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B.A. Thesis Assessment

Zátoka svini-příčiny, příprava, vylodění a důsledky operace

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Jan (Honza) Mikulík has written an interesting B.A. dissertation on the infamous Bay of Pigs operation of 1961. Honza is an avid follower of Latin American affairs and he is special in that he is older than most B.A. students and definitely more responsible. The work is well-conceived and its structure is impressive. I especially like the referencing and the utilization of archival sources, something not very common in B.A. dissertations nowadays. Insofar as the structure of the treatise is concerned, it contains an introduction (Chapter 1), four main chapters (Chapters 2-5), and a conclusion (Chapter 7).

In the introduction, Honza clearly spells out the purpose of the dissertation and evaluates the available sources on the Bay of Pigs operation. Honza not only deals with the actual execution of the operation, but also the planning and historical background. He is clear and succinct, which is always better than writers who “beat around the bush” largely because they have little to say in their work.

The first main chapter (Chapter 2) briefly recapitulates the theories surrounding the Bay of Pigs operation and Honza also provides some historical background by analyzing Cuban-American relations from independence up until 1961. He also discusses Fidel Castro and the genesis of the revolutionary 26th of July Movement and its later divisions (and ultimate abolition) after the revolution of 1959, which brought Castro to power. This chapter ends with the fateful Havana Declaration of September 1960, in which Castro announced his determination to fight “any form of imperialism and capitalism.” The wholesale nationalization of Cuban industrial enterprises, banks, and hotels ensued shortly thereafter and

this set the stage for confrontation with the United States. I have no problem with what Honza has produced here and his powers of analysis are praiseworthy.

Chapter 3 provides a description of the evolution of plans to topple Fidel Castro's regime. Honza discusses previous operations and how they influenced the overall planning. It is important to keep in mind that the operation was conceived in the final period of Eisenhower's presidency and its nature would change over the course of the crucial election year of 1960. I feel that Honza more than adequately portrays the situation.

Chapter 4 explains how a change of plan crystallized in the summer months of 1960. After Kennedy's narrow victory in the 1960 presidential election, Kennedy was familiarized with the plan and came to understand that its future success or failure would depend on the actions of his virgin presidential administration. Indeed, this would be the case as the next chapter so eloquently informs us.

Chapter 5 deals with the actual execution of the operation in 1961 and its eventual failure. President Kennedy accepted responsibility. The United States has had to put up with Communist tyranny in Cuba and Castro's meddling in the affairs of other countries in the region ever since. The poor planning and execution of the Bay of Pigs operation emboldened Castro further and the world came closer than ever before to nuclear annihilation in 1962 during the so-called Cuban Missile Crisis.

In the conclusion (Chapter 6), Honza rightly asserts that the strategy on which the Bay of Pigs operation was based was flawed from the outset and the failure of the Kennedy Administration to provide air support doomed the operation. I am also glad that Honza states that Fidel Castro became a partner of the Soviet Bloc willingly and was not forced to do so by external circumstances. He points to the early abandonment of the principles of the 26th of July Movement whose fighters risked (and often lost) their lives only to be betrayed by el lider maximo after the revolution.

Honza Mikulík has produced a fine piece of work. There are some minor errors insofar as spelling and numbering of chapters are concerned, but I still think he deserves to be rewarded with an **EXCELLENT** mark for his efforts. I also understand that Honza wishes to pursue his M.A. in the Department of American Studies. It will be an honor to teach him if he is admitted to our department.

