

Tomas Diez Acosta, October 1962: The 'Missile' Crisis as Seen from Cuba

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Source:

[International Journal of Cuban Studies](#). 4.3-4 (Autumn-Winter 2012): p391.

Document Type:

Book review

Full Text:

Tomas Diez Acosta, October 1962: The 'Missile' Crisis as Seen from Cuba (Pathfinder, 2012) pb 332pp, ISBN: 9780873489560

By the time this review is published, the 50th anniversary of the momentous events described in this book will have passed and hundreds if not thousands of documentaries, articles and conferences will have been broadcast, published and organised to commemorate what was the only time in history that the whole of humanity has contemplated its mortality at the same moment. It is a safe bet that in most of these accounts the blame for bringing the world to the precipice of nuclear war will be at best shared between the two superpowers and more often as not laid squarely at the actions of the USSR. As with the settlement to the crisis itself, there will be little said about the participation of Cuba, an oversight that in fact distorts the history as much as it belittles the centrality of Havana in the course of events, so it is with great joy that we learn that Pathfinder Press have republished in English this excellent history of the crisis by a veteran of the revolution who as a youth participated in the literacy campaign and later joined the armed forces.

Tomas Diez Acosta presents here the full story of the crisis from the Cuban point of view, providing evidence and documentation in appendices that come from the Cuban archives and interviews with key individuals who directly participated in those fateful October weeks so very poetically described by Che Guevara as 'sad and luminous' but here translated as 'brilliant yet sad'. As a revolutionary, Diez Acosta is naturally partisan in his approach, underlining the determination and readiness of the Cuban people to defend their island and making clear the Cuban position that

they did not accept the missiles because they wanted them to defend themselves but because they wanted to help the Soviet Union redress the imbalance of being ringed by US weapons. Here, too, is a description of the entire Soviet plan code-named Operation Anadyr, which was intended to install 42,000 Soviet troops as well as the missiles in Cuba by November 1962.

As for Washington's activities there is no room for doubt in this account of the intention and the planning that was being made to invade Cuba in 1962 in revenge for the defeat that the Cubans had dealt the hegemon at the Bay of Pigs in 1961. Here in detail is a chapter explaining 'Operation Mongoose' a massive destabilisation campaign unleashed by the Kennedys in the aftermath of defeat to prepare the ground for the invasion. (Part of the plan was to assassinate the Cuban leadership using Mafia hit men--a liaison that conspiracy theorists believe led to the Mafia turning their guns on JFK himself just a year later.)

This book makes it clear that the discovery of the missiles in October 1962 caused a rethink of the entire invasion plan and resulted in the great game that ensued. Most commentators concentrate on the role of the two superpowers, but here the emphasis is not on the Cold War confrontation but on the way in which the resolute nature of the Cubans provided the hard rock of reality upon which the two powers had to settle. Cuba was not going to surrender regardless of what either Kennedy or Khrushchev did. Though Washington and Moscow settled the matter without reference to Havana, Havana was adamant throughout on standing firm on the issue of sovereignty--firstly, they had a right to have the weapons because they were a sovereign nation and secondly they were not going to have their sovereignty violated by either superpower--being entirely prepared if necessary to suffer annihilation rather than surrender the principle.

Cuba argued from the off that the Soviets were wrong to have tried to keep the installation of the missiles secret, correctly predicting that the surprise when he found out would put Kennedy in an impossible situation and potentially endanger world peace. Cuba, after the Bay of Pigs, prepared to defend itself from another invasion. So well prepared was Cuba that the Pentagon estimate provided to Kennedy at the height of the crisis

suggested they would lose 18,500 men in the first ten days of an invasion--enough to dissuade him from that course of action.

Indeed, this book's thesis is that Cuba's resolve and preparation is the key to understanding why the Crisis had to end the way it did--because any other decision by Kennedy would have resulted in disaster, if not for the world then for the United States itself.

This is a really valuable document that should to be part of every bibliography on the subject.

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Source Citation (MLA 7th Edition)

Wilkinson, Stephen. "Tomas Diez Acosta, October 1962: The 'Missile' Crisis as Seen from Cuba." *International Journal of Cuban Studies* 4.3-4 (2012): 391+. *Academic OneFile*. Web. 21 Dec. 2012.

Document URL

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Gale Document Number: GALE|A309068994