Cuba Essay, Research Paper

“Kennedy’s Fixation with Cuba”

Thomas G. Paterson

Thomas G. Paterson’s essay, “Kennedy’s Fixation with Cuba,” is an essay primarily based on the controversy and times of President Kennedy’s foreign relations with Cuba. Throughout President Kennedy’s short term, he devoted the majority of his time to the foreign relations between Cuba and the Soviet Union. After the struggle of WW II, John F. Kennedy tried to keep a tight strong hold over Cuba as to not let Cuba turn to the Communist Soviet Union. Kennedy seen Cuba and the Soviet Union as a major threat to the United States. As Castro fell farther and farther into the Communist party, he inched his way closer and closer to becoming a close ally with the Soviet’s, As Kennedy seen this happen before his eyes, he was astonished. Kennedy, a newly formed president, did not want to seem like the kind to just sit back and roll with the punches, he wanted immediate action taken for these measures. “As someone said, Cuba was one of the four-letter words of the 1960s” (268). Cuba was not viewed as a very potential power before Fidel Castro took office. It was viewed more as a neutral country that we sent aide and military supplies to in exchange for sugar and other products. When Castro took office, things drastically changed. He started taking back land that we had set aside for military bases, he wanted the American forces no more than what they had in Washington, and he openly defied orders from America. Unknown to Kennedy Khrushchev, leader of the Soviet Union, was also watching everything that played out between Cuba and the United States. President Kennedy, later realizing, would make a few decisions for the worst. These decisions would haunt him for the rest of his short lived term.

Throughout the course of President Kennedy’s term the few bad mistakes that he made would come back to haunt him. One such even that put a black mark on Kennedy’s record was the whole Cuba uprising. At one point and time, as Kennedy was a senator, supported the Cuban uprising along with many other American’s. They thought the uprising was a solid improvement over the oppressive rule of Batista. No where in this line of sight did anybody see the new government becoming Communist. As Castro took over Cuba, he became increasingly radical in his views and actions. When these actions came about, nobody ever suspected that the U.S. might be the ones that forced or led Castro to become the radical leader.

The President rejected the idea that intense United States hostility to the Cuban Revolution may have contributed to Castro’s tightening political grip and flirtation with the Soviet Union. Nor did Kennedy and other American’s with to acknowledge the measurable benefits of the revolution?improvements in education, medical, care, and housing and the elimination of the island’s infamous corruption that once had been the American mafia’s domain. Instead, Kennedy officials concluded that Cuba’s was a ?betrayed revolution’ (Paterson 269).

As the revolution unfolded day by day, it seemed as if we were not so much worried about Cuba itself, but the fact that everything has a tie in with the Cold War. The Soviets were trying to expand their horizons across the globe and Cuba was another opportunity for the Soviet’s to step in and offer aide, military, and support in return for Cuba’s Communism. “Cuba came to represent the Cold War in the united States’ backyard” (Paterson 270). Some people felt that Kennedy was not all responsible for the trouble with Cuba. A lot of people believed that the majority of the problem from Cuba started with President Eisenhower.

Kennedy’s foreign policy troubles have sometimes been explained as inheritances from Eisenhower that shackled the new president with problems not of his own making. To be sure, Kennedy inherited the Cuban problem from Eisenhower (Paterson 272).

Another event that was a tremendous backlash for the Kennedy administration was the Bay of Pigs. The Bay of Pigs was a covert operation that was organized by the CIA to overthrow Castro. From the very beginning, the Bay of Pigs was leading to be a disaster. The U.S. even tried to lie to the public to keep the awareness of the U.S. bombing of Cuba down. The U.S. staged a pilot to fly a B-26 into Miami to say that he had escaped Cuba and bombed the airfields, in which we did ourselves. We organized this “cover-up” so that it did not seem as if America was meddling. The first real attack from the Bay of Pigs came on April 17, 1961. Kennedy sent in a group of Cuban refugees that had been speciality trained to fight. Theses refugees were sent back to Cuba to hopefully stir an uproar in the other underground refugees that were still in Cuba. As they neared the beaches of Bahia de Cochinos, the Cuban militia was very present. Some of the commandoes never even made it to the beach because of the coral that was in the water. The coral shredded numerous boats before they could even get to the shore line. The small army not only shot down planes but they also sank ships vital to the progression of the invasion. These ships carried communication equipment, ammunition, and supplies for the troops. After this incident was said and done Castro boasted that he was victorious and the American’s did not look so well. “With Castro’s boasting the mercenarios had been foiled, the final toll was grim: 114 of the exile brigade dead and 1,189 captured. A pall settled over the White House” (Paterson 272).

It was very hard for the blame to be put on one person for the Bay of Pigs Failure. The blame was shifted from person to person and then finally came to rest on the CIA when they took full responsibility for it. “Failures in intelligence, operations, decision-making, and judgement doomed the Bay of Pigs undertaking” (Paterson 274).

After the Bay of Pigs passing, other covert operations were put into effect. Such operations included assassination attempts on Castro by the CIA. “The CIA devised new plots to kill Castro. Poisonous cigars, pills, and needles were directed Castro’s way, but to no avail” (Paterson 276). Kennedy had made an assumption that there could be no dealing with Castro. He believed that there was no room for Cuba to be a neighbor, or at least when ruled by Castro, to the United States. Other such plots against Cuba included bribing other countries to sabotage the goods that were be manufactured for Cuba. Through this whole time, the U.S. did not realize the extent that they were causing Cuba to do. By sabotaging the goods and bribing other countries, there was still one country still on their side, the Soviet Union. Cuba retaliated by relying more heavily on the Soviet’s to supply them with their essential needs.

Another such crisis that erupted with great fear was the Missile Crisis. The Cuban Missile Crisis was the most feared threat that had happened against the U.S. under Kennedy. The missile crisis began on October 14, 1961 when a U-2 spy plane took spy photos over Cuba and noticed the construction of missile silos. Now this evidence was the first “hard” proof that they had. There had been rumors of the missile sites being constructed but no evidence to support the theory. The whole origin of the crisis can be based back on the tension between the Soviet’s, America, and Cuba. The Soviet’s gave the Cuban’s missile to back them incase that we did invade Cuba. “The origins of the missile crisis, in other words, derived largely from United States?Cuban tensions” (Paterson 278). In a way the whole ordeal was a double standard. We had just turned over control of the Jupiter Missiles to Turkey that year. The Soviet’s also felt threatened by the missiles being in Turkey, but we would not tolerate any missile near us what so ever.

Then the rambling discussion turned to Khrushchev’s motivation. The Russian leader had been cautious on Berlin, Kennedy said. ?It’s just as if we suddenly began to put a major number or MRBMs in Turkey,’ the President went on. ?Now that’d be goddamn dangerous.” Bundy jumped in: ?Well, we did, Mr. President.’ Not liking the sound of a double standard, Kennedy lamely answered, ?Yeah, but that was five years ago.’ Actually the American Jupiter missiles in Turkey, under a 1959 agreement with Ankara, were put into launch position in mid-1961?during the Kennedy Administration?and not turned over to the Turkish forces until October 22, 1962, the very day Kennedy informed Moscow that it must withdraw its SS-4 or medium-range missiles from Cuba. (Paterson 279).

The Cuban Missile Crisis struck fear into the heart of many U.S. officials. The President came up with an idea to stop the further construction of the missiles. He decided to enforce a naval blockade. The naval blockade stopped all ships coming into Cuba for inspection of the necessary materials required to finish the missile sights. The U.S. had anticipated a possible retaliation of the ships, but to our surprise, the ships simply turned around and headed back to the Soviet Union. Later, the Soviet’s sent a Soviet embassy officer to the U.S. to discuss negotiations of the removal of the missile silos. The basic structure for removal of the missile included that they would remove all missiles, if and only if, we promised not to invade Cuba. “…the Soviet Union would withdraw the missile if the United States would promise not to invade Cuba” (Paterson 281). Later even still, Khrushchev sent a second notice that stated that he would trade the missiles in Cuba for the ones in Turkey. In other words, if we disposed of the ones in Turkey then he would remove the ones in Cuba. Ultimately we did chose to accept these guidelines, and all missiles were removed.

Throughout the course of the Kennedy Administration, there were tremendous turmoil that rocked the whole foundation of the presidency. The Bay of Pigs was a disaster before it was even off the ground. The CIA did not plan out the invasion enough to succeed in a successful victory. The majority of the blame went onto Kennedy’s record as not being the one that had planned it out and not giving the go ahead for the second air raid. It was later proven that no matter what the outcome of the second air raid would have been, it would not have mattered. The CIA also released a document taking the full responsibility and blame for the incident at the Bay of Pigs. The Cuban Missile Crisis not only worried the U.S. but also worried the rest of the world as to how it would turn out. The Soviet’s backed Cuba as an ally and fed them missiles and the supplies to build the missile silos in Cuba. The Soviet’s said they did this as a counter measure incase we did in fact invade Cuba. Between these two major conflicts of the time, it can be said that the two countries were not battling over Cuba in itself, but more or less battling over the belief of Communism.