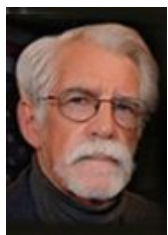


Not Another Cuban Missile Crisis, Part 2



By Servando Gonzalez

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In the first part of this article I explained in some detail why most likely the Soviet nuclear missiles on Cuban soil were dummies.

Now, the question remains: Why did Nikita Khrushchev placed the dummy missiles in Cuba? My answer is very simple: Because Khrushchev needed to get rid of troublesome Castro and wanted the Americans to do the dirty job on his behalf. Unfortunately, they didn't fall in the trap.

Did Americans Give Cuba to Castro?

As Khrushchev admitted later in his memoirs, at the time Fidel Castro took power in Cuba, the Soviets had little contact with the Island and, therefore, very little knowledge of what was happening there. (Diplomatic relations between Cuba and the Soviet Union had been severed since 1952). To the Soviet intelligence Fidel Castro was a strange and enigmatic figure. By late 1959 they had gathered many fragments of information about him, but had not been able to put all the pieces together into a meaningful whole.

Something that attracted the attention of the Soviets was the American haste to recognize Castro's government after president Batista's escape on January 1, 1959. This haste was not only surprising to the Soviets, but also to some American

diplomats. According to Ambassador Earl T. Smith, the U.S. were very hasty in its recognition of the Castro government. Usually the U.S. withholds recognition from a new government until it is formally established and operating. Normally, the U.S. does not want to be among the first nor among the last to recognize a new government. The U.S. usually waits until assurances are given that the new government will honor its international obligations. In Latin America it was the custom for the U.S. to wait until several Latin American countries had recognized the new government. However, in January 7, 1979, just six days after former President Batista fled from Cuba and one day before Fidel Castro arrived in Havana, the U.S. officially recognized the Castro government.

Also, some facts indicate that the CIA sent weapons to Castro. When he was in the Sierra Maestra mountains fighting Batista's troops, Castro received some weapons delivered by the International Armaments Corporation, the company that sent weapons to Guatemala, under the CIA's orders, to overthrow Jacobo Arbenz's government, and also because the Company was organized by Samuel Cummings, a former CIA operative. Also, there is evidence, that between October 1957 and the middle of 1958, the CIA gave no less than fifty thousand dollars to Castro's men in Santiago de Cuba.

One thing that seemed very suspicious to Soviet intelligence were the sudden American efforts to prove that Castro was a Communist. The Americans, who before Castro took power denied he was a Communist, now had changed their minds, and were accusing him of being a Communist. To top all, Castro himself was telling everybody that he was a Communist. But no one knew better than the Soviets that this was far from being true. According to the information the KGB had gathered, Fidel Castro never joined the strong Cuban Communist party, nor any of the Communist front organizations, because the Cuban Communists hated him. Moreover, he was not a crypto-Communist, nor was he ever recruited by the Soviet intelligence services.

So, why were the Americans so eager to prove he was a Communist? But an unexpected event dissipated those suspicions.

Suspicious Snafu at the Bay of Pigs

Four days after Yuri Gagarin went into outer space, just three months after Kennedy's inauguration, on the morning of April 7, 1961, 1400 Cuban exiles sent by the United States were wading toward disaster at a beach called Playa Girón, near a bay south of the central part of the island –the Bay of Pigs. The first news about the invasion that appeared in the Soviet press reflected the general consensus that Castro's revolution was living its very last hours in the face of an American direct invasion. But then, the Soviet leaders and the intelligence analysts watched in disbelief as John F. Kennedy, with enough military force at hand to destroy the world, did nothing as Fidel Castro rounded up prisoners off the beach.

Plans for an underground uprising, coordinated with the invasion, were so mismanaged as to indicate deliberate sabotage. To be successful, even with air cover, such a small force had to be supported by uprisings all over Cuba. Some of the reasons why the uprisings never occurred were that the underground was never alerted about the landing date and did not know whether the Bay of Pigs operation was a real or a diversionary invasion. The CIA's short wave broadcast station (Radio Swan) failed to broadcast the prearranged signals to trigger the waiting underground into action. Instead the station broadcasted a series of conflicting and false reports of uprisings in Cuba.

The Bay of Pigs adventure was not merely a military disaster; it strengthened enormously Castro's iron grip over the island. The U.S. had given Castro a legitimacy he could not have won any other way. No other American act could have helped him any more. In addition, the invasion struck a mortal blow to the anti-Castro underground movement in Cuba. The invasion allowed

Castro to easily neutralize his most active opponents without raising any criticism, because he seized the opportunity to appeal to the Cubans' nationalistic sentiments. Since the image of the opposition to Castro had always been an American one, with Cubans in the U.S. appearing to participate in a subordinate capacity, the harsh treatment given to the anti-Castro underground appeared to be justified by the circumstances. All opposition to the regime had been identified in the Cuban mind as American-inspired and counterrevolutionary, thus playing right into Castro's hands.

Then, on December 2, 1961, Fidel Castro delivered a televised speech in which he declared to his amazed audience that he had always been a Marxist-Leninist by heart and would remain so until the last day of his life. Castro's non-Communist affiliation had been so widely taken for granted internationally, particularly in the U.S., that his speech caused a commotion. It was also received with extreme suspicion by the Soviet intelligence analysts. Evidently, Fidel Castro was trying to create for himself, a posteriori, what in intelligence parlance is known as a "legend," a false biography to fool an enemy.

Obviously, Castro was frantically trying to sell himself to the Soviets under an image of anti-Americanism, but the facts pointed to the contrary. The available evidence indicated that, contrary to conventional wisdom, Fidel, like most anti-Castro Cubans in Miami, was an admirer of the American Way of Life. His favorite sports were basketball and baseball. He only watched American cowboy films, and most of the women with whom he had been romantically involved were of the same profile: upper-class, Americanized, English-speaking, most of them blondes. The one he married to had worked as a secretary at the American Embassy in Havana.

Castro's Deep Game

By the end of 1961 a great concern about Castro had been raised in Moscow, not only among the intelligence analysts, but among the Soviet leaders as well. First of all, Cuba under Castro had become a real economic embarrassment to the Soviets, who had made a great mistake in trying to undertake the development of a country whose tastes, needs, and economy had been modeled on American patterns.

Cuba, which was intended to be a showcase of the Soviet model of development in America, was in fact quickly turning into a showcase of Soviet inefficiency, mainly due to the Cuban leader's inability to make good use of Soviet aid. Furthermore, Cuba was an ideological source of distress due to the propagation of Castro's "heretical" ideas and his immature propensity to preach to the Soviets about how to conduct things in their own backyard. Castro's behavior was creating a new focus of dissent in a field already engaged in internal quarrels. In addition, his front line position on the Latin American, Asian and African anti-imperialist struggle put a question-mark on the Khrushchev's thesis of Peaceful Coexistence, and played right into Mao's hands.

Therefore, notwithstanding Castro's continued and persistent pounding at the Russian gates, the Soviet leaders, particularly Khrushchev, had some serious doubts as to where it might lead in the future. Though his defiance of the United States was according to their interests, the alliance with Castro presented certain problems. Was he real or was he the main element of a game of strategic provocation staged by the CIA? Also, accepting that he was real, were the Soviets able to contain Castro's ambitions? How far would he embroil the USSR in Latin America and at what cost? Opposition to Castro was already strong among the Latin American communist parties; they were reluctant to endanger their precarious status by taking up arms. Furthermore, to adopt Castro's tactics would have been an abrupt shift to "putschist" and "adventurist" policies, denounced by both Lenin and Khrushchev.

As early as mid-1959, the old-guard Cuban communists and the Kremlin leader were rightfully worried about Castro's radical theories and concerned with the secret training of revolutionaries in Cuba for military adventures against Cuba's neighbors. Yet, having mistakenly come to Castro's rescue –if only for the initial bait of exploiting the political propaganda opportunities offered by the US-Cuban dispute – Khrushchev found himself with an unsolicited client on his hands which he cannot disavow, at least overtly, without great embarrassment and loss of prestige. Khrushchev had been caught on the horns of a dilemma: abandoning Cuba would mean jeopardizing Soviet pretensions of leadership of the Communist camp; but allowing Cuba to exist would probably have the same result, because Castro had his own aspirations for control over the international communist movement.

Castro's guerrilla activities was also a big concern of the Soviet intelligence. On the one hand, even if Castro was what he claimed to be, the Soviet Union could simply never afford to have a bunch of Castros in Latin America. A Fidel-style takeover of Bolivia, Guatemala or the Dominican Republic would suck up Russia's resources like quicksand, and the resulting fiasco could only hurt the Soviet's and Khrushchev's prestige. The Soviet Premier was not interested at all in Pyrrhic victories. On the other hand, there was the possibility that Fidel Castro was not what he purported to be. If this were the case Castro was acting as an agent provocateur, pushing the Soviet Union into unwanted, risky adventures.

Khrushchev's Deep Game

The sequel to the Soviet commitment in Cuba had been a calamitous failure. In such circumstances the sensible course for Khrushchev was to cut his losses and get out of the game, particularly considering that the Soviet lines of supply to Cuba were long and extremely vulnerable. But to leave Cuba voluntarily would have been tantamount to an admission of failure and would have involved substantial loss of face. If,

however, Castro could be eliminated as a result of American "aggression," then Khrushchev and the USSR could retreat from Cuba, their honor relatively untarnished. After an American invasion of the island the failure of Communism in Cuba could be blamed not on deficiencies in Soviet-style communist management of Cuban affairs, but on "Yankee Imperialism."

As seen from the Kremlin, Castro was unpredictable, volatile, undisciplined, and often nonsensical. His wholesale executions, mass arrests, and terrorist adventures against his Latin American neighbors, together with the sight of hundreds of thousands of Cubans attempting to flee his rule, raised the very Stalinist specter Khrushchev was trying to dispel and contrary to his doctrine of Peaceful Coexistence. Moreover, Castro was making a shambles of the Cuban economy and neglected to pay attention to "suggestions" coming from Moscow. Thus, even though Khrushchev never fully agreed with the theory that Castro was an American mole, the Soviet Premier decided to follow the KGB's advice to overthrow Castro and replace him with an old-time Communist, obedient to the Soviet Union. Now Khrushchev faced the dilemma of getting rid of Fidel by force, but, given the Soviet role vis á vis the Third World and the Chinese, he couldn't resort to direct action or threaten him with force. It was less easy, however, to resist the temptation to proceed to overthrow him by indirect means, with the help of the KGB's section of Special Operations.

The first Soviet plan to overthrow Fidel Castro was handed over to the Soviet Ambassador in Havana, Sergei Mikhailovich Kudryavtsev, an experienced KGB officer who had been expelled from Canada accused of heading a Soviet spy ring. Since his arrival in Havana in 1960, Kudryavtsev had been a conspicuous figure in Cuban politics. Unlike many Soviet envoys, he never bothered to conceal his power or to limit himself to behind-the-scenes activities. Khrushchev's plan consisted in eliminating Castro and replacing him with Aníbal Escalante, a

trusted member of the pro-Soviet Cuban communist party.

There is evidence that Castro discovered the plot from its very beginning, early in 1962, but he let it go on for a while, playing a cat and mouse game with the Russians. Finally, at the end of May, he decided to move swiftly and detained the plotters and neutralized Kudryavtsev and his KGB operatives. In May, 30, 1960, the Cuban intelligence detained Ambassador Kudryavtsev and put him in a Soviet plane back to Moscow. Some time later Castro confessed that he "had expelled Kudryavtsev" for having engaged in "open and excessive political activities."

And, what happened to him when he arrived in Moscow? Was he sent to a gulag in Siberia? Of course not, he was appointed as a Soviet delegate to the UNESCO in Paris –which indicates that his actions in Cuba had been following orders, most likely from Khrushchev himself.

When Nikita Khrushchev received the news of the failed coup he was furious. He now tried to find a way to, once and for all, get rid of his Cuban "Communist." But, if Fidel was in his hands, he was no less in the hands of Fidel. After the purging of Escalante and several of the "old line" Cuban Communists, some members of the Cuban communist party, out of fear, were following Castro's line and had become an instrument of his policies rather than Moscow's.

This state of affairs highly irritated Khrushchev. Still, the Soviet Premier could not afford to openly destabilize the Castro government. The cost in terms of Soviet international prestige –vis á vis Peking, Washington and the Third World– would have been intolerable. Any direct Russian action against Castro would have led to serious political and ideological consequences for the Soviet Union.

Therefore, after the Kudryavtsev-Escalante frustrated coup d'état, Khrushchev conceived another plan.

This plan was simple: it consisted of provoking President Kennedy to invade Cuba and overthrow Castro. After Kennedy had invaded Cuba he would find himself empty handed because he would have no Soviet nuclear missiles to show to the American public. This would make Kennedy the laughing stock of the world and place the U.S. in a very embarrassing and difficult position before the world and its own conscience, as the big, powerful nation that unjustifiably attacks a very small, innocent one.

Thus, President Kennedy would unknowingly have helped Khrushchev in the dirty work of getting rid of Castro. With an American invasion of Cuba Khrushchev would have solved his Castroist problem and made good use of the U.S. loss of face. He would, in the end, have inherited Castroism, but without the troublesome Castro.

According to Khrushchev's own version, it was during his visit to Bulgaria on May 14-20, 1962, that he conceived the idea of installing strategic missiles in Cuba-that is, just after he got the news of Kudryavtsev's failure. Khrushchev was aware that a large part of the American public and a number of political leaders were calling for an invasion of Cuba. The American leaders were hysterical about Castro at the time of the Bay of Pigs and thereafter. The Kennedys had their Irish up, and were determined to get even with Castro at any cost.

In his memoirs Khrushchev claims that his main concern in sending missiles to Cuba was Castro's fear of an American invasion. But it is very difficult to believe, however, that Khrushchev planned to install missiles in Cuba to protect Castro after he had tried to overthrow the Cuban leader just a few days earlier. Even if that were not the case, simple logic dictates that no great power is going to give missiles to any newcomer who just asks for them. The USSR installed missiles where it wanted, and nowhere else. When Mao asked for missiles the Soviets turned him down flat.

Moreover, neither before 1962, nor after, did the Soviets had deployed nuclear warheads beyond their borders. It was not many years later, only after they had developed reliable devices to control its arming, that the Soviets allowed a limited number of nuclear warheads to cross their borders, and always under strict KGB's Spetsnaz units control. Why, then, would the Soviets would place missiles so close to the trigger-happy Castro? Khrushchev rightly believed he could exploit Castro's megalomania. Castro would surely accept his offer because the Cuban leader harbored secret intentions. The Cuban leader secretly believed that, once in Cuba, it would be easy for him to capture the nuclear missiles and use them for his own purposes.

At that moment Khrushchev had practically unlimited powers and the authority to use them as he saw fit, not only at home, but also in foreign affairs. So he ordered that missiles be sent to Cuba, but without the nuclear warheads-which he never sent, and never intended to send to the island. Moreover, there is the possibility that the missiles, like the ones Khrushchev was displaying in Moscow's parades, were a ruse de guerre, nothing but empty dummies.

Moreover, at the time there was a pro-Castro faction in the Kremlin as well as an anti-Castro one. The anti-Castro faction was headed by Khrushchev himself. So, he carried out his plan behind the backs of the pro-Castros.

To maximize the effectiveness of the missiles as a provocation, Khrushchev used every possible means to make the Americans believe that, after the installation and further training of Cuban personnel, the missiles would be under Castro's control. This is clearly implied in the Soviets' first statement of the crisis on October 23 in which they affirmed that Cuba alone had the right to decide what kind of weapons were appropriate for its defense.

The plan to set up the missiles was carried out in such a way

that they would inevitably be discovered by the Americans. If one assumes that the antiaircraft SAMs (Surface to Air Missiles) were intended to protect the installations of the strategic missiles, then they should have been installed and ready to shoot the U.S. planes before the strategic missiles arrived. Actually the SAMs and other associated antiaircraft nets only became operational when the construction of the strategic missile sites was well along, and the Soviets employed almost no camouflage at all to hide either set of weapons. In any case, since the SAM's could not shoot down planes flying below 10,000 feet, these antiaircraft missiles would not have been useful in the event of an American invasion.

But Khrushchev's carefully conceived plans had not counted on the unexpected and apparently irrational behavior of both Castro and President Kennedy. All reports received in Washington about the strange developments in Cuba seemingly aroused less suspicions than Khrushchev thought they should provoke. Even the CIA, which is often denounced as unnecessarily alarmist, seemed, in this case, rather unimpressed.

Then, on the morning of October 14, 1962, a U-2 entered Cuban air space and flew over the province of Pinar del Río. The Cubans watched the plane on the radar screens, appalled as the Russians did nothing. Later Castro complained bitterly about the Russian inaction. Why were the Soviets allowing the American planes to discover the missiles? The Russians had warned him of an imminent U.S. invasion, but now were letting the Americans know about the missiles that were waiting for them. The always suspicious Fidel smelled a rat.

So, on October 22, just after President Kennedy's address to the nation, Castro ordered a maximum alert of the Cuban armed forces. While Fidel was mobilizing all military forces, his brother Raúl, chief of the armed forces, warned that an invasion of Cuba would unleash World War III. By October 26,

Fidel had lost his patience with the bewildering Russian behavior and unilaterally announced that the Cuban anti-aircraft guns would start shooting at American planes, even if the Russian-operated SAMs didn't.

At that crucial hour it was convenient for Khrushchev to have the U.S. believe the missiles were under Castro's control. If Americans believed so, they might very well launch a preemptive attack against the sites and follow with an invasion of the Island, confident that there would be no Soviet reprisals.

Following Castro's orders, and disregarding Soviet advice, on the morning of October 27, anti-aircraft batteries manned by the Cuban army began firing at American low-flying reconnaissance planes, damaging at least one. As Castro himself told Tad Szulc, "I am absolutely certain that if the low-level flights had been resumed we would have shot down one, two, or three of these planes... With so many batteries firing, we would have shot down some planes. I don't know whether this would have started nuclear war."

Then, on October 27, at the most critical moment of the crisis, Castro pulled an Ace he had up his sleeve. An American U-2, piloted by Major Rudolph Anderson, Jr., was detected over the eastern part of Cuba and a SAM site at Los Angeles, near Banes, in the Oriente province, fired one or several anti-aircraft missiles and shot it down.

Who Pushed the Button?

Several conflicting interpretations have been advanced to explain the strange incident of the downing of the U-2. It has been suggested that it may have been an attempt on the part of the Soviet hard-liners to sabotage efforts at a negotiated settlement of the crisis. It has also been suggested that some Russian officer in charge of the anti-aircraft battery got nervous and fired the missile without

it having been ordered by his superiors. Some American officials have also speculated that the U-2 was shot down by a Soviet SAM fired by an out of control Russian crew.

But Carlos Franqui, a Cuban writer who had been in exile for many years, has offered the explanation that it was Fidel himself who, during a visit to a Soviet SAM base, pushed the button that fired the missile. Franqui was the editor of *Revolución*, the 26th of July Movement's official newspaper, and very close to Castro at the time.

Franqui wrote some time ago that Castro himself told him that he had personally pushed the button which launched the missile that shot down the U-2. According to Franqui, Fidel was itching for a nuclear confrontation between the U.S.S.R. and the United States and had been growing restless as the crisis evolved towards a possible agreement between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. At some time, wrote Franqui, Fidel "went on to say that if he were in Moscow, he would send the government to the subway, which was supposed to be safe during a nuclear attack."

Franqui's account of the incident may contain at least one grain of truth. According to Seymour Hersh, there is strong evidence that, on October 26, 1962, a Cuban army unit attacked and overran a Soviet-manned SAM base at Los Angeles, near Banes, in the Oriente province, killing many Soviets and seizing control of the site. Hersh based his article on information partly drawn from an interview with former Department of Defense analyst Daniel Ellsberg, who was himself citing classified material from a post-crisis study of the event. The speculation is based on an intercepted transmission from the Soviet base at Los Angeles indicating heavy fighting and casualties. Adrián Montoro, former director of Radio Havana Cuba, and Juan Antonio Rodríguez Menier, a senior Cuban intelligence officer who defected in 1987 and is now living in the U.S., seem to confirm Ellsberg's information.

In 1987 Cuban defector Gen. Rafael del Pino Díaz said that Soviet officers in Cuba were so outraged at Khrushchev's compliance with the American quarantine that they shot down the U-2 without authorization from Moscow. According to del Pino, "the officers wanted to provoke a confrontation."

And here comes another intriguing puzzle of the Cuban missile crisis. When the news that a U-2 had been shot down reached the Ex Comm, most members thought that war was just around the corner. In fact they had decided earlier that if a U-2 were shot down, the SAM battery responsible would be immediately knocked off. "It was the blackest hour of the crisis," Roger Hilsman later recalled.

But, like Khrushchev, most of the Ex Comm members miscalculated: Surprisingly, President Kennedy backpedaled on his promise and decided not to give the order to the U.S. fighters on stand-by to destroy the SAM battery. Adding more to the surrealistic aspects of the story, instead of retaliating in Cuba, as he had agreed, Kennedy ordered in a rush to defuse the missiles in Turkey to be certain that they could not be used without his personal permission –which probably meant never using them. May it have been, one can only guess, that, like the Soviet missiles in Cuba, the American missiles in Turkey had actually been dummies?

The End of the Crisis

Finally, Soviet developments in Cuba were so blatant and political pressure in the U.S. so strong, that Kennedy was forced to act. But, when he announced the blockade of the island, he unexpectedly stated that American actions would not be directed against Cuba, but against the Soviet Union. Kennedy's behavior was so surprising that Khrushchev was caught completely off balance and panicked before the possibility of a nuclear confrontation which he had not anticipated and was not prepared for.

The Cuban Missile Crisis was a further irritant to Khrushchev's already risky political situation. Though the state of the Soviet economy was the main factor in his demotion in October, 1964, undoubtedly his Cuban misadventure contributed to his fall.

Not long after the end of the Cuban Missile Crisis David Rockefeller traveled to Russia and, after realizing that hard-headed Nikita would never become his obedient tool, David's agents in the Kremlin overthrew Khrushchev. Not by a coincidence, Davids' agents who overthrew Khrushchev were members of the pro-Castro faction.

So, again, I suggest you may use any name you want to name the present crisis with Russia. But, please, don't call it another Cuban Missile Crisis. Russia is not the Soviet Union, David Rockefeller agents in the Kremlin do not control it, Joe Biden is not John F. Kennedy, Vladimir Putin is not Nikita Khrushchev and Putin's nuclear missiles are not dummies.

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