

Chapter 5 SYSTEM-CONSTRAINED LEARNING



Chapter 4 organized evidence concerning one vector affecting the intelligence and effectiveness of American foreign policy, the behavior of leaders and advisers during the decision-making process. In this chapter I will assemble evidence bearing upon a second vector, the repetition of policy choices. To afford a broader perspective, I will review America's earlier encounters with Fidel Castro in the Eisenhower administration. Then I will expand the historical frame further to argue that individual American foreign policy decisions can be seen to follow a larger pattern and a more general logic (of power relationships) evidencing America's instinctively chosen role in the international political system.

FROM FAILURE TO FAILURE: CUBA AND AMERICA FROM 1958 TO 1960

"What an interesting thing this international chess game is."

—Fidel Castro, 1960 (discussing his choices in American-Cuban relations.)¹

One way to write history is to be guided by an esthetic theory of truth, seeking to write a story with balance, portraying conflicts as mistakes that might have been avoided had both sides not seen "through a glass, darkly." But in any simple sense, this view of Cuban-American relations is inaccurate: Conflict was inevitable, and could be resolved without violence only were one side, the other, or both to modify its purposes. Thus, what must be appraised critically is that neither side did so and each became impotent to prevent what was, "rationally," its own worst case: for Castro, an American-backed invasion which, if well-executed, had a chance to succeed; for America, a Cuban-Soviet alliance.

I will review selectively the history the two countries created: the main outline of American policy prior to Castro's victory; the sequence of deterioration in 1959-1960; and four aspects of that deterioration which reflected misperception or misjudgment (Castro's abandoning of democratic forms,

his hasty efforts to export revolution, his—initially unrealistic—fears of American hostility, and dependency).

Castro's Victory and Its Legacy

In December 1956, Fidel Castro and a handful of men returned to Cuba from exile to begin a revolution. They were to be victorious in two years: Batista's regime collapsed and he fled on January 1, 1959.

From the first, the vital concern in Washington was whether or not Castro was Communist. The evidence argued against the proposition. He was not trained by Moscow. He did not quote Marx nor indoctrinate his troops with Marxist ideology. He criticized both communism ("it kills men by killing their freedom,") and capitalism ("it kills men by hunger"). He promised return to Cuba's constitution of 1940. Initially, the Soviet government predicted that his survival in such close proximity to the United States was unlikely and was unwilling to commit prestige and significant material aid to his support. The Communist Party of Cuba—long since infiltrated by the CIA—did not consider Castro a member, thought him too undisciplined to subscribe reliably to any ideology, and was wary of his plans for them; they jumped on his bandwagon only at the last minute when his victory became assured.

Under Dulles and Bissell the CIA kept a close watch on dissident groups in foreign countries. Their information concerning Castro was carefully researched: In 1957, when Castro's rebellion numbered less than two dozen men in the Sierra Maestra Mountains, at least one was a CIA agent.²

Early American foreign policy became a shifting compromise in battles between factions. Eisenhower's ambassador of the late 1950s, Earl Smith, strongly supported Batista and was his personal friend. Smith believed Castro a secret communist but had no persuasive evidence, and his personal credibility among foreign policy professionals was minimal: a former Wall Street broker and Republican campaign contributor, he also spoke no Spanish. In Washington, key senior posts had changed hands since the Guatemala operation and were now held by individuals more favorably disposed toward change. The assistant secretary for Latin America Affairs, Roy Rubottom, favored Castro's reforms. His chief, Robert Murphy (deputy under secretary of state) could not stomach Batista's corruption and police torture, referring to him privately as a "gorilla." The health of Secretary Dulles, afflicted with intestinal cancer, was failing (he resigned in April 1959 and died five weeks later); his successor (Christian Herter) was a more modest and less domineering personality without Dulles's messianic fervor and belief that even neutrality was "immoral." And a new public mood supported the moderates: Vice-President Nixon was spat upon and his life threatened by an angry mob during a goodwill visit to Latin America in 1958. Dramatically reported in the American press, the incident catalyzed learning, a sensibility that new

forces of change were astir on the continent. With different people, a new mood, and persuasive evidence that Castro was not a Communist, cautious forbearance could temporarily shape policy.

The American government's instinctive hostility to Central American revolutionaries was also altered by the vivid and appealing portrayal of Castro presented by the *New York Times*. Castro had anticipated that American public attitudes would be crucial to his success and invited a senior editor of the *Times*, Herbert Matthews, to his camp in the Sierra Maestra. Matthews' enthusiastic report appeared in the *Times* (with front-page headlines for three consecutive days) in February 1957. He wrote.

The personality of the man is overpowering. It was easy to see that his men adored him . . . Here was an educated, dedicated fanatic, a man of ideals, of courage and of remarkable qualities of leadership . . . one got a feeling he was invincible . . . A great talker who dealt fairly with the peasants, paying for everything they ate.³

Matthews' view of Castro as a social democrat created a warm response: Castro suddenly became a North American hero. He presented himself as a moderate and spoke without hostility to America. When a CBS News camera crew visited to do a follow-up story, Castro emphasized that he opposed bloodshed but wished to create an atmosphere in which the Batista government would have to fall. The interview, televised nationally in May 1957, further built Castro's American constituency and bolstered State Department moderates.⁴

American policymakers, however, preferred known, "friendly" leaders to a rebel. The first American plan was to urge Batista to recognize the handwriting on the wall and pressure him to effect economic and political reforms and to end police torture and repression. But Batista (a former sergeant who had obtained power by a coup) had never been interested in popular democracy or economic redistribution and may not have had the power to produce them. The State Department specifically urged democratic elections to give the discontented a greater share of power, but Batista held elections so blatantly rigged that even Ambassador Smith—who claimed to have trusted Batista's "solemn promise" to be honest—said they lacked the semblance of credibility.⁵ Believing Americans ingenuous (he faced a growing underground and urban terrorism), Batista accelerated the secret police torture, summary executions, and arrests (followed by permanent disappearances) he thought necessary to maintain order and survive.

Batista's large army, never an effective fighting force, was corrupt, and its typical soldier had no incentive to fight for Batista's survival. A "Big Push" military offense of May 1958 fizzled. His high command was revealed as a "gaggle of corrupt, cruel, and lazy officers without combat experience." Viciously, they engaged in summary executions and took no prisoners. By

contrast, Castro took 433 prisoners, none were mistreated, and these were turned over to the International Red Cross. Castro spoke warmly of young officers in Batista's army who were not corrupted but lived for their careers and their Service. He contrasted them with higher ranks who made themselves millionaires by vice protection and other crooked practices.⁹ Castro was appealing, the kind of man Cubans wanted for their leader.

After the "Big Push" failed, the American government stepped up pressure on Batista and, simultaneously, began to distance itself to abandon him and change sides. America stopped his arms supply and declared official policy to be "noninterventionist." Ambassador Smith was instructed to tell Batista U.S. troops would not prevent Castro's victory if Batista could not quickly reform to sustain his own popular support: "the United States would take no steps to keep Batista in office and would take no steps to remove Batista from office."¹⁰ The State Department further attempted to increase pressure for its policy of reform by a private campaign to discourage other countries from selling arms to Batista.¹¹

The American press contributed further to hasten Batista's end. Matthews of the *Times* aided Castro's cause by stories that implied Castro commanded a substantial military force. (Castro had tricked Matthews; when he became a hero in the American press, he had only eighteen men. Castro told Matthews there were other camps; his aide Ché Guevara dressed their men in different uniforms and marched them by in different formations during Matthews' interview with Castro.)¹² Cuba's elites believed the *Times* portrayal rather than the denials in their own censored press; and when the American press also dramatized the "Big Push" defeat, agreed Batista was hopelessly corrupt, reported Castro's power growing, and predicted Batista's fall as inevitable, it helped to create the reality.

The U.S. government did not surrender control gracefully. Its second plan was to maneuver to block Castro and transfer Batista's power to men who were known to be friendly to the United States. The CIA scouted the possibilities of a military junta to exclude Castro from power, a substitute president in whose favor Washington could persuade Batista to resign, and a coalition that would limit Castro's real power. It tried to find, but could not find, suitable candidates.¹³

Castro's victory was based upon the new American-invented prototype, the Guatemala model. He established an enclave and engaged in psychological warfare to produce collapse. Contrary to popular myth, he never fought a major "war." There were no large battles. In the summer of 1958, he had 300 men against Batista's 40,000. When the Batista government collapsed, only 1,500-2,000 Cubans had taken up arms behind Castro's banner.¹⁴ (The size of Castro's victorious "army" encouraged Dulles and Bissell because it illustrated what an invasion force of 1,200 with the right psychological impact might accomplish in these countries: it further validated the Guatemala sce-

nario. Castro's victory also tended to scare American policymakers: In the dreamlike world of Latin American politics, without strong political institutionalization, images *were*, often, political reality.¹⁵ A blink and an established government with a formidable military could fall, its power dissipate like smoke. Conventional thinking which linked political power to military strength—40,000 versus 1,200—was erroneous.)

From these early events, two plausible but erroneous American lessons followed. First, as State Department liberals perceived their cut-off of Batista to be motivated by sympathy and to be effectively supportive, they hoped Castro might realistically begin his relations with the United States with this same understanding. Second, the State Department judged Castro's new political power to be very conditional. His victory did not come from large numbers of organized followers but from his ideals and because he was in the right place at the right time. If he was untrue to his earlier promises and image, appeared to sell out his nation to the Soviets and establish a dictatorship, they thought him vulnerable to replacement.¹⁶

Overview of Deterioration

Shortly after his victory in April 1959, Fidel Castro visited the United States. He came to Washington, D.C. at the private invitation of a group of newsmen: he had not been officially invited and President Eisenhower—in a deliberate display of displeasure—extended a golf vacation.¹⁷ But State Department officials met with Castro's ministers (who accompanied him) and expressed willingness to consider requests for foreign aid favorably. Castro instructed his ministers to make no requests, and they never did so.¹⁸ In the following year the American government, without an affirmative response, made over two dozen formal and informal offers of aid and negotiation of differences.¹⁹

A year after this visit, in early 1960, Castro accepted foreign aid from the Soviet Union, a \$100 million trade and aid package announced during a visit by Soviet First Deputy Premier Mikoyan. Thus, as Castro had meanwhile engaged in fierce anti-American rhetoric and spurned American overtures, and now had selected a Soviet benefactor, Eisenhower concluded the man had chosen sides to be America's enemy; he approved the CIA's involvement in covert action against Castro—which became the Bay of Pigs plan—within a month after the Mikoyan visit.²⁰

The story of how this break came about can best be reviewed by analyzing the deeper issues at stake from Castro's side. By March 1959, in decisions that now appear internal and not caused by specific American provocation, he began (1) to break free from a traditional framework of Cuban-American relations; (2) to abandon promises for democratic elections and to persecute opponents; (3) to effect social reform promptly by beginning to expropriate

property and business (\$800 million to \$1 billion owned by Americans) without any serious plan for timely payment; (4) to test America's willingness to support nonviolent and rapid change in Latin America; (5) to attempt export of his model of armed revolution; and (6) to prepare his people for an invasion he feared forces in America eventually would launch.²¹

To explore how American-Cuban relations unraveled, I will examine four of these issues in detail: Castro's abandonment of electoral democracy; his early attempts to export revolution; Castro's fears of an American plot; and America's unwillingness to address seriously the problem of dependency.

Abandoning Democracy

Initially, Castro was undecided about a future role; he refused the presidency of Cuba and accepted only command of the armed forces. But he began to give public speeches every two to three days, usually of several hours' length, and to electrifying effect. The crowds adored him and shouted themselves hoarse. He seemed to achieve a mystical, charismatic union of himself with his listeners: "Do we need elections?" Castro would ask. "No!" the crowds shouted. Castro's newly discovered charismatic power, expressed in this sense of mutual union, emboldened him.²²

Castro decided to take the presidency and to lead Cuba without elections, "until the purposes of the Revolution were achieved." Determined to bond all elements of his country with his charismatic leadership, he became greatly agitated by the experience of formal opposition as if, given the nature of his powerful identification with his people, internal divisions threatened his personal equilibrium. He dealt harshly with opponents. Former Batista officers who had tortured or killed prisoners were executed after public show trials, conducted with public enthusiasm.²³ Former loyal supporters who criticized Castro were driven from office or imprisoned. Many critics, unwilling to live forever in the shadow of Fidel's personality, left for the United States for greater freedom and to solicit American backing.

By these steps, Castro began to appear ominous to American planners; his emerging scenario appeared to be a familiar pattern of evolution to a Communist, one-party state and dictatorship, the alarming pattern of recent messianic leaders who then sought to expand their power, in the next step, by foreign conquests. And that, too, happened.

Exporting Revolution²⁴

Castro followed his victory by several attempts to export revolution. He aided bands of other expatriates to mount armed landings, establish enclaves, trigger internal uprisings and overthrow other right-wing dictators; by April 1959, American intelligence knew him to be involved in planning invasions of Haiti, Panama, Nicaragua, and the Dominican Republic.

In April, his first expedition was launched: 102 men — mostly Cubans — landed in Panama and were quickly surrounded and defeated.

In early June, 110 Nicaraguan expatriates landed in Nicaragua from Costa Rica (where they had been trained and financed by President Betancourt of Venezuela); their landing coincided with a landing of seventy men from other political factions who embarked from Cuba. The rebels were quickly defeated.

In mid-June, Cuba launched air and sea attacks against the Dominican Republic. Two hundred and twenty-four men were involved. Trujillo, dictator of the Dominican Republic, was alerted to the sea landings because radio silence was broken, and his air force destroyed the invasion ships by rocket attack (a fate similar to Kennedy's force, almost two years later, when he allowed Castro to retain operational aircraft). Most of the attackers were quickly slain.

In August, perhaps against Castro's personal wishes, about twenty-five to thirty Haitian revolutionaries departed Cuba to overthrow the government of Haiti. Upon landing, they were quickly hunted down and killed.

Washington might have drawn either of two lessons from these violent events. It might have concluded Castro was, at most, a nuisance. He acted impetuously, with poor planning. No mass uprisings occurred in the target countries.²⁵ He posed no serious danger.

In Washington, however, men responded more to what they imagined were the impulses behind Castro's actions. Now there were data points, they extrapolated the trend, and made a straightforward forecast: Castro was likely to continue such efforts. Thus, the U.S. government continued to refuse arms sales (Castro wanted to purchase battleships and other weapons) and tried to block arms sales to Cuba from all non-Communist sources (successfully in the case of Britain; unsuccessfully in the case of Belgium although Belgian deliveries were destroyed when the delivery ship *La Coubre* exploded in Havana harbor, an event Castro blamed on the CIA).

In retrospect, these early invasions were vastly overconfident and hasty.²⁶ As we will see, Castro simultaneously wanted support from America in the form of arms sales, a Marshall Plan, and increased sugar purchases. But nothing would make American planners more wary than an early warning Castro intended to incite wars in the Caribbean. Castro's bizarre "invasion" of Panama, especially, vastly underestimated American sensitivity to its security interests in the Panama Canal. Nor did it help Castro's case to speak publicly — as he did — about the "liberation" of Puerto Rico.²⁷ The major effect of these actions was to increase Washington's wariness and to force Castro eventually to seek Communist sources if he wished offensive (or defensive) weapons.

Overthrow Fears

Initially, the novel situations in which Castro and America found themselves stirred vivid imaginations on both sides: high hopes of culminated romance coexisted with deep fears of treachery. To some in America, Castro

was a hero or new-found friend. Yet others imagined his appeal to be a shrewd facade, convinced that he would string America along eventually to emerge in his true colors as a demagogue and Communist enemy. In Cuba, Castro initially told his aides they should not ask America for foreign aid – and this would so surprise Americans they would offer it without being asked. Yet he also feared invasion and duplicity. Awash in scenarios, alert and wary perception of others' imagined secret strategies ultimately led each side to act more from fear than from hope.²⁸

To Castro, it appeared realistic, given the Guatemala overthrow, to anticipate Eisenhower might try to overthrow him. We know, now, there was no such plan, but the American government was unable (likely, unwilling) to convey that message. Ché Guevara, Castro's lieutenant, had been in Guatemala City (as a young medical student) in 1954; he and Castro discussed and studied the precedent thoroughly.²⁹

Castro's "learning," his prediction of American hostility, was also supported by interpretations drawn from other evidence; Eisenhower's people had appeared to favor Batista until his cause was hopeless (and Castro may not have known of the complex interplay of motives and compromises behind American foreign policy and that Ambassador Smith's views were atypical).³⁰ Next, they had maneuvered to block Castro from power. Castro's enemies who fled to America were resettled hospitably by the American government in a common area from which attacks could be launched (Miami), and they began to organize and buy arms without effective control by U.S. authorities. By the summer of 1959, terrorist bombs began to explode in Cuban cities, occasional incendiary bombing raids were launched from private American airports, and American officials neither devoted the resources to stop them nor allowed Castro to buy weapons to defend his country. Reality was ambiguous, but was it more reasonable to believe these actions reflected coherent American policy or to believe the State Department's dismayed explanation that these were only unfortunate incidents that Eisenhower, in a free country, could not fully control? Castro, with fire, passionately denounced America for desiring "to castrate" his revolution and Cuba's new independence.³¹

Other evidence before Castro also forecast that, whatever *current* American government policy might be – and the new American ambassador, Philip Bonsal, was genuinely supportive of Cuban social reforms and consistently expressed American desires for friendship and good relations – there were "forces" in America who did want to overthrow him. Vice President Nixon, a likely presidential candidate, had visited Cuba under Batista and praised his "competence." *Time* magazine had supported Batista and now seized upon the public executions of former Batistianos with a moral fervor absent when the tortures and murdering of prisoners took place. Even at Batista's worst, major American critics had never advocated a threat to destroy Cuba's economy (by ending its sugar quota for sales in American markets) to change

Batista's odious policies, but they now did so to attempt to coerce an end to Castro's public executions and to force elections. In 1959, a Senate *Internal Security Subcommittee* staged hearings at which Castro's enemies testified he was communist. True, the Eisenhower administration took pains to be publicly calm and avoid recriminations, but to a man like Castro, the evidence that powerful enemies were building a case against him loomed large.³²

In retrospect, we can appreciate the problem Castro faced in discussing aid. As he recognized, it was a "chess game." If he accepted offers of American aid and negotiation – treated the benevolence as publicly credible – he left himself vulnerable: the United States could string him along, undercut any efforts to prepare his people to resist, strengthen his enemies in exile to create an invasion force, and then invade; or enemies in America could build their case and – with Nixon as president – policy could change suddenly. Castro's other option (and, he thought, the less risky) was to polarize relations, refuse to credit that enticements of aid were sincere, and so strengthen his own control and the anti-American fervor of his people that an invasion could be deterred or defeated. The sympathetic American ambassador, Philip Bonsal, judged in his memoirs that Castro had already concluded by the spring of 1959 that an American invasion was probable – and hence reassurances could not be considered anything but duplicitous stratagems.³³ Castro *thought* he saw clearly the choices and risks.³⁴

Dependency

Another source of conflict – unaddressed by American policy – was dependency, a difficult subject for American policymakers to grasp and which they tended to ignore. In Cuba, "dependency" meant Cuba's fate was vulnerable to almost complete unilateral control by Washington. American troops had intervened, and American ambassadors had played major pro-consul roles throughout Cuba's history.³⁵ The Cuban economy depended on American markets for the majority of its imports and exports; American investors were the primary source of private capital and owned major portions of key industries and prime agricultural land. American sugar quota subsidies were a major source of government revenue.³⁶

"Dependency" also meant a cumulative, historically produced, psychological drama, a "knowledge" of a zero-sum imaginative reality: America loomed large, and Cubans were comparatively diminished. American decision makers had little memory for the relevant history. But Castro's speeches recalled each past wrong: every intervention, every American manipulation. The Platt Amendment, which earlier in the century had presumptuously asserted America's legal right to supervise Cuban policies, lived on in the image of his current "America." The unwillingness to forget history blocked learning and recognition of any changed American attitudes.³⁷

The psychology of this dependency problem apparently was lost on Eisen-

hower, never an arrogant man. He saw America and Cuba as great trading partners, thus the mutual advantages were obvious, and mutual friendship and good relations the obvious attitude for any sensible man in touch with reality. As long as Castro was not a Communist, he had nothing to worry about. To Eisenhower it was a genuine mystery what made "that bearded fellow," as he sometimes referred to Castro, so upset, especially when America offered to be generous in foreign aid to help him.

Eisenhower's vexed perplexity was not his alone. In the late 1950s, American political elites had little experience with Black protest or domestic radicals. As America had not been invaded since 1812 and was a "superpower," the agitating vulnerability and demeaned status of Cuba — with its continuing image of American condescension — was not a problem they could appreciate readily. But probably, at a deeper level, they did not *want* to understand it either. The self-image of a world leader was comfortable, America's hegemony was understood as merely expressing a genuine, responsible benevolence. Too much would have to change to credit Castro's reversed image of a condescending, hostile America. American leaders *knew* their self-image to be objective reality and, like a therapist with an upset patient, Castro's exercised psychological problems were deemed his to sort out. (But it is probably true that most American leaders would have welcomed a cure: the inferiority complexes, resentments, and sensitivities made Cuba exasperating to deal with.)

Castro put forth a solution to the dependency problem; he wanted to make himself, and Cuba, a leading power in Latin America, build up his military to deter an invasion, and change his trade and aid relations. He would seek to establish foreign aid as a right (to forestall going hat-in-hand to Washington and being subjected to lists of changes America might want to discuss while they considered whether to be generous).

Initially, he tried a peaceful approach. In 1959, while ruling out bilateral aid requests, he tested America's attitude by enthusiastically proposing (at an Organization of American States meeting) a \$30 billion Marshall Plan, funded by America, to aid development throughout Latin America and thus accord Latin American peoples status equal with those of Western Europe. His Marshall Plan speech was a sensible test of whether America had a new attitude to Latin America and would be a friend of rapid reform.¹⁸ (As his own initiative, such a public proposal would — if accepted — heighten his prestige in Latin America and further his heroic identity.) Castro also proposed that America expand its sugar purchases from Cuba and raise the price it paid, thus implicitly (as "purchases" rather than aid) increasing his revenues without making Cuba appear a "hat-in-hand" benefactee. He also solicited American agreement to sell him arms.

But the Eisenhower administration was less than interested in such changes from a traditional framework. The Marshall Plan speech was icily rejected with the clear message Castro was presumptuous to propose it.¹⁹ His hints

of indirect aid, at American initiative, were ignored. Arms sales were blocked because Castro had not been peaceful. America intended to be wary of Castro until it better understood his intentions and how they would fit with American plans. It took the position he should settle down, grow up, and stop behaving like a juvenile delinquent with a bizarrely romantic fantasy about more violent revolutions.²⁰

Review: Motivation and Understanding

For the purpose of analysis in later chapters, I want to underscore several features of this history.

1. Castro's hubris led him to overconfidence and risky misjudgment. He would have won democratic elections by an overwhelming majority; spurning them, he strengthened his enemies. His efforts to overthrow governments in Haiti, Panama, Nicaragua, and the Dominican Republic were also badly planned, vastly overconfident, and premature.

2. Castro was wrong about the most probable American actions. Prior to March 1960 there was no administration intention or plan to overthrow him. To be sure, Richard Nixon had agitated for an invasion since early 1959, but this was not Eisenhower's policy nor Herter's. Perhaps it could be said that Castro had learned too quickly, learned the rule but not the exceptions: he did not understand the complexities and inconsistencies of American foreign policy, did not recognize he could now be an exception to the Arbenz (and other interventionist) precedents, and failed to recognize that neither the extravagant praise Batista had enjoyed nor the vituperative rhetoric of the American right fully represented the character of American policy at the time.

3. Knowing its own history, the United States did not act realistically and effectively to calm Castro's fears as it should have done if it wished good relations. By treating Castro as either an overwrought adolescent (to be "calmed down" by a kindly ambassador) or a madman, it acted consistently with a benevolent self-image but failed, specifically, to give the verifiable guarantees that Castro would have needed to find a kindly ambassador credible.

In part, such American failures of empathy and imagination arose because policymakers did not use their own psychological experience. Earlier in the 1950s, Americans' imagined fears of a foreign enemy approached the point of hysteria during the McCarthy period, even at a very *low* level of good evidence: no large network of anti-American agents exploded terror bombs throughout the country, no foreign-based planes routinely bombed cities and destroyed crops with impunity, no groups of enemies were known to be arming, unimpeded, in a neighboring country. Yet Cubans were subjected to this treatment by former Batistianos who had fled to the United States. It was an extraordinarily presumptuous attitude to think there could be good relations — or even effective reassurance — by words alone when terror bombs were

exploding in Havana and the American right and Batistianos were, with impunity, flying in from American airports to drop incendiary bombs. American inaction, and a slightly ingenuous American viewpoint that these were "minor" incidents, were policy responses badly out of touch with reality in Cuba and overestimated the power of Washington's viewpoint to be the standard to define reality.⁴¹

4. The American government became caught up in a public drama driven by simple, yet unrealistic, images and associations. For example, it never bargained with Castro about the thresholds to be honored to guarantee his survival. Cuba's quota of sugar sales to the United States was suspended in the spring of 1960—de facto economic warfare designed to destroy support for the Castro government—without prior bargaining, and this simple Dr. Jekyll/Mr. Hyde switch reflected the absence of well-planned prior use of coercive diplomacy.⁴²

Moreover, Castro's acceptance of \$100 million in aid from the USSR was deemed at the time—wrongly—to show his regime was "dominated" by international Communism and that his decided course was to become a "puppet" of the Russians.⁴³ In fact, after the Cuban Missile Crisis, Castro confirmed the earlier assessment of his politics, that is, that he was always his own man. Having effected a Soviet guarantee of his survival, and pledges of massive aid, Castro next turned on the indigenous Cuban Communist Party, purged over half of its members, and has for over twenty years assured that, whatever the dominant rhetoric on his island might be, the primary loyalty of the Cuban Communist Party will be to himself and to his brother.⁴⁴

In assaying both of these overreactions it is probably worth noting that the dramas of international relations reported (and created) in the American press, once an aid to Castro's cause, later worked against him. The drama of the Mikoyan visit was contentious, highly publicized, and created a reality which made the Eisenhower administration vulnerable to political cost if it did not seem to respond effectively to a challenge.

5. The American government learned too slowly and, in retrospect, it is probably correct to say that Castro was not considered important enough by Eisenhower—that is, powerful or dangerous enough—to produce more rapid learning. Ultimately the United States did take actions which, had they been taken two years earlier, would have achieved more positive results and possibly prevented the deterioration to violence and strong Soviet ties. Castro's \$30 billion test in 1959 was met in spirit by Kennedy's 1961, \$20 billion Alliance for Progress. Only after a potential Soviet deal was set in motion, in 1960, did American officials become serious about proposals to end the private war and offset the expropriation costs of American property. Had they been so concerned even a year earlier, there would have been a base for wider negotiations of Cuban-American relations. And in 1962 Kennedy pledged not to invade Cuba. These, with verifiable guarantees, were the quid pro quos that should have been offered two years before.⁴⁵

THE INTERNATIONAL POLITICAL SYSTEM

I want to pull back, at this point, to place the types of American foreign policy decisions we have observed into a broader perspective. Detailed stories, drawn from several decision cycles, give the impression major foreign policy outcomes depend upon personalities, organizational routines, or details of press coverage. Yet the principal outcomes of policymaking processes remain substantially invariant across decades (Table 5.1).

As the historical inventory in Table 5.1 shows, recent American interventions belong to a larger managerial pattern. Many (North) Americans are unaware of this history, but the recurrent pattern of American interventions in the Central American region is striking: the United States intervened with troops on forty-three separate occasions in the nineteenth century. Then, in the first third of this century, U.S. military interventions occurred in Cuba, Panama, Mexico, and Honduras. The United States occupied the island of Haiti for more than nineteen years, set up a military government in the Dominican Republic from 1916 until 1924, and launched two major interventions in Nicaragua.

The historical record suggests a more general cause and that the fear of Communism is not a unique justification for American use of troops—and violence. In fact, the agitation of *any* revolutionary disorder has risked an American suppressive response. Since its Monroe Doctrine was unilaterally promulgated in the early nineteenth century, the American proprietary response has been to eliminate—and at a low threshold of sensitivity—any major rival in the region. In the mid-nineteenth century, the British Empire aroused American proprietary responses. Spain's influence was the target of the Spanish-American War. Japan became another rival who stirred action in Nicaragua, in 1909, when President Taft believed that country might accord either Japan or Britain the right to build what ultimately became (after an American-sponsored revolution) the Panama Canal. During World War I a new German menace moved to the fore. Bolshevism became the foreign threat to American hegemony when, in the 1920s, Mexico was feared by some to show signs of increasing USSR influence.⁴⁶

Since the 1950s, American policymakers have continued to attempt to direct events, often using economic power and economic aid. Beginning in the mid-1960s, military aid increased (both substantially and in proportion to economic aid) in the belief that strong indigenous military establishments would be progressive forces (or at least preserve order), and, since the 1950s, America has learned to use covert activities to reduce public controversy further.⁴⁷ But when immediate action has been required, troops have been used. (Lyndon Johnson promptly sent 20,000 American troops to the Dominican Republic in 1965 to "prevent another Cuba"; the Reagan administration sent American troops into Grenada in 1983 to overthrow a government of

Table 5.1. Selected Chronology: U.S. Military and Covert Interventions in Latin America*

19th Century	
43 interventions, including Spanish-American War (1898)	
1903-1914	<i>Panama</i> Protect American lives and interests during independence war with Colombia and the construction of the Panama Canal
1906-1909	<i>Cuba</i> Restore order and protect lives after revolutionary activity
1912-1925	<i>Nicaragua</i> Prevent attempted revolution; remain to promote peace and stability
1914-1919	<i>Mexico</i> Respond to Villa's raids (included Pershing's expedition into northern Mexico and 9 subsequent brief incursions)
1915-1934	<i>Haiti</i> Maintain order during period of chronic threatened insurrection
1916-1924	<i>Dominican Republic</i> Maintain order during period of chronic threatened insurrection
1917-1922	<i>Cuba</i> Protect American interests during an insurrection and subsequent unsettled conditions
1918-1920	<i>Panama</i> Perform police duty during election disturbances and in subsequent unsettled conditions
1926-1933	<i>Nicaragua</i> Help put down revolutionary activity (included forays against the "outlaw" Sandino in 1928)
1954	<i>Guatemala</i> Assist overthrow of Arbenz government (CIA)
1961-1962	<i>Cuba</i> Attempt overthrow of Castro at Bay of Pigs; Operation MONGOOSE follows to "raise the cost." At least two assassination attempts coordinated with the Bay of Pigs invasion use Mafia intermediaries; 6 during MONGOOSE phase activate QJ/WIN and others with direct CIA control
1961	<i>Dominican Republic</i> Collude in assassination of right-wing dictator Trujillo to "prevent another Cuba" (CIA)
1965	<i>Dominican Republic</i> Intervene to "prevent another Cuba" during civil disorder
1967	<i>Bolivia</i> Help track down Ché Guevara (Special Forces & U.S. space satellites). Guevara killed by Bolivians
1971-1973	<i>Chile</i> Carry out covert operations to "make the economy scream." CIA involvement in assassination of the elected Marxist president, Allende
1980-?	<i>Nicaragua, Honduras, El Salvador</i> Commence "secret" wars against revolutionaries. Use of Argentine and Israeli "cut-outs." Buildup of American military infrastructure in Honduras
1983	<i>Grenada</i> Carry out invasion to overthrow Marxist government

*Excludes 23 minor troop incursions of less than a year, 1901-1933.

Sources: U.S. Senate (1962) in Ronning (1970), pp. 25-32; Fain et al. (1977).

radicals.) For 150 years the pattern of decision has been consistent: When inattention is disrupted by challenge, the American response has demonstrated, in the words of the historian Walter LaFeber, "... a willingness to use military force, a fear of foreign influence, and a dread of revolutionary instability."⁴⁸

The policy events we have observed, then, appear *not* to be the inadvertent result of intellectual arguments or facts that a decision process failed to include. Primarily, while being concerned about learning, we have been witnessing instances of a broader pattern of behavior by a system, and behavior of presidents and decision makers who are, themselves, actors inside a system.⁴⁹ But what could *cause* a system's decision makers to behave in this way? I turn to this question in the next chapter.

NOTES

1. Quoted in H. Thomas, *The Cuban Revolution* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971, 1977), p. 1270.
2. *Ibid.*, pp. 938-939.
3. *Ibid.*, pp. 948, 1206-1207, 1211-1212 recounts the policy battles. The memoirs of E. Smith, *The Fourth Floor: An Account of the Castro Communist Revolution* (New York: Random House, 1962) provide his version, but oddly exculpate Eisenhower and Herter. P. Bonsal, *Cuba, Castro and the United States* (Pittsburgh: Univ. of Pittsburgh Press, 1971) provides an unusually sympathetic and perceptive account, although his characterization of the history of American foreign policy does not explain the many crucial decisions (e.g., to eliminate the sugar quota) which were not discussed with him in advance (although he was the ambassador) and concerning which there was no direct bargaining. Smith was correct that Castro *became* a self-described Communist, but there is still no persuasive evidence he held those views prior to the end of 1962 when it was clear that his survival depended upon the Soviet Union's protection, as it has since.
4. For a discussion of the nature of such personal differences, and supporting evidence, see Lloyd Etheredge, *A World of Men: The Private Sources of American Foreign Policy* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1978).
5. Quoted in Thomas, *Cuban Revolution*, p. 919.
6. *Ibid.*, pp. 909-924, 937; see also T. Draper, *Castro's Revolution: Myths and Realities* (New York: Praeger, 1962), Appendix; H. Matthews, *Castro: A Political Biography* (London: Allen Lane, 1969).
7. Smith, *Fourth Floor*, pp. 154-155. Details of the "perfectly fraudulent" election are discussed in Thomas, *Cuban Revolution*, p. 1014, but glossed over in Smith. Castro sought to block the elections by issuing Revolutionary Law Number Two, on October 10, 1958, calling for capital punishment of all candidates.
8. Thomas, *Cuban Revolution*, p. 997 et passim. Castro's intelligence was also superb (*ibid.*). There have been persistent rumors that bribery of Batista's military was used to good effect.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 999.
10. Smith, *Fourth Floor*, pp. 94-95.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 100.
12. Thomas, *Cuban Revolution*, p. 920; Draper, *Castro's Revolution*, Appendix.
13. Thomas, *Cuban Revolution*, pp. 1015-1019; Smith, *Fourth Floor*, pp. 165-166.
14. We may also admire a further case of learning between professionals. To plan

- the Bay of Pigs, Bissell adapted Castro against Castro. His novel scheme (not part of Guatemala) was to bring journalists to the beachhead and feed them false stories to create an impression that the momentum of events was against Castro; it cleverly adopted Castro's own public media strategy. Moreover, Castro's own success bolstered the CIA's confidence. Estimates of military strength are provided in Thomas, *Cuban Revolution*, p. 1042.
15. S. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 1968) provides a good discussion of this concept. It might illustrate this concept to note that during the 1960s Fidel Castro established a Radio Free Dixie in Cuba—analogue to the Radio Swan used against himself—and apparently believed that he could easily foment rebellion against state governments in the southern United States.
 16. P. Bonsal, "Cuba, Castro and the United States," *Foreign Affairs* (January 1967): 260-276; Bonsal, *Cuba, Castro and the United States*, pp. 28-33. et passim.
 17. On Eisenhower's attitude and Castro's visit see Thomas, *Cuban Revolution*, p. 1210.
 18. Thomas, *Cuban Revolution*, p. 1213.
 19. P. Blackstock, *The Strategy of Subversion: Manipulating the Policies of Other Nations* (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1964), pp. 239-240.
 20. A review of events is provided in Thomas, *Cuban Revolution*, pp. 1262-1270 et passim.
 21. J. Dominguez, *Cuba: Order and Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1978), p. 145 et passim; Thomas, *Cuban Revolution*.
 22. In the spring of 1960, a group of Princeton-based academics confirmed the phenomenon. They studied public opinion in Cuba with a cross-section sample of 1,000 Cubans drawn primarily from urban areas. They found 86% of adult Cubans supported Castro; 43% they called "fervent": L. Free, *Attitudes of the Cuban People Toward the Castro Regime in the Late Spring of 1960* (Princeton, NJ: Institute for International Social Research, 1960), pp. 5, 6. Castro's people were found to have enormous confidence in his powers: on a scale of 0 to 10, the average subjective rating of their "quality of personal life" five years earlier was 4.1; in 1960 (at the time of the survey) it was 6.3; but for 1965 they envisioned 8.4 (ibid., p. 1). The director of the study personally briefed Allen Dulles of its results a week before the Bay of Pigs operation. (B. Wedge, personal communication.) I have been unable to determine whether Dulles told Kennedy of these results, but they were consistent with the CIA's general estimates of Castro's majority support.
 23. Miro Cardona, the first prime minister of Cuba after Batista's fall, resigned over the retroactively legalized death penalty, the violations of civil liberties, and Castro's increasing move to one-man rule.
 24. For these accounts I have relied primarily upon C. Ameringer, *The Democratic Left in Exile: The Antidictatorial Struggle in the Caribbean, 1945-1959* (Coral Gables, FL: Univ. of Miami Press, 1974), pp. 270-283.
 25. Although, to be sure, the rebels were never able to establish a foothold as Castro had done.
 26. These also helped to convince the Kennedy Administration that Trujillo of the Dominican Republic was so retrograde that he would encourage Communist advances; it eventually collaborated indirectly in his assassination, an action which likely received additional justification because Trujillo attempted to assassinate Betancourt of Venezuela, one of the liberal, progressive supporters of Kennedy's Alliance for Progress. See the review in U.S. Senate, Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities, *Alleged Assassination Plots Involving Foreign Leaders* Senate Report 94: 465. November

- 20, 1975 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1975). It would be incorrect to term American foreign policy reactionary; in the Trujillo case, and also (later) in the Diem case in South Vietnam, it has sought to replace rightist foreign leaders who blocked reforms deemed necessary for anti-Communist purposes.
27. The Puerto Rico threat is reported in A. Berle, "The Cuban Crisis: Failure of American Foreign Policy," *Foreign Affairs* 39 (October 1960): 44.
28. Bonsal, *Cuba, Castro and the United States* passim and Thomas, *Cuban Revolution* passim.
29. Thomas, *Cuban Revolution*, p. 1060.
30. Ibid., p. 1060.
31. Ibid., p. 1077.
32. Bonsal, *Cuba, Castro and the United States*, pp. 28-33 et passim.
33. Ibid., p. 67.
34. Ibid., p. 112.
35. E.g., Thomas, *Cuban Revolution*, p. 1062.
36. Bonsal, *Cuba, Castro and the United States*, pp. 231-245, discusses the role of sugar.
37. Thomas, *Cuban Revolution*, pp. 1206-1207 et passim; Bonsal, *Cuba, Castro and the United States*, pp. 246-288, discusses the historical background to Castro's feelings. See also J. Plank, "The Caribbean: Intervention, When and How" *Foreign Affairs* 44 (October 1965): 37-48 for a thoughtful general discussion and contribution to historical memory.
38. Thomas, *Cuban Revolution*, p. 1213.
39. Ibid.
40. "He thought of himself as riding a wave that would engulf the future in Cuba, the United States and Latin America. He saw himself as the heroic pioneer of the future." Bonsal, *Cuba, Castro and the United States*, p. 65.
41. The language used by participants to discuss relations between America and Cuba, imagining an interpersonal relationship, was also far too simple and unrefined ("friendly," "dependent," "pro-communist") to be an adequate linguistic model for the ambiguous, multileveled, and complex, emotion-charged relationship that existed and evolved on both sides. Chemists have developed an elaborate notational system to identify complex organic compounds, and the absence of an analogous technical characterization in international relations may produce too hasty thematic analyses based upon interpersonal analogies.
42. Bonsal, *Cuba, Castro and the United States*, pp. 145-153. Note also (p. 132) that discussions were not undertaken with the Soviet Union. See the general discussion by A. George, D. Hall, and W. Simons, *The Limits of Coercive Diplomacy* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1971) who seek to draw lessons from past experience.
43. In 1959 the U.S. accounted for 74% of Cuban exports and 65% of its imports. Thus, at the \$100 million threshold, if it applied its own test, the United States was the dominant political force on the island and would remain so. Dominguez, *Cuba*, p. 149.
44. Ibid., pp. 212-213, 306.
45. Thomas, *Cuban Revolution*, pp. 1263, 1270, discusses these last-minute offers which emerged after discussions for a Soviet-Cuban deal became known.
46. R. Millett, "We've Done It All to Them Before in Central America" *Washington Post* (August 7, 1983), C1, 4; W. LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolution: The United States in Central America* (New York: Norton, 1983) passim.
47. LaFeber, *op. cit.* provides an excellent overview. See also J. Chace, "Deeper into the Mire" *New York Review of Books* (March 1, 1984), pp. 40-48.

48. LaFeber, *op. cit.*, p. 18. Logically, one might desire a search for counterexamples, identifying all "potential" intervention cases to show the American response has been invariant. However, it seems to have been so, and with only two exceptions. Thomas Mann, a specialist in American foreign policy toward the region, told the Kissinger Commission: "United States policy of opposition to attempts by states hostile to our form of government to impose their systems on independent American states . . . was first announced by Monroe in 1823 . . . [and] on only two occasions has the US failed to follow this policy. (His references are to Fidel Castro and to the Nicaraguan and El Salvador Marxists in the 1980s.) T. Mann, *Testimony in National Bipartisan Commission on Central America, Appendix to the Report of the National Bipartisan Commission on Central America* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1984), p. 680.
49. This conclusion is not to say that variations of personality are unimportant. In the history we have considered, Nixon would have preferred earlier intervention and used American troops to finish Castro decisively (the advice he gave to Kennedy). Eisenhower likely would have approved the Trinidad plan with a guerrilla escape but gone no further. Kennedy might have pursued only peaceful Alliance for Progress competition if he had not found the capabilities for an expatriate invasion awaiting him (i.e., the lead-time before Castro acquired MICs was too short for the option of "deniable" invasion to be developed *de novo* beginning in 1961). If learning would involve motivational change, the degree of learning the American political system is capable of integrating into its responses is limited, albeit genuine. Etheredge, *World of Men*, provides evidence of sources of personality variations. Note that study addresses the problem of explaining variations about means, not the means (which might be considered the system baselines).