

Jan Mikulík

M.A. Thesis Evaluation

2010

Příliš horký Karibik: CIA a „problém Kuba“ 1959-1962

Jan (Jenda) Mikulík has spent his time at our institute preparing his study of the CIA's involvement in Cuba from the Cuban Revolution until the Cuban Missile Crisis. Jenda's favorite event of this period is the failed Bay of Pigs invasion (often referred to in Spanish as Playa Giron). From the time of his B.A. studies, I had the pleasure to listen to Jenda's detailed descriptions of the CIA's involvement in Cuba and about the horrors of Che Guevara and Fidel and Raul Castro. I supervised Jenda's B.A. dissertation and I have the honor of presiding over this M.A. thesis. In addition, I hope to serve as Jenda's PhD. Supervisor starting in autumn 2010.

The M.A. work itself is divided into an introduction, eight main chapters, and a conclusion. In line with Jenda's background as a musician in the Czech military, his writing is short, sweet, and definitely to the point.

The introduction is brief, yet informative. He begins with the quote "Imperialists, we are absolutely unafraid of you." As it became clear that Fidel Castro's regime was hostile to the United States, Jenda points out two alternatives for action by the outgoing Eisenhower administration. Either Eisenhower could embark on a direct military occupation or he could employ covert methods to replace the revolutionary regime with one more friendly to the United States. Eisenhower opted for the latter option, which was executed by the Kennedy administration and failed. Jenda mentions the various theories about who was to blame and he states unequivocally that the CIA did not act alone, but

rather carried out official administration instructions, which proved inadequate. In general, the introduction is formulated well.

Chapter 1 represents an overview of the sources consulted by Jenda. Separate sections discuss the various primary, secondary, and electronic sources utilized. Insofar as the sections on primary and secondary sources are concerned, Jenda explains quite well the quality of the archival collections and other works and why he finds them useful.

Chapter 2 discusses U.S.-Cuban relations after the revolution. Jenda includes some background prior to the revolution. An emphasis is then placed on Castro's increasing anti-U.S. rhetoric after what seemed to be a brief period of his reaching out to the United States. I am particularly impressed by Jenda's meticulous examination of documents, which clearly indicate that Castro was aware of (and actually welcomed) increasing Communist influence within the revolutionary government. We now know that the Czechoslovak politburo was very pleased with this state of affairs. Communists were becoming ever more influential and even Che Guevara, the Argentine adventurer (a crucial player in both the winning and the later excesses of the revolution), was made the head of the Cuban Central Bank. Isn't it strange that somebody with no economics background could even aspire to such a post? Well, I might add, Guevara's various government appointments did not last and he would revert to what he knew best, that is, killing people in lands far away from his own. The chapter then goes on to explain how ousting Castro's regime through a covert operation became a central tenet of American policy in the final months of the Eisenhower administration.

Chapter 3 examines the notion of CIA covert operations in general. An excellent analysis of the reasoning behind covert operations is provided and the later

political outcry at the substance of the operations themselves is also mentioned. The chapter also dispels the popular myth of Eisenhower as a president on the golf course. On the contrary, he was very concerned about Communist infiltration in the Third World and the successful covert operation in 1954 against Guatemalan president, Jacobo Arbenz, is proof of that.

Chapter 4 illustrates the ties between the CIA and Cuban exiles in the United States. Jenda portrays the concept of the betrayed revolution, the formation of an exile political representation in the United States, propaganda radio broadcasts, and how the CIA realized that Castro and his comrades were too organized for these efforts to have any practical impact.

Chapter 5 maps out the creation of armed resistance to Castro's regime. Jenda analyzes the training and its lack of success. Basically, Castro's preparedness was underestimated by the CIA and fellow socialist countries, especially Czechoslovakia, did their bit to prepare Castro's men for the fight against external enemies. It is also important that Castro had a special group of fighters dedicated to fighting and these were apart from the regular Cuban Army.

Chapter 6 is properly entitled "From Trinidad to the Bay of Pigs." Here, Jenda discusses the concrete development of plans for the invasion and he explains why the fateful decision was finally made to use the Bay of Pigs as the site of the invasion. In the end, the entire operation was a fiasco and the United States decided against providing proper support, thereby dooming the invasion. Though there was enough blame to go around, Jenda argues that Kennedy was the main culprit, not the CIA and its covert operations chief, Richard Bissell (who also was not blameless by any means).

Chapter 7 deals with Operation Mongoose, which the Kennedy administration put into place after the failed Bay of Pigs invasion. The goal was a multifaceted approach including propaganda, sabotage, and an eventual uprising in Cuba that would remove Castro. Directly involved in this scheme were Robert Kennedy and General Gordon Lansdale (among others) and the CIA was expected to perform “dirty work” for which it was unfit. The operation was put on hold anyway thanks to the installation of Soviet nuclear missiles in Cuba, which American intelligence discovered later rather than sooner.

Chapter 8 analyzes the Cuban Missile Crisis, American reactions, and the outcome. Basically, the American blockade resulted in Khrushchev’s decision to remove the missiles and the Americans agreed to promise that they would not meddle in Cuba’s internal affairs. This doomed Operation Mongoose forever.

In the conclusion, Jenda claims that the main weakness in CIA operations against Castro was an underestimation of Castro and the Cuban regime. Also, the unwillingness to involve American troops did not help matters. The initial exile invasion (planned by Eisenhower and executed by Kennedy) was also hampered by lack of sufficient intelligence. Jenda’s main conclusion is that Kennedy could have cancelled the planned invasion before its execution at the Bay of Pigs and spared the United States the embarrassment of failure. As for Operation Mongoose, this was Kennedy’s pet project to get rid of Castro. Even without the Cuban Missile Crisis, the Operation Mongoose was probably destined to fail because of misconceptions and basic planning flaws.

Jenda has produced a fine piece of work. Apart from some minor grammatical errors and poor spacing in parts of the treatise, I feel that it deserves an **excellent** mark.

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