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Assassinating Castro: A Peculiar Psychology

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Abstract. The recent reporting (Bardach & Rohter, 1998) of yet another alleged assassination attempt launched from United States soil against Fidel Castro sets the occasion for offering a psychodynamic rationale for the quantity and quality of such attempts against the Cuban leader.

Assassination attempts against Fidel Castro have been many. They have come from agents within his own government; of other governments; formal but nongovernmental organizations; cabals; informal groups; and individuals differing in degree of ideology, ideological fervor, and mental health. The attempts have occurred within Cuba and outside of it. They have all failed.

One rationale for these failures is based on a rational and logical analysis of security. For example, the internal and external counterintelligence assets of the Cuban government have provided an exceptional early warning system for assassination attempts. The creation and maintenance of bogus opposition entities--cf. Dzerzhinsky's The Trust--the penetration of legitimate ones, the utilization of double agents, the implementation of false flag operations, and the exploitation of useful idiots and play-acting Fidelistas from intellectuals to the intellectually challenged have stymied even well-planned assassination operations.

Another rationale, however, is predicated on the observation--based on books, journals, newspaper accounts, and television/radio interviews--that most assassination attempts against Castro have been anything but well-planned. This may especially be the case for attempts originating from the United States (US) by the US Government (USG) or--at least since President Ford's executive order prohibiting assassination as a foreign policy tool--by Cuban-Americans residing in the US but--if in accordance with USG public policy--acting independently and without its knowledge.

This rationale is based on the psychodynamics of policy development, implementation, and evaluation--the sine qua non of which is psychological conflict. For example, there seemingly has been and continues to be a significant ambivalence about assassination on the part of some senior USG decisionmakers. This ambivalence may involve tensions in developing a rapprochement among ethical, moral, legal, and strategic criteria. The intrapsychic compromise resolution of competing concerns-- i.e., conflict--may be a flawed plan; too little or too much monitoring of the operation; sudden and last-minute modifications of a plan that doom it to failure; and inadequate operations, communications, personnel, and physical security.

As another example, Castro's coming to power so close to US territory and not conforming to USG security objectives (hegemony) in Latin America have induced a huge narcissistic wound within some senior USG decisionmakers. These decisionmakers have personalized their professions and possess a sense of entitlement that events in Latin America must stay within a prescribed envelope of security possibilities. Straying from the envelope threatens not only the security of the USG but the psychological security of these decisionmakers. The resultant narcissistic rage engenders schemes vetted more for fantasy and the satisfaction of unconscious desire and self-strivings than for operational efficacy.

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A last example is less specific to Castro and more generally related to the nature of political leadership. One foundation of such leadership is the nature of unconscious linkage--between leader and followers; leader and other leaders; and leader and yet others who harbor beliefs, attitudes, opinions, and feelings about what this leader looks like and how this leader thinks, feels, desires, and behaves. This unconscious linkage is based on the various intrapsychic compromise formations that continuously titrate, shape, and manifest conflict and the fit of these formations with information about the leader. Political cognition and behavior are significantly affected--their rational and logical bases often contaminated--by these linkages. Especially because the latter are unconscious, the former often exhibit primitive characteristics contraindicated by the canons of operational planning.

In conclusion, the more than 30-year era of assassination plots against Castro mirrors the peculiar psychology of politics--a nexus of sophistication and the primitive, the conscious and the unconscious--suggesting that powerful forces are at work. For even the most intelligent among us can act "out of character"--even if "out of character" comes from the character within. (See Bardach, A.L., & Rohter, L. (May 5, 1998). Investigation leads to plot to kill Castro by powerful Cuban lobby. *The New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com>; Bernstein, J.S. (1995). The grandiose character. *Psychoanalytic Review*, 82, 293-311; Blum, H.P. (1997). Clinical and developmental dimensions of hate. *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, 45, 359-375; Executive Order No. 11,905. (February 18, 1976); Lansky, M.R. (1996). Shame and suicide in Sophocles' Ajax. *Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, 65, 761-786; Miliora, M.T. (1995). The dialectics of historical fantasy: The ideology of George Lincoln Rockwell. *Psychohistory Review*, 23, 259-281; Myers, S.L. (May 7, 1998). The Pentagon now belittles the menace posed by Cuba. *The New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com>; Rhodewalt, F., & Morf, C.C. (1998). On self-aggrandizement and anger: A temporal analysis of narcissism and affective reactions to success and failure. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 74, 672-685.) (Keywords: Assassination, Castro, Cuba.)