

ple, protested against non-payment for lands arbitrarily seized in contravention of the provisions of the land reform, but not against the law itself. However, Castro's bitter criticism of the United States over the explosion aboard *La Coubre*, his implication that he would seek to purchase arms from the Soviet Union, his negotiation of a trade agreement with the Soviets, and the beginnings of the expropriation of American businesses all exhausted the Eisenhower Administration's patience, already limited by the approach of the 1960 presidential elections.

The result was a dramatic shift in US policy towards Cuba in mid-1960. First, in mid-March, the president authorized the organization and finance by the CIA of an anti-Castro military force. Second, the US government urged Texaco, Esso, and Shell — the three companies controlling Cuba's oil refining capacity — to refuse to handle Soviet crude, posing a serious threat to Cuba's economy. Third, Eisenhower requested direct authority over the Cuban sugar quota. In the midst of appeals to "destroy Castro and communism in Cuba" and to stop "supporting the rapid growth of international communism at our very doorstep", Congress in mid-year gave Eisenhower the authority he requested. He then reduced the quota by 700 thousand tons in 1960 and to zero for 1961, thereby at a stroke eliminating Cuba's major source of foreign exchange. It was anticipated that these measures would either cause Castro's demise or bring him back into line. In fact, however, had they been explicitly designed to provide an opening for the expansion of Soviet influence in the region, they could not have been better tailored.

The combination of the sugar quota cancellation and the refusal to refine Soviet crude (in conjunction with foreign exchange problems which rendered it difficult for the Cubans to obtain oil elsewhere) was a recipe for economic disaster unless some other power bailed the Cubans out. The active sponsorship of an anti-Castro invasion force³³ greatly enhanced the Cuban need for arms, while the United States was blocking access to sources over whom it enjoyed influence. As Blasier put it:

Any one of the Eisenhower Administration's anti-Castro actions might have led to the fall of the Castro government. Castro reasoned, not implausibly, that he was in mortal peril.³⁴

³³ Castro apparently learned of this decision in mid-1960. Blasier, *op. cit.* note 27, p. 195.

³⁴ *loc. cit.*