

of the central government, and with direct American aid, including military advisers, he recruited white mercenaries. The rebels responded by terrorizing white foreigners. In November 1964 a small force of Belgian paratroopers dropped from U.S. aircraft into the Congo to rescue Belgian and American citizens. Although a serious communist threat never emerged in the Congo, the Kennedy administration, reading Cold War lessons, had thrust America into the shaky politics of Africa. American ambassador to Guinea William Attwood noted that leading African nationalists felt humiliated by the American and foreign intervention in the Congo because "the white man with a gun, the old plunderer who had enslaved his ancestors, was back again, doing what he pleased, when he pleased, where he pleased. And there wasn't a damn thing Africa could do about it, except yell rape."⁹² Attwood identified the chief source of resistance to American nation building—nationalism itself.

T A COMPLETE BREAK: FIDEL CASTRO AND THE CUBAN REVOLUTION

Africa counted as a sideshow compared to Latin America, formerly a secure U.S. sphere of influence. Cuba claimed center stage. On July 26, 1953, a young lawyer and Cuban nationalist, Fidel Castro, attempted to overthrow the American-backed regime of Fulgencio Batista. Imprisoned and later released, Castro fled to Mexico. In late 1956, under the banner of the 26th of July movement, he returned to Cuba. Almost captured, he escaped into the mountains, where for three years he augmented his guerrilla forces, gained popular support, and fought Batista's American-supplied army. In January 1959, despite CIA plots to deny him power, the bearded rebel marched into Havana and initiated social and economic programs designed to reduce extensive U.S. interests that had developed since 1898 and had come to dominate Cuba's sugar, mining, and utilities industries.

Determined to reduce the North American cultural influence that they believed had undermined Cuba's national identity, the Castroites crippled the gangster-run gambling casinos and ousted from government the *batistianos* who had profited from close contact with U.S. investors. Calling the new Cuban leaders "children" who needed a fatherly hand, U.S. officials nonetheless saw that Castro intended "a complete break" with the past and an end to U.S. hegemony in the Caribbean.⁹³ Declaring the Platt Amendment mentality dead, Castro remarked that "we no longer live in times when one had to worry when the American Ambassador visited the [Cuban] Prime Minister."⁹⁴ Indeed, "what happened in Guatemala will not happen here."⁹⁵ When Castro visited Washington in April 1959, Eisenhower refused to meet with him and headed south to play golf instead. Fearing that a successful Cuban revolution would cause the United States to "get kicked around in the hemisphere," but finding no evidence that Castro was a communist, Washington soon applied a series of tests: Cuba must respect North

American-owned property, continue alignment with the United States on international questions, and adhere to a democratic politics that permitted pro-U.S. "moderates" to sustain ties.⁹⁶ Cuba failed to satisfy these U.S. requirements. Land reform struck at U.S. interests, the execution of Batista supporters reduced U.S. influence, and the moderates faltered in their competition with Castroite radicals. Castro postponed elections, and he defiantly evicted the U.S. military missions that had supported Batista. In vehement anti-Yankee orations, Castro also called for revolutions throughout Latin America. Washington warned against his "Nasser-like ambition" and his apparent turn toward neutrality in the Cold War.⁹⁷ In late 1959 the CIA began to work with Castro's rivals to "check" or "replace" the revolutionary regime.⁹⁸ When President Eisenhower made a goodwill tour to Latin America in February 1960, he spotted a sign in Rio de Janeiro: "We like Ike. We like Fidel too."⁹⁹ In March 1960, Eisenhower ordered the CIA to train Cuban exiles for an invasion of their homeland—this shortly after Cuba signed a trade treaty with the Soviet Union.

In mid-1960, as the revolutionary government nationalized foreign properties, the United States suspended imports of Cuban sugar and then forbade U.S. exports to the island in an effort to bring down the Castro government. These strong measures only pushed Cuba toward a new economic lifeline—the Soviet Union. As Ambassador Philip Bonsal explained, "Russia came to Castro's rescue only after the United States had taken steps to overthrow him."¹⁰⁰ Now embracing the thesis that Castro had moved from neutralism to communism, Washington broke diplomatic relations with Cuba in early January 1961.

Cuba had hardly become a Soviet puppet or a threat to U.S. security by 1961. "The Castro regime is a thorn in the flesh," Senator J. William Fulbright argued, "but it is not a dagger in the heart."¹⁰¹ Still, ignoring the U.S. contribution to Castro's anti-Americanism, President Kennedy defined Cuba as a test of will, a new Cold War battleground, and he decided to remove the Cuban irritation. The CIA assured him that it could deliver another Guatemala, just like 1954—or even better. The CIA predicted that the Cuban people would rise up against Castro and a CIA-hired assassin's bullet would kill him. The CIA pinpointed Bahía de Cochinos (Bay of Pigs) as the invasion site and organized a Cuban Revolutionary Council to take office. Uneasy with the plan, Kennedy nonetheless approved it, although he prohibited direct U.S. military participation. The CIA did not protest this prohibition because "we felt that when the chips were down," Allen Dulles later wrote, "any action required for success would have been authorized [by the president] rather than permit the enterprise to fail."¹⁰² Kennedy had made Cuba an issue in the 1960 campaign and eagerly sought to oust Castro, and CIA assurances seemed incontrovertible. The administration also worried that the trained exiles would embarrass him politically if he scotched the expedition—the "disposal" problem.¹⁰³ The Kennedy administration never tried to talk with the Castro government, and it never consulted Congress on launching this war against Cuba.

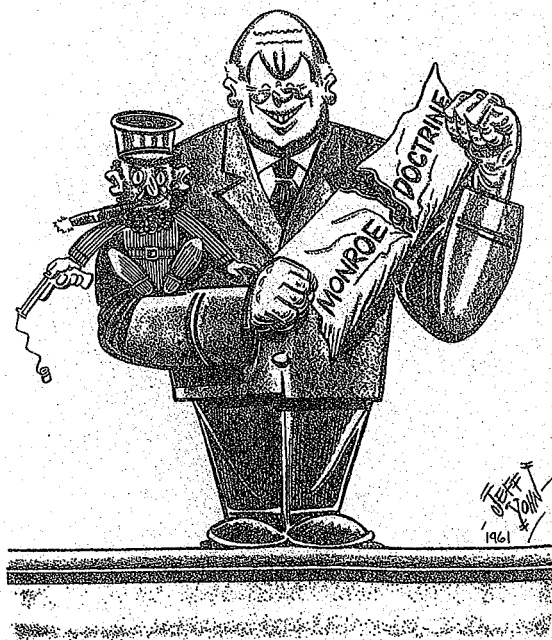
In mid-April 1961, 1,453 CIA-trained commandos departed from Nicaragua for Cuba (see map, page 492). They met early resistance from Castro's militia, no sympathetic insurrection occurred, and within two days the invasion had become a fiasco. One hundred and fourteen commandos died, and more than 1,100 were

captured. Some one hundred and fifty Cuban defenders were killed. Four American pilots also died in the operation. Like his brother John, Attorney General Robert Kennedy found defeat difficult to accept: "We just could not sit and take it"; Moscow might think Americans "paper tigers." Walt Rostow, sensitive to Kennedy machismo, reassured him that "we would have ample opportunity to prove we were not paper tigers in Berlin, Southeast Asia, and elsewhere."¹⁰⁴ After the disaster, President Kennedy, who had vetoed a desperate CIA request for U.S. air attacks during the last hours of the failing invasion, blamed the CIA and Joint Chiefs of Staff for faulty intelligence and sloppy execution. He had no qualms about overthrowing a sovereign government, only the methods for doing it.

Little sobered by the Bay of Pigs setback, Kennedy vowed a "relentless struggle in every corner of the globe" with communism.¹⁰⁵ During the next year, the United States imposed a tighter economic blockade on Cuba, evicted the island nation from the Organization of American States, refused to recognize Castro, directed U.S. Information Agency propaganda at the Havana regime, and continued assassination plots on Castro's life. Under Operation Mongoose, CIA agents cooperated with anti-Castro exiles to stage hit-and-run sabotage raids against oil facilities and other island targets. This multitrack campaign did not knock Castro from his perch. What next? "If I had been in Moscow or Havana at that time," Secretary of Defense McNamara later remarked, "I would have believed the Americans were preparing for an invasion."¹⁰⁶

"Now It's Official." Jeff Yohn's anti-Castro, anti-Soviet cartoon appeared in the *San Bernardino Sun-Telegram* (California) newspaper in 1961. In July 1960, when the Soviet Union agreed to purchase Cuban sugar after the Eisenhower administration ended sugar imports from the island, Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev declared the Monroe Doctrine dead and pledged military aid to Cuba—"if it became necessary." During the April 1961 Bay of Pigs crisis, Khrushchev told President Kennedy that the Soviets would give "to the Cuban government all the necessary assistance to repel aggression." In 1962 such aid included nuclear-tipped SS-4 missiles, setting off yet another crisis. (Library of Congress)

NOW IT'S OFFICIAL!



The Sun-Telegram, San Bernardino, Ca.

