

BOOK REVIEW

October 1962

The 'Missile' Crisis As Seen From Cuba

TOMÁS DIEZ ACOSTA

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The events of October 1962 were without doubt some of the most dramatic to occur during the Cold War. The Cuban Missile Crisis or Caribbean Crisis, as it is known in the United States and Russia respectively, has received a great deal of scholarly attention during the last 40 years but the October Crisis, as Cubans call these events, has not. In this book, Tomas Diez Acosta, a political instructor in Military Unit 2562 in the west of Cuba during the crisis and, since 1987, a researcher at the Institute of Cuban History, makes an invaluable contribution to the study of the Cuban perception of this event.

Acosta provides an enormous amount of detail on the difficult situation that Cuba faced in the early 1960s, regarding its relationship with the United States. He gives an excellent detailed account of the decisions taken in Washington that formed U.S. policy towards Cuba and the fears that these evoked in Havana. In a similar vein, the author also details in great depth the reasons behind the decision to station nuclear missiles on Cuba and the Soviet attempts to do this covertly. In this respect Acosta gives an excellent description of the conditions that Soviet military personnel had to endure on their trip to Cuba and the worries of being detected by either U.K. or West German intelligence while on route to the Caribbean. Significantly, Acosta also embraces the much debated point of the exact number and type of missiles that were stationed on Cuba and whether these were under the control of Moscow or the head of the Soviet Troop Force on Cuba, General Pliyev.

Acosta also states that the Cuban government were unhappy with Moscow's decision to try and accomplish this covertly, that the launch sites were exact copies of ones in the Soviet Union and in addition had not been sufficiently well camouflaged to prevent easy detection by U.S. military over-flights. Moreover, he writes that Castro believes this could have easily been achieved. At the end of the book, a number of extremely useful and insightful documents (including the draft agreement between Moscow and Havana in August 1962 over the weapons to be sent to Cuba, and Castro's address to the Cuban nation on 23 October) are printed.

However, it is my belief that the author could detail the Soviet-Cuban link much more thoroughly. On the Cuban decision to allow the weapons to be stationed on the island he merely states that this resulted from "international fraternalism." This is undoubtedly correct but downplays the role of defending the Cuban Revolution. He fails to mention Castro's pronouncement of the revolution as socialist in April 1961, or himself Marxist-Leninist in December 1961, in an attempt to try and achieve increased security guarantees from Moscow, as the Cuban regime believed that Washington was preparing further military action against the island. In addition, the author also does not state that the Soviet government certainly believed this to be the case as Mikoyan proclaimed in November 1962, during his trip to Cuba, that the

'Monroe Doctrine is dead.' This was in no small part an attempt to placate the Cuban government in the aftermath of the agreement between Moscow and Washington but by failing to address these issues more thoroughly Acosta, I believe, misses an excellent opportunity to more thoroughly analyse the October Crisis from the Cuban perspective.

In relation to this, I also believe that Castro's January 1968 'secret speech' to the Central Committee of the Cuban Communist Party is an important omission from the printed documents as in it he addressed the effect of the missile crisis on Soviet-Cuban relations. This is more surprising since it was often thought that Cuban participants at various conferences, which Acosta attended, held on the crisis since the end of the Cold War had read this in preparation for these conferences. This omission could, in part, be due to the fact that this work was written inside Cuba and although I feel that the Soviet-Cuban link should have been addressed in more detail, it does not detract from this important contribution to the literature on the Cuban Missile Crisis. Anyone with an interest in the events in the Caribbean in October 1962 will find this book beneficial and insightful.