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Book Review: An International History of the Cuban Missile Crisis

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Review of *An International History of the Cuban Missile Crisis*

David Gioe, Len Scott, and Christopher Andrew (2014). *An International History of the Cuban Missile Crisis*. London: Routledge. ISBN: 978-0-415-73217-8 (hbk). ISBN: 978-1-315-81727-9 (ebk). 307 pages

An International History of the Cuban Missile Crisis (Gioe et al. 2014) is a compilation of various independent works on the global perspectives of the 1962 Cuban missile crisis. The editors note that the various pieces focus on three key areas, including the importance of memory, intelligence achievements and failings, and the risks of nuclear war (Gioe et al. 2014).

Many of the pieces in this compilation focus on the gaps between personally recorded historical perspectives and information widely available in pre-existing literature on the history of the Cuban missile crisis. For example, Andrew and Catterall portray the importance of public perception and media during the crisis (Andrew 2014, 9–24; Catterall 2014, 72–98). The use of personal accounts during the crisis by both leadership and common civilians give testament to the images and perceptions not otherwise noted in common sources on the crisis. The analyses of personal accounts provide valuable comparative material for students in political science and international relations studying the differences between public and leadership attitudes during the Cuban missile crisis. Various pieces also provide more insight into the various processes by which policy decisions were made during the crisis. For example Munton's piece titled the *Fourth Question* focuses on considerations behind John F. Kennedy's decision to offer up the Jupiter missiles in Turkey (Munton 2014, 258–278). Furthermore, the personal historical accounts as well as the accounts of media coverage on the crisis (Seaton and Hughes 2014, 43–71) serve to initiate discussion on the similarities and differences between the U.S. and British reactions to the imminent threat of nuclear war in 1962 with those of today by both civilian and political figures. Unfortunately, the literature on memory does not address how the U.S. population could react today to an equivalent threat of nuclear war given different views, threat perceptions, and the long forgotten memories of the destruction of the nuclear bombs unleashed during World War II. Thus, although substantive in the ability to add to the pre-existing literature on the perceptions and images of the Cuban missile crisis of 1962, the section on memory falls short to relate how the memory of the 1962 Cuban missile crisis informs how international conflicts are remembered today or how similar conflicts may be remembered in the future.

The accounts of intelligence achievements and failures during the Cuban missile crisis also add to the existing literature, yet also fall short on extrapolating how lessons learned impact intelligence practices today. The pieces on intelligence activity during the crisis read more to the tune of a historical narrative of which there is already an abundance of on the Cuban missile crisis. For example, Goodman's piece

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titled the *Joint Intelligence Committee and the Cuban missile crisis* (Goodman 2014, 99–105) and Peterson's piece titled *A trial by fire* (Peterson 2014, 106–134) provided additional historical perspectives on the roles of the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) and the emergence of the DIA but do not deeply discuss the impacts of the crisis on the JIC or the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) today. Once again, the literature incorporated into this book regarding intelligence activity adds to further historical narratives of the Cuban missile crisis, yet does not discuss how or why many of the same perception and image problems, as well as organizational problems continued, or play into how the U.S intelligence community approaches new threats, collects and analyzes intelligence, works with ally intelligence services, or creates actionable intelligence today. The various works presented in this compilation on the intelligence community are thus best read in conjunction with more formal works on critical thinking, political psychology, and intelligence community history. Recommended additional readings for the intelligence pieces found in this compilation might include Cottam et al.'s (2010) *Introduction to Political Psychology*, Cottam's (1994) *Images and Intervention U.S Policies in Latin America*, and Jeffrey T. Richelson's (1997) *A Century of Spies Intelligence in the Twentieth Century*.

In regards to the topic of weapons of mass destruction, this compilation focuses more on political implications and perceptions and less on lessons learned and future considerations. Although none of the pieces were found to directly speak to the issue of how Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) affect policy and intelligence operations, the topic is primarily present in recounts of individual historical perspectives and the worries of various international bodies such as the UN and third parties such as Australia and Italy. For example, Scott's piece titled *Intelligence and the risk of nuclear war* (Scott 2014, 25–42) focuses on the perception and attitudes toward nuclear war as well as leadership profiles, and less on the interpretation of intelligence data or practices in regards to a nuclear crisis. The literature focusing on intelligence provides little insight regarding the implications of WMD policy today, such as the lack of international consensus on what now constitutes a WMD. What this book lacks is the ability to connect how the lessons learned from the Cuban missile crisis have affected policy and intelligence operations today. For example, although Kent and Naumkin (2014) address how Russia perceives and remembers the Cuban missile crisis today, no insight is given into how the relationship that was forged during the Cold War between Russia and Cuba (and further strengthened by the Cuban missile crisis) is currently impacted by recent developments regarding the United States lifting the Cuban embargo today. These types of topics are of extreme interest to intelligence professionals and students today.

Overall, this compilation best supplements pre-existing literature on the Cuban missile crisis, but does not add new insight into current Cuban–International or Cuban–U.S affairs. For those personally interested in behind the scenes political perceptions and the various reactions of the U.S. and British public to the threat of nuclear war; this book provides good source material and rare insights into personal reactions to the crisis. For students of political science and international studies this

book serves as an adequate compilation of additional historical perspectives on the inner workings of policy and international negotiation during the Cuban missile crisis. For students in intelligence studies, this book is best used only as a source for specific pieces on intelligence community history during the Cuban missile crisis as it focuses heavily on history and less on lessons learned or the intimate intricacies of the various intelligence disciplines used during the crisis to collect and analyze data. Overall, this book compiles a variety of interesting pieces which help further understand the inner workings and underpinnings of the Cuban missile crisis, yet it does not offer the necessary discussions on future policy and intelligence considerations during WMD threats which would have distinguished this book from the pre-existing literature on the Cuban missile crisis.

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