

Håkan Karlsson & Tomás Diez Acosta, *The Johnson Administration's Cuba Policy: From "Dirty War" to Passive Containment*. London: Routledge, 2020. xvi + 236 pp. (Cloth US\$155.00)

After the assassination of John F. Kennedy, Lyndon B. Johnson inherited the Cuban policy designed to overthrow the Fidel Castro regime. By then, the infamous covert operations appeared ineffective at best, counterproductive at worst. The Bay of Pigs invasion ended in disaster, and it convinced the Soviet Union to defend the Cuban Revolution with nuclear missiles. The last thing the new president wanted was to repeat a similar international conflict involving the Soviet Union. So why didn't Johnson choose to accept the existence of the Communist regime 90 miles away? Around the end of his presidency, even Kennedy had explored the possibility of dialogue with the Cuban leader. Why didn't Johnson do the same?

This book by Håkan Karlsson and Tomás Diez Acosta makes no mention of dialogue, but their answers to these questions are clear. Johnson had no intention of choosing peaceful coexistence with Havana, and he preferred to remodel the secret war into a less expensive and more sustainable one. Never as enthusiastic as Kennedy about the CIA's Integrated Covert Action Program, he moved to phase it down. But the U.S. president had little sympathy for the Cuban Revolution, and his priority was on his reelection, the war in Vietnam, and anything else. With the July 1964 passage of the OAS resolution calling for a hemispheric-wide embargo on Cuba, the Johnson administration escalated its economic war against Cuba. Combined with psychological warfare, occasional provocations, and persistent efforts to cut Cuba's trade with Western Europe and Japan, its Cuba policy continued to aim for the overthrow of the Cuban regime.

This storyline is familiar to historians of U.S.-Cuban relations. Most of the declassified U.S. records Karlsson and Diez Acosta rely on are those compiled in the *Foreign Relations of the United States* (FRUS) volumes, available online. Regrettably, the book rarely discusses the major English-language secondary works that have used the same sets of U.S. documents to explain where their interpretation differs from those written by others. Because of the unavailability of critical Cuban sources, readers still cannot verify the nature of Cuban military support for armed revolutionaries in Venezuela despite its pivotal importance for Johnson's perception of Cuba. Nor, in the absence of international research, will readers know how accurate the U.S. analysis of the policies of other nations had been.

Regardless of these limitations, the book presents fresh perspectives of Johnson's Cuba policy and carefully situates Johnson's foreign policy in the regional

and global context, including the U.S. invasions in the Dominican Republic and Vietnam. It highlights some key factors that previous studies might not have sufficiently emphasized, such as Johnson's concern about the expected Soviet transfer of the surface-to-air missiles to Cuba. Most importantly, the cited secondary Cuban sources, recently published in Cuba, testify to the impact of repeated provocative acts by CIA officials and U.S. military personnel stationed in the U.S. Guantánamo Bay Naval Base. Some of them might even have gone against Johnson's personal wish to restrain them, but with the memory of the infamous Tonkin Gulf incident still fresh, each of these acts influenced Cuba's perception of U.S. threats.

At the heart of Johnson's Cuba policy was the passage of the 1964 OAS resolution. Unlike many U.S. historians who tend to limit their focus to U.S. thinking, Karlsson and Diez Acosta pay attention to the Declaration of Santiago, a Cuban response to the resolution, and present a more balanced view of the whole event. They claim that the OAS resolution was unfair and even hypocritical because it only dealt with Cuba's threat to Venezuela—whatever it might have been—while completely ignoring the danger Cuba faced from the United States and pro-U.S. military dictators in Latin America. To reinforce this point, they highlight Mexico's opposition to the OAS resolution.

The internal logic of U.S. policy toward Cuba had substantially changed with the subsequent rise of Cuban American politics. The successive waves of Cuba-to-U.S.A. emigration in the last half-century had a transformative impact on the dynamic of U.S.-Cuban relations. Given the ongoing U.S. economic sanctions against Cuba, however, the relevance of the Johnson-era story is not yet gone. *The Johnson Administration's Cuba Policy* is a welcome reminder of the lasting legacy of the U.S. response to the Cuban Revolution.

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