

Anger, Anti-Americanism, and the Break in U.S.-Cuban Relations

Q: Mr. President, do you want to comment on the behavior of Fidel Castro? What do you suppose, sir, is eating him?

The President: I have no idea of discussing possible motivation of a man, what he is really doing, and certainly I am not qualified to go into such abstruse and difficult subjects as that. I do feel this: here is a country that you would believe, on the basis of our history, would be one of our real friends. The whole history—first of our intervention in 1898, our making and helping set up Cuban independence, the second time we had to go in and did the same thing to make sure that they were on a sound basis, the trade concessions we have made and the very close relationships that have existed most of the time with them—would seem to make it a puzzling matter to figure out just exactly why the Cubans and the Cuban Government would be so unhappy when, after all, their principal market is right here, their best market. You would think they would want good relationships. I don't know exactly what the difficulty is.

—President Dwight D. Eisenhower, Press Conference, October 28, 1959

In the breakdown of relations between the United States and Cuba in the months following Fidel Castro's revolutionary triumph, anger was a critically important factor in the decisions taken in both Washington and Havana. Castro's anger manifested itself in speeches caustically critical of the United States (though some were calculated attempts to mobilize popular support by appealing to Cuban nationalism). U.S. policymakers found Castro's "anti-Americanism" deeply insulting and infuriating.

A growing literature in international relations recognizes that emotions are a long-neglected yet important factor in foreign policy decision-making.¹

1. Two widely recognized foundational works are Neta Crawford, "The Passion of World Politics," *International Security* 24, no. 4 (Spring 2000): 116–56; and Jonathan Mercer, "Approaching Emotion in International Politics," Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Studies Association, San Diego, California, April 25, 1996. For reviews of the literature, see Roland Bleiker and Emma Hutchison, "Fear No More: Emotions and World Politics," *Review of International Studies* 34 (2008): 115–35; and Emma Hutchison and Roland Bleiker, "Theorizing Emotions in World Politics," *International Theory* 6 (2014): 491–514.

As Barbara Keys notes, emotion and cognition are inextricably linked, so “even the most Herculean efforts to insulate policy choices from sentiment are doomed to failure.”² Yet the fact that all decisions have an emotional dimension does not acquit emotions from responsibility for sometimes contributing to bad ones. Emotions may cloud the connection between means and ends, distort the importance of some causal connections over others, and skew cost-benefit analysis in ways that lead decision-makers to choices that are unlikely to succeed and entail disproportionate costs.

Frank Costigliola makes this point implicitly when he argues that U.S. diplomats W. Averell Harriman and John R. Deane had justifiable grievances against the Soviet Union based on their experiences during World War II, yet those grievances, magnified by emotion, led them to advocate a “get tough” policy that contributed decisively to the onset of the Cold War—an outcome that was not inevitable. As Costigliola notes, “Despite the egregiousness of Soviet actions, these actions—and the jabs and counter jabs that followed—did not justify the Cold War. The costs of that conflict proved far higher.”³

This article makes an argument analogous to Costigliola’s: that the intense emotional response of U.S. policymakers to Fidel Castro’s anti-American rhetoric led them to conclude that coexistence with Castro’s revolutionary government was impossible, even before Castro took policy decisions that seriously threatened U.S. interests. The result was a half century of hostility between Cuba and the United States, of which neither the duration nor intensity was inevitable.

As Max Paul Friedman has shown, U.S. elites have been hyper-sensitive to criticism from abroad, branding even well-intentioned foreign policy advice from allies as anti-American. The idea of anti-Americanism, Friedman argues, is intimately bound up with the idea of American Exceptionalism and the right, if not the duty, of the United States to carry its civilizing mission abroad. To criticize any aspect of that mission is to question the virtue and good intentions of the United States itself. Policymakers instinctively dismiss such criticism out of hand, ignoring its substance and branding critics as irrational adversaries—as “anti-American.”⁴

On the emotion of anger specifically, see Andrew Linklater, “Anger and World Politics,” *International Theory* 6 (2014): 574–78; and Todd H. Hall, “We Will Not Swallow This Bitter Fruit: Theorizing a Diplomacy of Anger,” *Security Studies* 20, no. 4 (2011): 521–55.

2. Barbara Keys, “Henry Kissinger: The Emotional Statesman,” *Diplomatic History* 35, no. 4 (September 2011): 587–609.

3. Frank Costigliola, “After Roosevelt’s Death: Dangerous Emotions, Divisive Discourses, and the Abandoned Alliance,” *Diplomatic History* 34, no. 1 (January 2010): 1–23. See also his elaboration on this argument in Costigliola, *Roosevelt’s Lost Alliances: How Personal Politics Helped Start the Cold War* (Princeton, NJ, 2012).

4. Max Paul Friedman, *Rethinking Anti-Americanism: The History of an Exceptional Concept in American Foreign Relations* (New York, 2012), 2. Friedman notes that during the U.S. occupation of Cuba after the Spanish-American War, Cuban nationalists were branded as anti-American in the United States (56–58). Lars Schoultz is especially good on the history of Washington’s civilizing mission as played out in Latin America, which he argues was a cloak for more traditional economic and national security interests: Lars Schoultz, *Beneath the United States: A History of U.S. Policy toward Latin America* (Cambridge, MA, 1998). On the centrality of Washington’s civilizing mission

In 1959 and early 1960, Fidel Castro did not spare U.S. feelings in his criticism of U.S. policy in Cuba, not merely toward his government but since the Spanish-American War.

To be sure, a number of issues contributed to the break in U.S.-Cuban relations: the nationalization of U.S. property; Castro's tolerance for communists in his government; his "neutralist" (and later pro-Soviet) foreign policy. But none of these had yet reached critical mass by June 1959, when senior officials in the Eisenhower administration decided that the continued existence of Cuba's revolutionary government was incompatible with U.S. interests. The issue dominating the bilateral discourse during the six months following the triumph of the revolution in January was Washington's irritation at the anti-Americanism expressed by Castro and other revolutionary leaders. It remained a central concern throughout the ensuing year as U.S. policy evolved from trying to coexist with Castro to plotting his overthrow. U.S. diplomats raised the issue of anti-Americanism in almost every meeting with their Cuban counterparts. Not only did they take Castro's harsh criticism of the historical role of the United States in Cuba as an indication of his hostility and defiance, they reacted viscerally to Castro's "insults" and "insolence."⁵ By castigating the United States for a history that U.S. officials (including President Eisenhower as quoted above) saw as benign, Castro made them angry.

DEBATING THE CAUSE OF THE BREAK

Historians have long debated the causes of the diplomatic conflict between the United States and Cuba that unfolded in the first two years of Fidel Castro's revolutionary government. In January 1959, Washington was wary of Castro's radicalism but nevertheless hoped to establish a *modus vivendi* with him. By the fall of 1960, the United States had cut off Cuba's sugar quota, Castro had nationalized most U.S. property on the island, and planning for the Bay of Pigs was well underway. Cuba and the Soviet Union had developed a strategic partnership symbolized by Castro's famous embrace of Nikita Khrushchev at the United Nations in September.

But in which direction did the causal arrow point? Did the United States push Castro into the arms of the Soviet Union or did he jump? In one camp are those who interpret U.S. policy as largely benign until Castro himself demonstrated his hostility by aligning Cuba with the Soviet Union. In the other camp are those who

in its relations with Cuba in particular, see Schoultz, "Blessings of Liberty: The United States and the Promotion of Democracy in Cuba," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 34 (2002): 397-425; and Schoultz, "Benevolent Domination: The Ideology of U.S. Policy toward Cuba," *Cuban Studies* 41 (2010): 1-19.

5. Telegram from the Embassy in Cuba to the Department of State, January 19, 1960, *Foreign Relations of the United States* (hereafter *FRUS*), 1958-1960, vol. VI, Cuba, ed. Ronald D. Landa (Washington, DC, 1991), doc. 424, pp. 747-48; and Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Cuba, February 2, 1960, *FRUS*, vol. VI, Cuba, doc. 448, pp. 780-81.

interpret hostile U.S. actions as leaving Castro little alternative but to seek safety under the Soviet umbrella.⁶

One reason this debate has endured is that U.S. policy toward Castro's Cuba, like most foreign policies, developed gradually and emerged from an internal debate in the Eisenhower administration about whether or not it was possible for the United States to coexist with Castro—a debate whose origins actually preceded the triumph of the revolution.⁷ In addition, as the policy of hostility coalesced, it was cloaked in secrecy to avoid damaging relations with Latin America—relations President Dwight D. Eisenhower was trying to repair in the wake of Vice-President Richard M. Nixon's disastrous and nearly fatal visit to the region in 1958.⁸

Cuba's relationship with the Soviet Union also developed slowly and, during its earliest stages, in secret. As early as April 1959, Raúl Castro sought the help of Spanish Civil War veterans living in the Soviet Union to train the new Cuban army. But the first Soviet citizen, KGB officer Aleksandr Alekseyev working undercover as a TASS news agency correspondent, did not arrive in Cuba until October.⁹ His mission was to keep a low profile, get to know Cuba's new leaders, and gather intelligence since the Kremlin still knew so little about Cuba's revolutionary government. "We knew almost nothing," Alekseyev conceded. "I was sent especially to find out what had happened in Cuba, what kind of revolution was it, who had come to power, what do they want."¹⁰

Castro showed no special affinity for the Soviet Union during his first year in power despite these behind-the-scenes contacts, and the Soviet reaction to the Cuban revolution was diffident as well.¹¹ The first public indication of a budding Cuban-Soviet friendship did not come until February 1960, when Soviet Vice-President Anastas I. Mikoyan arrived in Cuba with a Soviet trade mission and signed a \$100 million trade deal.

In the debate over what caused the break in U.S.-Cuban relations, most scholars have neglected the influence of anger on U.S. decision-making. This neglect stems

6. David Bernell provides a thorough review of this debate. Bernell, "The Curious Case of Cuba in American Foreign Policy," *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 36, no. 2 (Summer 1994): 65-103.

7. The best account of U.S. attitudes toward Castro before 1959 is Thomas Paterson, *Contesting Castro: The United States and the Triumph of the Cuban Revolution* (New York, 1994).

8. On May 13, 1958, an angry mob in Venezuela attacked Nixon's limousine, pelting it with stones and rocking it from side to side. Lester Tanzerstaff, "Nixon Unhurt as Red-Led Mob Attacks Car in Caracas," *Wall Street Journal*, May 14, 1958.

9. Aleksandr Fursenko and Timothy Naftali, *One Hell of a Gamble: Khrushchev, Castro, and Kennedy, 1958-1964: The Secret History of the Cuban Missile Crisis* (New York, 1998), 25-29.

10. Interview with Alexander Alekseyev, in Mikoyan's "Mission Impossible" in Cuba: *New Soviet Evidence on the Cuban Missile Crisis*, National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 400, eds. Svetlana Savranskaya, Anna Melyakova, and Amanda Conrad, October 27, 2012, accessed January 6, 2016, <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB400/docs/Interview%20with%20Alekseev.pdf>.

11. Jacques Lévesque, *The USSR and The Cuban Revolution: Soviet Ideological and Strategic Perspectives, 1959-77* (New York, 1978).

in part from the short shrift emotions have generally received in the study of international relations, but also from the conventional wisdom about the timing of the key U.S. decision to abandon the policy of coexistence adopted in January 1959, replacing it with a policy of hostility designed to overthrow the Castro government.

Most scholars date the key decision to either the fall of 1959, when President Eisenhower signed the formal statement of the new policy, or early 1960, when the last effort at negotiating a *modus vivendi* with Cuba failed and Eisenhower approved preparations for the Bay of Pigs invasion.¹² This timing leads them to focus on the aspects of Cuban behavior that U.S. policymakers believed threatened U.S. interests—the growing influence of communists in Castro’s government, Cuba’s failure to compensate U.S. investors for nationalized property, and the February 1960 trade deal with the Soviet Union. Thomas Paterson dates the decisive policy shift to November 1959, citing the reasons above, plus the concern that Castro’s bad behavior might spread elsewhere in Latin America. He mentions Castro’s “vituperative anti-American rhetoric” only in passing as an aggravating factor.¹³

Mark Falcoff dates the change in policy to early 1960, when Eisenhower authorized planning for the Bay of Pigs, arguing it was only then that the United States had “given up hope” of coexisting with Castro and began “exploring other avenues.” He, too, mentions Castro’s anti-American rhetoric in passing, but lays the blame for the breakup squarely on Castro’s attraction to communism—nationalizing property, allowing communists in his government, and aligning Cuba with the Soviet Union.¹⁴

Richard Welch, like Falcoff, dates the change in U.S. policy to early 1960, albeit for different reasons. He regards October 1959 as a key moment because the arrest of Huber Matos signaled the growing influence of communists in Castro’s government, but he regards Eisenhower’s January 1960 offer of negotiations as an indication that Washington had not given up entirely on the policy of coexistence.¹⁵

12. The formal policy statement Eisenhower approved in November is Paper Prepared by the Department of State, “Current Basic United States Policy,” October 23, 1959, *FRUS*, 1958–1960, vol. VI, Cuba, doc. 376, attachment, pp. 638–39. The covert action program approved in March is in Paper Prepared by the 5412 Committee, “A Program of Covert Action Against the Castro Regime,” March 16, 1959, *FRUS*, 1958–1960, vol. VI, Cuba, doc. 481, pp. 850–51; and Memorandum of a Conference with the President, March 17, 1960, doc. 486, pp. 861–63. For a discussion of the failed attempt at negotiations in early 1960, see William M. LeoGrande and Peter Kornbluh, *Back Channel to Cuba: The Hidden History of Negotiations between Washington and Havana* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2014), 29–34.

13. Paterson, *Contesting Castro*, 255–58. Rabe also dates the change to November 1959, though he does not go into detail on the precipitating factors. Stephan G. Rabe, *Eisenhower and Latin America: The Foreign Policy of Anti-Communism* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1988), 125–27.

14. Mark Falcoff, ed., *The Cuban Revolution and the United States* (Washington, DC, 2001), xviii, 205–6.

15. Richard E. Welch, Jr., *Response to Revolution: The United States and the Cuban Revolution, 1959–1961* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1985), 36–37.

Schoultz notes the division of opinion between administration officials who thought Castro a communist from the beginning and those who supported an attempt at coexistence. He focuses on U.S. concerns about the rising influence of communists in the government, brought to a head by the October arrest of Matos, which Schoultz calls “the straw that broke the camel’s back” for U.S. policymakers. He is, however, one of the few scholars who gives weight to Castro’s incessant anti-Americanism as an important factor in U.S. decision-making.¹⁶

The issue of timing is important because by the fall of 1959, Cuban actions had, in fact, begun to harm U.S. interests as Washington defined them, and this was even more true after Cuba hosted a Soviet trade delegation in February 1960. But senior U.S. policymakers reached a consensus on the need to remove Fidel Castro from power not in late 1959 or early 1960, but in June 1959—well before Cuban actions had begun to pose a serious threat to U.S. interests. It would take nearly five months for this conclusion to be formalized in a policy framework approved by the president, and another six after that before the last hope of a negotiated *modus vivendi* with Cuba was extinguished.¹⁷ But the die was cast much earlier than scholars have generally believed.

The reason the key meetings in June and July 1959 that changed U.S. policy are so often overlooked is that they remain shrouded in secrecy even now. The editor of *Foreign Relations of the United States* could find no extant records of them.¹⁸ We know of the meetings only through occasional and oblique references by Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs R. Richard Rubottom in later meetings and in his oral history interviews. Until now, we did not even know their exact dates.

The initiative for shifting to a tougher policy came from Rubottom, who despite his own skepticism about the Castro regime, had originally backed a policy of “patience and forbearance” advocated most insistently by U.S. Ambassador Philip Bonsal.¹⁹ Rubottom gave up on constructive engagement after Castro’s May 1959 agrarian reform. “It didn’t make any difference whether Castro was a Communist or not,” Rubottom explained. “He was so obsessed in his hatred for the United

16. Schoultz, *Beneath the United States*, 104.

17. Tad Szulc mistakenly dates the critical U.S. decision to March 10, 1959, quoting the notes of an NSC meeting that actually took place a year later on March 10, 1960. Szulc, *Fidel: A Critical Portrait* (New York, 1986), 480. The NSC document is Memorandum of Discussion at the 436th Meeting of the National Security Council, March 10, 1960, *FRUS*, 1958–1960, vol. VI, Cuba, doc. 474, pp. 832–37.

18. An editor’s footnote to one of Rubottom’s references to these meetings reads, “Not further identified.” *FRUS*, 1958–1960, vol. VI, Cuba, doc. 419, p. 732, fn. 3.

19. Rubottom recounts his skepticism in Interview with Roy Richard Rubottom Jr., John Foster Dulles Oral History Collection, Seeley G. Mudd Manuscript Library, Princeton University, 81. Bonsal’s unflagging effort to find a *modus vivendi* with Cuba is described in LeoGrande and Kornbluh, *Back Channel to Cuba*, chp. 1.

States and his policies toward the United States were so negative and adverse to our interests that we had to take some steps to try to deal with him.”²⁰

On June 19, Rubottom met with Deputy Under-Secretary of State for Political Affairs Robert D. Murphy to discuss what should be done about Cuba. This was followed by a second meeting on July 15, with Murphy and CIA Director Allen Dulles.²¹ “I told them that I felt the time had come when the United States should give some consideration to supporting the anti-Castro people, that this man was a clear-cut threat to the United States,” Rubottom recalled.²² Together, they convinced Secretary of State Christian A. Herter, and the planning for a new policy commenced.²³ Rubottom later described the shift: “The period from January to March [1959] might be characterized as the honeymoon period of the Castro Government. In April a downward trend in U.S.-Cuban relations had been evident. . . . In June we had reached the decision that it was not possible to achieve our objectives with Castro in power. . . . In July and August, we had been busy drawing up a program to replace Castro.” The Central Intelligence Agency was tasked to develop a plan to support Castro’s domestic opponents and weaken his government, culminating in regime change before the end of Eisenhower’s presidency.²⁴

Both Fidel and Raúl Castro have argued that the agrarian reform marked the tipping point in U.S.-Cuban relations. “The problem was that the first Agrarian Reform Act, whether more radical or less, was absolutely unacceptable to a country whose corporations owned the best sugar cane land in Cuba,” Fidel told biographer Ignacio Ramonet.²⁵ “The 1959 land reform was the Rubicon of our revolution. A death sentence for our U.S. relations,” Raúl Castro said years later. “At that moment, there was no discussion about socialism, or Cuba dealing with Russia. But the die was cast.”²⁶

20. Interview with Ambassador Roy R. Rubottom, Jr., February 13, 1990, Frontline Diplomacy: The Foreign Affairs Oral History Collection of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

21. The dates of the two meetings with Murphy and Allen Dulles, which have not been previously identified, are in Murphy’s appointment books, Papers of Robert D. Murphy, box 5, folder 5, Archives of the Hoover Institution, Stanford University.

22. Interview with Roy Richard Rubottom Jr., John Foster Dulles Oral History Collection, 75–76. In the oral history, Rubottom mistakenly places this meeting in the fall, but his own contemporary notes place it in June. See Memorandum of a Conversation Between the Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs (Rubottom) and the President’s Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Gray), December 31, 1959, *FRUS*, 1958–1960, vol. VI, Cuba, doc. 416, pp. 723–24.

23. “Secretary Herter last July agreed that we could no longer work with the Cuban Government,” quoted in Memorandum of Discussion at the Department of State-Joint Chiefs of Staff Meeting, Pentagon, January 8, 1960, *FRUS*, 1958–1960, vol. VI, Cuba, doc. 419, pp. 731–34.

24. Memorandum of Discussion at the 432nd Meeting of the National Security Council, January 14, 1960, *FRUS*, 1958–1960, vol. VI, Cuba, doc. 423, pp. 740–46.

25. Fidel Castro and Ignacio Ramonet, *Fidel Castro: My Life, A Spoken Autobiography* (New York, 2009), 245.

26. Sean Penn, “Conversations With Chávez and Castro,” *The Nation*, December 15, 2008.

However, Cuba's first agrarian reform was not all that radical, and the U.S. response at the time was not all that negative. Ambassador Bonsal was instructed to tell Castro that the United States recognized Cuba's sovereign right to expropriate land, was "not opposed to sound land reform," and would even be willing to provide aid to implement a well-designed program. In Washington, the State Department regarded the interests of U.S. investors in Cuba as subordinate to U.S. foreign policy interests, although the proposed law had "greatly concerned and disturbed" investors, and Washington expected "prompt, adequate, and effective compensation."²⁷ Bonsal expected to be able to resolve the compensation problem through negotiations, which he pursued diligently over the next six months.

If the agrarian reform by itself is not an adequate explanation for the U.S. decision to seek Castro's ouster, and the Soviets, in the form of Mikoyan, did not appear publicly in Cuba for another eight months, what prompted the Eisenhower administration to discard the policy of patience and forbearance? Why did it run out of patience so soon, despite the fact that U.S. interests did not yet seem to be seriously threatened? A large part of the answer is anger and frustration over Fidel Castro's unrelenting anti-Americanism—his public attacks on the U.S. role in Cuba from 1898 onward and the defiance it represented.

Scholars have remarked on Castro's anti-American diatribes, but generally have not considered them as a central cause of the breakdown in relations.²⁸ Only a few have focused on the emotional dimension of U.S.-Cuban relations. Fagen in 1962 wrote about the "emotional style" of Cuban foreign policy, arguing that the resulting behavior—including Castro's anti-American rhetoric—served Cuba's domestic and international interests. He did not engage the issue of how Washington reacted to Castro's anti-Americanism, focusing instead on how it boosted the regime's domestic legitimacy by appealing to Cuban nationalism.²⁹

Friedman includes a brief account of how U.S. officials reacted to Castro's "anti-Americanism" by labeling him an irrational madman. Friedman's main purpose is to show that Castro's complaints against the United States were not irrational at all, but well-grounded in the history of U.S.-Cuban relations. Logically, one could deduce from this that U.S. policymakers, blinded to the underlying logic of Castro's position by their anger at his anti-Americanism, might opt for a policy of hostility, but Friedman does not develop this line of argument.³⁰

Louis Pérez argues that Castro's insistent articulation of a *Cuban* view of the history of U.S.-Cuban relations in which Washington was not a beneficent good

27. Telegram from the Department of State to the Embassy in Cuba, June 1, 1959, *FRUS*, 1958–1960, vol. VI, Cuba, doc. 311, pp. 515–16; Schoultz, *Beneath the United States*, 97–98.

28. Paterson, *Contesting Castro*; Lars Schoultz, *That Infernal Little Cuban Republic: The United States and the Cuban Revolution* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2011); Falcoff, ed., *The Cuban Revolution and the United States*; and Rabe, *Eisenhower and Latin America*, 117–33.

29. Richard R. Fagen, "Calculation and Emotion in Foreign Policy: The Cuban Case," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 6, no. 3 (1962): 214–21.

30. Friedman, *Rethinking Anti-Americanism*, 147–50.

neighbor but rather a rapacious imperialist occupier, was traumatic for U.S. elites and intolerable—a conclusion that fits neatly with Friedman’s theory on the emotional dimension of anti-Americanism. But Pérez then draws the logical conclusion about the impact of Castro’s rhetoric on U.S. policy formation, arguing that the persistence of the policy of hostility for the next half century, despite its record of failure, can only be understood as an emotional response to Castro’s effrontery.³¹ My analysis differs from Pérez in that it seeks to trace the policy process in 1959 to establish that the emotional U.S. response to Castro’s anti-Americanism was a decisive factor in the decision to abandon attempts at coexistence, even before most of the actions Cuba took that endangered traditional U.S. interests.

CASTRO’S ANGRY “RANTINGS”³²

During the struggle against Fulgencio Batista, Fidel Castro was careful not to antagonize Washington. His famous closing statement at his 1953 trial, *History Will Absolve Me*, makes only passing reference to the United States. His manifestos issued from the Sierra Maestra during the guerrilla war occasionally warn Washington against intervention on behalf of Batista, but are free of the anti-American rhetoric that would characterize so many of his speeches after January 1, 1959.³³ Nevertheless, Castro’s nationalism was apparent, and his anger toward Washington’s longstanding support for Batista was evidenced by a private letter he wrote to his confidante and aide-de-camp Celia Sánchez after watching planes supplied to Batista’s air force by the United States bomb the guerrillas and their peasant supporters. “When this war is over a much wider and bigger war will commence for me,” Castro wrote, “The war I am going to wage against them [the United States]. I am aware that this is my true destiny.”³⁴

Within just weeks after the triumph of the revolution, Washington’s relations with the new Cuban government were thrown into crisis by vocal criticism in the U.S. press and Congress over summary trials and executions of several hundred police and military officials from the old regime.³⁵ As the arrests and executions mounted during January, they became a dominant theme in U.S. coverage of the revolution, prompting congressional criticism. Senator Wayne Morse (D-Ore),

31. Louis A. Pérez, Jr., “Fear and Loathing of Fidel Castro: Sources of US Policy Toward Cuba,” *Journal of Latin American Studies* 34 (2002): 227–54; Pérez, *Cuba in the American Imagination: Metaphor and the Imperial Ethos* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2008).

32. Rubottom complains of Castro’s “rantings” in a letter to Bonsal, June 13, 1960, Geographical File, Cuba, 1960, May-June, folder 1, box 2, Philip W. Bonsal Papers, 1914–1992, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress (hereafter Bonsal Papers).

33. Fidel Castro, *History Will Absolve Me* (Havana, 1975); Rolando E. Bonachea and Nelson P. Valdés, eds., *Revolutionary Struggle, 1947–1958: Volume 1 of the Selected Works of Fidel Castro* (Cambridge, MA, 1972).

34. Fidel Castro, Letter to Celia Sánchez, June 1958, in Bonachea and Valdés, eds., *Revolutionary Struggle, 1947–1958*, 379.

35. William L. Ryan, “Rebels Executed Batista Aides,” *Washington Post*, January 8, 1959; Hugh Thomas, *Cuba: The Pursuit of Freedom* (New York, 1971), 1076–77.

who had been a vocal critic of Batista, now called for an end to the “bloodbath” in Cuba.³⁶

Fidel Castro was incensed at U.S. criticism of the trials, which he regarded as a cynical “campaign of lies” to defame the revolution and a harbinger of U.S. hostility. He reacted defiantly: “We have given orders to shoot every last one of those murderers, and if we have to oppose world opinion to carry out justice, we are ready to do so.”³⁷ The following day, irked by a reporter’s shouted question, he declared, “If the Americans don’t like what is happening in Cuba they can land the Marines and then there will be 200,000 gringos dead.”³⁸

On January 21, Castro called upon Cubans to assemble at the Presidential Palace to demonstrate their support for the trials. Hundreds of thousands came to hear Castro blast the United States for its aid to Batista, its refusal to extradite his cronies and return the millions they stole from the Cuban Treasury, its bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki “in the name of peace,” and the “barrage of defamation” it had unleashed against Cuba intended to “weaken the revolution” by turning international public opinion against it.³⁹ Castro’s anger was to some extent calculated. That evening, he encountered U.S. Chargé d’Affaires Daniel M. Braddock, and said he hoped Washington “had received no hurt [from his speech] as he had intended none,” but that it was “necessary in a public rally of that sort to express certain points of view.”⁴⁰

Intended or not, U.S. officials took offense. As early as February, they began complaining about anti-American rhetoric emanating from Havana. In a meeting with several Cuban cabinet ministers, Braddock explained that Washington wanted good relations with the new government, but this was being hampered by Cuban “misunderstanding” that the United States government and U.S. businesses had supported Batista. Another obstacle was the “mutual irritation and recriminations over the trials and executions of war criminals.” The Cubans replied that Castro wanted good relations, too, but that, “it was good politics to have a whipping boy.”⁴¹ Braddock reported back to Washington that he thought Castro’s anti-Americanism was for domestic consumption. “Castro is not as

36. R. Hart Phillips, “Military Court in Cuba Dooms Fourteen for ‘War Crimes,’” *New York Times*, January 13, 1959.

37. R. Hart Phillips, “Castro Deplores His Critics Here,” *New York Times*, January 22, 1959; R. Hart Phillips, “One Hundred Face Death in Trials About to Begin in Havana,” *New York Times*, January 15, 1959.

38. R. Hart Phillips, “Castro Says Cuba Wants Good Ties with Washington,” *New York Times*, January 16, 1959.

39. Discurso pronunciado por Fidel Castro, en el Palacio Presidencial, el 21 de enero de 1959, Discursos e intervenciones del Comandante en Jefe Fidel Castro Ruz, Presidente del Consejo de Estado de la República de Cuba, accessed January 6, 2016, <http://www.cuba.cu/gobierno/discursos/>.

40. Embtel to Sec State from US Emb Havana (Braddock) No. 869, January 22, 1959, doc. 611.37/1-22-59, folder 611.37/1-159, box 2473, 1955–1959 Central Decimal File, Record Group 59 (hereafter RG 59), National Archives (hereafter USNA).

41. Despatch to Dept of State from US Emb Havana (Braddock), February 13, 1959, no. 897, “Conversation with Cuban Officials,” File: U.S.-Cuba 1959, box 3, Cuba, Havana

anti-American as he sounds in his public pronouncements. . . . He often resorts to this kind of nationalistic demagoguery because of its popular appeal.”⁴²

On February 19, Castro gave a four-hour television interview in which he once again catalogued Cuba’s historical grievances against the United States. Braddock described it evocatively: “Castro in his standard uniform of rumped fatigues, radiating health and boundless energy, hunched over the table as he talks, waving arms and hands, with the eternal cigar. . . . Words pour from him in a ceaseless torrent. . . . He is a dynamic, forceful speaker, with that rare quality of fixing and swaying his audience regardless of the contents of his words. . . . He spoke with tremendous vitality and rapidity.” But as he did so often, Fidel was deploying his oratorical ability to flay the United States. “There can be little doubt that his basic attitude toward the United States is one of distrust and unfriendliness. Also, the downfall of Batista has left him and his movement without a convenient whipping-boy, and consciously or not he tends to fill that void with the United States and certain Latin American governments. . . . Officers of our government dealing with Cuban affairs should get used to the feeling of walking gently around the edges of a volcano that is liable to burst forth with sulphurous fumes at the slightest provocation.”⁴³

In the weeks leading up to Castro’s April 1959 goodwill trip to the United States, the State Department repeatedly warned Cuban diplomats that his reception would be colored by his repeated rhetorical attacks on the United States.⁴⁴ In one of Ambassador Bonsal’s first meetings with Foreign Minister Roberto Agramonte, he complained that Castro “was continuing to attribute Cuba’s troubles of the last 50 years or so to actions of the United States. . . . It was not right that these bonds developed over the years, should be thrown into the waste basket.”⁴⁵

President Eisenhower did not want to give Castro a visa for the April trip because of his public vilification of the United States and the appearance of communists in his government, but the president relented when CIA Director Allen Dulles warned that barring Castro would only boost his nationalist credentials.⁴⁶ At the State Department, Assistant Secretary R. Richard Rubottom was so fed up

Embassy: Classified General Records, 1959–1961, RG 84, Records of the Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, USNA.

42. Despatch from the Embassy in Cuba to the Department of State, February 18, 1959, *FRUS*, 1958–1960, vol. VI, Cuba, doc. 253, pp. 401–4.

43. Despatch to Dept of State from US Emb Havana, March 13, 1959, “Views of Fidel Castro on Relations with the United States. . .” no. 1013, file: 737.00/3-259, box 3081, Central Decimal File, 1955–1959, RG 59, General Records of the Department of State, USNA.

44. Memorandum to Rubottom from Wieland, March 19, 1959, “Your Appointment with Ambassador Dihigo of Cuba Today at 4:30,” doc. 611.37/3-1959, folder 611.37/1-159, box 2473, Central Decimal File, RG 59, General Records of the Department of State, 1955–1959, USNA.

45. Despatch to Dept State from US Emb Havana (Braddock), no. 1046, March 20, 1959, “Discussions with Minister of State, March 18, 1959,” doc. 611.37/3-2059, folder 611.37/1-159, box 2473, Central Decimal File, RG 59, General Records of the Department of State, 1955–1959, USNA.

46. Memorandum of Discussion at the 400th Meeting of the National Security Council, Washington, March 26, 1959, *FRUS*, 1958–1960, vol. VI, Cuba, doc. 266, pp. 440–43.

with Castro's attacks on the United States that he wanted to abandon the policy of restraint and respond in kind to every criticism. "Mr. Rubottom said that it seemed to him the time had come when we could no longer passively accept irresponsible statements about the United States by Fidel Castro," wrote his staff assistant, passing along instructions to the bureau's principal officers. In preparation for Castro's upcoming trip, Rubottom ordered the creation of a card index of all of Castro's anti-American claims so that U.S. officials would be ready to stand up and refute them if he repeated them during his visit.⁴⁷

Ambassador Bonsal cautioned Rubottom that engaging in a war of words with Castro would prove counter-productive. He stated, "Condemnation of Castro for these utterances alone will be taken as U.S. opposition to the Cuban revolution which still has very considerable support and was justified on many counts." He counseled restraint: "We should give the Cubans themselves as much opportunity as possible to straighten themselves and Castro out before unlimbering our artillery against Castro."⁴⁸

Following his trip to the United States in April, Castro curtailed his public blasts at Washington—at least for a while. But in June 1959, Pedro Díaz Lanz, chief of the Cuban air force, fled to Miami after Fidel rebuked him for complaining publicly about communist "indoctrination" in the air force.⁴⁹ The real trauma, however, came two weeks later when Díaz Lanz testified before the Senate Internal Security Subcommittee, claiming that Castro and virtually every senior official in his government were communists.⁵⁰ Castro was furious that the Senate *Internal Security Subcommittee* would hold hearings on Cuba as if it were a colony. In a speech on July 11, denouncing Díaz Lanz as "Cuba's Benedict Arnold," Castro attacked the United States more severely than at any time since his April trip.⁵¹

Meeting with Cuba's ambassador, Ernesto Dihigo, on July 13, Rubottom blamed the deterioration of bilateral relations in large part on the "frequently expressed antagonism of the Government of Cuba toward the United States." The revolutionary government had come to power with "an immense reservoir of good will and support among the American people," Rubottom said, but Castro had squandered it.⁵² "Castro is a convinced anti-American," Rubottom told

47. Memorandum from the Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs' Staff Assistant (Devine) to Certain Officers in the Bureau of Inter-American Affairs, April 8, 1969, *FRUS*, 1958–1960, vol. VI, Cuba, doc. 273, pp. 452–53.

48. Telegram from the Embassy in Cuba to the Department of State, April 14, 1959, *FRUS*, 1958–1960, vol. VI, Cuba, doc. 277, p. 457.

49. Thomas, *Cuba: The Pursuit of Freedom*, 1229–30.

50. U.S. Senate, Subcommittee to Investigate Administration of Internal Security Act and Other Internal Security Laws, Committee on Judiciary, *Communist Threat to the U.S. Through the Caribbean*, part 1, 86th Cong., 1st Sess., July 14, 1959.

51. Telegram from the Embassy in Cuba to the Department of State, July 13, 1959, *FRUS*, 1958–1960, vol. VI, Cuba, doc. 332, pp. 556–57; "Castro Asserts U.S. Interferes in Cuba," *New York Times*, July 13, 1959.

52. Memorandum of a Conversation, Department of State, July 13, 1959, *FRUS*, 1958–1960, vol. V, American Republics, doc. 83, enclosure 3, pp. 300–3.

visiting U.S. businessmen two days later, “and it seems that no amount of persuasion or evidence to the contrary will make him change his poor opinion of the United States.”⁵³

After the Díaz Lanz affair, Bonsal, too, began to complain more openly about Castro’s anti-Americanism, both to journalists and to Cuban officials. On July 23, he told Foreign Minister Raúl Roa that relations had deteriorated, “fundamentally due to the anti-American attitudes taken in public statements by Fidel Castro and other Cuban Government leaders.” Reporting the conversation to Washington, Bonsal wrote, “I said that we are also a people with pride, ‘amor propio’ . . . that our pride and “amor propio” had been wounded and our sentiments outraged by these statements.”⁵⁴ From this point forward, U.S. officials raised the issue of anti-Americanism in every encounter with their Cuban counterparts, both in Havana and in Washington.

Anticipating a meeting with Castro himself, Bonsal cabled Washington in July with proposed talking points laying out U.S. concerns, of which anti-Americanism was second only to the influence of communists in the government. Bonsal would inform Castro that he had “alienated much public and official opinion in [the] US by continued anti-American statements which have been echoed by official press and other government officials.”⁵⁵

Castro did not agree to receive Bonsal until September 3. Later he would recall that he avoided meeting the ambassador because his expressions of concern about anti-American rhetoric and the treatment of U.S. investors “were simply intolerable.”⁵⁶ When they did finally meet, Bonsal recounted the litany of U.S. complaints, and expressed, “Our deep concern at [the] practically continuous barrage of anti-American statements from Cuban officials and from [the] press.” Castro said he regretted some of his own harsh public jabs at the United States, and was “unaware” of the anti-American tone of the press, implausible as that seemed.⁵⁷

53. Memorandum of Conversation between Lawrence Crosby, Chairman U.S. Sugar Council, Rubottom, and Richard B. Owen, Asst Officer in Charge of Cuban Affairs, July 15, 1959, “U.S. Relations with Cuba; Agrarian Reform,” doc. 611.37/7-71559, folder 611.37/4-159, box 2473, Central Decimal File, RG 59, General Records of the Department of State, 1955–1959, USNA.

54. Memorandum of a Conversation Between the Ambassador in Cuba (Bonsal) and Minister of State Roa, Havana, July 23, 1959, *FRUS*, 1958–1960, vol. VI, Cuba, doc. 342, pp. 569–73.

55. Telegram from the Embassy in Cuba to the Department of State, July 16, 1959, *FRUS*, 1958–1960, vol. VI, Cuba, doc. 336, pp. 561–62.

56. Szulc, *Fidel*, 503; Lee Lockwood, *Castro’s Cuba: Cuba’s Fidel* (New York, 1967), 159. Bonsal brought up these topics at his first meeting with Castro on March 5, 1959, and at virtually every meeting thereafter. Telegram from the Embassy in Cuba to the Department of State, March 5, 1959, *FRUS*, 1958–1960, vol. VI, Cuba, doc. 258, pp. 420–21.

57. Philip Bonsal, *Cuba, Castro, and the United States* (Pittsburgh, PA, 1971), 89; Telegram from the Embassy in Cuba to the Department of State, September 4, 1955, *FRUS*, 1958–1960, vol. VI, Cuba, doc. 359, pp. 595–98.

Shortly after Bonsal's meeting with Castro, Ambassador Dihigo proposed negotiations to repair the fraying bilateral relationship.⁵⁸ Over dinner at Washington's Metropolitan Club, Rubottom warned the Cuban ambassador that anti-American rhetoric by Cuban leaders was poisoning relations and that as a result, Cuba might find itself "harvesting a crop of unfriendliness and lack of sympathy." Negotiations, he added, would be possible only if there was "a change in attitude on the part of the Cuban Government." Dihigo replied that the government's anti-American rhetoric was "arising from the revolutionary enthusiasm of many young and inexperienced government officials."⁵⁹

At the end of September, Bonsal returned to Washington for consultations, and discovered that support for his policy of coexisting with Castro had evaporated. "We have all been staunch advocates of extending the hand of friendship to Cuba and adopting a patient, tolerant attitude," Deputy Assistant Secretary William Wieland told the ambassador, "but we cannot continue this policy much longer without some positive achievement to show in its justification."⁶⁰

Upon returning to Havana, Bonsal vented his frustration to Foreign Minister Roa. There was "increasing perplexity and concern" in Washington "due entirely to the attitudes, public statements and actions of Cuban leaders and the Party press," Bonsal said. Roa replied that Bonsal was being "hypersensitive" and that he had "misinterpreted" Cuban statements. Bonsal repeated the warning of the "unfortunate harvest which Cuba is now gathering from attitudes, statements and actions of her rulers since January 1."⁶¹

In late October, just as the State Department was finalizing a formal statement of the new policy seeking Castro's ouster that senior officials had sketched out over the summer, relations took a sharp turn for the worse. On October 16, a State Department official inadvertently revealed that the United States had urged Great Britain not to deliver to Cuba jet aircraft originally purchased by Batista. To Castro, this was proof of Washington's perfidy in claiming to want better relations, and he said so. "The bombs and arms which destroyed Cuban cities and attacked

58. Memorandum of Conversation between Rubottom and Ambassador Ernesto Dihigo of Cuba, "Desire of GOC to arrive at an understanding on various problems now troubling relations between Cuba and the United States," September 21, 1959, file: 350 Cuba (July-Sept) 1959, box 5 [should be in box 4], Cuba, Havana Embassy: Classified General Records, 1959-1961, RG 84, Records of the Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, USNA.

59. Memorandum of Conversation between Bonsal, Dihigo, and Rubottom (at dinner), September 21, 1959, doc. 611.37/9-2159, folder 611.37/4-159, box 2473, Central Decimal File, RG 59, General Records of the Department of State, 1955-1959, USNA.

60. Memorandum of a Conversation, Department of State, Washington, September 18, 1959, *FRUS*, 1958-1960, vol. VI, Cuba, doc. 362, pp. 603-5.

61. Memorandum of Conversation between Foreign Minister Raúl Roa and Ambassador Bonsal, "General Attitude Toward U.S.," October 6, 1959, file: Efforts at Negotiation with Cuba, box 6, lot 63D91, Subject Files 1960-1963, Records of the Bureau of Inter-American Affairs, Office of the Coordinator of Cuban Affairs, RG 59, General Records of the Department of State, USNA.

Cuban people came from those who are now preoccupied to see that we lack aviation,” he declared, reminding his audience of U.S. support for Batista.⁶²

Four days after the aircraft story broke, *Comandante* Huber Matos, the 26th of July Movement governor in Camagüey province, resigned over the influence of communists in the government. Matos was immediately arrested and tried for sedition. On October 21, the very day Matos was arrested, Pedro Díaz Lanz reentered the picture, “bombing” Havana with anti-Castro leaflets. Anti-aircraft fire went astray causing several dozen casualties and creating the impression that Lanz’s plane dropped bombs. The day after Lanz’s flight, the banner headline in *Revolución*, the daily newspaper of Castro’s 26th of July Movement, read, “The Planes Came from the United States,” and 1,000 people protested outside the U.S. Embassy.⁶³

To Castro, these disparate events belied a pattern. Exiles were attacking Cuba with impunity from airfields in Florida, Washington was blocking Cuba’s ability to acquire the aircraft it needed to defend itself, and Díaz Lanz’s brazen attack on Havana coincided with Matos’s abortive mutiny. In a speech on October 26 to over 300,000 people rallying in defense of the revolution, Castro compared Díaz Lanz’s flight to the attack on Pearl Harbor and accused the United States of “foreign aggression” for giving the “war criminals” a safe haven from which to attack.⁶⁴

Castro’s rhetoric on October 26 was “highly inflammatory and pro-revolutionary . . . as strongly anti-American as anything he has ever done,” Bonsal advised the State Department—so harsh that even the stoic ambassador recommended a public response.⁶⁵ Rubottom agreed. “We cannot let Castro’s charges and anti-American campaign go unanswered,” he wrote back to Bonsal. “It is necessary to bring out clearly where responsibility for current low point in relations lie.”⁶⁶ Washington delivered its reply the following day in a public note decrying the “deliberate and concerted efforts in Cuba to replace the traditional friendship between the Cuban and American people with distrust and hostility.” Charges that the United States was allowing exiles to operate against Cuba from its territory, the note said, were “utterly unfounded,” and Washington “reject[ed] with indignation” any such inferences.⁶⁷

62. Telegram to State from US Emb Havana, “Impromptu Appearance Before Meeting,” October 20, 1959, *Foreign Broadcast Information Service*.

63. R. Hart Phillips, “Cuban Crowds Assail U.S. After Attack by Terrorists,” *New York Times*, October 23, 1959.

64. R. Hart Phillips, “300,000 Rally to Back Castro; He Condemns ‘Raids’ from U.S.” *New York Times*, October 27, 1959.

65. Telegram from the Embassy in Cuba to the Department of State, October 23, 1959, *FRUS*, 1958–1960, vol. VI, Cuba, doc. 377, pp. 639–41; Editorial Note, *FRUS*, 1958–1960, vol. VI, Cuba, doc. 379, pp. 642–46.

66. Telegram to US Emb Havana from Rubottom, in reply to Embtel 912, October 24, 1959 [no number], doc. 611.37/10-2359, folder 611.37/10-159, box 2473, Central Decimal File, RG 59, General Records of the Department of State, 1955–1959, USNA.

67. “Text of U. S. Statement on Envoy’s Protest Against Accusations by Premier Castro,” *New York Times*, October 28, 1959.

Bonsal himself delivered the diplomatic note to President Osvaldo Dorticós and Foreign Minister Roa. The statement, he told them, was “in reply to the many public statements of Dr. Fidel Castro and other revolutionary leaders which we consider deliberately hostile to U.S. and damaging to Cuban-U.S. relations,” and which were responsible for the deterioration in relations. Dorticós replied that the United States was not doing everything it could to halt exile attacks and that, “If the U.S. was indignant about some things, GOC [Government of Cuba] was equally indignant at continuous charges in U.S. that [the] Government [was] infiltrated by Communists.”⁶⁸

Revolución denounced the U.S. note in no uncertain terms: “The revolutionary government has done no more than protest the aggressions received from the United States ... the outrageous press campaign against the revolution ... the threats to reduce the sugar quota ... cunning attacks against our nation from the [U.S.] territory ... the bombardment of our sugar centrals and our cities by planes coming from airfields in the North.”⁶⁹ The next day, Bonsal filed a lengthy situation report, leading with, “Publicly expressed anti-Americanism at a new high and continuing ... Campaign continues actively fomented by top governmental figures and press and radio organs associated with government, with latter become [sic] aggressive and violent in tone.”⁷⁰

In early November, Cuba stoked the fires of animosity by publishing a fourteen-page pamphlet blaming the United States for the Díaz Lanz “bombing,” illustrating it with graphic images of the dead and wounded. The Foreign Ministry mailed one directly to Secretary of State Herter. Rubottom summoned Ambassador Dihigo to deliver what the *Washington Post* called “a bluntly worded” reply.⁷¹ “Inaccurate, malicious and misleading reports have been spread throughout the world,” the note began. The “offensive” pamphlet was the latest incident in “a campaign evidently designed to create an atmosphere of hostility in United States-Cuban relations.”⁷²

68. Telegram to Dept of State from Bonsal, October 27, 1959, no. 939, file: U.S.-Cuba 1959, box 3, Cuba, Havana Embassy: Classified General Records, 1959-1961, RG 84, Records of the Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, USNA.

69. The editorial is quoted in Telegram from Bonsal to Sec State, no. 960, October 29, 1959, doc. 611.37/10-2959, folder 611.37/10-159, box 2473, Central Decimal File, RG 59, General Records of the Department of State, 1955-1959, USNA.

70. Telegram from the Embassy in Cuba to the Department of State, October 30, 1959, *FRUS*, 1958-1960, vol. VI, Cuba, doc. 382, pp. 648-50.

71. United Press International, “U.S. Charges Cuba Spreads False Reports,” *Washington Post*, November 10, 1959.

72. “Statement by U.S. on Cuban Charges,” *New York Times*, November 10, 1959. The language in an earlier draft of the note was even tougher, calling the pamphlet, “a shocking compilation of half-truths, innuendos and insinuations” and “a deliberate attempt to inflame world opinion against the USG.” Telegram to US Emb Havana from Dept of State, Herter, November 7, 1959, no. 542, file: U.S.-Cuba 1959, box 3, Cuba, Havana Embassy: Classified General Records, 1959-1961, RG 84, Records of the Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, USNA.

Cuba delivered a long diplomatic note in response to the U.S. protest, and also released it publicly. Cuban leaders were at least as thin-skinned when it came to defamatory accusations as U.S. officials were. The note blasted “the most flagrant falsehoods and the most humiliating insults against the Revolutionary Government and its foremost figures” that had appeared in the U.S. press, and demanded to know whether the U.S. government endorsed such “insidious propaganda.”⁷³

The events of October and early November, and the escalating rhetoric that accompanied them, shook Bonsal’s faith in his ability to reason with Castro. “Intrinsic damaging effect of these developments greatly inflated for present at least by hostile hysterical manner in which Castro has treated them in his TV appearances,” he cabled Washington on October 23. After yet another diatribe by Castro on October 26, Bonsal wrote, “Our efforts . . . to remove Castro’s deep-seated hostility to USA and suspicion of our motives and actions have been unsuccessful. My previous view of Castro as highly emotional individual yet generally rational and often cold-bloodedly and cynically playing the demagogue [has been] replaced by opinion that evident cynicism goes hand in hand with definite mental unbalance at times. His performance of October 26 was not that of a sane man.”⁷⁴

On November 4, the State Department sent a new policy statement on Cuba to the president for approval: “The immediate objective of the United States with respect to Cuba,” it declared, “is the development of a situation in which, not later than the end of 1960, the Government then in control of Cuba should, in its domestic and foreign policies, meet . . . the basic United States policy objectives for Latin American countries.”⁷⁵ As Rubottom explained in his cover memo to Secretary Herter, this meant ousting Castro. “The policies and programs of the Castro government . . . are inconsistent with the minimal requirements of good Cuban-U.S. relations,” he explained. “Our restraint has generally been answered by continued attacks on the United States by Castro and his lieutenants.”⁷⁶ In a memo for the president, Rubottom listed a number of reasons that Castro had to go; first on the list was his “deliberate fomenting of anti-American sentiment.”⁷⁷ Eisenhower approved the new policy on November 5.

73. “Text of Cuban Note Rejecting Protest and Calling for a Change in U. S. Policy,” *New York Times*, November 14, 1959.

74. Telegram from the Embassy in Cuba to the Department of State, Havana, October 23, 1959, *FRUS*, 1958–1960, vol. VI, Cuba, doc. 377, pp. 639–41; Embtel, from Bonsal to Sec State, No. 1043, November 6, 1959, doc. 611.37/11-659, folder 611.37/10-159, box 2473, Central Decimal File, RG 59, General Records of the Department of State, 1955–1959, USNA.

75. Current Basic United States Policy, October 23, 1959, *FRUS*, 1958–1960, vol. VI, Cuba, doc. 376, attachment, pp. 638–39.

76. Memorandum from the Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs (Rubottom) to the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs (Murphy), October 23, 1959, *FRUS*, 1958–1960, vol. VI, Cuba, doc. 376, pp. 635–38.

77. Memorandum to the Secretary, Herter, from John A. Calhoun, DOS Executive Secretariat, November 4, 1959, with Rubottom Memorandum attached, Current Basic United

Washington's tough public replies to Cuba's charge of complicity with Díaz Lanz marked a shift in its public diplomacy strategy concomitant with the shift in overall policy from trying to coexist with Castro to trying to overthrow him. Implementation plans summarized it as "a shift from a policy of restraint in the face of Castro's anti-American campaign to a policy of answering his regime's charges."⁷⁸ U.S. officials who had been forced to suffer Castro's insults in silence rejoiced at the opportunity to fire back. "I know you are as damn sick and tired as I am of our failure to rebut adequately the massive anti-United States propaganda being carried out by the Cuban Government," Deputy Assistant Secretary Wieland wrote to Rubottom in early December. "On several occasions we have discussed these counter-attacks and decided that we would be defeating our own purposes" by answering Castro's every charge. Now, with the change in policy, Wieland looked forward to "an intensive campaign to counter Cuban propaganda, take the initiative, and wage this particular 'psychological war.'"⁷⁹

Rubottom agreed and won approval for a more aggressive response to counter "the vicious, unjustified attacks by the Castro government on the United States." It was important, he argued, for Washington to take "a more openly critical and challenging posture vis-a-vis Cuba in order that our attitude to date may not be considered a sign of weakness."⁸⁰ Bonsal, too, was aware of the domestic political dimension of the problem. In an election year, "The American posture of moderation in the face of Castro's insulting and aggressive behavior was becoming a political liability."⁸¹ In fact, the growing anger of administration officials was paralleled by anger among members of Congress, which in turn reinforced executive's sense that they needed to do something about Castro.⁸²

States Policy Toward Cuba, doc. 611.37/11-459, folder 611.37/10-159, box 2473, Central Decimal File, RG 59, General Records of the Department of State, 1955-1959, USNA.

78. "Summary of Actions Taken or Underway in Implementation of Statement on Current Basic United States Policy Towards Cuba," attached to Memorandum to the Acting Secretary from Mr. Rubottom, ARA, "Discussion Paper on Cuba for Oral Briefing of NSC on Thursday, January 14," January 13, 1960, file: Planning and NSC Briefings 1960, box 4, Bureau of Inter-American Affairs, Records of the Special Assistant on Communism, 1958-1961, RG 59, General Records of the Department of State, USNA.

79. Memorandum to Rubottom from Wieland, December 4, 1959, "Countering the Cuban Propaganda Offensive," folder: Cuba, General 1959, 1 of 2, box 1, lot 63D67, Subject Files 1957-1962, Records of the Bureau of Inter-American Affairs, Office of Caribbean and Mexican Affairs (CMA), RG 59, General Records of the Department of State, USNA.

80. Memorandum from the Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs (Rubottom) to the Under Secretary of State (Dillon), December 28, 1959, *FRUS*, 1958-1960, vol. VI, Cuba, doc. 414, pp. 716-20.

81. Bonsal, *Cuba, Castro, and the United States*, 134.

82. Asa Mc Kercher, "Steamed Up: Domestic Politics, Congress, and Cuba, 1959-1963," *Diplomatic History* 38, no. 3 (June 2014): 599-627.

DIPLOMACY'S LAST GASP

The last serious effort to negotiate a *modus vivendi* with the Cuban revolution began, ironically, as the unintended consequence of a diplomatic shouting match. As part of Washington's new get-tough approach, the State Department delivered another diplomatic note to Cuba on January 11, 1960, protesting the treatment of U.S. investors.⁸³ A few days later, Vice-President Nixon, on a campaign swing through Miami, warned that Cuba's hostility toward U.S. investors risked deterring future investment and perhaps provoking Congress to cut Cuba's sugar quota.⁸⁴ Castro responded angrily to the implied threat, calling it "insolent." He denounced the United States for waging "an insidious hostile campaign" against Cuba, and accused the U.S. embassy of plotting with traitors to subvert the revolution.⁸⁵

Castro's "tone and attitude," Bonsal wrote to Washington, were "arrogant, insolent and provocative." The conspiracy charges against Bonsal led the Department of State to recall him, over his objections. "In view of the stepped-up campaign of calumny against the United States Government by the Government of Cuba which has descended to the point of insulting and derogatory public statements by Prime Minister Castro . . . I feel that a vigorous action is required in order to maintain the dignity and prestige of the United States Government," Rubottom wrote to Bonsal.⁸⁶

The recall proved fortuitous. Back in Washington, Bonsal was able to convince Secretary Herter and President Eisenhower to offer the Cubans one last olive branch.⁸⁷ On January 26, Eisenhower released a statement to the press expressing concern about the poor state of relations, but acknowledging Cuba's right to undertake social, economic, and political reforms. Most importantly, it called for negotiations to settle bilateral differences.⁸⁸

Cuba accepted the offer, and during the preparations to begin talks, Castro toned down his anti-American rhetoric noticeably. Before the January initiative, Rubottom reported to Under-Secretary of State C. Douglas Dillon, Cuba had been "conducting an intense campaign of vilification against the United States which has included insulting and calumnious public statements by Prime Minister

83. Telegram from the Embassy in Cuba to the Department of State, January 11, 1960, *FRUS*, 1958-1960, vol. VI, Cuba, doc. 422, pp. 739-40.

84. "Nixon Warns Cuba on Alienating U.S.," *New York Times*, January 17, 1960.

85. Telegram from the Embassy in Cuba to the Department of State, January 19, 1960, *FRUS*, 1958-1960, vol. VI, Cuba, doc. 424, pp. 747-48.

86. Telegram from the Embassy in Cuba to the Department of State, January 21, 1960, *FRUS*, 1958-1960, vol. VI, Cuba, doc. 429, pp. 752-53; Draft Memorandum from the Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs (Rubottom) to the Secretary of State, January 21, 1960, *FRUS*, 1958-1960, vol. VI, Cuba, doc. 427, pp. 750-51.

87. Memorandum of a Conference with the President, White House, Washington, January 25, 1960, *FRUS*, 1958-1960, vol. VI, Cuba, doc. 436, pp. 763-65.

88. Editorial Note, *FRUS*, 1958-1960, vol. VI, Cuba, doc. 438, pp. 767-68.

Fidel Castro as well as other Cuban officials.” But since the initiative, Castro and other Cuban leaders “have taken a somewhat softer line and have refrained from directly attacking the United States.”⁸⁹

Nevertheless, the State Department was hard at work drawing up an “action plan” entitled, “Countering Anti-United States Attitudes Generated by the Government of Cuba.” The eleven-page single-spaced document attributed Castro’s “program of virulent attack on the United States Government” to communist influence, his attempt to appeal to Cuban nationalism, and “Castro’s paranoiac mentality; he may sincerely believe the United States is guilty of actions and designs on Cuba.” The memo then outlined a “counter-propaganda” campaign consisting of both overt and covert operations to mold Cuban and Latin American opinion against Castro who, the paper remarked, “is violently sensitive to criticism.” It was not clear whether this last comment was meant as a cautionary note or intended to point out a weakness to exploit.⁹⁰ In any event, it was proof that even paranoiacs sometimes have real enemies.

The “ceasefire” in the war of words, as Bonsal called it, did not last long. When diplomats could not agree on the terms to begin negotiations, Raúl Castro gave a blistering speech at the University of Havana, calling the U.S. intervention in Cuba in 1898 an “act of international piracy” by “imperialistic hordes” intent to “establish the right of new conquerors.” And that was just for starters. “The coarse horsemen, the apocalyptic horsemen of the dollar came to frustrate the second great revolutionary phase,” Castro continued. “This shameless intervention of the United States served to enable its aggressive monopolies to seize our best lands, our mineral resources, our foreign trade, our whole life.”⁹¹

It was “the most violent anti-United States attack since Fidel Castro’s speech of January 20,” Bonsal reported to Washington. “The significance of Raúl Castro’s remarks lies in the fact that they represent the first violent attack on the United States by a principal figure of the Government since the campaign of invective by top Revolutionary officials stopped following the public statements by President Eisenhower and President Dorticós on January 26 and 27, 1960.”⁹²

89. Memorandum to the Under Secretary from Mr. Rubottom, ARA, “Recent Development and the Present Situation in Cuba,” February 1, 1960, file: Briefing Papers, Cuba 1960, lot 63D91, box 2, Records of the Bureau of Inter-American Affairs, Office of the Coordinator of Cuban Affairs, Subject Files 1960–1963, RG 59, General Records of the Department of State, USNA.

90. Memorandum to Wieland from R. G. Cushing (ARA/P), February 4, 1960, “Action Paper on Cuba: Countering Anti-U.S. Attitudes,” folder: Cuba, General 1960, 2 of 2, box 3, lot 63D67, Subject Files 1957–1962, Records of the Bureau of Inter-American Affairs, Office of Caribbean and Mexican Affairs (CMA), RG 59, General Records of the Department of State, USNA.

91. Raúl Castro, “Reclamamos el derecho a seguir el modo de vida que nos plazca,” *Revolución*, February 25, 1960, attached to Despatch from US Emb Havana to Dept State, March 8, 1960, no. 1256, “Raul Castro Speaking at the University of Havana Violently Attacks U.S.,” file: 350 Cuba (March) 1960, box 4, Cuba, Havana Embassy: Classified General Records, 1959–1961, RG 84, Records of the Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, USNA.

92. Despatch from US Emb Havana to Dept State, March 8, 1960, no. 1256, “Raul Castro Speaking at the University of Havana Violently Attacks U.S.,” file: 350 Cuba (March) 1960, box 4,

On March 4, the French freighter *La Coubre*, unloading an arms shipment from Belgium, exploded in Havana harbor killing 75 dock workers and wounding over 200.⁹³ Forty years later, Castro's recollection of the carnage was still vivid. "All of a sudden, we heard a very strong explosion and the building itself was shaken . . . Minutes after, there was a second explosion. . . . When we arrived at the docks, there was a crowd of people, wounded wandering around, people trying to help. We could hear the sirens of the police and ambulances coming to pick up the wounded and the dead. I can still see the scene as if I were looking at it now."⁹⁴

Castro was convinced the CIA was responsible.⁹⁵ He knew that Washington had tried unsuccessfully to talk the Belgians out of delivering the munitions on *La Coubre*. "We must look for the guilty ones among those who did not want us to have these weapons," he said at the funeral for those killed in the explosion. "We have the right to think that those who through diplomacy tried to prevent us from getting this equipment, could certainly have tried to achieve the same objective by other methods." Comparing the destruction of *La Coubre* to the sinking of the U.S. battleship *Maine* in Havana harbor in 1898 that precipitated the Spanish-American War, Castro warned Washington not to make the mistake of thinking that it could once again send troops to abort Cuba's struggle for true independence.⁹⁶

Washington, expressing "shock and outrage," officially protested Castro's accusation of sabotage, calling it "unfounded and irresponsible."⁹⁷ The Cubans rejected the U.S. protest as "insulting."⁹⁸ Bonsal, who had tried so hard to find common ground with the revolutionary government, gave up trying to secure meetings with Castro. "Fidel has insulted and offended our government on numerous occasions. If he wants to see me . . . he can let me know," Bonsal wrote privately to Rubottom, adding, "I do not believe there is the slightest chance of influencing Castro in any constructive way."⁹⁹ The negotiating track, which had

Cuba, Havana Embassy: Classified General Records, 1959–1961, RG 84, Records of the Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, USNA.

93. Thomas, *The Pursuit of Freedom*, 1269.

94. "Bay of Pigs Forty Years After," conference sponsored by the University of Havana and the National Security Archive, Havana, Cuba, March 22–24, 2001, conference panel I, tape 1.

95. In 2007, writing about the explosion in one of his "reflections," Castro reiterated his conviction that the CIA blew up the ship. "Reflections of President Fidel Castro: World Tyranny: The Basics of the Killing Machine," *Granma Internacional*, July 9, 2007.

96. "Palabras pronunciadas . . . en las Honras Funebres de las víctimas de la explosión del barco La Coubre, el 5 de Marzo de 1960," Discursos e intervenciones del Comandante en Jefe Fidel Castro.

97. Memorandum of a Conversation, Department of State, Washington, March 7, 1960, *FRUS*, 1958–1960, vol. VI, Cuba, doc. 469, pp. 823–24; Telegram from Dept State to US Emb Havana, March 12, 1960, no. 1335, "Text of US protest of Castro speech Mar 5," file: 350 Cuba (March) 1960, box 4, Cuba, Havana Embassy: Classified General Records, 1959–1961, RG 84, Records of the Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, USNA.

98. "Cuba Rejects Herter's Protest," *Washington Post*, March 9, 1960.

99. Letter from Bonsal to Rubottom, April 22, 1960, Geographical File, Cuba, 1960, Jan–April, folder 9, box 1, Bonsal Papers.

looked promising in late January and February, was cut short by the mutual re-
criminations. On March 17, President Eisenhower signed the formal authorization
for the CIA to begin planning the Bay of Pigs invasion.¹⁰⁰

THE POWER OF WORDS

The verbal assaults exchanged between Washington and Havana did not stop after
the breakdown in relations, of course; they continued on for the next half century.
Although Fidel Castro modulated his tone over the years in conjunction with the
shifting climate of relations, when tensions were high, he could be just as harsh in
his criticism of succeeding presidents as he was of the Eisenhower administration.
The long critique of U.S. depredations against Cuba from 1898 onward became a
staple of Cuban diplomatic dialogues with the United States—up to and including
the secret talks in 2013–2014 that produced the agreement to normalize
relations.¹⁰¹

The Cuban case reinforces Friedman's argument that fundamentally different
visions of the U.S. role in the world are the catalyst for the sort of conceptual
disjuncture that in Cuba generated such anger among key decision-makers. By
challenging the United States' self-image of beneficence, Fidel Castro triggered a
deep emotional reaction that manifested itself in charges of anti-Americanism and
a hostile foreign policy response. If ever a case demonstrated the centrality of
emotion in foreign policy decision-making, the 15 months of U.S.-Cuban rela-
tions after January 1959 is a compelling one.

The traditional issues of national interest—protecting U.S. economic assets
and national security—were not unimportant. Washington was certainly con-
cerned over Castro's nationalization of U.S. property (and the example it set for
the rest of Latin America), his tolerance of communists in his government, and his
neutralist foreign policy as those policies unfolded in 1959. But the clash of inter-
ests was exacerbated by the emotions that Castro's harsh rhetoric inflamed. As
these conflicts of interest intensified in late 1959 and 1960, U.S. policymakers
(except for Ambassador Bonsal) had already given up any real hope of reaching
an accord with Castro because his rhetoric had convinced them he was an irre-
deemable anti-American. In the end, the breakdown in relations turned in large
part on these real conflicts of interest, but the anger that Castro's diatribes pro-
voked created an emotional climate that made a diplomatic resolution impossible.

Fidel Castro's anger with the United States was largely a product of his own
deep sense of nationalism and his belief that Washington had held Cuba in sub-
jugation since 1898. At times his rhetoric was clearly the product of anger at events
he blamed on Washington and regarded as contemporary manifestations of U.S.
domination—the criticism of the trials of Batista officials, Pedro Díaz Lanz's

100. Paper Prepared by the 5412 Committee, "A Program of Covert Action Against the
Castro Regime," March 16, 1960, *FRUS*, 1958–1960, vol. VI, *Cuba*, doc. 481, pp. 850–51, fn 1.

101. Warren Strobel, Matt Spetalnick, and David Adams, "How Obama Outmaneuvered
Hardliners and Cut a Cuba Deal," *Reuters*, March 23, 2015.

escapades, the explosion of the *La Coubre*. But there was also an instrumental dimension to how and when Castro expressed his anger to mobilize domestic support behind the revolutionary government. His nationalist appeals resonated with the Cuban people.

Castro may have made a distinction between anti-American rhetoric for domestic consumption and the language of diplomacy, as he explained to Daniel Braddock, but policymakers in Washington made no such distinction. Whatever the motive, Castro's version of U.S.-Cuban relations was not one that U.S. officials were willing to hear because it departed so completely from their own conception of that relationship, past and present. To them, the United States had been Cuba's good neighbor, and they took Castro's criticism to be not just insulting but intentionally defamatory. No doubt they felt their anger was every bit as righteous as Fidel Castro felt his to be; their fault was in believing that no reasonable person could possibly agree with Castro when, in fact, most Cubans did.¹⁰²

The anger of U.S. officials is palpable in the endless stream of derogatory adjectives they used to describe Castro's speeches: insolent, irresponsible, inflammatory, insulting, aggressive, malicious, calumnious, derisive, scurrilous, virulent, arrogant, provocative, fraudulent, harping, malevolent, pathological, psychopathic, and hysterical. Their anger hampered negotiations over substantive disagreements. Their emotion made compromise appear hopeless and a sign of weakness.

When the passions of the day had cooled to some degree, policymakers themselves would look back on the actions and reactions of 1959–1960 and conclude that they had acted in ways contrary to their self-interest. As Fidel Castro said to U.S. diplomat Wayne Smith in 1978, "In retrospect, I can see a number of things I wish I had done differently. . . . Even adversaries find it useful to maintain bridges between them. . . . Perhaps I burned some of those bridges precipitously; there were times when I may have been more abrupt, more aggressive, than was called for by the situation."¹⁰³

In a post-mortem review of the break in relations conducted by the Kennedy administration, NSC staff member Gordon Chase and State Department official John Plank recognized how the gulf in understanding had hampered efforts to maintain friendly relations. "There was a general reluctance on the part of the U.S. Government . . . to throw itself wholeheartedly into the job of winning Castro over to our side with the carrot," because of "the difficulty and unpleasantness of the task in the face of Castro's sporadic anti-American behavior," they wrote. "Although we recognized that a real revolution had occurred, we either refused

102. A poll commissioned by the CIA and conducted in Cuba in 1960 by Lloyd Free found that only 2% of respondents were critical of the government's policy toward the United States. Free concluded, "criticisms from American sources of the regime's anti-U.S. policies are apt to fall on relatively deaf ears." Lloyd A. Free, *Attitudes of the Cuban People Toward the Castro Regime* (Princeton, NJ, 1960).

103. Wayne S. Smith, *The Closest of Enemies: A Personal and Diplomatic Account of U.S.-Cuban Relations Since 1957* (New York, 1987), 144–45.

to face up, were unable to face up, or had not yet had time to face up, to the full implications of this and what it entailed in terms of a major revision . . . of the traditional relationships between the U.S. and Cuba, not only in the economic sphere, but in the political and psychological spheres as well.” Chase and Plank saw this psychological dimension as especially important because of how it colored policy-makers’ responses. “Vice-President Nixon’s description of his meeting with Castro reeks of this failure to understand, inherent in the view that Cuba was still a Caribbean dependency, was still subject to the tutelary influence of the U.S. and was still amenable to the patronizing devices of control and persuasion appropriate to the pre-Castro era.”

When Fidel Castro rejected Washington’s patronizing presumption of hegemony in no uncertain terms, U.S. policy-makers were frustrated and angry at such defiance. “The U.S. Government, in the face of Cuban ungratefulness and ungentlemanly antics, generally limited its cooperation investment to bland, oral extensions of good will,” Chase and Plank concluded. “Concrete offers of aid were coyly held in abeyance until the Cubans “shaped up” and/or swallowed their nationalist pride and asked for aid.”¹⁰⁴

Fidel Castro was not one to swallow his pride or to accept the tutelary influence of the United States. As he said in his first speech after Batista fled the island on January 1, 1959, “This time, the Revolution will not be frustrated . . . This time, the Revolution is for real.”¹⁰⁵

104. “U.S./Cuban Relations – January 2, 1959 to January 3, 1961,” attached to Memorandum from Gordon Chase to McGeorge Bundy, “Plank/Chase Cuban Project,” February 3, 1964, Gale Declassified Documents Reference System.

105. “Discurso pronunciado por el Comandante Fidel Castro Ruz, en el Parque Céspedes de Santiago de Cuba, el 1ro. de enero de 1959,” <http://www.cuba.cu/gobierno/discursos/1959/esp/fo10159e.html>.