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**Christopher Hull. "Parallel Spheres: Anglo-American Cooperation Over Cuba, 1959-61." *Cold War History* 12:1 (February 2012): 51-68. DOI: 10.1080/14682745.2010.506510. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14682745.2010.506510>**

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Review by **Stephen G. Rabe**, University of Texas at Dallas

This is a straight-forward and useful article. Utilizing the records of the Foreign Office at the Public Record Office in Kew, Christopher Hull of the University of Nottingham has analyzed the policies of the United Kingdom toward Cuba and the United States during the first, critical years of the Cuban Revolution. Hull finds that the government of Prime Minister Harold Macmillan largely acceded to U.S. wishes to isolate Cuba. But British leaders upheld their traditional faith in free trade and freedom of the seas and declined to join the economic embargo of Cuba. They also privately questioned whether the United States was pursuing a wise course with its hostile policies toward Cuba. They believed that the United States was repeating the same mistakes that the United Kingdom had made toward Gamal Abdel Nasser during the Suez Crisis of 1956.

Between 1959 and 1961, relations between the United States and Fidel Castro's Cuba deteriorated rapidly, leading to the Bay of Pigs invasion of April 1961 and the Cuban Missile Crisis of October 1962. The Dwight D. Eisenhower administration initially took an ambivalent, even contradictory, attitude toward the 26<sup>th</sup> of July Movement. As the insurgency led by Castro, Ernesto "Che" Guevara, and the band of bearded guerrillas, known as *los barbudos*, spread, the United States cut off arms deliveries in March 1958 to its long-time client, the dictator Fulgencio Batista. As the same time, U.S. officials futilely cast about for a moderate alternative to Castro.<sup>1</sup> The Eisenhower administration granted diplomatic recognition in early 1959 to the new Cuban government and hoped to moderate it with economic aid. By November 1959, however, Secretary of State Christian Herter and officials within the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) had decided that Castro must be overthrown and the Cuban Revolution overturned. Castro had undermined the substantial

<sup>1</sup> Thomas G. Paterson, *Contesting Castro: The United States and the Triumph of the Cuban Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 69-225.

U.S. investments in Cuba, challenged U.S. hegemony in the Western Hemisphere, and flirted with the Soviet Union. Castro's closest advisors, his brother, Raúl Castro, and Che Guevara, were avowed Communists. In March 1960, President Eisenhower approved a CIA program to destabilize the Castro government. The plan included an exile invasion of the island. The administration also began to restrict trade with Cuba and, in early January 1961, just before the inauguration of President John F. Kennedy, the administration broke diplomatic relations with Cuba. Eisenhower had warned the president-elect that "in the long run the United States cannot allow the Castro government to continue to exist in Cuba." The administration had also launched a series of plots aimed at assassinating Cuban leaders, including Castro.<sup>2</sup>

The Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations pressured the Macmillan government to adopt a hostile stance toward Cuba. As Professor Hull demonstrates, the United Kingdom largely succumbed to U.S. pressure, albeit reluctantly. The Macmillan government agreed in November 1959 not to exchange military aircraft with Cuba and, in August 1960, it acceded to U.S. requests to restrict sales of military equipment to Cuba. After the break in U.S.-Cuban relations, the United Kingdom's embassy in Havana made available to Washington the embassy's diplomatic and intelligence reporting. And in response to a personal appeal from President Kennedy, the United Kingdom supported the United States at the United Nations in the aftermath of the Bay of the Pigs debacle. Privately, British officials, in the words of Henry Hankey, the long-time head of the Latin American section of the Foreign Office, believed that the United States had placed the United Kingdom in an "impossible position" at the United Nations, because the Bay of Pigs invasion represented an "open infraction of international law" (63).

Hankey's observation that the United States pursued ill-conceived policies toward Castro's Cuba was repeated by British officials in London and Havana in the period from 1959 to 1961. Embassy observers considered U.S. fears of communism in Cuba to be exaggerated. Thinking perhaps of the United Kingdom's past misjudgment of Nasser of Egypt, they labeled the Cuban Revolution as "a nationalist and agrarian movement with neutralist tendencies in some sectors" (54). In June 1960, Prime Minister Macmillan recorded in his diary that the United States appeared "paralysed and uncertain" over Cuba. The Prime Minister reasoned that the United States did not understand "colonialism" and "imperialism" (54). Officials in London further feared that clumsy U.S. efforts to overthrow Castro would fail, leaving the Cuban leader in a dangerous, embittered mood. The Soviet Union would inevitably benefit from such a development.

The United Kingdom had long ago learned to defer to U.S. leadership in the Western Hemisphere. During the Venezuelan Boundary Crisis of 1895, the United Kingdom tacitly conceded that the region was a U.S. sphere of influence. As Secretary of State Richard Olney memorably put it, U.S. "fiat was practically law" and "its infinite resources combined with its isolated position render it master of the situation and practically invulnerable as

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<sup>2</sup> Stephen G. Rabe, *Eisenhower and Latin America: The Foreign Policy of Anticommunism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 117-33, 162-73.

against any or all other powers.”<sup>3</sup> Throughout the twentieth century, British interests were constantly reminded of Olney’s boast. In the aftermath of World War I, British oil companies had to forfeit their monopolies in oil-rich Venezuela and permit U.S. companies, like Standard Oil of New Jersey, to drill for oil. As one Department of Trade officer lamented, the British could not resist “the power of the dollar.”<sup>4</sup> British Ambassador Harold Caccia in Washington regretted the course of history. In August 1960, Caccia told the Foreign Office that he was “aware that in two world wars, while we were fighting for freedom, United States firms scooped our trade in Latin America” (60). Further indignities awaited London. In February 1962, Secretary of State Dean Rusk informed the Foreign Office that “it is not possible for us to put up with an independent British Guiana under [Cheddi] Jagan.” The United States subsequently forced London to deprive the popularly elected Indo-Guyanese leader of power.<sup>5</sup>

In the area of international trade, however, the Macmillan government resisted U.S. demands. As Hull notes, the United Kingdom depended on trade for its economic viability and any hope of matching the postwar economic growth of countries like West Germany depended on expanding trade. In the nineteenth century, British merchants dominated Latin America’s trade. As late as 1913, the United Kingdom had supplied Latin America with 25 percent of its imports. By 1960, British traders supplied Latin America with only 5 percent of its imports. But Cuba had been a bright spot, ranking as the United Kingdom’s third best market in the region, after Argentina and Venezuela. Key exports to Cuba included textiles, chemicals, machinery, vehicles, civilian aircraft, and whiskey. The British proceeded cautiously. The government permitted Washington to prohibit the export of offensive weapon systems, but British merchants continued to trade with Castro’s Cuba through the 1960s. In February 1964, for example, Prime Minister Sir Alec Douglas-Home rejected a personal appeal made by President Lyndon Baines Johnson in the White House for the British to join in the trade embargo against Cuba.<sup>6</sup>

Professor Hull correctly observes that the historical literature on Anglo-Cuban relations is not well developed. With this fine article, Hull has made a good start on rectifying that gap. Let us hope that he continues his good research and writing.

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<sup>3</sup> Olney’s declaration can be found in Robert Holden and Eric Zolov, eds., *Latin America and the United States: A Documentary History*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 66-69.

<sup>4</sup> Stephen G. Rabe, *The Road to OPEC: United States Relations with Venezuela, 1919-1976* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982), 22-42.

<sup>5</sup> Stephen G. Rabe, *U.S. Intervention in British Guiana: A Cold War Story* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 93-138.

<sup>6</sup> Stephen G. Rabe, *The Killing Zone: The United States Wages Cold War in Latin America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 78-79.

countries, including leading seminars in Argentina, Brazil, and Ecuador. He has served as the Mary Ball Washington Professor of American History at University College, Dublin in Ireland and as the Fulbright Bicentennial Chair in American History at the University of Helsinki in Finland. He has written or edited ten books. These include: *John F. Kennedy: World Leader* (Potomac Books, 2010) and *The Killing Zone: The United States Wages Cold War in Latin America* (Oxford University Press, 2012).

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