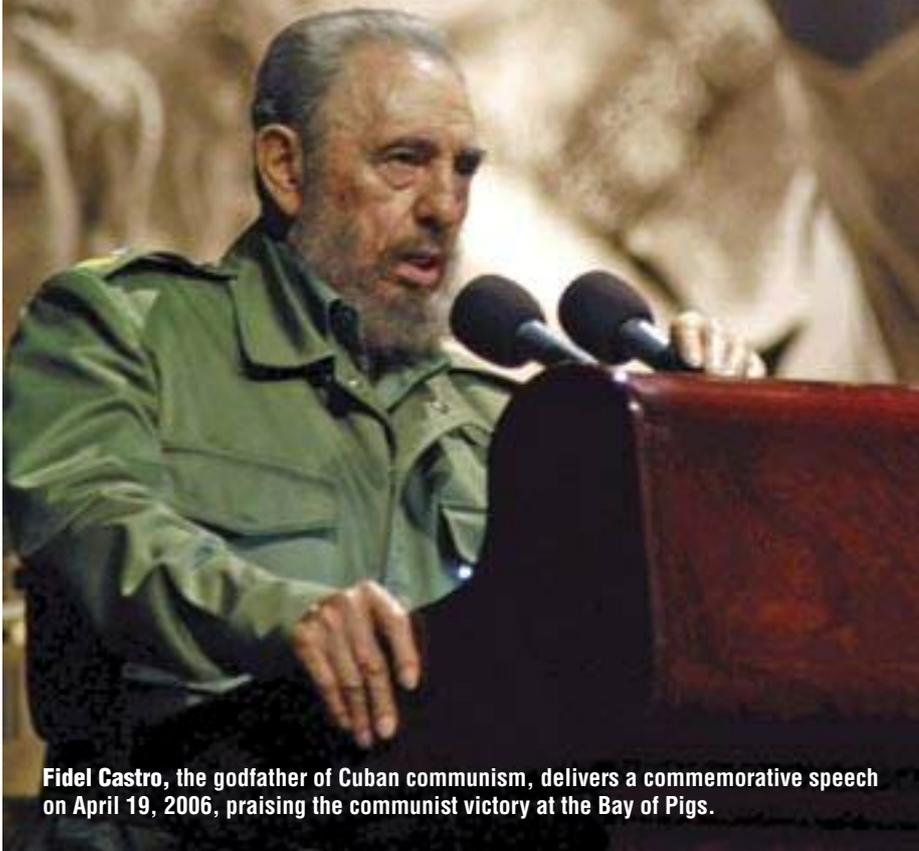


Bay of Pigs Betrayal



Fidel Castro, the godfather of Cuban communism, delivers a commemorative speech on April 19, 2006, praising the communist victory at the Bay of Pigs.

The betrayal of the Cuban people by the CIA, State Department, and staff members of the *New York Times* ranks as one of America's darkest foreign-policy moments.

by Michael E. Telzrow

For three days the men of Brigade 2506 had fought a relentless battle against Cuba's communist forces in an attempt to break Castro's stranglehold on their beloved country. By the third day of nonstop battle, the situation was nearing the end for the Free Cuban expeditionary force. Short of ammunition, and lacking the promised American tactical support, brigade members sensed that the end was near. Though

the outcome was no longer in doubt, they fought on bravely hoping for the promised American military intervention that never came. "I am destroying all my equipment," said the Free Cuban commander in his last radio transmission to American naval vessels standing off the coast. "I have nothing left to fight with. The enemy tanks are already in my position. Farewell my friends."

On April 17, 1961, a military task force made up of 1,400 Cuban patriots had landed on a southern Cuban beach in an attempt to reclaim their country from Fidel Castro's communist regime, and they were decimated. Conventional accounts of the U.S.-planned invasion, and its subsequent failure, go something like this: Fidel Castro's courageous and scrappy Cuban "militia" forces defeated the American-supported "mercenaries" in less than one day, while suffering light casualties. The CIA-led invasion ultimately propelled Fidel Castro into the communist camp and set the stage for the Cuban Missile Crisis.

Castro's Communist Credentials

A closer look, however, reveals that the truth is quite different. By the time Castro landed in Oriente Province in 1956 with a tiny band of revolutionaries, he had already manifested a strong link to communism dating back to the 1948 uprisings in Bogotá, Colombia. In Colombia, the 22-year-old Havana University law-school student actively helped organize the insurrection. The "Bogotazo," as it was known, which involved looting, murder, and the takeover by communists of radio stations and government buildings, revealed Castro's communist affiliation and should have made Castro a pariah on the American political scene. But elements within the U.S. State Department and CIA refused to acknowledge the fact, setting the stage for his eventual triumph in Cuba.

Between 1956 and 1959, when Castro took control of Cuba, the CIA and U.S. State Department not only consciously ignored Castro's communist background, they waged a not-so-covert action to insure that the government of Fulgencio Batista did not receive the support needed to defeat Castro's communist revolutionaries. In close cooperation with *New York Times* reporter Herbert Matthews, the State Department kept up Castro's noncommunist

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appearance. It was a deception that worked amazingly well in the halls of Congress and on the American street.

After an interview with Castro, Matthews described the bearded revolutionary as a “man of ideals” who “has strong ideas of liberty, democracy, social justice and the need to hold elections.” Matthews even went as far as to describe Castro as an “anti-communist.” At the same time, the *New York Times* painted Batista with broad strokes as a right-wing dictator ready to suspend constitutional guarantees at the drop of a hat. The State Department went so far as to require the newly appointed ambassador to Cuba, Earl E.T. Smith, to be briefed by Matthews in 1957.

After spending some time in Cuba, Smith conducted an intensive background check of Fidel Castro. He questioned anti-Batista elements that included members of the clergy, intellectuals, and professional men. These individuals, though not supporters of Batista, were unanimous in their assessment that Castro was a terroristic communist whose ascendance to power

would not be in the best interest of the Cuban people. The idea that the anti-Batista element was unanimously pro-Castro was a lie. Aware of Castro’s communist affiliation, Smith attempted to engage the CIA in an effort to monitor Communist Party strength in Cuba. Although the communists had polled over 120,000 votes the last time they voted as a party, the CIA insisted that card-carrying communists numbered merely 10,000, and that sympathizers numbered no more than 20,000. Several months after assuming his post as Chief of Mission in Havana, Smith recommended to CIA Director Allen Dulles that a CIA operative infiltrate Castro’s top echelon to monitor the extent of communist infiltra-

tion. Smith assumed that this was never done, given the CIA’s seemingly complete lack of knowledge regarding communist infiltration among Castro’s movement.

Despite Smith’s warnings about Castro’s communist alignment, the State Department and the establishment media successfully maintained the illusion that Castro was clean. With the influential *New York Times* firmly in his pocket shaping American policy and opinion, Castro did not need to achieve military victory. He simply had to wait until a demoralized Cuban government gave up. Even as late as 1960, U.S. Secretary of State Christian Herter was still trumpeting the company line when he remarked: “I don’t think anyone could say affirmatively that Cuba is Communist at the present time.”

How was it possible that the State Department and CIA could smother the fact that Castro was a communist? Through some clever maneuvering by William Wieland and Roy Rubottom, both of whom were on the staff of the U.S. Embassy in Bogotá, the true political nature of Castro was suppressed by key elements in each department. Although they knew otherwise, Wieland and Rubottom continued to maintain that Fidel was not a commu-

nist, even as late as 1961 when it had become apparent to even the most idealistic that Castro was not the freedom-loving hero portrayed by the media.

Interventionist “Nonintervention”

Meanwhile, through the concerted efforts of the U.S. State Department and Herbert Matthews of the *New York Times*, Batista’s government was undermined both politically and publicly. While State Department policy regarding nonintervention prevented Ambassador Smith from providing support to the Batista government, the State Department looked the other way while pro-Castro groups operated freely in Miami. These pro-Castro groups worked actively to secure supplies, money, and weaponry for Castro’s rag-tag revolutionaries. Meanwhile Batista came up empty when the U.S., historically Cuba’s closest



Bound for Florida and freedom: Nearly a thousand Cuban relatives of just-released Brigade 2506 prisoners board the *African Pilot* in Havana, Cuba.

ally, refused to ship armored cars purchased by the Cuban government. This action emboldened Castro's forces and demoralized the national government. It can be said that the United States effectively intervened on the side of Castro by working to bring about the fall of Batista.

Castro's terrorist activities continued and included the abduction of 47 Americans, who were freed after a week of captivity. In March 1958, U.S. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles dealt a death blow to the Batista government by refusing to ship 1,950 Garand rifles legally purchased by the Cuban government. It was a mortal blow from which Batista failed to recover. Dulles claimed that he took this action in the interest of "nonintervention," but here again the United States was essentially providing aid to Castro's forces by subverting the efforts of the national government.

Still all was not lost. A Cuban anti-communist candidate for president, and former prime minister, Dr. Andres Rivero Agüero, was elected in November 1958 (after Batista was prohibited from running for reelection), but he too, like Batista, was ultimately undermined by the U.S. State Department under the same pretense of "nonintervention." Agüero handily defeated his opponent, former president Ramon Grau St. Martin, but Agüero faced the same pressures that Batista faced: Castro's growing confidence that the United States would not intervene on behalf of the national government, and the reluctance of the State Department to reveal the true nature of the situation, coupled with the United States' intrusive "nonintervention" policy that promised to hinder the national government. This reality painted a bleak picture for the survival of the national government. With Castro's takeover imminent, Agüero was forced to leave the island in January 1959 without ever having taken office.

The Batista government eventually collapsed. On January 1, 1959, Batista fled Cuba for the Dominican Republic with Agüero in tow, and Castro assumed control of the government. U.S. property was confiscated; free elections were suspend-



AP
Castro's Soviet-supplied revolutionaries gather at Cuba's Giron Beach, the site of their victory over Brigade 2506.

ed; and private business was socialized. Bloody purges followed and Cuban patriots went before the firing squads crying, "Long live Christ the King! Down with communism!"

Left High and Dry

In a country in which the population was staunchly anti-communist, Castro had managed with just a few ragtag insurgents to achieve complete control. But it was not the story of glorious struggle between valiant revolutionaries and a U.S.-backed right-wing dictator that Marxists and their dewy-eyed Hollywood comrades insist it was. Absent the complicit help of the *New York Times*, and the U.S. State Department and CIA, Castro's barefooted mob would never have achieved success and the destruction of free institutions in a country that was solidly anti-communist.

Speaking before the U.S. Senate in 1960, Ambassador Earl E.T. Smith opined: "Without the U.S., Castro would not be in power today." In a letter published in a September 1979 edition of the *New York Times*, the ambassador reiterated his belief that U.S. actions to depose Batista amounted to intervention on the part of Castro's communist cause:

The final coup in favor of Castro came on Dec. 17, 1958. On that date, in accordance with my instructions from

the State Department, I personally conveyed to President Batista that the Department of State would view with skepticism any plan on his part, or any intention on his part, to remain in Cuba indefinitely. I had dealt him a mortal blow. He said in substance: "You have intervened in behalf of the Castros, but I know it is not your doing and that you are only following out your instructions." Fourteen days later, on Jan. 1, 1959, the Government of Cuba fell.

But the betrayal of the Cubans to the communists was not complete. In the summer of 1960, Cuba began to receive Soviet arms. Now the cat was out of the bag for everyone to see, except perhaps Castro's enablers in the media and his assistants in the U.S. State Department. Unease among the Eisenhower administration led to the formulation of a plan to back an exile effort to oust Castro.

Eisenhower's plan was modified by the incoming Kennedy administration. Although the original plan did not call for direct U.S. military involvement, the Cuban forces were led to believe that U.S. forces would provide assistance to prevent defeat. Kennedy, however, was dead set against using official forces of the U.S. military. There would be no visible signs of assistance from U.S. armed forces for

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the land-based phase of the invasion.

The administration did promise to provide an "air umbrella" in order to keep Castro's air force out of the action. But the promised air cover never materialized for the 1,400 Cuban exiles that landed at the Zapata swamp near Bahia de Cochinos — the Bay of Pigs, in the early hours of April 17, 1961.

Three air strikes (piloted by Cubans in obsolete B-26s) intended to knock out Castro's planes had been promised, but only one ineffective strike took place. President Kennedy, fearing international condemnation, had cancelled the others. Only eight sorties of a planned 48 were completed. Only a handful of Castro's planes were destroyed.

As the battle raged between the 1,500-

man Brigade 2506 and Castro's 50,000-plus Soviet-armed troops, U.S. Chief of Naval Operations Arleigh Burke could see that things were not going well for the outnumbered invasion force. The CNO requested U.S. naval support for the beleaguered Cuban patriots, but was refused by Kennedy who astonishingly said that he did not want the

United States to become involved. A frustrated Burke replied: "We are involved, sir. We trained and armed these Cubans. We helped land them on the beaches. Mr. President, we can't let those boys be slaughtered there!"

Also, anticipated anti-communist uprisings throughout Cuba never materialized, primarily because the underground was never alerted to the operation location. CIA radio broadcasts intended to alert over 100 underground operations were never transmitted. Instead, according to the St. Louis *Post-Dispatch*, a series of misleading and conflicting reports were broadcast. By the time it was apparent that the Bay of Pigs was the assault site, it was too late to render assistance.

Despite being deserted, Brigade 2506

fought on bravely for nearly three days. Grayston Lynch, the CIA operative who commanded the invasion task force, later wrote: "They fought like Tigers. But their fight was doomed before the first man hit the beach." They inflicted over 2,000 casualties on Castro's overwhelming forces. The little band of doctors, lawyers, common laborers, and university students, some as young as 16 years old, acquitted themselves well but were doomed to fail before the battle even started.

As the situation became progressively worse, it became apparent to the small invasion force that they would not be receiving U.S. assistance. Frenzied calls for help from the pinned-down forces went unanswered. Still, they fought on. "There is no retreat!" cried Brigadista Erneido Oliva, one of the outnumbered freedom fighters, as the communist counterassault intensified. But ultimately their courage and dedication in the face of overwhelming forces and betrayal were not enough to escape the inevitable.

At the end, 114 members of Brigade 2506 lay dead, and 1,189 were captured and incarcerated by the communists for almost two years. A ransom of \$53 million in medical supplies and baby food was paid for the release of these prisoners.

This humiliating chapter in U.S. history came to a close, but the repercussions of the betrayal had far-reaching effects. An emboldened Soviet Union, sensing a weak resolve on the part of the United States to defend its interests in the Western Hemisphere, began a course of action that would strengthen the communist presence in Latin America. That presence remains as strong as ever, despite claims to the contrary.

Today's beneficiaries of the betrayal of the Cuban people and the action at the Bay of Pigs, are none other than Marxist Presidents Hugo Chavez of Venezuela and Evo Morales of Bolivia. America's willingness to encourage Castro's rise to power at a critical time in history will continue to profoundly affect U.S. security in the foreseeable future. ■



A B-26 bomber lays wrecked and ruined at Giron, Cuba. This obsolete WWII bomber, and others like it, formed the vanguard of the patriot air assault leading up to the infantry landing at the Bay of Pigs.