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## American general who wanted to oust Fidel at any cost

by Paulo Nogueira

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These were some of the compliments paid by the New York Times obituary in 1988, which it dedicated to the four-star general, Lyman Lemnitzer, who died at age 89.

There is another far less admirable side of Lemnitzer . Lemnitzer was Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces of the United States, the most powerful position in the American military hierarchy. He was in his position when Kennedy took office in 1961.

Lemnitzer despised Kennedy. He thought him a weak, easy prey for the Soviets in the Cold War. He likened him to Neville Chamberlain, the British prime minister who failed to deal with Hitler and was eventually replaced by Churchill.

Lemnitizer feared that Communism would triumph in the United States. For him, social programs advocated by Kennedy were dangerous steps toward socialization of the economy. (It's more or less what Mitt Romney thinks.)

Cuba, under the Soviet orbit, was a huge threat to the general. So he planned an action which only became known 40 years later, when secret documents were released.

It was called Operation Northwoods. To declare war on Cuba was complicated internally and externally. The Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956 was fresh in the memory of the world. "We cannot make Cuba our Hungary," said Kennedy.

Lemnitizer had an outlet. With the men on his staff, he planned a perfect coup. The United States would carry out a series of terrorist attacks and ascribe them to the Castro government.

The U.S. military base at Guantanamo would be attacked. Cuban anti-communists would be killed in the United States. A plane was hijacked and shot down. Americans would die and so would create the conditions for a war against Cuba.

Public opinion in the United States would cry out for retaliation. And it would be clear to the world that it was not a repeat of the tragedy of Hungary.

All this is the subject of a fascinating book called "Body of Secrets," by the American journalist, James Bamford. Bamford was the one who discovered the documents in the archives of U.S. intelligence.

It is unknown if the General's plan reached Kennedy. What is certain is that it was passed to Kennedy's Secretary of Defense. The project was finally rejected. However, in the Kennedy administration, Lemnitizer was removed from his position. Shortly after he would assume the NATO military command in Europe.

The discovery of the plan, four decades after being aborted, would stoke the imagination of conspiracy theorists according to which September 11 was plotted by the United States.

Personally, I consider this to be a foolish theory. But Lemnitizer, the "war hero" hailed by the New York Times, eventually went down in history as a symbol of the American way of seeing the world and taking care of their interests.