**The Cuban Revolution – A Civil War and Guerrilla War Study**

**Causes**

**Refer to Castro’s Rise to power – causes.**

**Participants**

26JM – Fidelistas

Llano

Batista and Cuban Military

**Timeline of Events**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 1956 | Earlier | Castro and the 26th July Movement (26JM), released from prison, left Cuba for Mexico to ‘activate plans to invade Cuba from Mexico and arouse the youth of the country to take up arms to oust the dictator’.26JM trained in Mexico under Colonel Alberto Bayo – an anti-communist/anti-Franco freedom fighter in self-imposed exile. He was a Cuban and instructor at the Mexican Aviation School.Funded by exiles in the USA and loyal supporters in Cuba they were trained vigorously in guerrilla tactics and strategy. They were frequently harassed by authorities, encouraged by Batista.March 19th - Castro divorced 26JM from all political parties in Cuba and formed an independent revolutionary organization. |
| 1956 | November  | November 25th – the rebels left for Cuba onboard the Granma. The landing did not go well. The boat was overloaded and old. It was 2 days late for its expected arrival. It was planned to arrive on November 30th at Niquero to co-ordinate with a revolt led by Frank Pias in Santiago de Cuba. |
|  | December  | December 2nd – the Granma landed south of landing spot and missed the supplies waiting for them. They instead met the Cuban Army (a warship) with 1000 soldiers and air force spotter planes.The Fidelistas had 2 anti-tank guns, 35 rifles with telescopic sites, 55 mendoza rifles and 40 machine guns. In their flight from the Cuban Army they lost all but a few weapons and ammunition and had to march for 3 days without food and water.December 5th - they stopped to rest in a sugar cane field in Alegria de Pio. They were spotted by Cuban piper planes and attacked. After a 2-hour fight 24 guerrillas were killed and the rest fled. They were able to reach a safe haven at the farm of Ramon Perez. His brother Crescencio Perez was the unofficial peasant leader in the Sierra Maestra. He helped to settle and gain local support for the Fidelistas. They ensured that they were model visitors who paid for their food and supplies, sometimes at double the price.Of the 82 revolutionaries who arrived on the Granma, 21 were killed, 30 captured and the 31 that remained had 7 weapons between them.Phase 2 – Sierra Maestra – Regrouping PeriodDecember 24th – the Fidelistas headed high up into the Sierra Maestra mountains to regroup and to get acquainted with the territory with the aim of avoiding contact with the army. |
| 1957 | January  | January 15th Batista reacted to the threat by suspending civil rights in Cuba.January 17th - The battle of La Plata – the Fidelistas attacked an isolated army outpost. The attack only lasted 1 hour and was a classic guerilla assault. Castro posed as an army colonel and gathered data on the outpost and soldiers from Osorio – the drunken estate manager.He divided 22 guerillas into 4 divisions and attacked in the dark – they fired volleys from all 4 sides and set several houses on fire. Of the 15 soldiers at the outpost 2 were killed, 5 wounded, 3 were taken prisoner and the rest fled. The result was a victory for the Fidelistas who captured weapons, medicine and clothes. It was their first military victory and a boost for morale.More significantly the army press and radio disclosed the attack and the Cuban people learned of their survival of the guerrillas.*An attack on a small army garrison at the mouth of the La Plata river in the Sierra Maestra produced our first victory. The effect was electrifying and traveled far beyond that rough region. It was like a call to attention, proving that the Rebel Army did in fact exist and was disposed to fight. For us, it reaffirmed our chances for final victory. Che Guevara*January 22nd - Castro headed north and ambushed an army patrol at Arroyo del Infierno. The ambush was set up in a small clearing with two huts. They waited for a passing column of soldiers. During the ambush 5 soldiers were killed and a small amount of ammo was collected. The guerrillas learned a valuable lesson – *A few days earlier we had defeated a group smaller than ours, entrenched in a barracks; now we had defeated a column on the march, superior in numbers to our forces. We could all verify the importance of this type of battle to eliminate the enemy's forward guard, for without a forward guard, an army is paralyzed. Che Guevara*Despite the success things were not great for the Fidelistas. They were attacked twice and were nearly wiped out;1. An air attack near Caracas
2. An ambush at Altos de Espinosa

‘The column lacked cohesion. Day after day more comrades asked to be assigned to missions in the cities…….. it was evident that they simply could not stand the rough going’ Che Guevara.Castro was almost assassinated by a peasant Guerra who lost his nerve. It was during this phase that Castro requested an interview with a foreign press correspondent. *This was the first victorious battle of the Rebel Army. This battle and the one following it were the only occasions in the life of our troop when we had more weapons than men. Peasants were not yet ready to join in the struggle, and communication with the urban bases was practically nonexistent. Che Guevara* |
|  | February  | February 17th - Fidel Castro was interviewed in the Sierra Maestra by Herbert Matthews a correspondent from The New York Times. Matthews noted that the Fidelistas used a whistling code system to guide him silently through the mountains.The interview had 3 main purposes;1.Crush Batista’s censorship and credibility2. Global attention3. Mark Castro and 26JM as the center of the revolution |
|  | March | March 13th – a rival group Directorio Revolutionaria – attempted to overthrow Batista by storming the presidential palace in Havana. They failed in their attempt but Batista, despite gaining sympathy and support turned to horror and violence with brutal repercussions – the only safe place was the Sierra Maestra.As an indirect result the Fidelistas grew in prestige and attracted new recruits.March 14th the first group of reinforcements arrives – 50 men from Santiago under Jorge Sotus.  |
|  | April |  |
|  | May | May 23rd - All was not well with the new recruits. Castro remarked ’our struggle against lack of moral, ideological and physical preparation of combatants was daily’. He disbanded a whole squadron and reduced his total forces from 150 to127 men of which only 80 were armed.Castro and Guevara felt that action was needed immediately if they were to keep the momentum. They chose the army garrison on the sea coast at El Uvero in Oriente Province. At daybreak on May 28th the Fidelistas attacked the 53-man army garrison at El Uvero commanded by Lieutenant Carrera. Bordered by the sea on one side, the Fidelistas took up positions on the other three. In the ensuing battle, 15 guerrillas were killed while the army suffered 14 killed, 19 wounded, 14 captured and 6 escaped. During the battle Guevara noticed that one flank had no cover. He took several men and a machine gun and attacked. Guevara was later promoted to Comandante. The battle was the first significant Fidelista victory and therefore greatly improved morale. Batista too immediate action. Politically, Batista took drastic measures. He had 200 families evacuated from the Oriente and placed in concentration camps. However, under nationwide condemnation, which threatened his drive for popular support, he was forced to rescind this action. Militarily he shifted the army to the Oriente to a policy of guerrilla containment because the Fidelistas controlled the province. As said by Che the victory at El Uvero had ‘greater psychological impact than any other in the history of the war’ because ‘the fate of every garrison located far from major troop concentration’ was sealed. Militarily the tide was turning but not politically. |
|  | June | Within the 26JM there were two factions – Llano (urban faction) and the Sierra faction. Both shared the same goal but differed significantly in their strategy to achieve it. Llano was centered in cities, namely Havana and Santiago. Frank Pias headed the Llano in Santiago wanted a new line. He wanted to reduce the number of leaders in 26JM, centralize coordination and decision making and to act ‘a little in a dictatorial fashion.’ He advocated a 13 member national directorate with Castro’s guerrillas only getting one delegate. Pias felt emphasis should be on a revolutionary general strike that would drive Batista from power. Castro felt Llano should support the rebel army and be complementary. Castro believed that Guerrilla warfare was the key to ousting Batista – he believed the guerrillas were the vanguard of 26JM and as such must retain political and military leadership. He felt security was better in the mountains because the urban centres were Batista’s power. |
|  | July | In July to bolster his power and to undercut Llano Fidel aligned himself with the ‘old generation’ in Cuba. Through negotiations with Raul Chibas, founder of the brother of the Ortodoxo Party and leader of the Ortodoxos and Felipe Pazos, First President of the National Bank of Cuba, Castro drew up the ‘Sierra Maestra Manifesto’ (July 12th). The alliance was nationalistic in context and placed special emphasis on a broad civil front to combat Batista. More importantly it gave Castro and the Fidelistas ‘respectability, stature, and opened the door to accommodation with old political leaders and professional groups.’July 30th Frank Pias was captured and killed in Santiago. The Llano center shifted to Havana and Castro emerged as the dominant leader of the 26JM.During the funeral of Pias, 60,000 Cubans came out to show their respects, including a routine visit by US ambassador Earl E T Smith. The police reacted violently and brutally beat 200 demonstratting women. Once again Batista had stirred the fires of public outrage and trained his image with the US government. |
|  | August |  |
|  | September | September 5th Naval Lieutenant Dionision San Roman led a military revolt at the Southern Naval district at Cienfuegos in the Las Villas Province. Planned as part of a national uprising at barracks in Havana, Cienfuegos, Mariel and Snatiago which was called off at the last minute, the isolated rebellion at Cienfuegos was crushed by Batista. The police and military intelligence went on a campaign of torture and murder of suspected revolutionaries including aerial bombing of the city of Cienfuegos – the government troops buried 200 wounded alive. This once again weakened the Batista Regime. Many officers in the army resented his brutality and some became close collaborators with the revolutionaries. |
|  | October |  |
|  | November |  |
|  | December | December – the Fidelistas were a credible guerrilla army who controlled 2000 square miles within the Sierra Maestra. This also ended the nomadic period for the guerrillas. Relatively safe in the mountains they settled into a semi-permanent camp ‘the rebel forces had, for all intents and purposes, converted themselves into something approaching a regular army, bivouacking in friendly territory.’ Basic training was conducted for recruits and the guerrillas even did some small scale manufacturing of explosives, boots and uniforms. They started a field hospital, established outposts connected by telephones and started a small newspaper the El Cubano Libre. |
| 1958 | January  |  |
|  | February  | February 24 – from his headquarters in La Plata, Castro began broadcasting from a small transmitter on what would eventually grow into Radio Rebelde. From this base. The guerrillas began to expand their activities. |
|  | March | March 10th Raul Catsro took a column of 82 men and moved into the seven municipalities northeast of Fidel’s group In the Sierra Maestra. At the same time Ameida took a second column of 70 men and established a base at El Cobre, west of Santiago. The three formed a triangle of guerrilla operations in the region.March 14th the USA suspended arms shipments to Batista. They claimed that he was using weapons for interal war rather than hemispheric defense. The effects of the suspension were devastating. He not only lost arms but US sanction of his policies. Thus he was essentially isolated with his close associates, police and paramilitary groups. With the situation worsening the Llano faction thought perhaps the time was right for another national strike.Perez, Llano leader in Havana, conferred with Castro in Sierra Maestra and the two agreed that a general revolutionary strike in conjunction with stepped up rebel military action might drive Batista out. |
|  | April | April 9th – the strike was initiated but failed miserably because of poor communications, short notice activation and an overall lack of support from all the 26JM urban groups. For the Fidelistas the failed strike had 3 significant results. 1. It showed that Batista’s real force lay in the urban police not the armed forces. 2. It obliterated and discredited the Llano leadership and resources. 3. It enable Castro to consolidate, once and for all his political and military leadership of the Cuban military leadership of the Cuban revolutionary movement. |
|  | May | May 24th Batista launched operation Verano and sent 10,00 soldiers with air and naval support to Oriente Province. Under the command of General Cantillo the army moved down from the north and northeast. Along the way they were ambushed and harassed with land mines by a small guerrilla commando force under Cienfuegos. Castro positioned his column west of Turquino Peak along a 15 mile front and covered all natural entrances to the Sierra Maestra.  |
|  | June | June 15th the army closed in and pushed Castro’s column back into the rugged regions of the Sierra Maestra forcing him to fight within a much more tightly drawn perimeter.June 14th Raul and the second front in the Sierra Cristal signed a nonaggression pact with Major Aquila who commanded an army battalion of approx. 1000 men. In late June Raul kidnapped 45 Americans – a mix of civilians and US marines. Raul demanded that the US stop all shipments of military equipment to Cuba, stop allowing Cuban aircraft to refuel at Guantanamo Base and force Batista not to use US weapons against Castro.The US delayed their answer but put pressure on Batista to save the hostages and to suspend bombing on the second front. Raul finally released the hostages without concessions but in the 3 week cease-fire Raul had been preparing new ambushes for the army offensive after the release of the hostages. The offensive never came.June 29th Colonel Mosquera with 1000 men was resting in a valley in Santo Domingo. Castro surrounded him with 300 Fidelistas and in 3 days of sporadic fighting decimated Mosquera’s forces. During the battle Castro captured some short wave radio equipment and the army’s code manual, thus improving his combat intelligence allowing him to track army battalions.Batista’s High Command became ‘a demoralized gaggle of corrupt and lazy officers without combat experience, who began to fear total extinction from an enemy of whose numbers and whereabouts they knew nothing accurate.’ |
|  | July | July 11th Castro surrounded Major Quevedo at El Jigue. When he learned that Quevedo was a former classmate from university, Fidel requested a cease fire and sent a letter seeking a truce. The two men met. After talking with Castro, Quevedo told his men that their first obligation was to the fatherland and so they must join the rebel forces. All 146 soldiers surrendered and gave their weapons and ammunition to the Fidelistas. Quevedo was later instrumental in establishing rebel contacts with other army officers.  |
|  | August | Frustrated, demoralized and confused, Batista’s army began to retreat to garrisons on the perimeter of Oriente and the Sierra Maestra on August 7th – Operation Verano lasted 76 days. The Fidelistas turned the retreat into a rout in which the army left the rebels over 600 weapons. During the withdrawl, the Cuban Air Force, unable to distinguished between Batistianos and Fidelistas napalmed both. Castro used his army codes to track troop movement and to give misleading orders to the air force. The rebels lost 27 guerrillas meanwhile the rebels took 433 prisoners of which 422 were turned over to the Red Cross. Now the Fidelistas decided to take the offensive. |
|  | September |  Castro felt that the countryside would soon be in rebel hands and that the army would be forced to retreat to the cities. His strategy was to surround and isolate these urban areas by cutting off communications, then step up urban terror, culminating with a concerted attack by his Rebel Army. Castro’s plan encompassed 3 geographical locations. Fidel and Raul with their columns, stayed in the Sierra Maestra because by this time Fidel’s base camp at La Pata was formally organized. From this base Castro sent Che Guevara and a column of 148 men to Las Villas Province. He sent Cienfugos and another column of 82 men on a parallel course with Che’s column to Pinar del Rio Province. Both Guevara and Cienfugos marched for 45 days before reaching Las Villas Province. While the Fidelistas were positioning for their offensive, Battista was struggling one last time for political legitimacy. |
|  | October |  |
|  | November | November 3rd – Batista held national elections in an attempt to regain political legitimacy. The Fidelistas encouraged and, in some cases, ‘threatened’ people not to vote. As a result, the electoral turnout was low, 30% and Batista’s candidate Aguero ‘won’. The election only succeeded in turning the remaining sector of Cuban society against Batista. Meanwhile the Fidelistas stepped up activity in Oriente, Camaguey and Las Villas Provinces; along with disorders, bombings and terrorism in Havana and other cities.In November, after a systematic war on transportation and a succession of army barracks at Bayamo, Holquin, Manzanillo, and other towns the Rebel Army ranks were swelling with recruits. Castro moved out of his base and headed for Santiago de Cuba.November 20th Castro met the Cuban army at Guisa. For two weeks the battle raged, categorized by fierce, heavy armour, air force bombing, night attacks and counter attacks. 200 Fidelistas faced 5000 army soldiers. |
|  | December | December 6th the army retreated, leaving a tank and heavy weapons behind. Castro’s forces were now forminable.In Las Villas Province Guevara and Cienfuegos were threatening to cut the entire island in two. Although Batista sent 2000 reinforcements with tanks and heavy equipment to the province, isolated barracks continued to fall, and garrisons continued to fall, some garrisons joined Che’s forces. When the city of Cabaiguan fell the Rebels controlled Cuba’s major highway. The army was forced to retreat.Che Guevara’s ultimate victory at Santa Clara was classical traditional army, as well as guerrilla tactics. – isolate, divide and conquer. With 300 fidelistas he first captured all surrounding localities thereby isolating the city and then took the city itself in a piecemeal fashion. In a desperate attempt to save the city, Batista sent a troop train with tanks and 35o soldiers. Che met the train when it arrived, tore up the tracks around it, blew it up with dynamite and then set it on fire. The 350 soldiers surrendered. By December 31st the battle was over and the Rebels controlled the city. Meanwhile Castro was having equal success in driving toward Santiago.Batista bespite having 40,000 soldiers was almost powerless. The US told him to capitulate. Fearing a military conspiracy Castro met with Cantillo, commander of all military forces in the Oriente on December 28th. They agreed on a military revolt that would begin on December 31st. Cantillo met with Batista on December 29th and agreed to form a military junta after Batista left. Cantillo then sent a message to Castro requesting a delay on the revolt until January 6th. Castro was not fooled and he made an agreement with General Rubido army chief of Santiago. |
| 1959 | January  | On January 1st Batista abdicated power and left Cuba for the Dominican Republic. Cantillo attempted to set up civilian-military junta presided over by Piedra. The oldest magistrate of the Supreme Court. Castro denounced the junta over Rebel Radio and pledged that his Rebel Army would keep fighting.While calling for a general strike, Castro ordered Camilo and Guevara to advance their columns on Havana. Matos, another of Castro’s commanders took Santiago without firing a shot. The strike brought the nation to a standstill and the junta disintegrated. Castro appointed Urrutia provisional president, Rubido commander of the armed forces and moved the capital from Havana to Santiago. The war was over. |
|  | February  |  |

**Nature of the Fighting/Strategy and tactics**

**The Territory**

The Sierra Maestra (5) – is the wildest part of Cuba and the highest point including Pico Turquino – the blue mountain at 8,600 feet. Most of the mountain area is wooded – it ranges from course cactus at the lower, drier slopes to rainforest at the highest parts. The mountain range is 100 miles long and 20-30 miles wide bounded by the sea to the south, coastal plains to the west and the Cuban central highway to the north and east.

Mountains continue east and eventually become the Sierra del Cobre – the copper mountains and fall away to Santiago de Cuba and its bay to the south.

The area is economically very poor and a great base for revolutionaries.



**The use of Terror and Violence**

One point of contrast between the army and the Fidelistas was there treatment of prisoners –

‘The care with which these men were treated was exemplary even if the treatment served as a political purpose, for it contrasted so strongly with the treatment of prisoners captured by Batista that it inflicted another blow to army prestige. The army had, until this point taken no prisoners at all.’ – Hugh Thomas – Cuba – The Pursuit of Freedom.

**Use of propaganda**

Theory - PSYOP – Psychological operation – Coined in US Army Field Manuel (FM) 33-5 Psychological operations in 1962. The aim of this strategy is to “ plan operations that convey selected information and indicators to audiences to influence their emotions, motives, objective reasoning and ultimately the behavior of governments, organizations, groups, and individuals." The term

  used in the PSYOP community for these is "target audience." Joint Publication 1-02, Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms, defines a target audience as "an individual or group selected for influence or attack by means of psychological operations."

 JP 1-02 defines a PSYOP action as "an action or activity planned primarily for its psychological impact." Broadly defined, psychological operations are designed to influence the attitudes and perceptions and ultimately change the behavior of selected groups so their thoughts and actions favor the goals and objectives of the initiator. All PSYOP plans must begin with an ultimate objective or goal.  PSYOP objectives, then, are developed to lead to the accomplishment of the ultimate objective. From this objective, target audiences could be determined, and sub-objectives could be formed that would help achieve this goal. Target audiences help the initiator focus on sub-PSYOP objectives that are based on the group's peculiarities. Messages and actions that are effective for one group might not be so for another; therefore, each target audience must be understood and targeted separately. Study of each target audience helps the planner determine the themes that will resonate with the target audience.   Finally, initiators design PSYOP programs to support each of their sub-objectives. This includes determining the type of media to use and when to use it; actions hat when viewed by the target audience will cause a desired reaction; themes to stress and themes to avoid; and the frequency and timing of dissemination plans.

**Castro’s PSYOP plan in Cuba**

Ultimate objectives –

1. "Defeat the Batista regime." This simple, concise statement is the impetus for the development of the plan that Castro implemented during the Revolution.

Target audience - The Cubans that could influence the achievement of the revolutionaries' first objective were the population of Santiago de Cuba, the Guajiros in Oriente Province, Cuban youth movements, and the Cuban military.

Message - to convince fellow Cubans of the Revolution's legitimacy and that it could succeed.

1. "Deter U.S. involvement in the Revolution."

Target audience - U.S. press, U.S. policymakers, and the U.S. population in general, all of whom are important in helping Castro achieve his objectives.

Message - the Revolution's denial of any involvement with communism. This sub-objective would read: "Convince U.S. policymakers the Revolution is not communist based." Castro understood the reaction he would incite from U.S. policymakers if he did not make this denial. This theme also played across the spectrum of his target audiences because of U.S. sensitivities toward communist movements during the early Cold War years.

To achieve this objective, they had to reach the U.S. press and population and U.S. decision makers.

**Objective 1:**

**Convince the Cubans of the Revolution's legitimacy.**

**Target Audience:** **The Santiago de Cuba population, the Guajiros, Cuban youth movements, and the Cuban military.**

**The Santiago de Cuba population.** Castro said, "No weapon, no force is capable of defeating a people who have decided to fight for their rights." Santiago de Cuba, located on the eastern end of Cuba near the Sierra Maestra Mountains in the Oriente Province, "is shut off from Havana as surely as if it were another country." Residents believed people from Havana looked on their city as backward, and they felt exploited by the Havana government. Santiagueros were proud, defiant, and antigovernment in general. Throughout Cuba's history, Santiago de Cuba served as a starting point for revolution. Castro recognized and exploited these qualities in choosing to attack the Moncada Army Barracks in 1953 and later during the Revolution when using the Sierra Maestra Mountains as his operational base. Castro's objectives were to increase the discontent among Santiago de Cuba's population demonstrate the Revolution's strength and resolve to win; and encourage Santiagueros to support the Revolution.

Part of Castro's initial plan during the attack on the Moncada Army Barracks was to capture the local radio station so the rebels could use it to "call the people to revolt.” The attempt to seize the radio station failed, but Castro followed up with a rallying cry for the Santiagueros during his trial defense. He repeatedly emphasized the atrocities committed against the population by the Batista regime. He described soldiers whose uniforms became butchers' aprons. He painted the Batista regime as the worst of all the oppressors of Cuba—a regime that purposely preyed on the Santiagueros, a peaceful, liberty-loving people. He described the deaths of innocent children at the hands of soldiers: "After the battle, they threw themselves like wild beasts on the city of Santiago de Cuba and on its defenseless population."

  Castro did not forget Santiago de Cuba as he launched his second attempt at revolution. He planned to coordinate his landing with an uprising in Santiago de Cuba through Frank País, the movement's leader in the city. The plan would make Santiago de Cuba "the rebel stronghold" of the Revolution. Because of the delay of Castro's landing, the synchronization that the plan called for never materialized. However, País did conduct an uprising and controlled the city in the name of the 26th of July movement for hours on the day of the planned landing.

País was instrumental in gaining support for the Revolution in Santiago de Cuba and was the key executor of propaganda in the city from the 1956 landing until his death in 1957. During a pro-Batista rally organized by Roland Masferrer on 18 May 1957, "País used a clandestine radio to cut into Masferrer's speech." País called for revolution and exalted Castro and his followers throughout the city, and the 26th of July movement gained support from the Santiagueros. The movement shipped arms through Santiago de Cuba and received medical treatment, shelter, and provisions in the city.

  **The Guajiros**. The refuge for the rebels in the mountains consisted of "2,500 square miles and 50,000 Guajiros." The Guajiros can be described as "poor, illiterate black, white, and mulatto peasants" who lived in the villages and farms throughout the Sierra Maestra area. Most of them were squatters who cleared land for subsistence farming and built huts in which to live between sugar harvests. During harvests, they left their mountain homes and worked as sugarcane cutters. Castro understood that to survive in the mountains he needed the Guajiros' support. He had to convince them to support the 26th of July movement; to recruit them to join the Revolution; and to persuade them to inform the rebels of government action in the area.

Guevara served to motivate the Guajiros. In late 1957, with Castro's permission, Guevara began to build a small-scale infrastructure in his sector of the Sierra Maestra—El Hombrito. Guevara's action demonstrated to the local population the rebels' commitment to improving their lives. Guevara oversaw the construction of a small hospital, a bread oven, pig and poultry farms, a cigar factory, and a small armory. The guerrillas paid farmers to grow certain types of vegetables so the rebels could purchase them for subsistence. The benefit of seeing words transformed into actions served to steel the resolve of the Guajiros to support the rebels.

Guevara also established a newspaper and radio network to serve the area. The small newspaper, El Cubano Libre was copied on a mimeograph and distributed throughout the area. Articles written by Castro, Guevara, and others served to illustrate the ideology of the 26th of July movement and their plans for Cuba's future. The radio station started small, broadcasting only in the local area but widening its area as the war progressed: "When we began to broadcast from our own transmitter, the existence of our troops and their fighting determination became known throughout the Republic; our links began to become more extensive and complicated, even reaching Havana and Camagüey in the west, where we had important supply centers, and Santiago in the east." The results of the intensive campaign waged among the Guajiros served the rebels well. The network of supporters kept the rebels informed of "the presence of not only the Army but of any stranger" who entered the rebel zone.26 The combination of civil and military development provided a working model of the society the Revolution hoped to create.

The Batistas also targeted the Guajiros, but the strength of Castro's campaign prevented government inroads into the rebel zone. Castro was able to give the Guajiros hope, and the Guajiros gave Castro the time and support he needed for success.

**Cuban youth movements**. Another key group Castro targeted was Cuba's youth movements. Castro's objectives were to establish the legitimacy of the 26th of July movement to unite all revolutionary efforts and to convince youth movements that the main effort was in the Sierra Maestra Mountains.

Castro understood the importance of uniting all of the revolutionary movements throughout the island, and he began his campaign to do so even before the Moncada Barracks attack. On 23 July 1953, he released a manifesto declaring the philosophy of the Revolution to the Cuban people. The manifesto defined the vanguard of the Revolution as "a youth that wants a new Cuba, a youth that has freed itself from all the faults, the mean ambitions, and the sins of the past."

Castro continued efforts to unite Cuban youth movements during his time in Mexico. In September 1956, he and José Antonio Echevarría, the leader of the University Federation of Students (FEU), signed the Mexico pact that united the revolutionary efforts of these two powerful organizations.28 Point 16 of the pact reads: "The FEU and the 26th of July movement adopt as their watchword the unity of all the revolutionary, moral, and civic forces of the nation—students, workers, youth organizations, and all men of dignity—so that they will support us in this struggle which will end in our victory or our death." Thus, on the eve of Castro's invasion, unity with a powerful youth organization took shape and legitimized the 26th of July movement in the eyes of other youth movements throughout Cuba.

  **The Cuban military**- Castro's embrace of a soldier as he left his prison cell on the Isle of Pines was a symbol of his attempt to stop the military from participating in the violence directed by the Batista regime. Castro knew that if he could influence the Cuban military to support the Revolution by either joining him or, at least, not fighting him, he could rapidly achieve Batista's overthrow. The objectives he established to influence the military were to erode military support for Batista, stress the legitimacy of the 26th of July movement, and emphasize the inevitability of the military's defeat.

In June 1957, Batista began an all-out offensive against Castro that led to Castro being surrounded on a mountain crest near La Plata. With no more than 40 men, he and his men held their position, wearing down the attackers. Castro used this opportunity to apply tactical "psychological warfare for the first time in the Sierra war by installing loudspeakers that blared the national anthem, patriotic songs, and revolutionary exhortations at the exhausted Batista soldiers." Castro's force denied the military a victory at that decisive point.

Castro opened a dialogue with military commanders, and several exchanges illustrate his PSYOP objective of eroding support to the regime. To General Eulogio Cantillo he wrote, "I appreciate your noble feeling toward us, who are, after all, your compatriots, not your enemies because we are not at war with the armed forces, but against the dictatorship." During the battle of Mompie, Castro fought against a former law student colleague, Major José Quevedo. Castro reportedly held a dialogue with Quevedo guaranteeing the good treatment of the soldiers if they surrendered. After several days of this, Quevedo surrendered. The rebels fed Quevedo's soldiers before turning them over to the International Red Cross.

Castro's humane treatment of his prisoners of war served to legitimize his fighting force in the eyes of his armed adversary. As Castro's army marched across the island in 1958, Cuban military commanders could not rally their troops to fight the rebels. One commander cautioned his soldiers not to be impressed "by what Fidel Castro's radio station and his propaganda organs—or the ill-born Cubans who propagate rumors—may say.'" Castro's campaign against Cuban Armed Forces was effective and greatly hastened his march to victory.

**Objective 2:**

**Deter U.S. involvement in the Revolution.**

**Target Audience:** **The U.S. press and population and U.S. decision makers.**

**U.S. press and population -** Castro possessed a radio in the Sierra Maestra Mountains, which allowed him to monitor Cuban broadcasts and U.S. broadcasts from Florida. He knew that to further the Revolution, he had to get the right message out so the international press and, more important, the U.S. press would not disregard the rebellion in Cuba. His contacts led him to Herbert L. Matthews, a Latin America expert for The New York Times, who conducted an interview of Castro in Cuba. Matthews' interview became a three-part series of articles about the Cuban revolt and, more important, Castro, its leader. Allowing Americans to see his ideas in print would lend legitimacy to Castro's cause, as would his denial of it being a communist-based revolution. "Above all," he said, "we are fighting for a democratic Cuba and an end to the dictatorship.”

Matthew's articles had a de-legitimizing effect on the Batista regime. After Cuban officials challenged the validity of the story, The New York Times responded by publishing a photograph of Matthews and Castro together in the Sierra Maestra Mountains. The effect of Matthews' article was invaluable to Castro.

Castro presented to Matthews a force that appeared to be well organized. Nothing could have been further from the truth. Castro said his army "works in groups of 10 to 40," and, he further stated that he had "no less than 50" rifles with telescopes that Cuban soldiers feared. The reality of the situation was that at the time Castro's army numbered "less than 20 armed men." Matthews's articles were filled with admiration for Castro and his cause. As a result, U.S. attention turned toward the Cuban situation. Matthews' scoop opened the floodgates, and U.S. journalists hastily tried to reach the Cuban rebels. Money, recruits, and support flowed to the Sierra Maestra.

Such interviews allowed Castro to publicly separate himself from Cuba's communist movement. He understood that U.S. citizens, decision-makers, and the U.S. press needed to hear his denial of communist affiliation for themselves. Anticommunist sentiment in the U.S. was strong during the late 1950s, and Americans would oppose any rebellion with communist connections. If Castro convinced the U.S. press that his movement was not communist, he also would be able to reach other important target audiences.

Castro convinced Matthews that his group had no links to the communists. The second article in the series focused on the rebels' anti-dictatorial stance and, more important, for the rebels, the separation of the movement from the communists: "Communism has little to do with opposition to the regime. There is a well-trained, hard core of communists that is doing as much mischief as it can and that naturally bolsters all the opposition elements, but there is no communism to speak of in Fidel Castro's 26th of July movement or the disaffected elements in the Army."

Castro continued to distance his movement from the communist movement before the U.S. press. In a February 1958 Look magazine interview, Andrew St. George questioned Castro on charges that the Revolution was communist-inspired. Castro credited Matthews with discrediting this claim and stated that "the Cuban communists, as your journalist John Gunther once reported, have never opposed Batista, for whom they have seemed to feel a close kinship." Castro not only denied the charges, he attempted to link Batista with the communist movement.

In a letter to the U.S. policy journal The Nation, Castro summarizes the programs of the 26th of July movement that the rebels would implement when they won.

The program is outlined in six paragraphs, with paragraph 5 addressing the international affairs of the proposed government: "In international affairs, the establishment of close solidarity with the democratic nations of the American continents." Again, through the U.S. press, Castro attempted to demonstrate his distance from the communist movement.

Before Matthews' interview, the Cuban press covered mostly articles about the resort atmosphere of Havana, and the Cuban government did a fairly good job of controlling the stories that left the island. Entries in the Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature focused on how Americans could vacation cheaply in Havana, of the visits of high-profile celebrities to the island, and so on.42 After Matthew's interview, Reader's Guide articles focused on rebel demands and interviews with Castro, which kept the Revolution on the front pages of the U.S. press.

  **U.S. decision-makers -** Castro had to convince U.S. decision-makers that the movement was not communist. He had to persuade them to stop shipping small arms and planes to Cuba, and he wanted to dissuade them from intervening in the Revolution.

Castro's programs with regard to the U.S. press, concerning the movement's political goals, also served to affect U.S. decision-makers. Castro's public rejection of communism was reflected in correspondence, dated 7 December 1957, between the U.S. Department of State and U.S. American Embassy policy officer Wayne Smith. Smith wrote: "The Cuban Government accuses Castro of being a communist, but has not produced evidence to substantiate the charge." Castro's campaign of distancing himself from communism was reaching his intended audience.

Castro, no stranger to Cuban history, was well aware that the United States believed it had a legitimate reason to intervene in Cuban politics. He had to maintain a delicate balance of fighting against a demonstrably illegitimate dictator, while simultaneously not offending the United States enough to cause intervention in Cuban affairs. Part of the program to reduce the chances of U.S. intervention was the anticommunist rhetoric he spouted. Matthews wrote that Castro "has strong ideas of liberty, democracy, social justice, the need to restore the constitution, to hold elections." In the interview, Castro said, "We are fighting for a democratic Cuba and an end to the dictatorship." In the Look interview, Castro said, "Under our constitution, I am far too young to be a candidate." The ideals that Castro presented through the press to the U.S. public made it difficult for U.S. decision-makers to justify an intervention on Batista's behalf.

**International Intervention**

**US Involvement in Cuban Revolutionary War**

**Press statement on involvement – Jan 16 1958**

On the afternoon of January 16, prior to leaving Washington, Ambassador Smith issued the following statement to the press:

"The United States recognizes the present Government of Cuba and deals with it as a constituted government of a friendly sister American Republic. We maintain a policy of objectivity and nonintervention in the internal affairs of Cuba. The United States Embassy strictly adheres to that policy.

"I am now convinced that both the Government of Cuba and the opposition are fully cognizant of this policy and respect it.

"Our next hope is that the Government of Cuba will restore full Constitutional guarantees. On December 14 the Government of Cuba did publicly announce that it was its intention to lift the suspension of Constitutional guarantees at the end of this new forty‑five day period. This period will terminate January 27. After that we hope that elections will be held which will be acceptable to the people of Cuba.

"Four opposition parties have fulfilled their legal requirements and have token the necessary steps to be prepared for the national elections scheduled for June 1, 1958." (Department of State, CCA Files: Lot 70 D 149, Nov.‑Dec. 1958)

*The US supplied arms to the Batista Regime in 1957-58*

3. Memorandum From the Director of the Office of Middle

American Affairs (Wieland) to the Assistant Secretary of

State for Inter-American Affairs (Rubottom) [1]

**Washington, January 10, 1958.**

SUBJECT

Arms Shipments to Cuba

You will recall that in my memorandum to you of December 19, 1957, entitled "Policy Recommendations for Restoration of Normalcy in Cuba",[2] it was proposed, on page 4, that "sales of arms to Cuba will continue . . . "[3] This proposed course of action was tied to discussions the Ambassador would hold with Batista regarding the creation of a favorable political atmosphere in Cuba, and it was expected that our attitude on arms sales would be used as one of the primary inducements for Batista to take ameliorating steps in this respect.

Attached to this memorandum is a statement' reviewing the action taken during calendar year 1957 on Cuban requests to purchase arms in the United States. In summary, **eleven requests were approved and seven were pending at the close of the year. Of the seven pending cases, four have been recommended favorably by the Embassy and no recommendations have yet been received on the remaining three. In the memorandum it is recommended that three of the four requests which have been favorably recommended by the Embassy be approved. These three requests are for;**

**1. 100,000 rounds of 20 mm. ammunition for the Cuban Navy. This ammunition would be useful in controlling movements of small boats which are suspected of carrying arms to rebel groups, including that of Fidel Castro.**

**2. 10,000 hand grenades. It would be expected that these would be largely used in Oriente Province, including combating attempts to burn the cane fields.**

**3. 3,000-75 mm. howitzer shells and two aiming devices. It is possible that these might be used in Oriente Province.**

**Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Cuba[1]**

***Washington, January 22, 1958‑7:48 p.m.***

384. Embtel 369.[2] Ambassador from Rubottom. Action proposed re delivery GOC 20 armored cars and other arms requests in my memorandum January 17 to Secretary[3] (copy forwarded Embassy Jan 17) approved.

**Your discretion you may inform Batista cars "on schedule" and delivery may be expected within period March 4 to June 4 stated original offer by Department of Defense. Suggest you emphasize it necessary he cooperate in creating conditions that would minimize adverse reaction in US and elsewhere against US Government as well as his own. Your emphasis might stress mutual nature problem resulting from adverse criticism US Congress and public and on this basis appeal for his cooperation reduce effect to minimum by such action as (1) restricting official publicity arrival shipment, and (2) limiting use to training and other inconspicuous tasks. If you think appropriate you should also indicate to Batista that reaction in Congress and other influential sectors of US to use this equipment will perforce be important factor governing approval future requests for equipment purchases.**

FYI shipment cars will be contingent upon our prior review positive steps taken by GOC create favorable conditions for June elections, i.e., restoration constitutional guarantees, etc. Approval of memorandum by Secretary subject condition that foreign affairs committees Congress would be informed prior any shipments.

Re pending requests small arms suggest you defer informing Batista now our decision to approve in favor staggered approval and later notification GOC on basis priorities established on three most pressing items in following suggested order: (a) 10,000 hand grenades (Emb. Desp. 410);[4] (b) 100,000 projectiles (Embtel 222)[5] and (c) 3,000 75 mm. shells (Embtel 216).[6] Desire your comments this procedure including suggestions on spacing these approvals. End FYI.

**9.**                  **Telegram From the Embassy in Cuba to the Department of  State[1]**

*Havana,* ***January 31, 1958‑3 p.m.***

424. Reference Deptel 394 [384?].[2] Deptel 384 not received here until January 30. I will inform Batista through Guell as instructed second paragraph 384.[3] Re procedure suggested final paragraph 384 **I recommend approval these three requests and delivery when ready unless situation significantly changed in meantime. As general policy I believe US should honor reasonable requests recommended by Military mission as long as GOC proceeds along lines acceptable to US.** Holding back on each request to force GOC step by step seems petty and as likely to thwart our objective as to attain it.

*Manipulation and control of the media coverage of the situation*

10. Letter From the Director of the Office of Middle American Affairs (Wieland) to the Ambassador in Cuba (Smith)[1]

**Washington, February 3, 1958.**

DEAR EARL:

The off-the-record remarks which you made at your press conference here on January 16 [5] seem to be a matter of public knowledge. Where the leak occurred, we do not yet know and are investigating. I am enclosing a copy of a letter of January 24 and enclosure from Herb Matthews in this respect and a copy of a resume of that portion of your conference which is supposed to have been transmitted to Castro himself, [6] We have heard that the latter may be printed verbatim in Bohemia.

**With respect to Castro, I am still hopeful that some effective way can be found to get the other side of the Castro story to the United States press as well as to Congress. You will recall that I suggested to you while you were in Washington that American businessmen in Cuba might be told when they expound their views to you on Castro that maybe they should get their views to their respective representatives in Congress. At the present time the correspondence we are getting from the Hill is very one sided. Any suggestions you might have on this point will be appreciated.[7]**

Sincerely yours,

William A. Wieland [8]

**Remouval of US military support**

189. Memorandum From the Acting Secretary of State to the President [1]

Washington, December 23, 1958.

On March 29th of this year, sixteen months after the rebellion started, we suspended the shipment of combat arms to the Cuban Government, [3] in accordance with our policy not to ship arms to countries beset by such political tension as that existing in Cuba. In our best judgment, we could not continue to supply weapons to a government which was resorting to such repressive measures of internal security as to have alienated some 80 percent of the Cuban people, by all reports, as well as public and official opinion in most of the other American Republics, not to mention important elements of press and congressional opinion in the U.S. However, we have retained our Army, Navy, and Air Force Missions in the country, and have shipped some non-combat equipment, such as communications items.

For the Ambassador:

Eugene A. Gilmore, Jr.
Counselor of Embassy

NOTES:

1. Source: Department of State, Central Files, 737.00/7-7858. Confidential. Drafted by Topping.

2. For text of the agreement providing guarantees against inconvertibility of investment receipts, as effected by an exchange of notes at Havana on February 4, 1957, and entered into force on November 29,1957, see 8 UST 2375.

41. Memorandum From the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State For Inter-American Affairs (Snow) to the Secretary of State [1]

Washington, March 24, 1958.

Recommendation:

Your approval is requested of ARA's decision, made after consultation with other interested offices of the Department and the Department of Defense, that further shipments of combat arms to Cuba not be authorized until Cuban conditions improve to the point where arms furnished will be dependably used for hemispheric defense and not used up internal strife.[6]

43. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Cuba[1]

Washington, March 26, 1958 - 4:34 p.m.

526. Department has carefully studied question arms shipments to Cuba in light Embtels 543 and 544[1] and continues feel decision Deptel 4923 necessary in view recent GOC suspension constitutional it guarantees, announced strengthening armed forces and indications of strong measures to come such as another mass movement Oriente population (Embtel 5364). As result, elections even though postponed appear impossible realize unless GOC takes effective measures soon convince people they will be fair.

Department has considered the possibility its action could have adverse psychological effect GOC and could unintentionally contribute to or accelerate eventual Batista downfall. On other hand, shipment US combat arms at this time would probably invite increased resentment against US and associate it with Batista strong arm methods, especially following so closely on heels of following developments:

1) Government publicly desisted from peace efforts.

2) Government suspended guarantees again.

3) Batista expressed confidence Government will win elections with his candidate and insists they will be held despite suspension guarantees but has made no real effort satisfy public opinion on their fairness and effectiveness as possible means achieve fair and acceptable solution.

4) Batista announced would increase size army and informed you he would again undertake mass population Oriente, and otherwise acted in manner to discourage those who supported or could be brought to support peaceful settlement by constructive negotiations.

Moreover, shipment of combat arms at this time might jeopardize our entire Latin American MAP program, already under fire by press and in Congress, and might invite rebel retaliation against US citizens and property.

Department agrees Embassy should continue efforts with its usual discretion to attain fair elections though possibility now seems remote. Mere statements by GOC that elections will be fair have proved ineffective, although public opinion in US and elsewhere was being favorably influenced by US and Cuban press comment on Batista's restoration guarantees in January until again disillusioned by GOC's latest decision abandon peaceful means an resort to increased repressive measures.

55. Memorandum From the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs (Snow) to the Acting Secretary of State [1]

Washington, May 6,1958.

SUBJECT

Sales of Arms to Cuba

Discussion:

In the Secretary's approval of ARA's memorandum of March 24, 1958, on the above subject (Tab A),[2] he indicated that he wished no arms to be furnished to Cuba until conditions there improved to the point where this equipment "will be dependably used for hemispheric defense and not used up in internal strife". He also indicated that he wished to be informed of any other elements which might alter that decision.

The Cuban Government has cancelled all outstanding requests to purchase combat equipment in the United States (Tab D) and has turned to other sources of supply (e.g., the Dominican Republic). Following the abortive attempt by Fidel Castro to overthrow the Government of Cuba in early April, the situation is now quiet in Cuba. National elections are scheduled for November 3,1958.

Recommendation:

1. That, in keeping with the Secretary's desire, shipments of combat equipment for Cuba under the grant Military Assistance Program continue to be withheld until there is assurance that such equipment will be used only in defense of the hemisphere.

2. That sales of combat equipment to Cuba by the Department of Defense or by private American firms be selectively approved whenever in the judgment of the Assistant Secretary for Inter-American Affairs or the Acting Assistant Secretary such approval would further our foreign-policy objectives as set forth above.

3. That shipment of non-combat items, such as certain communications equipment, furnished to Cuba as a grant under the Military Assistance Program or sold to the Cuban Government by the Department of Defense or by private American companies, be approved. (Some requests for purchase of non-combat items were recently approved. See Tab E). [4]

**Effect of International Involvement**

Throughout the past two years this Government has had to contend with a very difficult public relations problem in so far as Cuba is concerned. The U.S. press and the Latin American press have been overwhelmingly anti-Batista and have been critical of any evidence adducing U.S. support of him. Some of the papers, particularly in Latin America, are pro-Castro, but this is not a uniform pattern. Ambassador Gardner was widely considered to be overly friendly to Batista, and his successor, Ambassador Smith, after being almost declared persona non grata following an incident in Santiago shortly after his arrival in Cuba, which evoked a public statement from him deploring brutality, has gradually become a target of criticism for any dealings he has with the Batista Government. It must be recognized that any U.S. representative would find it virtually impossible to avoid criticism under present conditions in Cuba. The Congress has manifested widespread interest in the Cuban problem and, during the hearings while it was considering the Mutual Security Bill early last session, the questioning revealed strong feeling against U.S. arms shipments to that country. In fact, it was the Cuban situation, along with our somewhat strained relations with the Dominican Republic, which led to the so-called Morse Amendment, [4] calling for an annual determination by you as to whether arms may be granted to Latin American Governments.

**OAS Involvement**

We also know that the Communists are utilizing the Castro movement to some extent, as would be expected, but there is insufficient evidence on which to base a charge that the rebels are communist dominated. Hence there seems to be no basis for invoking the Caracas Resolution of 1954, [2] which would call the OAS into action. However, we have consulted with the other American Republics regarding the Cuban problem. They have expressed interest in the matter, but except for Ecuador, none of them has expressed willingness to take any initiative. In fact, the Organization of American States does not have clear-cut authority to move into an internal problem like that in Cuba, although it has repeatedly demonstrated its capacity for effective action in disputes involving two or more countries.

**UK Involvement in Cuban Revolutionary War**

When the United States—the traditional supplier of arms to Cuba—decided not to supply Fulgencio Batista's government after March 1958 and the dictator approached Britain, this presented a dilemma for Harold Macmillan's administration so soon after the 1956 Suez crisis. Whitehall was keen to sell arms but wary of doing business with a country so firmly located in the United States' sphere of influence. It will be seen that the Foreign Office conferred with Washington at every stage in its decision process, both in deciding to arm Batista after gaining US acquiescence, and later in acceding to pressure and not supplying military hardware to Fidel Castro's nascent regime.

The UK supplied arms to the Batista government in Cuba right up to the time of Batista's dramatic flight in December 1958. The new Castro government's request that the balance of an order for Sea Fury aircraft ‐ paid for by Batista ‐ be delivered, created a marked dilemma for the British government. Supply was economically desirable and would also bring political benefits. However, supply would also run counter to US interests. Later in 1959 the dilemma was heightened when the Cubans suggested exchanging the Sea Furies for more advanced Hunter aircraft. This case represents an intriguing example of the politics of British arms sales in the immediate post‐Suez era, and also a modest contribution to the ongoing debate which seeks to explain US reactions to the Cuban Revolution, and the question of whether or to what extent the US ‘pushed’ Castro into the arms of the USSR.

184. Telegram From the Embassy in the United Kingdom to the Department of State [1]

London, December 17, 1958 - 5 p.m.

3237. During question period Commons December 15, opposition claiming Cuban rebels being killed by arms supplied by UK, badgered Minister State Foreign Affairs (Noble) into giving assurance "no further weapons of any sort will be sent (to Cuban Government) without informing Commons."

Assistant head American Department Foreign Office (Hildyard) informed Embassy officer December 16 it not yet decided whether this assurance will include arms already loaded on ships, or contracted for, or only to new orders.

Foreign Office said assurance given primarily as concession UK public opinion and not indication HMG foresees rebel victory. This possibility not overlooked by Foreign Office, however, particularly if Cuban economic situation deteriorates.

Whitney

**Reasons For Victory**

**See document 1a - 265. Despatch From the Embassy in Cuba to the Department of State** USA

It states that the main reasons for Batista’s defeat were;

Lack of effective communication and effects of strict censorship.

Lack of reserve strength and low morale

Lack of effective supplies to the forces

Lack of transportation

Lack of international support

Batista’s decision to leave

Effective defensive tactics of rebels