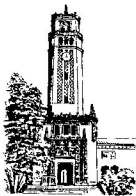


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- ¹ Lloyd Best and Kari Polanyi Levitt, *Essays in the Theory of Plantation Economy*. Mona: UWI Press, 2009.
- ² Victor Bulmer-Thomas, *The Economic History of the Caribbean since the Napoleonic Wars*. Cambridge, 2012.

Tomás Diez Acosta. 2012 (First published 2002). *October 1962: The Missile Crisis As Seen From Cuba*. New York; London: Pathfinder. 333 pp. ISBN: 978-0-87348-956-0.

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The Cuban Missile Crisis is one of the most debated historical problems of our recent past. Developments in the last two decades, particularly the collapse of the Soviet Union and the substantial declassification of relevant documents by the US government, have furnished scholars with ample new material to expand and revise the rich historiography. Memoirs, especially those of former Soviet officials, have also proliferated, animating the debate. The new century has opened the way to a fresh approach that eschews ideological wrangling in favor of dialogue and collaboration among scholars of the former rivals. Nevertheless, the leading role of the superpowers remains a defining feature of this history's narrative, with the Cuban experience playing a subsidiary role in the momentous clash of titans.¹

Tomás Diez Acosta's *October 1962: The Missile Crisis As Seen From Cuba* stands out as a determined effort to incorporate the Cuban perspective on events prior to, during, and after the actual incident. The book's balanced selection of sources integrates data from official records of the three main protagonists in a step-by-step account that also features vignettes of each side's apparent take on the event and its aftermath. This encompassing approach yields a panoramic outlook, allowing the reader a glance at the sort of interaction that defined the crisis. Nonetheless, unlike other exemplars of the historiography, Diez Acosta's volume accentuates Cuba's participation in events, while underscoring the pathos of an island caught in the middle of an imperialist tug-of-war

between the two superpowers.

Two very significant and original features stand out in the book: its incorporation of Cuban archival material to the analysis, and its evaluation of the crisis's impact for Cuba in real context. The work's access to documentation from Cuban military archives contributes a unique vantage point, especially when assessing Cuba's response in concrete terms (Chapters 2, 7 and 8). The study emphasizes, for example, the country's administrative and military structural reorganization in the course of the Bay of Pigs assault, including the transformation of the Revolutionary Armed Forces (FAR) into a regular, multi-leveled fighting force (Chapter 2). In addition, as the author points out, "government management advanced in close interconnection with military actions (p. 72)," establishing social organizations, efficient support networks, and policies that became paramount to the regime's survival in the long run. In general, Diez Acosta seems to suggest that the Bay of Pigs assault and the missile standoff signified an ultimately beneficial, rite of passage for the Cuban revolution, contributing to the system's consolidation and endurance.

The book's approach to the events seems to aim at defining the standoff as yet another, albeit potentially disastrous, imperialist clash of wills. For Diez Acosta, the United States "was trying to use any means to justify its future intervention in Cuba..." and "starve the Cuban Revolution into submission" (p. 55). In turn—at least according to the former Soviet high officials interviewed—plans and implementation of "Operation Anadyr," Khrushchev's pet project for Cuba, were organized and coordinated in Moscow without consulting the Cuban leadership (Chapters 4 and 5). According to the author's interpretation, these two sets of isolated circumstances finally merged into a perfect formula for imperialist confrontation: prior to the October 1962, the US government had already decided on a "total blockade" as the first stage of an invasion scenario (Chapters 1 and 3), and the Soviets' insistence in keeping the missile operations a secret provided the perfect pretext to activate the plan (Chapters 5 and 6).

The subliminal "we say/ you say" play on developments, is another of the work's inventive features. While recent Soviet sources stress the "emotional" character of the Cuban leadership,² Diez Acosta in turn underscores the Soviets' mishandling of the situation, and Khrushchev's conniving manipulation of the Cuban missile project (Chapter 4). However, although some of the evidence seems valid and to the point, it is difficult not to feel somewhat overwhelmed by the *novela*-like quality of the exposé on the Soviet "betrayal," mostly corroborated by little else than Castro's bombast (Chapter 8).

A few other instances further suggest vestiges of the Cold War approach to this historiography. For example, several chapters rely

heavily on interviews and the anecdotal commentaries of former Soviet officials (Chapters 4, 5 and 7). While these sources undoubtedly contribute telling details, without archival corroboration we must depend on the interviewees' ability to recall events from five decades ago, and their willingness to offer accurate reports rather than mythic constructions of their participation in events. Similarly, Diez Acosta's meticulous account of the Soviets' military buildup in Cuba, including his assertion that the US intelligence services had dangerously miscalculated the Soviet nuclear capability in the island (pp. 123-124), lacks citation of precise sources. Thus, the reader is left to speculate whether his assertions are based on testimony or genuine archival material.

Although the author strives to remain objective throughout his discussion, the ideological underpinnings in his discourse seem also unavoidable at times. His recurrent reference to "the people of Cuba" seems troubling (i.e.: pp. 25, 27, 61, 74, 75), considering that the only Cuban voices we hear throughout the account are those of Fidel Castro and Che Guevara. In some instances, the insertion of elements with specific metaphoric content to construct a subliminal, ideological vision becomes quite evident. For example, the narrative on CIA plots in the island incorporates the "coward/courageous" binary to identify the right sort of Cuban, a stereotype reminiscent of the macho-oriented, homophobic formula that also colored Cuban political discourse at the time.³ According to the author, the plan to storm a naval base had failed because the head of the Cuban mercenary group "did not dare to land" (p. 41). Another assault foundered when one of the leaders, "frightened" by the arrest of another conspirator, "fled the country abandoning to their fate the men...[who also] lost their nerve when they learned their chief had fled..." (p. 47).

As is the case with most of the details regarding the CIA's "secret war" in the island prior to the crisis (Chapter 1), Diez Acosta's evidence on the Cuban mercenaries mainly reproduces the allegations published in other Cuban sources. The author is not able to provide solid archival documentation corroborating direct US involvement in the incidents, nor concrete details that could identify those accused in Cuba, as confirmed CIA operatives. This is not meant to invalidate Diez Acosta's credible representation of the tense atmosphere on the island at the time—CIA involvement in sabotage and plots in Cuba has been substantiated by other sources—⁴ but, considering the volumes of declassified records currently available, archival validation of longstanding Cuban claims would have perhaps enhanced the innovative quality of the book, as well as the unquestionable legitimacy of the allegations.

All in all, the book represents a commendable endeavor to articulate Cuba's side of the story within an academically reliable framework,

contributing new data from US and Cuban sources and details extracted from the author's personal interviews of former Soviet officials. Despite uneven sourcing, the work still accomplishes its aim of contributing a novel approach to the episode. In addition, by incorporating Cuba's experience into the picture, Diez Acosta's book may have set into motion another sort of blockade, one that could finally interrupt the former superpowers' intellectual monopoly over the history **and** story of the Missile Crisis. But in order to accomplish this successfully, Cuba and its historiography may also have to evolve into a new era, beyond the Cold War juxtaposition of victims and villains; heroes and rogues.

Notes

- ¹ The list of sources on the subject is too voluminous to include here. Some of the most recent works are: James G. Blight and David A. Welch, *On the Brink: Americans and Soviets Reexamine the Cuban Missile Crisis* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1989); James G. Blight, *The Shattered Crystal Ball: Fear and Learning in the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Savage, MD.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1990); Bruce J. Allyn, James G. Blight, and David A. Welch (eds.), *Back to the Brink: The Moscow Conference on the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Lanham, MD.: University Press of America, 1991), and *Cuba On the Brink: Fidel Castro, the Missile Crisis and the Collapse of Communism* (New York: Pantheon, 1993); Bruce J. Allyn, James G. Blight, and David A. Welch (eds.), "Essence of Revision: Moscow, Havana and the Cuban Missile Crisis," *International Security* 14, no. 3 (1989-1990), pp. 136-172; Michael Dobbs, *One Minute to Midnight: Kennedy, Khrushchev, and Castro on the Brink of Nuclear War* (New York: Knoff, 2008); Svetlana Savranskaya (ed.), *The Soviet Cuban Missile Crisis: Castro, Mikoyan, Kennedy, Khrushchev, and the Missiles of November* (Stanford University Press/Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2012); Alice George, *The Cuban Missile Crisis: The Threshold of Nuclear War* (New York: Routledge, 2013).
- ² Savranskaya (ed.), *The Soviet Cuban Missile Crisis*.
- ³ Ian Lumsden, *Machos, Maricones y Gays: Cuba and Homosexuality* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996); Llovio-Menéndez, José Luis, *Insider: My Life as a Revolutionary in Cuba* (New York: Battam Books, 1986); Lourdes Arguelles and B. Ruby Rich, "Homosexuality, Homophobia, and Revolution: Notes Toward an Understanding of the Cuban Lesbian and Gay Male Experience, Part I," *Signs*, The University of Chicago Press, Vol. 9, No. 4 (Summer, 1984), pp. 683-699.