



IMPACT OF THE AMERICAN ATTACK ON CUBA AT THE BAY OF PIGS ON THE UNITED STATES AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Sheriff Ghali Ibrahim, Farouk Ibrahim Bibi-Farouk and Ozor Chinelo

Department of Political Science and International Relations, University of Abuja, Abuja-Nigeria

ABSTRACT: *In the relations among nation-states in the international system are times of cordiality and enmity. These are not in themselves attempts to curry the favour of others in the system or to have enemies; everything is about national interest. As nation-states pursue national interest and power; they are bound to clash with others in the international system. Consequently, this study examined the American attack on Cuba at the Bay of Pigs. It focused on what happened and its aftermaths. The study employed secondary sources of data collection. The findings of the study revealed that the attack of Cuba by the United States (US) at the Bay of Pigs was a national disaster to the US. It dented the international image of the US but made the regime of Fidel Castro popular as Castro stood against the US to defend Cuba's national interest. It was therefore, recommended that political leaders, all over the world, should make national interest the priority. This should be the highest priority as they relate with other nation-states in the international system.*

KEYWORDS: American, Attack, Cuba, Bay of Pigs, National Interest, International Relations

INTRODUCTION

Cuba is ninety miles away from South-eastern strip of the United States (US). Though independent since 1902, Cuba was still under the influence of the US. The American military maintained a naval base at Guantanamo Bay and American capital. The US has dominated the Cuban economy, especially the sugar and tobacco industries, under the accommodating Cuban leadership of Fulgencio Batista, who was both anti-communist and who favoured keeping Cuban markets open to American corporations (Mooney, 2006). It was a terrifying manifestation of Cold War struggle for economic, political and military dominance that threatened to spin out of control in the Mid-April of 1961. The Cold War struggle led to some 1,500 heavily armed men mounted a night-time seaborne invasion of Cuba, their landing point on the southern coast being two beaches close to the Bay of Pigs (Bahí'ade Cochinos), ninety miles from Havana. The heavily armed men were called 'Brigade 2506.' It consisted mainly of refugees from the regime headed by Fidel Castro, whose own forces had overthrown the authoritarian and pro-American *caudillo* (military strongman) Fulgencio Batista twenty-seven months previously (Dunne, 2011).

It is noteworthy to state that the Brigade had two politico-military objectives. It wanted to oust Castro and the *Fidelistas* while forming a provisional government to appeal for recognition and military aid from the US. Within three days the invaders had been defeated, losing over a hundred men killed with almost all the rest being captured by forces



commanded by Castro himself. In a term coined by Theodore Draper, “the Bay of Pigs was one of those rare politico-military events: a perfect failure” (Draper, 1962:52). The failure was not just for Brigade 2506; it was a failure of all the alliances formed against Fidel Castro. This is because, it should be noted, according to Dunne (2011), the whole disastrous operation had been masterminded by the United States Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), endorsed by the Joint Chiefs of Staff and authorized by two Presidents namely Dwight D. Eisenhower and John F. Kennedy.

It can be argued, therefore, that although the failed attempt to overthrow Fidel Castro was carried out by Brigade 2506; it was motivated and sponsored by the US through the CIA. Thus, the task in this work is to make an analysis of the American attack on Cuba on the Bay of Pigs. To accomplish this, after this introduction, the study examines the theoretical framework adopted for the study. After the theoretical framework, the study focuses on the Cuba-United States relations and the American attack of Cuba at the Bay of Pigs. This is followed by the section that deals with the aftermath of American attack on Cuba at the Bay of Pigs. The final section of the study is conclusion and recommendations.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Power theory is adopted as the theoretical framework for this study. This theory of international relations emphasises the distribution of power in the international system as most significant as states relate in the system. Having its intellectual root in the realist interpretation of international politics (Dauda, 2002), the leading exponents of power theory are Thucydides (460-406 B. C), Niccolo Machiavelli (1469-1527), Han Morgenthau, Carr (1939), Thompson (1958) and Kissinger (1984) (Dauda, 2013). According to Morgenthau (1957), power can be defined as man’s control over the minds and actions of others (cited in Dauda, 2002). Associating power with the state, it is the “general capacity of a state to control the behaviour of others” in the international system (Holsti, 1972:155 cited in Dauda, 2002:18). Two important points are clear about power. First, power is a relational concept. One must exercise power in relation to another entity. Second, power is a relative concept; calculations need to be made not only about one’s own power capabilities, but about the power that other state actors possess (Dunne and Schmidt, 2002 cited in Dauda, 2013). In these two perspectives, states use power in the international system.

It should be noted that the pursuit of national power is a natural drive and those who neglect to cultivate power actually invite war. In the realist perspective, the state has the sovereignty and right to pursue power. They also rely on fact that the pursuit of power by states in the international system will lead to balance of power system to constraint the competition among states. This will bring about:

State actor capabilities to alter or influence the policies, priorities and choices of others. State actor capability to wage war or withstand external attack. State actor capacity to realise its vital (national) interest (Ofoegbu, 1980:15).



When power is pursued as a national interest, it is:

What is meant is that they (statesmen and bureaucrats who formulate and implement foreign policy) are being called upon to take action on issues that would improve the political situation, the economic and social well-being, the health and culture of the people as well as their political survival. They are being urged to take action that will improve the lot of the people rather than pursue policies that will subject the people to domination by other countries (Adeniran, 2007:301).

Therefore, power theory in international relations as far as foreign policy is concerned has to do with the “objectives in the foreign policy that must be promoted vis-à-vis those of other members of the international system” (Dauda, 2010:35). The pursuit of foreign policy objectives of each nation-state in the international system often leads to competition in the system. It is argued that:

The nature of the competition is often seen in zero-sum term; in other words, more for one, less for other. This competitive logic of power politics makes agreement on universal principles difficult. Given that the first move of the state is to organise power domestically, and the second is to accumulate power internationally (Dauda, 2013:20).

Applying power theory to this study, therefore, the American attack on Cuba on the Bay of Pig is for attainment of power in the international system. As it is pointed out in the argument of power theorists, each country wants to assume prominence in the international system. The whole essence of the US attacking Cuba was to overthrow Fidel Castrol regime that was perceived as against the economic, political and military interest of the US in Cuba. The United States wanted to dominate Cuba within the international system and it was for acquisition of power in the system.

It is notable that what each of these countries, the U.S. and Cuba, seeks to pursue is the national interest. The US wanted to overthrow Castro through the CIA via Brigade 2506 and Fidel Castro that defended his regime against the invaders was all about national interest. The national interest pursued by both countries was to manifest in the improvement of the political situation, the economic and social well-being, the health and culture of their citizenry. All actors and those at the helms of affairs of each of the countries (no matter how one views it), it should be pointed out, are only taking actions that are tailored towards the improvement of the lot of the people rather than pursue those actions that will subject their people to the domination by others in the international system. Therefore, the pursuit of power by the U.S. and that of Cuba is for power. The pursuit of this power in international system is for the attainment of national interest of the US and Cuba.

Cuba-United States Relations and the American Attack on Cuba at the Bay of Pigs

Cuban history showed many examples of seaborne invasions, which gave the English language the word ‘*filibuster*’ to describe such attacks before the American Civil War. Then the purpose was to wrest ‘the Pearl of the Antilles’ from what was left of the Spanish empire in the Americas, incorporate the island into the federal union and so enlarge the political and economic power of the southern slave-holding states (Dunne, 2011). Following the American Civil War, Cuba, with its



largely non-white population and slave-based economy, was reconceptualised not necessarily as an area to acquire, but certainly one to control, the ‘key to the

Gulf of Mexico,’ the ‘bulwark of the New World’ and the western hemisphere’s ‘Gibraltar,’ in the traditional phrases. In keeping with this strategy, the United

States intervened in the second Cuban War of Independence beginning in 1895 (following the Ten Years’ War, 1868–78) and snatched victory from the *insurrectos* in 1898. Under the terms of the 1898 Treaty of Paris concluding the so-called ‘Spanish-American War,’ a later treaty between the United States and Cuba, and the contemporaneous Cuban constitution, Cuba was formally declared both independent *and* subject to United States control.

The key document expressing the real status of Cuba as an American protectorate was the Platt Amendment, which began life in 1901 as a rider to a U.S. Army appropriations act (Leuchsenring, 1973). Under its terms, the US intervened militarily three times in the next twenty years. Though the Platt Amendment was rescinded in 1934 as part of President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s ‘good neighbour’ policy, the reality of ultimate American control lasted until the ousting of Batista on New Year’s Eve 1958–59. The Cuban economy was dominated by American owners in retailing, banking, oil-refining, food production, trade (especially in Cuba’s major export-earner, sugar), hotels and tourism—not to mention the American-based ‘Mob,’ which was heavily involved in Cuban gambling and prostitution.

The CIA had helped to set up BRAC—Batista’s secret police force concentrating upon rooting out communists (Dunne, 2011). Cuban foreign policy followed that of its infinitely more powerful neighbour. And lest the Cubans forget their subordination, the US retained (and continued to retain) a forty-five square mile naval base in Guantanamo Bay—one of the world’s best natural harbours and home to the awesome firepower of the American armed forces.

Fulgencio Batista had come to prominence in 1933 (the first year of FDR’s presidency) and for the next 25 years he ruled Cuban politics. Beginning his political career as a non-commissioned officer, he rose to the rank of colonel and

Chief of Staff of the Cuban armed forces; he then held the presidency twice with an interval in the U.S.—a trajectory not uncommon in the political tradition of twentieth-century Latin American *caudillismo* (Dunne, 2011). Like other *caudillos*, Batista served and was served by public and private interests in the United States: in the Caribbean basin, the Somoza dynasty in Nicaragua and Rafael Leonidas Trujillo Molina in the Dominican Republic offered similar contemporary examples.

Towards Cuba and all U.S. neighbours, the Eisenhower White House issued a statement detailing its foreign policy principles and objectives it sought to achieve. Some of these are:

- i. The United States’ reiteration of its commitment to its treaty obligations of non-intervention;
- ii. That, although it was recognised that Cuban territory had been used as a point of departure to launch illegal actions in other countries, it would not allow the use of United States territories to be used as staging grounds for any actions against Cuba;



- iii. Expressed concern at the unsubstantiated accusations being directed at the United States by Cuban authorities;
- iv. Recognised Cuba's sovereign right under international law to pursue its own domestic reforms; and
- v. A declaration that the United States had a right to defend the rights of its citizens in Cuba after they had exhausted their remedies under Cuban law (cited in Thompson, 1992).

It was based on the above that the U.S. related with her neighbours, especially with Cuba. Its relations with Cuba were cordial because Fulgencio Batista's regime was favourable towards the US.

Having seized the presidency for a second time in 1952 in a *golpe de estado* (*coup d'état*), Batista became a byword for corruption and brutality, while his regime rested increasingly upon American officials and gangster support. It was as a result of corruption and brutality of the Batista regime; Fidel Castro overthrew it. Contrary to Fulgencio Batista, Fidel Castro was a charismatic and astute politician who was exceptionally popular among most working-class in Latin America (Falcon, 1993). He was able to convince large followers that any link between his revolution and Communism was more of the usual Washington propaganda of associating all Latin reformers with Communists.

According to Kce (2015), within six months of Castro's overthrow of Fulgencio Batista's dictatorship in Cuba in January 1959, U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower broke off diplomatic relations with Cuba. Prior to that, the CIA had been training Cuban exiles for a possible invasion of Cuba. The invasion plan was approved in February 1961 (but took place in April 1961), by President John F. Kennedy, Eisenhower's successor.

Dunne (2011) argues that the narrative of the invasion itself began in March 1959, that is, within *three months* of Batista's overthrow, when the CIA and the National Security Council (NSC) began to consider removing Castro. Throughout the spring and summer, preparations continued, with Nixon leading for the Eisenhower administration. The penultimate stage was reached in November 1959 when Eisenhower himself went on the (secret) record as endorsing Castro's elimination: deposition or death. Secret, Eisenhower might hope for his own reputation; but the British government knew of the administration's intentions months before. The shape of the Bay of Pigs operation was approved after twelve months of planning. At an NSC meeting on 17 March 1960 Eisenhower agreed to a 'program of covert action against the Castro regime'. The programme was the brainchild of the CIA's Deputy Director for Plans, Richard M. Bissell Jr, and endorsed warmly by the Agency's Director, Allen W. Dulles, the two architects of the Guatemalan counter coup. Now code-named 'Operation Pluto,' the scheme had four major elements:

- i. Grouping the leading Florida exiles into the *Frente Revolucionario Democrático*;
- ii. Training a paramilitary force outside Cuba (Guatemala became the main site) for an armed seaborne invasion;
- iii. A propaganda offensive against Castro himself and the Cuban road to communism; and
- iv. American-aided sabotage and counterrevolutionary attacks within Cuba (Dunne, 2011:454).



What secrecy Operation Pluto had done not last long. By the end of April 1960 Castro was publicizing to mass audiences Pluto's crucial element: the training of exiles in Guatemala. 'Mercenaries,' Castro called them, and 'maggots' (*gusanos*).

While the training went on, late spring and summer marked the intensification of the economic and diplomatic contests between the United States and Cuba. On the economic side, the chief elements were the Cuban expropriation of the remaining American-owned companies, particularly sugar and oil refineries, and the United States' cutting of the sugar quota, the precursor to an embargo in October on all exports except foodstuffs and medical supplies.

The diplomatic war had two fronts. The United States directed its energies to rounding up support within the western hemisphere, notably by trying (but failing) to align the other members of the Organization of American States (OAS) with its political campaign against Cuba. Collectively the membership of the OAS was more concerned with gaining American economic support for regional development, building upon Brazilian proposals and looking towards what would become the Alliance for Progress (Clissold, 1970). If the United States was concerned about authoritarianism, then the OAS response was to point the accusing finger at Trujillo in the Dominican Republic and asked the American government to sever its links with him, not Castro. As for Cuba, its diplomacy looked beyond the hemisphere: resuming formal relations with the Soviet Union in May 1960 and recognising the People's Republic of China in September, 1960.

When all the arrangements and planning had been completed, the US through the CIA via Brigade 2506 attacked Cuba. According to Kce919 (2015), on April 17, 1961, approximately 1,500 Cuban exile forces armed with U.S. weapons landed at Playa Girón and Playa Larga, two beaches on Cuba's southern coast near the Bay of Pigs (Bahía de Cochinos). The exiles planned to advance into Cuban territory, rally anti-Castro support from other Cubans, overthrow Castro's regime, and establish a provisional government in Cuba. The area around the landing sites was swampy, which made it difficult for them to establish a beach head and move into the countryside. The exiles were also heavily outnumbered by Castro's army. Castro's Air Force also strafed the exiles, sank two of their escort ships, and destroyed much of their Air Support. The exiles further suffered from a lack of ammunition, food and water.

Presenting what seems like the summary of the failure of the American warship to destroy the forces of Fidel Castro at the Bay of Pigs, Jones (2008:1-2) submits that:

At 6:00 a.m. on April 17, 1961, a lone B-26 roared out of the dim light of the distant western horizon to challenge the Cuban brigade as it hurried to complete a night-time landing at Red Beach in southern Cuba. The pilot, one of Fidel Castro's best, circled the Barbara J before zeroing in on the huge gunboat with rhythmic blasts of machine-gun fire that disabled two engines and almost sank it on a return assault. But those on board the ship returned the volleys with the steady hammer of BARs and machine guns, hitting the plane on its third pass and sending it down in a fiery crash beyond the dense mangrove trees and into the swamp. Within minutes, however, three more planes burst onto the scene, including another B-26 that repeatedly missed both the Barbara J and the Houston, and a Sea Fury fighter that rolled and dived while strafing the Houston. Then came the third and deadliest



challenge—a T-33 jet that streaked across the sky, firing a bevy of rockets at the ships, two of them ripping into the stern of the Houston and threatening to send it to the bottom as its men jumped into the shark-infested water. The blazing speed with which the Cuban pilot maneuvered his T-33 around the invasion force made it virtually impossible for the cannon on the heavy landing vessels to hit their mark. The sleek plane's wave of bombs and rockets somehow missed the Barbara J, but their percussion loosened the plates protecting the hull, ripping open jagged passageways that allowed huge volumes of water to rush inside the crippled vessel.

As the invasion of the Cuban forces failed, there were implications for the failed attempts to overthrow the regime of Castro. The study turns to look at some of the aftermaths of the event.

The Aftermath of the American Attack on Cuba at the Bay of Pigs

Dunne (2011) argues that the immediate consequences of the Bay of Pigs were partly predictable, partly surprising. Along with increased popular support for Castro throughout Latin America as well as in Cuba came the round-up of thousands of suspects by the Cuban authorities and the trial and execution of some twenty participants (including four American citizens), but for offences committed under Batista (these are maximum figures, on which there is no agreement). Those 1,100+ Brigade 2506 members captured were eventually released to the United States in return for privately funded US\$53 million worth of medicines and food (Dunne, 2011; Kce919, 2015).

President Kennedy paradoxically emerged with some credit, publicly taking responsibility for a flawed operation conceived under his predecessor but significantly altered by himself. At a press conference on D-Day + 4 Kennedy said:

“There’s an old saying that victory has 100 fathers and defeat is an orphan” (cited in Dunne, 2011:456). On the other hand, there was shifting of blame in the military sector. According to Dunne (2011:456-457):

Less surprisingly, JFK (John F. Kennedy) privately blamed ‘CIA bastards’ and the Joint Chiefs of Staff ‘sons-of-bitches’: the former for poor planning, faulty intelligence and over optimism; the latter for being lukewarm towards Pluto/Zapata while not emphasizing the military risks of an amateur invasion. Equally privately, the CIA blamed Kennedy for calling off the airstrikes and thus abandoning Brigade 2506. For the future, Kennedy placed his trust in counterinsurgency special forces to wage his war against Third World nationalism and international communism—the two being presented as synonymous. In what now became a vendetta, Kennedy (along with his brother and Attorney General, Bobby) intensified Mob aided assassination efforts against Castro in Operation Mongoose, while broadcasting the option of outright American support for a further invasion and the recognition of a provisional, anti-Castro government—the political goal of Zapata.

The failed attempt by the American CIA to overthrow Castro government strengthened Castro to embrace communism. Perhaps this might have not happened but for the attempt to overthrow Castro’s government. According to Dunne (2011), by the end of 1961, Castro



formally embraced Marxism-Leninism (having disclaimed communism prior to the invasion); instituted the official Cuban Communist Party which was 'adapted to conditions' in Cuba by including M-26-7 and the PSP; and came closer to accepting the Soviet Union's 1960 offer of nuclear missiles to deter American attacks. The scene was being set for a confrontation of global rather than hemispheric proportions: the Cuban Missile Crisis of October 1962.

In addition, the attack of Cuba by the US at the Bay of Pigs exposed the ill-prepared administration of Kennedy for foreign policy. It is argued that

The Bay of Pigs exposed an Administration that was ill-prepared for crisis decision-making, and sent a message to the world that the new President was too narrowly focused on a single objective and too weak to carry out a bold foreign policy agenda (Falcon, 1993:49).

The failure of the US to defeat Cuba at the Bay of Pigs increased popularity of Castro throughout Latin America and Cuba. The failed overthrow of Cuba gave the country independence from the United States. Its ability to defend herself against the United States put an end to the U.S. domination of the Island and its economy. Cuba, under Fidel Castro, was able to achieve its national interest and exert itself in the international system. This enabled Cuba to attain international power, even though it was close to the US.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Bay of Pigs operation was exclusively a CIA conceived plan. It was carried out with the use of Cuban insiders, the Brigade 2506. Yet, as Falcon (1993) argues, as with most major disasters, there was sufficient blame to share with any organization remotely associated with its implementation. Some of the blame, whether justified or not, was directed at the military.

It should also be noted that the CIA in its misreading of Cuban politics and popular opinion. The only leading figure to challenge the premises and implementation of Pluto/Zapata was Senator J. William Fulbright of Arkansas, the chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Urging Kennedy not to push Cuba even further into the Soviet camp, Fulbright uttered the famous phrases: 'The Castro regime was a thorn in the flesh...not a dagger in the heart' (cited in Dunne, 2011:457). With this, it seems US recognised the power and the sovereignty of Cuba, her immediate neighbour. Consequent upon the above, it is recommended that:

- i. Political leaders, all over the world, should make national interest the priority. This should be the highest priority as they relate with other nation-states in the international system.
- ii. Foreign policy actors should know that no nation-state is too small to look down on in the international system. In dealing with others in the system, they should formulate foreign policy in such a way that it will take care of international relations with any country, either big or small with respect.



- iii. Political leaders should work harder and guarantee socio-political development of their countries. In the framing of foreign policy, they should consider the socio-economic and political welfare of the people.
- iv. States should learn from Cuba in the aspect of equipping her military. Part of what constitute elements of national power is the military. Therefore, states should provide the military with both human and financial resources to be able to carry out its duties to the states.
- v. World leaders should make the protection of the national integrity a highest priority in their dealing with others in the international system. Fidel Castro did not joke with the protection of the national integrity of Cuba. This earned him the popularity he enjoyed throughout his terms as the President of Cuba.

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