his last article for the *Times*:

I will not deny that as I sat with Fidel Castro, his brother Raul, Che Guevara and others up in the Sierra Maestra on the chilly morning of Feb. 17, 1957, Clio, the muse of history, touched me with her hand—or whatever she uses. The resulting publicity in *The Times* gave Castro and his guerrilla band a nationwide and even a worldwide fame that, chronologically, was the start of the most fantastic career of any leader in the whole course of Latin America's independent history.<sup>200</sup>

Whether Matthew's hyperbole is true or not, every full-length biography of Fidel Castro agrees with the reporter on the fact that he and the *Times* helped to overthrow Batista. However, none goes so far as to argue that, without Matthew's articles, Castro would never have risen to take over Cuba. Several have actually defended Matthews. Tad Szulc wrote:

It was theater, literally guerrilla theater, that Castro put on for Matthews...[Matthews] must never be accused of being a dupe or naive; he was in an environment totally controlled by Fidel, the Cuban leader was eminently credible, and above all he was very much in existence when Batista was still claiming him dead.<sup>201</sup>

The above facts may or may not be true, but what Mr. Szulc fails to realize is that they do not constitute a valid defense for Matthews. Whether Castro put on "guerrilla theater" for Matthews is irrelevant, for even if it was a play, Matthews was a good

<sup>199</sup> *New York Times*, April 19, 1959.

<sup>200</sup> *New York Times*, August 31, 1967.

<sup>201</sup> Szulc, *Fidel*, 448.

audience, and very willingly 'suspended his disbelief'.<sup>202</sup> Matthews fiercely defended his journalism in letters to his peers, editorials for the *New York Times*, and in all three of his major works on the subject, *The Cuban Story* (1961), *Fidel Castro* (1969), and *Revolution in Cuba* (1975). In *The Cuban Story*, he wrote:

In this interview...was the true figure of Fidel Castro, before power taught him intoxicating spiritual corruption, before the ideals of democracy and freedom presented themselves as impossibilities if he was to make a drastic social revolution.<sup>203</sup>

Matthews again defended himself in *Fidel Castro*,

I never claimed more for myself in the interview I had with Castro in the Sierra Maestra than that I recognized his quality and, joining it to the country-wide antagonism to the Batista regime which existed at the time, forecast the role that he was to play. I could not realize then how much danger and hardship he and his followers had yet to survive, or I might not have been so confident. I did not know how small a force Fidel had at that time—eighteen men with rifles—but I doubt that this would have made any difference in the story I wrote for the *New York Times* ...That group of eighteen men was enough for the purpose of the moment in the struggle...Anyway, what Fidel did not seem to realize was the extent to which he had already become a symbol of resistance for the youth of Cuba, and that he would become the symbol of revolution after my story was published in the *New York Times*.<sup>204</sup>

Matthew's arguments fall down under scrupulous criticism. The "true figure of Fidel Castro" was not in any of Matthew's work. "That group of eighteen men" was not "enough for the purpose" or they would not have been hiding in the highest reaches of the mountains. Indeed, Matthews has been attacked by many historians and

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<sup>202</sup> A theater term used to describe the state in which an audience believes the various parts of a performance - the set, the actors, the plot - to be real, even though they know them to be false.

<sup>203</sup> Matthews, *Cuban Story*, 39.

<sup>204</sup> Matthews, *Fidel Castro*, 105.

by his peers in the media. One critic who represents both of these groups is Theodore Draper, a 1950's journalist and prominent ex-Communist who later became a historian of the Cuban Revolution. In an exchange of letters with Matthews in March 1962 (which was initiated by a letter to Draper from Matthews in response to an article Draper had written for the CIA-funded magazine *Encounter*), Draper brought up some very good points. He wrote:

I am baffled by the certainty of persons like yourself that they 'know' Fidel...I cannot understand how you can believe that you could look into his real soul and penetrate his private mind by providing him with an audience on set occasions...I strongly doubt that your articles would have had such an electrifying effect if you had not personally vouched for Castro's large and willing force...It was strange reporting to bear witness to a large force which merely existed in your imagination.

Draper went on to write:

Having gone this far, I am going to continue, and try to tell you what has been so disturbing about your role in this whole affair. It has been a most unusual role for a journalist. How many journalists have been able to say, as you have said, that your articles 'literally altered the course of Cuban history?' Therefore, your responsibilities have been unusually great. You have represented in this case the most influential newspaper in the United States, perhaps in the world today. Your words have often been quoted: 'In all my thirty-eight years on the *New York Times*, I have never seen a big story so misunderstood, so misinterpreted and so badly handled as the Cuban Revolution.' I am inclined to agree with you, but I cannot exempt you from your own criticism.<sup>205</sup>

Matthews was obviously driven by his own zeal to make Castro and his movement 'larger than life'. In *The Cuban Story*, Matthews wrote:

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<sup>205</sup> Theodore Draper to Herbert L. Matthews, March 5, 1962, transcript in Theodore Draper, *Castro's Revolution: Myths and Realities* (New York: Praeger, 1965), 189-191.



I knew I had a sensational scoop. I exulted at the fact that at the age of fifty-seven I could still show a younger generation of newspapermen how to get a difficult and dangerous story, and how to write it.<sup>206</sup>

Matthews would have, and did, do more for Castro—and his own career—than simply writing a single article. From 1957 until his retirement several decades later, Matthews was on the editorial board of the *New York Times*, and wrote no less than ten editorials in defense of Castro's conversion of Cuba to Communism. He also helped Castro in ways that were more material. Mario Llerena, a former member of Castro's revolution, later wrote:

It was evident that Herbert L. Matthews was most sympathetic toward the revolutionary cause in Cuba and toward Fidel Castro in particular. He was also willing to help. It would be a good idea, he suggested, for me to go on television—my identity should be disguised, naturally—and speak to the American audience as a secret agent of the Castro underground in Havana. I agreed at once...Matthews immediately picked up the phone and called the Columbia Broadcasting System.<sup>207</sup>

Robert Taber (who later went to the Sierra Maestra to interview Castro, as mentioned above) of CBS then tried to get Matthews to go on the show with Llerena, but Matthews declined, saying that

he could not do it because he was already too publicly involved with the Castro movement, and a television appearance with me so soon after the publication of his articles might reflect upon his editorial position with *Times*.<sup>208</sup>

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<sup>206</sup> Matthews, *Cuban Story*, 40.

<sup>207</sup> Llerena, *Unsuspected Revolution*, 94-95.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid.

As Llerena asserts, these later actions prove that Matthews was not only sympathetic to Castro's movement, but that—once committed to Castro in his zeal to revitalize his career—he used every method at his disposal to further it.

"The Cuban Story" serves as an excellent example of how Russian *pokazukha* can succeed with the help of a willing audience. Castro and his men deliberately erected a Potemkin village to deceive Matthews that fateful day in the Sierra Maestra, in order that he would then be manipulated into writing propaganda on their behalf. Matthews was there to get a "scoop" and to make the object of that "scoop"—Castro and his movement—as successful as possible. Both men accomplished their goals. By writing what amounted to propaganda, Matthews was rewarded by being immediately promoted to the editorial board of the *Times*. By employing *pokazukha*, Castro was rewarded, as Matthews made him a worldwide hero and helped propel him into power.

It is easy to answer the question of just how historically significant Matthew's work was. Without his articles, Castro would have been dead in the minds of the Cuban people and the world. Without his work, Batista's censorship and integrity would not have been destroyed as easily or completely. Without Matthews—and his hidden agendas—Castro would not have become the triumphant hero of the Cuban Revolution. Instead, he would only have been a Communist radical hiding furtively from defeat in the highest eyries of the Sierra Maestra. The strength of character, strength of arms, and anti-Communist feelings that the Castro in Matthew's article possessed were never commanded by the real Fidel Castro. It was Matthew's fictitious

hero that won the Revolution; and afterward, the world was left to mourn the fact that the reality did not live up to their expectations—expectations created by Castro's *pokazukha* and by the mind and pen of Herbert Matthews.

In his last book, *A World in Revolution*, Matthews wrote:

I do not expect to live long enough to see my writings on Cuba generally accepted...One day in October 1963, when my wife and I were with Fidel Castro and Celia Sanchez in her house in Havana, Fidel said earnestly to me: 'You will be vindicated some day. People will see that you told the truth and are telling the truth now about the Cuban Revolution.' 'I'm afraid I'll be dead by that time,' I answered.<sup>209</sup>

Now, long after his death, Matthews has still not been vindicated; he never will be. The lives of millions and the history of a country were changed forever because of his words. Matthew's work comprised the most history-changing journalism Cuba had ever seen. While there are innumerable examples of Fidel's Russian-style *pokazukha* and his Stalinist propaganda use of foreign journalists, "The Cuban Story" illustrates the extraordinary power of such tactics if they are skillfully employed before a willing audience. Matthews and the editorial staff of the *New York Times* was fully prepared to accept and develop the image of a Cuban underdog and make the most of his story in order to sell newspapers.

While Castro deployed the *pokazukha* tactics of Potemkin, Lenin, and Stalin, Stalin's successor was simultaneously using and refining those same techniques in the Soviet Union. Both Fidel and Nikita Khrushchev were practicing these tactics at the same time; yet since Castro had to hide his true affinities, his agitprop prior to 1959

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<sup>209</sup> Matthews, *World in Revolution*, 7.

was done without the support—indeed without the knowledge—of the top leaders in the Kremlin. That situation would soon change.

## Chapter VI

### THE U.S.S.R. AND KHRUSHCHEV

[Cuba has become] a beacon, a hopeful lighthouse for all the unfortunate, exploited peoples of the world.

—Nikita Khrushchev, 1960<sup>216</sup>

Prior to 1959, the Cuban Communists were only on the periphery of Moscow's vision. The countries of Latin America, including Cuba, were not far enough along the predetermined path to global socialism for them to be any kind of focus of the international movement.<sup>217</sup> Even so, just as aglprop was modified over the years to fit the political exigencies of the moment, the influence emanating from the Soviet Union was not static, and Soviet policy went through several major shifts in its relations with Latin America from 1917 until 1959. The differences between the policies came in two major areas: strategic (the main enemy, the character of the revolution) and tactical (class against class, the 'Bolshevization' of national parties). Although there were significant differences in policy depending upon the Soviet leaders' needs of the moment, all policy was directed from Moscow—funneled through the KGB, the

<sup>216</sup> N. Khrushchev, *Mysovetskaia Biografiia: Vospominaniia* [Memoirs of Nikita Sergeevich Khrushchev], *Izvestiia natsionalnogo istoricheskogo otdela* no. 7 (1991): 91.

<sup>217</sup> Cahallan, *Latin America*, 149–51.



Department for Agitation and Propaganda, and the Commission on Cultural Affairs in the Central Committee.<sup>212</sup>

## Chapter VI

In 1953, the death of Joseph Stalin created a series of shifts in Moscow, from which Nikita Khrushchev, THE U.S.S.R. AND KHRUSHCHEV as the defender of

Leninist orthodoxy, he launched a revival of party propaganda as a necessary step [Cuba has become] a beacon, a hopeful lighthouse for all the unfortunate, exploited peoples of the world.

—Nikita Khrushchev, 1960<sup>210</sup>

the top boss of the Soviet Union, partially through his successful use of brilliant propaganda and his pertinacious use of Potemkin-like foreign policy. The late 1950s were an optimistic period for both the people of the U.S.S.R. and their leaders: the predetermined path to global socialism for them to be any kind of focus of the Soviet economy was expanding, and the space race was in the history and international movement.<sup>211</sup> Even so, just as agitprop was modified over the years to fit the political exigencies of the moment, the influence emanating from the Soviet Union was not static, and Soviet policy went through several major shifts in its relations with Latin America from 1917 until 1959. The differences between the policies came in two major areas: strategic (the main enemy, the character of the revolution) and tactical (class against class, the 'Bolshevization' of national parties). Although there were significant differences in policy depending upon the Soviet leaders' needs of the moment, all policy was directed from Moscow—funneled through the KGB, the Latin America will lead to the immediate armed intervention of the United States.

—*Communist Manifesto*<sup>214</sup>

<sup>210</sup> N. Khrushchev, *Мемуары Никиты Сергеевича Хрущева* [Memoirs of Nikita Sergeevich Khrushchev], *Вопросы истории*, [Historical Questions] no. 7 (1993): 93.

<sup>211</sup> Caballero, *Latin America*, 149-55. *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 79.

Department for Agitation and Propaganda, and the Commission on Cultural Affairs in the Central Committee.<sup>212</sup>

In 1953, the death of Joseph Stalin created a series of shifts in Moscow, from which Nikita Khrushchev eventually emerged victorious. Posing as the defender of Leninist orthodoxy, he launched a revival of party propaganda as a necessary complement to the ending of Stalinist terror. By 1955, he had established himself as the top boss of the Soviet Union, partially through his successful use of ebullient propaganda and his pertinacious use of Potemkin-like foreign policy. The late 1950s were an optimistic period for both the people of the U.S.S.R. and their leaders: the Soviet economy was experiencing growth; high-profile projects in the military and space technology fields were 'proving' the superiority of the socialist state in full view of the world; and emerging détente between East and West was lessening the perceived danger from global nuclear war.<sup>213</sup> By 1962, it appeared as if Khrushchev believed his own propaganda, and his optimistic foreign policy brought the world to the brink of nuclear war.

#### Soviets in the American 'Sphere'

The revolution of the proletariat and poor peasants in any country of Latin America will lead to the immediate armed intervention of the United States.

—*Comintern Manifesto*<sup>214</sup>

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<sup>212</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>214</sup> Comintern Manifesto, "To the Workers of Both Americas," quoted in Caballero, *Latin America*, 79.

From 1917 until 1928, the U.S.S.R. largely ignored Latin America. Strategically, the Comintern focused on 'imperialist' enemies and the formation of the international movement, particularly in Europe. The early leaders of the U.S.S.R. believed, following Marx and Lenin, that revolution would occur in Europe first, then in Asia, followed by the rest of the globe. Thus, during the first decade of Soviet leadership, Latin American Communists were expected to support their comrades in the more industrialized countries. Tactically, they were to distribute propaganda at home and wait patiently for the revolution to occur in Europe.<sup>215</sup>

In the mid-1920s, the leaders of world Communism in Moscow slowly began to realize that global revolution beginning in Europe was not *ad portas*. This situation caused a realignment of ideology and policy, such that, in 1928, the Soviets 'discovered' America as a place where revolution might just originate on its own. However, Latin America was still on the periphery. From 1928 until the outbreak of WWII, the leaders of the Comintern shifted expectations, and predicted that the revolution would happen first in Asia, and then spread to the United States. Strategically, 'Trotskyism' was added to the list of major enemies, followed closely by fascism. Tactically, Latin American Communists were to 'Bolshevize' (reorganize) their parties and prepare to support the Revolution in the United States.<sup>216</sup> It was

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<sup>215</sup> Caballero, *Latin America*, 25-64.

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid*, 65-124.

within this context that Fabio Grobart began working among the Communists in Cuba (discussed above).

With the outbreak of WWII and the invasion of the U.S.S.R., fascism became strategic enemy number one and supporting the Soviets the highest tactical order of the day. This situation shifted slightly when the United States became an anti-Fascist ally, and supporting both the United States and the U.S.S.R. together became the highest tactical imperative. In Cuba, Communists and non-Communists alike enthusiastically supported both the United States and the Soviet Union until the end of the war.<sup>217</sup> In fact, the Cuban republic was the first Latin American government that officially recognized the U.S.S.R. (which they did under pressure from the United States).<sup>218</sup>

The Comintern dissolved at the outset of WWII, and from 1945 until 1959, Cuba's Communist Party was left to fend largely for itself. Cuba's signing of the 1947 Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance, which was in effect a restatement of the principles of the Monroe Doctrine, confirmed the ideological suspicions of the leadership in Moscow. Although Stalin and his subordinates dealt pragmatically with some 'bourgeoisie' nationalists such as Chiang Kai-shek, and broke with some Communists like Josip Tito, at this time the Soviets believed that the world was clearly divided into 'Communist' and 'capitalist', and that the Latin American nations,

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<sup>217</sup> Ibid.

<sup>218</sup> Miller, *Soviet Relations*, 6.



including Cuba, were firmly entrenched in the capitalist camp.<sup>219</sup> This belief was held so firmly that the Soviet Union even closed its embassy in Havana in 1958, believing that it had no practical purpose. There were no Soviet intelligence officers operating in Cuba in the late 1950s—when Castro marched into Havana in 1959, the nearest KGB or GRU (military intelligence) presence was in Mexico City.<sup>220</sup>

That is not to say that the leaders of the Soviet Union during the early Cold War were uninterested in the Third World—it is simply that they ignored Latin America as irrevocably 'lost'. Until his death in March 1953, Stalin expanded relations with several nations emerging from the colonial grip. However, Stalin was never able to develop his foreign policy beyond his unshakable belief in an inevitable war between the forces of capitalism and the forces of socialism. Thus, Soviet Stalinist foreign policy was directed, first and foremost, to the strategic defense and economic support of the U.S.S.R. itself. John Lewis Gaddis, a Cold War expert, put it this way:

Stalin's plans for expanding the Soviet Union's influence beyond its borders contained a major contradiction. On the one hand, he clung to the notion, growing out of his belief in the instability of capitalism, that proletarians in other countries would eventually choose the socialist model: hence, his illusions with respect to Germany and Eastern Europe at the end of the war as well as his euphoria when the Chinese unexpectedly did move in that direction. But on the other hand, Stalin's economic policies caused the Soviet presence in those regions to come across as exploitive, and this generated resentment among the very people whose loyalty he had hoped to win...The Soviet Union, for this

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<sup>219</sup> Ibid.

<sup>220</sup> Sergei Khrushchev, "How My Father and President Kennedy Saved the World: The Cuban Missile Crisis as Seen from the Kremlin," *American Heritage* (October 2002), <http://www.Americanheritage.com/articles/web/20051022-cuban-missile-crisis-kennedy-khrushchev-cold-war-cuba-fidel-castro.shtml>

reason, never came close to building relationships based on a sense of mutual interest.<sup>221</sup>

Prior to 1953, Soviet foreign policy was constrained by Stalinist dogma, which held that there was only one road—a violent one, led by a Bolshevized worker vanguard—to socialism, and that road was policed by the U.S.S.R.<sup>222</sup> However, once Khrushchev came to power in 1954-55, dogma gave way to a more pragmatic approach, and Soviet leaders began to enthusiastically support a number of non-Communist regimes in the newly independent countries of Asia and Africa.

#### Khrushchev, Optimistic Propagandist

How can we not rejoice, comrades, at the gigantic achievements of our industry?...What other state has ever built on such a scale? There has never been such a country. Only for our country and its remarkable people—a people of fighters, a people of pioneers—are such things possible [Stormy applause].

—Nikita Khrushchev, 1958<sup>223</sup>

From 1955 to 1959, many things changed for the Soviet Union. In a climate where emerging détente was lessening the perceived danger from global nuclear war, the Soviet command economy seemed to be experiencing growth and Soviet scientists were 'winning' both the space race and the race for superiority in military

<sup>221</sup> Gaddis, *We Now Know*, 204. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>222</sup> Taubman, *Khrushchev*, 271.

<sup>223</sup> N. Khrushchev, speech to voters of Kalinin electoral district, Moscow, March 14, 1958, in N. Khrushchev, *For Victory in Peaceful Competition with Capitalism* (New York: Dutton, 1960) 157-158.

technology.<sup>224</sup> Nikita Khrushchev, now top boss in the Kremlin, imposed new flexibility in foreign policy and infused it with a new form of agitprop. In fact, *pokazukha* became so important to Soviet policy during the Khrushchev years that it is now impossible to separate many of Khrushchev's foreign policy declarations and tactics from his equally extraordinary agitprop. In Khrushchev's Moscow, Potemkinism reached a height unparalleled in Russian history.

At the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) in February 1956, Khrushchev secretly denounced Stalin's purges and openly announced changes in Soviet foreign policy (discussed below). In an important section of his report to that meeting, entitled "Problems of Ideological Work", Khrushchev emphasized that propaganda must be "practical".<sup>225</sup> In that report, he conflated propaganda and agitation, making the two into one, and fusing them with foreign policy in general. According to Western experts on Soviet propaganda, Khrushchev's 1956 policy declarations marked "a further stage in [Soviet propaganda's] transformation from an instrument of a fanatical but vital political religion into a gigantic totalitarian public relations program."<sup>226</sup>

The collapse of the colonial empires "enchanted and mesmerized Khrushchev, stirring old memories of the revolutionary passions of the [Russian] Civil War and the

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<sup>224</sup> Caballero, *Latin America*, 27.

<sup>225</sup> N. Khrushchev, "Speech to the 20<sup>th</sup> Congress of the C.P.S.U.," Feb. 25, 1956. Sub Archive of Soviet Government Documents. Marxists Internet Archive, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/khrushchev/1956/02/24.htm>

<sup>226</sup> Barghoorn, *Soviet Foreign Propaganda*, 30.

Soviet 'Comintern 1920s.'"<sup>227</sup> As the leader and primary instigator of the change in foreign policy, Khrushchev "did not mind abandoning for a while the role of sober and reasonable world statesman in order to pose more persuasively as a friend of all revolutionaries and 'liberated peoples' of the world. From being his own foreign minister, he became a chief Soviet propagandist."<sup>228</sup> Over the next few years, foreign policy, the military, the scientific bureaus, and the diplomatic corps were all joined together with the agitprop department to make up this "gigantic" P.R. campaign under Khrushchev—and for awhile, the Potemkin-like façades they built stood up to the scrutiny of the world.

On October 4, 1957, the Soviets accomplished a major technological and propaganda feat that changed the world's opinion of Soviet technology overnight. The first satellite in human history was launched—not by the U.S. or any western country, but by the Soviet Union. As *Sputnik I* ("sputnik" means "satellite" in Russian) rose up to earth orbit, feelings of superiority fell markedly in the West. The West had underestimated the Soviet Union, confusing substandard Russian cars and other consumer goods with the state of Soviet science and technology. Prior to *Sputnik*, there had been a media flap about possible Soviet 'suitcase bombs'. In response to that fear, it became a common joke that the Russians could not bring such bombs into the

<sup>227</sup> Paul Dickson, *Sputnik: The Shock of the Century* (New York: Berkley Books, 2001), 109.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid.

<sup>228</sup> Zubok and Pleshakov, *Kremlin's Cold War*, 206.



United States because they had not been able to perfect the suitcase. After the launch of *Sputnik*, the laughter stopped.<sup>229</sup>

The Soviet propagandists knew the global importance of their scientists' achievement, and set the stage well in advance. They deliberately took advantage of the Western tendency to discount Soviet achievements. At the end of August, less than two months before the *Sputnik* launch, the Soviet news agency announced: "Successful tests of an intercontinental ballistic missile as well as explosions of nuclear and thermonuclear weapons have taken place in the Soviet Union."<sup>230</sup> At the time, pundits and scientists in the West "felt that the Russians still were far from having achieved a useable ICBM"—and they stated so publically and vociferously.<sup>231</sup> Soviet agitprop had maneuvered the U.S. into making public statements that would soon be questioned the world over.

The night of the launch, the Soviets propaganda wizards invited some fifty scientists from thirteen countries, all members of the International Geophysical Year's conference on rockets and satellites, for cocktails at the Soviet Embassy in Washington. The group included a select number of journalists, in order that the reaction of the international scientific community might be broadcast around the world. *New York Times* science reporter Walter Sullivan was called to the phone and

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<sup>229</sup> Paul Dickson, *Sputnik: The Shock of the Century* (New York: Berkley Books, 2001), 109.

<sup>230</sup> *Tass* (Soviet news agency) announcement, quoted by *Associated Press*, "Soviet Missile," *New York Times*, September 1, 1957: 99.

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid.*

told that Moscow had put a satellite into orbit. In the words of one of those gathered at the embassy:

[Sullivan] hurried back and whispered the news in the ear of U.S. physicist Lloyd Berkner, who rapped on the hors d'oeuvre table until the hubbub quieted and dramatically declared to the unknowing and startled group, including the Russians, 'A satellite is in orbit at an elevation of 900 km. I wish to congratulate our Soviet colleagues on their achievement.' Washington changed in those next few hours. The U.S., which had assumed scientific pre-eminence, had been beaten in the opening lap of the space race. Before the night was over the Russians had fueled themselves with vodka and stood curbside in front of their embassy, staring into the night sky, singing and cheering. I didn't go to bed that night, rushing from the Soviet embassy to Capitol Hill to the White House. Those at the center of the power game knew their lives had changed.<sup>232</sup>

At the Naval Research Laboratory—which was in charge of "Project Vanguard," the U.S. space program—the engineers bathed the roof in searchlights so they could adjust their radio dishes to pick up the loud and undeniable beep from *Sputnik*. The White House affected indifference, and reassured the nation about American scientific proficiency. Some of the West's top scientists, like M.I.T.'s Vannevar Bush, "took refuge behind closed doors until they could figure out what to say."<sup>233</sup> Anxiety spread throughout the West. When the U.S. rushed their satellite to the launching pad two months later, its rocket lurched, buckled and blew up on the ground. The American scientific community continued to assert that U.S. technology was more sophisticated than that of the Soviets. "But by then the game had moved

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<sup>232</sup> Hugh Sidey, "Oct. 7, 1957: The Space Race Lifts Off," in "80 Days that Changed the World," *Time Magazine* online (March 23, 2003), <http://www.time.com/time/80days/571004.html>

<sup>233</sup> Ibid.

beyond pure science."<sup>234</sup> It had moved into the realm of politics and possibility—a realm perfect for the operation of Potemkin-like *pokazukha*.

Khrushchev was in Kiev meeting with civilian and military officials when he received the news about the success of *Sputnik*. According to his son, as Nikita reported the achievement to the gathering, his face "shone." The elder Khrushchev announced:

The Americans have proclaimed to the whole world that they are preparing to launch a satellite of the earth. Theirs is only the size of an orange. We, on the other hand, have kept quiet, but now have a satellite circling the planet. And not a little one, but one that weighs up eighty kilos.<sup>235</sup>

Khrushchev rarely failed to take proper propaganda advantage of the *Sputnik* triumph. After the public humiliation of the Vanguard's launch pad fiasco, Khrushchev claimed that the U.S.S.R. had "outstripped the leading capitalist country—the United States—in the field of scientific and technological progress."<sup>236</sup> Following Stalin's example of holding timely meetings with foreign journalists, Khrushchev granted an interview with the *New York Times* on October 8, four days after the *Sputnik* launch:

After having said that the Soviet Union had all the rockets it needed for its defense, the party secretary added that some Americans had laughed when he announced that the Soviet Union had the intercontinental ballistic missile. But now that Moscow has launched the earth satellite, which requires a powerful rocket to move it into orbit, only the

<sup>234</sup> Ibid. *New York Times*, "Khrushchev Scores U.S. on Satellite," Jan. 23, 1959: 19. Emphasis added.

<sup>235</sup> Sergei N. Khrushchev, *Nikita Khrushchev and the Creation of a Superpower* (University Park, PA: Penn State Press, 2000), 260.

<sup>236</sup> N. Khrushchev, *For Victory*, 23. *New York Times*, Mar. 5, 1958: 10.

uninformed and technically ignorant can say the Russians are not telling the truth, he said.<sup>237</sup>

Agitprop scientists had set up a *pokazukha* coup; Khrushchev gleefully capitalized on it out with a timely propaganda interview. Khrushchev pressed this propaganda advantage at every chance, listing Soviet missile and satellite feats as an indication of "the high level of science and technology" in Russia. "I think the Americans too will develop rockets and launch them," he declared, "but the difference is that they *will* launch and we have *already done that*."<sup>238</sup> In April 1958, Khrushchev felt able to declare that, "It is the United States which is now intent on catching up with the Soviet Union."<sup>239</sup>

With these tactics, Khrushchev and his propaganda machine were indulging in the most blatant *pokazukha*—and some in Washington did peer behind their façades. John Foster Dulles, then Eisenhower's Secretary of State, exposed Soviet posturing about missiles as "a hoax and a fraud and asked, in effect, what kind of numbskulls the Soviet leaders thought Americans were."<sup>240</sup> The rocket that carried *Sputnik* into orbit was not an operational weapon. Although the U.S.S.R.'s thermonuclear weapons

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<sup>237</sup> James Reston, "Khrushchev Asks World Rule of the Satellite and Missiles if Part of Wide U.S.-Soviet Pact: A Long Interview," *New York Times*, Oct. 8, 1957: 10.

<sup>238</sup> *New York Times*, "Khrushchev Scores U.S. on Satellites," Jan. 25, 1959: 19. Emphasis added.

<sup>239</sup> N. Khrushchev, *For Victory*, 309.

<sup>240</sup> James Reston, "Dulles and the 'Hoax'," *New York Times*, Mar. 5, 1958: 10.



worked well enough, their missiles lacked sufficiently precise guidance to put the weapons where they were aimed.<sup>241</sup>

In fact, it was not until the beginning of the next decade that the first accurate Soviet ICBMs became operational. Sergei Khrushchev later admitted, "We threatened with missiles we didn't have." He continued, however, to say that the United States did not discover "the real balance of forces in terms of missiles" until years later.<sup>242</sup> Indeed, many people disagreed with Secretary Dulles, even in the U.S., and Premier Khrushchev's claims worked wonders, both in North America and worldwide, on those that wanted to believe that the Soviets were technologically and militarily 'beating' the United States. Nikita Khrushchev would later admit: "It always sounded good to say in public speeches that we could hit a fly with our missiles...I exaggerated a little."<sup>243</sup> Khrushchev's exaggerations worked. In the words of one contemporary American pundit in 1958:

The Soviet Union is scoring propaganda victory after victory. No matter how it turns its policies, Washington finds itself reeling and from reverse to reverse on the propaganda front...The counterpart to the image of the Soviet Union growing up in the world appears to be that of a hesitant legalistic, suspicious, myopic, negativist Uncle Sam or, perhaps one should say, John Foster Dulles. For it is Mister Dulles' caricature rather than that of the traditionally benevolent Uncle Sam that is appearing more and more frequently in the press of Europe and

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<sup>241</sup> Gaddis, *Cold War*, 69.

<sup>242</sup> S. Khrushchev, in Blight, Allyn, and Welch, *Cuba on the Brink*, 130. Khrushchev's statement is borne out by the CIA intelligence estimates of the time. See "Soviet Capabilities and Probable Programs in the Guided Missile Field," CIA intelligence reports (top secret), 1954-1961, <http://www.astronautix.com/data/5703nie.pdf>

<sup>243</sup> N. Khrushchev, *Khrushchev Remembers: The Last Testament*, trans. and ed. Strobe Talbott (Boston: Little, Brown, 1974), 47.

the uncommitted nations of Asia...Perhaps Americans should admit that, although Madison Avenue may be unexcelled in the art of selling goods, the Russian technique of political propaganda is unrivaled. The Russians have succeeded in presenting their main lines simply, directly, forcefully.<sup>244</sup>

The Soviet *pokazukha* machine repeated these sorts of tactics—combining technological advances with Potemkin villages and clear, concise statements of propaganda—over and over during Khrushchev's reign.

One of the most highly developed tools of Soviet agitprop during the 1950s and 1960s was the travelling exhibition. Used at world's fairs and in shows that traveled all over the globe, the Soviets boasted that a tour of their exhibits was, "as good as a trip to the Soviet Union." After a walk through one of these exhibitions in New York in 1959, Max Frankel, special correspondent for the *New York Times* in Moscow, uncovered these façades for what they were. He wrote, "A visitor can see far more here in two hours than this correspondent saw in two years in the Soviet Union, far more especially of the stuff of Soviet wishful dreams. The exhibition projects a glistening Soviet future, but strains facts of Soviet reality."<sup>245</sup> The Soviet people were not ignorant of the insubstantial nature of their gleaming *pokazukha* façades, their new Potemkin villages. One former Soviet citizen told the following story:

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<sup>244</sup> Dana Adams Schmidt, "Soviet Gives the U.S. a Lesson in Propaganda," *New York Times*, Mar. 30, 1958: E3.

<sup>245</sup> Max Frankel, "Soviet's Hopes on View, Coliseum Exhibition Depicts Nation not as It Is, but as It Wishes to Be," *New York Times*, June 30, 1959: 17.

I remember something my husband said to me back in the late 1950s, early 1960s. He was a member of the Communist Party, you know, an officer in the Soviet Army. He said to me one day after reading some report or another in the papers that we should take one of Khrushchev's rockets to visit our world's fair exhibition so that we could see how *well* we *really* lived [laughs].<sup>246</sup>

Even something as complex as a rocket to the moon could be turned into a tool of Khrushchev's *pokazukha*. Although *Sputnik I* dominated center stage at Soviet exhibitions, the timing of its launch had not been set by the demands of agitprop. Rather, the agitprop surrounding that launch was constructed to sync up with the scientists' practical timetable. Not so with later Soviet space achievements. For example, on September 12, 1959, just three days prior to Khrushchev's visit to the United States, his *pokazukha* machine again capitalized on Soviet technological advances by launching the world's first rocket to the moon. Making a point to call it a "guided rocket" in press releases (using the language of missile weaponry), the Soviets coordinated the mission perfectly with Khrushchev's visit. The rocket reached the moon the next day at midnight Moscow time (an unfortunate hour for the slumbering Soviet people), but at precisely 5:00 pm in New York, giving American journalists plenty of time to write articles about it for every edition of their papers. Those newspapers then hit newsstands the next day, September 14, the day before Khrushchev arrived in the U.S.

On September 13, Max Frankel noted that "The significance of the timing of the [moon] shot was not lost here. Soviet photographers were at the central telegraph

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<sup>246</sup> Lubov Nicolaievich Lipovskaya, interview by author, Kharkov, Ukraine, September 15, 2006.

office to take pictures of foreign correspondents filing the news."<sup>247</sup> The lunar rocket carried Soviet medallions whose purpose soon became clear. On September 14, Khrushchev announced to the world that he would give a replica of those medallions to President Eisenhower upon the Russian Premier's arrival in the U.S. the next day. Predictably, the newspapers of the world had a field day with this obvious, but interesting, *pokazukha* tactic. The *New York Times* ran the story on the front page for September 15, the day Khrushchev arrived.<sup>248</sup>

As we have seen, under Khrushchev all segments of the Soviet bureaucracy could be bent to the goals of agitprop—including foreign policy. At the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU, in February 1956, Khrushchev did more than change Soviet *pokazukha* strategy—he made public much of his new thinking in foreign policy, breaking officially with a great deal of the dogma followed so diligently under Stalin. Although the world was still divided into communist (socialist) and capitalist (imperialist) camps, no longer was a new world war "fatalistically inevitable". In the parts of the world emerging from imperial rule, Khrushchev said, different countries could take *different* roads to socialism—and even peaceful, *non-revolutionary* paths to socialism were possible.<sup>249</sup> To Khrushchev, the Third World was an arena of

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<sup>247</sup> Max Frankel, "Russians Fire Rocket at Moon, Expect it to Hit Target Today; Shot Timed to Khrushchev Trip," *New York Times*, Sept. 13, 1959: 1.

<sup>248</sup> *New York Times*, "Bringing Memento of Moon Shot," Sept. 15, 1959: 1.

<sup>249</sup> N. Khrushchev, "Speech to the 20<sup>th</sup> Congress of the C.P.S.U."



competition for influence *vis-à-vis* the imperialist West, and even bourgeois nationalist leaders in emerging countries could be allies in this struggle.<sup>250</sup>

For Khrushchev, the position of the Soviet Union in world affairs had changed quickly.

When we formed the Warsaw Pact [1955], Western countries had a great advantage over us in their economies and in their nuclear arsenals. Because of that we had to mobilize and make better estimates of our forces in the event that the enemy should attack either the Soviet Union or our allies. Our military union [the Warsaw Pact] was a product of the times we lived in. Things are different now. The military and economic balances have shifted to our favor. That makes it easier for us to take the offensive in the areas of disarmament and world cooperation.<sup>251</sup>

Khrushchev's assessment spelled out a weakening of the imperialist West with the added benefit of strengthening Soviet security.<sup>252</sup> Even the KGB, the powerful and generally pessimistic Soviet intelligence organization, really believed that "the world was going our way."<sup>253</sup>

In response to the decline in imperial power and optimism in the Soviet Union, the Soviets developed a new theory to account for the possibilities of socialist transition in the emerging nations of Asia and Africa. National democratic states freshly removed from imperial rule were neither a part of the capitalist/imperialist, nor

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<sup>250</sup> Duncan, *Soviet Union*, 26.

<sup>251</sup> N. Khrushchev, *Glasnost Tapes*, 71-2.

<sup>252</sup> Duncan, *Soviet Union*, 27.

<sup>253</sup> Christopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin, *The World Was Going Our Way* (New York: Basic Books, 2005).

the communist/socialist, camps. Rather, they were free to choose between the two. The new Soviet dogma stated that the emerging national democratic states would select socialism, for the anti-imperialist currents were strong in countries just emerging from the fog of colonial rule.<sup>254</sup> Khrushchev seems to have believed what he said in 1956:

The new period in world history which Lenin predicted has arrived, and the peoples of the East are playing an active part in deciding the destinies of the whole world, are becoming a new mighty factor in international relations.<sup>255</sup>

As each nation emerged from colonial rule, it was essential that the Soviet Union "play an active part" to assist in their struggles for "independence." In Khrushchev's foreign policy, each success of socialism in the Third World would expand Soviet prestige and power on the global stage, and each nation that chose the capitalist path would be a major setback.

These assumptions led the KGB, the Soviet leadership in general, and Nikita Khrushchev in particular to court several countries in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. Through clandestine organizational support and open military and economic aid, the Soviet Union attempted to ensure that the emerging nations would follow their natural anti-imperialist tendencies right into the arms of the global Communist revolution. Egypt received the first aid in 1955, followed by Iraq in 1958 and India in 1960. Between 1955 and 1960, Moscow gave military and economic aid to eleven

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<sup>254</sup> Duncan, *Soviet Union*, 27-8.

<sup>255</sup> N. Khrushchev, "Speech to the 20<sup>th</sup> Congress of the C.P.S.U."

Third World countries. In late 1959 and early 1960, just as Castro and his supporters were consolidating their revolution in Cuba, the Soviet Union began to give aid to smaller countries like Guinea, Ghana, and Mali.<sup>256</sup>

Many of the leaders of emerging nations were happy to accept Soviet aid. As one historian put it:

In the euphoria of liberation from colonial rule there were many who...were seduced by anti-imperialist fantasy economics. Convinced that heavy industry was the key to rapid economic development, they welcomed inefficient Soviet steel mills and other heavy plants as symbols of modernity rather than potential industrial white elephants.<sup>257</sup>

Throughout the Third World, including Cuba, when the Soviets were involved, so was *pokazukha*. Façades took the place of substance, and Soviet-built factories, regardless of usefulness, became the symbols of socialist progress in emerging countries. In turn, the fiery rhetoric of the new generation of Third World leaders against both their former colonial rulers and American imperialism inspired Khrushchev to new levels of public support. During his visit to the United States in 1959, he spoke to the General Assembly of the United Nations:

The last strongholds of the moribund colonial system are crumbling away, and crumbling away for good, and this is one of the most significant factors of our time...Future generations will have a high regard for the heroism of those who are leading the struggle for the independence of India and Indonesia, the United Arab Republic and Iraq, Ghana, Guinea and other states, just as the people of the United States today revere the memory of George Washington and Thomas

<sup>256</sup> Duncan, *Soviet Union*, 28.

<sup>257</sup> Andrew and Mitrokhin, *Going Our Way*, 5-6.

Jefferson, who led the American people in their struggle for independence.

I deem it necessary to state here from the rostrum of the United Nations organization that the Soviet Union has the most sincere sympathy and the most profound understanding for all the peoples who on different continents are upholding their freedom and national independence.<sup>258</sup>

It was within this context that Khrushchev's Soviet Union began relations with Castro's Cuba. The U.S.S.R.-Cuba connection was not an isolated association. As the new Cuban leadership grew increasingly bellicose towards the United States, nationalized U.S. property, and centralized state control over the Cuban economy and polity from 1959-1961, Khrushchev and his advisors naturally saw in the Cuban Revolution an extraordinary opportunity. A Communist Cuba under the influence of the Kremlin would expand the Soviet's world propaganda presence as well as their political influence "right under the nose" of their arch-nemesis—the United States of America.<sup>259</sup>

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<sup>258</sup> N. Khrushchev, "Address at the United Nations," in *New York Times*, Sept. 19, 1959: 9.

<sup>259</sup> Interview with Georgi Kornienko, May 1990, Moscow, in Zubok and Pleshakov, *Kremlin's Cold War*, 207; also A.E. Alekseev at the Conference on the Cuban Missile Conference, Moscow, September 1994 in *ibid.*; see also Duncan, *Soviet Union*, 28.



## Chapter VII

## UP TO THE BRINK

Not so very long ago, the struggle for national liberation raged throughout Asia in particular. Then, it spread to Africa...The national liberation movement is now becoming more widespread in Latin America as well. Here is a very recent example: the triumph of the insurrection of the Cuban people right under the United States' nose! The heroic and freedom-loving people of this famous sugar-producing island made those sweet-tooth Yankees swallow a very bitter pill.

—*Otto Kuusinen, Politburo Member, February, 1959*<sup>260</sup>

During the first four years of the Cuban Revolution, until after the missile crisis in October 1962, "the American problem" structured and determined the Soviet response to Castro's Cuba. The optimistic official thesis of Khrushchev's foreign policy—that the socialist camp now had sufficient political and military means to stop the United States from exporting counterrevolution—was not intended for Latin America and certainly not for Cuba. However, when Castro began to thwart the interests of the United States, the leaders of the Soviet Union started to believe that perhaps, just perhaps, the socialist camp could win a major victory "right under the United States' nose," making it swallow a "bitter pill" indeed.

<sup>260</sup> Speech delivered at the 21<sup>st</sup> Congress of the Central Party of the Soviet Union, February 3, 1959, quoted in Levesque, *USSR*, 8. Kuusinen was a member of the Soviet Politburo and Secretary of the Communist Party's Central Committee.

### Cautious Collaboration

Cuba forced us to take a fresh look at the whole continent, which until then had traditionally occupied the last place in the Soviet leadership's system of priorities.

*This lack of understanding* —Nikolai Leonov, KGB expert on Latin America<sup>261</sup>

The first contact between the Cuban rebels and Moscow was indirect. In December 1958 a Costa Rican importing company, functioning as a front, approached the Czech government to discuss the supply of rifles, mortars and ammunition for Fidel's rebel detachments. Prague, firmly in Moscow's 'sphere of influence', requested guidance from the Kremlin. Moscow's leaders approved "the intention of the Czech friends to help the liberation movement in Cuba." However, the Russians continued, "In no document should it be written that the weapons delivery was destined for the Cubans." Furthermore, no Soviet-made weapons were to be sent, as it was assumed that if the CIA discovered the shipments, it might be easier for Washington to swallow the presence of German or Czech weaponry in Cuba.<sup>262</sup>

Although they had sanctioned Prague's sale of Czech weapons to the Cuban rebels, the Soviet leadership in Moscow knew very little about the Cuban leader that would soon be asking for their support. According to Sergei Khrushchev, Nikita's son:

The arrival in Havana of the partisan fighter Fidel Castro on January 1, 1959, and Fulgencio Batista's flight, attracted little attention in Moscow. When Father asked for information about Cuba, it turned out

<sup>261</sup> N.S. Leonov, *Likholet'e* [The Bad Years] (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia, 1995), 60.

<sup>262</sup> Soviet communiqué, quoted in Fursenko and Naftali, *One Hell of a Gamble*, 12-13.

there was none to give him. Neither the Communist Party Central Committee's International Department, KGB intelligence, nor military intelligence had any idea who Castro was or what he was fighting for.<sup>263</sup>

This lack of understanding is exaggerated, but the Kremlin did not have many sources of information inside Cuba. The Cuban Communist Party, the KGB station in Mexico City, and Czech intelligence all provided much-needed information to the leadership in Moscow, but there were no Soviet intelligence officers 'on the ground' in Cuba until October of 1959.<sup>264</sup>

In January of that year, Aleksandr Alekseev, a top Russian expert on Latin America within Soviet intelligence, had asked the KGB to be sent to Cuba as a Soviet observer and operative. From 1954 to 1958, Alekseev had been covering Latin America, recruiting agents and cultivating pro-Soviet politicians hemisphere-wide from his base in Buenos Aires. He was recalled to Moscow in 1958 to devise "propaganda operations" for Latin America for the Commission on Cultural Affairs in the Central Committee.<sup>265</sup> In January 1959, Alekseev forwarded to the KGB his belief that Cuba was unusual among the emerging states. For Alekseev, Castro's revolution did not fit the pattern of the typical Latin American coup—especially since neither the Cuban military nor representatives of the U.S. seemed to have taken over the new government. In February, the KGB not only granted Alekseev's request, but expanded

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<sup>263</sup> S. Khrushchev, "My Father."

<sup>264</sup> Fursenko and Naftali, *One Hell of a Gamble*, 25.

<sup>265</sup> J. Zhukov, A. Shelepin, and A. Orlov to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, quoted in Fursenko and Naftali, *One Hell of a Gamble*, 26.

his "special mission" to include establishing direct contact with the top levels of the new Cuban leadership.<sup>266</sup> Although the leaders of Cuba did want to establish such contact, they wanted to keep it secret from the world (especially the United States) until they were ready. Therefore, they denied a visa for Alekseev until October.<sup>267</sup>

In fact, the Cubans made the first clandestine moves toward a direct Soviet-Cuba connection. However, Castro was well aware of the United States' role in Cuban history. Therefore, he sent his own emissaries to Moscow rather than allowing the Kremlin to send one of theirs—it was far less likely that the CIA's informers would notice a Cuban in Moscow than they would a high-ranking Russian intelligence expert in Havana. Members of the Cuban Communist Party volunteered to forge the link between Havana and Moscow, and a series of emissaries traveled between the two capitals. For example, in March 1959, Castro sent a representative of the Cuban Communist Party to meet with the chief of Staff of the Soviet armed forces to discuss future relations between the two militaries.<sup>268</sup>

Castro, with the help of his brother Raul, then picked Lazaro Pena, a longtime Cuban Communist Party member and former President of the Cuban Labor Congress, to be his first major emissary to the Soviet Union. Pena traveled to Moscow in April 1959. Through him, the Castro brothers asked for Soviet assistance in consolidating their control of the Cuban army and improving their intelligence network. Not even

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<sup>266</sup> Ibid.

<sup>267</sup> Fursenko and Naftali, *One Hell of a Gamble*, 25-6.

<sup>268</sup> Ibid., 13.



this help was to be obvious—the Cubans asked not for Slavic advisors, but rather for Spanish Communists who had graduated from Soviet military academies.<sup>269</sup> The Cuban leader's intention in asking for Spaniards was to either make the CIA miss the assistance altogether, or to confuse the North Americans if they did detect it.<sup>270</sup>

Along those same lines, Castro timed his first visit to the United States to coincide with Pena's visit to the Soviet Union. Here again, the Cuban leader deployed Russian-style *pokazukha*. Sarcastically codenamed "Operation Truth," Castro's six-city whirlwind tour of the U.S. and Canada was intended as exactly the opposite. Castro had several goals for this "operation." Officially, he was in the U.S. "not to get a change in the sugar quota or to get a government loan but to win support...from American popular opinion."<sup>271</sup> To that end, since his government did not yet have its own agitprop department, Castro engaged a Manhattan public relations firm to assist in planning his itinerary and to advise the Cubans "on how to project a favorable image during their stay in the United States."<sup>272</sup> The firm, Louis-Rowe-Fisher-Lockhart Enterprises, Inc., boasted the famous heavyweight boxer Joe Lewis as its Vice President.<sup>273</sup>

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<sup>269</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>270</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>271</sup> Nixon memorandum, quoted in Jeffrey J. Safford, "The Nixon-Castro Meeting of 19 April 1959," *Diplomatic History* 4 (1980): 426-31.

<sup>272</sup> Quirk, *Fidel Castro*, 236.

<sup>273</sup> "Cuba Contract Ended," *New York Times*, July 8, 1960: 2. When relations between Cuba and the United States began to sour, Mr. Lewis demanded that the firm drop Cuba as a client, and the relationship ended.

Castro was also in the United States to turn CIA attention from Pena's visit to Moscow. In addition, Fidel wanted to deflect rumors that he—and his government—were Communists. Castro knew that North American acceptance of a Latin American regime depended upon its being perceived in Washington as non-Communist. To accomplish that part of his mission, he intentionally brought with him Cuban officials whose ideas on economics and trade matched those of the Eisenhower administration. He also publicly denied his own Communist sympathies every time he was asked during the trip, which was often. Furthermore, he deliberately downplayed the role of his brother Raul in the new government, as the younger Castro was a known Communist.

Again, Russian-style *pokazukha* served Castro well. On the cover of the *New York Times* for April 18 (the Saturday after Castro arrived in the U.S.), the following headline ran in large, bold font: "Castro Declares Regime is Free of Red Influence."

The first paragraph of the article read as follows:

Premier Fidel Castro of Cuba denied today charges of Communist influences in his regime. In a speech before the American Society of Newspaper Editors he asserted: 'I have said very clearly that we are not Communists.'<sup>274</sup>

The very same day, the Cuban ambassador held an elaborate reception at which Fidel shook hands with the Soviet Ambassador and talked to the American Secretary of Defense. Both were invited to the embassy to witness the main event of the

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<sup>274</sup> E.W. Kenworth, "Castro Declares Regime is Free of Red Influence," *New York Times*, April 18, 1959: 1.

reception—in a solemn ceremony, Castro awarded gold medals (mentioned above) to the North American journalists who had interviewed him in the Sierra Maestra. The first to receive this accolade was Herbert Matthews.<sup>275</sup>

Castro's overall objective during "Operation Truth" was to decrease North American influence over Cuban affairs. He did this by his own public actions in the United States as well as by his representative's covert actions in Moscow. During the entire trip, Castro's timing and his manipulation of the foreign press were impeccable. Castro had learned the lessons of *pokazukha* well.<sup>276</sup>

Although the Soviet leaders were optimistic and energized by the possibility of a Communist success in the Caribbean, they were as cautious in their support as Castro was in his request. Cuban requests for assistance in building a military and an intelligence network met with approval, but preliminary discussions of economic aid and propaganda assistance were rebuffed. In a geopolitical climate of superpower competition in the Third World, even Khrushchev was unwilling to go beyond secret support for a revolutionary that the Soviets knew little about. While the visits of Cuban Communists to Moscow were encouraging, the Russians still did not have any intelligence assets on the island.<sup>277</sup> The men in the Kremlin were also aware of the long shadow of the United States, and were determined not to have a public relations fiasco taint their new policy of success in the Third World.

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<sup>275</sup> "Castro Hails Newsmen," *New York Times*, April 19, 1959: 4.

<sup>276</sup> Fursenko and Naftali, *One Hell of a Gamble*, 8-9. Quirk, *Fidel Castro*, 235-243.

<sup>277</sup> *Ibid.*, 13-21.

From May to July, 1959, Che Guevara became Cuba's commercial attaché, traveling the world in search of moral and material benefits for Cuba. Although he deliberately stayed away from socialist countries to avoid raising suspicion in Washington, he spent time with the local Soviet and Eastern Bloc representatives in almost every capital on his itinerary. The Kremlin was kept abreast of these meetings. In general, Che was telling the Soviets that they had a new ally in the Third World, and that Castro's government fully intended to build socialism in Cuba, in spite of the influence of the United States.<sup>278</sup> For that, they would need help.

Guevara was clear, however, that the Cuba-Soviet compact had to be approached carefully. As Che explained to the Soviet Ambassador to Japan in July, Cuban "rapprochement to socialist countries" had to be "gradual...because the enemies of the revolution will try to use every sign to obstruct domestic affairs on the pretext of a communist threat in Cuba."<sup>279</sup> In August and then in September, Guevara negotiated agreements for the U.S.S.R. to buy Cuban sugar at world market prices—first 170,000 metric tons, then 333,000 tons.<sup>280</sup> In fact, the Soviet Union had purchased Cuban sugar throughout the 1950s (in 1955, they bought half a million tons). Some scholars have made the argument that these purchases from Guevara

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<sup>278</sup> Ibid.

<sup>279</sup> From the Diary of Soviet Ambassador to Japan, N.T. Fedorenko, quoted in Fursenko and Naftali, *One Hell of a Gamble*, 20.

<sup>280</sup> Miller, *Soviet Relations*, 62-3.



were "routine commercial transactions."<sup>281</sup> Such a position is, however, without merit. This volume of sugar, purchased directly from the new Cuban government, was a sign of the Soviet leadership's budding confidence in the Cuban revolutionary regime.

Prior to 1959, the Soviets bought Cuban sugar from reliable private exporters. With Guevara, they were purchasing directly from a revolutionary government not yet fully in control of its country. Under those circumstances, and in light of the new foreign policy in Moscow, these purchases point to a desire on the part of the Kremlin to gamble on the future friendship of the Castro regime by supporting it economically, despite the risk. Nikolai Leonov, KGB insider and translator for Khrushchev and Guevara, later wrote that "Nikita Khrushchev did everything possible so that Che Guevara's mission was successful."<sup>282</sup>

Also in September 1959, the Cubans approached Poland with a request similar to the one that they had made the Czechs the year before—they wished to buy weapons secretly. Just as the Czechs had, the Poles asked permission from Moscow. The answer from the Kremlin was delayed by Khrushchev's absence (he was in the United States at the time), and because it was the considered opinion of the Soviet intelligence community that "the supply of arms to Cuba will drive the Americans toward active interference in the internal affairs of Latin America and, in the first

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<sup>281</sup> Ibid.

<sup>282</sup> Leonov, *Likholet'e* [The Bad Years], 69.

instance, in the affairs of Cuba."<sup>283</sup> Khrushchev's return to Moscow changed that decision. Khrushchev was dedicated to his new optimistic policy regarding the Third World, and the socialist conversion of Cuba "right under the United States' nose" was too tempting for him to resist. Warsaw Pact weapons, designed by Soviets and manufactured in Poland, were sent to Cuba without delay—but still secretly.<sup>284</sup>

In October, the Soviets were finally able to secure a Cuban visa for the Latin American expert Aleksandr Alekseev, who was by then assigned to the KGB. Within three days of his arrival, Alekseev met with Guevara. The next day he had a private meeting with Fidel himself. During that meeting, Castro assured Alekseev that "All that needs to be done will be done."<sup>285</sup> Knowing firsthand the power of agitprop, he urged that the traveling Soviet technological and propaganda exhibition then in Mexico be routed next to Cuba, and that Anastas Mikoyan, Deputy Chairman of the Soviet Council of Ministers, come with it. The friendly October meeting was the first of many meetings that Alekseev was to have with the Cuban dictator over the next several months, and it signaled a change in Castro's willingness to ally himself openly with the Soviet Union.

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<sup>283</sup> J. Zhukov, A. Shelepin, and A. Orlov to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, quoted in Fursenko and Naftali, *One Hell of a Gamble*, 23.

<sup>284</sup> Fursenko and Naftali, *One Hell of a Gamble*, 28.

<sup>285</sup> Ibid., 29.

### Poster-child of the Revolution

Yes, he is a revolutionary. Completely like us. I felt as though I had returned to my childhood.

—Anastas Mikoyan, to Khrushchev, February 1960<sup>286</sup>

In February 1960, Mikoyan took Castro up on his offer, and traveled to Havana to assess the situation for himself. In a public speech at the opening of the Soviet cultural and technological exhibit in Havana, he confidently assured the Cuban people that the socialist system had proven itself superior to the capitalist system. The "majestic successes" of the socialist system were made possible by centralized planning and the work of the laborers. Under the wise leadership of the Communist Party, the Soviet Union was "marching forward with confidence in the friendly family of the socialist countries"—a family that Mikoyan invited the Cuban people to join.<sup>287</sup>

After several days of friendly negotiations, Mikoyan met with Fidel to sign a major trade agreement. The Soviets agreed to buy 425,000 metric tons of sugar during the remainder of 1960, followed by the purchase of a million tons a year for the next four years. Sugar in the fifth year was to be paid for in cash, the rest in Soviet goods, including six million barrels of Soviet oil per year. Other products the Soviet were to send included wheat, iron, steel, aluminum, newsprint, sulfur, caustic soda, fertilizers, and machinery. The Cubans would also export fruit, juices, fiber and hides to the

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<sup>286</sup> Anastas Mikoyan, quoted in Fursenko and Naftali, *One Hell of a Gamble*, 39. See also Taubman, *Khrushchev*, 533. Mikoyan was First Deputy Premier of the Soviet Union from 1955-1964. He was one of Khrushchev's closest allies and had been a revolutionary ally of both Khrushchev and Stalin. In the early years of the Soviet-Cuba connection, Mikoyan was Khrushchev's primary emissary to Cuba and Castro.

<sup>287</sup> Anastas Mikoyan, quoted in Quirk, *Fidel Castro*, 294.

U.S.S.R. The Soviets agreed to provide technical assistance in the Cuban industrial sector (building factories and refineries), as well as helping the Cubans to drain some of their most pestilential swamps. Furthermore, Mikoyan agreed to loan Castro's Cuba \$100 million at the very low yearly interest rate of 2.5 percent for ten years.<sup>288</sup>

When the Soviet delegation returned to the U.S.S.R., they left behind most of the machinery that had been featured in the exhibition, including a helicopter that was promptly claimed by Fidel for his own use. They also left behind the agitprop language of 'international solidarity' and the stamp of approval that the other socialist countries needed in order to pursue trade. Indeed, the support from Moscow was quite strong, and even Khrushchev personally, "threw around his political weight to ensure that every ton of Cuban sugar was bought by the USSR and its East European allies."<sup>289</sup> A delegation from the German Democratic Republic arrived while the

Soviets were still in Havana, and delegations from China and the other Eastern Bloc countries were not far behind. By the end of the month, Cuba had completed trade agreements with both the G.D.R. and Poland.<sup>290</sup> The U.S.S.R. had opened a way for Cuba to survive without the previously essential United States markets and supply.

Mikoyan's visit served also to heighten the positive response of the Soviet leadership to the revolution in Cuba. Unexpectedly, Mikoyan discovered more in Cuba than a chance to increase Soviet prestige under the nose of the United States.

<sup>288</sup> Quirk, *Fidel Castro*, 295. See also Miller, *Soviet Relations*, 73.

<sup>289</sup> Zubok and Pleshakov, *Kremlin's Cold War*, 207.

<sup>290</sup> Quirk, *Fidel Castro*, 295-6.



During his visits with Guevara and the Castro brothers, Mikoyan came to realize that here, in a small island country just off the coast of the U.S., real socialist revolution had sprung up without any significant aid from the U.S.S.R.

For Mikoyan, his visit to Cuba had the invigorating affect of "an ideological Fountain of Youth."<sup>291</sup> A member of the Soviet 'Old Guard', Mikoyan was now an aging survivor of the Soviet Revolution, the Civil War, two World Wars, and three regime changes in the Kremlin. By 1960, along with many others in Moscow, he had become jaded by the lack of the predicted Communist world revolution. As Oleg Troyanovsky, one of Khrushchev's top foreign policy advisors, later put it:

In the doctrine, Marxist-Leninist doctrine, you were supposed to believe that Communism would prevail; but this was a little like the Second Coming of Christ. You were supposed to believe in it, but very few did [Laughs].<sup>292</sup>

Under these circumstances, Cuba was "a completely unexpected miracle," and Mikoyan made little secret about how he felt.<sup>293</sup> His enthusiasm was such that, only a few months later, even Eisenhower noted "I have been told that Mikoyan, on returning to Moscow from Cuba, was exuberantly rejuvenated, finding that what was going on in the youthful and disorganized Cuban revolution brought him back to the early days

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<sup>291</sup> John Lewis Gaddis, *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 181.

<sup>292</sup> Oleg Troyanovsky, interview by unknown correspondent, CNN, 1999. NSA Archive, <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/coldwar/interviews/episode-10/troyanovski3.html>. Troyanovsky was a foreign policy assistant and interpreter for Stalin. Under Khrushchev, he was promoted to top foreign policy advisor. He was later the Soviet ambassador to several countries.

<sup>293</sup> Jerry Hough, *The Struggle for the Third World: Soviet Debates and American Options* (Washington: Brookings Institution, 1986), 72.

of the Russian Revolution."<sup>294</sup> Mikoyan later confirmed this in a conversation with Dean Rusk:

You Americans must realize what Cuba means to us old Bolsheviks. We have been waiting all our lives for a country to go Communist without the Red Army. It has happened in Cuba, and it makes us feel like boys again!<sup>295</sup>

Thus, the Soviet-Cuba connection became more than just political or economic. In Moscow, upon Mikoyan's return, an ideological fervor reentered Soviet foreign policy. In the words of two Russian Cold War historians, Khrushchev was in the midst of a "romantic affair with Third World revolutionarism." This was true for Africa and Asia, but it was especially true for Cuba:

Khrushchev's attachment to Castro's Cuba was the most visible symptom of his 'leftist disease' in late 1960 and early 1961...[he] allowed himself to get carried away... Khrushchev and his colleagues in the Presidium...saw the young Cubans as heroes who had revived the promise of the Russian Revolution, and dared do it under the very nose of the most powerful imperialist country on earth.<sup>296</sup>

Mikoyan's enthusiasm was confirmed when Khrushchev embraced Castro in Harlem, New York, later in the year. At that meeting, "a psychological union was

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<sup>294</sup> Eisenhower to Harold Macmillan, July 11, 1960, quoted in Gaddis, *We Now Know*, 181.

<sup>295</sup> Dean Rusk, as told to Richard Rusk, *As I Saw It* (New York: Norton, 1990), 245. See also Richard Reeves, *President Kennedy: Profile of Power* (New York: Simon & Shuster, 1993), 105.

<sup>296</sup> Interview with Georgi Kornienko, May 1990, Moscow, in Zubok and Pleshakov, *Kremlin's Cold War*, 207; also A.E. Alekseev at the Conference on the Cuban Missile Conference, Moscow, September 1994 in *ibid.*; see also Duncan, *Soviet Union*, 28.

built between the two leaders that upset American political circles."<sup>297</sup> Fidel Castro would later say:

Nikita loved Cuba very much. He especially cherished Cuba. He had a weakness for Cuba, you might say—emotionally and so on—because he was a man of political conviction, a man with a political doctrine, a political theory, and he was consistent with that doctrine. He thought in terms of capitalism versus socialism. He had very firm convictions. He thought, perhaps in a kind of mistaken conception, that socialism would, in peaceful competition, overcome capitalism...I never got a clear answer [from the Soviet leaders] on the role of the strategic argument in the Soviet deliberations. So I want to make clear that this was our perception of the motivation.<sup>298</sup>

Thus did ideological romanticism also play a major part in the actions of the Soviet leaders. Some scholars of the Cold War have gone so far as to argue that Khrushchev's emotional commitment caused him to lose perspective completely.<sup>299</sup>

Whether that argument is entirely true or not, on June 6, 1960, Khrushchev publicly placed Cuba under Soviet nuclear protection—making a military and political commitment that he would find difficult to back down from two years later. He did this without any direct knowledge of U.S. intentions to intervene. Although in March 1960, Eisenhower had authorized the CIA to begin planning for a possible removal of Castro, Soviet intelligence appears not to have been aware of this fact. Significantly, the U.S. intelligence agency had no specific plans by June to which Khrushchev could

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<sup>297</sup> Rudolf Pihoya, *Почему Хрущев потерял власть-Кубинский ракетный кризис 1962 г.* [Why Khrushchev Lost His Power: Cuban Missile Crisis, 1962], *Международный исторический журнал* [Journal of International History] no. 8 (March-April 2000), [http://history.machaon.ru/all/number\\_08/analiti4/khrushchev/1/index.html](http://history.machaon.ru/all/number_08/analiti4/khrushchev/1/index.html)

<sup>298</sup> F. Castro, quoted in Blight, Allyn, and Welch, *Cuba on the Brink*, 202-203.

<sup>299</sup> Gaddis, *Cold War*, 77.

have been reacting. Rather, he appears to have been unilaterally declaring full solidarity with the Castro regime, reacting to preconceived notions of the U.S. threat both to Havana and to Moscow—and his own emotionally-driven ideological commitment to the revolution in Cuba.

At a meeting of Soviet educators, with one of his own childhood teachers present, Khrushchev announced: "If need be, Soviet artillerymen can support the Cuban people with their rocket fire, should the aggressive forces in the Pentagon dare to start intervention against Cuba."<sup>300</sup> With this statement, Khrushchev set the stage for the ensuing three decades, committing the Soviet Union not just to ideological, economic, diplomatic, and military support—but also to nuclear support. Once the Soviet Premier publicly reached this level of commitment, Castro believed he could operate defiantly, free from repercussions emanating from Washington. He had secured his superpower ally, and he could now do what he wished in Cuba—as long as he supported the *pokazukha*-based foreign policy of the U.S.S.R. The Soviet-Cuba connection had reached 'the brink' of nuclear war without any significant help from the United States.

Simultaneously, however, the U.S. was finishing up a concerted—and successful—effort to investigate behind the Soviet façade of missile superiority. Once that Potemkin village was pulled down, the primacy of Khrushchev's *pokazukha* was

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<sup>300</sup> N. Khrushchev, quoted in Fursenko and Naftali, *One Hell of a Gamble*, 52.



## Chapter VIII

## PIGS AND HEDGEHOGS

The fate of Cuba and the maintenance of Soviet prestige in that part of the world preoccupied me.

—Nikita Khrushchev<sup>301</sup>

In 1960, with Soviet support assured, Castro no longer needed to hide his Communist sympathies from Washington. Castro's Cuba fully embraced its job as poster-child of the anti-imperialist Third World, while simultaneously capitalizing on both Khrushchev's public commitment and the Russians' desire to retain leadership of the socialist camp. The United States also began to work against Cuba, but only in response to specific actions taken by Castro against the private property of U.S. companies. Although in March of 1960 Eisenhower had authorized the CIA to begin planning for a possible removal of Castro, the U.S. reaction continued to be slow and uncertain. The Bay of Pigs invasion, executed as it was in a ridiculously half-hearted manner, served only to fuel the propagandistic fires burning in the Potemkin villages of Moscow and Havana.

Simultaneously, however, the U.S. was finishing up a concerted—and successful—effort to investigate behind the Soviet façade of missile superiority. Once that Potemkin village was pulled down, the primacy of Khrushchev's *pokazukha* was

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<sup>301</sup> N. Khrushchev, *Khrushchev Remembers*, trans. and ed. by Strobe Talbott (New York: Bantham, 1971), 546.

irrevocably lost. In an impulsive bid to retain that position, the Soviet Premier sent nuclear missiles to Cuba—but it was already too late.

### Triumphant Brinkmanship

We were in the antechamber of the holocaust and we were cracking jokes.

—Fidel Castro<sup>302</sup>

In August of 1960, the Cuban Communist Party held its Eighth National Congress. General Secretary Blas Roca wrote the report to that Congress, in which he stated Cuba's unequivocal support of, and gratitude to, the Soviet Union. Clearly, the Cuban leadership had ceased bothering to maintain an anti-Communist façade, and made some definitely—and defiantly—socialist political decisions. Lengthy quotation is here worthwhile, as Roca states Castro's position—and the motivations behind it—clearly, concisely, and (almost) accurately. The best lies are, of course, those that are composed mostly of truth.

The solidarity of the socialist countries, offered spontaneously and generously as a consequence of Marxist-Leninist principles of proletarian internationalism and aid to countries fighting for liberty and independence from imperialism, the principles which guide their policy, has been decisive for the Cuban Revolution.<sup>303</sup>

Roca's report is similar to Khrushchev's reports to the CPSU. Roca described how the U.S. "resorted to the criminal maneuver" of cutting off oil shipments to Cuba

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<sup>302</sup> F. Castro, in a secret speech to his Communist Party Central Committee, 1968, quoted in Francois Raitberger, "Castro Joked, JFK Firm in 1962 Missile Crisis" *Reuter News Service*, August 15, 1997, <http://www.fiu.edu/~fcf/castro.kennedy.nukes81597.html>

<sup>303</sup> Blas Roca, *The Cuban Revolution: Report to the Eighth National Congress of the Popular Socialist Party of Cuba* (New York: New Century Publishers, 1961), 73.

(which it did in response to the nationalization of U.S.-owned refineries), "in the hope that they could thus bring the revolutionary government to its knees." In that case, "the Soviet Union sold Cuba all the fuel it needed and guaranteed, to the amazement and consternation of the imperialists, all the tankers that were needed to transport the oil." This statement was true to a point, as the U.S.S.R. did supply oil and tankers, and this did cause consternation in the U.S. However, in 1960, the Soviet Union did not supply Cuba "all the fuel it needed." Furthermore, the Russians were not particularly happy about this development. For the first, but definitely not the last time, Khrushchev discovered himself captive of his own foreign policy *pokazukha*, stuck living in a Potemkin village of his own making. In 1970, Khrushchev related how difficult providing aid to Cuba was for the Soviet Union, even from the beginning.

Life on the island was in danger of coming to a standstill. It was urgent that we organize an oil delivery to Cuba on a massive scale. But that was easier said than done. We didn't have enough ocean-going vessels in our own tanker fleet. Our efforts to provide Cuba with the petroleum products it needed put a heavy burden on our own shipping system and forced us to order extra tankers from Italy.<sup>304</sup>

"Eisenhower himself," Roca continued in his 1960 report, "took on the dirty job of eliminating the sugar quota in the market of the United States." Again, this is true, but was done in response to Cuban confiscation of U.S.-owned holdings on the island, this time of agribusiness. "Once again," announced Roca, "in the face of this aggression, the solidarity of the socialist countries was shown in all its scope."<sup>305</sup> The

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<sup>304</sup> N. Khrushchev, *Khrushchev Remembers*, 490.

<sup>305</sup> Roca, *Cuban Revolution*, 74.



Soviet Union and China, Roca wrote, began to buy sugar in quantities that made up for the loss of the United States and its quotas. In reality, the purchases were not a reflection of "the solidarity of the socialist countries." Indeed, "It seems to have been Moscow's need to counter a challenge from Beijing which prompted the next Soviet commitment to Cuba."<sup>306</sup> Mao's China had broken with Khrushchev's U.S.S.R. in 1956, and was now in a struggle with Moscow for domination of both the established socialist states and the emerging countries of the Third World.

Following the early commitments described by Roca, both China and the Soviet Union sought to outbid each other in support of the Cuban Revolution. In November, 1960, Che Guevara signed an agreement in the Chinese capital that committed the Asian Communists to a purchase of an additional one million tons of sugar in 1961. The agreement also provided for a Chinese loan of \$60 million to Cuba. "With the rift between Beijing and Moscow deepening, the Soviet leaders, aware that the Maoist model was not unattractive to the Cubans, made haste to better the Chinese deal."<sup>307</sup> The Soviet rejoinder was a commitment the next month to the purchase of 2.7 million metric tons at less than world market price, along with a wide variety of economic aid and technical assistance measures.<sup>308</sup>

"Thanks to these purchases," continued Roca in June, even before the second round of support was concluded with either country, "Cuba will not sell less sugar this

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<sup>306</sup> Miller, *Soviet Relations*, 80.

<sup>307</sup> Ibid.

<sup>308</sup> Ibid., 80-81.



year than last, but more. It will not have an economic crisis, but prosperity."<sup>309</sup> Thus did the Cubans reap the economic rewards of Mao and Khrushchev's Potemkin-like foreign policies—rewards beyond both Cuban and Soviet expectations. Furthermore, the compensation was not just monetary. Castro would need the latest in weapons technology if he was to repel attacks from imperialist enemies. To that end, Che Guevara again visited Moscow. As a result of agreements made there, a group of Soviet military specialists, headed by A. A. Dement'ev, were sent to Cuba. The delegation was to come up with a detailed plan to locate conventional missiles on Cuba. In addition, the group supplied Cuba with a substantial amount of artillery, including hand-held surface-to-air missiles, and trained Cuban army specialists in military tactics and strategy.<sup>310</sup>

Changing subjects, Roca continued his June report:

In the light of the evidence that that the United States, desperate and furious, was preparing to launch open military intervention with the criminal purpose of occupying our country by blood and fire and defeating by arms a revolution that could not be overthrown even that way, Prime Minister Khrushchev and leading figures in the U.S.S.R. issued the well-known sensational warning that if Cuba was attacked in this way, the Soviet Union would give its full aid, even to the flight of intercontinental missiles to the United States if that were necessary.<sup>311</sup>

In reality, as we have seen, only the month before had the United States begun to explore the *possibility* of invading Cuba. Despite Roca's claims, Khrushchev's

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<sup>309</sup> Roca, *Cuban Revolution*, 74.

<sup>310</sup> Pihoya, "Why Khrushchev Lost."

<sup>311</sup> *Ibid.*

proclamation had little to do with the actions of the United States and everything to do with his optimistic potemkinism. Even so, since Roca was following the logic of *pokazukha*—simply *claiming* that Khrushchev had stopped the U.S. was just as good as if it had actually occurred. Continuing to apply that logic, Roca wrote, "This warning stopped the North American imperialists cold. In the face of its categorical terms they were forced to...suspend their plans for direct military intervention in Cuba."<sup>312</sup>

In fact, Khrushchev's blustering had little effect in the United States—but it had a profound impact back home in the U.S.S.R., where Khrushchev's claims compelled the Soviet military to attempt to give their leader's façades some semblance of reality. Vladimir Rezun (alias Viktor Suvorov), Soviet Army officer and member of Soviet military intelligence, wrote the following about the Soviet missile program: "The Strategic Rocket Forces have a much revered father figure. If he did not exist neither would the SRF. His name is Fidel Castro: you may smile, but the SRF does not."<sup>313</sup>

Rezun went on to tell a story of the Soviet commitment to Cuba that marvelously reveals, from the perspective of a Russian insider, what *pokazukha* in action looked like under Khrushchev. With Castro's Cuba, Rezun wrote, "The Kremlin saw an unexpected chance to loosen the hold of its hated enemy, capitalism, on the Western hemisphere...but one which it seemed impossible to exploit because of

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<sup>312</sup> Ibid.

<sup>313</sup> Viktor Suvorov, *Inside the Soviet Army* (New York: MacMillan, 1982), 57.

lack of strength on the spot." Previously, the Soviet Union had been able to support allies with conventional weapons.

But how could it help Fidel Castro on the other side of the ocean? At that time...strategic aircraft existed but only for parades and demonstrations of strength. How could the United States be dissuaded from stepping in? There was a simple, brilliant solution—bluff.<sup>314</sup>

Having covered the background, Rezun continued: "It was decided to make use of a weapon which had not yet come into service—what Goebbels [Nazi Germany's Propaganda Minister] would have called a 'miracle weapon'." Throughout 1959 there had been successful Soviet rocket tests. In January 1960, Khrushchev announced the formation of the Strategic Rocket Forces. He followed this with claims, in true *pokazukha* fashion, that nothing would be able to withstand these forces, and that Soviet missiles could reach any point on the globe. Khrushchev revealed "in confidence" to journalists that he had been to a factory where he had seen rockets "tumbling off the conveyor belts, just like sausages." "Incidentally," wrote Rezun in 1982, "then, as now, the supply of meat sausages was presenting the U.S.S.R. with acute problems."<sup>315</sup>

The West, unaccustomed to dealing with such a charlatan, credited his bluff and was appropriately impressed. Khrushchev began making fierce threats about "pressing the button". However, many Soviet leaders and elites were bewildered and surprised by Khrushchev's behavior and rhetoric. This was particularly true because

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<sup>314</sup> Ibid.

<sup>315</sup> Ibid.



his claims were nothing more than *pokazukha*. Many in the top echelons of Soviet society knew that all the operational Soviet rockets were immediately used for demonstrations in space while the new Strategic Rocket Forces received nothing but replicas, "which were shown off in parades and in films. Empty dummies, resembling rockets, were splendidly designated 'dimensional substitutes'."<sup>316</sup> Meanwhile, a frantic scramble was in progress to produce real, operational rockets. Working at a fevered pace, Soviet scientists and engineers were the victims of numerous accidents. In one such incident on October 24, 1960, an experimental rocket exploded on its launch pad, killing the Commander-in-Chief of the new Strategic Rocket Forces. Along with his entire staff and numerous scientists, engineers, and workers, the head of Khrushchev's 'omnipotent' nuclear arsenal was burned alive.<sup>317</sup>

Thus did Khrushchev's Potemkin-like foreign policy make Fidel Castro the "revered father figure" of the Soviet Strategic Rocket Forces, multiplying *pokazukha* all the way down the chain of command. It was this "miracle weapon" upon which Blas Roca staked the reputation of the Cuban Revolution when he wrote in his June 1960 report that:

Nationally and internationally, the forces of the Cuban Revolution and the forces that support it are stronger than the forces of imperialist, reactionary, and counter-revolutionary enemies. And so once more we repeat: WE SHALL WIN!<sup>318</sup>

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<sup>316</sup> Ibid, 58.

<sup>317</sup> Ibid.

<sup>318</sup> Roca, *The Cuban Revolution*, 76.



### The Almost Invasion

The danger of direct aggression could again gain momentum following this failure [the Bay of Pigs Affair]. We have said that imperialism will disappear. We do not wish it to commit suicide; we want it to die a natural death. If it dies the world will live in peace. But it will die violently if it begins a world war.

—Fidel Castro, *on the Bay of Pigs invasion, April 1961*<sup>319</sup>

While Castro and Khrushchev were busy capitalizing on their successfully built Potemkin villages, the Americans were busy with one of the closest Presidential elections in U.S. history. The Cuban Revolution and Soviet ICBMs became issues in the race between sitting Vice-President Richard Nixon and Senator John F. Kennedy. Meanwhile, in Florida, Cuban leaders in exile simply could not conceive of a world in which the United States would *not* intervene in a Communist Cuba. Until after the Bay of Pigs, Cubans who had fled the revolution to take up residence in Miami did not buy houses or involve themselves in local affairs. They did not get jobs or even read the *Miami Herald*—they felt that their sojourn in the U.S. was temporary, and their lives were consumed with returning to their homeland.

This was due, in no small part, to history and the political currents emanating from Washington. History told the Cuban exiles (just as it did the Soviets and the *Fidelistas*) that the United States would intervene—and both Nixon and Kennedy

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<sup>319</sup> F. Castro, "Castro Denounces U.S. Aggression," April 23, 1961. Castro Speech Database, <http://www1.lanl.utexas.edu/la/cb/cuba/castro/1961/19610423>

seemed to support that theory.<sup>320</sup> Just as in Guatemala in 1954, exiles would become the primary element of a U.S. intervention. However, in what was later officially called "The Bay of Pigs Affair," those exiles were not supported by U.S. military might, and the invasion ended in a major political and propaganda defeat for the United States.

By late 1959, the CIA and the Eisenhower administration had decided (as they had five years earlier with Arbenz in Guatemala) that Fidel Castro was a tool of Communism and an ally of the Soviet Union. However, no detailed plan of attack was developed until late in 1960. Throughout that election year, and largely for his own political reasons, Nixon chafed at the CIA's evident lack of progress on that plan. John F. Kennedy, his opponent in the Presidential race, was attacking the Eisenhower administration—and Nixon as its Vice President—for allowing both the alleged "missile gap" and Communist Cuba to develop. Nixon sent his military aide to push the American intelligence services into quicker action. "How are 'the boys doing at the institute?' he asked. 'Are they falling dead over there?' The 'Guatemalan problem' in 1954 had been finished off in no time."<sup>321</sup> A month before the election, it was evident that there would be no invasion before November to prod the American people into voting Nixon's way. Thus, "Nixon insisted that the Democratic candidate be kept

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<sup>320</sup> Carbonell, *And the Russians Stayed*.

<sup>321</sup> Quirk, *Fidel Castro*, 347. *"Talk on Cuba," New York Times*, Jan. 7, 1960, 20.





Eastern Bloc weapons on a regular basis, strengthening his regime. Soon, argued Dulles and Bissell, it would be too late to execute an easy victory on the island.<sup>325</sup>

Modeled on the Guatemalan PBSUCCESS operation, the CIA Cuban plan (which used multiple codenames) called for a CIA-trained force of Cuban exiles who would seize an isolated area along Cuba's southern coast, allowing émigré political leaders to return to the island and offer the populace a democratic alternative to Castro. However, unlike the Guatemalan plan, the Cuban Brigade's air power would consist of émigré-flown, outmoded B-26 bombers allegedly purchased on the black market. This would be in stark contrast to the Guatemalan operation, which used state-of-the-art, CIA-flown bombers supported by fighters.

The original Cuban plan called for a "D-Day airstrike" similar to the airstrikes on Guatemala City in 1954, but at the last moment, President Kennedy decided not to allow U.S.-flown airplanes to see action over Cuba, other than a single hour of support for the B-26s by unmarked fighters deployed from an aircraft carrier. Even this support went undelivered during the actual invasion, as the CIA and the Pentagon were unaware of a time zone difference between Nicaragua and Cuba.<sup>326</sup> Kennedy later told a group of Cuban exile leaders in Florida that "the Soviet government had threatened to attack West Berlin if the United States continued to launch raids on Cuba

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<sup>325</sup> Michael Warner, "Lessons Learned: The CIA's Internal Probe of the Bay of Pigs Affair," Center for the Study of Intelligence, <https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/kentcsi/docs/v42i5a08p.htm#ft4>

<sup>326</sup> Telephone Conversation, President John F. Kennedy and Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy discuss the Stennis committee review of the Bay of Pigs, March 2, 1963. National Security Archive, <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/bayofpigs/baypigs1.ram>



and backed the invasion."<sup>327</sup> Whether this was true or not, Cuban exile leader (and Bay of Pigs participant) Nestor T. Carbonell later observed: "Tools to do the job were not lacking; what failed was the will to use them—the will to win."<sup>328</sup> The CIA's internal probe of the Bay of Pigs Affair concluded that:

The White House and the CIA were like ships passing in the night during the planning for the Bay of Pigs invasion; they assumed they spoke the same language with regard to Cuba, but they actually were imprisoned by mutually exclusive misconceptions about the invasion's likely outcome. The Kennedy administration believed the assault brigade would be able to escape destruction by melting into the countryside to wage guerrilla warfare...CIA officials, from Dulles on down to the branch chief who ran the operation, professed this same belief but tacitly assumed President Kennedy would commit U.S. troops rather than let the Brigade be overrun.<sup>329</sup>

Regardless of the reasons behind the failure, it amounted to a major propaganda coup for the *Fidelistas*. In an August 17, 1962 meeting with Che Guevara, Kennedy aide Richard Goodwin was told, in no uncertain terms, that the Castro government was quite pleased with the outcome of the 'affair':

[Guevara] then went on to say that he wanted to thank us very much for the invasion—that it had been a great political victory for them—enabled them to consolidate—and transformed them from an aggrieved little country to an equal.<sup>330</sup>

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<sup>327</sup> Carbonell, *And the Russians Stayed*, 190.

<sup>328</sup> Ibid., 155.

<sup>329</sup> Michael Warner, "Bay of Pigs Affair."

<sup>330</sup> White House, Memorandum, SECRET, "Conversation with Commandante Ernesto Guevara of Cuba," August 17, 1961: 4. National Security Archive, <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/bayofpigs/19610822.pdf>

### Behind the Façade

Potemkin villages work only as long as no one peeks behind the façade.

—John Lewis Gaddis, on Khrushchev's foreign policy<sup>331</sup>

The Bay of Pigs fiasco came during a time of intense propaganda competition between the United States and the Soviet Union. The Khrushchev-led *pokazukha* campaign seemed to be winning the battle for world opinion, and errors by the United States played into the hands of both the Cuban and Soviet propagandists. In May, 1960, the Soviets shot down a U-2 spy plane on what might have been one of the last of such flights, for the U.S. satellite reconnaissance program was about to be completed. The Soviets captured the pilot, Francis Gary Powers, and turned the incident into a propaganda nightmare for the United States. At the summit in Paris two weeks later, "Khrushchev showed up...only for the purpose of wrecking it."<sup>332</sup> The Soviet leader had decided that the U-2 incident made further cooperation with the Eisenhower administration close to impossible. Instead, Khrushchev would wait for Eisenhower's successor. "It was an impulsive decision, but it reflected an awkward reality: having seen the quality of the photographs from the downed plane, Khrushchev had to know that his Potemkin strategy was in trouble."<sup>333</sup>

Khrushchev's *pokazukha* was indeed about to be challenged. U.S. intelligence, under the auspices of the Eisenhower administration and using the U-2 spy plane, had

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<sup>331</sup> Gaddis, *The Cold War*, 72.

<sup>332</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>333</sup> Ibid.

secretly uncovered the superficiality of Khrushchev's Potemkin villages. American intelligence now knew that the Soviets did not have the missiles with which Khrushchev threatened. Although Khrushchev may have believed Kennedy would be easier to manipulate than his predecessor, J.F.K. would quickly disabuse him of that notion. The Americans suffered through several more propaganda embarrassments, however, before Kennedy finally tore down Khrushchev's façade.

In April 12, 1961, Soviet scientists again accomplished the unthinkable—they put the first man into space. Yuri Gagarin rode the *Vostok I* into orbit, again fueling the Soviet *pokazukha* machine. During his flight, Gagarin (perhaps on orders from the agitprop department) whistled the tune, "The Motherland Hears" [Родина слышит].<sup>334</sup>

The first two lines of the song are: "The Motherland hears, the Motherland knows/Where her son flies in the sky."<sup>335</sup> The *Washington Post* headlined Khrushchev's triumphant dare: "Let the Capitalist Countries Try to Catch Up!" The Cuban media echoed the Soviet Premier. *Revolución*, the Cuban newspaper, ran a full page of cartoons dedicated to the Soviet success. One cartoon portrayed a naked, defeated Uncle Sam, hiding in shame and embarrassment behind his tall striped hat. President Kennedy, in his first public reaction to the flight, praised "the great feat."

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<sup>334</sup> Yuri Gagarin, *Дорога в Космос* [The Road to Space], <http://epizodsspace.testpilot.ru/bibl/gagarin/doroga/obl.html>

<sup>335</sup> "The Motherland Hears," Soviet Music Archive, <http://www.sovmusic.ru/english/download.php?fname=rodinasl>



He soon added, however, that he was "tired" of having the United States always come in second.<sup>336</sup>

The fiasco at the Bay of Pigs came directly after Gagarin's victorious space ride. In June, Khrushchev bullied Kennedy at a summit in Vienna. In August, the world watched East Germany erect the Berlin Wall, unopposed either from the East or by the West. Although he was "tired" of second place, Kennedy knew from the U-2 missions and new satellite reconnaissance that Soviet space technology did not equate to missile superiority. Furthermore, there were no mass-produced Soviet ICBMs.

Kennedy had undoubtedly read the CIA's 1959 National Intelligence Estimate on Soviet capabilities in guided missiles and space vehicles, in which the myth of the 'missile gap' had been thoroughly debunked. Although Soviet ICBM missile test flights were continuing, there was no evidence whatever of production or deployment beyond a single launch pad for prototype rockets.<sup>337</sup>

Why, if the President was tired of second place, did he not immediately expose and discredit the *pokazukha* of his Russian adversary? The answer lies in Kennedy's own election 'propaganda'. He had campaigned using the fears of a 'missile gap' as a political weapon against Nixon and the Eisenhower administration, and to acknowledge its absence too soon after taking office would have been

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<sup>336</sup> Quirk, *Fidel Castro*, 365-366.

<sup>337</sup> CIA, TOP SECRET, "National Intelligence Estimate: Soviet Capabilities in Guided Missiles and Space Vehicles," November 3, 1959, <http://www.astronautix.com/data/5703nie.pdf>



embarrassing.<sup>338</sup> There had been enough embarrassments during his first six months in office—Kennedy did not want any more. However, when Khrushchev announced in October 1961 that the Soviet Union would soon test a 100-megaton thermonuclear weapon—an outright lie—"Kennedy had had enough."<sup>339</sup>

The President decided to reveal Khrushchev's Potemkin missiles for what they were. On October 21, Deputy Secretary of Defense Roswell Gilpatric broke the news to the world that the United States would no longer accept Soviet *pokazukha*. In a front-page story, the *New York Times* reported Gilpatric's remarks:

The United States is so strong and its power so well deployed that an aggressor making a sneak nuclear attack would invite self-destruction...the Government's confidence in its ability to deter Communist action or resist Communist blackmail was based on an appreciation of the military power of each side. Mr. Gilpatric's remarks had been cleared at the highest level. Although the Russians use rigid security as a military weapon, he said, 'their Iron Curtain is not so impenetrable as to force us to accept at face value the Kremlin boasts.'<sup>340</sup>

The following February, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara announced that the U.S. had "a clear military superiority for major nuclear conflict."<sup>341</sup> In March, just days before the Soviet Army High Command decided it needed to develop an operation that would send nuclear weapons to Cuba, Kennedy met Soviet *pokazukha*

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<sup>338</sup> Gaddis, *The Cold War*, 74. See also Jack Raymond, "Kennedy Favors Pentagon Shift and Plane Alert," *New York Times*, Oct. 24, 1960: 1.

<sup>339</sup> Gaddis, *The Cold War*, 74.

<sup>340</sup> Joseph A. Loftus, "Gilpatric Warns U.S. Can Destroy Atom Aggressor," *New York Times*, Oct. 22, 1961: 1.

<sup>341</sup> Robert McNamara, quoted in Taubman, *Khrushchev*, 536.

with American reality. No longer tired of being second best in the area of weapons technology, the President announced that, "Khrushchev must *not* be certain that, where its vital interests are threatened, the United States will never strike first." Indeed, he told one reporter, "In some circumstances, we might have to take the initiative."<sup>342</sup>

Once United States intelligence had gotten a bird's eye view of the Potemkin villages erected in the Soviet Union, they quickly discovered that those villages were nothing more than façades. Once exposed, those façades could no longer serve, through *pokazukha* and propaganda, to help Khrushchev win victories on the world stage. Thus began a new phase of the Cold War—and the beginning of the end for Premier Khrushchev.

#### Lobbing Hedgehogs

Why not throw a hedgehog at Uncle Sam's pants?

—Nikita Khrushchev, April 1962<sup>343</sup>

The effect of Kennedy's exposure of Soviet deception was electric. Since the Soviet Union had built both its foreign and military policies on the continued success of its *pokazukha*, such a reaction is unsurprising. In the words of Khrushchev's Pulitzer Prize-winning biographer:

The Soviet reaction to this reversal of fortune—angry denials that the United States had a strategic advantage, plus attacks on Kennedy for threatening to strike first—was allergic in the extreme. Given Khrushchev's assumption that even a seeming strategic superiority

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<sup>342</sup> Ibid.

<sup>343</sup> N. Khrushchev to R. Malinovsky, quoted in D.A. Volkogonov, *Семь Вождей* [Seven Leaders] (Moscow: Novosti, 1995), 420.

could be decisive, the actual American advantage was doubly damaging: not only had he lost the kind of strategic leverage he had been employing for four years, but the Americans had gained it.<sup>344</sup>

The implications for Khrushchev himself were manifold. He had personally insisted on ICBMs as the cornerstone of the Soviet military. He had personally built the Potemkin villages behind which there were almost no ICBMs (there were exactly six ICBMs, total, in all of the Soviet Union, at the time of Gilpatric's announcement). Khrushchev had personally employed a foreign policy of bluff and threat, counting on apparent Soviet superiority to allow him to negotiate with the U.S. from a position of perceived strength. Domestically, he had staked his stature in the Presidium on completing disarmament agreements with the U.S. that were favorable to the U.S.S.R. These policies were risky for a leader who, unlike Stalin, depended upon the support of Soviet elites for his continued power. Yet that support was quickly dwindling away, for "Instead of being a symbol of prosperity and dignified strength, their leader appeared bellicose and rambling."<sup>345</sup> The first to begin undermining Khrushchev were from the top ranks of the KGB and GRU. They justified their betrayal on the grounds that, despite his "peaceful coexistence" rhetoric, Khrushchev's aggressive Potemkin-like foreign policy might trigger a new world war.<sup>346</sup> Now, both the Soviet position at

<sup>344</sup> See Fursenko and Naftali, *One Hell of a Gamble*, 145-176. See also Taubman, *Khrushchev*, 536-7.

<sup>345</sup> Taubman, *Khrushchev*, 536.

<sup>346</sup> Zubok and Pleshakov, *Kremlin's Cold War*, 208.

<sup>347</sup> The details of the Pitsunda meeting are taken from S. Khrushchev, *Crucifix of a Superpower*, 473. Sergei was physically at the meeting, and claims that he took detailed notes.



the center of the world stage and Khrushchev's position of power in Moscow were dangerously close to unraveling altogether.<sup>347</sup>

Khrushchev did what many Russian leaders, before and since, have done when crisis hit them—he went on vacation.<sup>348</sup> While on holiday at Pitsunda, a resort city on the Black Sea, Khrushchev presided over an important meeting of his Defense Council. Almost all top-ranking members of the Soviet leadership attended, including many members of the Presidium. Also in attendance were all of the Soviet High Command and the majority of their leading missile designers, both from the space program and from the nuclear missile program (many of them worked for both departments). At the sports hall near the calming waters of the Black Sea, Khrushchev listened while his subordinates told him how bad the situation was.<sup>349</sup>

The only piece of good news that they could come up with was that the Soviets were on par with the United States when it came to short- and intermediate-range nuclear weapons. This was well known to all the attendees, but was reiterated before the presenters delivered the bad news, which came in a long series of presentations. The first presentation detailed Soviet plans to utilize cruise missiles on light vessels and submarines in order to neutralize the heavy U.S. advantage represented by

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<sup>347</sup> See Fursenko and Naftali, *One Hell of a Gamble*, 155-156. See also Taubman, *Khrushchev*, 536-7.

<sup>348</sup> The last Tsar fled to his 'dacha' [country home] after his St. Petersburg palace was requisitioned by revolutionaries; Stalin spent the majority of his paranoid reign ruling from his various country homes; Gorbachev was at his villa in the Crimea when the coup occurred in Moscow.

<sup>349</sup> The details of the Pitsunda meeting are taken from S. Khrushchev, *Creation of a Superpower*, 471-475. Sergei was physically at the meeting, and claims that he took detailed notes.



American aircraft carriers. This was followed by a review of the progress in submarine-launched ballistic missile development, confirming that Soviet capability, as compared to that of the United States, would be limited for at least another decade.

After announcing some plans for the distant future, Marshal K.S. Moskalenko briefed the assembled leaders on the status of actual ICBM deployments. A few Soviet ICBMs were complete and on the ground, but it took several hours to prepare each one for launch. The rockets could stand armed, fuelled, and readied for launch for only a few days before their corrosive fuel degraded their tanks and lines. Then each had to be sent back to the factory for refurbishing. Therefore, Soviet ICBMs could only be considered a first strike weapon—they could only be effective with several hours advance notice, and only for a short period. The competing American ICBM used solid fuel, and could therefore remain 'at the ready' indefinitely. Development of improved Soviet ICBM designs was dragging on without any significant results. In the event of war, Moskalenko concluded, "Before we get [our rockets] ready for launch, there won't be even a wet spot left of any of us."<sup>350</sup>

Khrushchev was also dealing with worries caused by his new Third World poster-child. Although there was no question that Cuba was now fully Communist, Castro was still uncommitted, one way or the other, to either Soviet or Chinese leadership. One question, if answered, would seemingly obligate the Cuban leader to either the Chinese or the Soviet camp: Would he choose to support Khrushchev's "peaceful coexistence" policy, or would he follow Mao Zedong's lead in supporting

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<sup>350</sup> K.S. Moskalenko, quoted in S. Khrushchev, *Creation of a Superpower*, 474.

violent overthrow of imperialist regimes? Shortly after Khrushchev returned to the capital from the Crimea, Castro again sent Ramiro Valdes (now Cuban Minister of Internal Affairs) to Moscow, this time to ask the Soviet Union to organize an intelligence center in Cuba—including a KGB training camp for agitators and guerilla revolutionaries. The goal of this center would be to give "active support to revolutionary movements in Latin America."<sup>351</sup> When the KGB, following orders from a now deflated Khrushchev, refused the Cuban request, Valdes deliberately baited the Soviets. "At a time when the Chinese are striving to put a center of Chinese influence on every continent, the Russians must do this as well."<sup>352</sup>

Khrushchev needed to find a way out of these problems. Sometime in March, the idea of a missile gambit "began in Khrushchev's mind as a work of inspiration, even whimsy."<sup>353</sup> Khrushchev did want to protect Cuba from invasion by the United States, and although the Soviets did not have many ICBMs, their arsenals were full of short- and intermediate-range nuclear missiles. Placing some of them in Cuba would serve a double purpose: it would exponentially multiply the number of warheads capable of reaching American cities, and it would protect and mollify the increasingly militant—and decreasingly loyal—Cubans. It might yet be possible for Khrushchev to

Although additional aims were to protect Communist Cuba and solidify Castro's

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<sup>351</sup> Fursenko and Naftali, *One Hell of a Gamble*, 168.

<sup>352</sup> Ramiro Valdes, quoted in Fursenko and Naftali, *One Hell of a Gamble*, 168.

<sup>353</sup> Fursenko and Naftali, *One Hell of a Gamble*, 168.

regain the upper hand in negotiations with the U.S. while simultaneously protecting and retaining leadership over his unruly poster-child.<sup>354</sup>

In a conversation with Rodion Malinovsky, Commander-in-Chief of the Soviet Ground Forces, Khrushchev suggested that Cuba might make a useful base for Soviet missiles, and asked contemplatively, "Why not throw a hedgehog at Uncle Sam's pants?"<sup>355</sup> Top Khrushchev advisor Oleg Troyanovsky later related that these Cuban rockets were intended "to redress the nuclear balance in favor of the Soviet Union." Troyanovsky also recalled that Yuri Andropov (then in charge of foreign relations with other socialist countries) told Khrushchev: "Once this is done we'll be able to target them at the soft underbelly of the United States."<sup>356</sup>

Khrushchev would later say that "our missiles would have equalized what the West likes to call the 'balance of power'"—a balance tipped suddenly towards the United States due to the collapse of Khrushchev's policy of *pokazukha*. In reality, the Cuban deployment was just more of the same—the Soviets would still not come close to matching the firepower of the United States. Even so, if the Soviet military could succeed in placing even a few missiles that could reliably hit North American cities, Khrushchev would have gained back a bit of the negotiating power he had lost. Although additional aims were to protect Communist Cuba and solidify Castro's

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<sup>354</sup> See Fursenko and Naftali, *One Hell of a Gamble*, 166-175; See also Taubman, *Khrushchev*, 535-539; and Zubok and Pleshakov, *Kremlin's Cold War*, 206-274.

<sup>355</sup> N. Khrushchev to R. Malinovsky, quoted in Volkogonov, *Seven Leaders*, 420.

<sup>356</sup> Oleg Troyanovsky, quoted in Taubman, *Khrushchev*, 537.



loyalty to the U.S.S.R., it was within this larger context that Khrushchev conceived the missile deployment to Cuba.

To accomplish his goals, Khrushchev needed Castro's permission and support, which was by no means guaranteed. While the Soviet military commanders worked on a deployment plan, Khrushchev called Aleksandr Alekseev back to Moscow from Havana to ask his opinion, in person, about how Castro might be persuaded. Alekseev predicted that Castro would refuse to cooperate, fearing loss of face if he was perceived to be a lackey of the U.S.S.R.<sup>357</sup> Khrushchev responded by naming Alekseev his next ambassador to Cuba, and drafting a letter to Castro that included some extraordinary promises. First, the Soviet Union excused *all* Cuban debt. Second, Khrushchev promised to provide Cuba with arms and ammunition, free of charge, "including missiles and other arms, details about the supply of which will be discussed by our delegation in Havana."<sup>358</sup> Khrushchev, after all, did have a strong affinity for the Cuban revolutionaries. His support at this juncture was spurred, therefore, by both diplomatic and ideological considerations—even if it was desperate and ill-conceived.

The Presidium met at Khrushchev's country home on May 27 to give the Cuban delegation its instructions. Marshal Sergei Biryuzov, commander of the Soviet Rocket Forces (he had recently replaced the previous commander, discussed above, who was burned alive on a launch pad), was to head up the delegation, travelling as an

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<sup>357</sup> Pihoya, "Why Khrushchev Lost."

<sup>358</sup> N. Khrushchev, quoted in Fursenko and Naftali, *One Hell of a Gamble*, 175.



irrigation expert under the name "Engineer Petrov". He was to tell Fidel that the missiles were to protect Cuba from the United States and to "buttress the defensive power" of the worldwide socialist revolution.<sup>359</sup>

Contrary to Alekseev's fears, when Biryuzov arrived and made the offer, Castro accepted quickly and easily. Alekseev was correct—Castro did worry openly about what this would do to his image. However, Fidel said that Cuba "had no right to base our decision on narrow self-interest." If the Soviets wanted to "buttress the defensive power" of the socialist camp by placing nuclear weapons in Cuba, Castro would let them.<sup>360</sup>

Surely, the Cuban leaders were reminded of the aftermath of the Bay of Pigs Affair, when the actions of the United States had "transformed them from an aggrieved little country into an equal." The Soviet Union was now doing the same thing. Thoughts of China probably disappeared from their minds. Here was the commander of one of the world's two superpower's Strategic Rocket Forces urging the Cubans to accept free and powerful conventional weapons for their own use, forgiving them hundreds of millions of dollars of debt, and offering to protect them from their archenemy by using the most powerful weapons the world had ever seen. Small wonder that, "For the first and only time in eight years," Alekseev recalled, "I saw the Cubans writing things down."<sup>361</sup>

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<sup>359</sup> Taubman, *Khrushchev*, 545.

<sup>360</sup> Ibid.

<sup>361</sup> Aleksandyr Alekseev, quoted in Taubman, *Khrushchev*, 545.

The week before, on May 21, Khrushchev had met with his most trusted advisors and had secretly decided to install medium- and intermediate-range missiles in Cuba. The decision was not final, for it would need approval from both the Defense Council and the Presidium. But prior to those endorsements, the professional military planners of the Soviet Army High Command were to prepare a preliminary blueprint for "the creation, transportation, and supply of a military unit similar in its makeup and mission, if not in size, to Soviet army groups stationed in Europe. This was to be a new group within the Soviet military, to be named 'The Cuban Group', similar to the 'The German Group'."<sup>362</sup> This task fell to General Anatoly Gribkov and two of his coworkers. For the next two days and nights, Gribkov lived in his office, working furiously and secretly.<sup>363</sup>

Although his superiors did not specifically order him to do so, Gribkov (in good Russian *pokazukha* tradition) intentionally built as much secrecy and deceptive illusion into his plan as he could think to include. In a deliberate move to mask its true destination, Gribkov codenamed the operation "Anadyr" after a river and region in freezing, unpopulated northeastern Siberia, as far from the tropical Caribbean as the globe allowed.<sup>364</sup> There were to be seventy to eighty merchant vessels that, after

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<sup>362</sup> Anatoly Gribkov, *Разработка замысла и осуществление операции «Анадырь»* [Development and Implementation of Operation 'Anadyr'], in *Операция «Анадырь»: Факты. Воспоминания. Документы* [Operation 'Anadyr': Facts, Memoirs, and Documents] (1994), 2, <http://raurostov.narod.ru/01/anadyr/anadyr01-01.htm>

<sup>363</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>364</sup> Ibid.

refitting, would carry missiles, troops, support staff, and cargo to Cuba. The workers involved in the project, in all seven Soviet ports used, were to work in fenced compounds guarded by the KGB. The captains of the vessels were not to be told of their destination until they opened sealed orders after their ships were well underway.<sup>365</sup> Gribkov's plan called for these vessels to make a total of 150 trips, carrying everything the Cuban Group of Soviet Forces would need.

Gribkov's list was five pages long, and included: forces comprising all branches of the Soviet armed forces, under a single integrated staff of the Cuban Group headed by a Commander in Chief. The 43rd Missile Division, comprised of five missile regiments, would be the core of the force. With the missile units would go 1.5 missiles and 1.5 nuclear warheads per launcher (sixty missiles and sixty warheads in all), with one field technical base per regiment for equipping the warheads.

Upon arrival at their designated locations in Cuba, Gribkov gave the personnel of the missile regiments ten days to equip their positions and be ready to launch. To help them accomplish this job, he planned to send along twenty-five engineers and 100 construction personnel as well as 100 technological and radio experts.<sup>366</sup>

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<sup>365</sup> Ibid., 7-11.

<sup>366</sup> The summaries in this and the next five chapters are paraphrased from "Memorandum to the Chairman of the Defense Council on Deployment of Soviet Forces to Cuba, 24 May 1962," TOP SECRET, SPECIAL IMPORTANCE, ONE COPY ONLY. Cold War International History Project, [http://www.wilsoncenter.org/index.cfm?topic\\_id=1409&fuseaction=va2.document&identifier=5034D753-96B6175C9D5918F94FCBA36D&sort=Coverage&item=Cuba,%20Republic%20of](http://www.wilsoncenter.org/index.cfm?topic_id=1409&fuseaction=va2.document&identifier=5034D753-96B6175C9D5918F94FCBA36D&sort=Coverage&item=Cuba,%20Republic%20of)

For air defense, he would send two antiaircraft divisions, including twenty-four antiaircraft battalions, six technical battalions, one fighter air regiment with the latest MIG airplanes (three squadrons—forty aircraft), a helicopter regiment (two squadrons—thirty-three helicopters), and two radar battalions. For defense of coasts and bases in the sectors of probable enemy attack, Gribkov would send one regiment of *Sopka* [little volcano] missile launchers, comprised of three battalions (six launchers each) with three missiles per launcher.

For defense on the sea, he planned a brigade of missile patrol boats, a detachment of support ships, a mine-torpedo aviation regiment made up of three squadrons (thirty-three aircraft) with jet torpedoes and air dropped mines (for destruction of surface ships), two cruisers, two missile destroyers, two conventional destroyers, seven missile submarines with three intermediate-range nuclear missiles each, four torpedo submarines, two submarine tenders, and one refueling tanker.

For protection on the ground, the Group would need four separate motorized rifle regiments, with a tank battalion in each, at an overall personnel strength of 7,300 foot soldiers. In 'the rear,' Gribkov specified three hospitals of 200 beds each, one anti-epidemic sanitary detachment, seven warehouses (two for food, one for general storage, and four for fuel), and even one field bakery factory.<sup>367</sup> Gribkov then summarized the personnel total: "The overall number of the Cuban Group of Soviet

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<sup>367</sup> As any expert on Russian culture knows, Russians can survive a great many deprivations, but they suffer tremendously without access to their special black bread.



Forces [not including naval forces] will be about 44,000 military personnel and 1,300 workers and civilians."<sup>368</sup>

On May 24, Malinovsky presented Gribkov's plan to Khrushchev, who immediately endorsed it. The Premier then sent the Defense Council's secretary, with a formal version of the plan, to each member of the Defense Council and the Presidium, individually—even, on orders from Khrushchev, tracking some of the men down at their country homes. When some Presidium members expressed doubts, the Premier called them personally. After the call, they signed. When the document had made the rounds, approval of the plan was 'unanimous'. Three days later, the delegation led by Biryuzov and Alekseev left for Havana.<sup>369</sup>

From June to October, the Cuban Group deployed to the island and set up their defenses. A policy of *pokazukha*, originally begun by Gribkov but expanded upon by others, dictated how they deployment was carried out. None but the highest ranks knew their destination before they arrived. Many of the troops were issued parkas, boots, and skis to support the codename of their mission. Other than a few lucky officers who were able to travel in tourist disguise, the troops and their support personnel were forced to spend the trip below deck in ships without air conditioning. Since they were traveling through some of the warmest waters in the world, and since

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<sup>368</sup> Ibid. 8-10.

<sup>369</sup> Gribkov, "Operation Anadyr," 3.

they were allowed on deck for only fifteen minutes each night, the twenty-day journey seemed like hell on earth.<sup>370</sup>

The last of the shipments was arriving when the United States intelligence community (which had largely ignored the thousands of human intelligence reports coming out of Cuba over the summer about the missiles) finally spotted one of the rocket installations during an overflight of Cuba by a U-2, on October 14. By October 19, the U-2s had photographed four such installations. On October 22, President Kennedy delivered a publicly televised address announcing the discovery of the missiles. Khrushchev's last attempt at parity through *pokazukha* had failed.

For *pokazukha* this was—Khrushchev had no intention of using those missiles, he simply wanted them deployed in Cuba to give him back some of his perceived power. He later said unequivocally that the missiles were intended only "to threaten the United States. After installing the missiles we, together with the Castro government, intended to announce their presence in a loud voice. There was no sense in keeping the missiles secret, because they were not meant for attack."<sup>371</sup>

This time, Kennedy had not waited months to expose the Soviet façade-builder. As soon as his bluff was called, Khrushchev took what he could get from the situation and removed his missiles. What was it that he gained? First, a secret promise from Kennedy that the U.S. would remove some aging intermediate-

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<sup>370</sup> Ibid., 8-10.

<sup>371</sup> N. Khrushchev, *Glasnost Tapes*, 172.

range nuclear missiles from Turkey (the U.S. was planning to do that anyway).<sup>1960s</sup>

Secondly, according to Khrushchev:

[Journalists] used to say that the power of America forced Khrushchev to back down. The Chinese used the same argument. We have to weigh the gains against the losses. We removed our missiles in exchange for the American promise not to invade Cuba. The aim of the Americans was to destroy Cuba. Our aim was to preserve Cuba. Today Cuba exists. So who won?<sup>372</sup>

However, Khrushchev achieved victory only on his secondary goals, and that marginal success did nothing for his own career. Khrushchev's last two years in power were a time of desperation. After the collapse of his Cuban foray, he tried to address other foreign policy issues, but without the momentum that a Cuban triumph would have provided. Much of his energy and imagination were spent. In the words of his biographer, "Khrushchev had learned at last that bluff and bluster didn't pay, but they had been his main weapons, and without them, he was lost."<sup>373</sup>

The true winner of the missile crisis was Fidel Castro. Although Khrushchev did win a minor battle by extracting Kennedy's pledge in exchange for nothing, Kennedy had won the war over public opinion. Although Kennedy was victorious in the propaganda realm, he had abandoned Cuba to a Bolshevik dictator. Only Fidel won in both the public realm and in the realm of hard-nosed practicality. In 1988, as the Cold War was thawing shortly before the Iron Curtain came crashing down, Castro

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<sup>372</sup> Ibid., 180.

<sup>373</sup> Taubman, *Khrushchev*, 581.

granted an interview to NBC's Maria Schriver. She asked him about the early 1960s, and he replied:

[Castro] The United States was not prepared to accept the idea of an independent country in Latin America, a revolutionary country in Latin America, and a socialist country in Latin America. They were not mentally prepared for that...China was the Red threat, the Yellow threat, the threat of all colors...The U.S.S.R. was the evil empire and had no relations. Today U.S. relations with China and U.S. relations with the U.S.S.R. are excellent. We are left with the honor of being one of the few adversaries of the United States.

[Shriver] That's an honor?

[Castro] Of course it is an honor. Because for such a small country as Cuba to have such a gigantic country as the United States live so obsessed with this small island, a country that no longer considers itself an adversary of the U.S.S.R. or adversary of China and considers itself an adversary of Cuba—it is an honor for us.<sup>374</sup>

*Pokazukha* has often worked well as foreign policy—in the short term. For Catherine and Potemkin, it admirably aided their goals following the Tauride Tour. For Khrushchev, it allowed him to maintain a façade of Soviet missile superiority, using that propaganda advantage to expand Soviet influence in the emerging nations. For Castro, it helped him gain and consolidate power while holding off intervention from the United States. However, when *pokazukha* is revealed for what it is, its power disappears. It is therefore quite dangerous as a long-term basis for policy. Khrushchev's foreign policy, built almost entirely on façades, failed quickly and completely when his bluff was called. Despite his blustering, he did not have ICBMs that could imperil the United States. In spite of his threats, even when he had missiles in Cuba that could reach most of the important targets in the U.S., he did not use

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<sup>374</sup> F. Castro, Interview by Maria Schriver, *NBC*, Feb. 24, 1988. Castro Speech Database, <http://lanic.utexas.edu/la/cb/cuba/castro/1988/19880228>



them—he had never intended to. *Pokazukha*, then, worked well for Khrushchev—but only until it was revealed for what it was.

## CONCLUSIONS

Imagine, if you will, that you find yourself standing in the middle of a small town in the American West circa 1880. A tumbleweed rolls across the dusty street lined with horses tied to handrails. Cowboys wearing chaps and spurs stroll with their laughter-crazed ladies. Suddenly, a villain, dressed all in black, comes charging out of a saloon, firing wildly and yelling at the top of his lungs. You would quickly find the nearest cover, wouldn't you? Ducking for cover, you have discovered how potent the works, creating a powerful illusion in the minds of its intended audience.

Now imagine that, while you are hearing a busy street around the corner of one of the buildings, you discover that the storefronts that looked so real from the front are actually two-dimensional facades, held up with wooden supports. Investigating further, you notice that a large fan is rotating the buildings and the dirt, and that the horses are actually animatronics. That means, of course, that the people are all actors, the bullets are all blanks, and you were never in any danger after all—except in your own mind. Discovering the falseness of the scene, you feel what occurs when the facade of *Pokazukha* is revealed for what they truly are—the illusion has lost all of its power.

## Chapter IX

### CONCLUSIONS

Imagine, if you will, that you find yourself standing in the middle of a small town in the American West circa 1880. A tumbleweed rolls across the dusty street lined with horses tied to handrails. Cowboys wearing chaps and spurs stroll with their gingham-clad ladies. Suddenly, a villain, dressed all in black, comes charging out of a saloon, firing wildly and yelling at the top of his lungs. You would quickly find the nearest cover, wouldn't you? Ducking for cover, you have discovered how *pokazukha* works, creating a powerful illusion in the minds of its intended audience.

Now imagine that, while you are beating a hasty retreat around the corner of one of the buildings, you discover that the storefronts that looked so real from the front are actually two-dimensional façades, held up with wooden supports. Investigating further, you notice that a large fan is motivating the tumbleweeds and the dust, and that the horses are actually animatronic. That means, of course, that the people are all actors, the bullets are all blanks, and you were never in any danger after all—except in your own mind. Discovering the insubstantiality of the scene, you felt what occurs when the façades of Potemkin villages are revealed for what they truly are—the illusion has lost all of its power.

As we have seen, *pokazukha*, directly translated, means "it's all put on, just for show." *Pokazukha* is that which operates to "reveal" with an ulterior motive. It is the eclipse of the truth with something created. It is deception as art, illusion as reality. Someone practicing *pokazukha* is building more than a façade, he is constructing his own particular edifice of the real. For Khrushchev, such constructions allowed him a brief period of perceived geopolitical preeminence. For Castro, they allowed him to create his legend, to stave off U.S. intervention and to secure the support of the Soviet Union.

However, the instigator needs help to produce truly effective *pokazukha*. Beyond deception and ostentation is an implied complicity on the part of both the deceiver and the deceived—a complicity that lends some reality to the illusion being created. The actions that constitute *pokazukha* have some reality without the belief of the audience, but audience participation is necessary when the desired effect is dependent upon the *pokazukha* being taken for reality. In the case of Herbert Matthews and the *New York Times*, Castro's *pokazukha* worked because the journalists wanted the Cuban rebel to be a hero, in order to sell newspapers. In the case of Kennedy and his delay in exposing Khrushchev's bluff of missile superiority, Khrushchev's *pokazukha* continued to work because Kennedy's campaign had insisted that there was a 'missile gap', just as Khrushchev claimed. However, in situations such as this, when the *pokazukha* is exposed all of its power immediately disappears—a fact which Khrushchev discovered as soon as Kennedy tore down the façade of Soviet missile superiority.

In Communist countries influenced by Soviet ideology, 'showing off' and 'putting on' are more than just deceptive façade-building. For the Soviets and their adherents, illusion is an important part of the process of *becoming*. If not for the necessity of supporting Castro with missiles, Khrushchev may not have created the Strategic Missile Forces and pushed their scientists and engineers to the limits of their abilities. If not for his claim that his band of bandits was a "rebel army", Castro could not have maintained the illusion that he was a real threat to Batista's regime. Indeed, if not for the imperatives engendered by Khrushchev's *pokazukha*-based foreign policy, the Soviet Union may not have supported Castro's Cuba at all.

Under the Bolsheviks, Russian *pokazukha* and propaganda were codified as part of the new Marxist-Leninist strategy of world revolution. The leaders of the Russian Revolution utilized concepts from the traditions of both *pokazukha* and propaganda, fusing them together to form the strategies of Soviet "agitprop." In the years that followed, the agitprop department distributed the deceptive practices of the Soviets worldwide, through printed propaganda and by sending agitators like Fabio Grobart into countries like Cuba. Fidel Castro would later make good use of standard Soviet *pokazukha* strategies. Castro's "Operation Truth", for example, was intended to persuade the people of the United States that he was their country's friend. In reality, behind this façade, Castro was simultaneously—and secretly—cementing a relationship with its arch-nemesis, the U.S.S.R.

Stalin also developed certain innovative agitprop techniques that laid the groundwork for the achievements of his successors, including Khrushchev and Castro.



Stalin systematically exploited exchange programs for propaganda purposes, inviting countless delegations from all over the world—and sending agitprop agents to the countries agreeing to exchange. As we have seen, just such a program solidified Soviet influence over Raul Castro. Stalin also pioneered the use of well-timed interviews with foreign journalists as an instrument of Soviet agitprop. Fidel Castro used this technique in 1959 to overcome Batista's censorship and project his own heroic image to the world.

From Lenin to Khrushchev, the leaders of the Soviet Union and their disciples abroad utilized concepts from the Russian tradition of *pokazukha*, codifying them in the official strategies of agitprop. Many of Castro's agitprop techniques so closely resemble those of the Soviets that it seems clear that he was profoundly affected by the Soviet example. Fidel and his associates were the first to fully utilize organized agitprop on Cuban soil. Additionally, as this thesis project has shown, the Soviet-Cuban connection was infused with *pokazukha* from its very beginnings, and the building of façades characterized both countries' foreign policy during the Cold War of the late 1950s and early 1960s.

What motivated the Soviet superpower to support a shaky revolution on the other side of the world? Khrushchev and those in his Kremlin were absorbed by the project of expanding Soviet power and prestige through the use of Potemkin-like posturing. Much of the world was emerging from a colonial yoke, and the Kremlin believed that the geopolitical position of the Soviet Union was intimately tied to supporting anti-Western revolutions in the Third World. Khrushchev was dedicated

to this new expansionist, *pokazukha*-based foreign policy, and the socialist conversion of Cuba "right under the United States' nose" was too tempting for him to resist.

Castro's commitment to Communism came as a welcome surprise, and both the history of United States interference and the emotional and ideological brotherhood they felt toward Castro's movement caused the Soviet leaders to escalate their support.

What could cause the independent-minded leaders of the Cuban Revolution to ask for Soviet support? The Castro brothers grew up learning the lessons of Cuban history. They knew that the United States often intervened when 'American interests' were threatened. They also grew up watching Stalin and his socialist union thwart the interests of one imperial power after another. Deeply imbued with revolutionary fervor and Soviet strategies of *pokazukha*, they saw an opportunity to use those strategies—and the socialist superpower that exported them—to escape the historic, economic, and political hold that the United States had on their country.

Although some scholars have argued that Castro simply exchanged one dependence for another,<sup>375</sup> this rings true only in the economic realm. The Soviets did not—could not—force Castro to follow their every whim. Once they had committed to Cuba (both emotionally and geopolitically) as part of their *pokazukha*-based foreign policy, the Soviets wanted Castro's revolution to survive and thrive. The importance of the Cuban Revolution to the reputation of the Soviet Union, both as counter to the capitalist-imperialist threat and as poster-child of socialist revolution in the Third World, allowed Castro to forge the Soviet-Cuba connection on equal terms, regardless

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<sup>375</sup> See Miller, *Soviet Relations*.

of the economic and geopolitical inequality between the two countries. Of course, the blunders made by the leaders of both superpowers also helped to artificially elevate the little Caribbean country.

Beyond their intervention in Guatemala, the actions of the Eisenhower administration had little to do with the forging of the Soviet-Cuba bond. Much more important was what the leaders in both socialist countries saw as historically preordained interference by the United States. Rather than diplomatic actions of the moment, the geographic and historical shadow of the United States played the primary North American role. Living in that shadow, Castro felt the need to import Soviet support. Troubled by that shadow, the Soviets hesitated to export such aid—and then, once publicly committed, they threw the entire weight of the socialist world behind an unstable revolution in a diminutive county a globe away from Moscow.

In both Castro's Cuba and Khrushchev's U.S.S.R., appearances were vital. For both leaders, in different ways, foreign policy successes—particularly *vis-à-vis* the United States—were essential in consolidating and holding power domestically. Both men used *pokazukha* to accomplish their political ends. By the mid-1950s, the leaders of both nations were heavily affected by the Soviet version of façade-building as well as the agitprop practices of the Russian Revolution. Such strategies worked extraordinarily well for both leaders until the early 1960s, when the United States finally developed the technologies necessary to expose Khrushchev's bluff for what it was—a Potemkin village. Even as his façade of strength was dismantled, however, Khrushchev was able to use *pokazukha*, in the form of nuclear missiles he did not

intend to use, to ensure that Fidel Castro was safe from intervention by the United States.

Potemkin's legacy is very much alive today. Lenin, Stalin, Khrushchev, Guevara, Castro and the nameless thousands who worked in their agitprop networks adapted and expanded on the Russian Prince's *pokazukha*, but it is still recognizable as Potemkinism. Potemkin's legacy lives in the propaganda pronouncements of rulers like Hugo Chavez and Hu Jintao. As of this writing, that legacy still lives in the person of Fidel himself, now a walking version of the Lenin mausoleum—both of them (Lenin as a corpse and Castro as a zombie) are excellent examples of *pokazukha* personified. Potemkin's legacy lives in the military instruction manuals of the world, where Castro's *pokazukha* is studied as a model of militant propaganda.<sup>376</sup>

Unsurprisingly, it is very much alive in Communist Cuba, which still survives "right under the United States' nose," reveling in the "honor" of being one of the longest-lasting opponents of the world's only remaining superpower.

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<sup>376</sup> See Major Russell J. Hampsey, U.S. Army, "Voices from the Sierra Maestra: Fidel Castro's Revolutionary Propaganda," *Fort Leavenworth Military Review* (November-December 2002), <http://www.latinamericanstudies.org/cuban-rebels/voices.htm>



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## APPENDIX

## Oral History Releases



In consideration of the recording and preservation of my oral history memory by Michael T. Westgate and the St. Cloud State University, I the narrator hereby grant, assign, and transfer to Michael T. Westgate and St. Cloud State University the rights, including all literary and property rights unless restricted or noted below, to publish, duplicate, or otherwise use and dispose of any recordings of and/or transcribed interview(s) recorded on April 2, 2007. This includes the rights of publication in print and in electronic form, such as placement on the Internet/Web for access by that medium; the right to retransmit the interview or portions thereof on the Internet and in other electronic formats; and permission to transfer the interview to future technological mediums. I (the narrator) hereby give the interviewer and the university the right to distribute the recording(s) and/or transcription(s) to any other libraries and educational institutions for scholarly and educational uses and purposes.

Similarly and for the same considerations noted preceding, I the interviewer, Michael T. Westgate, hereby grant, assign, and transfer to St. Cloud State University the rights, including all literary and property rights, to publish, duplicate, or otherwise use and dispose of the above-described recording(s) and/or transcription(s). This includes the rights of publication in print and in electronic form, such as placement on the Internet/Web for access by that medium; the right to retransmit the interview or portions thereof on the Internet and in other electronic formats; and permission to transfer the interview to future technological mediums. Likewise, I hereby agree to preserve the products of this interview in accordance with accepted professional standards of responsible custody and agree to provide the narrator with access to the interview(s).

# APPENDIX

## Oral History Releases

Dated: 7-29-07 Signature of Narrator: M. Blum  
Narrator's name as he/she wishes it to be used: Michael Blum

Dated: July 12, 2007 Signature of Interviewer: Michael T. Westgate

Interview Agreement

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In consideration of the recording and preservation of my oral history memoir by Michael T. Westrate and St. Cloud State University, I the narrator, MIKHAIL SERGEYEVICH BLINKOV, hereby grant, assign, and transfer to Michael T. Westrate and St. Cloud State University the rights, including all literary and property rights unless restricted as noted below, to publish, duplicate, or otherwise use and dispose of any recording(s) and/or transcribed interview(s) recorded on APRIL 3, 2006. This includes the rights of publication in print and in electronic form, such as placement on the Internet/Web for access by that medium, the right to rebroadcast the interview or portions thereof on the Internet and in other electronic formats, and permission to transfer the interview to future technological mediums. I (the narrator) hereby give the interviewer and the university the right to distribute the recording(s) and/or transcription(s) to any other libraries and educational institutions for scholarly and educational uses and purposes.

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Dated: 7-29-07 Signature of Narrator: MBlinkov

Narrator's name as he/she wishes it to be used: Mikhail Blinkov

Dated: July 22, 2007 Signature of Interviewer: Michael T. Westrate

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Дата: 10/6/07 Подпись Рассказчика: Любовь Липовская

Фамилия Имя Отчество Рассказчика: Любовь Николаевна Липовская

Narrator's name transliterated: LIPOV NICHOLAEVNA LIPOVSKAYA

Дата: JUNE 10, 2007 Подпись Интервьюер: Michael T. Westra

В рассмотрении условий записи и сохранения моих устных воспоминаний об истории для использования Майклом Вестрейт и Ст.Клауд Стейт Университетом, я рассказчик, Золотко Сергей Викторович, этим документом передаю полномочия и вручаю Майклу Вестрейту и Ст.Клауд Стейт Университету права, включая все литературные права и права собственности, на опубликование, распечатку или иное использование, а также размещение записей и/или переписанных с моих слов материалов 10/9, 2006.

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Подобным образом в рассмотрении условий упомянутых выше, я интервьюер, Майкл Вестрейт, этим документом передаю полномочия и вручаю Ст.Клауд Стейт Университету права, включая все литературные права и права собственности на опубликование, распечатку или иное использование, а также размещение записей и/или переписанных материалов упомянутых выше. В эти условия также включаются права на опубликование в печати и в электронной форме, размещение в электронном формате в сети Интернет/Веб и других электронных форматах, а также технических форматов используемых в будущем. В дополнении, я данным документом даю разрешение на сохранение этого устного исторического материала в соответствии с принятыми профессиональными стандартами о сохранности информации и даю соглашение предоставить рассказчику доступ к материалам интервью, если востребовано.

Дата: 12/6/07 Подпись Рассказчика: Золотко Сергей Викторович

Фамилия Имя Отчество Рассказчика: Золотко Сергей Викторович

Narrator's name transliterated: SERGEI NICHOLAEVICH ZOLOTKO

Дата: JUNE 12, 2007 Подпись Интервьюер: Michael S. Kohnate