

Chapter Ten

Response as Illustration

U.S. response to the Cuban Revolution serves in many ways as a mirror of the beliefs and discontents of the American public, its conviction of national righteousness and its periodic sense of national frustration. But perhaps the first point to emphasize is the parallelism between public sentiment and official policy in the U.S. response to Fidel Castro and the radicalization of the Cuban Revolution.

There were differences. The initial reaction of a majority of the press to Batista's departure was comparatively more enthusiastic than that of Christian Herter. Elements of the business community labeled Castro a Marxist before Ambassador Philip Bonsal did, and both the Longshoreman's Union and the American Legion criticized the vacillating policy of the Eisenhower administration in the early months of 1960. Finally, when the CIA laid plans to overthrow the Castro regime in a covert, paramilitary operation, it outdistanced the level of anti-Castro sanctions advocated by a majority of the public, as did John Kennedy at the Bay of Pigs.

These differences are not unimportant, but the path to antagonism toward the Cuban Revolution taken by American public opinion and the Department of State was remarkably similar. If Washington was initially more cautious about Castro and then less rhetorically censorious and still later the more ready to give covert military assistance to Castro's enemies, it is nonetheless true that every economic and diplomatic sanction officially imposed upon the Cuban government was endorsed by a majority of the American public. Except for a small though vocal group of leftist critics and academic/literary dissidents, the public kept step with U.S. Cuban policy in the period between November 1959 and April 1961; at points it was in the lead.

The similarity of response of Washington and majority public

opinion was not the result of manipulation or pressure. Each served to reenforce the apprehensions and antipathies of the other. This process of reenforcement was, in turn, the consequence of shared assumptions. Of these, five were of major importance:

1. The assumption that communism was inherently expansionist and innately evil.
2. The assumption that no people ever willingly accepted a Marxist-Leninist government. Communist governments were the result of subversion or conquest, and the communization of Cuba must be the result of the conspiratorial tactics of Cuban communists and the Soviet Union. Castro's Marxist regime was by definition repressive and unpopular.
3. The assumption that it was unnatural as well as dangerous for the Soviet Union and communism to invade the Western Hemisphere, a region distinct and separate from the rest of the world. There was a historic association between the United States and Latin American republics—proclaimed by President Monroe, implemented by the Good Neighbor Policy and guaranteed by the Rio Treaty—and any Latin American state that sought to deny that association was a danger to Latin America as well as to the United States.
4. The assumption that the Caribbean was within the sphere of influence and part of the defense perimeter of the United States.
5. The assumption that Cuba owed its independence to the United States, and was properly dependent on the latter for its diplomatic security and economic prosperity. A Cuban leader who sought to destroy Cuba's historic ties with the United States could not be acting from motives of concern for the Cuban people but must be a power-hungry dictator with regional ambitions.

It was the last assumption in particular that was responsible for the belief of Main Street as well as Pennsylvania Avenue that as a result of Castro's increasing alignment with Marxism and the Soviet Union, we had "lost" Cuba. Unlike the earlier charge levied against the Truman administration about the "loss" of China, this conviction was not confined to right-wingers or partisan enemies of an incumbent administration. Nor was the conviction confined to

the investment community or to those Americans who had seen Havana as a playground for winter vacations. Branch members of the Foreign Policy Association along with officials in Washington appeared ignorant of the history of anti-Yanqui resentment in Cuba and unaware of the Cuban conviction that the United States had been an obstacle to political democracy and social-economic reform. The myth of the grateful, smiling Cuban working for the Yankee dollar was not less powerful for its lack of historical validity. Some Americans were prepared to admit that the United States had made errors in its dealings with such dictators as Machado and Batista, but Cuban friendship for the United States was automatically assumed. Who else could help them in their effort to achieve a better life and a closer approximation of the American standard of living? U.S. capital and U.S. markets were essential to Cuban progress. Geography and history had prescribed for Cuba the role of loyal friend and dependent ally, and any bearded charlatan who sought to take Cuba into the communist camp was guilty of theft. For Cuba to turn against the United States represented a perversion of history.

The conviction that Cuba belonged by right on the U.S. side explains much of the bitter reaction of policy makers and the readers of *Time* to the radicalization of the Cuban Revolution. Only a minority blamed left-leaning bureaucrats in the State Department; most saw conspirators in Havana as the responsible agents. Fidel had fooled the American people and in the process taken Cuba behind the Iron Curtain. Behind castigations of Castro's Cuba was a half-conscious sentiment of having been cheated, gulled, tricked. It was a sentiment that helped explain both the oscillating policy of the Eisenhower administration and Eisenhower's approval of the CIA training camp in Guatemala. It was a sentiment that explained the conviction of the New Frontiersmen that Castro was an agent of international communism and a personal enemy. It was a sentiment that linked the evolution of U.S. Cuban policy with the evolution of editorial opinion in *Business Week* and the *Christian Science Monitor*. Finally, it was a sentiment that helps explain why Cuba became an issue of such political volatility that demagogic senators would seek to capitalize upon it and presidential candidates in the election of 1960 would find it both irresistible and dangerous.

European observers frequently commented on the strange fixation of the United States, the world's richest nation, with a tiny island whose population was less than that of New York City. Their bemused censure demonstrated a lack of understanding of the diplomatic history and psychology of the American people.

The U.S. response to the Cuban Revolution not only serves as a general illustration of the tendency of the American people and government to claim certain nations as natural allies and diplomatic subordinates; it also provides a mirror for U.S. Cold War certitudes, U.S. policies toward Latin America, and U.S. apprehensions about revolutionary movements in "the less developed nations."

Castro's Cuba would not have assumed for many Americans the character of a dangerous evil had it not been for the growing conviction that Castro in alliance with the Soviet Union was determined to bring the Cold War to the Caribbean and the Western Hemisphere. Americans had grown accustomed to resisting communist expansion in Greece, West Berlin, and Korea—even in the Congo and Laos—but for the Soviet Union to invade our defense perimeter was seen as an affront as well as an act of aggression. Events in Cuba heightened the sense of impatience experienced by many Americans with the apparent inability of the United States to win the Cold War, but the resulting discontent led not to a demand for a review of the basic assumptions of our Cold War policies but to a demand that they be more successful. The assessment of the aggressive, conspiratorial nature of communist ideology and its monolithic character and subservience to Soviet imperialism was not subject to question. Events in Cuba simply offered further proof of its accuracy. What was needed was a more effective implementation of the containment policy. If the United States had been able to contain communist expansion in central and southern Europe, surely it should be able to find ways to deny communism a Soviet satrapy in the Caribbean.

Chester Bowles, hardly the most dogmatic of Cold War warriors in Washington, informed the National Farmers Union in spring 1961 that the Cold War was reaching "a historic watershed which may determine the shape of human society for generations and even centuries to come." The choice was between the "universal enslavement" of Marxism-Leninism and the values of the Ameri-

can Way—"our belief in human dignity, our dedication to personal freedom, to spiritual progress, and to justice under law."¹

The judgment of U.S. policy makers that national security was synonymous with anticommunism was shared by a majority of the foreign policy public. This view shaped our policy toward the Cuban Revolution and public response to that policy—a response that offered a mirror image of the doctrinal fixations of U.S. Cold War psychology.

U.S. response to the Cuban Revolution also illumines the assumptions and priorities of the nation's Latin American policy. The Cold War did not change U.S. policy in Latin America; rather it reaffirmed its goals while modestly altering its tactics. Traditionally, the United States had sought order and stability for its Latin American neighbors. Order and stability would provide a satisfactory context for U.S. trade and investment and serve as a barrier to foreign ideologies and adventurism. Fear of communist subversion accentuated a determination to maintain the status quo and then to support certain evolutionary social reforms that would encourage economic development. Recognition that economic growth and social welfare programs were a better barrier to communism than were military juntas and right-wing dictators found implementation in Eisenhower's approval of the Inter-American Bank and in Kennedy's Alliance for Progress. These programs reflected a determination to confine the threat of Castroism to the island of Cuba.

Castro was not alone responsible for the increased appropriations for economic assistance to Latin America, but the Cuban Revolution and Castro had an impact unequalled in the twentieth-century history of U.S.–Latin American relations. Perón had been a nuisance to the State Department, but Perónism had little influence beyond the borders of Argentina. Castro was the first Latin American leader capable of gaining wide sympathy among Latin American intellectuals and the Cuban Revolution was the first political event in Latin America in the century to gain the sustained attention of U.S. policy makers.

The Alliance for Progress, despite the claims of the New Frontiersmen, did not represent a new dawn in U.S.–Latin American relations. It embodied an intelligent appraisal of the long-term value of Latin America as a market for U.S. exports and an appreciation that right-wing oligarchies were a natural target for *fidelismo*

and its supporters. *Alianza para el Progreso* was designed to promote social and economic progress within approved boundaries, and it reflected a long-standing American presidential tradition of equating progress in Latin America with U.S. values and example.

As the Cuban Revolution enhanced U.S. fears of violent revolution in Latin America, so it strengthened the identification of revolutionary change with communist gain in underdeveloped Third World nations. If it was difficult for the United States to understand the determination of Castro's Cuba to exist as a separate historic personality divorced from U.S. economic and diplomatic influence, so was it difficult for the nation to empathize with revolutionary movements in Asia and Africa. That difficulty preceded the radicalization of the Cuban Revolution, but the latter was seen as an example of the probability that international communism would take advantage of popular authoritarian movements in the Third World. The Cuban Revolution strengthened the determination of U.S. policy makers to restrict and manage change in the underdeveloped nations.

Americans could not identify easily with peoples with a long history of material insufficiency. By the late 1950s, the Cold War witnessed a struggle for the allegiance of the underdeveloped nations, and American observers and policy makers refused to recognize the dissimilarity between themselves and the recently decolonized. Americans believed that two-party elections, a free press, and other institutions of political democracy were—for all nations—the proper base on which to raise a structure of economic development and social reform. They would not acknowledge that the reverse might be true; that it might be necessary to change a nation's economic structure before attempting to reform its political institutions and practices. Radical revolutions were seen as a forerunner of communist infiltration and influence. Cuba served as an example.

In its suspicion of foreign revolutions, the United States appeared the advocate of the status quo and the enemy not only of revolution but of Third World nationalism.

Castro's revolution in Cuba affected American policies in Latin America and in regions as distant as Iraq and Cambodia. American response to that revolution offered a mirror for U.S. Cold War mo-

ality and an illustration of the long-standing belief that U.S. capital investment was a necessary instrument for order and stability. More significantly, however, U.S. Cuban policy reflected the ambivalence of the much-cited "global revolution" in U.S. foreign policy in the generation after World War II—the adoption of diplomatic responsibilities and aspirations in areas beyond the Western Hemisphere.

The response to Castro's revolution demonstrated that the United States clung to the idea of the Americas as the natural sphere of interest of the United States even as it sought to pursue the foreign policy of a global superpower. Regionalism and globalism combined to determine the goals and apprehensions of policy makers in the years 1959–61, and neither the foreign policy public nor the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations recognized any self-contradiction in the requirements of regional and global ambitions. Nor did they recognize any self-contradiction in U.S. insistence on clinging to the old idea of the American republics as a "separate sphere" while establishing military bases throughout the globe. In the UN, the United States insisted that the problem of Castro's Cuba was a regional issue and should be settled by the OAS. Interference by extrahemispheric powers was unwarranted aggression and so was infiltration by alien doctrines. The doctrine of Marxism-Leninism was foreign to the Western Hemisphere and inherently dangerous to the security and welfare of the United States, the hemisphere's natural leader and guide.

U.S. response to Castro's Revolution provided a case study in the conviction of the American government and people that godless communism was an evil doctrine that sought global domination. Its conspiratorial designs imposed on the United States the requirement of achieving military and diplomatic superiority in order to promote peace, stability, and order. The international community was polarized between the alliance systems of the Soviet Union and the United States, and Soviet-American relations was the prism through which all international relations must be viewed. International politics was a zero sum game; a gain for one side was a loss for the other. The Soviet bloc aimed at the enslavement of the world under totalitarian communism. The Free World alliance, forged by the United States, supported political democracy and nonsocialist economic progress. Any international devel-

opment that enhanced the strength of the Free World was in the interest of peace and justice. Any development that aided the Soviet bloc was harmful to both. Consequently, for Cuba treasonably to desert the Free World alliance and align itself with the Soviet bloc was a catastrophe of global dimensions. Not only did the defection of Cuba promote the diplomatic prestige of the Soviet Union but it enhanced the psychological momentum of international communism as well. For all the doctrinal quarrels among communist governments, the expansion of communism and Soviet influence were still synonymous. Similarly, communist governments were synonymous with totalitarianism. Castro's Cuba, despite its rhetoric of concern for the poor and oppressed, was an example of the identification of Marxism-Leninism with one-party dictatorship. Cuba by going communist had become a bad country and an enemy of free peoples and democratic governments.

Castro's Cuba not only represented the intrusion of an alien doctrine into the Western Hemisphere; it implied that old beliefs in the inevitable movement of history toward liberal democracy were subject to question. Americans had assumed, perhaps only half-consciously, that history was on the side of the United States and its values of constitutionalism, civil liberties, and reformed capitalism. The evolution and appeal of Castro's revolution cast doubt on the benevolence of history and the goodwill of the masses in Latin America and the Third World. Castro's ability to ignore the censure and wishes of the United States suggested that America power was not unlimited and that her good intentions were not universally acknowledged. By the late 1950s, Americans allowed themselves occasional expressions of defeatism in reaction to the protracted struggle of the Cold War. For some, Cuba represented the most disagreeable and frustrating development in that war.

According to Reinhold Niebuhr, "arrogance is the inevitable consequence of the relation of power to weakness."² It is perhaps equally true that when the weak do not bow to the will of the strong, the natural reaction of the latter is one of bewilderment, frustration, and anger. All three sentiments characterized U.S. response to the Cuban Revolution. Nor did that response escape a flavor of ethnic superiority. American policy makers and businessmen had long regarded Latin Americans as lesser people and so too the racially mixed population of Cuba. This is not to say that

had the island population been composed exclusively of the descendants of New England Puritans that the course of the Cuban Revolution would not have been seen as a serious threat to U.S. interests and influence. But the presumed cultural inferiority of the Cubans made their successful resistance to U.S. demands a source of additional insult.

The United States proved unable to recognize that Castro, whatever his distortion of the original aims of the Cuban Revolution, represented a broad-based movement for independence from the Cuban past—a past dominated by U.S. economic and diplomatic influence. In the view of Washington and a majority of the articulate public, Castro had not simply changed the aims of the revolution, he had purposely betrayed them to the advantage of the Soviet Union, thereby committing an act of international treason. By 1961, apprehensions about the evil nature of the Castro regime had become certainties.

For some Americans there had been a half-wishful quality to those apprehensions, just as in Havana the radical faction of the 26th of July Movement had both desired and deplored overt antagonism from Washington. The final break in Cuban-American relations was, of course, the result more of ideological differences and conflicting diplomatic ambitions than of psychological conflict and wishful thinking, but by 1961 the stereotypical fears of both nations had found confirmation in the actions of the other. The subsequent course of Cuban-American relations would be characterized by mutual and self-righteous enmity.