We no longer believe in your philosophy of exploitation and privilege. We no longer believe in your philosophy of gold, the gold you rob from the work of other peoples. We no longer are willing to submit to the orders of your ambassadors. We no longer are disposed to follow in tow your reactionary policy, which is the enemy of human progress.

—Fidel Castro, August 1960

We who in living memory rescued the island from medieval bondage; we who have given order, vitality, technical wisdom and wealth are now being damned for our civilizing and cooperative virtues!

—Senator Karl Mundt, August 1960

1960 THE YEAR OF PUSHING AND SHOVING

"We will bury you." So Nikita Khrushchev had boasted in late 1956, and a year later the Soviet Union had won the race into space. When the United States placed a satellite in orbit two months later, a relieved Fulgencio Batista cabled President Eisenhower that the Cuban leader, for one, had never doubted "the security which is found in American resources and its scientific capacity to surpass the achievements being made by the Russians." But nearly everyone else conceded that the Russian word "Sputnik" now identified the cutting edge of space technology, and that fact alone almost guaranteed that the 1960 election would focus on America's fading global supremacy. "Most informed people agree that the Soviets are ahead of us technologically," warned General James Gavin, who popularized the term "missile gap," and the Eisenhower administration's public response, intended to reassure, had the opposite effect; in early 1960 the grandfatherly president reluctantly acknowledged that "the Soviets have made some very spectacular achievements" and then followed with a lame admonition—"I don't think that we should begin to bow our heads in shame." His next sentence sounded even more defensive: "Our country is not asleep, and it is not incapable of doing these things." 1

Then why weren't the Republicans doing them? Clearly aware of the issue being handed him on a silver platter, Democratic presidential candi-
date John Kennedy reminded voters a few months later that "the first passengers to return safely from a trip to outer space were named Sterlka and Balka, not Rover or Fido or Checkers." Not content to drag Vice President Richard Nixon's dog into the debate, Kennedy also made fun of his rival's well-publicized kitchen debate at a U.S. trade exhibit in the Soviet Union, telling a campaign audience that the best Nixon "could do in that Moscow kitchen was to wag his finger in Mr. Khrushchev's face and say: 'You may be ahead of us in rocket thrust, but we're ahead of you in color television.'"

Then, in the next sentence, came Cuba: "He tells us now that economic aid to Cuba and Latin America five years ago would have prevented the rise of Castro—but he neglects to say that he was there five years ago and didn't do anything about it." In this election year, Cuba was about to become for the Republicans what the loss of China had been for the Democrats eight years earlier—a political albatross.

In Cuba, the new year began as the old one had ended, with more bad news for U.S. investors—the expropriation of another seventy thousand acres of U.S.-owned sugar lands, half belonging to the United Fruit Company, whose executives maintained exceptionally close ties to the Eisenhower administration. Focusing on Cuba's promise to pay in bonds rather than cash, the U.S. protest note on 1 January was delivered to Cuban authorities just as counterrevolutionary exiles were escalating their occasional bombing of Cuban targets into a concerted effort to destroy the sugar harvest, hitting several sugar mills the day after the note's delivery. A week later, an airplane dropped four bombs on Havana, while another dropped incendiary white phosphorus on a Las Villas sugar mill; the next week, Camaguey was hit by five aerial bombings and Oriente by another three. Since all of the attacks had been launched from Florida, it was Cuba's turn to lodge a protest, which Fidel Castro delivered in a blistering public attack on 18 January, lashing out at both the counterrevolutionaries and their supporters, which he vaguely identified as "international oligarchies" and "foreign tyrannies." Asked about Castro's charge, a seemingly puzzled President Eisenhower told reporters, "We don't know really the foundation of these accusations."

That assertion is difficult to believe. Months earlier, immediately after the exiles' first aerial leafletting of Havana, Assistant Secretary of State R. Richard Rubottom Jr. had requested a coordinated effort by state and federal authorities to stop any further flights, calling them a needless complication for U.S. policy. Secretary of State Christian Herter had taken Rubottom's request to Attorney General Nicholas Katzenbach, who actually convinced him it was a legal impossibility. Katzenbach then privately explained to the White House that he was puzzled; the legal analysis was "baffling" and "confusing"; the subject was "not an easy one to deal with." A similar reaction came from Assistant Secretary of State John W. Acheson, who was assigned to look into the matter. The Department of State, Katzenbach said, was "trying to spread the responsibility for the decision with several officers, so that no one officer can be held solely responsible for the decision."

Ambassador Charles E. Bohlen sought to resolve the legal question through a correspondence with Katzenbach. On 19 December, Bohlen had written to Katzenbach: "I have been directed by your department to proceed in the following manner: (a) We will not be able to take any legal action at this time, but we will inform the Cuban Government of our decision. (b) We will continue to inform them about all the evidence that we have against the Castros. (c) We will continue to seek their cooperation in the capture of the revolutionaries in Cuba. (d) We will continue to try to persuade the Cuban Government to take action against the Castros." The next day, Katzenbach replied that he was "satisfied with the course of action that you propose." The author's note on 21 February described the situation as "cloudy" and "difficult". The author believed that the U.S. was not doing enough to prevent the Castros' activities in Cuba.
bottom’s request to the president, who then assured reporters that Attorney General William P. Rogers was “using every kind of reinforced means he can to make sure that there is no violation of this kind.” That was news to the attorney general, who asked the president at a meeting of the National Security Council (NSC) to explain “what our policy was with respect to stopping anti-Castro elements preparing some action against Cuba from American territory.” Here, away from the TV cameras, Eisenhower was not puzzled; the meeting’s minutes indicate that he immediately cut off any discussion: “The President said it was perhaps better not to discuss this subject. The anti-Castro agents who should be left alone were being indicated.” The flights kept occurring; Cuba kept protesting.

Ambassador Philip Bonsal had spent much of 1959 receiving these protests and passing them to Washington, regularly adding his view that the attacks were inflicting grave damage on U.S.-Cuban relations. Now a worried embassy again cabled that “regardless of origin of aircraft, large portion of public convinced they come from United States.” Two days later came a second cable, reporting that “twin engine aircraft painted white with red stripes flew over general area of Centrals Adelaida and Punta Alegre beginning about 1530 yesterday, dropping incendiary bombs and starting extensive fires. . . . Consulate Santiago reports officials of Cuban American Sugar company have called to say that same or another unidentified aircraft appeared about 10 o’clock this morning, attempting to start fires in Chaparri Delicias area.” The Eisenhower administration issued its standard denial of any responsibility, but on 18 February a plane exploded while trying to bomb the España central, and when documents found in the wreckage revealed the pilot to be a U.S. citizen, Robert Ellis, the administration finally launched a concerted effort to halt the flights. The president issued an executive order conferring extraordinary powers on the attorney general to seize arms and aircraft, he called General Elwood Quesada out of retirement to lead a government-wide effort to stop the raids, and at a cabinet meeting he instructed all federal agencies to help interdict and prevent the illegal flights.5

The Federal Aviation Administration promptly created a flight information center in Miami and began contacting aircraft rental agencies throughout the Southeast to request cooperation, but results were slow in coming: on 21 February, another plane bombed the Havana suburbs of Regla and Cojimar; on 23 February, planes dropped white phosphorus on harvested cane in Matanzas and Las Villas; on 24 February a similar attack occurred on the Trinidad central; on 2 March white phosphorus was dropped for a
second time on the Washington central in Las Villas and on the Chaparra and Delicias centrales in Oriente; on 8 March more bombs were dropped in Las Villas; on 2 April Havana and Matanzas were bombed; and on 23 April bombs fell on several centrales around Bauta.6

The embassy also requested that the most notorious perpetrators be moved out of striking distance, a request championed by Rubottom, who wrote to Herter that “many Cubans find it increasingly hard to reconcile our professions of friendship for the Cuban people with the continued presence in Florida of persons commonly regarded in Cuba as butchers guilty of unspeakable atrocities against the Cuban people. Bonsal on numerous occasions has expressed his opinion that the presence of these individuals adds to the difficulties of his task and has recommended that the Department make every effort to remove them from the area.” Rolando Masferrer soon became one of the few major exile figures to be ordered by the Immigration and Naturalization Service to stay out of Florida and at least 150 miles from the coast of any other state bordering the Gulf of Mexico, but the ban was overturned a few months later by the U.S. District Court in Miami.7

Although it wanted the flights stopped, the embassy considered the Cuban government’s protest language “arrogant, insolent and provocative,” and Rubottom agreed. In January, he recalled Bonsal “in view of the stepped-up campaign of calumny against the United States Government by the Government of Cuba which had descended to the point of insulting and derogatory public statements by Prime Minister Castro.” Rubottom insisted that the recall “is required in order to maintain the dignity and prestige of the United States Government (which is a particularly important concept in Latin American eyes).”8

When he arrived back in the nation’s capital, Bonsal discovered that any decision about U.S. policy toward the Cuban Revolution was being complicated enormously by U.S. officials’ inability to understand Fidel Castro’s popularity. He was clearly popular; as Vice President Nixon had noted after their meeting a year earlier, Castro “has those indefinable qualities which make him a leader of men,” and Nixon was not alone in his evaluation; everyone could see what the Canadian ambassador saw in early 1960: the revolution’s “principal asset is the undoubted devotion to Castro of the great majority of the people. Devotion is not too strong a word; anyone who has seen and heard the reaction of a Cuban crowd when Castro appears on a balcony is left in no doubt at all that the unlettered multitude regards him quite simply and sincerely as a Messiah.”9
Washington has always had trouble understanding this type of leadership. The U.S. political system to date had specialized in producing very white men in very dark suits whose politics were calculated to attract the modal voter, who above all else was strongly averse to anything radical, such as a beard. Given this preference for muted, moderate politics, the initial U.S. reaction to Castro’s ebullient personality had been to label his charismatic appeal as an indicator of Cubans’ immaturity. Cuban politics differed from U.S. politics because Cubans differed from the solid voters of Peoria. In Cuba, “the amorphous mass representing the lower classes has characteristically been on the side of whoever was in power,” the embassy reported, with “the ‘intellectual’ issues of human rights, representative government, free enterprise, etc., having little bearing on their reactions.” Instead, Cubans were said to be “guided largely by their emotions and full-stomach psychology.” At about this time, Rubottom told his colleagues that “until Latin Americans, and especially Cubans, can approach politics with reason, we will always have problems in Cuba and elsewhere.”

Fidel Castro was a perfect example of what such a political culture could produce, and his “foreign tyrannies” speech on 18 January had been mild when compared to a television appearance two days later, where the Cuban leader spent five hours firing salvo after salvo at every subject that displeased him, touching at one point on Spanish dictator Francisco Franco. Within minutes, the program’s startled viewers saw a furious Spanish ambassador storm into the TV studio to demand an apology, prompting Castro’s heated defense of his accusation. With the two men close to blows, the studio director wisely took the program off the air; when it resumed a few minutes later, a calmer Castro explained that the Spanish ambassador had been escorted back to his embassy and given twenty-four hours to leave Cuba—subject, of course, to the agreement of President Osvaldo Dorticós, who was seated in the studio audience. Dorticós nodded his approval. Castro then wondered aloud whether Cuba’s ambassador to Spain should be recalled; Dorticós thought that was a good idea, too.

Peoria had never seen anything like this, and the State Department’s Bureau of Intelligence and Research was having trouble deciding whether Castro was a reflection of Cuban culture or just plain crazy. In one early 1960 report, the bureau took both views, beginning on the former tack by arguing that Castro had “a typical Latin temperament” and then, two pages later, characterizing the Cuban leader as “a vain egocentric with a decided messianic complex which some observers believe borders on paranoia.” Eisenhower preferred the latter interpretation, as Bonsal discovered...
when he briefed the president in late January. But both men agreed that "we should not punish the whole Cuban people for the acts of one abnormal man," and early 1960 was not yet time for an open condemnation. Eisenhower was therefore more diplomatic at a press conference the next day, telling reporters, "We are not going to be party to reprisals or anything of that kind" in response to Castro's 18 January criticism of foreign tyrannies.\(^\text{12}\)

**IN LATE FEBRUARY, Cuba finally responded to the 11 January U.S. note protesting the uncompensated seizure of U.S. property by proposing the creation of a commission to discuss the two nations' differences, including compensation, with the only condition that the United States take no hostile action during the discussions.\(^\text{13}\) Washington's prompt rejection of this proposal reflected the fact that Cuba had already taken hostile action: on 4 February, the first deputy chair of the Council of Ministers of the Soviet Union, Anastas Mikoyan, had arrived in Havana with a scientific, cultural, and technical exhibition, and before departing he signed an agreement to purchase about 20 percent of Cuba's sugar crop for each of the next five years.\(^\text{14}\)**

The impact on Washington was profound. Senator Fulbright's Committee on Foreign Relations immediately held a closed-door hearing at which the State Department reported that the Soviet purchase had been negotiated at world market prices, about half the price paid by the United States, but that Mikoyan had also offered Cuba a one-hundred-million-dollar credit, half for the purchase of Soviet machinery and petroleum. Even more worrisome were Moscow's agreement to send unspecified but ominous-sounding "technicians" to Cuba and an announcement that the two countries would soon resume diplomatic relations, which they did in early May. "A great propaganda victory for the USSR," is how the CIA characterized the accord; now "there is little hope we can work out a satisfactory relationship with the Cuban Government."\(^\text{15}\)

The Soviet trade agreement unified Washington. CIA officials had predicted something similar, and its occurrence gave them an upper hand over the dwindling group advocating patience, whose members now threw in the towel. Assistant Secretary Rubottom conceded that "for all practical purposes Castro could be in the employ of the Soviet Government," and a few days later Undersecretary Livingston Merchant made the State Department's change of heart official, informing the NSC that the Cuba problem had become a "problem of proportions with the Communist world."\(^\text{16}\)

Now how did Castro, the Soviet powerbroker, feel about the American hemisphere?\(^\text{17}\) Were the U.S. actions taken as a show of force?\(^\text{18}\)

That was the last major event relevant to this and the previous chapter. The U.S. eleven days later said that it had accepted "all the American agreements to which the country and the people of Cuba have consented," which was a rather small group;\(^\text{19}\) they then repressed the protesters.\(^\text{20}\)

He had now done what he and the people of Cuba had done so many times before: they said they were ready to achieve the same thing that others had achieved through bloodshed and violence.\(^\text{21}\)

Castro had been referring to the previous American occupation of Cuba to turn that
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had become “the most difficult and dangerous in all the history of our relations with Latin America, possibly in all our foreign relations.” And this statement was made before Mikoyan’s visit.

Now how should the United States respond? Just after Mikoyan left Cuba, the State Department’s director of policy planning instructed a staff member to walk down to the fourth floor and pick the brains of the Latin American bureau. He came back empty-handed: “The general view within ARA is one of defeatism, that nothing can be done until a new Administration takes a fresh look at our Latin American policy with a view to making departures from existing attitudes and policies.”

That was not helpful. A new administration was a political eternity away, events were moving rapidly in Cuba, and asserting that nothing could be done was simply unacceptable. Something had to be done, even if the Bureau of Inter-American Affairs had decided to take itself out of the game, and the policy vacuum was quickly filled by men such as Admiral Arleigh Burke, the chief of naval operations, who recommended that the United States “assist rebel groups covertly to overthrow the present government.” He had no difficulty convincing his colleagues on the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who together recommended that the United States “initiate now a program of positive action to re-establish a stable, friendly, non-communist government in Cuba.”

Two days later, on 4 March, the French freighter La Coubre, carrying a shipload of Belgian arms, exploded in Havana’s harbor, killing seventy-five Cuban dockworkers. “This was sabotage and not an accident,” asserted an outraged Fidel Castro at the funeral, placing responsibility for the blast squarely on Washington: “Aircraft piloted by criminal mercenaries take off from the United States, and that government, which is so concerned with preventing us from getting arms, has been unable to prevent these flights.” The U.S. goal was obvious, he said: “They want us to be defenseless. And why do they want us to be defenseless? So that they can force us to yield, so that they can subjugate us.” Warning that “anybody who attacks us should know quite clearly that the Cubans of today are not the Cubans of 1898 and 1899,” Castro pledged that “this generation will fight to the last drop of blood.”

Castro’s comment about Washington “preventing us from getting arms” referred not to the Belgian arms or to the U.S. arms embargo that had begun the previous October but to a highly public U.S. effort to convince Britain to turn down Cuba’s request to purchase Hawker Hunter jet fighters. The
United States clearly did not want to see jet fighters anywhere in the region, but CIA director Allen Dulles had a special reason to halt this particular sale, telling the British ambassador that “he hoped that any refusal by us to supply arms would directly lead to a Soviet bloc offer to supply. Then he might be able to do something.”20 Eager to export, the British needed a substantial amount of arm-twisting, but in the end they agreed to Washington’s request. The Cuban government complained bitterly that “the Government of the United States has the right to refuse to grant export licenses for arms and other implements of war to whomever it pleases, but what it cannot do is use its influence with other governments, on the pretext of cooperating in the maintenance of peace in the Caribbean area, to prevent a friendly government from acquiring, for purely defensive reasons, the aircraft it needs.”21

The episode demoralized many State Department moderates. The Cuba desk officer recalled that after Cubans blamed the United States for the explosion, “from then on, there really was no talking,” and the embassy informed Washington that no hope remained of establishing a satisfactory relationship with the revolutionary government. Dulles said the same thing to the NSC, and after a brief discussion, national security adviser Gordon Gray summarized the new U.S. policy: “Our objective is to bring another government to power in Cuba.” The problem, he continued, was that “there is no apparent alternative.”22

The CIA had been developing one. A product of the agency’s Western Hemisphere Division, led by Colonel J. C. King, the plan had its genesis six weeks before the explosion, at a 13 January meeting of the NSC subcommittee responsible for covert action—the 5412 Committee—where Dulles suggested that “covert contingency planning to accomplish the fall of the Castro government might be in order.” Between that mid-January meeting and Castro’s early March funeral outburst, King’s division prepared “A Program of Covert Action against the Castro Regime,” which Dulles presented to President Eisenhower and his principal advisers in mid-March.23 Budgeted at a modest $4.4 million for the first eighteen months, it was a four-part effort to launch a propaganda offensive, to create a civilian opposition outside Cuba, to set up an anti-Castro underground within Cuba, and to develop a military force outside Cuba that would land at the Bay of Pigs thirteen months later. The president needed no convincing but merely emphasized the need to keep the plan secret: “Everyone must be prepared to swear that he has not heard of it.” One way to ally suspicion was to send Bonsal back to Cuba (“as good a cover as we could have,” said Herter), but...
just one more aggressive comment by the Cubans and he would be recalled again, never to return: "This is the last effort at reasonableness."

The propaganda offensive began immediately, with the CIA not only purchasing time on commercial radio stations whose broadcasts reached Cuba from the United States, Guatemala, and Venezuela but also installing its own radio station on the Swan Islands off the coast of Honduras, with plans to place another in the Bahamas and a third on a ship anchored off Cuba. The agency also began producing a U.S. version of the Cuban magazine *Avance* for airdropping into Cuba, while a CIA-controlled group inside Cuba was already printing counterrevolutionary broadsides. The offensive also included Latin American lecture tours by Cuban exiles, and when President Dorticós and Foreign Minister Roa visited six Latin American capitals in May, the CIA arranged for "every manner of unpleasant and embarrassing question to be thrown at them."

At the same time, Secretary Herter outlined "an accelerated program to prepare Latin American public and governmental opinion to support the United States in possible OAS action." The goal was to ready Latin Americans for a resolution similar to the 1954 Caracas Declaration, which had justified the U.S.-supported invasion of Guatemala by dissident military forces. Since U.S. officials again planned to base their proposed OAS resolution on the collective-defense provision of the 1947 Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance, they immediately began preliminary discussions with every Rio Treaty ally, revealing an outline of the U.S. plan to nineteen Latin American governments, some of whose abilities to keep secrets have never been much better than Washington's. Not surprisingly, Cuban authorities soon learned of the effort, and Castro's reaction was to abrogate the Rio agreement—"We do not feel bound by this treaty," he announced in late March. The White House responded that "it would be difficult to overstate the amazement and concern with which we view this statement."
on the afternoon of May 11, 1960, an official of the Cuban revolutionary government, accompanied by two armed soldiers entered the Hotel Capri, the hotel I began building in 1957 and which opened in November 1958, and demanded the keys to my apartment, my office, and my safe, saying that everything now belonged to the revolutionary government of Cuba. I was told I could leave the country, but I must take nothing with me, since it no longer belonged to me. Being unable to obtain transportation that night, my family and I stayed until the next day when we were able to get air travel reservations.

As a final indignity, "I was charged $30 for spending the night in my own hotel."²⁷

Shepard’s experience was far from unique; Cuba was the largest uncompensated nationalization in U.S. history. A similar story was told by the Mississippi-based Karpark Corporation, which never received a dime for the seven thousand parking meters it had recently installed in Havana—a $686,000 loss—and the meters themselves could not be repossessed since the Cubans, unaccustomed to paying for on-street parking, had destroyed every one of them in the celebration following Batista’s departure. A similar tale was told by Frederick Swetland, a rancher from the Isle of Pines, who reported that “we got our silver out and we got out some of our books and everything else we left behind, including the dog.”²⁸

The State Department was the first contact for many of these aggrieved investors, including the general manager of the Miami-based Dixie Export Company, whose two-hundred-thousand-dollar inventory in a Havana warehouse had been confiscated. As he later complained to President Eisenhower, all he received from State Department officials was “a vast amount of press releases and such statements as ‘our government, through its regular channels, is abreast of the situation in Cuba.’ As losers we find such statements to be far from consoling and certainly not indicative of some government action worthy of the strongest nation on earth.” Other investors did what Walter Reynolds did when the Cuban government seized his bat guano fertilizer company—they went to their congressional representatives, who, in turn, demanded the State Department’s assistance. The result was innumerable telephone calls such as that from Senator James O. Eastland, who dialed Rubottom in early April to say that he “totally disagrees with our Cuban policy” —“it is appeasement down there and a lot of others up here [on Capitol Hill] feel the same.”²⁹

What impact did such a call from one of the Senate’s most powerful members have? But that was certainly his desk in the State Department in 1960. Investors in the effort at least kept up the effort at keeping the Department of State informed of eight reports per year paying the $25, ²⁸ stating that “we shouldn’t have expected more than that.”³⁰

And in the meantime, the Cubans were busy closing off American businesses on-site in Havana, occupying buildings, Tables in the Mercedes-Benz small-automobile assembly plant and an oil refinery, two large retail chains, and so on.

This development was repeated in Mexico. The interesting development was that the Mexican government, through the efforts of its president, the late José López Portillo, did not allow its assets to be expropriated by the Cuban government. The reason was that President López Portillo was a man of principle and was determined to do something about the situation in Cuba. He was not afraid to stand up to Fidel Castro and his government.

This was not the case with President Kennedy. As Douglas hurd, one of his key aides, later wrote, Kennedy was afraid of Castro and his government, and he wrote...
members have? It probably helped solidify the administration’s hostility, but that hostility would have existed anyway, and Eastland’s action certainly had no effect on immediate tactics: in mid-1960, the State Department instructed Ambassador Bonsal to stop seeking compensation for U.S. investors because “it would set us back if he attempted any reconciliation effort at this time.” Upset investors and members of Congress nonetheless kept prodding: one list of proposed sanctions handed to State Department officials by the private-sector Business Advisory Council contained eight recommendations, including a cut in Cuba’s sugar quota and a program to assist “opposition elements to overthrow the Castro regime.” Replying that he was not ready for such drastic action, Rubottom agreed that “we should plan to throw the economic book at the Cubans.”

And a weighty book it was. It included a number of minor but nonetheless damaging moves such as recalling the Department of Agriculture’s on-site inspectors who provided expedited entry of Cuban fruits and vegetables into the United States. The State Department also terminated the small Point Four technical assistance missions in agriculture and civil aviation and immediately thereafter complained publicly about Cuba’s “calculated campaign to misrepresent and denigrate the special economic relationships between our two countries.”

This was only the warm-up for the first eyeball-to-eyeball dispute, which developed out of Cuba’s need to refine the Soviet petroleum it had obtained in Mikoian’s February trade agreement, and it triggered one of those interesting cases of the government seeking help from the private sector, not vice versa. In late April, officials from Standard Oil of New Jersey (Esso) had asked State Department officials for help with an unrelated problem of its Cuban subsidiary, which had imported and refined crude oil and then sold it to Cuban consumers, who paid in pesos; the company wanted the Cuban central bank to convert those pesos into dollars, but the bank was refusing to do so. The State Department could offer little assistance; in the course of the meeting, however, Esso executives mentioned that “they might be requested by the Cuban Government to run Russian crude through their Cuban refinery,” intimating that a plan to handle that problem was being prepared elsewhere in Washington.

This information was news to the State Department, and two days later national security adviser Gordon Gray filled in acting secretary of state Douglas Dillon: “There is a special activity proceeding under the chairmanship of Bob Anderson with which you may or may not be familiar,” he wrote. Six weeks earlier, at the 17 March White House meeting launch-
ing the CIA’s four-part assault on the Cuban Revolution, Treasury Secretary Robert Anderson, a Texas oil executive, had suggested a fifth measure: “If we were to cut the Cubans off from their fuel supply, the effect would be devastating on them within a month or six weeks.” While the Mikoyan trade agreement appeared to make such a cutoff more difficult, the Soviet crude oil would need to be refined in Cuba’s three facilities, all of them owned and operated by foreigners—Esso and Shell in Havana and Texaco in Santiago.\footnote{34}

The issue came to a head in mid-May, an especially difficult time. On 1 May, the Soviets had shot down a U-2 spy plane, and fifteen days later Nikita Khrushchev had walked out of a Paris summit after President Eisenhower refused to apologize for the spying. The next day, Cuba’s Banco Nacional notified the three companies that operated oil refineries on the island that the country would soon be taking possession of a substantial amount of Soviet crude oil, which the refiners would be required to accept as payment for debts owed the companies by the Cuban government. Texaco was selected to begin with a boatload of Soviet crude that had already arrived.\footnote{35}

The bank’s directive meant that Texaco would be stuck with even more wads of Cuban pesos when it retailed the refined Soviet oil, but local managers of the three oil companies were willing to be flexible—Esso’s Cuba manager told Bonsal that he saw no alternative to refining the Russian crude, and he was especially reluctant to antagonize the shipment’s formal owner, the Banco Nacional, whose recently appointed president, Che Guevara, controlled the hard currency that Esso wanted in exchange for its Cuban pesos. Guevara, of course, was known for his dislike of foreign investment, on one occasion characterizing it as “a great business for the investor, but a bad business for the country” and on another arguing that “private foreign capital comes here only for profit and does nothing for the people of Cuba.”\footnote{36}

Given the issue’s delicacy, local refinery managers sought instructions from their home offices, giving Anderson the opportunity he had been seeking—he asked two assistant secretaries of state (Rubottom and Thomas Mann) to travel to New York to urge senior company executives not to refine the Soviet crude. As requested, the home offices promptly instructed their local managers to refuse the oil, then waited for the other shoe to drop as a furious Castro told a Cuban television audience that the companies’ refusal was “a concrete act of aggression.” In Washington, the talk was equally tough; at a special NSC meeting just three days before the Repub-

| Lican National Party, serving Cuba’s interests, had gradually become more adamant when it came to “the Suker’ through the scree 188 ordered to leave.”\footnote{37}

Then there was the intervention of the U.S. Congress, which, after warning the Administration that the U.S. Government had been expellee immediately, was inclined to pass the 189 and 190 bills, and the the Administration was inclined to pass the 189 and 190 bills, and the Administration’s rejection of the request was a further step toward the takeover of the refineries by the Cuban Government and trade relations.

\footnote{38} CUBA’S ACHILLES’ HEEL: precisely, Cuba’s sugar cane industry. When the United States had its origin in the sapphire industry, and in the protection of the island’s natural beauty, the purpose was to establish a target price for sugarcane that would provide a floor for the industry, not to create a new industry for Cuba. When the United States began to import sugarcane from Cuba, the Cuban sugar industry was already in decline. The United States’ decision to import sugarcane from Cuba was a blow to the Cuban economy, which was already struggling with a severe economic crisis. The United States’ decision to import sugarcane from Cuba was a blow to the Cuban economy, which was already struggling with a severe economic crisis.
lican National Convention, Vice President Nixon argued that U.S. airlines serving Cuba should be ordered not to use the Soviet oil, and he became adamant when Secretary Herter seemed lukewarm to the idea: "The time has come to take strong, positive action to avoid becoming labeled 'Uncle Suker' throughout the world."³⁷

Then the shoe dropped: on 28 June, Prime Minister Castro signed Decree 188 ordering Texaco to process the waiting boadload of Soviet oil. After warning Washington that the situation was "pretty hopeless," Bonsal watched as Texaco refused to obey the decree and the Cuban government immediately took over management of the refinery. Then came Resolutions 189 and 190, ordering Esso and Shell to refine the oil Texaco had rejected. When they also refused, the Instituto Cubano de Petróleo "intervened" their facilities as well.³⁸

The refusal to refine the Soviet oil dramatically increased Moscow's influence in Cuba—as one Kennedy administration official would remark several years later, "We forced the Russians to pick up the tab in Cuba [and] the consequences of the decision may not have been thought out."³⁹ That was not the view at the time, when everyone at an NSC meeting seemed eager to strike back: Eisenhower asked for advice about when (not whether) to sever diplomatic relations, Undersecretary of State Dillon responded with a manly jousting metaphor ("We had entered the lists. We can only lose or win; it was important that we win."), and Anderson observed that "the American people are beginning to wonder how much roughing up and how much abuse we can accept." Fortunately, he continued, the Texaco plant would need spare parts within a month, and he intended to pressure European suppliers not to provide them. In the interim, the administration limited its public response to a sharply worded diplomatic protest, calling the takeover one more example of the "relentless economic aggression by the Government of Cuba designed to destroy Cuba's traditional investment and trade relations with the free world."⁴⁰

Cuba's Achilles heel was not petroleum, however, but sugar—or, more precisely, Cuba's preferential access to the U.S. sugar market. This access had its origin in a 1902 treaty granting the fledgling republic's exports a 20 percent tariff reduction, making Cuban sugar inexpensive relative to that of other foreign producers. Then came the 1934 Sugar Act, whose principal purpose was to protect depression-era U.S. growers by restricting the entry of foreign sugar.⁴¹ The act directed the Department of Agriculture to establish a target price for domestic sugar that would ensure a profit for U.S.
growers and then to calculate how much to restrict both domestic acreage and the entry of foreign sugar to raise the price to that level, with the foreign supply regulated by assigning a quota to each producing country.

Under the Sugar Act, about 55 percent of all U.S. consumption was satisfied by domestic producers, and 45 percent was satisfied by foreign producers, with about 70 percent of the foreign quota going to Cuba. The island's share represented about a third of the entire U.S. sugar market between 1934 and 1960, with sugar representing about 80 percent of the value of Cuban exports, dwarfing the second-leading export, tobacco, which accounted for about 7 percent. One-third of Cuba's labor force was employed in the sugar industry. As the Canadian ambassador reported in 1953, "The mainspring of Cuba's foreign policy is the necessity to sell her sugar abroad in order to live." And, as the King Ranch's Robert Kleberg laid out the scenario when he visited the State Department in mid-1959, "If Cuba were deprived of its quota privilege, the sugar industry would promptly suffer an abrupt decline, causing widespread further unemployment. The large numbers of people thus forced out of work would begin to go hungry. They would then readily perceive the catastrophic nature of Castro's program, and that would mean the end of Castro politically."

Career officials spent the following months debating among themselves whether a quota cutoff would have the effect Kleberg predicted, with a worried William Wieland, the director of State's Office of Caribbean and Mexican Affairs, capturing the consensus: "We would be taking an irrevocable step which would certainly injure and could indeed destroy, the source of Cuba's livelihood." In early 1960, the discussions became increasingly pointed, in part because of Cuban behavior but primarily because the Sugar Act was up for renewal. The previous renewal had been for four years and, as one official noted, "We would not want an extension for 4 years which would guarantee Castro's U.S. market." Ambassador Bonsal had previously opposed a quota cut, arguing that it "would, in my judgment, prove disastrous not only for our relations with Cuba but also to our relations with other Latin American countries," but Mann responded that "there are cogent economic reasons for making a reduction in Cuba's quota." Most career officials remained on the fence, with one undecided economic officer writing that "my major difference with Mr. Mann was this: Mr. Mann would start cutting Cuba's quota right away. My difference with Wieland is that apparently he would never cut the quota."

This ambivalence was not apparent at senior levels, where the hardliners had become overwhelmingly dominant, and the White House therefore proposed to grant the embargo. Though Congress had aggressively depicted election-year sugar politics as a battle between economic sense and communist après nous, Congress was more than pleased to represent the former. The House Agriculture Committee, chaired by Florida's Jim Gardner,"as Sikes told the floor to proudly by example, "counters the Communist counter charges by considering the economic sense of the decision."

With the ferocity of his representation, economic sense not be cloaked by the Rocky Mountain pretense of the Keith Thompson and his colleagues, it must be carried a step further.

While prayer may answer enthusiasm for representation, it is also an exercise in quota "we can't have everything." The Communists also cited enrollment, and whether they must be driven out of their cuba." On the urging in 1958 of the House of Represe
fore proposed legislation to extend the Sugar Act for only one year and to grant the president authority to cut Cuba’s quota for 1960 and 1961. Although Congress had never before ceded this authority, the legislators’ election-year response was never in doubt—two quota-cutting bills had been introduced even before the administration’s proposal reached Congress, and they became the first effort by Congress to insert interest-group politics (the protection of domestic sugar producers) into Washington’s policy toward revolutionary Cuba: one bill from a representative of sugar-beet-growing Idaho proposed giving part of Cuba’s quota to domestic producers, and a second proposed eliminating the quota entirely. Both were quickly discarded in favor of the administration’s proposal, which reached the House floor the day after Texaco’s refinery was seized. Sensing a financial opportunity for his cane-growing constituents, Representative Robert Sikes told his colleagues that to replace Cuban supplies “the great State of Florida can tremendously expand its sugar production”; he then yielded the floor to another member from Florida, who argued that “we cannot sit idly by exercising patience and forbearance in the face of threats made by a Communist puppet”—and, incidentally, he urged the House to “give every consideration to expanding and enlarging our domestic sugar industry.”

With the feeding frenzy under way, he yielded the floor to yet a third Florida representative, who argued that the United States should “use hard economic sanctions—and in the sugar field they are powerful—to show we will not be clobbered by a tiny nation made free by us.” Then it was time for the Rocky Mountain beet growers to weigh in, led by Wyoming representative Keith Thompson: “Cuba lives off our sugar purchases,” he reminded his colleagues, and “it is time to apply Teddy Roosevelt’s policy of ‘speak softly but carry a big stick.’”

While parochial economic advantage clearly generated much of the enthusiasm for cutting Cuba’s quota, there was no shortage of support from representatives whose districts grew no sugar. “I am a patient man, but I am also an American,” began Rhode Island’s Silvio Conte; with the sugar quota “we are, in effect, supporting the rapid growth of international communism at our very doorstep.” South Carolina’s Mendel Rivers asked his colleagues to “think of what is happening—Castro’s communism—both must be destroyed,” arguing that a quota cut was too light a rap on the knuckles: “We should, if necessary, and, if conditions demand it, occupy Cuba.” One obscure Delaware representative, elected by a razor-thin margin in 1958 and now facing a stiff challenge, elbowed his way into the well of the House, eager to document a get-tough attitude: “If Cuba’s splendid
people understand they must sell their sugar or their economy will be destroyed they will themselves find a way to deal with the present misleaders and fomenters of hatred." Democratic House Speaker John McCormack made certain to put Republican Albert Quie on the record: "There was no member of [the agriculture] committee, Republican or Democrat, that was soft on Castro, was there?" "Not one," Quie responded. With that, the House voted 396–0 to authorize the president to cut Cuba's quota.47

The Senate quickly followed suit, and on 6 July President Eisenhower cut Cuba's sugar quota. Before leaving his desk at the end of the day, he wrote in his diary, "Approved emergency sugar act and after 2 long conferences today, issued official proclamation and accompanying statement. Have warned all to be alert to Cuban reaction." When the next day's New York Times editorialized that "the die is cast and there is no question that the United States, Cuba and Latin America are entering a new era," President Eisenhower took the time to write to the newspaper's publisher that "the piece reflects my views exactly."48

TWO WEEKS EARLIER, Castro had warned Cubans that "they are adopting a law against our economy," promising a quick reaction. Then he told a radio and television audience that "if we can lose our sugar quota, part of our quota, they can lose part of their investments; [if] we can lose all our sugar quota, they can lose all their investments." A defiant Castro then promised to follow through on the day President Eisenhower cut the quota, although Ambassador Bonsai was relieved to report that there was nothing in his speech, "violent and disagreeable as it was, to indicate an intention on his part to resort [to] mob or goon squad action against Americans." But, he continued, "I rather get impression that at this stage he will use special powers in recently approved legislation to seize American property in retaliation."49

The recent legislation was Law 851 empowering the government to nationalize the property of U.S. citizens. Written in anticipation of the quota cut and explicitly retaliatory, it provided for compensation with thirty-year bonds at 2 percent interest, paid from a fund created by one-quarter of the proceeds from U.S. sugar purchases in excess of 3 million tons per year at prices over 5.75 cents per pound. If these purchases did not occur in any year, then Cuba's payment for that year would not simply be deferred but canceled. (During the 1950s, the United States had purchased on average 2.6 million tons per year at prices slightly below 5.75 cents.)50

Implementation began with a flourish: a Castro speech four days after the quota cut. "Under our constitution, Cuba is sovereign to destroy us, to expel us, to burn our cities, to kill our citizens, to do anything at all," he said. That said, more than 2,000 farms that had been acquired by the United States (then the Cuban Tobacco Company, later a subsidiary of United States Tobacco), totaling and twenty-two million acres, had been lost to the Cubans, with the remaining 80,000 remaining as the legal basis for future presidential U.S. production."51

Cuba also took steps to protect the sugar industry, charging that President Eisenhower had not made a case against the sugar companies. "The U.S. administration cannot say that the sugar industry has been 'right' or 'wrong' in the world, the terms 'right' and 'wrong' are not possible," Vice President Nixon said to Gordon Gray of the New York Times, "and it is all nonsense to say that Herter replied.

Meanwhile, the United States held its fire, by accusing the Cuban government of perverting the meaning of Pelotaje and Cabot Lodge (although it most likely had little to do with the invasion). But the United States did not have to wait long for retaliation. The Sugar Code was signed, and the United States, in its own words, was able to seize American property in retaliation.52

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Implementation began with a flourish: a Castro speech four days after
the quota cut that criticized the United States as “the country that wants to destroy us, that wants blood to run down our streets, that wants to destroy our cities, that wants to spread mourning, death and ruin on our land.” That said, more shoes began to drop. The initial focus was on expropriating firms that had already been intervened—twenty-eight large U.S. companies valued at slightly less than a billion dollars, including the Cuban Electric Company (majority-owned by the American and Foreign Power Company), the Cuban Telephone Company (an International Telephone and Telegraph subsidiary), the U.S.-owned oil refineries plus a smaller Sinclair operation, and twenty-two sugar refineries whose surrounding acreage had already been lost to the agrarian reform. Over the next few months, Law 851 served as the legal basis for the nationalization of nearly all remaining nonresidential U.S. property in Cuba.31

Cuba also lodged a formal complaint with the U.N. Security Council, charging that the quota cut and other moves constituted economic aggression. President Eisenhower told Secretary Herter that “if the Cubans can make a case against us that will have any weight with the other nations of the world, then he could only conclude that he does not know what the terms ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ mean.” Then the president left for a vacation and Vice President Nixon hit the campaign trail, so national security adviser Gordon Gray called to ask the secretary of state to chair an upcoming NSC meeting: “There might be something on Cuba,” he said. An exasperated Herter replied that “there was something on Cuba every five minutes.”32

Meanwhile, Cuban foreign minister Raúl Roa opened the U.N. debate by accusing the United States of aggression, and U.S. ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge ended it by telling the Security Council that “unnecessary though it most certainly seems to me, let me here and now give him this assurance, heaped up and overflowing: The United States has no aggressive purposes against Cuba.” Unwilling to acknowledge planning for the Bay of Pigs invasion but also clearly trying not to tell an outright lie, Herter chose his words carefully when reporters asked about the Cuban complaint: “I have never talked with the President about military intervention in Cuba.” Delicately picking his way through an ethical minefield, Herter added, “We have a very solemn obligation under the Charter of the United Nations not to take aggressive action against any member of the United Nations.”

The Security Council shelved Cuba’s complaint, accepting the U.S. suggestion that the matter be referred to the Organization of American States. Senator Karl Mundt was upset by the entire proceeding: “We who in living memory rescued the island from medieval bondage; we who have given
order, vitality, technical wisdom and wealth are now being damned for our civilizing and cooperative virtues!"\textsuperscript{53}

The real surprise came from the other side of the world, when Nikita Khrushchev told a Moscow audience that “Soviet artillerymen can support the Cuban people with their rocket fire if the aggressive forces in the Pentagon dare to launch an intervention against Cuba.” The president instantly replied “in the most emphatic terms that the United States will not be deterred from its responsibilities by the threats Mr. Khrushchev is making.” But the next day Che Guevara warned Eisenhower to think twice—“We are defended by one of the most powerful military forces in history”--while Khrushchev proceeded to compare the United States to a vulture that “snatches the last crumb out of the mouths of the dying children and old folk just to grow fat and rich.” He told reporters that “the Monroe Doctrine has had its day, has outlived itself, has died a natural death, so to speak. Now the remains of that doctrine ought to be buried, the way any dead body is buried, so that it won’t poison the air with its putrefaction.”\textsuperscript{54}

“What did they expect?” asked Castro a week later. “For us to kneel down and wait to be killed? For us to renounce all help in this world, so we will remain alone, without a quota, and easy victims of aggression. What do they want? For us to place our necks under the Yankee axe and tell our mighty northern neighbor: ‘You can go ahead now, and let the axe fall?’”\textsuperscript{55}

\textbf{THE PROBLEM NOW FACING} Cuba’s leaders was not simply that the United States held lots of axes (on the day of the quota cut, President Eisenhower instructed advisers to begin “looking forward to subsequent steps”) but also that Khrushchev’s 9 July statement had converted whatever was left of a bilateral dispute into a highly public test case of U.S. leadership of the Free World, with the secretary of defense warning about “a disturbing tendency on the part of smaller nations to seek to involve the Soviet Union in their problems in the hope of playing East against West. If we do not follow through with respect to Cuba, we may be encouraging similar behavior by other countries.”\textsuperscript{56}

These words were unmatched by immediate actions. Recruitment for the Bay of Pigs was now under way, of course, but it was secret. With no concrete steps forthcoming, the White House was back on the defensive soon after the quota cut, and Khrushchev’s “rocket” comment prompted a wave of constituent letters to the vacationing president: “For God’s sake stop fishing and golfing and get back to Washington and prepare aggressive action against Castro,” cabled one New Yorker; another ordered Eisenhower to “calm down and stop running for President,” Chester Conner ordered the military to be on the alert if Castro were to "disappear." By this time, the administration was in a very tough spot. toughened as a result of the crumbling of support for the United States could lose its nerve. The 9 July statement was described by one as “a very competitive” speech, and expressions of confidence were few. It was all very distressing. In late July, Secretary of State Dulles was in New York, speaking of the possibility of a secret deal to cut down the number of missiles in Cuba. Secretary Henry A. Kissinger was having a hard time convincing the President to move. Though the CIA was not satisfied with the use of force in Cuba, President Eisenhower was determined to “not only to own our mistakes, but to be the very Devil’s creature.” His sympathy for the Cuban people was very strong, he was not very well disposed toward Castro, and he had dealt with him so at times that Castro was an embarrassment to the United States. Other members of the administration said that if Castro were to disappear, the United States would lose its nerve and be unable to confront the Soviets on the issue. Chester Conner, for example, said that this would be a very big mistake. Other members of the administration said that if Castro were to disappear, the United States would lose its nerve and be unable to confront the Soviets on the issue. Chester Conner, for example, said that this would be a very big mistake.
hower to "stop playing golf and go back to work and tell Mr. K. that America is not afraid." And, the writer added, "I was your campaign manager in West Chester County in 1952. I am a Republican. I am very much afraid that you are disappointing your many friends."  

By this time both major parties had held their nominating conventions, and the administration was now busy beating off repeated demands for tougher action from nervous Republican legislators. In one meeting, a vulnerable senator proposed a blockade, but the president urged Republican members of Congress to exercise restraint, pointing out "that if the United States does not conduct itself in precisely the right way vis-a-vis Cuba, we could lose all of South America." Yet he had told the NSC months earlier that "it might be necessary to blockade Cuba yet," and Treasury Secretary Anderson had argued that the United States had to be "prepared to go all the way." Now, with the election on the near horizon and Khrushchev's 9 July statement striking Washington like a thunderbolt, these flak of random suggestion began to turn into a blizzard of concrete proposals. In late July, the Pentagon handed the State Department a lengthy list of possible moves—everything from freezing Cuba's U.S. bank accounts to cutting the telecommunications cable between Havana and Moscow. Secretary Herter replied that he was already working on most of them.  

State was especially eager to muster the support of U.S. allies. When the CIA reported that it had been unable to convince Greek owners to halt the use of their ships to transport Soviet petroleum, Herter persuaded the president to write to British prime minister Harold Macmillan for help "not only with respect to British tankers, but in influencing other tanker-owning countries." Macmillan replied sympathetically: "Castro is really the very Devil," he wrote, and he later assured Eisenhower, "I know, and fully sympathize with, your purpose—the unseating of Castro," but he also expressed reservations, worrying first that Washington had no plan ("I am not very clear how you really mean to achieve this aim") and second that hostile acts might turn Castro into a martyr. Macmillan was saying that he had cooperated once by refusing to sell Cuba jet fighters and had done so at considerable domestic political cost; with regard to a broader trade embargo, Britain would cheer quietly from the sidelines but would not lift a finger.  

Other friendly governments also "had not been as cooperative as they might have been," Allen Dulles reported, and even if they were to cooperate, the world surplus in ships was working to Cuba's advantage. Treasury's Anderson kept up the pressure, urging Eisenhower to remind NATO allies
"that we have given billions of dollars to them for mutual security, and that it is important for NATO to align itself with us" by helping to tighten the screws on Cuba. In particular, Anderson felt, "it was inconceivable that the Canadians would not cooperate," but when given a green light to apply pressure, he found Ottawa reluctant to support economic sanctions; instead, the northern neighbors favored "patient forbearance." The Canadian foreign office was frank with Anderson's emissary, who reported that "they could not imperil the free right of their banking institutions and businesses to take up any slack that might be created by U.S. economic sanctions. Altogether, it was a very disturbing conversation." 60

Then the administration turned to its Latin American allies. In 1938, the twenty-one independent countries of the Western Hemisphere had met in Lima and, recognizing that occasional conferences were ill-suited to the faster pace of the times (the final act of one conference typically called for another in five years), created a new diplomatic mechanism, a "meeting of consultation of ministers of foreign affairs," that could be called at any time. Three such meetings had been held during World War II, and each had been fairly cooperative, but the 1954 Caracas meeting that tacitly gave Washington permission to overthrow the democratic Guatemalan government (technically, an international conference of American states and not a meeting of consultation) had left many Latin Americans worried about a return to the big-stick policy of an earlier era. Such was the situation in 1960, when the U.N. Security Council turned Cuba's complaint over to the OAS, prompting the Eisenhower administration to propose a meeting of consultation in San José, Costa Rica.

By this time, Washington's purpose had become obvious—to do to Cuba what the 1954 meeting had done to Guatemala—and as an alternative, Mexico, Brazil, and nonmember Canada offered to mediate the dispute. The United States declined the offer, with Rubottom advising Herter that withdrawal of the sugar quota was already damaging Cuba's economy and that negotiations would help Castro just as he was beginning to weaken.

* The concept of a meeting of consultation was incorporated into both the 1947 Rio Treaty and the 1948 OAS Charter, and a meeting of consultation subsequently could be called under two separate treaties. The Rio Treaty allowed a meeting only to address an armed attack or a threat to the peace; a resolution adopted by such a meeting required a two-thirds vote and required all members to impose any approved sanctions, with the exception that each state remained free to determine whether to accept a resolution calling for the use of military force. The OAS Charter allowed a meeting to consider urgent problems, but the foreign ministers had the power only to recommend and not require sanctions.
To soften this refusal to accept mediation and to avoid the taint of "another Guatemala," the United States had to mollify several democratic Latin American leaders who were more concerned about Rafael Trujillo than about Cuba—the Dominican dictator was widely accused of supporting a coup against Venezuela's President Romulo Betancourt and, after that effort failed, of being the mastermind behind a car bombing that wounded the Venezuelan leader.65

Secretary Herter had already warned the president that Trujillo's despotism "may soon create a situation like that in Cuba where the opposition is taken over by wild radicals," and in April the two U.S. leaders had discussed promoting a coup. At a mid-May White House meeting, "Mr. Rubottom said that Trujillo is involved in all sorts of efforts all over the hemisphere to create disorder. The President commented that Castro is also, and he would like to see them both sawed off." In June, therefore, the administration decided to propose not one meeting but two, held consecutively: first a meeting of consultation would focus on the Dominican Republic; it would then adjourn, and a second meeting would focus on Cuba. Eisenhower accepted this pairing as the cost of Latin American cooperation, telling aides that "until Trujillo is eliminated, we cannot get our Latin American friends to reach a proper level of indignation in dealing with Castro."62

By endorsing both meetings, the Eisenhower administration had signaled its decision to distance itself from Trujillo, leaving the State Department free to throw its energy into preparing the case against Cuba, an effort that began with the release of an exceptionally detailed document accusing the revolutionary government of a variety of sins but focusing on its close relationship with communists and its dictatorial behavior. Fidel Castro replied with a speech the embassy characterized as a "gutter-type attack... remarkable for its disregard for established institutions and the amenities of international life." The Cuban leader was especially critical of Washington's attempt to round up Latin American support, noting that "our enemies are used to threatening countries, they are used to trampling on the sovereignty of nations and issuing orders"; in contrast, he held up the example of Cuba, where "there are no Yankee soldiers commanding our armies anymore."63

When a reporter asked about Castro's comments, President Eisenhower appeared mystified: "Cuba has been one of our finest friends. We were the ones that conducted the war that set them free. And when they got in trouble, we had an occupation, back about 1908, and again we set them on their feet, and set them free." Although he had just been updated on
progress for the Bay of Pigs invasion, the president insisted that “we have not tried to throw out someone we didn’t like, or anything like that.”

The first of the two San José meetings focused on the charge that Trujillo had tried to kill Betancourt, the Venezuelan president. Since everyone found the evidence compelling, the foreign ministers quickly agreed to an immediate break in diplomatic relations and a partial suspension of trade, then adjourned. The meeting about Cuba began the next day. Nelson Rockefeller had advised Herter to permit a longer intermission—a transition that would allow Latin American leaders to make speeches expressing the “hopes and aspirations of their people”—and had encouraged the secretary of state to make a similar speech, sending along some suggested language that, he confessed, was “warm and human, which may sound corny but is the kind of thing the Latins love.” The Massachusetts Yankee had little time for diplomatic foreplay, however, and after a couple of pro forma introductory sentences, Herter plunged in with the indictment: “The leaders of the Soviet Union and Communist China have made abundantly clear their determination to exploit the situation in Cuba as a means of intervening in inter-American affairs. Their purpose is to break the bonds of inter-American solidarity, sow distrust and fear among the peoples of the American hemisphere, and thereby prepare the way for political control of the New World.”

Such charges were easy to document. On the same day as Herter’s speech, Fidel Castro told a Havana audience, “We will be friends of the Soviet Union and of the Chinese People’s Republic because they have shown they are our friends.” Then he spoke directly to the United States: “You have attacked and wish to destroy us.” Why, he asked? Because “we no longer believe in your philosophy of exploitation and privilege. We no longer believe in your philosophy of gold, the gold you rob from the work of other peoples. We no longer are willing to submit to the orders of your ambassadors. We no longer are disposed to follow in tow your reactionary policy, which is the enemy of human progress.” The OAS proceedings in San José constituted nothing other than one more example of this “false Pan Americanism with which you wish to cloak the system of oppression and abuse, the system of domination that you have introduced among the divided peoples of America.”

“Castro has burned his bridges,” Secretary Herter telephoned the president from Costa Rica, but his aides knew better—their informal conversations with intervention-sensitive delegates revealed a widespread fear that the United States was preparing to take action against Cuba. Just days
earlier, South Carolina's Olin Johnston had stood up on the Senate floor and suggested that "Castro should be seized and dealt with as an international criminal," offering his view that "a few marines could do the job." 68 This congressional bluster had been supplemented by an ill-timed State Department announcement that third countries could no longer buy Cuban sugar with U.S. aid funds, which hinted at Washington's intention to curtail third-country trade with Cuba, a move that would be deeply resented in Latin America, especially Mexico. As a result, no support could be found among meeting participants for a resolution containing a direct reference to Cuba. 69

That was not an insurmountable problem (the 1954 Caracas declaration had accomplished its purpose without naming Guatemala), so the United States settled for what came to be known as the Declaration of San José, in which the OAS condemned "the intervention or the threat of intervention" — a pointed reference to Khrushchev's 9 July "rocket" comment — "by an extra-continental power in the affairs of the American republics." Latin Americans made approval of even this weakened text contingent on U.S. acceptance of companion wording, aimed directly at Washington, reaffirming "the principle of non-intervention by an American state in the internal or external affairs of the other American states" and reiterating "that each state has the right to develop its cultural, political, and economic life freely." Moreover, the Declaration of San José was approved only after the delegates of eight countries had given speeches supporting both Cuba's right to self-determination and the revolution's economic reforms. Although the vote in favor of the declaration was unanimous, 19-0, it was marred by Mexico's abstention and by the decision of Peru's foreign minister to appoint another member of his delegation to sign a resolution he considered offensive. Venezuela's foreign minister also refused to sign and declined to appoint a replacement; from Caracas, President Betancourt had to order him to turn the delegation over to another diplomat. Ambassador Bonsal privately evaluated the resolution as "a serious disappointment," and the State Department admitted that it "falls considerably short of what we would like to have had adopted." When called and asked for his approval, a resigned President Eisenhower told an aide that "if this is the best that the Secretary can achieve, he felt he had no choice but to accept it." 70

Back in Washington a week later, Herter tried to explain: "Latin Americans were extremely sensitive to what they call intervention," he told the NSC, and "Cuba, in its presentation to the OAS, had gone into a lengthy description of past U.S. intervention in Latin America." The secretary of state's
words prompted the president to ask “whether the Cubans had indicated that they were delighted with U.S. intervention in 1898.” Herter replied that “they had given no indication that the U.S. had been of any help.”

At the same time, Democratic presidential candidate John F. Kennedy complained that “our prestige has fallen so low that . . . we were unable to persuade our former Good Neighbors to pass a resolution even criticizing Cuba by name.” Back in Cuba, Foreign Minister Raúl Roa summed up his view of the San José meeting by telling a television audience that Secretary of State Herter was “nothing more than a sausage full of air without even a skin of ideas,” that Brazil had acted as Washington’s “pimp,” and, most memorably, that another U.S. ally, Argentine president Arturo Frondizi, was “the sticky concentration of all human excrement.” Roa was especially offended by the decision of an unidentified OAS official to turn off the Cuban delegation’s microphone, leaving Roa unable to reply to Herter’s accusation that Roa’s words had “a Soviet imprint.” The Cuban foreign minister consequently had walked over to Herter and told him face to face that “his methods reminded me of Hitler.” Herter told the NSC that “Roa was completely and utterly irrational.”

AS RELATIONS WITH CUBA continued to deteriorate, the State Department’s moderates slowly lost their influence and in some cases their jobs. First to go was Assistant Secretary of State Rubottom, who was gently pushed out in late July and named ambassador to Argentina. He yielded the assistant secretaryship to Thomas Mann, a career official who had frequently advocated a tougher stance while serving as assistant secretary of state for economic affairs. Undersecretary Dillon soon was telling Eisenhower that “the State Department has become much more aggressive.” Rubottom served in Buenos Aires for a year before being forced into retirement when the new Kennedy administration did not offer him another post. He was forty-nine years old.

Others were less fortunate, and the specific case that quieted any remaining moderate career officers was that of William Wieland, who had been named director of State’s Office of Caribbean and Mexican Affairs four months before Castro marched into Havana. An experienced professional, Wieland’s first experience in Latin America had come in 1933–34 as a newspaper correspondent in Havana, and he subsequently spent the war years in the U.S. embassy in Rio de Janeiro. In 1946 he entered the Foreign Service, working his way up the State Department ladder while serving in several Latin American capitals. In 1956 he returned to Washington, where one of his assignments violated the Foreign Service Regulations. The answer was to initiate the recall of the ambassdor for the Senate. Wieland appealed to the Internal Revenue Service for the Cuban Embassy in Washington, D.C., to the left.”

Nothing else he could do. Adolf Berle, his diary in hand, was at the bottom and in his turn they were torn apart by barrassingly personal life, with the contact with sexuality having

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Of his assignments was to determine whether the Batista government had violated the terms of the U.S.-Cuban mutual security agreement. Since the answer was obvious, Wieland had participated in drafting the proposal to initiate the required aid cutoff, an action for which he was never forgiven by Ambassador Earl Smith, who pointed a finger in Wieland’s direction when the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee to Investigate the Administration of the Internal Security Act began to seek out the individuals responsible for the Cuban debacle. Smith’s predecessor, Arthur Gardner, also told Senator Eastland’s subcommittee that Wieland was “leaning much too far to the left.”

Nothing more was needed to trigger Wieland’s loyalty investigation, and Adolf Berle, a Latin Americanist advising John F. Kennedy, soon wrote in his diary that “the F.B.I. came to see me. They are investigating Roy Rubottom and Bill Wieland for the State Department, the charge being that they turned over Cuba to Castro.” The testimony against Wieland was embarrassingly weak, and much of the investigation focused on his personal life, with the subcommittee’s staff director inquiring whether he had any contact with former undersecretary of state Sumner Welles, whose homosexuality had obliged him to resign in 1943:

**MR. SOURWINE:** Did you have any knowledge of anyone referring to you as Sumner Welles’ fair-haired boy in Havana?

**MR. WIELAND:** No, sir.

**MR. SOURWINE:** It has been testified that you were so known . . . As a Government administrator, are you aware that sexual deviation, and especially homosexuality among employees, presents a very special security problem?

**MR. WIELAND:** Yes, sir . . .

**MR. SOURWINE:** Have you ever had to deal with this problem in any way?

**MR. WIELAND:** No, sir.

By that time Wieland’s career was over, torpedoed by innuendo, with no one bothering to look at what exactly he had said or done. Had investigators taken the time to do so, they would have discovered that Wieland was never pro-Castro. The diplomat had made his first enemy when he took seriously his oath to uphold the law stipulating that military aid not be used to repress internal dissent, but this position did not mean that he supported the revolution; indeed, Wieland wrote his first warning message five weeks after the rebels marched into Havana: “We should be extremely cautious...
about giving any impression that we are so anxious to help Castro in the
face of his anti-American statements."

Wieland persistently argued against a cut in Cuba's sugar quota but did
so only because he believed it would benefit the revolutionary government
by inflaming Cuban nationalism. The Eastland subcommittee interpreted
this perfectly reasonable argument as evidence of disloyalty. In actuality,
the subcommittee discovered that Wieland, like Rubottom, was a middle-
of-the-road, plain-vanilla professional, perhaps not the brightest star in the
firmament but completely competent and clearly committed to doing his
best to protect U.S. interests. Wieland was not, however, a fortune-teller, so,
like many of his colleagues, he watched and waited, growing increasingly
uneasy but doing so more slowly than some others, including Mann, whose
impatience was more in tune with the times. This patience was Wieland's
downfall. When he finally had the opportunity to defend himself—"I was
never an admirer of Castro," he told Eastland's subcommittee in 1961—his
reputation had already been smeared, and he was forced into retirement.

Washington's Cuba policy probably would have evolved as it did with
or without Rubottom being fired and Wieland being pilloried, but there is
no way to know for certain. Looking at these two cases, State Department
moderates either learned to keep their mouths shut or, more commonly,
quietly moved on to other posts as part of normal rotations. That freed
Thomas Mann and his successors to appoint hard-liners.

As Washington was purging its ranks of moderates, Havana had its
eye on the September U.N. General Assembly, which Castro planned to
attend. The tone was set just before the Cuban delegation departed for New
York, when the State Department restricted Castro's travel to the island
of Manhattan. Cuba promptly evened the score by restricting the travel of
Ambassador Bonsal and then, the day before Castro's arrival in New York,
moved ahead in the tally by announcing the nationalization of the Cuban
branches of three major U.S. banks: "It is not possible for a considerable
portion of national banking to remain in the hands of imperialistic inter-
ests that inspired the reduction of our sugar quota by an act of cowardly
and criminal economic aggression."

Then the scoring accelerated. Fifteen minutes after his plane landed,
Castro had his first formal complaint for U.N. secretary-general Dag Ham-
marskjöld: an "uncivil and violent" plainclothes security officer had roughly
pushed Castro's arm back into his car when he waved to an airport crowd
of several hundred supporters. After one night in the midtown Hotel Shel-
burne, the Cubans accused the hotel management of “extortion” for demanding a ten-thousand-dollar security deposit, and Castro’s initial inclination was to pitch a tent in Central Park, telling reporters, “We are used to sleeping in the open air.” It is sometimes alleged that the Cubans were evicted for grilling chickens in their rooms, but that canard was the fabrication of the Republican Congressional Committee, which in 1963 produced an error-laced chronology of U.S.-Cuban relations with an entry for 18 September 1960: “Cuban delegation kills and plucks chickens in hotel suite, generally conduct selves in barbaric manner.”

Rather than pay the security deposit, the Cuban delegation transferred to Harlem’s Hotel Theresa, a move U.S. officials dismissed as grandstanding—something Castro could use “as proof of the fact that he and his revolution belonged to the humble and oppressed peoples and cared nothing for luxurious hotels in the so-called ‘aristocratic’ area of New York.” Arriving in Harlem at the head of a lily-white seventy-seven-person delegation, Castro instructed one of the principal Afro-Cuban rebel leaders, Major Juan Almeida, to fly up to New York and meet with community leaders. Almeida’s plane was promptly seized by U.S. claimants seeking compensation for their expropriated Cuban property, but Nikita Khrushchev seized the major asset—the visiting Soviet premier drove up to Harlem for talks and a front-page picture of himself hugging Castro. At the same time, the Cuban exile community was engaged in a “Journey of Mourning”—a pilgrimage from Miami by sixty-two anti-Castro Cuban women to pray in St. Patrick’s Cathedral for an end to the revolution. Unknown to the reporters covering the story, the pilgrimage had been organized and funded by the CIA—the agency called it a “Caravan of Sorrow,” part of the agency’s “special operation in New York” during the meeting of the General Assembly, which also included CIA-engineered demonstrations to fuel the curbside confrontation between pro- and antirevolutionary demonstrators. One such confrontation led to the death of a nine-year-old Venezuelan girl, killed by a stray bullet while dining with her vacationing parents.

Then came the main event, what remains to this day the longest speech in General Assembly history—4 hours—in which Fidel Castro basically expressed his wish that the United States drop off the face of the earth. This central theme was woven through remarks that focused on the colonial and the continuing postcolonial exploitation of Third World countries by international capitalists, drawing special attention to Washington’s continuing effort to subjugate the Cuban people. Among his milder comments was a reference to the Democrats’ presidential candidate as “an illiterate and
ignorant millionaire"; noding to bipartisanship, he quickly added that Republican Richard Nixon was not a bit better—"both lack political brains." The Cuban leader then returned to Havana in a Soviet aircraft to avoid the seizure of another plane.

The day after Castro's speech, the State Department warned U.S. citizens not to travel to Cuba and again instructed Ambassador Bonsal to cease seeking compensation for expropriated property—"Our best bet is to wait for a successor regime." State also scheduled a meeting with senior Pentagon officials to determine how to react to one of Cuba's central complaints, the continuing U.S. occupation of Guantánamo. At the meeting, Admiral Arleigh Burke voiced the hope that Cuba would do something rash so that "we could defend the base and then we ought to go and take Santiago again." Another participant suggested that "it was time to turn Cuba back to Spain."35

The State Department was preparing a detailed response to Castro's unfounded accusations, half-truths, malicious innuendoes and distortions of history, a response that made little effort to discriminate between fact and fiction; for example, to counter Cuba's charge that the United States was using the Swan Islands to "promote subversion in our country, violating all international treaties, including those related to radio frequency," the State Department simply lied: "There is a private broadcasting station on the islands, operated by the Gibraltar Steamship Company. The United States Government understands that this station carries programs in Spanish which are heard in Cuba, and that some of its broadcast time has been purchased by Cuban political refugees." The Gibraltar Steamship Company was a front, owned and operated by the CIA.36

As the Joint Chiefs were preparing to defend Guantánamo and as the State Department was preparing its public response, CIA director Allen Dulles began the first NSC meeting after Castro's New York speech by observing that Cuba had become "virtually a member of the Communist bloc," an assessment seemingly confirmed by Cuba's votes during the 1960 General Assembly: of the 102 ballots, the Cuban government sided with the Soviet Union 89 times, compared to only 20 times with the United States; on most of those 20 issues, the United States and the Soviet Union were in agreement.37 After Dulles had spoken, Undersecretary of State Douglas Dillon handed other NSC members a list of the steps that had been or were about to be taken in retaliation. The most important was closure of Cuba's largest industrial plant, the Nicaro nickel plant, which had been built by the U.S. General Services Administration during World War II and remained

U.S. government's

phosphate mine at Biscayne Bay.

In 1958 the Biscayne Bay mining operation was

the largest single commercial urban renewal project in the United States. The United States offered to buy its phosphate for $110 million. Castro agreed, and in return, the United States would "colonize" the "socially backward" and "barbaric" Nicaro district with "Americans and Cubans." It was a historic decision, and several American firms bid on the mine, which was called a "great American project.

Meanwhile, the United States continued to support the National Front in Cuba. By the fall of 1958, the National Front was proving to be a disaster: it was losing control of the rural areas, with the Fidelistas laid siege to the regime. The National Front also lost control of the United States, and actually the United States was taking control of the National Front. The Fidelistas were in the process of securing control of the National Front, and the United States was taking control of the National Front. The Fidelistas were in the process of securing control of the National Front, and the United States was taking control of the National Front.

While the Cuban government was still

irrefutably
U.S. government-owned but operated by a private contractor, Freeport Sulphur Company, which had also been developing its own nickel and cobalt mine at Moa Bay, forty miles to the east.

In 1953, seeking to ensure that Nicaro would not be mothballed after the end of the Korean War, as it had been after the end of World War II, the Batista government had granted Nicaro an exemption from taxes, but that arrangement ended in October 1959 when the new revolutionary government issued Law 617, imposing an export tax on all metals and minerals. Claiming that the tax made continued operation uneconomical, the United States first sought to sell Nicaro to the Cuban government, which offered $5.4 million for a facility the U.S. government had built at a cost of $110 million, with the offer contingent on a U.S. commitment to purchase Nicaro's output for five years. This deal, the State Department complained, "would amount to our paying the [Cuban government] to take Nicaro off our hands." Instead, the United States closed the facility.

Meanwhile, the Cubans were holding their own meetings in Havana. Soon after Castro's New York trip, the government issued its sweeping Urban Reform Law, which was not aimed at the United States but nonetheless affected a substantial number of U.S. property owners. The measure nationalized all commercial property and converted residential tenants into purchasers, who would make payments to the government, while the government would pay the former owners up to six hundred dollars per month. The next shoe to drop—Law 890 of 14 October—was clearly punitive: it nationalized a new group of U.S. properties ranging from Colgate's soap factory to Pan American's airport equipment to Swift's meatpacking plant; even Reader's Digest lost its printing facility. A few days later, Cuba also lodged a formal complaint with the U.N. General Assembly, charging the United States with "continuing intimidation, harassments, reprisals and acts of aggression and intervention." The complaint cited two concrete incidents—a late September airdrop of weapons to counterrevolutionaries in the Escambray Mountains and an early October landing of counterrevolutionaries in Oriente Province. These acts, Cuba complained, were examples of "the machinery of invasion set in motion by the State Department, the Pentagon and the imperialist rulers of the United States." U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations James Wadsworth assured the General Assembly that "there is no threat from the United States of aggression against Cuba.""
dency of the United States cynically advocating aggression, intervention and subversion.” In August, Richard Nixon had told the Veterans of Foreign Wars that “the United States has the power—and Mr. Castro knows this—to throw him out of office,” and in September the Republican candidate added that “we could give it to Mr. Castro in 24 hours.” John Kennedy had responded with a major speech “about the most glaring failure of American foreign policy today—about a disaster that threatens the security of the whole Western Hemisphere—about a Communist menace that has been permitted to arise under our very noses, only 90 miles from our shores. I am talking about the on[e] friendly island that our own shortsighted policies helped make communism’s first Caribbean base: the island of Cuba.”

Although Kennedy’s criticism of Cuba was harsh, Nixon was the Democratic hopeful’s principal target, and he was assisted the next night by the moderator of the second presidential debate, whose first sentence was, “Mr. Vice-president, Senator Kennedy said last night that the Administration must take responsibility for the loss of Cuba.” Placed immediately on the defensive, an irritated Nixon shot back, “Cuba is not lost, and I don’t think this kind of defeatist talk by Senator Kennedy helps the situation one bit.” During the debate, Kennedy needled Nixon for his 1955 visit to Cuba, where he “praised the competence and stability of the Batista dictatorship. That dictatorship had killed over 20,000 Cubans in 7 years.”

All this rhetoric only amplified the letters constituents were sending to President Eisenhower. “I demand that our proud nation take immediate action to avenge the barbaric thievery practiced by Fidel Castro,” wrote one irate Texan. “Our dignity has been invaded by a gangster, and you must not rest until he is punished.” Another Texan offered to administer the punishment: “I am confined to a wheelchair but I can still shoot a rifle. Like every other American I hate war but if that is what it takes to destroy that Communist animal at our front door then I say, ‘So be it.’ Authorize the Army to issue me a rifle and let me be the first to enter Havana. If you will I can guarantee that Communist Castro will never kill any more Americans.” Similar messages followed: “I voted and supported you in 1952 and 1956 but I am very sorry now that I did so,” and worse yet, “I am at present heading the Nixon-Lodge workers in my community, I feel however that I cannot continue to do so unless you as the Republican Party leader show enough strength and conviction to dispose of this malignant enemy.”

In this electoral context, Richard Nixon asked the president to ban U.S. exports to Cuba. “We must also think how this action will affect the American people,” Eisenhower replied, suggesting that an embargo might
backfire—"It tends to look as though we are acting not against Castro, but against the Cuban people." Nonetheless, he passed along Nixon's request to senior presidential advisers, saying that Nixon wanted "to take some action with respect to Cuba at an early date." Pouring on the criticism, Kennedy spent the same day telling one immigration-sensitive Florida audience that "Cuba has been lost to the Communists," a second group that "in Cuba the Communists have gained a satellite," and a third gathering that "I wasn't the Vice President who presided over the Communization of Cuba." Also campaigning in hotly contested Florida, Nixon responded by calling the Castro government "an intolerable cancer" and arguing that "there comes a time when patience which we have been displaying is no longer a virtue and that time is at hand." He promised the American Legion that the administration would "very promptly take the strongest possible economic measures." The next day President Eisenhower issued an executive order prohibiting all exports to Cuba except food and medicine. The legionnaires passed a resolution urging an invasion if the ban on exports did not work.

Neither the Democrats nor the Cubans let Eisenhower's ball land in their court before firing it back. Cuba's response was to nationalize what was left of U.S. property—166 separate businesses that had somehow escaped earlier expropriation. The Kennedy campaign criticized Eisenhower's move as "too little, too late" and demanded more pressure: "We must attempt to strengthen the non-Batista democratic anti-Castro forces in exile, and in Cuba itself, who offer eventual hope of overthrowing Castro. Thus far these fighters for freedom have had virtually no support from our Government." The fourth and final presidential debate occurred the night after this statement, and now it was Nixon's turn to go on the attack, calling Kennedy's proposals "the most dangerously irresponsible recommendations that he's made during the course of this campaign." From that point forward, Nixon repeatedly emphasized that he was not in favor of the "little pipsqueak" dictator, Castro, down in Cuba. The question is not who is against Castro. The question is how you handle him." Calling that the campaign's central question, Nixon challenged Kennedy to a fifth debate to focus exclusively on Cuba.

Secretary Herter was probably referring to this last-minute campaign rhetoric, to the trade embargo, and to Cuba's final round of expropriations when he concluded that the situation was "hopeless from the point of view of diplomatic negotiations." At the moment, Che Guevara was leading a
three-month tour of communist countries, signing one trade agreement after another, and President Eisenhower was receiving ever-increasing pressure from the U.S. private sector, including a letter from the president of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce demanding “quick and positive action.” At this point, the president wondered aloud “whether the situation did not have the appearance of beginning to get out of hand,” and as his penultimate presidential expression of displeasure he recalled Ambassador Bonsal once again. This time the envoy and his wife sailed out of Havana’s harbor with their car and the family dog. Arriving in the United States, Bonsal told reporters that he had returned “for what would apparently be a long stay,” and for emphasis Secretary Herter took the highly unusual step of naming Bonsal to another post. Bonsal would serve as the interim U.S. ambassador to the OAS concurrently with his now-pointless position as ambassador to Cuba in absentia.

Deprived of the unflappable Bonsal, the embassy gave up completely, reporting that “the United States faces in Soviet-supported Castro’s Cuba an intolerable threat to its prestige and its security which has to be eliminated.” Clearly unaware that the CIA was already hard at work on an exile invasion, the embassy suggested that “the United States might have to consider intensive economic warfare including para-military measures against Cuba,” and the next day embassy staffers recommended not simply severing diplomatic relations but also “an active program of sabotage.” A formal break might even be helpful, opening “the way for more vigorous economic and propaganda measures inconsistent with the maintenance of diplomatic relations.” President Eisenhower then canceled Cuba’s sugar quota for the first quarter of 1961 and recalled the embassy’s chargé to Washington. When he arrived, he agreed with Herter: the situation was “entirely hopeless.” A few days later, the president instructed the State Department to explore with other Latin American countries a simultaneous termination of diplomatic relations and to try to arrange the break before Kennedy’s inauguration on 20 January. Peru quickly agreed to go along, and Uruguay announced that it was considering a break, while the U.S. embassy in Caracas predicted that Venezuela would also follow suit.

U.S. diplomats “have been pressuring the Latin American governments to break relations with us,” Fidel Castro complained to a mass audience celebrating the second anniversary of Batista’s ouster. Since most U.S. embassy officials were spies and saboteurs, he continued, the embassy staff should be reduced to eleven, the number of Cuban diplomats in the United States.
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The State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research had noted earlier "that new policies are formulated during these lengthy public appearances, [Castro's] fertile mind grasping a new idea and translating it into an official pronouncement without prior consultation with his advisors." Such appears to have been the case in this instance, where the Cuban leader's initial remark about reducing the embassy staff prompted what the U.S. Information Agency transcription described as "wild applause." The strong crowd reaction clearly surprised Castro, whose next words suggested that his proposal was impromptu: "Permit me to finish the thought. The fact that we have established an order while speaking has served in this case to discover a desire of the people. We are not going to say all officials, but not a single official more than the number we have in the United States, which is eleven; and these gentlemen have more than 300 officials here, of which 80 percent are spies. If they all want to go, well then, let them go." The audience replied with a chant, "¡Que se vayan!" which in this context best translates as "Good riddance!" 100

Castro had barely left the podium when Cuban officials awoke the senior U.S. official remaining in Havana at 1:20 A.M. to hand him a note demanding that the embassy staff be reduced to eleven within forty-eight hours. President Eisenhower decided instead to close the embassy. Having put up with "a long series of harassments, baseless accusations, and vilification," he said, "there is a limit to what the United States in self-respect can endure. That limit has now been reached." 101