

Cuban International Relations at 60



Reflections on Global Connections

Edited by Mervyn J. Bain
and Chris Walker

Cuban International Relations at 60

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Introduction

Reflections on Cuba's Global Connections (1959–2019)

Mervyn J. Bain and Chris Walker

On August 24, 2016, the half century of civil unrest in Colombia came to an end with the signing of a peace treaty between the government of Juan Manuel Santos and negotiators from the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). This was a truly historic event with it being the culmination of a four-year series of talks which had taken place in both Norway and Cuba. Moreover, the final peace agreement was signed in the Cuban capital Havana. The Cuban government's role in this process and the venue for the signing of the peace agreement were indicative of Cuba as an international actor, a role it has played throughout the revolutionary period starting in January 1959. Cuba as a truly global actor was not only very different from the prerevolutionary period but was also remarkable for a Caribbean island.

The timing of the Cuban Revolution at the height of the Cold War and the island's relationship with the United States (U.S.) were crucial for Cuba's initial prominence on the world arena. Cuban-U.S. relations are the focus of the first section of this book, but the result of the role that the United States had played economically and politically in Cuba in the first half of the twentieth century gave rise to the prevalence of Cuban nationalism and counter-hegemonic feelings within the Cuban Revolution. In short, the new revolutionary government in Havana wanted to fundamentally alter its relationship with Washington. This Cuban desire and a U.S. refusal to have its hegemony on the island challenged (highlighted by the events at the Bay of Pigs in April 1961), resulted in a fracturing relationship between Havana and Washington, which has endured for over fifty years, or as Fidel Castro has noted, "We would not in any event have ended up as close friends. The U.S. had dominated us for too long" (Smith 1987).

However, as Cuba's relationship with the United States deteriorated, a burgeoning relationship with the Soviet Union emerged, despite Nikita Khrushchev stating, "At the time that Fidel Castro led his revolution to victory and entered Havana with his troops, we had no idea what political course his regime would follow. We knew there were individual Communists participating in the movement which Castro led" (Khrushchev 1971). Havana's relationship with Moscow is examined in a later chapter of this book, but the Cold War setting of the period was critical for relations between Cuba and the Soviet Union. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, international relations were bipolar and, in this situation, if Cuba did not side with the United States it was logical that it would side with the Soviet Union. The economic and security guarantees which the Kremlin could provide were significant. These guarantees could potentially challenge U.S. hegemony not just in Latin America, but also in Cuba a mere 90 miles from the United States. Thus, efforts to rebalance geopolitics were key driving forces for the support which Moscow provided for the Cuban Revolution and these guarantees would potentially help mitigate increasing U.S. aggression toward revolutionary Cuba. An example, underpinning this logic, was highlighted on May 9, 1960, when Moscow agreed to buy the 700,000 tons of Cuban sugar that the United States refused to purchase. On this Khrushchev commented, "Let Americans refuse to buy Cuban sugar. We shall be glad to buy it. . . . If the Americans don't want to eat Cuban sugar, it will be a pleasure for Soviet people to eat it" (Izvestia 1960, 10).

The outcome of Cuba's worsening relationship with the United States coupled with flourishing Havana-Moscow relations in the early 1960s brought Cuba into the epicenter of Cold War tension most infamously evidenced by the final two weeks of October 1962 and Cuban Missile Crisis. The immediate tension of this crisis may have dissipated (the crisis and its aftermath ended the honeymoon period of Cuban-Soviet relations with subsequent pressure appearing in the relationship), but it did not remove Cuba from the global stage as the Cuban Revolution continued to project itself on the world arena. As noted above, this was not only remarkable for a Caribbean island, but also resulted in the publication of a plethora of academic books which have focused on Cuba's relationship with individual countries and regions as well as attempted to explain this global foreign policy phenomenon.

In describing this phenomenon, Michael Erisman in *Cuba's Foreign Relations in a Post-Soviet World* detailed five concepts which he believed have, at times, been given credence within Cuba's revolutionary foreign policy. These are the superclient/surrogate thesis, *Fidelista peronalismo*, the revolutionary crusade, dependency and counter dependency, and realist pragmatism (Erisman 2000, 33–47). The close nature of Cuban-Soviet relations (despite noted pressures within the relationship after the Cuban Missile Crisis) brought to the fore the ideas of the superclient/surrogate thesis which

posited that Havana merely acted on the directives of the Kremlin. The huge economic support which the Soviet Union provided for the Cuban Revolution and the perception of Cuba acting as a “beachhead” for further Soviet penetration into Latin America underpinned the superclient/surrogate thesis (Morley 1987, 135–162; Andrew and Mitrokhin 2005, 33–58). Moreover, it was also thought that this thesis, and the economic and political support offered by Moscow, provided the motivation for Havana siding with Moscow in the Sino-Chinese split, despite what appeared to be a closer ideological affinity between the Cuban and Chinese revolutionaries.¹ Furthermore, Cuban military involvement in Africa from the mid-1970s appeared to strengthen the rationale behind the superclient/surrogate thesis as the Cuban military personnel were transported to Africa in Soviet planes. Cuban involvement in Africa will be further examined in the second section of this book, but it gave rise to the belief, particularly in the United States, that the Cuban military were “Gurkhas of the Soviet empire” (Erisman 2000, 34).

Internal Cuban changes in the 1970s further gave the Caribbean island the apparent appearance of being under the control of the Kremlin’s directives. Among these, the creation of JUCEPLAN in the autumn of 1971 (the Cuban version of the central Soviet planning body GOSPLAN), as well as Cuba gaining membership to the socialist trading block in June 1972 (known as the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance [CMEA]), were some of the most significant. Cuba giving its backing to the Warsaw Pact’s military interventions, first in Czechoslovakia in August 1968 and then Afghanistan in December 1979, further added to the ideas of the superclient/surrogate thesis. Moreover, the “discovery” of Soviet troops in Cuba in the late 1970s and early to mid-1980s, including the Cuban air force receiving some of the most modern Soviet military hardware, only exacerbated the idea of Cuba being at the behest of the Soviet Union (Pavlov 1994, 31–32).

However, the importance of nationalism within the Cuban Revolution remains key to understanding it. Additionally, nationalism also challenged the concept of the superclient/surrogate thesis from its inception. Additionally, the superclient/surrogate thesis disappeared with the implosion of the Soviet Union in December 1991, bringing a temporary end to close Havana-Moscow relations. The superclient/surrogate thesis was not only contested due to the predominance of Cuban nationalism within the Cuban Revolution, but the idea of Cuba merely acting at the behest of the Kremlin also ignored several of the other notions that were prevalent in revolutionary Cuban foreign policy.

Included in these other notions is the role of *Fidel personalismo*. *Fidel personalismo* is the specific Cuban version of the Great Man Theory. This theory supposes that, at certain times throughout history, specific countries have been dominated by one person who has acted beyond, or outside, the

traditional political system with their country's policies being at their own personal whim. Adolf Hitler in Nazi Germany and Joseph Stalin in the Soviet Union are often perceived in this manner.

For almost fifty years, Fidel Castro dominated the Cuban political system while also becoming a global international actor, not least as a champion of multiple causes in the Developing World. In 1979, he became the President of the Nonaligned Movement when this organization held its conference in the Cuban capital. Although this is the case, the Cuban political system and the island's foreign policy were never Castro's personal fiefdom. From the 1970s on the Cuban Revolution becoming increasingly institutionalized. The institutionalization process safeguarded the Revolution's future if Castro was removed from the political arena. Consequently, organizations such as the Cuban Communist Party (PCC), the National Assembly, the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC), the Cuban Armed Forces (FAR), and the Ministry of Revolutionary Armed Forces (MINFAR), all became increasingly significant players in the Cuban political system (González 1977; Erisman 2000).

Events since the summer of 2006 evidence both the success of the institutionalization process and how both the Cuban political system and its foreign policy have been more nuanced than to be dominated by solely *Fidel personalismo*. Initially, due to his deteriorating health Fidel Castro began to play an increasingly reduced role in Cuban politics. In February 2008 Raúl Castro became the permanent President of Cuba and, after Fidel's passing in November 2016, helped ensure the continuity and stability of the Cuban political system. Moreover, in April 2018, Miguel Díaz-Canel replaced Raúl Castro as the President of Cuba.

However, as noted above, Fidel Castro was a key advocate for issues within the Developing World. When this is combined with the actions of Che Guevara in the 1960s and Cuban support for revolutionary movements it has, at times, been surmised that the principle determinant in Cuban foreign policy were the ideas of a revolutionary crusade or desire to spark other global revolutions, especially in the Global South. This was particularly the case throughout the 1960s with Guevara's involvement in the Belgian Congo in 1965 and Bolivia in 1967. Further, Cuba also provided abetment for other revolutionary movements and progressive conferences such as the Solidarity Conference of the Peoples of Africa, Asia, and Latin America (also known as the Tricontinental Conference), being held in Havana in February 1966 (Granma February 7, 1966, 1). Moreover, Cuban internationalism was also evident in Cuban involvement in Africa in the mid-1970s when the island dispatched large numbers of both military and nonmilitary personnel to the continent.²

A major component of Cuba's activism was the island's internationalism with John Kirk and Michael Erisman writing, "Indeed, there was another key element to these internationalist initiatives that, although more low-profile

than Havana's military campaigns, proved to be much more significant in the long run. This often overlooked dimension entailed Cuba's extensive developmental aid efforts, at the center of which were its health care programs" (Kirk and Erisman 2009, 2). Cuban internationalism would come to even more prominence from the late 1980s and early 1990s onwards as the hopes for other successful revolutions receded with the reconfiguration of world politics at the end of Cold War. The number of Cuban doctors and teachers who have worked around the world, including with children affected by the Chernobyl disaster who were provided a period of convalescence on the Caribbean island (paid for the Cuban government) even after the end of Soviet-Cuban relations, demonstrate the Cuban government's continuing adherence to internationalism (Feinsilver 1993; Kirk and Erisman 2009). In sum, throughout the revolutionary period, the Cuban Revolution was, and remains, at the forefront of advocating for issues within the Developing World.

Since the time of the Spanish conquest in the 1490s outside powers have dominated Cuba. First Spain and then from 1898 until 1959, the United States. Some also believe that from the late 1950s/early 1960s until late 1991, dependency moved from the United States to the Soviet Union (Azici 2000). Additionally, it has also been suggested that in the last years of the first decade of the twenty-first century, a level of Cuban economic reliance on Venezuela materialized (Bain 2015).

Notwithstanding this, Erisman believes that since January 1959, Havana has continually striven to reduce its dependence on outside powers, with this resulting from the aforementioned primacy of nationalism within the Revolution. The outcome is counter-dependency, which is fundamental to revolutionary Cuban foreign policy and a key determinant for Havana's desire to fundamentally alter its relationship with Washington in the immediate aftermath of the Cuban Revolution, noted above. Additionally, during the period of close Havana–Moscow relations, it afforded the Cuban government with bargaining power, or leverage, in its relationship with the Kremlin. Havana repeatedly endeavored to demonstrate its independence from Moscow and therefore reduce its dependence on the Soviet Union. In sum, the antithesis of the surrogate thesis detailed previously. Cuba attempting to show its autonomy from the Kremlin was evident in both the aforementioned radicalism of the 1960s, with Havana's policy toward Latin America being very different from the more cautious Soviet approach of the time, as well as Cuba's involvement in Africa in the mid-1970s when Havana acted before the Soviet Union by deploying troops to Angola.³

Counter-dependency has also been apparent in the post-Cold War era when, bereft of its socialist trading partners, Cuba attempted to cultivate relationships with other countries. These Cuban attempts were both political and economic as the island continued to endure hostility from the United States.

As noted prior, a degree of economic reliance on Venezuela emerged in the twenty-first century, but to partially mitigate this economic reliance Havana has endeavored to foster increased economic relationships among others such as China, the European Union (EU), and Russia. Moreover, counter-dependency was again evident on January 20, 2015, when the Russian spy ship *Viktor Leonov* docked in the Cuban capital. Significantly January 20, 2015, was the day before bilateral Cuban-U.S. talks commenced after the beginning of a historical normalization process between Havana and Washington that had started in December 2014 (Eturbonews 2015). Participants in this normalization process, Ambassadors Josefina Vidal and Jeffrey DeLaurentis contribute to this volume. However, the timing of the visit of the *Viktor Leonov* to Cuba sent a very clear message to Washington that, regardless of how Cuban-U.S. relations developed, Havana was not going to allow any forms of reliance on the U.S. to develop, or, as William LeoGrande has written, that Havana was not going to put “all of Cuba’s eggs in one international basket” (LeoGrande 2016). Put simply, this would be to contrary to the principles of the Cuban revolutionary elite who, since January 1959, had continuously endeavored to prevent forms of Cuban dependence materializing.

In addition to the arrival of the *Viktor Leonov* in the Cuban capital, demonstrating the principles of counter-dependency within Cuban foreign policy, it also evidenced the ideas of realist pragmatism within it, a theme also evident throughout the revolutionary period. The principle driver in Cuban decision-making has been the security of the Revolution. Consequently, Cuba attempting to continue to show the importance of its relationship with Russia in early 2015 safeguarded the Revolution against the possibility of the talks and relations with the United States not developing as the Caribbean island hoped. With the deterioration of relations with the United States under the Presidency of Donald Trump, this appears somewhat prudent. Moreover, realist pragmatism also explains Havana’s aforementioned decision to side with Moscow in the Sino-Soviet split in the early 1960s due to the increased economic and military security which the Soviet Union could provide when compared to China. This is despite the apparent closer ideological affinity that Cuba had with China.

Realist pragmatism was also apparent in August 1968 when Cuba gave its support to the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia that ended the “Prague spring.” In providing this support, Havana hoped to both leverage increased security guarantees from Moscow as well as signal to the Kremlin that the Cuban radicalism of the 1960s was beginning to wane (Shearman 1987, 35). Furthermore, González has also described that despite the previously detailed institutionalization process of the 1970s, realist pragmatism was evident throughout this decade with Carlos Rafael Rodríguez, the island’s leading economist and member of the politburo of the PCC, being

one of the chief adherents to realist pragmatism (González 1977, 3). Raúl Castro has also often been perceived in a similar light, with the more pragmatic foreign policy pursued by Raúl Castro from 2008 to 2018 being significant for the improvement in Cuban-U.S. relations under his and Barack Obama's Presidencies (LeoGrande 2018, 161).

Realist Pragmatism was also at the fore in the late 1980s and early 1990s as Cuba's socialist trading partners disappeared with the reform processes that swept across Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. On the loss of the socialist bloc, Fidel Castro has later commented, "When the Soviet Union and the Socialist camp disappeared, no one would have waged one cent on the survival of the Cuban Revolution" (Castro and Ramonet 2008, 365). As noted, Cuba strove to foster relations with other countries, with this underpinning Cuba attempting to improve its relationship with China in the late 1980s. Simply, Cuba needed political and economic allies in the vastly altered geopolitical situation while continuing to endure U.S. hostility. Moreover, the Cuban economy was reformed in an attempt to encourage foreign investment in the island's economy (Bell Lara 2002). This economic change and desire to cultivate political relations with a number of countries enabled the Cuban Revolution to survive the difficulties of the early to mid-1990s and were underpinned by realist pragmatism. As part of this process Cuba was at the forefront of the creation of the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA) with the emergence a number of left-leaning governments in Latin America in the first years of the twenty-first century. Moreover, a close political and economic relationship with Hugo Chavez's Venezuela developed. This resulted in a level of Cuban economic reliance materializing as Venezuela became the island's chief trading partner.

In April 2018, a generational change took place in the Cuban leadership with Miguel Díaz-Canel replacing Raúl Castro as President of Cuba. Díaz-Canel may have been born after the 1959 Cuban Revolution, but realist pragmatism remains central to the foreign policy pursued by Díaz-Canel. This was highlighted in the autumn of 2018 when the Cuban President led a high-powered Cuban delegation, that included vice president of the Council of Ministers Ricardo Cabrisas and Foreign Minister Bruno Rodríguez, to visit Russia, North Korea, China, Vietnam, Laos, and the United Kingdom. Díaz-Canel was attempting to bolster bilateral relations, both political and economic, with these countries as Havana-Caracas relations suffered a downturn due to Venezuela's internal situation and the increased U.S. hostility under Trump's Presidency. This increased hostility involved the fallout associated with mysterious events beginning in 2017 when a number of diplomats in Havana became ill due to what became known as the "Havana syndrome" (the various theories surrounding the "Havana syndrome" are examined in a later chapter of this book). During this time, United States and Canadian

diplomats were recalled from Cuba and U.S. economic hostility increased, including the enactment of Title III of the Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity Act, known as the 1996 Helms-Burton Act.

At the time of writing, Cuban-U.S. relations remained strained with this being evident during the 2020 U.S. Presidential election when the Trump administration made it increasingly difficult for remittances to be sent to Cuba from the United States in an attempt to win votes in the key swing state of Florida. During the U.S. election, the Democrat candidate, Joe Biden, made it clear that his Cuba policy would be very different from Trump's Cuba policy. The historic advancements in Cuban-U.S. relations during the two-year period from December 2014 (detailed throughout this book) demonstrate what can be achieved in a short time period if Biden were to follow through in a similar fashion to the Obama presidency.

However, rapid change in the bilateral relationship could be slowed by the transition to a new government in Washington as well as due to the continued global struggle to control the spread of the deadly COVID-19 virus. Cuba has been able to keep the number of cases and deaths at a low level, but the island's economy has been adversely affected by the decrease in international travel and tourism. Moreover, Cuba was also at the forefront of the fight against the Ebola outbreak in 2014 with the island sending a number of medical experts and doctors to western Africa. This Cuban action demonstrated its continuing internationalism as highlighted by the number of international medical missions completed by Cuban doctors noted previously. In sum, Cuba remains a global player and champion of Developing World issues, with regular high-level political delegations from around the world visiting the island. In conclusion, the island's global presence throughout the revolutionary period is both remarkable and, as the Cuban Revolution celebrated its sixtieth anniversary in 2019, shows no sign of abating.

STRUCTURE OF BOOK

The genesis of this book was the international conference "Cuba's Revolution at 60" held in the autumn of 2019 at Dalhousie University in Halifax, Canada, and organized by Professor John Kirk. The conference brought together activists, ambassadors, experts, and scholars of Cuba from around the world who examined and discussed the Cuban Revolution and its progress in a number of different areas. From this conference, the idea for an edited book that examined and reflected on Cuba's global engagement and foreign policy since January 1959 materialized. In order to conduct this study, focus will be given to the island's key international relationships and issues, with the principle pressures and influences in each being scrutinized. The totality of these

individual studies will allow this book to explain Cuba's remarkable global engagement over the last sixty years.

Consequently, this edited book draws together experts on various aspects of Cuba's engagement with the world as well as two ambassadors, Josephina Vidal and Jeffrey DeLaurentis, who have spent their careers working on the relationship between Cuba and the United States. Moreover, both Vidal and DeLaurentis were intrinsically involved with the discussions which led on December 17, 2014, to the simultaneous historic statements by Presidents Raúl Castro and Barack Obama that deescalated tension between their two countries. DeLaurentis was the United States' proposed Ambassador to Cuba once diplomatic relations were restored on May 20, 2015, and at the time of writing Vidal is the Cuban ambassador to Canada.

This edited book is structured in two sections with the first concentrating on Havana's relationship with Washington which, since January 1959, has impacted both the Cuban Revolution itself and the island's other bilateral relationships. The first section begins with the addresses which Ambassadors Vidal and DeLaurentis gave at the conference "Cuba's Revolution at 60". Both addresses gave consideration to personal experiences of their involvement in the diplomatic process that resulted in Castro and Obama's simultaneous statements of December 17, 2014. The addresses also provided commentary on the effect of Trump's Presidency on the progress made in the bilateral relationship between December 2014 and Trump becoming U.S. president in January 2017. Vidal and DeLaurentis both ended their addresses stating their continuing belief in engagement between Cuba and the United States.

The first section of this book continues with William LeoGrande (American University, U.S.A.) who utilizes his experience of working on Havana-Washington relations to chronicle the complicated bilateral relationship from January 1959 until the present. Throughout this chapter, LeoGrande examines the concepts of U.S. coercion and engagement with Cuba since 1959 and which has been more successful in achieving Washington's goals in its Cuba policy. LeoGrande surmises that U.S. coercion has been unsuccessful while the two-year period of engagement between December 2014 and January 2017 (though much was achieved during this period) was too short for a final conclusion to be offered on the successes of engagement. In sum, a longer period of engagement is required to be able to provide a definitive answer. Since the early 1960s a highly significant aspect of Washington's Cuba policy has been the economic embargo against the island. As noted previously, President Trump tightened the embargo in April 2019 by enacting Title III of the Helms-Burton Act. The initiation of Title III permitted U.S. citizens to bring litigation against the Cuban government for property expropriated by

the Cuban Revolution. In the following chapter Robert L. Muse (Law Offices of Robert L. Muse, Washington DC) charts the history of the Helms-Burton Act, unpacks its complexities, and also scrutinizes the effect of the act being codified in law. Muse also examines the legal challenges which a president may face if the decision to lift the embargo was made. Muse concludes that any U.S. president could have made the decision to both end the embargo and resume bilateral trade with Cuba. Muse finishes his chapter by stating that if Joe Biden does not do this, a future US President will.

Throughout the last sixty years, Cuban-U.S. relations have endured many moments of both extreme pressure and misconceptions. The situation which unfolded in the summer of 2017, when reports were made that a number of U.S. and Canadian diplomats in Havana were feeling unwell, appears to epitomize the idiosyncrasies of Havana-Washington relations. Quick speculation of “sonic attacks” materialized (Crilly 2017). Peter Kornbluh (Director of Cuba and Chile Documentation Projects, National Security Archive, USA), re-examines the different theories which have appeared concerning what became known as the “Havana syndrome.” In this chapter, Kornbluh interviews several experts who have scrutinized the “Havana syndrome,” including Dr. Alon Friedman of the Department of Medical Neuroscience and the Brain Repair Center at Dalhousie University. Dr. Friedman has provided an alternative hypothesis than previously offered for the origin of these illnesses. However, Kornbluh concludes that a conclusive answer has yet to be provided. The first section of this book concludes with the work of Liliana Fernández from the Department of History at the University of Havana, with Fernández providing a Cuban perspective of the bilateral relationship. Fernández concludes that the 2020 U.S. Presidential election marks a turning point in Washington’s policy toward Havana. If Trump had won the election, U.S. Cuban policy would have been highly likely to remain unchanged. However, a Joe Biden victory creates the opportunity for a change from Trump’s policies toward Cuba.

The second section of this book scrutinizes Cuba’s global engagement by examining both key bilateral relationships and issues. This section commences with Isaac Saney (Dalhousie University, Canada) detailing Cuba’s long-running involvement with Africa. As previously detailed, Cuba’s involvement was very complex and nuanced in the continent’s anti-colonial and national liberation struggles throughout the 1960s. Its involvement became very public from the mid-1970s with the deployment of Cuban troops to Africa as well as its efforts to end South African apartheid from 1975–1990. Saney states that Cuba’s engagement has continued in the post-Cold War period with nation building initiatives and development projects, including the previously noted struggle against Ebola. Moreover, Cuba is currently supporting several African countries in their fight for reparations from the

slave trade. Saney highlights the significance of the historical links between Cuba and Africa which date to the slave trade and that consequently Cuba and Africa have, and will always have, close ties. Saney's chapter is followed by his colleague at Dalhousie University, John Kirk who details Cuba's relationship with Canada from the start of the twentieth century. Throughout the revolutionary period, Cuban-Canadian relations have been very different and much more cordial than Cuba's relationship with its other northern neighbor, the United States. Although this is the case, Kirk also chronicles that periods of tension have appeared in Havana-Ottawa relations, most noticeably during the Premiership of Stephen Harper from 2006 to 2015. Currently however, despite the aforementioned "Havana syndrome" and differing positions on the Venezuelan internal situation, Cuban-Canadian relations have returned to its more traditional amicable state under the government of Justin Trudeau.

As noted prior, Cuba's relationship with both China and the European Union became increasingly significant for the island as Havana attempted to mitigate the problems, not least economic, which materialized in the late 1980s and early 1990s due to the reform processes in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. Cuban-Chinese relations are examined by Adrian Hearn (University of Melbourne, Australia) and Rafael Hernandez (*Temas*, Cuba). Hearn and Hernandez chronicle the relationship from its "frozen" state of the 1960s to late 1980s to its contemporary position where Beijing is an important geopolitical and economic ally. Hearn and Hernandez utilize a 2016 survey, conducted while both were at Renmin University in Beijing, to conclude that the bilateral relationship may be complex but is of a nature where different conceptions of socialism in the two countries do not inhibit the relationship and can be discussed within it. Liliana Fernández and Mervyn Bain (University of Aberdeen, UK) analyze Cuban-EU relations with the development of the European integration project and the progress of the Cuban Revolution occurring simultaneously. Fernández and Bain highlight that EU policy toward Cuba has at times been contradictory with Cuban-EU relations. The relations have been impacted by history (particularly the island's relationship with Spain) and, since 2004, complicated by the membership of the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland (all former members of the socialist block) to the EU. Nevertheless, in December 2016, the EU's "Common Position" on Cuba was removed with the EU now being a key trading partner and source of tourists for Cuba.

Bain also chronicles Havana-Moscow relations which are, at the time of writing, at their most robust since the end of Cuban-Soviet relations in December 1991. Bain argues that many of the factors which drew the two countries together in the late 1950s/early 1960s continue to impact the contemporary relationship, but some such as the island's geostrategic importance for Moscow are now at a reduced level. Bain posits that due to the mutually

beneficial nature of the relationship for both countries it is highly likely that in the short to medium term it will continue as presently.

Chris Walker (St. Mary's University, Halifax, Canada) examines the island's counter-hegemonic relationship with Venezuela from an international development perspective. As detailed previously, this relationship increased exponentially at the start of the twenty-first century under the Presidencies of Fidel Castro and Hugo Chávez. This relationship has had huge benefits for both countries, mainly in economic terms for Cuba and increasing human capital for Venezuela (especially to the benefit of poor and marginalized communities). Yet, the relationship has received significant global attention, drawn the ire of the U.S. foreign policy, as well as suffers from Venezuela's historic and cyclical oil dependence. External pressures have been coupled with internal pressures as Venezuela continues to struggle under low oil prices, hyperinflation, increasing Venezuelan material/resource challenges, deepening political polarization, and declining support for the Chavista government.

While relations between Havana and Washington appear to fluctuate, relations between Caracas and Washington have been consistently at odds, escalating under Obama and further escalating under Trump. Despite this, Havana and Caracas have steadfastly committed to advancing their counter-hegemonic solidarity, through good times and bad, as well as continue to pursue social-egalitarian policy alternatives to neoliberalism. In light of the impact of U.S. foreign policy on this relationship, what remains to be seen is if Trump's changes, from reversing Obama's rapprochement with Cuba toward targeting Caracas by increasing economic pressure on Havana, will continue under a Biden presidency.

As detailed, Havana not only endeavored to cultivate new or improved relationships with various countries as the island felt the full force of the realignment of global politics with the disappearance of the socialist block and end of the Cold War, but the Cuban economy was also opened to the global economy. The Castro government's desire was to attract foreign investment to the Cuba economy. Paolo Spadoni (Augusta University, U.S.A.) scrutinizes this important phenomenon which has been central to the Cuban Revolution's ability to survive the loss of its socialist trading partners. Spadoni examines Cuba's expanding external and investment sector which has not only seen China and Venezuela become the island's leading trading partners, but has also surprisingly seen Russia re-emerge as a significant actor in the Cuban economy. Spadoni concludes that the Cuban economy is now predominantly a service-based and that further economic reforms are required to bolster the island's economy against the continuing U.S. embargo, the effects of the deteriorating internal Venezuelan situation, and repercussions of COVID-19.

In the final chapter of this book, Michael Erisman (Indiana State University, U.S.A.) offers an analysis of Cuba's evolving prospects of becoming a hemispheric petro-power due to reports that emerged in 2008 of the discovery of oil in Cuban territorial waters. Erisman examines (1) the size of Cuba's oil reserves, (2) the issues concerning their exploitation, (3) their potential for impacting the Cuban economy, and (4) the changes that may occur in Cuban-U.S. relations if sizable Cuban oil reserves are found extractible and significant. Erisman acknowledges that the size of this oil discovery remains uncertain, but that if sizable, it would boost the Cuban economy and subsequently Cuban society while also fundamentally altering the dynamics of Havana-Washington relations.

NOTES

1. K.S. Karol posited that, despite a closer ideological affinity with China, Cuba sided with Moscow in the Sino-Soviet split due to the greater economic security which the Soviet Union could provide. As Karol wrote at the time, "Fidel had his stomach in Moscow but his heart in Peking" (1971).

2. Cuban engagement in Africa was a mix of several different factors including the island's historical links to the continent, Cold War politics and Cuban internationalism. Kirk has succinctly summed up Cuba approach to international relations as, "an approach that is totally sui generis, following its own blend of principles and pragmatism, self-interest and selflessness, and fuelled by a volatile blend of nationalism and pride in being distinctive" (Kirk 2006, 333).

3. On the decision to deploy troops to Angola, Carlos Rafael Rodríguez, told Alexander Haig, the U.S. Secretary of State, in December 1981 during secret talks held in México City that "I can assure unequivocally, in as much as I played a direct role in this matter, that when the decision to dispatch Cuban forces into Angola was made, we communicated nothing about it to the Soviet Union" (Cold War International History Project).

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Part I

CUBAN-U.S. RELATIONS

Chapter 1

The Process of Rapprochement Between Cuba and the United States—Lessons Learned

*Remarks by Ambassador Josefina
Vidal at “The Cuban Revolution at
60” Conference, Dalhousie University,
Halifax, October 31, 2019*

Josefina Vidal

I would like to thank Professor John Kirk and the other members of the Organizing Committee for putting together this academic event, which I am almost certain is the most important that will be held outside of Cuba for the sixty years of the Revolution.

In preparation for my presentation today, knowing that some personal reflections on an event related to the Revolution were expected from me, I quickly concluded that the issue could not be other than that of relations between Cuba and the United States. This is the issue I have dedicated more than twenty-five years of my professional life to, first at the University of Havana and afterward at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Within this vast topic, I decided to choose the process of rapprochement that took place between December 2014 and January 2017, because this is, let’s say, the only totally different thing that happened in our bilateral relations for sixty years.

HERE ARE MY THOUGHTS

The first thing I should point out, by way of reference, is that, in compliance with the instructions given by the Cuban government, for many years, we

worked hard from the Foreign Ministry and our diplomatic representation in Washington to achieve a change in U.S. policy toward Cuba.

We should remember that, over almost fifty years, Fidel Castro expressed at several times Cuba's willingness to discuss and resolve differences with the United States through negotiations, without renouncing our principles; and after taking over the government in 2006, Raúl Castro confirmed Cuba's willingness to normalize relations with the United States on the basis of equality.

What made the rapprochement possible at the end of 2014?

Among other factors:

- The long and firm resistance of Cuba and the Cuban people to aggressions and pressures from the United States;
- The failure of the policies followed by ten successive U.S. administrations;
- The isolation and discredit caused by these policies to the United States, affecting its interests and goals, especially in Latin America;
- The international solidarity and activism in support of Cuba by countless people and organizations in many parts of the world;
- The willingness of both governments at the highest level to move along a different path;
- Cuba's interest to solve issues that accumulated for decades of bilateral confrontation damaging the island and, I would add, the interest of the United States to try a different strategy to achieve its goal of promoting changes within our country; and
- The consensus in Cuban and American societies in favor of a change that could benefit their respective interests.

Why was it possible this time, unlike previous failed attempts? Because

- The United States recognized the legitimacy of the Cuban government and its historical leadership;
- No conditions were imposed on Cuba, nor were concessions related to its domestic and foreign policy demanded;
- Cuba was treated as an equal, and negotiations and dialogues took place based on respect and reciprocity; and
- Both parties undertook the negotiations in a constructive spirit, willing to find solutions to outstanding problems and to identify areas of common interest in which the two countries could cooperate for mutual benefit.

Was it an easy process? Yes and no.

Yes, because,

- On the Cuban side, there was always the political will to move forward;

- We recognized the existing opportunity to solve pending problems accumulated for years and to obtain benefits for Cuba and its development, through cooperation on issues of common interest and the gradual erosion of the blockade; and
- There was quite broad support from the Cuban population to the decision to advance toward a normalization of relations with the United States.

No, because,

- It was not easy to restore diplomatic relations with the U.S. economic blockade in force. I have to remind [people] that the total lifting of U.S. unilateral economic coercive measures preceded similar processes with other countries. Therefore, I must underline that on the side of Cuba there was a realistic recognition of the role that Congress should play in eliminating the blockade, but, at the same time, of the wide use that the president could make of his prerogatives to implement it in a flexible way. That is why we insisted permanently on this point.
- More time than some expected had to be spent in the negotiations to restore relations, as some aggressive and inappropriate U.S. policies had to be reviewed. We also had to guarantee that rules for the behavior of the U.S. Embassy in Havana in correspondence with international law and norms should be established, to rectify interference practices of the past.
- Being aware of our many strengths to take on this unprecedented new stage, we had to devote time to prepare ourselves internally in the country, knowing that the U.S. strategic goal toward Cuba had not changed, that is, to provoke changes in our form of government and system.
- We had to devote much time and effort to educating and training Cuban entities on how to enter into agreements and do business with the United States, taking into account the limitations arising from its restrictive regulatory framework and the existence of the blockade.

Are we satisfied with what was achieved? Yes and no.

Yes, because

- For two countries which didn't have relations and almost no interaction and dialogue for more than five decades, what we achieved in just two years was not irrelevant, among others: the release of three members of the Cuban Five who were imprisoned in the United States; the exclusion of Cuba from the list of States Sponsors of Terrorism; the reestablishment of diplomatic relations and the reopening of embassies in Washington and Havana; the creation of the Bilateral Commission, a sort of permanent mechanism to follow up on a roadmap that we agreed to periodically to

advance relations and a forum to discuss pending problems and differences; twenty-five high-level visits in both directions and three meetings between the presidents of both countries; and the signing of twenty-two agreements, sixteen of them to cooperate on issues of mutual interest.

- We demonstrated that Cuba and the United States could try to build a new type of relationship, based on respect and equality; a relationship that recognizes the differences, but does not make them the center of our links, and instead rest essentially on the benefits it can bring to the two countries and peoples.

We are not satisfied because

- Very important issues for Cuba were not solved, in particular those that depended on executive decisions by the U.S. government, such as the dismantling of important aspects of the economic blockade through a wider use of the president's prerogatives, and the suspension of programs that pursued regime change. There were others that would depend on an act of Congress, such as the elimination of government sponsored radio and television broadcasts toward Cuba, and the return to our sovereignty of the territory occupied by the U.S. Naval Base in Guantanamo.
- In the case of the economic blockade, it took a long time for the U.S. government to adopt measures to make the implementation of some of its regulations more flexible; they were announced in five separate packages over two years which resulted in a loss of precious time to advance faster. Although positive, the measures taken were limited in scope, perhaps with the only exception of those implemented to expand travel to Cuba.
- The U.S. side did not exhaust all presidential prerogatives to issue more licenses to facilitate business with Cuba. For example, restrictions on exports for key branches of the Cuban economy and on imports of most Cuban products were maintained, U.S. investments in Cuba in general were not authorized and banking relations were not normalized.
- The dissuasive and punitive components of the economic blockade and its extraterritorial scope persisted, with negative consequences for Cuba: financial transfers continued to be blocked, payments withheld, services denied, and fines imposed on banks and foreign entities linked to Cuba.

REVERSIBILITY OF THE PROCESS UNDER TRUMP

At a very early stage of the rapprochement, I was asked in an interview if it could be reversed. My response then was that, of course, it was possible, that as President Obama had used his executive faculties to improve relations

with Cuba, a subsequent president could do the same to act in an opposite direction.

Recent events proved it right. Unfortunately, so.

Motivated by an ideological vision contrary to Cuban socialism—which is demonized now even as part of the domestic political game in the United States—and by a wrong electoral calculation to win the Cuban vote and the state of Florida, President Trump's government has fulfilled his promise to reverse the process initiated by his predecessor.

We were far from thinking, mistakenly, that the issue of Cuba would once again be held hostage to U.S. domestic politics.

The Trump Administration put an end, by decree, to the process of normalization of relations, replacing it with what he called the strengthening of U.S. policy toward Cuba.

It has dismantled almost everything that was achieved with the Obama administration, with the exception of the agreements we signed, which, although have not been canceled, are mostly inoperative or not honored, except for some cooperation that remains in law enforcement and judicial matters.

Trump has even gone further, implementing measures that are unprecedented for their level of aggressiveness and scope, such as the activation of Title III of the Helms–Burton Act and the persecution of fuel supplies to Cuba.

We are witnessing a renewed tightening of the blockade to levels not seen before, mainly with the goal of depriving Cuba of sources of revenue and suffocating its economy, through measures against tourism, the energy sector, financial transactions, foreign investment, and medical cooperation programs with other countries.

There are no official contacts, beyond the formal ones that exist at a low level, not even to deal with matters of the highest priority.

The U.S. Embassy in Havana is practically inoperative, due to the reduction of personnel under the false pretext of alleged attacks against their diplomats, which have been disqualified and discredited by the international scientific community. As a result, there is a clear setback in relations, the bilateral climate has deteriorated rapidly, and the U.S. government seems determined to continue a course of open confrontation with Cuba, which is unfortunate.

I do not have to say that the arguments used to justify this course, that is, the never demonstrated attacks against American diplomats and the presence of tens of thousands of Cuban military in Venezuela, are false.

How do we see the future? With serenity and still with some optimism, I would dare to say.

As the Cuban Foreign Minister recently stated, we hope this will be a temporary situation, a low moment, I would add.

As nothing concerning Cuba and the United States is easy, in the future we will have to restore and recover many things dismantled by the current U.S. Administration. On some issues, we will even need to start from scratch or deal with the lasting negative consequences of recent actions such as the activation of Helms-Burton Title III, which could undoubtedly delay a rapprochement in the coming years.

Besides, we will have to work hard in the sustainability of the process. The current setback reconfirms that the will and the executive powers of a U.S. president are not enough; that in order to ensure the long-term irreversibility of an improvement of relations, deeper changes are necessary in the American political context, including in the embargo legislations. This will remain a challenge.

In any case, as far as that comes, it will be worthwhile to continue trying to advance from the executive branch, to demonstrate the benefits that an improvement in relations reports, and to create the conditions for continuity.

The process initiated in December 2014 marked the beginning of a historical trend to build a relationship on a different basis than the previous period, which we still consider possible.

The channels and levels of official communication created and the mutual knowledge that developed between the two peoples for two years cannot be erased at a stroke of a pen.

Many of the factors that made the rapprochement possible a few years ago are still there: members of Congress of both parties, the majority of the public opinion and broad sectors of the American society, including the Cuban emigration, favor the normalization of relations, and the lifting of the blockade. In Cuba, there is a total rejection of the current policy and a broad consensus in favor of better relations. The Cuban government has all the political will to continue moving forward. Despite repeated attempts by the U.S. government, the world has not joined its offensive against the island.

In Cuba, the approach on relations with the United States responds to a vision of the State, which recognizes the reciprocal benefits they bring to both countries and peoples.

Well aware that the deep differences that exist between us will last, and that the normalization of ties with the United States will always be a complex and prolonged process, that we may never fully reach, we continue to believe that it is possible to develop a civilized coexistence between both countries.

On our part, we will persist, as we have done for decades.

Thank you very much.

Chapter 2

U.S.–Cuban Relations—Personal Reflections

*Remarks by Ambassador (ret.) Jeffrey
DeLaurentis, Saturday, November 2, 2019*

Jeffrey DeLaurentis

In recent months, I have begun remarks like these with a stark and fairly obvious comment: relations between the United States and Cuba are not good and unlikely to improve in the short term.¹ The relationship has descended to its lowest point in decades. We have all watched the reversals since January 20, 2017, and heard and read the justifications out of Washington. Official government-to-government communication is now at minimal levels, even on migration and law enforcements matters, where cooperation had been long-standing and mutually beneficial.

The Trump Administration continues to levy new sanctions against Cuba, targeting the island's imports and its tourism sector. It feels like a cascade. The latest was last Friday when the Administration announced a halt to commercial airline service to Cuba outside of Havana. A few days before that it restricted the leasing of commercial aircraft to Cuban state-owned airlines. There appear to be standing instructions for those working on Cuba policy to identify additional punitive measures. U.S. Special Envoy for Venezuela Elliot Abrams recently asserted that additional U.S. sanctions are designed to undermine Cuba's support for Nicolas Maduro. It is probably more than that, but they will not persuade the Cuban government to end its support for Maduro. The administration says the lifelines provided by Cuba and Russia account for the failure of its "maximum pressure" campaign to unseat Maduro.

Some in the United States like where we are. Some in Cuba do as well, I suspect. Many more in both countries, I believe, do not.

HOW DID WE GET HERE?

One of the most difficult moments for me professionally was to sit in my office at the U.S. Embassy in Havana on June 16, 2017, and watch on CNN all the hard work and progress evaporate with one speech. I had poured my heart and soul into the normalization process, and it was painful to witness it grind to a halt. I departed Cuba twenty-one days later. On the morning of our departure, Jennifer and I collected Norman the cat hiding under the bed and descended the stairs to say farewell to the household staff. They were lined up, formal and somber. I tried to steel myself, but it was too much. After shaking the first hand, I began to sob and had to walk away. I was mortified of course. It was hardly behavior befitting the top American diplomat in Cuba. But after six months of expressionless stoicism inside the embassy and out, trying to keep morale at passable levels, I could no longer hold in my reaction to the policy changes I vehemently opposed, to the health issue that had engulfed the embassy—which was real and no laughing matter—and to a mental self-flagellation that I could not prevent everything from going down the tubes.

Of course, the local staff at the U.S. residence—a house many of you know—had a front row seat to the impact of the courage shown by both governments, to begin the path toward a more constructive relationship. They witnessed thousands of enthusiastic Americans pass through our doors since December 17, 2014, including the president of the United States, almost every cabinet member, members of Congress, governors, mayors, business, educational, and cultural leaders, and many others from diverse constituencies across the country. Never mind the myriad of personalities from Cuba who finally felt comfortable to cross the threshold. But I am getting ahead of myself.

I have to start at the beginning. At least the beginning for me. When I arrived in Cuba in 1991, for the first of my three postings, I knew I was entering a parallel universe with a system radically different from the one I hold dear. There were many things about it I did not like. Yet, ideology aside, I was immediately struck by the similarities between the two countries, by the blended cultures. From baseball to music, to that stubborn sense of pride, to the hubris, the attitude (with a capital A) to a talent for ingenuity, to that strongly held view that their nation was the exceptional one. It all felt so familiar.

Although discouraged for different reasons and in different ways by both governments, I made it my business to meet as many Cubans as I could. Our policy was isolation, but I wanted to know who we were isolating. My training for Cuba turned out to be pretty two-dimensional, and the training among Cuban counterparts about the United States was, well, pretty skewed. We

had a lot more in common than each other knew or wanted to admit. Mostly what I discovered was our common humanity despite our differences. I made friends in Cuba then despite the obstacles. We disagreed and continue to disagree about many things, especially how we organize our respective societies, but our bonds run deep and I miss them every day.

It should be no surprise that in 1991, I also believed that a policy of isolation and pressure would eventually yield results. Remember what was happening all over the world. When I departed two years later, I had begun my own journey to a different conclusion—a view I still hold—that our policy, then and now, was not working and hurting the Cuban people more than the intended targets. It was not in the U.S. interest. About 70 percent of the American public now feel the same way.

I came away with another conclusion, which served me well later on at the United Nations where I spent the other half of my career: Even though you could strongly disagree about many things, including the values we champion, you should still be able to have a civil conversation, find common ground when it was in your interest to do so, and influence your interlocutor along the way. We had achieved this *modus operandi* with other countries with systems similar to Cuba's. Why could we not do it with a nation 90 miles away?

Well, it's a rhetorical question because we all know the relationship is complicated, personal, and symbiotic. A remnant of a Cold War we thought dead and buried. A sixty-year divorce proceeding with damages still to be negotiated. An ambivalence of love and hate so deep that we laugh and cry about it at the same time. The metaphors and epithets are endless.

In 1997, I found myself on the staff of the National Security Council handling the Cuba account. There had been more fits and starts and tragedy, but I thought we had a chance to move in a new direction. President Clinton was prepared to respond positively to Pope John Paul's visit to the island and his message to the world (i.e., "Cuba must open to the world; the world must open to Cuba"), and navigate the domestic challenges to begin to re-set relations. New measures were announced. I finagled my way back to Cuba in 1999 to implement them, advancing what I thought might be a new beginning. My colleagues at the State Department thought I was crazy. Alas, that initiative, too, was derailed. We still argue why and by whom.

In 2009, President Obama came into office promising to reexamine our Cuba policy because the one in place had failed to achieve its objectives. His view: we couldn't continue doing the same thing and expect a different result. To draw a bit from Obama's words, he said that "our governments had settled into a seemingly endless confrontation. In a world that remade itself time and time again, we were still fighting." Could this be changed on terms acceptable to both? Yes. I believe we demonstrated that.

As a diplomat, I like to think that this was also a story about the practice, the art of diplomacy—its transformational potential, its high impact, and its power—and an instance when it was designed and executed successfully. It affected peoples' lives on both sides of the Florida Straits. Real conversations began between governments estranged for decades. Reconciliation between people on opposite sides of an ideological divide was no longer unthinkable.

There are many pieces to this, but let me mention some of the elements on the American side that ensured the success of the secret negotiations begun in late spring 2013:

- (1) *Leadership and Political Will*—President Obama wanted this to happen. He believed our fifty-year-old policy was a relic of the Cold War, getting in the way of our broader agenda in Latin America. He believed that Cuba was changing and that engagement—our engagement—would have a greater impact as Cuba determined its future course. And attitudes among Cubans who had made new lives in the United States and successor generations were changing.
- (2) *Perseverance*—the secret talks, mostly in Ottawa, dragged on for months. Trust was difficult to build. Cuban suspicions of American intentions were almost overwhelming—until Mandela's funeral in December 2013.
- (3) *Mutual Respect*—the brief exchange between Presidents Obama and Castro at the Mandela funeral helped solidify an atmosphere of respect. The tenor of the negotiations changed after that.
- (4) *Third-Party Engagement at the Right Time*—On October 28, 2014, American and Cuban delegations gathered at the Vatican presided over by Vatican Secretary of State Cardinal Parolin. Both sides needed a third party they respected to validate the agreement—and reassure each side that the other would meet their commitments. Would both sides keep their word? The Vatican said yes to both. This was key. Negotiations concluded in November 2014.

I would like to think that a certain American ambassador, prepositioned in Havana a few months earlier, helped a little too.

Let me also say, with a bit of hubris, that we had learned a thing or two about dealing with our Cuban interlocutors, about the importance of experience and continuity. I recall reading in the terrific book, *Back Channel to Cuba*, a comment by former Cuban National Assembly President Ricardo Alarcon, about how little institutional memory the State Department carried over from one administration to the next. Only the interpreter stayed the same. Ricardo Zuniga, among the finest diplomats and human beings I know, with several postings dealing with Cuba under his belt, corrected that

shortcoming during the secret negotiations; with my multiple postings, I did the same thereafter. I also made sure that we assembled the best team at the embassy. They were extraordinary and many won prestigious awards for their work.

We all know what happened next, beginning with the simultaneous announcements by Obama and Castro on December 17, 2014.

It's hard to discuss this without touching on the emotional and human component of what was a diplomatic and historic sea change. I was very fortunate to be in Havana on that extraordinary day. Well before 7:00 a.m., at an air-field outside Havana, I witnessed American aid worker Alan Gross, wrongly imprisoned for five years, reunite with his wife, lawyer, and members of Congress who had worked hard for his release. There was something extraordinary about seeing a plane marked "United States of America" sitting on the empty tarmac. After the plane took off, I rushed back to the U.S. Interests Section (not yet an embassy) to inform my American colleagues what was about to happen. With over fifty crammed into a small, secure conference room, I told them that Alan was on his way home, and that Presidents Obama and Castro would be speaking to their respective nations at noon to announce, among other things, their authorization to negotiate the re-establishment of diplomatic relations. The applause was deafening. Everyone knew they were going to be making history.

Later in the day, after the two presidents concluded their messages, I heard church bells ring in Old Havana. Cubans gathered around television sets at their workplaces to watch President Castro and, I was told, cheered with delight. I saw flags draped over balconies—Cuban and American—and wondered where the hell did they get the American flags? The annual CIPI/ISRI Conference was underway in Havana at the time. Dr. Meg Crahan and Dr. Soraya Castro, who were attending, later wrote in *Cuba–US Relations: Normalization and its Challenges*, "the room erupted in cheers, sobs and the singing of the Cuban and US national anthems." "The experts were shocked." Which is exactly what we wanted. "The moment catalyzed what many conference participants were feeling—a sense that after more than 50 years of hostility, the long road toward normalization could begin." The new approach meant that where we could advance shared interests, we agreed that we would.

We decided to talk directly about our differences—for us that was human rights, fugitives from American justice, and expropriated properties. Cuba, of course, had its own, very long list. A few weeks later in his State of the Union address, President Obama called on Congress to lift the embargo. And the first of several rounds of regulatory measures were implemented to ease the embargo where it was in the president's authority to do so. There remains significant debate about how far his authority extended.

NEGOTIATING THE REESTABLISHMENT OF DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS

We spent the next few months negotiating the reestablishment of diplomatic relations. Each side had their issues. By June, we made sufficient progress to move forward and relations were reestablished on July 20, 2015. The flag raising ceremonies at both embassies felt like the hottest days of the year.

Negotiations were hard. There was no real relationship or trust, as had developed between the participants of the earlier secret negotiations. The bureaucracies had to catch up. I recall long, awkward moments of silence when we had finished reading our talking points. Instead of talking past each other, we had to talk to each other.

And apart from understanding and appreciating—which does not mean agreeing to—each other’s redlines, we were trying hard not to get side-tracked by the one constant both sides were comfortable with—hostility. Never mind that the presidents of both countries had already declared the two countries would work to re-establish diplomatic relations. We had to figure out how.

Compromises? Plenty.

Detractors? More than plenty.

On the American side, they now occupy the White House. Over the next fifteen months, we set up a negotiating mechanism and a roadmap to build a foundation for a new relationship. I can best describe it as three groups of issues:

- The first group related to bilateral cooperation in areas of mutual interest—environmental protection, prevention of natural disasters, health, civil aviation, law enforcement, counter-narcotics efforts, and so forth.
- The second group included issues where we disagreed, such as human rights, which we began to discuss directly, face-to-face.
- The third group covered outstanding issues to be resolved—for the United States, expropriated property claims and American fugitives from justice living in Cuba.

By the end of the Administration, we had signed twenty-three agreements and begun seventeen dialogues on issues two countries 90 miles apart ought to have as a matter of course. Issues that transcend national boundaries, and issues where cooperation contributed to the national security of both.

THE OBAMA VISIT

In the middle of this came President Obama’s visit in March 2016, the first of a U.S. president since 1928. He wanted to support the processes underway

and, to steal a line from his speech, “to bury the last remnant of the Cold War in the Americas”:

- The message was one of respect and hope.
- Cuba’s future is for Cubans to decide, especially its youth.
- We are not enemies of the Cuban people.

Spontaneous, enthusiastic crowds greeted the motorcade everywhere he went.

BLOWBACK/BACKLASH

What I thought was a respectful, honest, and direct speech generated quite a bit of blowback. And we lost a lot of time as a result. Shortly after President Obama took off, official media began to react—critically—as did the Communist Party Congress which met shortly thereafter. Castigation of the United States and the president from all sorts of interesting quarters went on for weeks in Cuba, and in certain corners of South Florida.

Not too long after Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MINREX) summoned the diplomatic corps and said it was pleased with the trip. Many of my diplomatic counterparts were confused by the presentation and asked me, so which is it? Are they happy or not? I responded, yes and no. And I thought to myself even Cuban officials, known for their enviable ability to speak with one voice, were having trouble keeping their messaging consistent. This was normally an American problem.

Things went dark for a few months—not on the diplomatic side—but in the commercial and cultural space and public discourse resurfaced warning against being seduced by American culture. But we were determined to keep going, and I would like to think many in Cuba were as well. The Presidential Policy Directive 43, outlining U.S. policy toward Cuba, released on October 14, 2016, and the U.S. abstention on the UNGA vote to lift the U.S. embargo of Cuba twelve days later, were meant to signal—strongly—that the Obama Administration wanted to continue the process, and we were losing time. Both initiatives were generated by the embassy I don’t mind saying. The Presidential Policy Directive, which I recall set off another spirited debate in Cuba, was designed to solidify as much as possible the policy changes we had made. We wanted irreversibility and transparency. I take personal responsibility for the U.N. General Assembly vote and watched from Havana with tremendous satisfaction as U.N. Ambassador Samantha Power spoke to the General Assembly, reflecting on what had brought us to that vote change, including the multinational effort to save a Cuban doctor who contracted

Ebola, as an example of how the United Nations, how the international community, should function.

After the U.S. elections, both sides made a concerted effort to secure as much progress as possible in the little time left. The last agreement signed was the most important, on migration issues. This is the only agreement those opposed to engagement in the United States like, in particular because it meant they did not have to take it on. Had we secured a commercial agreement between a large U.S. corporation and a Cuban entity financed by a U.S. money center bank, that might have made it more difficult to reverse the regulatory changes. But alas, that was not to be. I am not going to run through all the changes that have taken place since that day I listened to President Trump's speech on June 16, 2017, or to American foreign policy overall. I try to be respectful of the views of the Administration, the American people voted into office, even if I disagree with many of them.

I recall with some satisfaction in the early days of the new Administration, representatives from several government agencies tried to remind incoming officials of the benefits U.S.-Cuban cooperation had produced. Ultimately, these views were ignored by the chorus of "this was a bad deal and has to be changed." Since then, Administration officials have made pretty clear what they hope will happen.

So while the prognosis in the short-term is negative, let me conclude by telling you what a productive, impactful relationship looks like

Between early 2015 and January 2017, the two governments were in perpetual contact. We re-established diplomatic relations, opened embassies, signed agreements and launched the dialogues I've already mentioned. Each one began cautiously, but we started to have real conversations. We learned how to listen, how each other framed issues.

Many more American officials were visiting Cuba and Cuban officials were visiting the United States. Cabinet and subcabinet officials were meeting with their counterparts to discover areas where cooperation could be launched or enhanced. I recall, in particular, when HHS Secretary Burwell visited to meet with Cuban Ministry of Health counterparts. The enthusiasm among medical professionals on both sides was palpable. The potential for mutually beneficial exchange exciting.

People-to-people travel was skyrocketing on safe U.S. commercial airlines, with hundreds of thousands of Americans visiting. Cubans visiting the United States were at record levels.

Business delegations large and small poured in, leading to increased commerce. There are still something like sixty U.S. businesses engaged in lawful commercial transactions with Cuba.

Cultural and education leaders also came and organized exchanges.

U.S. regulatory changes, among other things, enabled increased telecommunication connections between the two countries. Cell phones were working, Wi-Fi hotspots were sprouting up all over the country. Cubans were coming online. The private sector—which is real despite official USG statements to the contrary—was dynamic and growing. (Unfortunately, it is facing significant challenges now in part because of policy changes on our side.) Living conditions for the Cuban people were improving—not for everyone, but it was a start.

People's mentalities were changing on both sides of the Florida Straits. Younger Cubans were enthusiastic about the future. Some putting their energy into commercial and other ventures rather than plotting to leave. Their contemporaries in the United States were coming to reconnect with their heritage, meet their counterparts, and explore opportunities. Organizations were stood up to facilitate this.

Reconciliation was beginning to happen. I was reminded of comments made quietly around kitchen tables in Havana and Miami in the early 1990s, about wanting, hoping, to find a way to communicate with compatriots on the other side. A statement by a senior State Department official—now former official—that nothing had changed on the ground in Cuba in twenty years is just false. I know. I was there.

So what did I learn from all this?: *The bilateral relationship between the United States and Cuba is quite special, one of the most intractable and vexing. I had the hubris, even arrogance, to think that I was part of the team that finally cracked the code.*

Clearly, I was wrong or at least premature in my declaration of success. I should have realized the normalization process was never going to be linear. Too many outstanding issues. In Cuba, the adjustment was slow in coming. As it turns out, not too different in certain corners of the United States as well. *It remains a domestic and foreign policy issue in both countries with a sharp turn toward domestic policy in the United States.*

Recent comments out of the White House already suggest that additional policy moves will be directly linked to the 2020 elections—intent on scoring political points and reversing the Obama legacy more than achieving any concrete foreign policy goals. Reasonable people in the United States continue to disagree on what the U.S. relationship with Cuba should be and have been disagreeing for sixty years. Just as Cubans no doubt disagree on what Cuba's relationship should be with the United States. The current state of affairs exacerbates the disagreement. *For that reason, we did not go far enough.* Both sides could have done more to ensure the sustainability and irreversibility of the new relationship we were trying to build. The dynamic between the two countries was not going to change overnight. There was still

plenty of history and ideology to work through. But the trajectory was where it should be.

While the timing on both sides was prescient and propitious for many reasons, I don't believe this is "one shining moment" that has passed. I am convinced that we have created a foundation to return to the negotiating table and deal effectively with issues important to both sides. I have heard some Cuban officials say something similar. On the U.S. side, all the Democratic candidates have expressed an interest in returning to what the Obama Administration started. One Republican, too. Maybe more will get into the race.

And should President Trump be re-elected, well, second terms often bring fresh perspectives and re-evaluations, although I can't say I am optimistic about the prospect. Perhaps leadership in the Senate will change and bills like the Freedom for Americans to Travel to Cuba Act of 2019 can get to both floors and pass. If one piece of legislation gets through, others will follow quickly. Apart from the lawsuits filed under Helms Burton Title III, everything else can be reversed with the stroke of a pen.

All that said, I remain very proud to have been a part of the normalization process, of what we accomplished. I received extraordinary support from the highest levels of the executive branch of the U.S. government, from members of Congress, prominent members of the Cuban-American community and many, many others. The proudest day of my diplomatic career was September 27, 2016, when President Obama nominated me to be the first American ambassador to Cuba since 1961. And the first congratulatory call I received came from my hero, former Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright, who said "I am ready to help." It does not get any better than that.

So I continue to believe that the engagement we began—what we did—was and is the best way to advance American interests, to have an impact on the ground, and to promote the universal values we hold dear. That was my job as an American diplomat. For me, now, as a former diplomat, Cuba is about unfinished business. About an opportunity I hope in the long run will not be squandered, to resolve long-standing, painful disputes between two neighbors who have failed—still—to find a way to get along.

Thank you.

NOTE

1. Segments of this address were published in the book *The Cuba–U.S. Bilateral Relationship: New Pathways and Policy Choices* edited by Michael J. Kelly, Erika Moreno, and Richard C. Witmer that was published by Oxford University Press in 2019.

Chapter 3

Coercive Diplomacy or Constructive Engagement

Sixty Years of U.S. Policy toward Cuba

William M. LeoGrande

Ever since Fidel Castro's Rebel Army rolled into Havana in January 1959, policymakers in Washington have debated whether United States (U.S.) interests would best be served by trying to coexist with the mercurial revolutionary government or beat it into submission. In every U.S. presidential administration, there were those who argued that some form of constructive engagement was more likely to produce results than coercive diplomacy. President Barack Obama's policy and President Donald Trump's represent the purest versions of these two approaches.

Although the term "constructive engagement" originated as the name President Ronald Reagan gave to his policy toward white South Africa, its broader connotation is a policy of engaging with regimes despite deep differences in order to reduce tensions and build on common interests (LeoGrande 2015, 231–258). Coercive diplomacy, on the other hand, is the use of diplomatic, economic, and/or military sanctions, or the threat of sanctions, to force another government (or nongovernmental actor) to behave as you want them to. It is, in essence, the diplomatic equivalent of extortion (George and Simons 1994).

FROM DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER TO GEORGE W. BUSH: FIFTY YEARS OF COERCIVE DIPLOMACY

In 1959, Ambassador Philip Bonsal, who arrived in Havana after the triumph of the revolution, was the principal advocate for constructive engagement, urging Washington to offer economic aid to the new government and

disregard Fidel Castro's anti-American invective. Conservative officials in the State Department, Defense Department, and CIA soon lost patience with Castro—and with Bonsal. By the fall of 1959, they had convinced President Dwight D. Eisenhower to replace the initial policy of engagement with a policy aimed at removing Castro from power through a combination of economic sanctions, covert aid to his opponents, attempted assassinations, and, ultimately, a paramilitary invasion (LeoGrande and Kornbluh 2014).

President John F. Kennedy doubled down on coercive diplomacy after the failure of the Bay of Pigs invasion, imposing a complete economic embargo on Cuba and launching "Operation Mongoose," a concerted campaign of paramilitary warfare and sabotage. But after the 1962 Missile Crisis, several of Kennedy's top aides—chief among them National Security Adviser McGeorge Bundy and his assistant for Latin America Gordon Chase—argued that Castro's anger at the Soviet Union for withdrawing the missiles offered an opportunity for détente. Constructive engagement might wean Cuba from the Soviet orbit. Talks with Havana to explore the possibility of rapprochement were about to begin when Kennedy was assassinated.

President Lyndon B. Johnson stuck with coercive diplomacy, primarily for domestic political reasons. He feared that Republican presidential nominee Barry Goldwater would accuse him of being soft on Castro if he pursued Kennedy's peace feeler. Instead, he sought to expand the embargo by making it multilateral in order to "pinch their nuts more than we're doing" (Schoultz 2011, 214). Washington convinced the rest of Latin America, with the sole exception of Mexico, to sever relations with Cuba and break off economic relations. Castro responded to this escalation in coercion by supporting leftist guerrillas in those countries.

Isolation from the West simply made Cuba more dependent on the Soviet Bloc. In 1967, Secretary of State Dean Rusk ordered a full review of policy toward Cuba. The review panel concluded that treating Cuba as a "hostile adversary" was not serving U.S. interests: "It is frankly very questionable whether the US can achieve satisfactory long-range rehabilitation of Cuba by coercion from the outside." The alternative was constructive engagement, which the panel called "positive containment" (DDRS 1968).

Any possibility of pursuing "positive containment" evaporated when Richard Nixon became president. As Eisenhower's vice-president, Nixon advocated exercising maximum coercion against Cuba; as president, he ordered the FBI to turn a blind eye to the paramilitary activities of Cuban exile groups. But Henry Kissinger recognized that coercion was not working and imagined engagement with Cuba as a natural corollary to détente with the Soviet Union and the opening to China. He initiated a secret dialogue with the Cuban government aimed at normalizing relations, but the talks were cut short when Cuba sent troops to Angola to repel an invasion by South Africa.

An angry Kissinger retreated to coercive diplomacy, threatening Cuba with military action if it tried to repeat its Angolan adventure (LeoGrande and Kornbluh 2014).

President Jimmy Carter also hoped that dialogue with Cuba would result in constructive engagement. Just weeks after his inauguration, he ordered his government to begin talks “to achieve normalization of our relations with Cuba” (Carter 1977, 1). During his first year in office, considerable progress was made, culminating in the reopening of diplomatic “Interests Sections” staffed by U.S. and Cuban diplomats. But progress faltered when Cuba sent more troops to Africa, this time to Ethiopia, in close coordination with the Soviet Union. Carter’s National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski, like Kissinger, saw the world as a global competition between superpowers. He convinced Carter to punish the Cubans for their partnership with the Soviets in Africa by ending the talks for constructive engagement and returning to coercion.

The Reagan administration’s focus on halting revolution in Central America led to a major escalation of coercive diplomacy targeting Cuba, which President Ronald Reagan blamed for supporting the region’s revolutionaries. Secretary of State Alexander Haig famously threatened to “go to the source” of Central America’s problems by launching a military attack against Cuba. Reagan also tightened elements of the economic embargo that Carter had relaxed, especially travel (LeoGrande 1998, 80–83).

President George H. W. Bush continued Reagan’s policies, confident that the end of the Cold War meant that Washington could coerce Moscow into halting aid to Cuba, finally bringing about regime collapse. Soviet aid did end after Boris Yeltsin replaced Mikhail Gorbachev, the Cuban economy did descend into the decade-long depression of the Special Period, but the regime did not collapse. In light of the new balance of international forces, the character of U.S. demands on Cuba changed. Heretofore, the primary goal of Washington’s coercive diplomacy had been to alter Cuban foreign policy—to sever Cuba’s ties with the Soviet Union, to end Cuba’s export of revolution to Latin America, to force the withdrawal of Cuban troops from Africa, to end Cuba’s support for revolutionary regimes and governments in Central America. Now, Bush declared, the United States would only normalize relations if Cuba abandoned socialism and adopted multiparty electoral democracy. Cuba could have normal relations with the United States only if it capitulated.

Bill Clinton was willing to tighten the embargo by endorsing the Cuban Democracy Act when he was a candidate in 1992, hoping to win Cuban American votes. He followed the same strategy in 1996, signing the Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity Act of 1996, which wrote the embargo into law. “Supporting the bill was good election-year politics in Florida,” Clinton later wrote in his autobiography, “but it undermined whatever chance I might have had if I won a second term to lift the embargo in return for

positive changes within Cuba” (Clinton 2004, 701). Clinton’s policy was contradictory; though he supported, for domestic politics reasons, legislation that escalated the coercive elements of U.S. policy, he actually believed that engagement was a better foreign policy. In his second term, he tried to expand engagement by loosening restrictions on nongovernmental “people-to-people” contacts and opening government-to-government dialogues on a range of issues of mutual interest. President George W. Bush, who won Florida by 537 votes with the fervent support of Cuban Americans angered by the Clinton’s return of Elián González to his father in Cuba, ratcheted up coercion by reversing many of Clinton’s engagement initiatives.

BARACK OBAMA: CONSTRUCTIVE ENGAGEMENT

As a candidate in 2008, Barack Obama took a different approach than Clinton had. Rather than trying to outflank the Republicans by promising to be tough on Cuba, he promised to engage Havana diplomatically and he appealed to the growing moderate segment of the Cuban American community by promising to remove the limits Bush had imposed on family travel and remittances. This political strategy worked; Obama won 35 percent of the Cuban American vote in 2008, as much as Clinton had won in 1996 and more than any other Democrat (Booth 2012). Obama was convinced that the coercive diplomacy of the previous half century was ineffective, as he acknowledged during the campaign. “We’ve been engaged in a failed policy with Cuba for the last 50 years, and we need to change it,” he declared in a campaign speech in Miami (Farrington 2007). Despite that sentiment, he made little progress on engagement during his first term, due in part to the arrest of USAID subcontractor Alan Gross, who was sentenced to fifteen years in prison for subversion. For the next three years, Obama continued to link engagement to the release of Gross and other Cuban concessions, especially on human rights.

Nevertheless, Obama kept his promise to Cuban Americans. In April 2009, he removed all limits on family travel and remittances, both of which increased dramatically. Cash remittances rose 44 percent during Obama’s first term to some \$2.6 billion in 2012. Cuban American travel jumped 500 percent to some 300,000 visits in 2009, after Bush’s 2004 restrictions had cut it in half (Eaton 2004; Adams 2009; Fund for Reconciliation and Development 2010). In 2011, he restored people-to-people travel and eased restrictions on academic exchanges that George W. Bush had imposed (Office of the Press Secretary 2011).

Reassured by this re-election victory in Florida, pressured by Latin American heads of state, and eager to have an impact on the reforms initiated

in Cuba by Raúl Castro, Obama opened secret negotiations in 2013 to normalize relations. Those negotiations culminated with the simultaneous televised announcements by Obama and Castro on December 17, 2014, that the United States and Cuba would restore diplomatic relations fifty-four years after the break in 1961.

Obama's rationale for abandoning coercive diplomacy was straightforward: the old policy did not work. As he said in his 2015 State of the Union address, it was "a policy that was long past its expiration date. When what you're doing doesn't work for 50 years, it's time to try something new" (Obama 2015).

But the policy also had a deeper logic, as Obama explained to ABC news anchor David Muir during the president's 2016 visit to Cuba. "I do believe that as a consequence of interaction with the United States, as a consequence of more Americans traveling here, as a consequence of remittances that are providing small businesses the opportunity to get started here, that then leads to a significant change and over time what you're going to end up seeing is a more prosperous and freer Cuba" (Enjoli 2016). Change in Cuba was not something the United States could orchestrate, as the old policy demonstrated. But the United States could create conditions that would reinforce the natural dynamics of change already underway on the island. "I think it is very important for the United States not to view ourselves as the agents of change here, but rather to encourage and facilitate Cubans themselves to bring about change," he explained to Muir (Obama 2016). In fact, the changes set in motion by Raúl Castro's economic reforms and the impending generational transfer of political power were among the reasons that Obama decided to change U.S. policy in hopes of influencing the trajectory of change on the island.

Republican leaders attacked Obama's abandonment of coercive diplomacy as surrender to Cuban totalitarianism, whereas some Cuban leaders suspected it was a soft power Trojan Horse still aimed at overthrowing the Revolution—a view reinforced when some U.S. officials described the policy shift from coercion to engagement as just a different means to achieve the same end.

Obama's constructive engagement had three major components: government-to-government diplomacy; promoting commercial relations; and encouraging people-to-people ties. Government-to-government engagement moved the fastest once the administration took Cuba off the Department of State's list of countries sponsoring international terrorism and restored normal diplomatic relations. In the eighteen months between the restoration of relations and the end of Obama's term, Cuba and the United States signed twenty-two additional bilateral agreements on issues of mutual interest. They also established an architecture of negotiating "tables" coordinated by a

Bilateral Commission that met semiannually to oversee the talks taking place in more than a dozen separate conversations on a wide range of issues, including migration, human trafficking, law enforcement, counter-narcotics cooperation, maritime safety, Coast Guard cooperation, environmental protection, global health cooperation, property claims, and human rights.

Commercial ties between Cuba and the United States are limited by the economic embargo imposed by President Kennedy in 1963 and written into law in 1996 by the Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity Act. While the president cannot simply end the embargo *per se*, he can license exceptions to it almost without limit. Obama exercised his licensing authority, promulgating five packages of regulatory reforms between December 17, 2014, and October 2016, each one widening the scope of what commercial activity was allowed. He authorized joint ventures for U.S. telecom and pharmaceutical companies with Cuban state enterprises, two-way trade with Cuban private small businesses, and sales to Cuban state enterprises if the sales benefited the Cuban people (effectively legalizing trade in consumer goods generally). He also approved the restoration of commercial air flights and sea voyages, enabling cruises ships to dock in Cuba (Sullivan 2017).

At first, U.S. businesses were eager to enter the Cuban market, closed to them for half a century. Hundreds of U.S. business executives flocked to Cuba on trade missions. But excitement soon turned to disappointment when the executives began to realize the difficulties of doing business in Cuba—a limited market, poor infrastructure, and an unresponsive government bureaucracy. The Cuban government, never particularly nimble, was overwhelmed with business proposals from U.S. firms, often taking months to respond. Only two U.S. industries had real success in establishing commercial relations: the airlines and telecommunications companies offering cell phone service. Most of the forty-five nonagricultural business contracts U.S. companies signed with Cuba during the last two years of the Obama administration were in those two sectors (U.S.–Cuba Trade and Economic Council 2017).

Civil society ties expanded more quickly. The number of educational exchanges and student abroad programs soared—so many, in fact, that the capacity of the University of Havana to host them all was overwhelmed. Obama's regulatory changes relaxed travel restrictions for nonacademic educational travelers and the number of non-Cuban American U.S. visitors shot up 570 percent, from 92,325 in 2014 to 618,340 in 2017 (ONEI 2017, 2019). Cultural exchanges expanded as well, though perhaps a bit too fast for some conservatives in the Cuban government. In late 2016, after an extravagant Chanel fashion show in Havana and several massive rock 'n roll concerts, there was a noticeable pull-back by the government in discussions of new cultural projects (DeLaurentis 2019).

Obama's pursuit of constructive engagement also suffered from internal contradictions, hampered by remnants of the old policy of coercion that he could not eliminate. The 2000 Trade Sanctions and Export Enhancement Act prohibited U.S. "tourism" in Cuba, defined as travel outside the twelve categories of legal travel recognized in Cuban Assets Control Regulations (CACR) the embargo's implementing regulations. The 1996 Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity Act enshrined the embargo itself in law. Foreign assistance legislation continued to fund "democracy promotion" programs targeting the Cuban regime, and TV/Radio Martí continued to beam anti-government propaganda to the island. Various other laws imposed a variety of restrictions on interactions with Cuba, all beyond the power of the president to change unilaterally. The persistence of these hostile elements of U.S. policy contributed to the Cuban government's suspicion that Obama offer of engagement was duplicitous.

After just twenty-four months, the balance sheet on Obama's policy of constructive engagement was positive. Diplomatic engagement had produced significant progress on issues of mutual interest and initial discussions about the contentious issues of property claims and human rights. Civil society linkages between Cuba and the United States were expanding rapidly and commercial relations were increasing, albeit more slowly than Obama had hoped. In short, the interactions that Obama hoped would further processes of change inside Cuba were all on the rise.

Nevertheless, Republicans continued to denounce the opening because it had not produced an immediate improvement in human rights—notwithstanding the fact that coercive diplomacy had not improved human rights in half a century and had arguably made things worse over the years by reinforcing a siege mentality among Cuban leaders. There was a sharp partisan edge to the criticism, coming mainly from Republican presidential candidates. As the 2016 campaign entered the homestretch, Donald Trump made a special appeal to Cuban Americans in Florida. Speaking to the veterans' association of the Bay of Pigs combatants, he promised to reverse Obama's policy of engagement. "All of the concessions that Barack Obama has granted the Castro regime were done with executive order, which means the next president can reverse them." Trump said. "And that is what I will do unless the Castro regime meets our demands" (Diamond 2016).

DONALD TRUMP: A RETURN TO COERCIVE DIPLOMACY

The Trump White House, strongly influenced by Senator Marco Rubio and hardline Miami exiles, favored radical new sanctions against Cuba from the

very beginning. The president himself was not especially invested in the policy, willing to outsource it to the Cuban American legislators. “Make Rubio happy,” Trump instructed his staff (Entous and Anderson 2018). But when the government conducted a formal review of Cuba policy in the spring of 2017, every agency involved reported that the policy of engagement was working well, serving U.S. interests, and ought to be continued (Kroll 2017). They were reinforced by the U.S. business community, which still hoped to take advantage of the Cuban market.

The White House simply overruled them all in order to keep the campaign promise Trump had made to Miami hardliners. In June 2017, in a speech to a cheering crowd of Cuban exiles in Miami’s Manuel Artime Theater, named for the leader of the exile brigade that went ashore at the Bay of Pigs, Trump declared, “Effective immediately, I am canceling the last administration’s completely one-sided deal with Cuba” (Trump 2017). In rhetoric reminiscent of the Cold War, he denounced the Cuban government as brutal, criminal, depraved, oppressive, and murderous. U.S. policy had returned to coercion aimed at regime change.

Nevertheless, in a concession to U.S. business, which lobbied the White House to keep the Cuban market open, Trump’s initial round of sanctions was modest. He eliminated the ability of U.S. travelers to craft their own educational tours of the Cuba and he prohibited all transactions with Cuban companies managed by the Cuban armed forces, which included a significant portion of Cuba’s tourism sector. But all of Obama’s other regulatory changes remained intact—for the time being (Federal Register 2017).

The issue of relations with Cuba was reopened in the fall of 2017 when news broke that some U.S. and Canadian diplomats and family members had suffered what the State Department called “health attacks” while serving in Havana during the previous nine months. Those afflicted reported symptoms consistent with mild traumatic brain injury. The State Department did not accuse the Cuban government of responsibility for the injuries, and Cuba reportedly cooperated with the U.S. and Canadian investigations, but investigators were never able to explain what caused the injuries (Robles and Sempleaug 2017).

Nevertheless, Republican senators led by Marco Rubio used the mysterious injuries to renew their demand that the administration roll back the remaining elements of Obama’s policy of engagement. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson said in mid-September that the administration was reviewing whether to close the U.S. Embassy and President Trump blasted Cuba as a “corrupt and destabilizing regime” during his speech to the U.N.s General Assembly (Marsh 2017). The following week, Tillerson announced the withdrawal of nonessential personnel from the embassy (about 60 percent of the staff), suspended visa processing for Cubans seeking to enter the United States, and issued a travel

advisory warning Americans not to travel to Cuba. That was not enough for Senator Rubio, who denounced Tillerson's actions as "weak, unacceptable and outrageous," and demanded that Cuban diplomats be expelled (Manchester 2017). Days later, the administration gave in to Rubio and expelled 60 percent of the Cuban embassy's staff, including the entire commercial section and all but one consular officer (Harris, Hirschfeld Davis and Londoño 2017).

Downsizing the embassies had far more impact on the relationship than Trump's June 2017 sanctions. The few officers remaining in the U.S. embassy's consular section were limited to only handling emergencies involving U.S. citizens. Cubans seeking either immigrant or nonimmigrant visas to enter the United States were forced to travel to neighboring countries to apply, something few Cubans could afford. The inability of Cubans to get visas led to the United States violating the 1994 migration accord in which Washington agreed to provide a minimum of 20,000 immigrant visas annually. The diminished capacity of the Cuban embassy's consular section meant that travel to Cuba by U.S. residents was also severely impaired. Cultural, scientific, and educational changes came to a virtual halt.

As the political crisis in Venezuela deepened in 2018–2019, the Trump administration blamed Havana for the Venezuelan opposition's failure to oust Nicolas Maduro. A new foreign policy team in the White House used Cuba's support for Maduro as a rationale for imposing yet another round of sanctions. John Bolton, who targeted Cuba during George W. Bush's administration with unsubstantiated claims that Havana was developing biological weapons, became Trump's national security advisor in April 2018 (Rotella 2018). Bolton hired Mauricio Claver-Carone, a long-time lobbyist for hard-line policies toward Cuba, as senior director for Western Hemisphere Affairs at the National Security Council.

In November 2018, on the eve of the U.S. mid-term elections, Bolton ratcheted up the rhetoric, calling Cuba, along with Venezuela and Nicaragua, a "Troika of Tyranny," "Triangle of Terror," and the "Three Stooges of Socialism." He accused Cuba of "vicious attacks" on U.S. diplomats in Havana, even though investigators were unable to determine the cause of their injuries. He promised escalating sanctions to overthrow all three governments. "The United States now looks forward to watching each corner of the triangle fall," he declared (Bolton 2018).

In April 2019, on the anniversary of the failed Bay of Pigs invasion, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced that the administration would allow Title III of the Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity Act to go into effect. Suspended by every other president since the law was passed in 1996, Title III allows U.S. nationals who lost property after the 1959 revolution, including Cuban Americans, to sue Cuban, United States, or foreign companies in U.S. federal court for "trafficking" in their confiscated property—that

is, making beneficial use of it. The main effect, and purpose, of activating Title III was to deter foreign investment and cripple Cuba's economic development.

That same day, speaking to an audience of Bay of Pigs veterans in Miami, Bolton, announced a new package of regulations significantly tightening the embargo by imposing new limits on the remittances Cuban Americans send to family on the island and limiting educational travel, which he denounced as "veiled tourism" (Chokshi and Robles 2019). Remittances, unlimited under President Barack Obama, were capped at \$1,000 every quarter—enough to supplement a family's meager state salary, but not enough to start and sustain a private business. The new regulations also prohibited U.S. companies from wiring funds from outside the United States, forcing Western Union to halt its handling of remittances from Cuban expatriates in Europe and Latin America. The new limits hit Cuba's nascent private sector hardest because funds from the United States had been the start-up capital for many small businesses.

The new sanctions eliminated the people-to-people category of educational travel which covered educational and cultural tours run by organizations like National Geographic, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, and the Smithsonian (Lee and Weissenstein 2019). Authorized originally by President Bill Clinton in the 1990s, people-to-people travel was eliminated by President George W. Bush in 2003, in response to complaints from conservative Cuban Americans in South Florida. President Obama restored it in 2011. Trump, like Bush before him, was responding to the Cuban American Republican base in Miami in the run-up to the 2020 presidential election. In 2018, 638,000 U.S. residents who were not Cuban Americans traveled to Cuba (Whitefield 2019). The vast majority—at least two-thirds if not more—went under a people-to-people license. In addition to ending people-to-people travel, the Trump administration also banned all U.S. passenger vessels from visiting Cuba, including cruise ships, which carried some 800,000 people to Cuba in 2018 (Mzezewa 2019).

These new sanctions were just the opening salvo in a concerted campaign aimed at imposing "maximum pressure" on Cuba. By systematically cutting off Cuba's major sources of foreign exchange currency, the administration intended, as Pompeo told a European diplomat, to "starve" the regime out (Gámez Torres 2020). In September 2019, the administration prohibited so-called "u-turn" transactions involving Cuba, transactions in which foreign banks process dollar-denominated transactions through a U.S. bank even when neither party to the transaction is subject to U.S. jurisdiction. By blocking such transactions, the administration made it difficult for Cuba to conduct routine international financial transactions (McMillan, Shin and Lefevre 2019).

In December 2019 and January 2020, the administration severed commercial and charter air links to all cities in Cuba other than Havana, and prohibited U.S. airlines from leasing planes to Cuba's state airline, forcing Havana to cut the number of internal and international flights (Gámez Torres and Dolven 2020). Washington's rationale was to reduce Cuba's tourism revenue, but since relatively few U.S. visitors other than Cuban Americans were flying into provincial cities, the main impact fell on Cuban and Cuban American families. The administration also ended the five-year multiple entry visa the Obama administration had established for Cubans to visit family in the United States (Gámez Torres 2019a). That, combined with the limitation on flights and the lack of consular services at the U.S. embassy, made it difficult if not impossible for most Cubans to come to the United States on family visits. Cuban private businesses whose supply chain extended to the United States suffered collateral damage from the limitations on travel.

Next, the administration targeted Cuba's energy supply by imposing sanctions on companies shipping Venezuelan oil to Cuba on the grounds that after opposition majority in the National Assembly declared Juan Guaidó interim president, Maduro was no longer president and therefore Cuba was stealing Venezuelan oil (Chiacu and Parraga 2019). Since Cuba produces only about a third of its energy needs, the oil-for-doctors agreement between Cuba and Venezuela provided a critical flow of petroleum, which had already been declining as a result of shortfalls in Venezuelan production. The U.S. sanctions on shipping aggravated fuel shortages across the island, forcing the government to impose fuel rationing on state enterprises.

The Trump administration also targeted Cuba's international medical assistance programs. Although Cuba has been sending medical brigades abroad ever since the earliest years of the revolution, in the past two decades, Cuba has negotiated service contracts with governments able to pay. The largest by far was with Venezuela: at the peak of this partnership, over 40,000 Cuban medical personnel served in Venezuela in exchange for some 100,000 barrels of oil per day at discount prices. Another 20,000 personnel served in other countries. The export of medical services was a major source of foreign exchange earnings (or in the Venezuelan case, a savings of hard currency that would otherwise have had to be spent on oil imports). Thus, the medical programs became a target in Trump's campaign to strangle the Cuban economy. "We urge host countries to end contractual agreements with the Castro regime that facilitate the human rights abuses occurring in these programs," Secretary of State Mike Pompeo tweeted January 12, 2020. Encouraged by the United States, conservative governments in Brazil, Ecuador, Bolivia, and El Salvador ended medical services agreements with Cuba. The programs in Ecuador, Bolivia, and El Salvador were relatively small, just 400 doctors in Ecuador and 700 in Bolivia (Krygier 2020). But the Brazilian program was

substantial, numbering over 11,000 medical personnel at its peak, generating \$250 million in annual revenue for Cuba (Pentón 2018).

Finally, for no purpose other than to add insult to injury (and appeal to south Florida's Cuban American electorate), the Trump administration designated Raúl Castro and several other senior military and security officials as human rights violators, making them and their families ineligible for visas to enter the United States (Gámez Torres 2019b).

In the weeks leading up to 2020 presidential election, Florida once again emerged as a key battleground state. Trump rolled out a series of new sanctions, announcing one every couple of weeks to keep the Cuban American Republican base energized. He banned U.S. visitors from attending professional conferences or cultural events in Cuba without prior permission from the Treasury Department; prohibited them from staying in Cuban hotels; and threatened to cut off remittances entirely (U.S. Department of the Treasury 2020).

COERCION OR ENGAGEMENT: A BALANCE SHEET

The policy of coercive diplomacy, initiated by President Eisenhower and pursued by every succeeding president—albeit with varying degrees of vigor—except Barack Obama in his second term, has lasted for six decades. Its stated aim has been to change the behavior of the Cuban regime or depose it, though over the years, the behaviors deemed objectionable have changed. During the Cold War, the United States demanded an end to Cuba's strategic partnership with the Soviet Union, and an end to Cuba's support for revolutionary movements and governments in Latin America and Africa. Occasionally, the issue of human rights was added to the mix. After the Soviet Union collapsed and Cuba stopped "exporting" revolution abroad, Washington "moved the goals posts," as former U.S. diplomat Wayne Smith put it, and began demanding fundamental changes in the Cuban political and economic system—that is, that Cuba abandon socialism for free market capitalism and a multiparty electoral system (Klein 1990). To these demands, the Trump administration has added the demand that Cuba abandon its support for the Venezuelan government.

Coercive diplomacy achieved none of these goals. On the contrary, Cuban leaders have consistently responded with defiance, declaring that Cuba's foreign policy and especially its political and economic system are its own affairs as a sovereign nation, matters not subject to U.S. approval.

President Obama's policy of constructive engagement aimed to increase diplomatic engagement, civil society engagement, and commercial ties with Cuba in order to facilitate cooperation on issues of mutual interest and

importance to the United States, and to create an atmosphere that would influence the trajectory of internally driven change in Cuba toward a more open political and economic system. It was a strategy that people in the administration referred to as “the long game” (Purdum 2015). Although constructive engagement lasted just two years and was hobbled by remnants of the old policy—most especially the embargo—it registered significant achievements—almost two dozen diplomatic accords, a large increase in travel, cultural, and educational exchanges, and the beginnings of commercial linkages. Whether this would have had a positive impact on the trajectory of change in Cuba—whether the “long game” would have worked—is unknowable, at least until another U.S. president opts to try it.

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Chapter 4

The President Has the Constitutional Power to Terminate the Embargo

Robert L. Muse

INTRODUCTION

Although it took a while, it is now commonly acknowledged that a president has the authority to unilaterally modify the U.S. embargo on Cuba.¹ This power exists notwithstanding Congress's attempted "codification" (i.e., the freezing in place) of the U.S. Treasury Department regulations that constitute that embargo. (1. The codification provision is found in the Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity Act of 1996, 22 U.S.C. § 6032(h) (1996); hereafter, "Helms-Burton Act" 22 U.S.C. §§ 6021-6091). (I will return later to the attempted codification.)

It remains little understood, though, that the president has the power to go beyond modifying the Cuban embargo, and indeed may terminate it once and for all. That power exists notwithstanding a provision of the Helms-Burton Act that purports to impose political conditions on Cuba that must be met before the embargo can be lifted by presidential action (22 U.S.C. §§ 6064–6066). In summary, the authority to unilaterally terminate the embargo on Cuba is based upon the constitutional primacy of the office of the president in managing the foreign relations of the United States. A question this paper addresses is could anyone challenge such a unilateral presidential termination of the embargo on Cuba? Members of Congress might try, but would they meet the constitutional requirement of "standing" to mount such a challenge in federal court? The answer is no, they would find it impossible to establish the "standing" necessary to bring such a lawsuit because, as a matter of law they would not be able to demonstrate actual personal harm to themselves arising from an end of the embargo, which is something they must, but cannot, prove to achieve standing.

However, for the sake of a complete analysis, we will assume for now that the standing of members of Congress to challenge a unilateral termination

of the Cuban embargo is determined by a court to be adequate; what legal principles would a court then apply in adjudicating whether a president has the power to end the embargo in defiance of the limits Congress attempted to impose on that authority in the Helms-Burton Act?

First, it is a venerable principle both endorsed and repeatedly reaffirmed by the Judicial Branch that the conduct of the nation's foreign relations is a function entrusted to the president by the Constitution. That function will not be permitted to be usurped by Congress. Second, the "political question" doctrine of judicial abstention encapsulates the principled desire of judges to avoid entering into policy-based controversies rightly left to the elected branches of government. Whether the president or Congress is correct in their assessments of the desirability, or otherwise, of an embargo on Cuba is precisely the kind of political question the courts of the United States have declined to adjudicate.

Taken together, the overarching principles of presidential supremacy in the country's foreign relations and the political question doctrine would preclude a successful congressional challenge to a unilateral presidential termination of the Cuban embargo.

AN ATTEMPTED CONGRESSIONAL USURPATION OF U.S.-CUBA POLICY FROM THE PRESIDENT

The late Senator Jesse Helms and several Cuban American legislators intended the Helms-Burton Act of 1996 to strip President Clinton and his successors of the authority to end the Cuban embargo. They attempted to achieve that goal by two means. First, the Act "codified" the restrictions of the embargo to prevent the relaxation of its various elements by the Executive Branch. Second, it attempted to entomb in Congress what it believed to be a now-frozen ("codified") embargo. This second step was to be achieved by stipulating that that embargo could be terminated only if Cuba were to acquiesce in the transformation of its political, economic, and social systems according to the precise specifications of the Helms-Burton Act (22 U.S.C. §§ 6064–6066). Then and only then could a U.S. president end the embargo. Among the specified conditions that Cuba was mandated to meet: "Free and fair elections" must have been held in Cuba under the supervision "of foreign observers"; Cuba must be "substantially moving toward a market-oriented economic system"; Cuba must have made "demonstrable progress in assuring the right to private property"; Cuba must have permitted the "unfettered" deployment of "international human rights monitors" throughout the island; Cuba must release "all political prisoners"; Cuba must also have given assurances that "assistance" will be provided for the "Cuban people"; Cuba must

have made “demonstrable progress in establishing an independent judiciary”; and Cuba must have “legalized all political activity”; Cuba must not block reception in Cuba of U.S. government-funded radio and television broadcasts (i.e., Radio and TV Martí) that violate international communications treaties; and Cuba must have dissolved specified Cuban government agencies (22 U.S.C. §§ 6065–6066). The requirements can only be read as a demand for an unconditional surrender of sovereignty by Cuba in exchange for an end to the U.S. embargo.

Notably though, the extensive requirements placed on Cuba by the Helms-Burton Act would be impossible to apply and police by a U.S. court. The ostensible adjectival standards of the statute are simply too vague or indeterminate to be applied. For example, if the president terminates the embargo and members of Congress sue to enforce the requirements that the Helms-Burton Act seeks to impose on Cuba as a predicate for such action, a court would be asked to resolve such questions as follows: What exactly constitutes a “political prisoner?” What constitutes “substantial movement to a market-oriented economy?” What is a “full and fair election?” How is “the right to private property” meant to be defined? What is an “unfettered” human rights monitor? Predictably courts will decline the invitation to do the job of Congress in defining, beyond tossing around adjectives, precisely what is required of Cuba.

As will be explained, though, even if more carefully drafted not one of the above-cited requirements imposed on Cuba is binding on a U.S. president. He or she may terminate the embargo on Cuba with no more than a written declaration to that effect. Alternatively, a president may let the statutory authority for the embargo lapse in September of any given year by doing nothing to renew that authority²:

The President may extend the exercise of [the Trading With the Enemy Act, upon which the Cuban embargo is based] for one-year periods upon a determination for each such extension that the exercise of such authorities with respect to [Cuba] for another year is in the national interest of the United States. (Section 101(b) of Public Law 95-223 (91 Stat. 1625; 50 U.S.C. App. 5(b) note)

There is simply nothing members of Congress can do about whichever means of embargo termination is chosen by a present or future president. Some members of Congress, though, would like U.S. presidents to think otherwise. At the time of President Trump’s June 2017 announcement in Miami of his administration’s new Cuba policy (The White House 2017), there were assertions beforehand of the primacy of the Helms-Burton Act and its preemptive effect on the formulation of U.S.-Cuba policy by any political actors other than Congress. The motive in those assertions was to convince Donald Trump

that he is legally bound by the Helms-Burton Act to maintain a strict embargo on Cuba until the many and extreme conditions for termination of the statute are met by Cuba.

Then-Secretary of State nominee Rex Tillerson fell for it when he framed U.S.-Cuba policy in congressionally oriented terms, “How do we bring [the U.S.] into compliance with long standing statutory obligations? . . . We think it is important that we take steps to restore the intent of the Helms-Burton legislation which was to put pressure on the regime to change” (Whitfield 2017).

In his Cuba policy announcement in Miami, President Trump likewise referenced the Helms-Burton Act and said: “Our new policy begins with strictly enforcing U.S. law. We will not lift sanctions on the Cuban regime until all political prisoners are freed. Freedoms of assembly and expression are respected. All political parties are legalized. And free and internationally supervised elections are scheduled” (The White House 2017). In so doing, Trump evinced an almost certainly unwitting acceptance of Congress’ attempted usurpation of his foreign relations prerogative.

But he, or his successor, can learn that the self-proclaimed primacy of Congress with regard to the embargo on Cuba is preposterous when viewed through a constitutional lens. Trump, or any future president, can learn this simple truth and act on that knowledge to end the economic embargo against Cuba. In doing so they would achieve the foreign policy legacy that eluded President Obama notwithstanding his visit to Havana.

THE LESSON FOR THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION IN THE FAILED “CODIFICATION” OF THE EMBARGO ON CUBA

When, ten years after the enactment of Helms-Burton, Fidel Castro transferred his powers of state onto his brother Raul in 2006, the U.S. Executive Branch remarkably claimed to be unable to respond to that event:

A State Department official said there would be no change in policy towards Cuba, whether Castro or his brother Raul were in charge, because of American laws restricting U.S. dealings with the communist government. “This is one of our most regimented policies. *Our hands are tied by laws*,” said the official (Reuters, 2006). (Emphasis added).

This was merely a repetition of the false wisdom that the Helms-Burton Act took embargo policy out of the hands of the Executive Branch by “codifying” it. (The most surprising aspect of this misstatement of constitutional authority is that it came from the Executive Branch itself.)

The provision in the Helms-Burton Act that “codified” the embargo on Cuba (in the sense that it purported to remove the discretion of the president to modify the embargo) reads:

Codification of Economic Embargo. The economic embargo of Cuba, as in effect on March 1, 1996, including all restrictions under part 515 of title 31, Code of Federal Regulations, shall be in effect upon the enactment of this Act, and shall remain in effect, subject to section 204 of the Act (Helms-Burton Act). (22 U.S.C. § 6032[h]).

The readily apparent problem with the “codification” of the embargo is that it codified the Cuban regulations verbatim “as in effect on March 1, 1996”—including the controlling provision, 31 C.F.R. § 515.201: “All transactions [involving Cuba] are prohibited *except as specifically authorized by the Secretary of the Treasury . . . by means of regulations, rulings, [and] licenses*” (emphasis added). The Helms-Burton Act simply left untouched the Executive Branch’s authority to modify the embargo on Cuba (i) by promulgating new regulations, (ii) by issuing specific licenses permitting new activities involving Cuba, or (iii) by generally licensing hitherto prohibited dealings with that country.³

Proof that such executive authority was unimpaired was provided shortly after the Act’s enactment when the Clinton administration invented a new category of authorized travel to Cuba under a general license, created to permit U.S. citizens to engage in “people-to-people” educational travel (64 Fed. Reg. 25808. 1999). Tellingly Senator Helms did not challenge this rebuff of his “codification” attempt.

PRESIDENT CLINTON’S HELMS-BURTON ACT SIGNING STATEMENT

President Clinton did not offer significant opposition to Senator Helms’ bill. Instead, he relied on the advice of campaign operatives concerned about the South Florida vote in the reelection of 1996. So he remained quiet on the subject of the Helms-Burton legislation when it was before Congress. In the aftermath of two planes from Miami being shot down by the Cuban Air Force, he signed the bill into law. However, Clinton took an important step to preserve presidential authority over U.S.-Cuba policy by issuing a signing statement that said:

Consistent with the Constitution, I interpret the Act as not derogating from the president’s authority to conduct foreign policy. A number of provisions could

be read to state the foreign policy of the United States. . . . While I support the underlying intent of these sections, the president's constitutional authority over foreign policy necessarily entails discretion over these matters. Accordingly, I will construe these provisions to be precatory.⁴ The president must also be able to respond effectively to rapid changes in Cuba. This capability is necessary to ensure that we can advance our national interests in a manner that is conducive to a democratic transition in Cuba. Section 102(h), concerning the codification of the economic embargo, and the requirements for determining that a transitional or democratically elected government is in power, could be read to impose overly rigid constraints on the implementation of our foreign policy. (Clinton 1996)

Clinton's signing statement rejected both the codification of the embargo on Cuba *and* the purportedly binding nature of the requirements placed on Cuba (e.g., an independent judiciary) by the Helms-Burton Act for the termination of the embargo. In issuing his statement, Clinton asserted the constitutional primacy of the president in the foreign affairs realm. It is as accurate a description of the scope of the foreign policy prerogative of a U.S. president now as it was when he signed it.

That Clinton's signing of the Helms-Burton legislation did nothing to legitimize that statute's attempt to usurp presidential authority over Cuba-U.S. policy was demonstrated by the U.S. Supreme Court in a case where President George W. Bush signed legislation that ordered the Department of State to issue passports stating the place of birth as Israel for any U.S. citizen born in Jerusalem. The Bush administration opposed the law because it presumed Israeli sovereignty over Jerusalem when the U.S. policy was to preserve the status of the city for future multiparty negotiations. When he signed the legislation, Bush issued a signing statement rejecting the binding authority of the law:

If construed as mandatory rather than advisory, [the statute would] impermissibly interfere with the president's constitutional authority to formulate the position of the United States [and speak] for the nation in international affairs. (Bush 2002).

The parents of a child born in Jerusalem sued to enforce the law and the matter reached the Supreme Court. The Bush administration won the case based on a traditional judicial deference to the long-standing prerogative of the president to conduct the country's foreign relations (see *Zivotofsky v. Kerry*, 576 U.S. 1059 [2015]). Zivotofsky's case underscored the fact that signing a bill that derogates from the presidential foreign relations prerogative does not diminish a later assertion of that inherent constitutional power: And such is the case with Cuba and the Helms-Burton Act.

AN IMPERMISSIBLE LEGISLATIVE VETO

As we have seen, the Helms-Burton Act purports to set out the requirements that Cuba must meet for the president to terminate the embargo. If the president takes action to terminate the embargo and Congress disapproves of that action, the Act declares that the president's action will "cease to be effective" once Congress enacts a joint resolution of disapproval (22 U.S.C. § 6032[e][1]). Astonishingly, the above provision constitutes an impermissible legislative veto that congressional lawyers should have recognized as such immediately.

Legislative vetoes were deemed unconstitutional and prohibited by the Supreme Court in *INS v. Chadha*, 462 U.S. 919 (1983). In that case, Chadha overstayed his student visa and a judge suspended his deportation. The House of Representatives vetoed the suspension and voted to overturn the Executive Branch's determination that Chadha be allowed to stay. The Supreme Court struck down that legislative action by ruling that it violated the Presentment Clause of the Constitution which enshrines the requirement that a congressional bill must be formally presented to the president for his signature, making it law, or for his veto.

Because there is no provision for presentation to the president of the congressional joint resolution rendering the president's action "ineffective," if such a resolution is passed and then invoked in court against a president for failure to comply with the Helms-Burton Act's conditions for lifting the embargo on Cuba, the judge will simply strike it down.⁵

It is unlikely that a court would pay much regard to arguments urging it to overturn a presidential action as contrary to the will of Congress when that body's attempt at a mechanism to override the disputed action has been found to be unconstitutional or simply ineffectual because its ultimate fate lies with a president who has already deliberately acted contrary to the statute. In other words, Congress chose its remedy and when that remedy proves to be constitutionally defective or ineffectual, the Judicial Branch—a branch of government that, by constitutional design and its own preference, is to play no role in the formulation of the nation's foreign policies—will not invent a means of salvation for Congress's usurpation of the president's foreign affairs prerogative.

MEMBERS OF CONGRESS DO NOT HAVE THE "STANDING" TO CHALLENGE A PRESIDENTIAL TERMINATION OF THE EMBARGO ON CUBA

In considering possible congressional reaction should a president simply lift the embargo, we should perhaps have first asked whether members of Congress will do anything at all.

Following the 1999 postcodification, Cuban embargo reforms of President Clinton (e.g., the creation of new categories of authorized travel), Representative Ros-Lehtinen said, “We want to know where is the legal controlling authority that authorizes them to change the law. The way we read Helms-Burton, they do not have any such authority” (Whitfield 2017).

There was talk of suing Clinton at the time, but nothing came of it (Haney *et al.* 2006). If the past is any guide, members of Congress will quite probably take no action should the president terminate the embargo without requiring Cuba to conform to the myriad conditions of the Helms-Burton Act.⁶

If, however, they do elect to sue, the legal requirement of “standing” will present a formidable challenge to a congressional litigant challenging Executive Branch action.

Should individual members of Congress file suit, they will allege that the president has failed to follow the requirements of the Helms-Burton Act for the termination of the Cuban embargo. Before a court will even consider the merits of such a claim it will insist that the plaintiffs demonstrate constitutional standing. To do so they must show an injury-in-fact that is directly attributable to an alleged failure of the Executive Branch to follow the law in question. What member of Congress could sustain such a claim with respect to the Helms-Burton Act? The short answer is, not one.

“Standing” to bring suit must be affirmatively established by a plaintiff challenging an action of the Executive Branch (*Lujan v. Defenders of Wildlife*, 504 U.S. 555 [1962]). The Supreme Court has ruled that in order to have such standing to litigate a claim, a plaintiff must “allege . . . a personal stake in the outcome of the controversy” (*Baker v. Carr*, 369 U.S. 186 [1962]).

The constitutional test for standing evolved by the judiciary requires that a plaintiff show that he or she has suffered (1) an injury-in-fact, which (2) is fairly traceable to the challenged conduct and (3) is redressable by a favorable judgment. Members of Congress challenging termination of the Cuban embargo by the president must state a claim showing an injury more personal and direct than simply an abstract interest in U.S.-Cuba policy (*Lujan*, 504 U.S. at 555). For example, in *Harrington v. Bush*, the D.C. Circuit denied standing to a member of Congress who challenged the legality of certain acts of the CIA and claimed that they diminished his effectiveness as a legislator (553 F.2d 190 (D.C. Cir. 1977)).

Suits by members of Congress brought against the Executive Branch invoke complicated separation of powers concerns for the federal courts. Such concerns leave judges reluctant to open the courts to legislators when they allege only “generalized, amorphous injuries due to . . . the conduct of

the Executive” (*Moore v. U.S. House of Representatives*, 733 F.2d 946, 951 (D.C. Cir. 1984)).

Members of Congress will simply not be able to demonstrate standing to challenge a president’s unilateral lifting of the Cuban embargo, because they cannot show injuries to themselves attributable to that action.

JUDICIAL DEFERENCE TO PRESIDENTIAL EXERCISES OF THE OFFICE’S FOREIGN AFFAIRS PREROGATIVE

A president’s plenary prerogative to conduct the nation’s foreign affairs has been central to the clear and expedient formulation and execution of the foreign policies of the United States. The recognized need for the United States to speak with one voice in foreign matters has resulted in a president’s actions being given extraordinary deference by the courts. In *United States v. Curtiss-Wright Export Corp.*, the Supreme Court described the constitutional scope of the president’s authority over the nation’s foreign policies:

It is important to bear in mind that we are here dealing with . . . the very delicate, plenary and exclusive power of the president as the sole organ of the federal government in the field of international relations. (Emphasis added) (*United States v. Curtiss-Wright Export Corp.*, 299 U.S. 304, 319 [1936])

In foreign affairs-based court contests between Congress and presidents, the latter have always won. There is no reason to believe a suit by members of Congress challenging a unilateral termination of the embargo on Cuba will fare any differently.

THE POLITICAL QUESTION DOCTRINE

Courts, in deciding whether to adjudicate certain controversies, perform a “political question” analysis which seeks to determine whether the question presented should be reserved for Congress and the president to resolve. That is, the courts must decide initially whether the matter is inherently political rather than legal, and, if so, they must leave it to what are called the “political branches” of government to resolve, or not, through such means Congress’s “power of the purse” and “advice and consent” to presidential appointments.

In hearing a suit based on the Helms-Burton Act and its codification of the embargo against Cuba, a court would inevitably be asked to decide,

effectively, whether the president or Congress has the better Cuba policy. This is something that the courts will not do. In *Sanchez-Espinoza v. Reagan*, a claim was brought by members of Congress arguing that President Reagan's aid to Contras amounted to waging war in violation of the Constitution's war power clause (568 F. Supp. 596 [D.D.C. 1983]). The case was dismissed on the ground that the complaint amounted to a political question. Similarly, in *Crockett v. Reagan*, a claim brought by members of Congress that challenged the presence of military advisors in El Salvador as a violation of the War Powers Resolution and the war powers clause of the Constitution was also dismissed as a political question (558 F. Supp. 893 [D.D.C. 1982]).

President Obama attempted to normalize relations with Cuba. President Trump strengthened sanctions against Cuba. Congress legislated conditions for ending the embargo. Given the level of past and present political discord relating to the U.S. embargo against Cuba, inviting a U.S. court to decide a given policy's wisdom in that regard will almost certainly be declined as a nonjusticiable "political" question.

INTERNATIONAL LAW IS THE LAW OF THE UNITED STATES AND U.S. COURTS REFUSE TO ACT CONTRARY TO THAT BODY OF LAW

Should members of Congress sue to enforce the requirements demanded of Cuba by the Helms-Burton Act (e.g., Cuba must adopt a "market-oriented economy"), they will inevitably end up subjecting the Act's requirements to an international law-based review and analysis by a U.S. federal court. In the *Paquete Habana* case the Supreme Court said, "[i]nternational law is part of our [U.S.] law and must be ascertained and administered by the courts of justice of appropriate jurisdiction, as often as questions of right depending upon it are duly presented for their determination" (*The Paquete Habana*, 175 U.S. 677, 700 [1900]).

Whether or not it is legally permissible for the United States, to coerce the transformation of Cuba's economic and political institutions is a question that can only be answered by a U.S. court through reference to the international law principle of nonintervention. As its name suggests, this principle holds that nations may not meddle (intervene) in the internal affairs of other nations. As one eminent commentator has said: "The most fundamental postulate underlying the state system is the notion that one does not try to control political developments in foreign societies" (Falk 1975: 245).

From its earliest days as an independent country, the United States has subscribed to the nonintervention principle. In the 1825 case of *The Antelope* where the U.S. Supreme Court said, "no principle of general law is more

universally acknowledged, than the perfect equality of nations. . . . It results from this equality, that no one [nation] can rightfully impose a rule on another.”⁷

Thomas Jefferson framed the matter in terms of the rights of nations as derived from natural law: “Every nation has, of natural right, entirely and exclusively, all the jurisdiction which may be rightfully exercised in the territory it occupies” (Emphasis added) (Jefferson 1793).⁸

In *The Schooner Exchange v. McFaddon*, a frequently cited case in support of the principle of the exclusive jurisdiction of a state over its territory, Chief Justice Marshall said:

The jurisdiction of [a] nation within its own territory is necessarily exclusive and absolute. It is susceptible of no limitation not imposed by itself. Any restriction upon it, deriving validity from an external source, would imply a diminution of its sovereignty to the extent of the restriction. (*The Schooner Exchange v. McFaddon*, 11 U.S. 116 [1812])

In the present era, the International Court of Justice had this to say on the matter of what is forbidden by the public international law principle of nonintervention:

[T]he principle forbids all States or groups of States to intervene directly or indirectly in internal or external affairs of other States. A prohibited intervention must accordingly be one bearing on matters in which each State is permitted, by the principle of State sovereignty, to decide freely. One of these is the choice of a political, economic, social and cultural system, and the formulation of foreign policy. Intervention is wrongful when it uses methods of coercion in regard to such choices, which must remain free ones (*Military and Paramilitary Activities in and Against Nicaragua (Nicar. v. U.S.)*, Judgment, 1986 I.C.J. Rep. 14, ¶ 190 [June 27]).

In an early American case, *Murray v. The Charming Betsey*, the Supreme Court held that acts of Congress should not be interpreted to violate international law unless no other construction is possible. A later iteration of the Supreme Court’s propensity to read statutes in ways that avoid congressional violations of international law is found in *F. Hoffman-La Roche Ltd. et al. v. Empagran S. A. et al.*, where the Supreme Court held that it will construe statutes to avoid interference with other states’ sovereignty (544 U.S. 155 2004).

In the case of the Helms-Burton Act, a court will be asked to rule that the statute’s requirements placed on Cuba for the lifting of the embargo are illegitimate because they clearly violate Cuba’s sovereignty. As a result, they violate international law. Because international law is the law of the

United States, it must be applied by U.S. courts. It follows that those courts, in conformity with that body of law, will deem the conditions for ending the embargo placed on Cuba as merely precatory and therefore unenforceable by members of Congress.⁹

HOW THE EMBARGO MAY BE TERMINATED

To end the embargo on Cuba, the president may simply declare it terminated and issue the executive orders necessary to resume trade and investment with Cuba. Alternatively (as mentioned in footnote 1), the president may simply let the embargo die through nonextension. Authority for the Cuban embargo regulations stems from section five of the Trading with the Enemy Act (TWEA) (50 U.S.C. app. § 5 [2006]). In 1977, Congress amended section 5(b) to limit the president's power under the TWEA to time of war. At the same time, Congress provided that any section 5(b) authorities being exercised with respect to Cuba on July 1, 1977, could continue to be exercised. *However, such authority will terminate unless extended annually by the president, for a further one-year period, upon the making of a written determination that such an extension is in the "national interest."*¹⁰ Therefore, all that is required to end the Cuban embargo is for a president to refuse, either actively or passively, to extend it when it comes up for its yearly renewal.

THE PRESIDENT LIFTS THE EMBARGO: WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

Cuba and the United States are founding members of the World Trade Organization (WTO). When the WTO was established in 1995 both countries accepted the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) as binding on all members. Article I of the Agreement prohibits signatories from discriminating among member nations when extending trade benefits. For example, if a nation grants another nation a particular customs duty rate on a product, it must grant that rate to all WTO members. This means that both the United States and Cuba must extend Most-Favored-Nation (MFN) treatment to other members' exported products—therefore Cuban goods imported into the United States must receive entry terms as favorable as those extended to other WTO members' products.

However, under Article XXI of the GATT a nation can opt out of its obligations to a particular nation under by claiming it is "necessary for the protection of its essential security interests." In 1962, the United States invoked

the Article XXI exemption of GATT when President Kennedy established the current embargo on Cuba. Kennedy's invocation has remained in effect ever since. Opting back into MFN treatment of Cuba is, though, a simple matter all it will take for such status to apply to Cuba-origin products is a stroke-of-a-pen presidential rescission of Kennedy's action in 1962.

But even without a restoration of MFN status, Cuban products may be imported into the United States under Column II of the current tariff schedule (U.S. International Trade Commission 2020). Column II duties vary greatly, but most are quite modest or, in many cases, nonexistent because duty does not apply to the product category. For example, Cuban coffee has been imported into the United States by Nespresso (Sesin 2016) without payable duty.¹¹ Similarly, Amazon has sold Cuban charcoal in the United States (Gómez Torres 2019). Again, no duty applied.

A representative item to which a Column II duty would apply (chosen at random for the purpose of illustration) is the Cuban beer, *Cristal*. The duty on it would be 9 cents per 355 ml can. Column I duties (i.e., MFN) for beer are zero (U.S. International Trade Commission 2020). So, with or without MFN treatment, most Cuban products may competitively enter the U.S. market upon a presidential termination of the embargo.

CONCLUSION

Obama's normalization initiative with Cuba ended up being too modest in scope to constitute an enduring foreign policy legacy. Truly normalized relations with Cuba will be characterized by an end to the U.S. embargo and the resumption of bilateral trade, as was the case with China. A U.S. president has the power to do both. If Joe Biden chooses not to exercise that power, inevitably a future president will, and in so doing he or she will lay claim to the resulting legacy.

NOTES

1. An earlier version of this chapter was published on the website Global Americans (<http://theglobalamericans.org>)

2. At the time of writing, on September 13, 2019, President Trump extended the embargo on Cuba until September 20, 2020. See, The White House (2019).

3. "A general license authorizes a particular type of transaction for a class of persons without the need to apply for a license." (Office of Foreign Assets Control, United States Department of the Treasury).

4. "Precatory: expressing a wish or desire but not creating a legal obligation or affirmative duty." (Merriam-Webster.com, 2018). <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary>

5. The Helms-Burton Act at 22 U.S.C. § 6064(e)(1) refers to the “enactment of a joint resolution,” but goes on to provide in the following subsection that “For purposes of this subsection, the term “joint resolution” means *only* a joint resolution of the 2 Houses of Congress” (Emphasis added.) In so doing, Congress omitted the requirement of presentation of the resolution to the president for his or her action. However, even if a presentment to the president of the join resolution was intended, a president that terminates the embargo—notwithstanding the conditions prescribed for such termination by Helms-Burton—can hardly be expected to sign a join resolution that would reverse his or her action in terminating the embargo. So the embargo would remain terminated notwithstanding Congressional passage of a joint resolution.

6. It is worth noting that the Helms-Burton is something of an orphan statute. Fewer than ten of the one hundred senators at the time of its passage in 1996 remain in Congress and none of them was a particularly ardent supporter of the Act at the time of passage. It is therefore questionable whether they would bother to file suit challenging a presidential termination of the embargo on Cuba.

7. The sovereignty and equality of states represent the basic constitutional doctrine of the law of nations” (Brownlie 2006: 287). Brownlie goes on to say that “the corollary of the independence and equality of states is the duty on the part of states to refrain from intervention in the internal or external affairs of other states.” *Id.* at 291. The principle of nonintervention finds expression in the Charter of the United Nations, in the following terms: “Nothing contained in the present Charter shall authorize the United Nations to intervene in matters which are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any state” U.N. Charter art. 2, paragraph 7.

8. Quoting Letter from Thomas Jefferson to Mr. Morris (Aug. 16, 1793), in *American State Papers* 167, 169 (Walter Lourie & Matthew St. Claire eds., 1832).

9. See the Clinton Signing Statement at page 7 above.

10. Section 101(b) of Public Law 95-223 (91 Stat. 1625; 50 U.S.C. App. 5(b) note. As mentioned earlier in footnote NOTEREF_Ref40976017 \h * MERGEFORMAT 1, on September 13, 2019, President Trump extended the embargo on Cuba until September 20, 2020.

11. There is an embargo exception available to items produced by “independent Cuban entrepreneurs as determined by the State Department.” (31 CFR § 515.582).

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Chapter 5

[Re]Searching for the “Havana Syndrome”

Peter Kornbluh

On March 2, 2020, just before Cuba temporarily closed its borders to stem the dire threat of the Corona virus, a delegation of doctors, scientists, and scholars from around the world gathered in Havana to address a perplexing and enduring question: “Does the Havana Syndrome Exist?” Hosted by the Cuban Center for Neuroscience, the two-day meeting examined the mysterious medical maladies that plagued U.S. and Canadian embassy personnel from late 2016 into 2018. Specialists from Cuba, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States (U.S.) evaluated theories on what might have caused the neurological and cognitive symptoms—dizziness, tinnitus, nausea, headaches, sleep impairment, memory, and concentration deficits among them—experienced by more than two dozen U.S. personnel, and at least sixteen Canadian diplomats and family members. The conference was intended to be “a call for an open scientific discussion of these health incidents,” Dr. Mitchell Valdés-Sosa, director of Cuba’s Center for Neuroscience stated in his opening remarks, as well as an effort to “get to the bottom of what happened” (Ministry of Public Health of Cuba 2020a).

The scientific presentations covered the range of possible explanations for what the media originally, but inaccurately, defined as “sonic attacks” and the *New Yorker* magazine eventually dubbed the “Havana Syndrome” (Entous and Anderson 2018). Among the academic papers was one titled “Multimodal Neuroimaging Reveals Neurotoxins as a Likely Underlying Cause of Illness Among Canadian Diplomats.” Dr. Alon Friedman, a former Israeli medical specialist now based at the Department of Medical Neuroscience and the Brain Repair Center at Dalhousie University in Halifax, shared his hypothesis that the detected brain injuries resulted from overexposure to toxic chemicals used in pesticide fumigation to fight another virus in Cuba—the Zika virus (Ministry of Public Health of Cuba 2020b).

Dr. Friedman's presentation in Havana reprised his compelling keynote presentation at the November 2019 international symposium in Halifax on "The Cuban Revolution at 60." There, for the first time, he publicly shared the conclusions of a comprehensive research study—"Havana Syndrome: Neuroanatomical and Neurofunctional Assessment in Acquired Brain Injury Due to Unknown Etiology"—commissioned by Canada's Global Affairs ministry and conducted by a team of experts at Dalhousie's Brain Repair Center (Friedman, Calkin and Bowen 2019). Led by Dr. Friedman, the medical team was able to evaluate sixteen Canadian diplomats and members of their families, including seven individuals who were tested before they went to Cuba and again after they returned. Cerebral scans revealed clear signs of trauma including evidence of what Dr. Friedman referred to as "a leaky brain"—hemorrhaging from small arteries. Blood tests indicated the presence of toxic organophosphates commonly used in pesticides. In researching pesticide use in Cuba, Dr. Friedman recounted, he found media coverage of Cuba's 2016 fumigation program to eradicate mosquitos carrying the Zika virus. Indeed, he presented dramatic video footage, taken on his iPhone during a trip to Havana, of Cuban workers generating thick clouds of pesticide spray near embassy properties. According to his study, "embassy records show a significant increase in fumigation in recent years with weekly exposure to high dose pesticides in and around many diplomats' residences" (Ibid., 3).

The conclusions of the Canadian medical study raise a number of questions, including how to explain differences between the experiences of the United States and Canadian personnel. Their cognitive symptoms appeared very similar, but circumstances under which they occurred seemed quite distinct. Unlike the Canadians, a number of the U.S. officials associated their illness with some sort of pulsating energy field that struck them inside their homes or hotel rooms—a sensation often accompanied by a distinct, grinding, metallic sound. "In contrast to previous reports on American diplomats, most Canadians did not describe an acute, directional, unusual sensory and/or auditory stimulus, but rather a gradual development of debilitating symptoms," acknowledged the Dalhousie study (Ibid., 2).

To verify the hypothesis that the victims were stricken by neurotoxins that targeted mosquitos, rather than humans, Dr. Friedman noted that he would be collaborating with Cuban public health authorities to test Cubans who also had been exposed to the Zika fumigation, and to analyze the chemical composition of the pesticide used in Cuba. Yet he seemed confident that the Dalhousie study had solved the mystery of the Havana Syndrome. During question-and-answer at the Halifax conference he was asked if the Zika fumigation assessment was a "fact or a theory." "What do we need to do to prove it?" he responded firmly. "Fumigate 10 more diplomats?" (Kimber 2019).

Since late December 2016 when the first U.S. “diplomat”—in reality a CIA officer under diplomatic cover—reported a series of cognitive ailments to the Embassy medical office, the “Havana Syndrome” has become an enduring international “whodunit”—or perhaps better stated “whatdunit?” In the United States, multiple agencies—the FBI, CIA, CDC, Pentagon, State Department, the National Institute for Health, the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine, and U.S. Congress among them—launched concerted inquiries. In Canada, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and the Global Affairs ministry, among other government agencies, investigated the unexplained maladies. In February 2019, fourteen Canadian diplomats and family members filed a \$28 million lawsuit against their own government for “continuing to put its diplomats and their families in harm’s way by sending them to Havana and requiring them to stay there despite becoming aware of the high and growing risk that they would sustain brain injuries associated with the Havana Syndrome.”¹ During the same month, a nongovernmental legal agency called the James Madison Project, representing U.S. personnel who had experienced trauma in Cuba, filed a Freedom of Information lawsuit against the State Department seeking thousands of documents generated by the medical mystery and multiple investigations into the injuries to Embassy personnel.²

Beyond the actual victims, Cuba’s bilateral relations with the United States and Canada also suffered substantive damage. Since several covert operatives were the first to fall ill in Havana, the CIA leadership became convinced that their agents were being targeted by hostile forces and decided to withdraw them and close down the CIA station, located on the upper floors of the U.S. embassy building.³ That decision influenced then Secretary of State Rex Tillerson to essentially shutter the entire embassy. “[I]f the CIA could not protect its spies, his diplomats were at least as vulnerable,” as U.S. officials described Tillerson’s decision to *Propublica* (Golden and Rotella 2018b). On September 29, 2017, the Secretary of State closed the consulate and drastically reduced the embassy staff from approximately fifty-three employees to about a dozen officials. The Canadian government eventually took similar steps, evacuating all diplomatic family members in April 2018, and then reducing its embassy staff by 50 percent in January 2019.

Unlike the Canadian government, which maintained normal, if reduced, commercial and political ties with the Cuban government, the Trump administration exploited the mystery of the Havana Syndrome to roll back the restoration of relations between the United States and Cuba achieved during the Obama era. Although the administration had no evidence that the injuries were the result of malicious intent by the Cuban government, the State Department expelled fifteen members of Cuba’s embassy personnel in Washington in October 2017. The State Department also issued a dire

warning to U.S. citizens “not to travel to Cuba.” In early January 2018, Cuba received a “level 3” travel designation with the warning “Reconsider Travel: Avoid travel due to serious risks to safety and security.” The warnings sowed confusion in the travel industry and contributed to a major drop-off of U.S. tourism with severe consequences for the Cuban economy before the advisory was lowered to level 2 (“Exercise Increased Caution”) in August 2018 (Travel Agent Central 2018).

While U.S. officials blamed Cuba for the situation, they also acknowledged that the cause of the Havana Syndrome remained a mystery. Despite extensive investigation, “there is no known cause, no known individual or group believed to be responsible at this time,” a State Department spokesperson conceded. Doctors who have examined the U.S. victims have referred to their injuries as “the immaculate concussion” for which, so far, there are no clear causal factors (Kornbluh 2018). With the potential exception of Dr. Friedman’s study, little new has been learned, despite intensive and extensive international inquiries. “I don’t think we are any closer to knowing what caused this,” a Senate aide who closely monitors U.S.-Cuba relations noted in a recent email to the author, “than we were three years ago” (pers. comm., July 31, 2020).

Filling the void of proven facts, several major theories have evolved, some of them already discredited, others awaiting additional evidence. In addition to the hypothesis of the Canadian study on neurotoxins and the Zika virus, since 2017 three major explanations on the Havana Syndrome have garnered significant attention:

“SONIC ATTACKS”

In Cuba, the first handful of individuals to experience cognitive symptoms were intelligence operatives, lending credence to the initial interpretation of a selective, targeted, campaign of harassment—not uncommon in spy versus spy wars, and not unprecedented in U.S.-Cuba relations. The first report of the phenomenon followed two dramatic events in Washington and Havana: the unexpected November 8, 2016, election of Donald Trump who, during the campaign, had threatened to roll back Obama’s normalization of relations; and, seventeen days later, on November 25, 2016, the death of Fidel Castro at age ninety. For months, the CIA and the U.S. embassy maintained a strict secrecy around all information relating to the injuries, in hopes of more easily identifying the mechanism or weapon ostensibly being directed at U.S. personnel.

On February 17, 2017, the State Department quietly lodged a formal diplomatic protest to the Cuban government. Soon thereafter, Ambassador

Jeffrey DeLaurentis informally met with Cuban President Raúl Castro, who adamantly denied responsibility. “It is not us,” Castro reportedly told the U.S. ambassador, urging that “we should work together to try to solve it.”⁴ But the health problems continued. After more members of the diplomatic corps fell ill, in May 2017, the Trump administration quietly expelled two officials from the Cuban embassy in Washington as a signal of Washington’s seriousness addressing the ongoing maladies.

Only after the office of conservative Florida Senator Marco Rubio got wind of the injuries and leaked the story to the press in August 2017 did the mainstream media adopt the catchy moniker “sonic attack” to describe what appeared to be some form of acoustic aggression. “News reports cited an official theory that attributed the symptoms to a sonic attack using some sort of invisible energy force,” the *New York Times* later reported, “like something out of ‘Star Wars,’ only real” (Hurley 2019). The “sonic” concept came from victims’ reports of hearing grinding chirps, or high-pitched buzzing and squealing sounds, along with feeling pressure and pulsating vibrations in their ears and around their heads. The allegation of an “attack” derived from the directional nature of the sensations that struck individuals inside residences and hotel rooms, and from the commonality of the initial group of intelligence operatives who were affected. As noted above, the CIA believed its operatives were being targeted in a campaign of harassment, either by the Cuban Intelligence Directorate or a foreign intelligence service operating in Havana.

The “sonic attack” label endured long after it had been disproven. Scientists and medical experts were virtually unanimous that the cognitive symptoms could not be caused by acoustics. “We think the audible sound was a consequence of the exposure, because audible sound is not known to cause brain injury,” according to Dr. Douglas Smith, director of the Center for Brain Injury and Repair at the University of Pennsylvania, who coauthored a controversial study in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* on the U.S. personnel stricken in Cuba (Finnegan 2018). The FBI arrived at the same conclusion. At the invitation of the Cuban government, as Ambassador Josefina Vidal pointed out in her presentation at the Halifax conference, teams of FBI specialists traveled to Havana at least six times in search of evidence of a sonic source for the injuries. In a still-classified report completed in early 2018, FBI investigators formally dismissed the possibility that a “sonic attack” caused the health problems.⁵

Even the “high-pitched beam of sound” that victims associated with their injuries defied clear explanation. After the first round of cases, the State Department supplied embassy personnel with tape recorders in an attempt to capture the noise for analysis. Several officials did manage to record it. The U.S. Navy conducted a comprehensive analysis of the acoustics, as did U.S.

intelligence agencies. To date, their assessments remain classified secrets of state.

But at least one recording was leaked to the *Associated Press* in October 2017; the AP posted it on-line for the world to hear. “It sounds sort of like a mass of crickets,” the AP reported, perhaps presciently; in an e-mail to the author, however, the former Havana AP bureau chief stated that acoustic analysts consulted by the AP had concluded the sound was “manmade” (Lederman and Weissenstein 2017).⁶

With access to the recording, a team of computer scientists at the University of Michigan and Zhejiang University in China subjected the recording to a rigorous acoustical analysis and computerized effort to recreate the sounds. In a March 2018 study titled “On Cuba, Diplomats, Ultrasound, and Intermodulation Distortion,” they concluded that the noise derived not from “sonic” sources, but rather from ultra-sonic sources striking each other, creating what they described as “audible byproducts that share spectral characteristics with audio from the AP news.” The metallic grinding noises, they theorized, could be the result of an accidental collision of inaudible ultrasound waves emanating from separate devices such as eavesdropping and jamming technologies. “If ultrasound played a role in harming diplomats in Cuba,” their study states, “then a plausible cause is intermodulation distortion between ultrasonic signals that unintentionally synthesize audible tones. In other words, acoustic interference without malicious intent to cause harm could have led to the audible sensations in Cuba” (Yan, Fu and Xu 2019).

But of course, that study would not be the final word on the sonic controversy. In early 2019, yet another team of scientists matched the recorded sounds to, yes indeed, “a mass of crickets”—specifically *Anurogryllus celerinictus*, commonly known as the Indies short-tailed cricket. During mating season in the Caribbean, it turns out, the crickets produce a massive din of chirping, grinding, noises. A *New York Times* story titled “*The Sounds That Haunted US Diplomats in Cuba? Lovelorn Crickets, Scientists Say*,” quoted the scientific conclusions: the song of the Indies short-tailed cricket “matches, in nuanced detail, the AP recording in duration, pulse repetition rate, power spectrum, pulse rate stability, and oscillations per pulse” (Zimmer 2019). There was “strong evidence,” the study asserted with confidence, “that an echoing cricket call, rather than a sonic attack or other technological device, is responsible for the sound in the released recording” (Stubbs and Montealegre-Z 2019).

MICROWAVE/RADIOWAVE WEAPONS

Obviously, the mating call of a Caribbean cricket did not cause brain injuries in the U.S. and Canadian embassy personnel. It is quite possible that the

distinctive noises associated with the phenomena did not, in the final analysis, have anything to do with the Havana Syndrome, or that the recording itself was not reflective of the associated sounds. But another salient element of the trauma also generated a whole school of analysis: the pulsating sensation that a number of individuals said they experienced before falling ill in Cuba. “All the victims described being bombarded by waves of pressure in their heads,” the *New Yorker* reported in a major article, “The Mystery of the Havana Syndrome,” drawing on descriptions provided by the initial group of CIA operatives. “Some of the victims said that it felt as if they were standing in an invisible beam of energy” (Entous and Anderson 2018).

The description of an “energy beam” led investigators to focus on energy-related technologies and, predictably, electronic weaponry. “Microwave Weapons Are Prime Suspect in Ills of US Embassy Workers,” the *New York Times* headlined a September 1, 2018, article which provided the history of U.S. military efforts to develop radio-frequency weapons that could “invisibly beam painfully loud booms and even spoken words into people’s heads,” as well as Russian efforts to manufacture similar technologies. In the past, these weapons were intended “to disable attackers and wage psychological warfare,” according to the article, which speculated, but provided zero evidence, that the injuries suffered in Cuba were inflicted with such weapons (Broad 2018). NBC News soon followed up with a report that U.S. intelligence agencies had intercepted communications indicating that the Russians were behind the “attacks” in Cuba, but did not have conclusive evidence sufficient “for the US to formally assign blame to Moscow” (Lederman et al. 2018). In a variant of this theory, on September 7, 2018, the *Miami Herald* reported that a team of neurotechnology experts working with the State Department believed that the Havana victims had been hit by “directed energy weapons”—electronic devices using ultrasound or electromagnetic pulses “which can cause injury by creating ‘cavitation,’ or air pockets, in fluids near the inner ear” (Gámez-Torres 2018).

Historical precedence fueled speculation that some sort of top secret microwave or electromagnetic device had been turned on intelligence agents and diplomats in Cuba, aimed by Russian operatives to destabilize the détente President Obama had developed with Raúl Castro. From 1953 to 1979, Russian intelligence beamed microwaves at the ten-story U.S. Embassy building in Moscow. Analysts never determined if the microwave irradiation campaign—known in intelligence circles as “the Moscow Signal”—was part of an espionage effort, jamming operation, or intended to cause harm to U.S. embassy staff. Over the years, close to 2000 U.S. personnel were exposed; initial medical studies commissioned by the State Department revealed no lasting harm to individuals who worked there but more recent analysis has challenged those findings (Martínez 2019).

Since the advent of the Havana Syndrome, the hypothesis that some sort of modern hi-tech energy device was deployed in Cuba has been explored in depth by U.S. intelligence agencies; an elite, secretive, team of scientific consultants known as the “Jason Group” has also evaluated this theory for the Defense Department. Given the national security sensitivities around advanced technological armaments, it is not surprising that their conclusions remain highly classified.

At the Havana forum in March 2020, however, this theory was addressed by Dr. Beatrice A. Golomb, a professor of medicine at the University of San Diego, who presented a paper on “Diplomats’ Mystery Illness: Pulsed Radiofrequency/Microwave Radiation.” She compared the symptoms, and the experiences described by victims in Cuba, to previous examples of individuals exposed to microwaves and radiofrequencies and found extensive commonalities. “Health effects reported by US and Canadian diplomats (and family members) in Cuba . . . and the circumstances surrounding inciting episodes, are consistent with effects of RF/MW,” her study concluded. “Prominence of auditory symptoms, including hearing loss, tinnitus, and ear pain in diplomat reports, typify reports of injury from pulsed RF/MW” (Golomb 2018).

“Everything fits,” Dr. Golomb asserted in an interview with *Science Daily* about her hypothesis (LaFee 2018). At least theoretically, a microwave/electromagnetic device would explain both the experience and the symptoms of the victims; the theory accounts for the pulsating sensation, the perceived sounds that accompanied that sensation, and the multitude of reported and diagnosed cognitive symptoms, many of them associated with damage to the inner ear. But missing from the equation was the fact that no microwave weapon that could inflict such damage to the brain is known to exist—despite attempts by the military industrial complexes in the United States, Russia, and elsewhere to create them. “Microwave weapons are the closest equivalent in science to fake news,” Dr. Alberto Espay, a University of Cincinnati neurologist, told the *Washington Post*, for an article titled “Scientists and doctors zap theory that microwave weapon injured Cuba diplomats” (Kaplan and Achenbach 2018). The theory was “crazy,” Kenneth Foster, a bioengineer at the University of Pennsylvania and longtime specialist in microwave technology, advised the *Post*. “To actually damage the brain,” Foster wrote in a rebuttal to the theory, “the microwaves would have to be so intense they would actually burn the subject, which has never happened in any of these incidents” (Foster 2018).

That opinion was reinforced by a task force of Cuban doctors and neuroscientists who traveled to Washington in September 2018, to meet with U.S. officials and doctors familiar with these cases. At a September 13 press conference held at the Cuban embassy, Dr. Mitchell Valdés-Sosa pointed out that the

level of microwaves needed to injure the brain would likely turn it into mush.⁷ As he told NBC News, “You’d have to practically vaporize the person before microwaves can damage the brain” (Mitchell, Williams and Lederman 2018).

MASS HYSTERIA

At their embassy press conference, Dr. Valdés-Sosa and his colleagues advanced a different theory: the Havana Syndrome, they argued, was actually an anxiety syndrome that had contagiously spread through the U.S. Embassy community. Appointed by their government to study the health problems associated with the embassy personnel, the Cuban team dismissed all allegations that an attack had occurred. They concluded the victims most likely suffered from a “collective psychogenic disorder” brought on by the stress of being posted in Havana. There was no doubt that U.S. personnel were sickened, Dr. Valdés-Sosa told reporters who attended the briefing (myself among them). But, he argued, psychogenic disease—physical ailments that derive from emotional or mental stresses—needed to be seriously considered as the potential cause (Harris 2018).

The idea that psychogenic factors—more commonly known as “mass hysteria”—could account for the injuries to both U.S. and Canadian personnel in Havana has garnered significant analytical and media attention. After a team of doctors at the University of Pennsylvania’s Center for Brain Injury and Repair published a lengthy evaluation of twenty-one of the U.S. victims in the *Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA)* that identified concussion-like symptoms without any evidence they had suffered actual physical head trauma, several specialists wrote to the journal editors to complain that “mass psychogenic illness” had not been seriously considered as a causal factor. “The most plausible explanation is mass psychogenic illness triggered by a group of close-knit staff working for the same department in an anxiety-fueled, hostile, foreign environment in a country with a long and well-known history of targeting US embassy personnel,” wrote Dr. Robert E. Bartholomew, a medical sociologist at Botony College in New Zealand (Bartholomew 2018).⁸ In a paper titled “Havana Syndrome: The Case for Mass Hysteria,” Dr. Bartholomew presented a fuller argument at the March 2020 forum in Havana; his book, *Havana Syndrome: Mass Psychogenic Illness and the Real Story Behind the Embassy Mystery and Hysteria*, was published soon thereafter. “In this book, we conclude that the mysterious ‘new’ illness that has baffled doctors and government officials, is part of a series of outbreaks dating back to ancient times: mass psychogenic illness,” Bartholomew and his coauthor, Robert W. Baloh, wrote in their introduction (Baloh and Bartholomew 2020).

Advancing the same argument, the *New York Times* published a lengthy magazine article, “Was it an Invisible Attack on US Diplomats, or Something Stranger?” The conventional wisdom was that the Embassy personnel were victims of some sort of targeted aggression, wrote the author, Dan Hurley. But “dozens of leading neurologists, psychiatrists and psychologists, meanwhile, have offered an alternative narrative: that the diplomats’ symptoms are primarily psychogenic—or ‘functional’—in nature” (2019).

If true, it would mean that the symptoms were caused not by a secret high-tech weapon but by the same confluence of psychological and neurological processes—entirely subconscious yet remarkably powerful—underlying hypnosis and the placebo effect. They are disorders, in other words, not of the brain’s hardware but of its software; not of objective injuries to the brain’s structure but of chronic alterations to how the brain functions, typically following exposure to an illness, a physical injury or stress. (Hurley 2019)

The *Times* magazine article inferred that the timeline of events supported this interpretation of anxiety contagion. The first victims of the Havana Syndrome were members of the small CIA station, operating in a high-stress environment; only after rumors about their ailments spread through the broader diplomatic community did Ambassador DeLaurentis call a meeting of the full staff in March 2017 to share information about the mysterious maladies. At that point, dozens of employees identified similar concerns about their health; then some eighty embassy officials and family members sought evaluation in Miami and about twenty of them eventually received diagnoses of brain trauma. Similarly, the Canadian diplomats and their families did not report the health problems they were experiencing until after a U.S. embassy employee shared news of the suspicious afflictions, warning one Canadian family that their U.S. neighbors had been targeted by “some kind of signal-sending device that had caused a spate of injuries.”⁹

Proving such an argument remains a challenge, particularly when doctors in both Canada and the United States have identified actual abnormalities and injuries in the brains of the victims. But perhaps the most compelling objections to the “mass hysteria” theory comes from the affected individuals themselves, and the officials and medical professionals who dealt with them as they processed this traumatic experience. Ambassador DeLaurentis, who personally worked with most of the individuals who fell ill, has consistently rejected the suggestion that their symptoms were psychological in nature. The health crisis that “engulfed the embassy,” he told the Halifax audience, “was real and no laughing matter” (DeLaurentis 2019). The harrowing descriptions provided by a number of the victims to the media and to the Canadian court appear far too detailed to be psychologically derived. Among the injured Canadians were children who suffered chronic

nosebleeds, headaches, and fainting spells, and even, it appears, a pet dog that died.¹⁰ Indeed, in their lawsuit, the Canadian victims accused officials of their own government of maligning them by suggesting psychological factors. “As the problem grew,” states their court filings, “some Government actors suggested the harm was psychosomatic, leaving those struggling with the impacts of the Havana Syndrome to contend with the rumors that they were faking it, or that their injuries were not real, compounding their injuries with reputational harm.”¹¹

Moreover, as they evaluated the Canadian diplomats and their stricken family members one-by-one, the Dalhousie medical team, which included a psychiatrist, specifically looked for any evidence of mass psychogenic illness. They found none and ruled it out as a cause. During his presentation in Halifax, Dr. Friedman addressed the psychogenic theory: “If you think about mass-hysteria,” he noted, “it doesn’t fit that” (Friedman 2019).

Only two weeks after the Halifax conference, on December 18, 2019, Dr. Friedman traveled to Washington D.C. to present his findings to a special “standing committee” of the prestigious National Academy of Sciences (NAS) that had been commissioned by the U.S. Department of State to investigate the Havana Syndrome. Nineteen specialists on the NAS committee examined all of the key theories and plausible causes for the health maladies. Their detailed scientific “consensus study report,” *An Assessment of Illness in U.S. Government Employees and Their Families at Overseas Embassies*, was submitted in August 2020 (NAS Report). But the State Department refused to release it until early December when it was shared on a confidential basis with members of Congress—and promptly leaked to the press.

The NAS Report devoted an entire section to evaluating Dr. Friedman’s theory that toxic chemical exposure caused the neurological symptoms suffered by the victims, but it discounted his findings in the cases of the U.S. Embassy officials. “Although some reports suggested that exposure to organophosphates (OP) and/or pyrethroids from insecticide spraying in Havana could be a cause or contributing factor, the committee concluded that this mechanism was not likely because there was no convincing evidence of acute high-level exposures and the clinical histories of affected U.S. Embassy personnel were not consistent with acute OP poisoning” (NAS Report, 2). The NAS Report also discounted the “mass hysteria” theory, noting that “the acute initial, sudden-onset, distinctive, and unusual symptoms and signs are difficult to ascribe to psychological and social factors” (Ibid.).

Instead, the NAS concluded that the symptoms were most likely caused by some sort of microwave, directed energy device. “[A]fter considering the information available to it and a set of possible mechanisms,” the report stated, “the committee felt that many of the distinctive and acute signs, symptoms, and observations reported by DOS employees are consistent with the effects of directed, pulsed radio frequency (RF) energy” (Ibid., XI).

The study generated a flurry of media coverage around the world; the *New York Times* described it as “the most definitive explanation yet of the illness that struck scores of government employees” (Swanson and Wong). Yet even the scientists who wrote the report admitted that their findings were hardly conclusive, in part because the national security agencies of the U.S. government had refused to make their own, still classified, assessments of the causes of the Havana Syndrome and their secret studies on microwave weapons technology available to the NAS committee (NAS Report, X). The State Department, which had commissioned the report, essentially dismissed it as “speculative” (Swanson and Wong). Led by Dr. Mitchell Valdés-Sosa, the Cuban Academy of Sciences also discounted the NAS conclusions as “not supported by direct evidence or by a critical appraisal of the available literature, nor by the bulk of the report itself” (Cuban Academy of Sciences). In his own assessment of the NAS study, Dr. Friedman noted that “generally speaking, there is not much new in the report” (Friedman).

STILL SEARCHING FOR ANSWERS

At the March 2020 “Does the Havana Syndrome Exist?” conference, Dr. Valdés-Sosa told reporters that Cuba had undertaken a “serious approach to a joint study” with the Canadian medical team to address their Zika virus fumigation theory. “We are now conducting an investigation with Canadian scientists, led by Professor Alon Friedman of the Dalhousie University of Halifax,” he stated, “whose hypothesis is that diplomats were affected by neurotoxins, by the fumigation against mosquitos.” In many parts of the world, Dr. Valdés-Sosa noted, “there is evidence that if you are exposed to insecticides, even in low doses, chronically, some people develop neurological symptoms.” Cuba has a vested, public health, interest in learning whether such pesticides can damage brain functions; far more Cubans have been exposed to the mosquito fumigation than have foreign embassy personnel. Valdés-Sosa predicted that results of the joint study would be available within a month.¹²

But within days of the Havana meeting, Cuba closed its borders and mobilized its medical community and public health resources to fight the existential threat of the Corona virus. Authorities suspended their collaborative investigation with the Canadians. With the global fallout over the COVID-19 crisis, and a protracted effort at economic recovery in the future for Cuba, Canada, and the United States, it remains unclear when, and whether, the mystery of the Havana Syndrome will be addressed, let alone resolved in the future.

For now, the Dalhousie medical study and its hypothesis that pesticide poisoning is to blame takes its place alongside the other principal theories—mass

hysteria and unknown high-tech weapons—that have yet to be proven, or completely disproven. The question “Does the Havana Syndrome Exist?” still merits a concrete answer—an answer that might be found in yet-to-be-conducted medical and scientific evaluations, or in still classified U.S. and Canadian government documentation.

Beyond the Havana Syndrome’s implications for international relations in general, and Cuba’s bilateral relations in particular, the individuals who were injured have a need, and a right, to know. “I hope that people who were affected medically continue to get the help they need,” Ambassador DeLaurentis told the audience at the Halifax conference. “I hope all three governments, in whatever way possible . . . continue to do their research to figure out what this was. Because I believe once we figure out what it was, we will get to the who, and/or the why” (DeLaurentis 2019).¹³

NOTES

1. *Plaintiffs vs. Her Majesty the Queen in Right of Canada*, [2019] FC T-238-19. 4.

2. *James Madison Project et al v. Department of State*, 1:2019cv00325 (US District Ct. FOIA request Feb. 7, 2019).

3. The Nation magazine first reported that the CIA station in Havana had been closed (see Kornbluh 2017). Significant details on the CIA withdrawal and Tillerson’s decision to drastically reduce the embassy staff can be found in Tim Golden and Sebastian Rotella’s 2018a article, “The Sound and the Fury: Inside the Mystery of the Havana Embassy” found at <https://www.propublica.org/article/diplomats-in-cuba>.

4. The diplomatic note, as well as Raul Castro’s conversation with Ambassador DeLaurentis, are recounted in Adam Entous and Jon Lee Anderson’s 2018 article, “The Mystery of the Havana Syndrome,” as well as in Golden and Rotella’s 2018a article, “The Sound and the Fury: Inside the Mystery of the Havana Embassy.”

5. The Associated Press reported on the contents of the report by the FBI’s Operational Technology Division, dated January 4, 2018. According to the article, the FBI report “is the clearest sign to date of the US ruling out the sonic weapon theory. The report says the FBI tested the hypothesis that air pressure waves via audible sound, infrasound, or ultrasound could be used to clandestinely hurt Americans in Cuba, and found no evidence.” See Josh Lederman and Matthew Lee’s 2018 article, “Tillerson Tells AP Cuba Still Risky; FBI doubts sonic attack.”

6. When the microwave weapons theory replaced the “sonic attack” theory as a leading media explanation, I wrote to Weissenstein to point out a rather obvious anomaly: the microwave explanation postulated that the acoustical noise was produced in the inner ear by the microwave device; it was not a sound that could be recorded externally as in the case of the AP tape. He wrote back that the recording had been analyzed “and determined to be manmade” but conceded that assessment could be incorrect (Michael Weissenstein, email to author, September 5, 2018).

7. I attended the press conference where Dr. Valdés-Sosa and his colleagues spoke. See also Gardiner Harris' 2018 article in the New York Times, "Cuban Experts Insist No Proof Exists of Attack on Diplomats."

8. See also Bartholomew and Dionisio F. Zaldivar Perez's 2018 article, "Chasing Ghosts in Cuba: Is Mass Psychogenic Illness Masquerading as an Acoustical Attack?"

9. The Canadian legal complaint identified the family as the Allen family, and described how the diplomat and his children began to suffer chronic illness in early 2017, including bouts of dizziness, headaches, nose bleeds, and in the case of one child, fainting. The family visited Canada in early April 2017 and when they returned to Cuba, they learned that their neighbor from the U.S. Embassy had abruptly left Cuba. According to the complaint, "A mutual friend from the US Embassy surreptitiously disclosed to Diplomat Allen that these friends had been targeted by some kind of signal-sending device that caused a spate of injuries which we now recognize as Havana Syndrome." Diplomat Allen filed a report with the Canadian ambassador shortly thereafter. See his Statement of Claim, *Plaintiffs vs. Her Majesty the Queen in Right of Canada*, [2019] FC T-238-19. 10.

10. The original version of the Dalhousie medical report stated that the Brain Center team had conducted a "post-mortem brain examination of a neurologically-injured exposed dog affected while with his owners in Havana." The canine autopsy "confirmed a brain stem lesion with white- and gray-matter BBB leakage and reactive gliosis" (Friedman, Calkin, and Bowen 2019, 2).

11. *Plaintiffs vs. Her Majesty the Queen in Right of Canada*, [2019] FC T-238-19. 4.

12. Dr. Valdés-Sosa comments are cited in coverage of the March 2020 Havana forum. See also Eric Carabollosó's 2020 article, "Is There a 'Havana Syndrome?,'" as well as the 2020 MedicalXpress article, "Scientists Study Pesticide Link to Diplomats' 'Havana Syndrome.'"

13. Ambassador DeLaurentis made these comments during the question and answer period after his conference presentation when asked for his response to Dr. Friedman's medical findings (DeLaurentis 2019).

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Chapter 6

From Eisenhower to Trump

A Historical Summary of the U.S.-Cuba Conflict (1959–2020)

Liliana Fernández Mollinedo

The United States (U.S.)-Cuba conflict is a part of a complex historical process, which originated from two significant factors: the consolidation of the United States as a nation, and the expansionist agenda inherent in the rationale of its imperialist development. Since the beginning of the nineteenth century, the so-called “Founding Fathers” began to consider Cuba as a “natural extension” of the continental platform. Since then, the supposed “Key to the New World” or the “Antemural of the West Indies” has become a centerpiece in the geostrategic interests of the northern neighbor.

At the end of the nineteenth century, Cuba’s independence was seized. The United States exercised both economic and political control over the island until the mid-twentieth century. This process reinforced the rebellion of the nation which already had a long tradition of struggle for its national sovereignty. Despite the particularities that define the evolution of the conflict, the struggle between domination and sovereignty has remained constant throughout history. The American historians Scott Nearing and Joseph Freeman provide a summary of this period:

Theoretically, Cuba is a sovereign state. Practically, the economic and political life of the island is controlled by New York and Washington. This method of control avoids the expenses of colonisation, while leaving the field open to American interests. Cuba’s property is almost entirely in the hands of the National City Bank. The bank directly controls the General Sugar Company. Its directors control the consolidated railroads and the huge sugar properties of the Cuban enterprise, as well as many other Cuban corporations. . . . The political life of Cuba is directed by the representative of the State Department. The US dominance on the island is absolute. (Nearing and Freeman 1973, 224)

U.S.-CUBA DURING THE EISENHOWER, KENNEDY AND JOHNSON ADMINISTRATIONS

The process of transformations that propelled the triumph of the Cuban Revolution in 1959 put an end to the domination of the United States over the island. This event, like no other, triggered a hostile and aggressive reaction from that government, making it a recognized subject area to some American scholars and researchers:

Fidel Castro came to power in 1959 with two broad goals for his revolution: to win, once and for all, Cuba's independence from US domination, and to radically change Cuban society in pursuit of greater social justice. Inevitably, both these goals brought him into conflict with the United States. (LeoGrande and Kornbluh 2015, 39)

The Cuban Revolution created a crack in the U.S. hegemonic projection in their backyard, challenging a power that, since 1945, was considered the leader of the international system.

The Eisenhower administration focused on the "Revolution Betrayed" pretext in designing the policy against the island. Its main objective was the secret war against Cuba accomplished through subversive activities and the physical elimination of the main leaders of the Revolution. The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) played a fundamental role in the framework of the confrontation. Its support to the "Trujillo conspiracy," organized by the Dominican dictator Rafael Leónidas Trujillo, in August 1959, marked the first major attempt to overthrow the Revolution. Between January 1, 1959, and June 30, 1960, 175 speeches with anti-Cuban content were made in the U.S. Congress, calling for the crushing of the Revolutionary Government, which included a military occupation of the island (Grinevich and Gvozdarov 1986).

Following the proclamation of the Agrarian Reform Law on May 17, 1959, the conflict escalated into further confrontation. The policy limited the power of foreign capital, and although the Cuban government provided compensation for the expropriated land, based on the value declared to the treasury, the provision was accepted by all countries with investments in Cuba, except the United States.

On September 15, 1959, the State Department and the U.S. Information Agency (USIA) issued a document entitled "United States Information Policy toward the Castro Regime in Cuba" in which they stated,

that any awakening public scepticism about Castro retain the appearance of being an indigenous Latin American reaction . . . and as to the Cuban opposition,

steps to be taken included the formation of an “exile” opposition whose slogan might be “Restore the Revolution” that had been lost to a new dictatorship of Cuba subject to “Sino-Soviet influence.” (State Department 1959)

The United States manipulated the Cuban case as part of the bipolar confrontation. Thus, before the Cuban Revolutionary Government decided to re-establish diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union (USSR), the Eisenhower administration launched a campaign on the “sovietisation” of the island with the intention of creating a context of rejection of the Cuban revolution in the hemisphere. However, scholars claim that in 1959, the USSR was still unclear about what kind of Revolution was taking place in Cuba. In his book on the relations between Cuba and the Soviet Union, Mervyn Bain, an academic at the University of Aberdeen in Scotland, states the following:

Aleksandr Alekseev, the First Soviet citizen to be granted a visa to travel to Cuba After January 1959, has also stated that he had no idea of what type of revolution had taken place on the Caribbean island. . . . This lack of clarity and apparent absence of Soviet knowledge of the Cuban Revolution had a number of effects on Moscow’s initial reaction to the Cuban Revolution and slowed the flourishing of Soviet-Cuban relations during 1959. (Bain 2019, 67)

On February 4, 1960, the Soviet Deputy Prime Minister Anastas Mikoyán paid an official visit to the island and on May 8, 1960, diplomatic relations were re-established.

Mikoyán’s visit included a commercial and financial agreement through which the island would receive a loan of \$100 million for the purchase of goods; an agreement was also signed in which the USSR would buy sugar from Cuba and sell oil to the island (Sánchez Parodi 2012). The United States reacted by suspending financial aid to Cuba and the U.S. refineries based in Santiago de Cuba and Havana refused to process any Soviet oil. Consequently, on June 29, 1960, Cuba nationalized these companies and on July 3, 1960, the United States eliminated the Cuban sugar quota. Later, Eisenhower banned all exports to Cuba except for food and medicine, thus, laying the foundation for the economic blockade, known as the embargo. Cuba nationalized the sugar mills, telephone, and electricity services, as well as banks and other U.S. companies.

On March 17, 1960, by signing the “Program of Covert Action Against the Castro Regime,” Eisenhower made the secret war against Cuba official. The program allowed for the organization of devastating actions against the island such as “Operation Peter Pan” through which 14,000 Cuban children were taken out of the country between December 1960 and October 1962. The cruel act of separating children from their parents as part of the psychological

warfare projected through a false media campaign, or Fake News nowadays. The operation was led by CIA agent David Attlee Phillips, an expert in psychological warfare. The most significant aspect of the document on Covert Action against Cuba was that it authorized the military preparation of Cuban exiles and granted \$13 million to support direct military action against Cuba, codified under the name "Plutonium." Under this code, the invasion of Playa Girón was prepared (Escalante Font 1993).

During the early months of 1961, several events foreshadowed a military intervention. On January 3, 1961, the United States broke off diplomatic relations with Cuba which prohibited Americans from traveling to the island. On March 4, 1961, the State Department released the "White Paper," accusing Cuba of posing a danger to the Western Hemisphere due to its links with the international communist movement, specifically with the USSR.

Girón was a historical milestone in the U.S.-Cuba conflict. It demonstrated the majority support of the population, as well as the boldness and courage of the Cuban troops following the command of their principal leader, who himself was in the combat zones directing operations. On April 16, 1961, during the burial of the victims of the aerial bombing, Fidel Castro gave a speech at the central corner of the twenty-third and twelfth in Vedado, where he proclaimed the socialist character of the Revolution. On April 19, 1961, the United States suffered its first major defeat in the Americas, as Fidel himself stated at that historic moment. President John F. Kennedy was not satisfied with the defeat. At the end of that same year, he created a Special Group led by his brother Robert, aiming to destroy the Cuban Revolution. On November 3, 1961, President Kennedy himself authorized "Operation Mongoose," a program aimed at organizing terrorist activities against Cuba, whose actions have been very well summarized by the Cuban researcher, Tomás Díez Acosta:

As a result of this action, throughout 1962, activities of sabotage, terrorism, burning of sugar cane fields, attempts to assassinate leaders, pirate attacks and infiltrations by special groups intensified significantly. From January to August 1962, the number of such acts reached 5780; of these, 716 damaged major economic and social objectives. In the Escambray alone, armed gangs grew from 42 in March to 79 in September. (Díez Acosta 2018)

Under pressure from the U.S. government, Cuba was expelled from the Organization of American States (OAS) on January 30, 1962, based on the grounds that the principles of communism were incompatible with the Inter-American System. A few days later, on February 3, 1962, Kennedy succeeded in suffocating the Cuban economy by signing the Federal Resolution

No. 1085, through which the embargo was put into effect through Presidential Decree No. 3447.

The conflict escalated further during the “Cuban Missile Crisis” which had global reach due to the danger of nuclear war. Cuba had accepted the emplacement of nuclear rockets to deter the United States from threats of a military attack. Besides, the location of the nuclear rockets in the Caribbean offered the USSR a certain balance in the ratio of nuclear forces compared to the United States. Inevitably, the crisis went beyond the bilateral framework as the dynamic of the Cold War imposed its course and the two great powers of the bipolar era reached an agreement without taking the Cuban opinion into account. Although the U.S.-Soviet agreement included Kennedy’s verbal promise not to invade Cuba, it did not guarantee the end of subversive activity, or the embargo, or the return of the Guantanamo Bay Naval Base, terms which were outlined in the five-point request made by the Cuban government in its official statement, on October 28, 1962. The Italian American professor, Piero Gleijeses described these agreements as such

The fact that the United States did not invade Cuba has given Kennedy’s pledge more weight than it deserves. The documents that have been declassified suggest that the prospect of an invasion was ‘shunned’ because of its potential cost—the toll in American lives, the risk of a confrontation with the Soviet Union spiraling into global war, the negative impact on the allies and on public opinion worldwide—rather than scruples pursuant to the purported noninvasion pledge. (Gleijeses 2002)

Nevertheless, the crisis showed the need to assume a more flexible position to avoid similar conflicts that could create a global danger of a nuclear holocaust. It seems that this motivated Kennedy to explore the ways for a rapprochement with Cuba. On November 22, 1963, the U.S. President was assassinated in Dallas, Texas, while in Varadero, Fidel Castro was talking about the possibility of opening talks between the two countries with Jean Daniel, the French journalist who was sent by Kennedy (Diez Acosta 2011).

The failed attempts of the U.S. government to end the Cuban project through military force and mercenary invasions determined a reassessment of the strategy toward Cuba. In addition to subversive activity, from then on, the central elements were economic encirclement and diplomatic isolation. Kennedy’s successor, Lyndon B. Johnson, called an OAS consultation meeting in December 1963, in which he urged all Latin American governments to break diplomatic and consular relations with Cuba, as well as to interrupt all direct or indirect trade with the island.

Consequently, the Cuban government responded with the “Declaration of Santiago” issued in that city on July 26, 1964. The text denounced the

aggressions of the United States toward the island with the support of several Latin American governments. Therefore, in its eleventh section, it stated:

That the Cuban people, warns furthermore that if the pirate attacks being carried out from US territory and that of other nations on the rim of the Caribbean does not cease, as well as the training of mercenaries to carry out acts of sabotage against the Cuban revolution, and also the sending of agents, arms, and explosives into Cuba, the Cuban people will conclude they have the same right to help, with all the resources they believe suitable, the revolutionary movements in all those nations which engage in such intervention in the internal affairs of our country. That is, the Cuban people consider it has the same right to help with all the resources at its command the revolutionary movements in all those nations which engage in similar intervention in the internal affairs of our country. (Declaration of Santiago, Documents of the Cuban Revolution 2003)

President Johnson blocked sales of food and medicine and imposed a license requirement on exporters from the Department of Commerce. Commercial flights between the two countries had ceased after the October Crisis. The measures severely affected the quality of life of the Cuban people. In these circumstances, illegal departures increased without the U.S. government taking any measures to prevent them. After a dangerous journey, the Cubans were received in Miami as heroes who “fled from the communist persecution.” On September 28, 1965, Fidel Castro opened the port of Camarioca for all Cubans who wanted to leave the country. The “Camarioca Crisis” marked the first great conflict concerning migratory matters. It revealed that there were common issues that affected the security of both countries. In October 1965, an agreement was signed that contemplated the legal exit of refugees through the Varadero air bridge. On November 2, 1966, Johnson approved the “Cuban Adjustment Act.” Under the distorted approach that considered Cubans as “political refugees,” they were granted permanent residence in the United States one year after their arrival. To destabilize the island, they were given legal status and other economic benefits that were otherwise denied to other immigrant groups.

In the mid-1960s, the Vietnam War caused a serious legitimacy crisis in the United States. Also, the countercultural and civil rights movements came into full swing, expressing the entrenched political-social turmoil of the country. Under these circumstances, the Cuban-Soviet relations cooled down. The Cuban academic Sergio Guerra Vilaboy and Mexican professor Alejandro Maldonado Gallardo explained this as such

This process coincided with a gradual distancing . . . which reached its peak in late 1967 and early 1968. Moscow discreetly disagreed with it because of its timid position in the war in Vietnam, when the war with the United States was

raging, and because of Moscow's incomprehension towards the guerrilla movement that was stirring in Latin America, which the Soviets considered to be subverting their strategy of "peaceful coexistence." In this way, the search for a model of socialism of its own was accompanied by these discrepancies with the foreign policy of the USSR, which was also expressed in the constructive and unitary position adopted by Cuba in relation to the Sino-Soviet dispute. (Guerra Vilaboy and Maldonado Gallardo 2009)

FROM THE EPHEMERAL DÉTENTE TO CONFRONTATION: THE UPS AND DOWNS OF POLICY TOWARD CUBA

The détente paved the way for a more moderate approach among the major Cold War powers. Relations between the United States, the USSR, and China improved. The U.S. Congress, with its Democratic majority, embraced this development as an argument for a new approach toward the island. Latin America saw a boom in progressive movements, encouraging some Latin American countries such as Argentina, Peru, and Chile to change their policy toward Cuba.

During the Nixon administration, matters of National Security of the United States were under the advice of Henry Kissinger, a standard-bearer of political realism. His stance on the need to defend the national interest above any other concerns was instrumental in his plans of readjusting the approach toward Cuba. This was influenced by the new Latin American context, as well as a new problem that affected national security on both sides: the hijacking of aircrafts. According to William LeoGrande and Peter Kornbluh, "between 1961 and 1967, 17 planes were hijacked to Cuba. Between 1968 and 1972, the number of plane hijackings worldwide rose to 325. Of those, 173 were diverted to Cuba" (2015, 123). Although Nixon opposed a thaw with Cuba, on February 15, 1973, the two countries signed an anti-kidnapping treaty that penalized the diversion of planes or boats within both territories. Nevertheless, it is also considered that Nixon's administration saw the greatest number of terrorist actions carried out against Cuba: attacks on fishing boats, Cuban missions abroad, as well as the introduction of pests and viruses such as the African swine fever.

Gerald Ford's administration did not differ much from its predecessor in terms of the situation of terrorism against Cuba. In June 1976, the Coordination of United Revolutionary Organizations (CORU) was created in the Dominican Republic. The counterrevolutionary organization planned a series of attacks on diplomatic offices of countries that had relations with Cuba. In October 1976, a Cubana de Aviación plane was blown up as it was

taking off from Barbados, with seventy-three people on board. Unlike Nixon, President Ford did have an interest in a rapprochement with Cuba. On January 11, 1975, the first direct meeting between representatives of both governments took place in New York, resulting in the easing of the embargo. Ships trading with the island could resupply in U.S. ports, and American companies in third countries could trade with Cuba (LeoGrande and Kornbluh 2015).

The process was halted by the arrival of Cuban troops in Angola in October 1975. The United States interpreted this as interference with their strategic plans in that region. However, the presence of Cuban troops in Angola guaranteed oil production in the installations located in the province of Cabinda and, as the Cuban specialist Néstor García Iturbe states, “this guaranteed a part of the oil to be used in the United States, which was of strategic importance and granted considerable profits for the oil companies” (García Iturbe 2007). Consequently, the African problem, at least during the first two years of the Democratic administration which succeeded the Ford administration, did not pose an obstacle from assuming a more flexible policy toward Cuba.

President James Carter made more progress than his predecessor regarding the Cuba agenda as per the statements he made a few weeks after his inauguration pertaining to his interest in normalizing relations with the island. The most significant changes were the opening of diplomatic representation in both countries (1977), the establishment of special flights between Havana and New York and Havana and Miami, the authorization of transactions in dollars between the financial entities of both countries and the suspension of the sr-71 spy flights. Several agreements were also signed, including one on Maritime Boundaries, Fishing Exploitation, and Air Piracy. However, his National Security Advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski, opted for the hardline against Cuba. He used the pretext of the Soviet presence on the island and accused Cuba of possessing MiG-23 planes, capable of bombing Florida. These arguments facilitated the consensus for the approval of the Presidential Directive 52, signed on October 17, 1979, which allowed the resumption of spy flights over Cuban territory, and the organization of military maneuvers in the Caribbean Sea (García Iturbe 2007).

The “Mariel” was the most significant incident that provoked the biggest migration crisis between the two countries, second only to Camarioca. It was prompted by the events that took place at the Peruvian Embassy in April 1980, when a group of people forced their way into the embassy. The U.S. government called the event a “humanitarian crisis” due to the “political persecution” of the Cuban government; rather than the result of their refusal to grant the necessary visas for Cubans to emigrate. The uncontrolled arrival of thousands of Cuban migrants to Florida created a security problem in that state, undermining the image of President Carter, whose handling of the crisis was questioned.

In addition to this, there was the issue of the increased Cuban presence in Africa which Brzezinski linked to Soviet interests, despite the fact that several voices within the government were of the opposite opinion. Cuba's prominence in Africa was perceived as a challenge to the U.S. hegemony. This was also the interpretation of President Ronald Reagan, who focused on recovering U.S. hegemony in the region that had been lost due to the "weakness" of his predecessor. Reagan's policy toward Cuba was based on the report of the "Committee of Santa Fe," prepared in May 1980 by Roger Fontaine, Director of the National Security Council and Latin American Affairs. This document recommended confrontation with the island.

The Cuban American National Foundation (CANF), created on July 6, 1981, in Miami, became an official lobbyist for the government's plans against Cuba. Toward the end of September 1981, Reagan signed Executive Order 12323 for the creation of the ill-named "Radio Martí," a subversive radio station that began broadcasting in 1985. Correspondingly, through the use of the Interest Section, espionage attempts increased in Cuba. In addition, the United States amplified the biological and bacteriological warfare which was geared toward damaging the health of the Cuban population.

Reagan put an end to all the measures adopted by Carter with the aim of relaxing the island's embargo. He obstructed the renegotiation of Cuba's foreign debt and imposed greater restrictions on travel to Cuba. He continued with spy flights and approved the conduct of military exercises in the Caribbean. Cuba was accused of intervening in the Central American conflict because of the humanitarian aid that was provided to Nicaragua and El Salvador. The Cuban government responded with "La Guerra de Todo el Pueblo," the creation of the Territorial Troops Militia, and the holding of Bastión military exercises (Sánchez Parodi 2012).

THE U.S.-CUBA CONFRONTATION IN THE TRANSITION PERIOD OF THE NEW INTERNATIONAL (DIS)ORDER (1989–2000)

The events that took place in the late 1980s in Eastern Europe transformed the international order that had been established in Yalta as well as strengthened conservative and far-right movements throughout Europe. The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 became a symbol of a new era and Francis Fukuyama's so-called "The End of History" created a sense of the triumph of capitalism over the forces of communism. By 1990, U.S. President George H. W. Bush announced the "need to create a New World Order." The disappearance of the socialist block in Eastern Europe along with its main integration mechanism, the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON), caused

a profound crisis for Cuba. The island entered a “Special Period in Time of Peace,” a euphemism for a deep economic crisis that severely affected the quality of life of the people.

Cuba’s relations with the USSR deteriorated. The island lost its geostrategic value for Moscow, while the U.S. government increased the pressure on Soviet President, Mikhail Gorbachev, to break off relations with Cuba. The trip of the president of the CANF to Moscow had the above objective. In reference to this matter, in his book, Bain has pointed out: “Additionally, in late 1991, the Cuban exile Community appeared to be attempting to influence Soviet-Cuban relations when in August 1991 Jorge Mas Canosa, leader of the Cuban America National Foundation (CANF), made a historic trip to Moscow” (Bain 2019, 131).

Following the collapse of the USSR in 1991, any campaigns about the Soviet “satelliteisation” of the island lost their support. The collapse of European socialism created a new international correlation of forces. This had repercussions in Latin America through the creation of a climate of negotiation between the antagonistic forces on the right and the left, which was illustrated by the defeat of the Sandinista Front in Nicaraguan elections (1990) and the end of long, seeming unsolvable, armed confrontations such as those in El Salvador (1992) and Guatemala (1996). Cuban troops also gradually withdrew from Africa during this time.

Instead of taking advantage of the new circumstances to embark on a process of normalization, the U.S. political elite bet on the fall of Cuba and proceeded accordingly. On August 20, 1992, while accepting the nomination as a candidate for a new presidential term at the Republican Party Convention, George H. W. Bush stated: “I expect one day soon to be the first President of the United States to visit the free soil of Cuba” (Sanchez 2012).

Faced with the loss of a historical enemy, which for many years served as a pretext for the confrontation with Cuba, the George H. W. Bush administration had to redraft a new strategy. While the issue of human rights has been part of the agenda against the island since Carter, Bush re-emphasized it to fill the void caused by the New World situation. The president tightened the embargo through a series of restrictions on travel and remittances and created the misnamed “TV Martí.” Additionally, he organized several military exercises in the Caribbean that were in close proximity to the Cuban coast, including one that involved an evacuation drill at the Guantanamo Bay Naval Base. However, the worst aspect of his legacy came toward the end of September 1992, with the approval of the “Cuban Democracy Act” also known as the “Torricelli Act,” created by Congressman Robert Torricelli, a Democrat from New Jersey, and friend of the CANF president, Jorge Mas Canosa.

The Torricelli Act imposed punitive economic measures against Cuba as well as sought a change of regime through a so-called “peaceful transition.”

This Act supported civil society through “track II,” which focused on “people-to-people” contacts aimed at promoting regime change. Moreover, the act prohibits the entry into U.S. ports of any vessel carrying passengers or goods to or from the island or carrying products in which Cuba or a Cuban national has an interest. Besides, vessels from third countries that set foot in Cuban waters, for reasons of trade, delivery, supplies, or services, could not load or unload goods in any port of the United States for a period of 180 days.

Although Bush signed the act, it would be President Bill Clinton who executed it. The application of the Torricelli Act intensified the crisis that the island had been suffering since the collapse of the USSR. Both factors had an impact on the explosion of a different migration issue, known as the “Rafter Crisis.” In 1994, tens of thousands of Cubans arrived on the Florida coast in all kinds of rustic boats. In September of that year, both countries signed a memorandum in which the United States undertook to offer 20,000 visas for Cubans who wanted to migrate each year, as well as to allow the return of Cuban rafters, who were refugees at the Guantanamo Bay Naval Base, who wanted to return to Cuba. In reference to the new agreement, signed on May 2, 1995, LeoGrande and Kornbluh stated:

The new migration accord ended the thirty-year US policy of encouraging illegal flight from Cuba. Cuban refugees could still win permanent resident status under the 1966 Cuban Adjustment Act but only if they actually reached the United States. Those intercepted at sea would go back to Cuba. On the basis of this distinction, the new policy came to be known as “wet foot—dry foot.” (2015, 299)

The Torricelli Act was supplemented by the “Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity Act” known as the “Helms-Burton Act,” passed in March 1996. The pretext for its approval was the situation created when, after multiple warnings to the pilots, the Cuban Armed Forces shot down two “Brothers to the Rescue” planes that repeatedly violated Cuban airspace and dropped incendiary leaflets against the island’s government.

The Helms-Burton Act made lifting the embargo dependent on the establishment of a transitional government in Cuba, based on a market economy and multiparty system. Its main objective is the prevention of the normalization of relations between the two countries and ignoring the island’s right to self-determination. By turning all the pre-existing provisions and regulations designed to damage the Cuban economy into law, the Helms-Burton Act made the process of lifting the embargo more complex by placing it under the ruling of Congress rather than the executive branch of government. Title III of the Act extends the embargo to third countries, affecting the relations of the United States with its allies, allowing U.S. companies to file claims

against companies from third countries that hold investments in Cuba or have ties with firms considered to be owned by U.S. citizens.

After Cuban armed forces shot down the “Brothers to the Rescue” planes, commercial flights ceased and Clinton restricted the travel and movement of Cuban diplomats. The situation was further complicated in 1997 when members of the CANF organized a series of attacks on tourist facilities in Havana which resulted in the death of a young Italian tourist.

In 1998, two momentous events laid the foundation for a new stage in the history of the Cuban Revolution. One was the “Battle of Ideas” about the return of the boy Elián González to Cuba. The second regarded the release of five Cuban heroes held in U.S. prisons (popularly known as the Cuban Five). On September 12, 1998, the Cuban Five, who were members of a Cuban spy network monitoring CANF terrorist activities, had been arrested in the United States, tried in arbitrary proceedings, and subsequently sentenced to excessive prison terms. In November of that same year, Elián was found in the Straits of Florida. His mother drowned after their boat sank as it headed for the United States. A part of the Cuban-American community made Elián a symbol of their hatred for the island. However, the crisis allowed for greater interaction between the two governments with the aim of reaching a just solution for the child. After a long and complex process, Elián returned to Cuba on June 28, 2000.

Near the end of his term, Clinton passed the Trade Sanction Reform and Export Enhancement Act (2000). It allowed the direct sale of food and agricultural products based on cash payments or with financing from a third country entity. However, this measure did not change much the economic situation of the island, which was further cornered by the extremist policies of neoconservative George W. Bush, who became president after a controversial election.

GEORGE W. BUSH’S “FIGHT AGAINST TERRORISM” AND ITS IMPACT ON CUBA (2001–2008)

The presidency of George W. Bush can be considered as one of the most aggressive administrations against Cuba. From the beginning of his term, the president established strong ties with CANF, incorporating Cuban-American right-wing figures in his cabinet such as Mel Martinez, who served as Secretary of Housing and Urban Development. The neoconservative president managed to legitimize himself after the tragic events of September 11, 2001. The date marked a turning point in the dynamics of international relations and, in particular, in conflict development between the two countries. The U.S. government declined Cuba’s offers to provide medical support after

New York was attacked and, instead, facilitated the use of its airport a few hours after the fall of the Twin Towers.

The passage of the Patriot Act on October 26, 2001, extended the presidential prerogatives over which the United States projected a unilateral policy under the pretext of a “War on Terror.” In his speech, on September 20, 2001 Bush summed up the global nature of his policy when he urged nations to choose between the United States and the terrorists. The unilateral policy dictated by Bush and his cabinet sought to include Cuba within an agenda of creating threats to the security of the United States. In line with this objective, on May 6, 2002, the island was irresponsibly accused of producing biological weapons by Under Secretary of State John Bolton. Although Secretary of State Colin Powell later clarified that the island only possessed the capacity to produce such weapons and was included in the list of potential holders of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD).

On May 20, 2002, during a speech in Miami, Bush unveiled the “Initiative for a New Cuba,” which called for the establishment of a market economy, with private ownership and monitored elections, scholarships for the children of dissidents, as well as expansion of the Martí Radio and TV Martí broadcasts. As part of this interventionist program, in March 2003, the Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) established a series of measures limiting “people-to-people” academic and cultural exchanges, which were disrupted by the denial of visas to a group of Cuban scientists and academics. Furthermore, Cuba was considered a “Rogue State” along with Syria and Libya, thus becoming part of a number of lists compiled by the United States. Additionally, an attempt was made to link the island to the issue of slavery when in June 2003, Cuba was placed on the U.S. government’s blacklist of human trafficking as a means of sexual exploitation and forced labor (Castro Mariño 2004).

On December 5, 2003, a “Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba” was created, which submitted its first report on May 1, 2004, known in Cuba as “Plan Bush I.” The document recommended the privatization of education and healthcare and the dismantling of the social security system following the fall of socialism on the island. The most damaging measures were those implemented on June 16, 2004, by the Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC), as these affected family relations and tightened the constraints of the embargo. Only visits by relatives with the first degree of consanguinity were authorized no more than once every three years, for a period not exceeding fourteen days, and with a minimum daily expense of \$50. Travelers could not buy goods in Cuba, and, among other restrictions, the sending of consignments was prohibited. The second report of this commission, presented on July 1, 2006, created the so-called “Cuba Fund” of \$80 million for internal subversion and another \$20 million each year (Sánchez Parodi 2012). In 2007, the George W. Bush

administration established the Cuban Medical Professionals Parole Program, with the aim of discouraging medical missions abroad.

During both the Clinton and George W. Bush administrations, the debate on Cuba became more heated. In the 1990s, entrepreneurs and businessmen traveled to the island intending to explore investment opportunities. Many political figures were in favor of lifting the embargo, some for moral reasons, others for more pragmatic reasons, as they deemed the policy a failure which had not fulfilled its objectives. Lobbying groups such as the Cuban Policy Foundation emerged, seeking to end such an outdated policy, one which also disadvantaged American people and obstructed inter-American relations. Even Roger Fontaine, a staunch critic of the Cuban Revolution, himself spoke out in favor of fully lifting the embargo. In May 2002, former President Carter visited Cuba and, in the Aula Magna of the University of Havana, asked the U.S. Congress to end the embargo as well as lift travel restrictions. The scholar Esteban Morales Domínguez, when discussing this matter, pointed out:

That is why today, the development of Cuba's internal reality and in particular the dynamics of its recovery process and economic reform, especially since 1995, have become variable, which, more than ever, is informing and making an impact on the characteristics of US policy towards Cuba on the peculiarities of confrontation between the two countries. (Morales Domínguez 2005)

Toward the end of the twentieth century, the island had withstood all the onslaughts and challenges imposed by the international context as well as the aggressive policies of the United States. The Cuban economy was in a gradual process of recovery and amid the process of economic reform. The former Cuban Minister of Economy José Luis Rodríguez said that

In 1994, the fall of the national economy came to a halt . . . in 1995 the gross domestic product increased by 2.5%. The Budget deficit was reduced in 1996 to 2.4% without affecting social expenditures and remained at an average of 2.5%. In 1996, total exports rose by 33%, while imports rose by 33%. (Rodríguez 1995)

Trade exchanges with other areas of the world were expanded and relations with Latin America were strengthened. Since 1992, the embargo has been repeatedly rejected in the UN General Assembly as most countries demanded an end to the policy. Pope John Paul II visited the island in 1998 also advocating for the end of the embargo on Cuba and in the year 2000, Vladimir Putin visited Cuba.

All the aforementioned events had a positive influence on the evolution of the conflict. Furthermore, the Democratic candidate for the 2008 elections,

Barack Obama, created some new expectations because since 2004, when he was a senator, he had spoken against continuing the embargo on Cuba. His slogan “Yes, We Can” awakened the hopes of millions of not only Americans but also of some Cubans, including the author of this text, who believed that the young African American president could change the course of the conflict with the island, especially during his second term, when he could pursue more progressive policies.

US-CUBA: THE WINDS OF CHANGE (2009–2016)

Barack Obama’s victory in November 2008 presidential election was an unprecedented event in U.S. history. For the first time, an African American would be leading the fates of that country. Obama took office in January 2009. A month later, in Cuba, Raúl Castro was elected by the National Assembly as the new president of the Council of State and Ministers. Throughout his first term, Obama retained the program for the promotion of democracy in Cuba which was developed by his predecessor George W. Bush. That same year, nonetheless, Obama also took discreet measures that restored educational and family travel as well as remittances to the island.

Since 2010, high expectations had been raised about the possibility of a new bilateral policy approach. Many factors intertwined to cultivate a change in the dynamics of the conflict between the two countries. In 2012, talks for the Colombian peace process began in Havana, with Cuba also acting as a mediator. Furthermore, during both the Summit of the Americas in Trinidad and Tobago (2009) as well as the Cartagena de Indias Summit in Colombia (2012), Latin American countries demanded an end to the embargo and a change in U.S. policy toward the island. One year later, on December 10, 2013, Raúl and Obama shook hands during the funeral of former South African President, Nelson Mandela.

The secret negotiations which began in mid-2012 under the mediation of Pope Francis and the Canadian government, resulted in the historic speech of both presidents on December 17, 2014. The simultaneous announcement of the beginning of the normalization of relations created great hopes for a possible thaw between the two countries. As a sign of the willingness to start a new phase, the United States, in exchange for one of its agents (Alan Gross), released the Cuban Five counter-terrorists who were serving unjust sentences in the United States since 1998.

Nonetheless, the process toward normalization was plagued with pitfalls as fundamental aspects including the embargo, the return of the U.S. Guantanamo Bay Naval Base to Cuba, the Cuban Adjustment Act, the continued use of Martí Radio and TV Martí, as well as the Torricelli and Helms-Burton Acts,

did not form part of the agenda. However, on July 1, 2015, the restoration of diplomatic relations was announced and subsequently made official on July 20, 2015, with events held in both Washington and Havana. On March 12, 2016, while visiting Cuba, the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission, Frederica Mogherini said, “We have addressed the Cuba-US opening process, and the many opportunities and challenges involved. We agree that the US embargo is completely obsolete and outdated. Now the priorities are dialogue and cooperation” (2016).

A few days later, Obama’s visit to Cuba, March 20–22, 2016, was a great historical event. It was the first time an American president had visited the island since 1928. However, Obama’s speech generated controversy and suspicion in Havana with regards to the legitimacy of interests due to the emphasis on “civil society,” specifically the self-employed sector. Hence, many of his policies had the same objective as his predecessors: regime change on the island, though now through soft power. When analyzing this topic, LeoGrande pointed out: “Licensing telecommunications companies to expand Cuba’s digital infrastructure was aimed at providing Cubans freer access to information. Loosening travel restrictions for US residents was aimed at expanding the diffusion of ideas” (2017).

On October 26, 2016, for the first time, the U.S. government abstained from voting against the resolution at the UN, condemning the embargo on Cuba. However, Obama was inconsistent by reinforcing the measures that affected the Cuban state, while loosening ones affecting those that benefited from the self-employment sector and “civil society.” Paradoxically, the Obama administration, more than any other, imposed the largest number of sanctions for violating laws of the embargo. This affected the development of some Cuban diplomatic offices abroad as well as hurt the Cuban economy. For this reason, Cuban scholar Morales Domínguez claims that Obama divided the embargo in two:

Obama, as we have expressed before, has divided the embargo in two: a garrotte against the leadership of revolution and carrot to try to conquer the Cuban civil society. Making the interest of subverting the Cuban political regime the centrepiece to his policy, despite also having declared that this is not his intention. (Morales Domínguez 2016)

Notwithstanding the objectives that encouraged Obama to initiate a change in Cuban policy through “smart and soft power,” it is fair to say that his presidency was an important historical milestone in the conflicts evolution. During the normalization process, a total of twenty-two bilateral agreements were adopted in different sectors such as healthcare, education,

agriculture, security, science, technology, migration, environment, aviation, and communications. In March 2016, Obama authorized U.S. cruise ships to travel to Cuba. At the end of his term, on October 14, 2016, Obama signed the Presidential Directive No. 43 (PPD-43) of the NSC, through which he instructed all government institutions to advance in the process of normalization (Castro Mariño 2017). On January 12, 2017, in a joint statement, Obama ended the “wet-foot dry-foot” policy and the special “parole” visa program for Cuban medical professionals.

While it is true that Obama was able to affect the embargo, and that during his administration the greatest number of sanctions were imposed for violating it, many of the measures which he took in the closing stages of his second term were a kind of “stop” in the historic bilateral conflict. Even though the process that was initiated did not culminate in the effective normalization of neighborly relations, it is fair to emphasize that mutual respect prevailed in the spirit of agreement to achieve common interests.

“AMERICA FIRST”: THE DESTRUCTION OF THE BRIDGE AND THE SETBACKS ON U.S.-CUBA RELATIONS (2017–2020)

LeoGrande and Kornbluh end their excellent book on the secret negotiations between Washington and Havana by alluding to a historical phrase by Raúl Castro, who in 1977 compared the relations between the two countries to the reconstruction of a destroyed bridge. The two historical conflict experts stated, “the final spans are yet to be finished, but Barack Obama and Raúl Castro have brought the bridge much closer to completion—close enough to shake hands” (LeoGrande and Kornbluh 2015, 453). Unfortunately, the victory of Republican Donald Trump in the 2016 presidential elections both prevented the bridge from being completed as well as destroyed the part that had been already been built despite so much sacrifice.

The concept of “America First” that Trump advocates has had serious implications for both domestic and international policymaking. Trump has generated conflicts near and far, even with his closest allies who do not share the same vision regarding certain international issues. The U.S. president does not accept scientific findings on climate change and, under that pretext, abandoned the Paris Agreement. He also withdrew from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and has promoted a policy of destabilization in Latin America, seeking to promote like-minded governments in this region. Far from contributing to the resolution of international conflicts, Trump has endeavored to make them more complicated resulting in escalating tensions with China, Russia, and

Iran. Trump has also provoked the Arab world after recognizing Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. Consequently, these escalating tensions marked a similar approach toward Cuba.

On June 16, 2017, at an event anticipating the new U.S. administration's outreach to Cuba, Trump pledged to reverse Obama's policy. The chosen place for this speech, the Manuel Artime Theatre in Miami, was an open provocation against the island, not only because the name of that facility is that of a mercenary from Playa Girón but also because the Cuban-American right often developed its anti-Cuban activities from that location. The renowned Cuban scholar on the subject, Soraya Castro Mariño, points out that Trump,

issued a new Presidential Directive called: National Security Presidential Memorandum on Strengthening the Policy of the United States toward Cuba, which revoked the Presidential Directive issued by President Barack Obama in October 2016. . . . Trump bet in favour of the failed policy of hostility with an aggressive, threatening and particularly disrespectful narrative in which he, once again, took up the quid pro quo principle that imposes inherent limitations to the sovereignty, independence and self-determination of the Republic of Cuba. (Castro Mariño 2017)

In line with his threats and looking for a pretext to lower the level of diplomatic relations in September 2017, Trump began a campaign on "acoustic attacks" that allegedly caused health problems for several U.S. officials in Havana. Due to this incident, Trump reduced U.S. Embassy staff in Havana to 60 percent, affecting immigration procedures as well as, consequently, family relations and all exchanges. The need to travel to a third country, moreover, without the security of obtaining a visa, makes the procedure more expensive. Moreover, that measure also violates the bilateral migration agreements because it fails to comply with the number of visas agreed for the safe and legal migration of Cubans to the United States.

The sonic incidents were not enough to justify an escalation of aggression against Cuba. Hence, in 2019, the justification for U.S. policies toward Cuba became the island's relationship with Venezuela (a justification that was also used to manipulate Cuban medical collaboration abroad). Since May 2019, the OAS joined Trump to discredit the work of the island's doctors who were providing their services in different parts of the world, seeking to distort the humanitarian role and the reality of Cuban medical services. In June 2019, the State Department, in its report on human trafficking, denounced Cuba's international medical cooperation and, a month later, imposed visa restriction sanctions on Cuban officials linked to medical missions (Concepción Pérez 2019).

Trump escalated already aggressive policies against Cuba by creating additional historically unprecedented policies aimed at increasing conflict. This includes the reactivation of Title III of the Helms-Burton Act, which became effective on May 2, 2019. The announcement was made on April 17, 2019, by Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo. That decision was made without regard to the consequences it would have on relations with its allies. Additionally, Washington relentlessly persecutes oil tankers that transport fuel to Cuba with the aim of suffocating the Cuban government, paralyzing its economy, and provoking social discontent in an attempt to create an internal explosion against the regime. To affect Cuban tourism, which is one of the main sources of income to the island's economy, Trump withdrew the licenses of U.S. cruise ships visiting Cuba and suspended the U.S. flights traveling to different destinations on the island, allowing for only flights to Havana.

At the time of writing, Covid-19 has claimed the lives of hundreds of thousands of people worldwide and caused the collapse of the healthcare systems in many countries, including the most developed ones. Faced with such tragedy, the Trump administration continues its policy of sanctions and threats of war toward Cuba. Despite worldwide calls to lift the embargo, it has prevented the arrival of medicines and medical equipment to Cuba. It has also launched a campaign against the medical brigades that have responded to the call from other countries to fight the pandemic.

The upcoming presidential elections in the United States will be decisive, not only for the nation but also for the future of U.S. Cuban policy. If the Democratic candidate Joe Biden wins, he could reverse the policies of Republican Donald Trump, as he has proclaimed in his campaign speeches. However, if Trump continues his presidency, the aggressive policy toward the island will persist. Faced with that scenario, the Cuban people will maintain the fundamental social conquests and will continue to defend their national sovereignty.

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Part II

CUBA ON THE GLOBAL STAGE

Chapter 7

Cuba Is Africa, Africa Is Cuba

Isaac Saney

“I don’t believe there is life after death, but if there is, we can be sure that the souls of our forefathers who were taken away to America to be slaves are rejoicing today to see their children reunited and working together to help us be independent and free.” Amilcar Cabral, 1966. (Quoted in Gleijeses 2001, 198)

“The Cuban people hold a special place in the hearts of the peoples of Africa. The Cuban internationalists have made a contribution to African independence, freedom and justice, unparalleled for its principled and selfless character. . . . We in Africa are used to being victims of countries wanting to carve up our territory or subvert our sovereignty. It is unparalleled in African history to have another people rise to the defense of one of us. . . . Cubans came to our region as doctors, teachers, soldiers, agricultural experts, but never as colonizers. They have shared the same trenches with us in the struggle against colonialism, underdevelopment, and apartheid.” Nelson Mandela, July 26, 1991. (Quoted in Mandela 1993, 119)

“Humanity has a debt to the African people. We cannot let them down.” Abelardo Moreno, Cuban Representative, UN Security Council, September 16, 2014. (Quoted in TeleSur 2014)

A central motif of the Cuban Revolution continues to be its ongoing and profound commitment to Africa. The three statements above vividly encapsulate the privileged position that Africa occupies in the Cuban Revolution’s foreign policy. From the early 1960s to the 1980s, Havana provided extensive support to African anti-colonial and national liberation movements.

This dedication to Africa was epitomized by active solidarity with African anti-colonial and national liberations struggles, reaching its climax in Angola where more than 330,000 Cubans soldiers served from 1975 to 1991, resulting in 2,082 deaths.

With the end of the Cold War, while circumstances may have changed, Cuba's solidarity with Africa continued and continues. This was followed by an unwavering determination to assist the nation building and development projects of the newly decolonized African counties through a variety of Cuba's critical contribution to the fight against the Ebola epidemic in the West African nations of Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone being a poignant example. The Cuban medical mission was by far the largest sent by any country. Even the *Wall Street Journal* declared, "Few have heeded the call, but one country has responded in strength: Cuba" (Hinshaw and McKay 2014). Standing side-by-side with the peoples of West Africa, Cuban doctors and nurses went to West Africa and joined the struggle against Ebola. As Jorge Lefebvre Nicolas, Cuba's ambassador to Liberia, declared: "We cannot see our brothers from Africa in difficult times and remain there with our arms folded" (AngolaPress 2008).

WEIGHT OF HISTORY

The questions, therefore, arise: Why does Africa occupy such a prominent place and space in the Cuban Revolution's worldview, we are left with the concomitant expenditure of significant human and material resources? What is the source of this special and unique relationship? The beginning of an answer to these questions in the Trans-Atlantic Slave-Trade and the global system that emerged as a consequence. Cuba's profound connection and intersection with Africa is undergirded and a product of historical and cultural ties with continent that predate the Cuban Revolution (Pérez Jr. 2015, 66). From 1763 to 1862, 750,000 enslaved Africans were brought to Cuba to work primarily in the sugar plantation system. The island's history of African slavery laid the basis for the enduring link to Africa, firmly establishing Cuba as part and parcel of the Black world and the African Diaspora.

Havana situated the Angolan mission within Cuba's history of slavery. The military intervention was justified as both defending an independent country against foreign invasion and repaying an historical debt owed by Cuba to Africa as a result of slavery and the slave trade. This was reflected in the mission's name *Operación Carlota*, who was an enslaved African Cuban woman, who led a revolt against slavery on November 5, 1843. Indeed, they explicitly cast their role in the fight against colonialism as a fight against racism and white supremacy. In his opening speech to the first Congress of the PCC, Castro spent considerable time explaining why Havana had decided to

intervene militarily in Angola. He cast the intervention as a struggle against racism.

Who are today the representatives, the symbols of the most odious, of the most inhuman discrimination? The fascists and racists of South Africa! And Yankee imperialism, unscrupulous in all forms, launched the South African mercenary troops to crush the independence of Angola . . . with our principles, our ideology, our convictions and our own blood, we will defend Angola and defend Africa! (Partido Comunista de Cuba 1975, 81)¹

Fidel Castro continued to invoke Cuba's historical links to Africa at several prominent occasions. At April 19, 1976, gathering to mark the fifteen anniversary of the victory at *Playa Giron* (Bay of Pigs); he declared that Cuba was a Latin-African nation: "That those who once enslaved man and sent him to America perhaps never imagined that one of those peoples who received slaves would one day send their fighters to struggle for freedom in Africa. . . . We are a Latin-African people" (F. Castro 1981a, 110, 115). Symbolically, "the historic traffic of African slaves . . . was reversed" with a new "cargo comprising ideological dogma, soldiers and weapons sent by the Cuban Revolution to assist in the decolonization of Angola" (Fiddian 2000, 1).

Castro also affirmed: "For the first time in history, one of the peoples of our hemisphere, descendants of . . . slaves who were cruelly uprooted from Africa by the voracity of the colonialist rule, sent thousands of its best sons to help peoples that were fighting for liberty and dignity in Africa" (F. Castro 1981b, 55). Castro was not the only one in the leadership to express these sentiments. Jorge Risquet—Havana's principal diplomat in Africa from the 1970s to 1990s—was also unambiguous in explaining Cuba's military intervention in terms of Cuba's commitment to Africa (Risquet 1990, 13). Raúl Castro was an avid supporter and shaper of Cuba's Africa policy in the 1970s. During the decade, he made two extensive visits to the African continent. In a 1976 report to the Cuban Communist Party's Politburo about his two-month visit to Angola, the Republic of the Congo and Guinea, he emphasized that solidarity with Africa was "an internationalist duty" (R. Castro 1976, 5). In a 1977 memorandum, he again forcefully advocated to "continue to help Africa" in the anti-imperialist struggle (R. Castro 1977). In other official documents shared within the revolutionary leadership, he consistently articulated the necessity to "continue to help Africa" in the anti-imperialist struggle (Ibid.). In a 1985 meeting with Mikhail Gorbachev, he declared, "Africa is literally dying, while the United States exploits it" (R. Castro 1985).

Cuba's role in Southern Africa especially resonated with Black Cubans, who were able to make at least a symbolic connection with their African roots. As Terence Cannon notes, for many Black Cubans volunteering was

akin to defending Cuba except that the fight was “this time in Africa. And they were aware that Africa was, in some sense, their homeland” (1981, 182). Reverend Abbuno Gonzalez of the *Cuban Pentecostal Church* was able to make both a symbolic and concrete connection: “My grandfather came from Angola. So it is my duty to go and help Angola. I owe it to my ancestors” (Bravo 1990). General Rafael Moracen stated: “When we arrived in Angola, I heard an Angolan say that our grandparents, whose children were taken away from Africa to be slaves, would be happy to see their grandchildren return to Africa to help free it. I will always remember those words” (Ibid.).

The Cuban Revolution also had a dramatic impact on Black Radicals, throughout the African Diaspora, especially from the United States (U.S.). In the 1960s, several groups of Black intellectuals and activists from the United States visited Cuba. This early fascination, support, and identification with the Revolution, did not diminish and continued into the 1970s and beyond. For example, Black veterans of the civil rights struggle and movement and the Black Power movement organized the very first *Venceremos Brigades* in the 1970s that challenged Washington’s sanctions against Cuba. This support and identification with the Cuban Revolution by African American activists was driven by the perception that a fundamental and radical social transformation had taken place in Cuba that had dramatically improved the status of Black Cubans, and Cuba’s direct assistance to African national liberation movements, especially in the fight against the apartheid South Africa.

Robin Kelley, in his landmark book *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination*, noted that once they had traveled to Cuba, African American activists “returned home transformed” (2003, 64). Even the *Nation of Islam* supported the Cuban Revolution, with its national publication regularly publishing articles on Cuba that condemned the aggressive U.S. policy toward the island. The acclaimed playwright Amiri Baraka, then known as LeRoi Jones, stated in his 1984 autobiography that after his trip to Cuba: “I carried so much back with me that I was never the same again. The dynamic of the revolution had touched me” (1997, 246). Black Power leader Stokely Carmichael described Fidel Castro as “the blackest man in the Caribbean” (Winston 1999, 246). That Cuba also served as a refuge for Black radicals fleeing from the United States further enhanced Cuba and Fidel Castro’s reputation (Ibid.).

ANGOLA AND APARTHEID’S DEMISE

From the early 1960s, Cuba supported and materially assisted African anti-colonial and national liberation movements. For example, Cuba helped the National Liberation Front of Algeria in its struggle for independence from

France and its forces were in the Congo where Che Guevara led a guerrilla group. Training material, aid, and medical personnel were given to Guinea-Bissau's liberation struggle against Portugal. In 1977, the Cuban armed forces were critical in expelling a Somalia invasion of Ethiopia. However, it was Cuba's military assistance to Angola to repulse and defend against South African aggression that truly underscores Havana's unique relationship—kinship—with Africa. It was the most dramatic internationalist mission was Cuban military assistance to help the Angolan government repulse South African aggression. Cuba's critical contribution to the struggle against the racist/fascist apartheid regime in South Africa is not only, frequently ignored, in western media, it is treated almost as if it had never occurred. However, the overarching significance of Cuba's role cannot be erased. Under *Operación Carlota*, Cuba not only defended Angola's independence from South African aggression but also played a decisive role in southern African national and anti-colonial liberation struggles. As noted, from 1975 to 1990, more than 330,000 Cuban volunteers participated in repelling several South African invasions, with more than 2,000 Cubans losing their lives.

Cuban military involvement in Southern Africa has been repeatedly dismissed as surrogate activity for the Soviet Union. This position has been unequivocally refuted. In Piero Gleijeses acclaimed 2001 book, *Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington and Africa, 1959–76*. This book details how the Cuban government—as it had repeatedly asserted—decided to dispatch combat troops to Angola only after the Angolan government had requested Cuba's military assistance to repel the South Africans, refuting Washington's assertion that South African forces intervened in Angola only after the arrival of the Cuban forces and. It also evidences that the Soviet Union had no role in Cuba's decision and were not even informed prior to deployment. In short, Cuba was not the puppet of the USSR.²

On November 5, in response to the request by Angolan President Agostinho Neto, the Cuban revolutionary government initiated *Operación Carlota*.³ Since 1965, a very close relationship existed between Havana and the Angolan liberation movement that now formed the government of that newly independent country. By the end of November 1975, more than 5,000 Cuban troops were in Angola. This number would rise to more than 36,000 in 1976. Among those dispatched were Cuban pilots who initially flew MiG 17s and MiG 21s. Havana also sent artillery, tanks, and the more technologically advanced MiG 23s. The Cuban intervention transformed the military picture. Cuban military assistance was decisive in not only stopping the South African drive to Luanda but also pushing them back over the Angolan border.

On March 27, 1976, the last South African troops withdrew from Angola into Namibia (United Nations 1976, 5). Pretoria's decision to withdraw was prompted not only by the SADF's inability to overcome Cuban/Angolan

resistance and the success of the Cuban/Angolan counter-offensive but also by the collapse of concrete U.S. support for the ongoing campaign. On December 19, 1975, and January 27, 1976, the U.S. Senate and U.S. House of representatives voted 54 to 22 and 323 to 99, respectively, to support Senator Richard Clarke's measure to suspend any financial or material support for any "military or paramilitary operations in Angola" (Franklin 1997). Pretoria had hoped to obtain more sophisticated weapons systems to use against the Cuban and Angolan forces (Geldenhuys 1984, 77).⁴ The Clarke Amendment dashed those wishes. The collapse of U.S. support was reflected in Washington's decision not to veto the March 31, 1976, UN Security Resolution 367 condemning South Africa's invasion, which was adopted by a vote of 9 to 0, with the United States abstaining (United Nations 1976, 5).

Despite the South African withdrawal, Havana apparently wanted to continue to pursue the South African forces into Namibia in order to end the South African occupation and establish Namibian independence (F. Castro 2005, 7; F. Castro and Ramonet 2006, 365; Officer of Cuban Armed Forces, interview conducted by author, May 10, 2006).⁵ However, Cuba did not carry out its planned military offensive because Moscow opposed any such action, refusing to provide any support because of concerns that such an action could provoke direct U.S. intervention to prevent the defeat of South Africa (F. Castro 2005, 7; F. Castro and Ramonet 2006, 365). After the South Africans were driven out of Angola, Cuban forces remained at the request of the Angolan government because of repeated South African invasions and continued aggression (Brittain 1988, 68). During this period, Cuba provided extensive development assistance, sending physicians, teachers, technicians, and construction workers. Also, hundreds of Angolans received technical and professional training in Cuba (Henderson 1979, 260).

The island's international stature was dramatically elevated, leading to many declarations of support and praise for the vanguard role Cuba was performing in the service of national liberation struggles, especially in the struggle against the racist South African state. Julius Nyerere, the Tanzanian president "urged Havana to keep its troops in Angola to protect it from South Africa and to help SWAPO, the Namibian liberation movement" (Gleijeses 2001, 380). Kenneth Kaunda, then President of Zambia, stated: "Britain and the United States joined forces with the Soviet Union to defeat Hitler during World War II. What is wrong now that our countries receive similar help as we confront another version of Hitler here in Southern Africa?" (North 1986, 211)

The defeat of the South African forces was a major development in the African anti-colonial struggle and "gave hope to South Africa's blacks" (Gleijeses 2001, 393). As one analyst opined at the time: "In Angola Black troops—Cuban and Angolans—have defeated White troops in military

exchanges and that psychological edge, that advantage the White man has enjoyed and exploited over 300 years of colonialism and empire, is slipping away” (Sargent 1976). The largest Black South African newspaper, *The World*, underscored the significance of the South African defeat: “Black Africa is riding the crest of a wave generated by the Cuban success in Angola. Black Africa is tasting the heady wine of the possibility of realizing the dream of total liberation” (The World 1976). A poignant example of Cuba’s dedication to the anti-apartheid struggle was generosity extended to the children who survived the notorious Kassinga massacre that was perpetuated by the South African armed forces on May 4, 1978. In response, the Cuban government offered to educate all the survivors on the Isla de la Juventud. Former Namibian Ambassador to Cuba, Grace Uushona was one of those children: “There were 600 of us who came. I went to high school and prep school there.” She described Cuba as “my second country.” The resolve to educate the survivors of the Kassinga massacre, was part of a general, and continuing Cuban goal to provide education to all of Africa (Prada 2016).

Afrikaner ruling circles sought to neutralize any real or perceived threat to the *apartheid status quo*. From 1975 to 1988, the South Africa armed forces embarked on a campaign of massive destabilization of the region. The war of destabilization wrought a terrible toll. Between 1981 and 1988, an estimated 1.5 million people were (directly or indirectly) killed, including 825,000 children (International Defence and Aid Fund 1981; Africa Watch 1992; Truth and Reconciliation Commission 1999, 46–55). This was the result of Pretoria-sponsored terrorist insurgencies (namely, UNITA in Angola and Renamo in Mozambique) and direct military actions by the South African armed forces. South Africa launched numerous bombing raids, armed incursions, and assassinations against surrounding countries. The *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa* concluded:

it would appear that conflicts in southern African states, particularly in Mozambique, Namibia and Angola, were often inextricably linked to the struggle for control of the South African state . . . the Commission believes that the number of people killed *inside* the borders of the country in the course of the liberation struggle was considerably lower than those who died *outside*. . . [It is] clear that some of the most powerful protagonists in the conflict in South Africa recognized at an early stage that the contest was occurring to a large extent outside South Africa. (Truth and Reconciliation Commission 1999, 4)

Operación Carlota culminated in 1988 with the decisive defeat of the South African armed forces at the town of Cuito Cuanavale. From November 1987 to March 1988, the South African armed forces repeatedly tried and failed to capture Cuito Cuanavale.

The Cuban commitment was immense, providing the essential reinforcements, material, and planning. Fidel Castro stated that the Cuban Revolution had:

put its own existence at stake, it risked a huge battle against one of the strongest powers located in the area of the Third World, against one of the richest powers, with significant industrial and technological development, armed to the teeth, at such a great distance from our small country and with our own resources, our own arms. . . . We used our ships and ours alone, and we used our equipment to change the relationship of forces, which made success possible in that battle. We put everything at stake in that action. (Castro 1991, 34–35)

This military effort culminated in the decisive defeat of the South African armed forces at the town of Cuito Cuanvale, driving the Apartheid army out of Angola and altered the balance of power in southern Africa. While the battlefields in Angola and the townships of South Africa were geographically separate and distinct arenas of struggle against apartheid, they were intimately entwined. The defeat of the *SADF* in Angola reverberated throughout South Africa, acting as both a symbol and a catalyst for the popular forces, while materially reducing the military capacity for repression of the South African government, decisively contributing to Namibian independence and accelerating the dismantling of apartheid in South Africa.⁶

In 1991, Nelson Mandela as a very public recognition of Cuba's role in the anti-apartheid struggle, deliberately chose Cuba as one of the first countries outside of Africa and the first in Latin America to visit after his release from twenty-seven years of imprisonment by directly expressing his gratitude. Mandela declared, as previously noted: "The Cuban people hold a special place in the hearts of the people of Africa. The Cuban internationalists have made a contribution to African independence, freedom and justice unparalleled for its principled and selfless character" (Mandela 1993, 119).⁷ He continually reiterated these sentiments during his 1994–1999 presidency of South Africa, and his successors have continued in this vein, with Thabo Mbeki and Jacob Zuma on several occasions echoing those sentiments (Mbeki 2001a, 2001b).⁸

At the Havana memorial to Fidel Castro, South African President Jacob Zuma emphasized the singularity of Cuba's engagement with Africa, stating that "the deep and undying special relationship between Cuba and Africa was cemented by the blood of heroic Cuban soldiers who paid the supreme sacrifice for their belief in anti-imperialism, freedom and justice" (Mail and Guardian 2016). Using South Africa as an example of Cuba's ongoing assistance to Africa, Zuma emphasized, "South Africa has gained many Cuban doctors in our hospitals and clinics, often in the most remote

areas of our country. In addition, many of our youth have qualified as medical practitioners in Cuba and many are continuing to study in this country” (Ibid.).

In commemoration of Fidel Castro’s ninety-fourth birthday, Ronnie Kasrils, former South African Minister of Intelligence Services (1994–2008) stated: “Fidel will live on in Africa, as everywhere else, as an everlasting icon of liberation in all its forms” (Prensa Latina 2020c). Physical monuments in South Africa to the anti-apartheid struggle also pay homage to Cuba. On the *Wall of Names* in Pretoria’s Freedom Park, the names of 2,106 Cubans who died in Angola during the 1975–1991 Cuban military missions are inscribed (Freedom Park 2009).

Cuba continually valorizes Cuba’s its role in Southern Africa with the society suffused with the retelling of the internationalist mission in Southern Africa. It has become central to Cuba’s national narrative. This exercise in national memory serves not only keep the alive among Cubans the story of Cuba’s sacrifices in Southern Africa, also ensuring that Africa and Africans do not forget, but also is a constant reinforcement of Cuba’s ties to Africa. Hector Friginals de la Torre (Coordinator for the North and Central America, Department of International Relations, Communist Party of Cuba) underscored that the Cuban leadership places a premium on the preservation and projection of the historical memory of Cuba’s role in Africa’s anti-colonial struggles, especially in Southern Africa (Communist Party of Cuba 2016). In 2007, Cuba television broadcast a twenty-two episode series on the internationalist mission, *La Epopeya de Angola*. Numerous memoirs have also been published, coupled with regular commemorative events. On March 24, 2008, Raul Castro presided over a major ceremony that reiterated the internationalist mission in Angola (as embodied in the victory at Cuito Cuanavale) as a defining period in the trajectory of the Cuban Revolution (Betancourt 2008). In 2012, as Cuba’s official representative at a conference honoring Kwame Nkrumah’s Pan-Africanism, the late Jorge Risquet pointed out that

Cuban fighters came to ancestral Africa to fight side by side with the people against colonialism and the oppressive apartheid regime. For 26 years, 381,000 Cuban soldiers and officers fought alongside African populations—between April 24, 1965, when Ernesto Che Guevara and his men crossed Lake Tanganyika, and May 25, 1991, when the remaining 500 Cuban fighters returned home triumphant. . . . Twenty-four hundred Cuban internationalist fighters lost their lives on African soil. Today we no longer send soldiers. Now, we send doctors, teachers, builders, specialists in various fields. (Azikiwe and Risquet 2015)

SAVING AFRICAN LIVES

While global circumstances—with the end of the Cold War—have changed, Cuba's solidarity with Africa continues, particularly in healthcare. Cuba's medical missions are no less important in illustrating the privileged position of the continent in Havana's foreign policy. Cuba's first medical mission was to Algeria. This set the stage for the deep medical engagement with Africa. By 1988, there were Cuban medical missions in twenty-two African countries. Africa was the principal area for Cuban medical personnel. In 1981, 40.8 percent of Cuban medical personnel serving overseas were stationed in Africa; in 1988 it was 47.3 percent. Over the course of the Revolution, Cuba has sent various internationalist missions to a total thirty-two African countries (Prensa Latina 2020a).

By 2015, it was estimated that 76,000 Cuban doctors had served in Africa (Kirk and Walker 2016, 16).⁹ The extent of Cuba's involvement goes beyond simply the number of countries. Cuban doctors did not simply augment the existing healthcare system; in many cases, they were the healthcare system. By 1977 Cuba was the crucial, if not central, provider of healthcare in six African countries. Cuba's medical internationalism also extended to training Africans as doctors and in other healthcare capacities. By 1990–1991, 2,524 doctors from Africa had been trained in Cuba, 1,507 being from sub-Saharan Africa (Kirk 2015, 23–26).

This commitment to Africa and Africans has been not only continued but also expanded. Cuban medical assistance to Africa is unprecedented. At the time of Fidel Castro's formal resignation from the presidency in 2008, Cuba had medical missions in twenty-two African countries, involving 1,184 medical personnel (including 832 doctors) (Huish and Kirk 2009, 135; Kirk 2009, 281). By 2012, Havana medical mission in Africa had expanded to encompass thirty-five countries on the continent, with more than four thousand healthcare workers (Kirk 2015, 40). By 2013, the contingent has grown to more 5,500 (Kirk 2015, 40; Luis Grillo 2016). Medical missions in Africa have grown from encompassing 41 percent of countries in Africa to 65 percent, with the actual size of the overall African mission increasing more than 4.5 times. In Mozambique another thirty doctors were sent, increasing the total to 160. Rwanda was added to Cuba's medical African map in 2010 when thirty-one doctors were dispatched. In Botswana, an eye-clinic was established (Kirk 2012, 87). Indeed, from 2007 to 2013, 32,314 Africans have received specialized eye-treatment as part of *Operación Milagro*, the program launched jointly by Cuba and Venezuela to provide access to ophthalmological care for basic ailments such as cataracts. Initially aimed at Latin America, the ambit grew to include Africa (Kirk 2015, 116).

Perhaps, the most convincing demonstration of the medical commitment to Africa was the 2014 Ebola epidemic that ravaged West Africa. Raúl Castro immediately recognized the gravity of the situation, and jointly with the WHO and the Pan American Health Organization convened an international conference in Havana the epidemic (Kirk and Walker 2016, 20). Cuba also went further. As Ebola ravaged Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone, the island nation offered “to send to Sierra Leone 103 nurses, and 62 doctors” (Kirk 2015, ix). In total 253 medical personnel were deployed in those three countries, with fifty-three sent to Liberia and thirty-five to Guinea. Cuba also trained 13,286 people in Africa in the protocols and techniques necessary to deal with Ebola (Kirk and Walker 2016, 17).

The Cuban medical mission was by far the largest sent by any country. As Jorge Lefebre Nicolas, Cuba’s ambassador to Liberia, declared: “We cannot see our brothers from Africa in difficult times and remain there with our arms folded” (BBC 2014). Such was the magnitude of Cuba’s solidarity with Africa that even the corporate media, usually unduly harsh in their views concerning Cuba, had to give the Caribbean nation plaudits for its actions. On October 9, 2014, the *Wall Street Journal* noted: “Few have heeded the call, but one country has responded in strength: Cuba” (Hinshaw and McKay 2014). This call has also been heeded in confronting the COVID-19 pandemic. Cuba sent medical detachments of health to several African countries. For example, more than 200 doctors were sent to South Africa, with another twenty-eight arriving in Guinea-Bissau, with others deployed to Mozambique, Kenya, and Gambia.¹⁰

Havana also trains doctors for various African countries. By 2016, it was estimated that 30,000 students from Africa had graduated from Cuban universities (Prada 2016). Since 1996 more than 1,500 South African doctors have graduated from Cuban medical programs (Prensa Latina 2020b). Cuba has also played a central role in establishing six medical schools across Africa, with Cuban professors as the principal instructors. Cuba has continued to support the goal of achieving African healthcare independence by building indigenous healthcare capacity by directly training doctors in Africa. Medical schools were established in Ethiopia (1984), Uganda (1986), Ghana (1991), Gambia (2000), Equatorial Guinea (2000), and Guinea Bissau (2004) (Kirk 2009, 281). Additionally, an additional eleven doctors were sent to teach at Tamale University in Ghana (Kirk 2012, 87). In 2008, the medical program in Gambia was expanded to provide training for community doctors. In the new program, twenty-nine Cuban professors taught thirty-five students (Kirk 2015, 27–28). This quite incredible instructor to student ratio illustrates the importance placed by Cuba on the necessity to create within Africa countries, the medical expertise vital to improving social and human development.

Havana is also committed to providing low-cost medicines to countries of the South, especially sub-Saharan Africa. One objective is to ensure that medicines are much more affordable so that expense is no longer a barrier to effective treatment; another is to foster independence from the west's monopoly on drug creation and production. This has meant directly challenging the grip of pharmaceutical giants on international markets. A successful example of this approach was the creation and distribution of a low cost of a vaccine for meningococcal meningitis, a bacterial infection that attacks the brain and spinal cord outer membrane. The result can be severe brain damage, with a 50 percent mortality rate if not properly treated. In 2006–2007, due to unusually dry weather, sub-Saharan Africa faced the possibility of deadly outbreak across “what is known as Africa’s *meningitis belt*, a band that stretches across 23 countries, from Senegal in the west to Ethiopia in the east, home to 430 million people” (Grogg 2010).

However, at the time the only producer of a vaccine against the disease, Sanofi Pasteur, a U.S. based corporation, was discontinuing production. In response, the World Health Organization issued an urgent call for the production of a vaccine. Cuba’s Finlay Institute and Brazil’s Bio-Manguinhos immunobiological institute responded and cooperated in producing a very low-cost vaccine. Their cost was \$0.95 per dose, as opposed to \$15–\$20 (Grogg 2010; Kirk 2015, 155). Cuba and Brazil had produced a vaccine that was fifteen to twenty-one times cheaper than the vaccine of Sanofi Pasteur. The vaccine was distributed across the *meningitis belt*, with the main targets being Mali, Ethiopia, Burkina Faso, Nigeria, Niger, and Chad, which had been deemed to be the ones facing the greatest threat. In the end, more than nineteen-million doses were distributed (Kirk 2015, 155). WHO specialist Alejandro Costa noted that Cuba and Brazil “were able to produce a vaccine at the lowest cost, which contributed to reducing the cases of meningitis” (Grogg 2010). Ramón Barberá, Finlay vice-president for production, described the vaccine’s creation, production, and distribution as “a victory of unity” (Grogg 2010).

Cuba’s missions in and medical assistance to Africa are designed “to contribute the development of the receiving nation . . . as act of unconditional solidarity” (Prada 2016). The focus on creating a more efficient and productive economy encompasses Cuba’s various internationalist missions but has not had a significant impact on the programs in Africa. Guidelines 110 and 111 of *The Guidelines of Economic and Social Policy* are quite explicit about ensuring the economic sustainability and stability of Cuba’s internationalist missions, stating that Havana will: “Continue to exercise international solidarity through cooperation projects pursued by Cuba and keep financial and statistical records, as required, for assessment purposes; in particular, cost analyses. . . . Where practical, consider a payment requirement to cover

at least the costs incurred by Cuba in its solidarity cooperation projects” (Communist Party of Cuba 2011).

The poorest countries would—and do—continue to receive the medical assistance “at no cost or at a heavily subsidized rate” (Kirk 2015, 26). Moreover, Cuba’s Latin American School of Medicine—the world’s largest medical school—continues to waive the tuition for students from the poorest African countries. Thus, Africa, particularly sub-Saharan Africa, continues to receive the service of Cuban healthcare workers at very low costs. The only exceptions are Angola and South African. This policy was reaffirmed in the two strategic documents adopted at the April 2016, Seventh Congress of the Communist Party of Cuba, which reiterated the commitment to internationalism as an important part of the Cuban model of socialist development. Article 326 of the *Conceptualization of Cuban socialism* emphasized building relations “with sister nations of the South based on solidarity” (*Partido Comunista de Cuba* 2016a, 15). Article 200 of the *2030 National Economic and Social Development Plan* identifies internationalism as fundamental “values, practices and attitudes that distinguishes our society” (*Partido Comunista de Cuba* 2016b, 24).

CONCLUSION

Cuba’s distinctive relationship with Africa is sui generis: no country has made such a sustained contribution and commitment to African anti-colonial and national liberation struggles and the continent’s social development. Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel reaffirmed that Africa could always rely on Cuba’s solidarity, declaring: “Together we shed the shared blood; together we face the challenge of development. Cuba has brought solidarity and brotherhood to a continent where empires have only brought contempt, wars and looting” (MINREX 2020). This relationship continues to be defined and shaped by the deep historical ties that were forged in the Trans-Atlantic Slave-Trade and the liberation struggles of the 1960s and 1970s. It is this history that has placed Africa at the heart of Cuba’s revolutionary internationalist foreign policy.

Cuba is ineluctably bound to Africa through the African Diaspora. As Fidel Castro declared: Cuba is a Latin-African nation. With the UN *Declaration of the International Decade for People of African Descent* for 2015–2024, Cuba’s solidarity with Africa assumes greater poignancy (United Nations n.d.). In reiterating its support for the decade at the Seventy-First UN General Assembly, Havana stated:

We share the view that the International Decade for People of African Descent provides an opportunity that should be seized by all States to focus on the

challenges to be faced in combating racial discrimination; to draw policies that allow us to solving identified problems and to strengthening international cooperation in order to achieve a world where equality, mutual respect and social justice prevail. (*Representaciones Diplomáticas de Cuba en el Exterior* 2016)

Aside from supporting the *International Decade for People of African Descent*, Havana also champions the lawsuit of fourteen countries of CARICOM, the English-speaking Caribbean Community, against the United Kingdom, France, and the Netherlands for reparations for the legacy of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. At April 2016 summit of Community of Latin American and Caribbean State, Raúl Castro declared his support for the lawsuit: “We support the just demand for compensation launched by the member states of the Caribbean Community. People from the Third World are still feeling the effects of the inhuman exploitation” (TeleSur 2016). His statement echoed Fidel’s September 1, 2001, address to the *World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance*, where he stated:

Cuba speaks of reparations, and supports this idea as an unavoidable moral duty to the victims of racism. . . . The irrefutable truth is that tens of millions of Africans were captured, sold like a commodity and sent beyond the Atlantic to work in slavery while 70 million indigenous people in that hemisphere perished as a result of the European conquest and colonization. (F. Castro 2001)

These unique interactions and engagements with Africa underscored that Cuba was (is) part of what has been termed the Black Atlantic, a space created by the histories of the Trans-Atlantic slave system, colonialism, and anti-colonial struggles.¹¹ Therefore, a distinctive feature of Cuba’s special relationship with Africa within the framework of Pan Africanism and the African Diaspora. A shared history and various instances of Pan-African praxis tie Cuba and the Cuban Revolution to Africa and the global Black world. Indeed, Cuba is a Pan African actor; Cuba is Africa, Africa is Cuba.

NOTES

1. Translation by the author.

2. For a detailed discussion see Gleijeses’ 2001 book, *Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington and Africa, 1959–1976*, as well as Isaac Saney’s 2006 article, “African Stalingrad: The Cuban Revolution, Internationalism and the End of Apartheid.”

3. Cuban involvement in Angola has often been characterized as surrogate activity for the Soviet Union, an instrument of Moscow's foreign policy directives. "1989–1993 and former African Director, US National Security Council"; Chester Crocker *High Noon in Southern Africa; Making Peace in a Rough Neighborhood*, 307–379; Gleijeses' 2001 book (pages 307–379), *Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington and Africa, 1959–1976*; and the 2002 article (pages 3–9) by The Economist called, "Killing Fields: The Superpowers in Africa."

4. See also Nicholas Ashford's 1976a article, "South African Cabinet Discusses Danger of Confrontation as MPLA Races Onward in Angola"; Ashford's 1976b article, "Will South Africa go to War?"; as well as Richard Walker's 1975 article, "Vorster Warns on Angola."

5. The officer wished to remain anonymous because he was not an official spokesperson for the Cuban Armed Forces.

6. For a detailed discussion see Gleijeses' books, *Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington and Africa, 1959–1976* (2001) and *Visions of Freedom: Visions of Freedom: Havana, Washington, Pretoria, and the Struggle for Southern Africa, 1976–1991* (2013), as well as Saney's 2006 article, "African Stalingrad: The Cuban Revolution, Internationalism and the End of Apartheid."

7. See also the video excerpt Democracy Now! 2013. "The Secret History of How Cuba Helped End Apartheid in South Africa." YouTube, 19:45. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jNpXUC391vc>.

8. See also the following articles by the Mail and Guardian: "Zuma leads ANC delegation to Cuito" (2008a) and "Zuma Salutes Combatants of Cuito Cuanavale" (2008b).

9. See John M. Kirk and Chris Walker's 2016 article, "Cuban Medical Internationalism: The Ebola Campaign of 2014–2015," page 16.

10. See also Saada Hasan's 2020 article, "Cuban Medical Personnel to Jet in Kenya Tonight," the 2020 Anadolu Agency article, "Kenya Health Workers Oppose Import of Cuban Doctors," the 2020 BBC News article, "Coronavirus: Cuban Doctors go to South Africa," and Felix Tih's 2020 article, "Cuban Medical Team in Guinea-Bissau to Combat COVID-19—Cuba has so far Sent 3,000 Medical Teams to 28 countries to Help in Combating the Pandemic."

11. For a discussion of the Black Atlantic see Paul Gilroy's 1995 book, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double-Consciousness*, and Solimar Otero's 2010 book, *Afro-Cuban Voices in the Atlantic World*.

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Chapter 8

Cuba–Canada Relations

Challenges and Prospects

John M. Kirk

This chapter analyzes Canada-Cuba relations, and while the focus is on the past sixty years, it is important to understand that in fact bilateral relations have deeper roots. In March 2020, for example, Canada and Cuba marked the seventy-fifth anniversary of the beginning of formal bilateral relations. Moreover, commercial relations have been in effect for over two centuries. Originally trade consisted of cod, potatoes, and lumber going south, with sugar, molasses, and rum coming to the Maritime provinces. Indeed, in 1903, the first Cuban consulate was established in the fishing village of Yarmouth, Nova Scotia, home of the salt cod industry in Canada. In 1945, as Great Britain passed the reins of foreign policy to Canada, an embassy in Havana was established. Since then there have been positive and negative elements in the bilateral relationship—and this chapter seeks to highlight the main elements of both.

The long-standing commercial ties between the two countries were quickly followed by the arrival of Canadian banking and insurance companies in the early twentieth century, in the wake of the United States (US) military occupation (1898–1902). In 1899, the first Canadian bank was established—the Merchant's Bank of Halifax (which later became the Royal Bank of Canada), and in 1906, it was followed by the Bank of Nova Scotia. The Merchant's Bank was contracted by the Cuban government to pay out pensions to the veterans of the War for Independence, and by 1913 had nineteen branches on the island. Canadian insurance companies first set up business in 1907, and by 1959 controlled two-thirds of all life insurance policies held on the island. In addition, Canadian business interests were established in the early twentieth century in mining and utilities (particularly railroads and power).

While there are strong historical ties between the two countries, the greatest diplomatic interest can understandably be traced back to 1959, and the

Revolution. What has happened since then is worth noting in many ways—in particular, the reaction of Ottawa to the socialist revolution, Canada's response to pressure from the United States over the issue of diplomatic relations with Havana, the development of many people-to-people connections, and the evolution of Canadian commercial and investment interests to name a few. This chapter seeks to assess some of these issues by analyzing key periods in the evolution of this relationship over the past sixty years, and then offering some thoughts on the essential nature of bilateral ties.

CANADA AND THE EARLY YEARS OF THE CUBAN REVOLUTIONARY PROCESS

The defining tone of the bilateral relationship was established in the first decade of the Cuban Revolution. In particular, the Progressive Conservative government of John Diefenbaker (1957–1963) set the scene for subsequent developments on several levels. First, it adopted a “wait and see” attitude toward events in Cuba, preferring to give the revolutionary government the benefit of the doubt as it proceeded to bringing in sweeping societal changes on the island. The Diefenbaker government successfully resisted pressure from Washington, as the administrations of both Dwight D. Eisenhower and especially John F. Kennedy sought Canadian support for Washington's policy on Cuba.

To a large extent, this was initially due to Canadian commercial interests which, after the U.S. government introduced its embargo with Havana, saw the potential for increased exportation of goods to Cuba. Canada produced many of the goods which U.S. companies manufactured, so why not take advantage of the gap left because of the U.S. embargo on Cuba? Washington soon moved to limit the potential for a Canadian trading bonanza, however, and Ottawa backed down—largely (but not completely) accepting limits on U.S. parts in Canadian exports.

In addition to strong commercial interests, the leadership of Diefenbaker should be noted. He was both an ardent anti-communist and a fierce nationalist and was extremely concerned at U.S. economic influence in Canada. While not in agreement with the revolutionary process (particularly after the 1961 declaration that it was pursuing socialist goals), he nevertheless understood the Cuban reaction against U.S. control—commercial and political—in prerevolutionary Cuba. He also understood the rationale for the need for social change in Cuba. He was therefore prepared to give the revolutionary government a chance to prove itself, and not rush and support U.S. policy toward the island.

To a certain degree, this was due to the strong personal antipathy that existed between him and John F. Kennedy, who was president from January

1961 to November 1963, when he was assassinated. They came from very different backgrounds—Diefenbaker was from modest roots, while Kennedy was from a wealthy patrician Massachusetts family with extensive business and political ties. Diefenbaker disliked the superiority complex that his much younger political ally exuded, especially toward Canada. He also resented the approach of the Kennedy administration as it pressured Canada to toe the diplomatic line on Cuba. As a result, he refused to support Washington when the Bay of Pigs invasion took place (April 1961), and even in October 1962—with the Missile Crisis—when he expressed fundamental disagreements with Kennedy. In sum, for a variety of reasons and despite ideological differences, the Diefenbaker years set the scene for a Canadian–Cuban understanding that continues to this day.

THE APEX OF BILATERAL RELATIONS: THE TRUDEAU YEARS (1968–1984)

Without doubt bilateral relations peaked during the first Trudeau government. Pierre Elliott Trudeau had traveled widely in the Global South and understood well the development aspirations of people there. He spoke Spanish well, had an unusual political apprenticeship serving as a lawyer interested in labor rights and civil liberties and later as a professor in constitutional law, and in many ways was a young, somewhat irreverent politician. He was clearly open to a fresh approach to Canadian foreign policy, and in particular was scornful of U.S. foreign policy—while being wary of U.S. influence in Canada, once noting “Living next to you is in some ways like sleeping with an elephant. No matter how friendly and even-tempered is the beast, if I can call it that, one is affected by every twitch and grunt” (CBC 2018). An economic nationalist, wary of U.S. foreign policy, and with extensive international experience, he was also prepared to develop an independent foreign policy toward revolutionary Cuba.

Two years after being elected, he faced a major political crisis—one in which Fidel Castro came to his rescue. It involved a small revolutionary group, the *Front de Libération du Québec* (FLQ), which sought the province’s independence. The FLQ captured James Cross (the British trade commissioner in the province) and Pierre Laporte (Québec Minister of Labour), and subsequently executed Laporte. Significantly, this was the first political assassination in Canada in a century. Québec, and indeed Canada, faced a major crisis.

Trudeau retaliated by bringing in the War Measures Act, severely limiting all civil liberties as a political impasse appeared. The resolution to this crisis came when the FLQ terrorists agreed to release Cross but demanded

safe passage out of Canada. After several countries refused Ottawa's request to receive the terrorists, the Canadian government approached Cuba—which agreed to take them as a humanitarian gesture. After almost a decade in exile, most members returned to Canada, frustrated that the Cubans would not provide them with military or guerrilla training. Trudeau was understandably extremely grateful to Cuba for helping to resolve this profound national crisis, arguably the most difficult moment of his political career.

In addition to possessing wide experience in the developing world Trudeau and Fidel Castro also shared some similarities in their upbringing—both had been educated by the Jesuits, and both were lawyers by training. They met for the first time in January 1976 when Trudeau, his wife Margaret and son Michel arrived in Havana, significantly the first visit by a NATO leader at a time when the Cold War was very much alive. Over 200,000 Cubans lined the streets to greet the motorcade in Havana. Another large crowd was on hand a few days later in Cienfuegos when the Canadian prime minister gave a speech in Spanish. He ended it “Long live Comandante Fidel Castro. . . . Long live the friendship between Canada and Cuba.”

This was a typically Latin rhetorical flourish, but was poorly received back in Canada—where media and opposition politicians attacked him for supporting the Cuban regime, particularly at a time when Cuba was getting increasingly involved in the Angola civil war. It did not help that Fidel Castro responded “We will never forget that in the most difficult years of the revolution, when almost every single country and state joined the blockade, only two countries in this hemisphere maintained relations with us. . . . Mexico and Canada” (Edwards 2016). Shortly after the visit, and largely because of disagreements over the Angola issue, Canada cut off development assistance to Cuba, and there was a clear disagreement over the issue between the two leaders. Similar disagreements surfaced several years later over Cuba's support for the Sandinistas and their struggle against the Somoza dictatorship in Nicaragua, and for guerrillas fighting against the pro-Washington government in El Salvador. Nevertheless, Trudeau made it clear that he understood Castro's position—and that it would not affect their friendship. In fact, after leaving political life Trudeau returned to visit the Cuban leader on several occasions.

During the Trudeau years, bilateral relations developed on several fronts. Canadian tourists started to fly to Cuba, government ministers from both countries visited to develop trade ties, and Canadian mining company Sherritt Gordon (later Sherritt International, and nowadays one of the most significant investors in Cuba) started a commercial relationship with Cuba. Export credits were given to Cuba for the first time. Support for Canadian University Services Overseas (CUSO) programming was provided from 1969 to 1981, giving many Cubans the opportunity to receive technical assistance and

training. In 1977, after Canada extended its international waters boundary from 12 miles to 200, the first fishing agreement signed by Canada was with Cuba, which maintained an office in Halifax for three decades. Agreements on several topics, from air transportation to hijacking, were also signed during this period, and outstanding claims for compensation on nationalized Canadian properties and investments were resolved.

Documents and diplomatic communications from the time reveal an extremely conservative approach to Cuba held by the Department of External Affairs bureaucrats, and a tendency to see Havana through a pro-Washington lens. Trudeau, however, was determined to develop a “made-in-Canada” policy, which he saw as useful in foreign policy terms as well as in trade interests. In fact, Canadian exports to Cuba increased tenfold (from \$40 million in 1969 to \$450 million in 1981), while Cuban exports to Canada increased during the same period from \$7 million to \$196 million) (Kirk and McKenna 1997, 106).

In sum, during the years when Pierre Trudeau was prime minister, Canada-Cuba relations developed quickly, despite disagreements on foreign policy between him and Fidel Castro. Trudeau came into office seeking a “Third Option” in foreign policy, reducing traditional ties with the British Commonwealth and the United States—and Cuba offered an opportunity to pursue this. A new, progressive foreign policy was a fundamental goal of the Trudeau government and was successfully implemented. In terms of Canada-Cuba relations, this period (particularly the first part of his leadership) clearly constituted a major development—and has never been replicated.

MIXED SIGNALS: FROM BRIAN MULRONEY TO JEAN CHRÉTIEN (1984–2003)

During the almost two decades of these governments, Canada-Cuba relations became firmly established, despite strong ideological differences between Ottawa and Havana. The governments of Brian Mulroney (Progressive Conservative, 1984–1993) and Jean Chrétien (Liberal, 1993–2003) basically maintained a normal, if not overly sympathetic, relationship with Cuba. The former was far more critical of Cuba, not surprising given his close personal friendship with U.S. presidents George H. Bush and Ronald Reagan. He was fundamentally opposed to the economic nationalism of Trudeau, seeking instead to harmonize Canadian and U.S. economic policy. The Free Trade Agreement of 1987 and the North American Free Trade Agreement of 1993 were both passed during his term in office. In terms of Canada-Cuba diplomatic relations, his policy reflected a clear neglect of Cuba, an absolute disinterest in developing ties with Havana.

Far more important was the decade when Jean Chrétien was prime minister. During this period, he employed a complex, and at times contradictory, approach to Cuba. He came to power boasting that he would offer a radically different approach to politics than Mulroney had and, since his political mentor was Pierre Trudeau, much was expected of him. In particular, he sought to develop a significantly different relationship with Washington—emphasizing political independence of Canada in setting its foreign policy and criticizing Mulroney's extremely close ties with Washington. Clearly, this augured well for the possibility of improving Canada's ties with Cuba.

A key component of the Chrétien approach to foreign policy was trade. In November 1994, he led a large (500-member) trade delegation to China. Shortly after he did the same to Latin America, emphasizing the need for Canada to go beyond its traditional dependency upon the United States, and develop new markets. This inherent economic nationalism was also reflected in his policy toward Cuba. In his early years, as prime minister Chrétien criticized Washington's obduracy on Cuba, reflected in the observations of his foreign affairs minister, André Ouellet, "It is time to turn the page on Cuba. The Cold War is over" (Whitfield 1994).

The first Summit of the Americas (December 1994) was held in Miami, and the basic differences between Canadian and U.S. policy on the Cuban question were immediately clear. President Clinton pointed out the deliberate omission of Cuba, due to its lack of democratic practices. Chrétien took issue with this perspective: "We have a right to disagree with that position. For us, it is the normalization [of relations] that will lead to more democracy" (CubaINFO 1994).

The passage of the Helms-Burton Act in 1996 also helped to strengthen Canada-Cuba relations in an unexpected way. Title III of the legislation allows any US citizen to sue in U.S. courts any companies "trafficking" in properties that had been confiscated. It also applies to Cubans who later became U.S. citizens. Several Canadian companies were affected by this law, and Ottawa immediately rejected it. Canada protested the extraterritorial application of this Act and reminded Washington of the legislation passed in Ottawa, the Foreign Extraterritorial Measures Act, which refused to recognize any court decisions made against Canadian companies or individuals under Helms-Burton. It appeared as if Ottawa was clearly developing closer ties with Havana.

Bilateral commercial ties developed during the early Chrétien years. Airport terminals (including in Havana and Varadero) were built and equipped by Canadian companies. Canadian food and drink—from Labatt's beer to McCain French fries—were widely available. Joint ventures started, led by the large Sherritt International investment in nickel mining and oil and gas ventures. Bilateral trade increased from \$305 million in 1993 to \$641

million in 1996, and almost a billion dollars in 2003–2004. The number of Canadian tourists increased rapidly, with some 160,000 arriving for the 1995/1996 season.

In January 1997 Foreign Minister Lloyd Axworthy visited Cuba, where he met with Fidel Castro. The visit was the most significant since that of Pierre Trudeau and was widely criticized in Washington. Axworthy and Castro discussed several areas of potential avenues of cooperation, from foreign investment to drug interdiction. A key interest of Ottawa was the question of human rights, and Chrétien wanted to prove to President Bill Clinton that the Canadian approach to Havana was far more successful than the decades of punishment and isolation pursued by the United States. A list of initiatives for potential bilateral collaboration was drawn up during the visit, and the preparations for a visit by Prime Minister Chrétien were made.

It appeared during the early years of the Chrétien government that Ottawa had rediscovered the central thrust of the policy toward Cuba pursued by the prime minister's mentor, Pierre Trudeau. However, relations deteriorated significantly following the 1998 visit to Havana of Jean Chrétien, largely over the question of human rights. At a dinner function, Chrétien sought to lecture Castro on human rights, producing a list of political prisoners whose freedom he requested. The Cuban leader was not impressed, and the decline in bilateral ties soon after was noticeable.

There are several examples of this deterioration. The Pan-American Games, held in Winnipeg in 1999, offered an opportunity for diplomatic fence-mending, but failed to improve relations. The Cuban government criticized the lack of security for Cuban athletes and the harassment from Cuban exile groups, as well as negative media coverage (one local paper offered an all-inclusive vacation in Cuba to readers who could guess the number of Cuban athletes who would defect). The low point in relations during the Chrétien years came in the April 2001 Summit of the Americas, held in Québec City.

In previous multilateral summits, the Chrétien government had argued in favor of Cuba's participation, and criticized U.S. opposition to this policy. Now that it was to be held in Canada, however, the government changed its position radically. It now condemned the human rights situation on the island and refused to allow Cuba's participation. The Cuban government was outraged at this political shift. The following month in the annual May Day parade in Havana, Chrétien was mocked and on national television Castro lambasted the Canadian prime minister. The potential for bolstering relations which had been so manifest when Chrétien was elected had disappeared and was summarized with clarity by him: "We're still engaged with them, but we have to put some northern ice in the middle of it" (Depalma 1999). This northern ice at the government level would continue for several years to come.

THE NADIR OF CANADA-CUBA RELATIONS: THE HARPER YEARS (2006–2015)

While diplomatic ties deteriorated noticeably in the waning years of the Chrétien years, they continued to worsen under the leadership of Stephen Harper. Unlike the previous period when there were mixed signals regarding Ottawa's position on the Cuban revolutionary process, under Harper there was no ambiguity—Cuba was not viewed favorably. To a certain extent, this was a continuation of the position laid out in later years by his predecessor but was strengthened by a number of outspoken criticisms of Cuba, focusing in particular on its political system and approach to human rights. In January 2009 Peter Kent, minister of state for the Americas summarized the position which was commonplace throughout the Harper years: "Some [people] are too willing to accept a candy-coated vision of what life in Cuba really is. It's still a good place to go and have a great vacation in an artificial bubble. But Canadians should be realistic. . . . It is still a dictatorship, any way you package it" (Blanchfield 2009).

During the Harper years, Canadian government policy consistently supported U.S. goals in Cuba. There were many examples of this official displeasure with Cuba. In 2007, for instance, the U.S. bank Maryland Bank National Association (MBNA) purchased Credit Union Electronic Transaction Services (CUETS), the largest Mastercard issuer for Canadian credit unions. This meant that Canadians using Mastercard credit cards at credit unions could no longer use them while on vacation in Cuba, given U.S. legislation. For many, this was a clear-cut case of an abuse of Canadian sovereignty, and many organizations called for the application of the Foreign Extraterritorial Measures Act (FEMA) legislation. The Harper government ignored such requests.

Another example was the decision of the Harper government to show clear support for Cuban exiles, while criticizing the revolutionary government. On May 21, 2008, Ottawa published a statement expressing its support for the Cuban people's struggle for freedom—the same day that the Bush administration did so in Washington, using a similar script. The idea was to take advantage of the anniversary of an important date for Cuban exiles (the date in 1902 when U.S. occupation forces handed power to a Cuban president approved by Washington). The celebration was lauded in Miami but detested in Havana. This was the first time that Canada had done this, and the imitation of the U.S. initiative understandably caused concern in Havana.

It was during the Harper years that the "Pink Tide" emerged in Latin America. This was a loose coalition of socialist and social democratic countries whose origins can be traced to the 1990s. Several countries in the

region (led by Venezuela, but including Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Ecuador, Nicaragua, among others) strengthened ties with Cuba. The position of Canada toward Cuba was noted, and Ottawa was soon isolated. To put this in context, at the 2012 VI Summit of the Americas held in Colombia, only the United States supported Ottawa's position on Cuba. Harper maintained the same beliefs throughout his time in office, consistently criticizing the Cuban system: "We do believe that the Summit of the Americas should be restricted to democratic countries and that Cuba should be encouraged to come as a democratic country in the future" (Kennedy 2012).

This question of human rights in Cuba permeated the opinion of Cuba held by Prime Minister Harper. Like his predecessor, Harper lobbied to have political prisoners freed and condemned Cuba's lack of democratic practices. He used this "principled position" to condemn Cuba at the Summits of the Americas in Trinidad and Tobago (2009) and Colombia (2012). It could be argued that in doing so, however, he held a rather selective view. For example, he was criticized for ignoring abuses in the U.S. enclave of Guantánamo. In an unusual statement, six former foreign ministers of Canada (from both Conservatives and Liberals) took Harper to task for his silence on this issue: "We urge Prime Minister Harper to speak up. He must press the US government to deal with the Guantánamo detainees, and all other detainees held in the 'war on terror' in a manner consistent with international human rights standards. He should appeal to the US to respect the rule of law and close Guantánamo" (Clark et al. 2007). The prime minister never did address this question.

The election of Barack Obama in November 2008 radically changed the U.S.-Cuba relationship, and in doing so contributed to the Canadian government shifting its position. Obama realized that decades of attempts to bring about regime change in Cuba had been unsuccessful, and as such it was time for a radically different approach. In December 2014, Presidents Raúl Castro and Obama agreed to renew diplomatic relations, broken by Washington in January 1961. (It is important to note that Canada's role was significant in this process, brokering seven meetings on Canadian soil, allegedly at the request of Washington). The intensity in criticism of Cuba by the Harper government steadily decreased as the Obama administration strengthened its relations with Cuba. The opening of embassies in both countries in July 2015 and the visit to Havana of Obama in March 2016 illustrated this clearly. The changed position of Prime Minister Harper at the Seventh Summit of the Americas in Panama (April 2015) was distinctly different from his previous track record. He noted: "I have become convinced, and our government has become convinced, that we are at a point in the hemisphere, and at a point in Cuba . . . where engagement is more likely to lead us where we want to go than continued isolation" (Kennedy 2015).

"CANADA IS BACK": JUSTIN TRUDEAU AND CANADA-CUBA RELATIONS SINCE 2015

Justin Trudeau won resoundingly the 2015 elections and formed a majority government. Instead of the extremely conservative foreign policy of Stephen Harper, Justin Trudeau offered a constructive, internationalist policy of "sunny ways" and announced that in terms of foreign policy, Canada was "back." To a certain extent, he delivered on his commitments, particularly during the early years of his first mandate. Some 40,000 Syrian refugees were welcomed into Canada, visa requirements imposed on Mexicans by the Harper government were dropped, a feminist foreign policy was adopted, the value of peacekeeping missions was emphasized, multilateralism was again stressed, and climate change became a major staple of his foreign policy.

In terms of Canada-Cuba relations things started extremely well. Illustrative of this was the visit of the HMCS *Fredericton* to Havana in November 2016, the first visit of a Canadian navy ship to Cuba in decades. Warships from several NATO countries had visited Cuba in recent years, but various Canadian governments had steadfastly refused to do so. Another Canadian warship visited Santiago de Cuba later.

November 2016 was in many ways crucially important for understanding Canada-Cuba relations. Justin Trudeau and his wife made a brief visit to Cuba, where he met with Raúl Castro, and three of Fidel Castro's sons—but not the ailing former president. The Prime Minister met with key government officials, gave a speech at the University of Havana, and participated in a roundtable discussion with several civil society organizations. Increasing trade and investment opportunities was a key objective for the Canadian delegation.

During the brief visit, it was announced that Canada would be the country of honor ("país invitado") at the massive International Book Fair held in Havana in February 2017. Canadian collaboration in food security, agriculture, and climate change project was agreed to, and a High Level Dialogue format between foreign ministries was established (Government of Canada 2016). Summarizing his official view on the bilateral relationship, Trudeau noted "The friendship between your family and mine is long and deep, but it's nothing compared to the true friendship between all Canadians and all Cubans, and I look forward to building on that" (Canadian Press 2016). This clearly augured well for the development of bilateral ties—a process which has not continued.

Just ten days later Fidel Castro died, and a debate in Canada arose over how Canada should respond. Topics included in the debate focused on whether the Prime Minister should attend the funeral, and what the Canadian government should say about the death of this significant world leader. Trudeau's

statement was personal and clear, as he noted his solidarity with the Cuban people “mourning their remarkable leader.” He added

Fidel Castro was a larger than life leader who served his people for almost half a century. A legendary revolutionary and orator, Mr. Castro made significant improvements to the education and healthcare of his island nation. While a controversial figure, both Mr. Castro’s supporters and detractors recognized his tremendous dedication and love for the Cuban people who had a deep and lasting affection for “el Comandante.” (Trudeau 2016).

This moving statement was roundly condemned by politicians in Canada as being too supportive of a leader who practised undemocratic values.

Bilateral relations have cooled significantly since Trudeau’s moving tribute to Fidel Castro, with two key issues illustrating areas of diplomatic tension—the political situation in Venezuela, and the mysterious “Havana syndrome” affair, which has had a significant impact on the health of Canadian diplomats. Both have been several years in the making, with clear differences of opinion resulting. The former revolves around the legitimacy of the elected government in Caracas, while the other is based upon concerns for Canadian diplomats working in the embassy there.

In the case of Venezuela, Cuba firmly supports the administration of Nicolás Maduro which was re-elected in 2018, and views it as the legitimate continuation of the Chávez government—with which it had particularly close ties. Havana’s commitment to the Venezuelan government is exceptionally strong, with ties in several spheres—ideological, commercial, social, and cultural. In February 2019, Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel explained this relationship well: “We are living at a time of imperial threat and attempts of restoration of capitalism in Latin America. . . . In Cuba . . . we are defending Venezuela, because in Venezuela we are playing for the dignity of the community” (Havana Times 2019).

Canada for its part sees Maduro as an illegitimate leader and supports the government led by Juan Guaidó, who was declared Acting President of Venezuela by the National Assembly. Canadian Foreign Minister at the time Chrystia Freeland assumed the leadership of the Lima Group, a coalition of thirteen Latin American and Caribbean countries formed in 2017 which supports Guaidó. In her Twitter account Freeland informed the Venezuelan people on May 1, 2019, that “Canada stands with you. . . . I would like to say to the illegitimate government of Maduro and its supporters: it is time to step aside and allow Venezuela to return to democracy” (Freeland 2019).

It is worth noting that, despite profound differences in interpreting the Venezuelan political scene, leaders in Canada and Cuba have consulted with each other about a solution to this impasse. There have been three meetings

between Freeland and her Cuban counterpart, Bruno Rodríguez (two in Havana and one in Canada) to seek an end to the diplomatic impasse, without resolution. That said, it is important that the level of mutual respect, and solid diplomatic ties, have allowed the meetings to take place, and seek a negotiated solution to the complex Venezuela issue.

The other irritant in the diplomatic relationship revolves around the mysterious ailment experienced by some diplomats in 2017, often referred to in the media as the “Havana Syndrome.” This affected U.S. diplomats at first, and then their Canadian counterparts. Many explanations have been given: “It’s a sonic weapon. It’s microwaves. It’s insecticide. The Russians are behind it. No, it’s the Cubans. The crickets. It’s mass suggestion” (Bartholomew 2019). In all, the health of twenty-six Canadian diplomats and family members was affected. A lawsuit against the Canadian government by former diplomats seeking \$28 million was initiated, and Ottawa replied by closing the consular section of the embassy and reducing significantly services offered by staff.

Cuban officials assisted all attempts to discover an explanation for the symptoms affecting U.S. and Canadian diplomats, and assisted Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) inquiries but were understandably frustrated by the downgrading of Canadian government services in Havana. Ongoing research is being undertaken by Canadian and Cuban neuroscientists to seek an explanation, although efforts to involve American colleagues have been rejected. Meanwhile, no definitive explanation to the mystery has resulted, a skeleton staff of Canadian bureaucrats works at the Embassy in Havana, consular work has been adversely affected, and there is concern regarding the lack of progress in Havana.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

After examining key periods in the bilateral relationship since 1959, some conclusions can be drawn. In many ways, Canada and Cuba have little in common, especially given the commercial and political influence of Ottawa’s neighbor to the south. To put this in context, the entire annual trade between Canada and Cuba is equivalent to approximately one half-day of trade between Canada and the United States. Fully 75 percent of Canada’s exports are to the United States, and economic relations account for about 20 percent of Canadian GDP. There are also strong cultural ties, with over twenty million Americans visiting annually, while twenty-seven million Canadians traveled to the United States in 2018.

Yet despite traditional political alliances between Ottawa and Washington, similarities in foreign policy, memberships in the same organizations, and extremely close commercial ties, on many occasions Canada has made clear

its differences with Washington in terms of policy toward Cuba. Official visits by Pierre Trudeau (1976), Jean Chrétien (1998), and Justin Trudeau (2016) have supported this traditionally independent policy toward Cuba. Even during the years when Stephen Harper was prime minister and was an extremely vocal critic of Cuba, normal relations were maintained—as were trade, cultural, and sports exchanges, and especially tourism. Indeed, as noted earlier, Harper also provided support for several meetings between Cuban and U.S. representatives that led to the re-opening of relations between Washington and Havana.

Canada has tremendous potential to collaborate with Cuba in many spheres. It has a solid tradition of respecting the Cuban revolutionary process—from the early 1960s. Canada, together with Mexico, were the only two countries in the Western Hemisphere that did not break diplomatic relations in 1962 when pressured by Washington. The strong personal ties between Fidel Castro and Pierre Trudeau, and the latter's visit in 1976, brought the diplomatic relationship to a different plane. Significantly, this close personal relationship continued for decades, and when Trudeau died in 2000 the family invited Fidel Castro to be an honorary pallbearer at his funeral.

For almost two decades, Canadian tourists have been the backbone of the industry—and are the single largest group of tourists to the island. The Canadian company Sherritt International, active in nickel mining and various energy initiatives, is the largest single investor on the island. Strong cultural, sports, and academic ties have been established for decades. Throughout the island the Terry Fox Run—a fund-raising campaign for cancer research and named after a Canadian folk hero who attempted to run across the country while battling cancer—is the largest in the world outside Canada.

There are consequently good reasons to explain this solid diplomatic relationship. Yet with few exceptions, Ottawa has never really appreciated the opportunity of developing bilateral ties to their full potential, probably because of the economic dependence on the United States. Canada has fallen behind initiatives on the island of other countries with far lesser interests—such as several European countries (the United Kingdom, France, Spain, Italy, and Norway, for example), as well as China and Japan. Ottawa still does not appear to realize that Canada could benefit substantially by collaborating with Havana in the Global South. The bilateral relationship is solid, and stable—but has not lived up to its potential.

In March 2020, at a reception held at the Cuban Embassy to celebrate the seventy-fifth anniversary of bilateral relations, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Marcelino Medina summarized well the nature of ties between Canada and Cuba. He emphasized the three main areas where the greatest progress had been made—commercial/trade, cultural, and tourism (Medina González 2020). A strong people-to-people tradition had evolved, with over a million Canadian

tourists visiting Cuba during the previous nine years. Canadian government support for the commercial and economic development had continued, while investment in mining, energy, oil and gas, food, and tourism were substantial.

The basis for this steady growth and development, he noted, was the fact that Canada had basically followed an independent policy toward Cuba since the 1960s—one which continued, as seen in Ottawa's opposition to the Helms/Burton legislation. For Medina, the nature of Canada-Cuba ties was clear:

The positive state of our bilateral relations is based upon mutual respect, and sovereign equality. The political dialogue at different levels and the broad exchange of official visits in recent years have allowed us to work in a constructive manner, maintaining a positive dialogue even when we have had different perspectives on matters pertaining to the international agenda. (Medina González 2020)

The official relationship between Canada and Cuba since 1959—and indeed since 1945—has been fairly cordial, and in many ways a model for dialogue and cooperation between two countries with different political systems and economic development. Fidel Castro himself regarded it as such.¹ Some sixty years later, it now appears to be an official and mutually beneficial state policy, to be maintained regardless of the ideology of the government of the day—bringing clear benefits to both countries.

NOTE

1. He noted this clearly in an after-dinner speech given to a visiting trade delegation from Nova Scotia in January 1994: "Yet despite these differences they have been our best friends—the most firm and loyal, the most independent. . . . I have always given Canadian-Cuban relations as an example to follow. What a pity that, instead of having the United States so close by, and Canada so far away, it wasn't the other way around. . . . So what are the Canadians? And I say that they are good people, wonderful people. And for all these reasons we Cubans are proud to be their friends." (cited in Kirk and McKenna 1997:182)

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Chapter 9

Cuba–China Relations and the Construction of Socialism

Adrian H. Hearn and Rafael Hernández

Cuba's relations with China are often depicted in both countries, and elsewhere, as harmonious. In a 2019 message to Raúl Castro, who relinquished Cuba's presidency one year prior, Chinese President Xi Jinping affirmed China's enduring support: "I wish to maintain a close relationship with you so that together we may write a new chapter of China-Cuba friendship for the new era" (Granma). But the harmony that currently prevails was forged from a complex and sometimes antagonistic history. Among the two nations' past disputes are Cuba's decision in the 1960s to ally itself with the Soviet Union as China vied for leadership of the Communist movement; China's 1979 invasion of Cuba's ally Vietnam, provoked by Vietnam's incursion into Cambodia a year earlier to depose the Khmer Rouge; and the 1988 conflict in Africa that saw Cuba and China back opposing sides. With the Soviet collapse at the end of the 1980s, Sino-Cuban relations began to warm, but the echoes of ideological tension linger into the twenty-first century.

In 2012, as Cuba set about implementing the resolution of the sixth Party Congress to "Update the Socialist Model," Fidel Castro commemorated the death fifteen years prior of China's "paramount leader" Deng Xiaoping: "He boasted of being a wise man and, undoubtedly, he was. But he made a small mistake. 'Cuba must be punished,' he said one day. Our country never even mentioned his name. It was an absolutely unwarranted offense" (Castro 2012). The epitaph reflects the contradictory and complex nature of bilateral relations.

As the two countries engage in reform programs—China since 1978 and Cuba since 2011—their visions of regulated private sectors are gaining traction. The two governments have ceded ground, with different pace and scope, to private businesses and the independent exchanges

they require. Both nations are grappling with resulting economic, social, and political transformations in their own ways, in the process updating and inflecting the concept socialism to align with their particular historic experiences, civic cultures, social structures, demographics, and geopolitical contexts.

This chapter analyses how Cuban and Chinese conceptions of socialism have converged and diverged, creating both opportunities and challenges. Ideological resonance, tension, and negotiation continue to the present day, revealing complex interactions behind the scenes of official declarations. The dynamics of these interactions reveal the internal transformations underway within both countries as they forge a new balance of state, market, and civil society forces.

China under President Xi Jinping is applying lessons learned by the generations who witnessed the Great Leap Forward (1958–1962) and endured the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976). In those years, often remembered for ideological radicalism and leadership purges, Xi and other young Chinese people experienced the extreme poverty of rural China. The political consciousness of China's current leaders is thus infused with commitments to resolving historically accumulated tensions within their political model. Crisis of a different kind shapes Cuban political thinking, which was influenced by the mid-1980s "Rectification of errors" and the post-Soviet hardships of the 1990s Special Period. While Cuba emerged intact from these upheavals, chronic stagnation to the present day has provoked awareness of the need for structural change not only of the economy but also of the encompassing socialist model. Underpinning these transformations is the long-standing need to renew and refresh the meaning of socialism in relation to changing conditions. This need conditions the current reform agenda both in China and in Cuba, and therefore inevitably shapes interactions between them.

The chapter's analysis of Cuban and Chinese approaches to socialism is enriched by a 2016 survey conducted by the coauthors at Renmin University in Beijing. The survey canvassed perceptions among Chinese students about socialism as an overarching framework to advance national interests and facilitate Sino-Cuban cooperation. Resulting Chinese appraisals of the bilateral relationship identified issues for Cuba and China to learn from each other's development experiences. Among these are the need to address growing inequalities, regional contrasts, the role of the public sector, and questions of citizen participation and democracy. In this regard, it is noteworthy that many respondents described Cuba as a source of inspiration in the pursuit of a more just, fair, and free socialist model. The final section considers Cuba's 2019 constitution to analyze the island's evolving socialist model and the degree to which this model can define its own future.

SINO-CUBAN ECONOMIC RELATIONS IN POLITICAL CONTEXT

China's importance for Cuba is widely recognized but, like accounts of other external foreign influences on the island, has obscured awareness of Cuba's independent political agency. This is evident in accounts of Cuba's economy in the second half of the 1960s as "Sino-Guevarist" and of the 1968 Revolutionary Offensive's nationalization campaign as a reflection of Stalinism (Mesa-Lago 1974). Such accounts do not sufficiently acknowledge the national priorities that drove these developments, nor Fidel Castro's public disagreements with Mao (since 1966) and with Soviet ideology (since 1962), nor Che Guevara's open criticism of clientelism arising from the Sino-Soviet split. Unfolding within the polarities of the Cold War, Cuba's relations with China and the Soviet Union were conditioned less by ideological affinities than the need to counterbalance geopolitical asymmetry with the United States (U.S.). Underpinning Cuba's strategy was the pursuit of political space for autonomous statecraft that alliances with China and the USSR could not by themselves provide.

The dynamics of alliance and autonomy illuminate more recent developments in Cuba's relations with the United States and China. They suggest, for instance, that steps taken by Raúl Castro and Barack Obama in 2014 toward bilateral normalization were not stimulated simply by Cuban acquiescence to U.S. pressure for economic reform. Domestic considerations in both countries were equally critical in the leadup to their rapprochement, as had also been the case for U.S. normalization with China and Vietnam. Indeed, Obama's pursuit of closer ties with Cuba resulted largely from favorable political circumstances within the United States during his second term. Accordingly, changes to these circumstances flowing from Donald Trump's "America First" policies have since halted the normalization process and generated new antagonisms with Cuba, China, and the rest of the world.

The window of bilateral hope that opened in 2014 gave rise to a wave of high-ranking foreign visitors to Cuba. For example, in September 2016, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani visited Cuba after attending the Non-Aligned Movement summit in Venezuela. Rouhani signed agreements on health, education, science, medicine, and banking with Raúl Castro; discussed global food security with Fidel; and substantiated the promise of his foreign minister to open a "new chapter" in bilateral relations (Marsh 2016). The same week as Rouhani's visit, Chinese Premier Li Keqiang conducted the highest-ranking Chinese mission to Cuba since Obama's visit in March 2016. Approximately, thirty agreements covering science, environment, industry, oil and gas, public health, and agriculture outlined the transfer of Chinese credits to sustain bilateral trade.

During this period, China became Cuba's second largest trade partner after Venezuela: from a base of just \$314 million in 2000, bilateral trade peaked at \$2.3 billion in 2007, fell sharply to \$1.6bn in 2009 during the global financial crisis, recovered to 2.2 bn in 2015 and then declined once again to \$1.6 billion in 2018 (see figure 9.1). At this time, growing tourism and remittances (surpassing \$3 billion in 2016) fueled the expansion of private restaurants, hostels, and taxis. Together with Raul Castro's policies to stimulate self-employed work, this injection of capital was critical for Cuba's emerging private sector. Also at this time, total labor force working in private urban and rural jobs (including private farmers and agricultural coops) increased from approximately 150,000 in 2010 to 500,000. The 2015 spike in Sino-Cuban trade reflected a sharp increase in Cuban imports of Chinese consumer goods, enabled by the easing of U.S. travel restrictions under Obama, increasing remittances and visits from Cuban emigres, and growing tourism from Canada and Europe. Chinese exporters were the main suppliers of electronic and other products made available in state stores in convertible pesos.

To increase the range of goods and services they provide to Cuba, Chinese exporters wished to see growing demand from the island and a broader range of projects made available for foreign investment. Conversely, to attract foreign investments and trade, the Cuban government created the Port of Mariel and it is associated with Special Development Zone as a secure

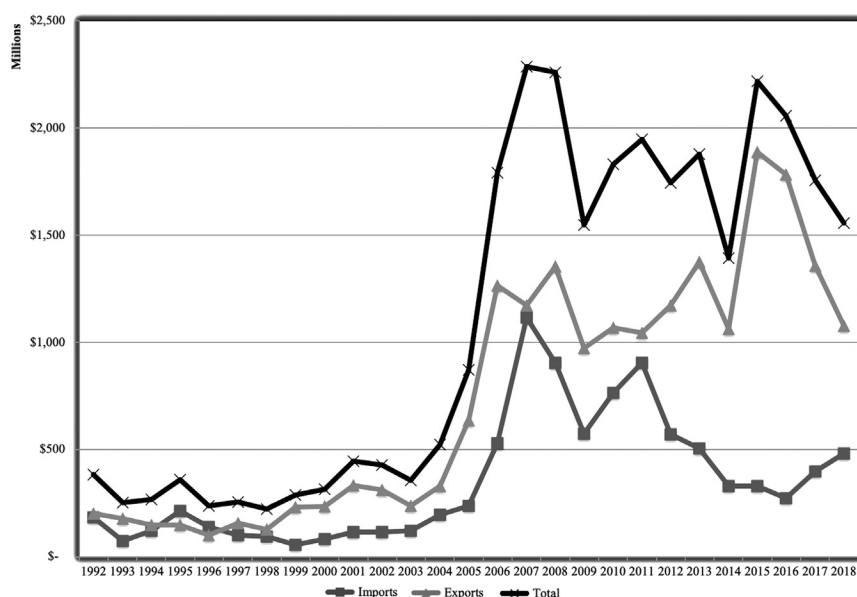


Figure 9.1 Cuba's Trade with China as Reported by China, 1992–2018. *Sources:* UN-Comtrade 2020.

manufacturing hub for foreign investors (see figure 9.2). In an attempt to attract Chinese investment, Cuban Foreign Trade and Investment Minister Rodrigo Malmierca spoke of Mariel’s relevance for Chinese exporters, which he hoped might use it as a distribution hub for markets in the Caribbean, Central America, and Mexico. No other Caribbean Basin port can currently accommodate the “post-panamax” (extra large) cargo vessels that will pass through the Panama Canal when it has been widened. The revamped port could therefore become a way station for vessels bound for the Americas, as well as for those on their way to Europe and elsewhere.

The SOE China Communications Construction Company Limited was experienced with Cuban maritime infrastructure, as it was upgrading the Port of Santiago de Cuba. Financed by a \$120 million line of credit provided during Xi Jinping’s 2014 visit, the project renovated the docking facility to a depth of eleven meters, accommodating vessels carrying loads up to 50,000 tons (double the former cargo limit). Featuring a 200-meter multipurpose quay, three gantry cranes, and two cargo warehouses, the Port of Santiago de Cuba has employed approximately 500 people in construction and operations. Dwarfing the Port of Santiago de Cuba, the expanded Mariel port is intended to compete with existing Caribbean transshipment hubs in Kingston (Jamaica), Caucedo (Dominican Republic), and Manzanillo (Panama). If Mariel’s development proceeds as envisioned, it will handle over two million cargo containers annually, more than doubling its present capacity and significantly augmenting Cuba’s foreign trade.



Figure 9.2 The Mariel Special Development Zone Under Construction. *Sources:* Photograph by Adrian Hearn, 2016.

According to Ricardo Cabrisas, vice president of Cuba's Council of Ministers, Mariel's scale and ambition were inspired by the Chinese Port of Shenzhen and its associated special economic zone. Mariel's first phase was completed in January 2014 and inaugurated by Raúl Castro and Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff, whose government loaned Cuba \$682 million for the \$950 million project. Cuba's commitment to the project is evident in the associated infrastructure and facilities already installed, including a 65-kilometer railway, completed in 2014, connecting the Mariel port to Havana. Raúl Pérez Ramos, vice-minister of transport, has stated his intention to acquire 240 additional train cars from China at an estimated cost of \$150 million.

The Cuban government has sought Chinese participation in the Special Development Zone adjacent to the revamped Mariel port. In September 2013, Raul Castro signed a decree permitting foreign firms to import goods duty free into the zone and to remain exempt from taxation on profits for ten years. Unlike previous regulations that required external investors to form joint ventures with the Cuban state, the new framework permits 100 percent foreign ownership and contracts of up to fifty years. Spanning 465 square kilometers, the zone is expected to generate 8,000 jobs, one-third of which in ongoing duties within the zone. In the Chinese pavilion at the 2013 Havana International Trade Fair, Minister Malmierca told representatives from sixty-five Chinese enterprises that "the Chinese companies that today produce in China and bring their goods here could produce here in Cuba, in this special zone . . . with many incentives" (China Daily 2013).

Although expectations about Chinese investments in Cuba during the boom in bilateral trade in 2015–2016 were overly optimistic, the economic and cooperative relationship has advanced in some key strategic areas. China replaced Venezuela as Cuba's leading trade partner in 2016, with Cuba selling 27 percent of its exports to China, led by sugar, nickel, and other primary products. As in other Latin American and Caribbean countries, China reciprocates these exports with household appliances and consumer products.

The dynamics of China-Cuba bilateral trade reflect the changing international context preceding the COVID-19 crisis. The pandemic's effect on other Cuban suppliers (Venezuela, Spain, Mexico, Brazil, Russia) may strengthen the position of China as a leader among these providers, as well as its profile among foreign investors. Although China is Cuba's leading trade partner, it is not a major recipient of the main services the island exports: tourism and the provision of medical services to sixty-seven countries. Nevertheless, several strategic value-adding sectors show promise for bilateral coordination. These include higher education and the development of artificial intelligence, for instance, in the construction of hospital centers where Cuba's medical capacity and China's advances in cybernetics come together. This cooperation involves not only institutions centered in Havana and Beijing, but also others

such as the Hebei University of International Studies, the medical universities of Camagüey, Holguín, the Latin American School of Medicine, and the National School of Public Health.

COVID-19 accelerated the Chinese-Cuban joint venture ChangHeber in Jilin province, which is mass producing the Cuban antiviral recombinant Interferon alfa 2B (IFNrec) following its selection by China together with thirty other medications to treat COVID patients. As with other trademarks of the Cuban biomedical industry, this drug stimulates the autoimmune system to face HIV, human papilloma, and hepatitis types B and C. Between 2016 and 2020 successive Sino-Cuban joint ventures based on biotechnological innovation also developed other value-adding drugs, such as Nimotuzumab-R3 to treat brain tumors.

Another significant area of cooperation is public transport. Cubans identify China's Yutong brand with an improvement that has allowed, for the first time in sixty years, the organized and regularized service of interprovincial buses. In the modernization of the Cuban railways, intact since 1975, Chinese collaboration has promised more than 200 cars and locomotives, a part of which started operating in the summer of 2019, both for passengers and for cargo transportation in sectors such as sugar, cement, and other products.

Having learned the dangers of dependency on the Soviet bloc, Cuba has avoided reliance on a single investor for its transport sector, sourcing a significant part of related infrastructure from the Russia Federation alongside China. Russian enterprises are contracted to provide one hundred freight cars and to restore Cuba's most important train route, the so-called "Central Line," a project described as "the flagship project of both nations' relations" (Cabrisas 2018).

Advances in cooperation in the area of electronic media and tourism are showing progress, although they also reveal deficits on the Cuban side. The bilateral partnership in television and radio that started in 2013 allowed the introduction of digital television through credit and technical assistance from Beijing. However, beyond the timid exchange of canned programs, the cultural and informational impact of this collaboration in electronic media on both sides remains limited and little used in Cuban television production.

In the tourism sector, the Chinese tour operator Ctrip has recently signed an agreement with Cuba that aspires to build on the 41,369 Chinese tourists who visited the island in 2019 according to Cuba's Ministry of Tourism. Cuba could emulate China's domestic strategy in this sector, which relies heavily on educational and heritage tourism alongside leisure travel. The massive lines to enter the Forbidden City in Tiananmen Square and the tomb where the terracotta warriors guard the Emperor Qin, in the city of Xi'an, place great value on national history, including China's revolution. The vast majority of Chinese tourists who travel domestically are not wealthy businesspeople but

rather represent a diverse range of backgrounds, including farmers from the most remote provinces. This approach to inclusive and educational tourism is well suited to Cuba's economic and political circumstances. As the next section shows, political circumstances have permeated Sino-Cuban relations for more than fifty years. Over that time, modes of cooperation between the two nations have never been static; rather, they reflect fluid and changing conceptions of socialism.

SAVING SOCIALISM

In 1991, Cuba entered a perfect storm comprising three factors: the demise of the Soviet bloc; the tightening of the U.S. embargo; and the declining performance of the 1976 socialist model, which was already sending precrisis signals throughout the second half of the 1980s. The storm was called *special period in times of peace*, a war-like scenario similar to the one imagined in military preparations for U.S. aggression three decades prior. The special period precipitated a 75 percent reduction in Cuba's import capacity and a 35 percent decline in GDP. China played an important but little-known role in seeing Cuba through this tumultuous period.

The Chinese Communist Party had also come under domestic pressure for change at this time. Despite the Tiananmen Square event in 1989, it was able to respond to public demands and manage the political crisis through a decade of sincere commitment to opening the economy, improving living standards, and creating jobs. Arriving in Havana in June 1989, just days after the Tiananmen incident, Chinese Foreign Minister Qian Qichen was warmly received by Fidel Castro. The gesture was deeply appreciated in Beijing, since every other country on Qian's itinerary had canceled his visit. As Cheng Yinghong notes, China's relationship with Cuba became "one of the most important Sino-foreign relations in the eyes of the post-Tiananmen Chinese leaders" (Yinghong 2007, 727).

The show of solidarity was mutually beneficial: in 1993, a time when many governments believed the downfall of the Cuban Revolution was imminent, Chinese President Jiang Zemin broke the island's isolation with a state visit and an offer of financial assistance. According to a Chinese official interviewed by the authors in Beijing, Jiang conducted the visit to "save Cuba's revolutionary project," expressly against the advice of some Communist Party leaders.

A vision of statecraft underpinned Jiang's decision, driven by five factors. First, he and other Chinese foreign policy leaders believed that Cuba was for the United States what Taiwan was for China. Therefore, as Taiwan became increasingly aggravating for China, especially as the first Bush administration

strengthened its ties with the island, Jiang perceived opportunity in mirroring this dynamic by strengthening ties with Cuba. The second factor also concerned Taiwan, particularly its maintenance of diplomatic recognition by numerous countries in Central America and the Caribbean. Cuba's political influence throughout the region was perceived in Beijing as a means of leverage against Taiwan, particularly as Cuba's alliance with Venezuela deepened. The third factor was economic, owing to China's need—and Cuba's capacity to provide—nickel and cobalt while opening opportunities for investment in mining, oil drilling, biotechnology, and tourism. These potential benefits justified ongoing financial support, insurance, and the rescheduling of Cuba's debt. Fourth was Jiang's desire to consolidate China's leadership of international socialism, advanced by saving a collapsing socialist economy and sending a message to Third World economies that Beijing's influence was growing. The final factor concerned military cooperation, including the exchange of high-level military delegations, which asserted China's foreign policy agenda while maintaining a discourse peaceful enough to avoid hostile reactions from the United States.

Raúl Castro, serving at the time as Cuba's vice president, showed interest in effecting domestic economic reforms and in building a new relationship with China. According to a former employee of the Cuban embassy in Beijing interviewed by the authors, Raúl's 1997 "week-long learning trip" to China actually consisted of a month of research into Chinese approaches to industrial reform, privatization, and urban development. As the evidence collected by Hal Klepak shows, the military institutions Raúl crafted on his return to manage operations in tourism and agriculture were subjected to essentially the same pressures as Chinese firms: to produce, be accountable, and make a profit. His efforts to this end were assisted by visiting Chinese advisors, such as a specialist appointed by Zhu Rongji, the future premier, to share insights into China's experience with foreign investment.

Another visitor was Mao Xianglin, a special envoy of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, who developed action plans for expanding Cuban consumer markets. This involved the establishment in 1997 of a bicycle factory with Chinese capital and technical expertise and a facility for producing electric fans and household consumer goods. Mao described this strategy as an incremental process:

I would hesitate to say that our Cuban manufacturing operations are entirely commercial, because what we're doing is broader than that. We're trying to help Cuba to incrementally upgrade its technical ability. If our products prove popular and useful then we assist by setting up factories. . . . It is interesting that China learned from the United States how to manage its economy, and now Latin America looks to China as a teacher of socialism! (Interview, December 14, 2007)

Mao Xianglin's mission in Cuba was driven by the goal of modernizing Cuba's infrastructure to enable the country's integration into international markets.

As noted, some Chinese Communist Party leaders were privately less enthusiastic about Cuba than Jiang Zemin was, and to this day, some Chinese officials are concerned about the slow recovery of the Cuban economy particularly since this has delayed the repayment of loans. Although the amount of Cuba's debt to China is not published, announced loans now exceed \$6 billion, largely in the form of trade credits bestowed during high-level Chinese visits. According to Chinese officials quoted by a U.S. diplomat in Havana, discussions between China and Cuba about carrying through Chinese-style reforms to kick-start the economy and permit foreign investment have become "a real headache" (Wikileaks 2010). China nevertheless continues to financially and politically support the Cuban government, indicating Beijing's confidence, according to some observers, that the latter's reforms will eventually yield economic results, among them the repayment of loans.

Bilateral relations thus reflect a blend of political and economic factors, evident during President Xi's visit to Havana in 2014. Xi committed China Minmetals Corporation to purchasing \$600 million of Cuban nickel and commended Cuba for "persisting on the socialist path, firmly safeguarding the sovereignty of the state" (Pérez 2014). Such statements have become an expected ceremonial feature of presidential visits between the two nations, equally prominent during Raúl Castro's 2012 visit to Beijing, when he praised China's scientific progress, humanitarianism, economic stability, and faithful pursuit of socialism. Cheng Yinghong argues that these rhetorical endorsements carried genuine value for the Chinese state:

Cuba has been perceived as the most unyielding and thus the most admirable anti-American hero who, as the Chinese government has introduced to its people, sets an example of the defiance of 'international pressures' and of survival against all odds. In this way the image of Cuba has facilitated China's newly emerging nationalism. The hardliners, old Maoists and new leftists have looked upon Cuba as the example of the socialism purer than China's. (Yinghong 2007, 728)

Cheng's argument raises questions about how socialism is understood in Cuba and China, and how these visions coincide or diverge. For nearly three decades, Chinese officials have advised their Cuban counterparts to liberalize markets and empower private actors, while at the same time extolling the virtues of assertive state leadership as a fundamental principle of socialist development. It is only since Raúl Castro assumed the presidency in 2008

that the Cuban government has shown genuine interest in formulating and applying such a blended approach at home.

Although leaders from both countries acknowledge that liberalization implies a greater role for the private sector and civil society, it is noteworthy that bilateral exchanges remain devoid of contact between nonstate actors. Nearly all aspects of formal engagement are designed and managed through governmental accords, limiting the potential for cooperation between the two nations to keep pace with developments within them. Interactions between emerging Cuban small businesses, cooperatives, and nongovernmental organizations and their more established Chinese counterparts could provide a broader basis for building trade, understanding, and trust. The formulation of legal guidelines for regulating such exchanges would also enable both sides to more effectively contain informal connections (Hearn 2012).

A prerequisite for the emergence of more heterogeneous forms of Sino-Cuban engagement is legal authorization and economic capacitation to develop autonomous partnerships, conduct trade, and host independent meetings, conferences, and forums. As the Cuban private sector gains strength, to forbid such activities is to invite unregistered trade, clandestine negotiations, and political dissent. The Cuban government is moving toward a more flexible and tolerant style of governance that accommodates a broader range of socioeconomic voices. As Raúl Castro's reform policies gain momentum, and as China advances its own forms of openness, cooperation between independent Cuban and Chinese actors will become more likely (Hearn 2016). So far, though, the realization of this prospect remains unsubstantiated and aspirational.

State authority has historically been an important feature of Cuban and Chinese visions of socialism, but "socialism with Chinese characteristics" has been evolving for decades in step with China's economic integration with the United States. With the prospect of normalized trade and investment with the United States on Cuba's horizon, China's experiences with the United States may harbor useful insights.

According to twelve Chinese officials interviewed in Beijing, the main impediment to improving China's relations with the United States has been mistrust. This sentiment permeates everything from United States attempts to promote "good governance" and democratization in China to incompatible military strategies in the South China Sea. Despite these sources of distrust, prior to the Trump administration political determination on both sides gradually moved bilateral relations away from confrontation toward dialogue, negotiation, and cooperation particularly in the economic sphere. When asked how Cuba might gain insight from China regarding relations with the United States, the officials emphasized the importance of strengthening business exchanges, expanding dialogue with U.S. corporations nationalized in

the 1960s, deepening market reforms, and reengaging with those who have moved overseas. China's experiences of rapprochement with the United States, and of development more broadly, are clearly relevant to Cuba. As the next section shows, Chinese assessments of this relevance include awareness of the need to avoid the inequalities and injustices that have accompanied China's rapid economic growth.

SURVEYING CHINESE PERSPECTIVES

In July 2016, the authors conducted a survey at Renmin University of China to gauge students' perceptions of Sino-Cuban relations and their understandings of socialism. We asked fifty-six English-speaking respondents to anonymously indicate strong agreement, agreement, neutrality, disagreement, and strong disagreement with sixteen statements. As discussed below, they were also invited to answer an open-ended question in their own words. Our sample furnished insight into the views of educated young people, providing a sense of how emerging thought leaders understand connections between models of domestic governance—socialism in particular—and approaches to foreign affairs.

The survey results confirmed some of our expectations and challenged others. As expected, the sample recognized shared political ideology as an encompassing feature of Sino-Cuban relations. A total of thirty-nine agreed with the statement that "Differences among socialist countries, such as China and Cuba, are a consequence of their different histories and cultures, but they share the same ideologies" (interviews, July 2016). More than two decades of diplomatic differences over relations with the Soviet Union, accompanied by the slower pace of market reform in Cuba compared to China, have apparently not shaken the impression that ideological solidarity remains a linchpin of bilateral exchange. The statements of President Xi and others, as quoted at the beginning of this chapter, have likely strengthened perceptions of socialist affinity.

Despite their consensus about the importance of ideology, the statement that "A strong public sector and a dynamic market economy can coexist better in a socialist than in a capitalist system" drew a mixed response (5 strongly agreed, 20 agreed, 15 neither agreed nor disagreed, 10 disagreed, and one did not answer). Our sample was thus undecided on the capacity of socialism and capitalism to attain a successful blend of state and market forces. Achieving this blend has been a central goal of China's reforms since the early 1980s, evident most strikingly in the introduction of special economic zones in Shenzhen and other South-Eastern port cities, the recent expansion of economic freedoms in the Shanghai Free Trade Zone, and the current application of successful results (negative lists, national treatment for investors, among others) to other industrial sectors (*ibid.*).

Given China's success in this regard, the respondents were less united than we expected behind the view that socialism provides the best platform for achieving a mixed economy. Their varied response may reflect the scarcity of counterexamples: barring outright revolutions, few capitalist countries have explicitly sought to become more socialist. Their opinions may also have been influenced by the views of senior Chinese commentators that Latin America's "pink tide" or "left turn" in the first decade of the 2000s was a positive development but lacked a clear social and economic strategy. In the words of senior Latin America specialist Jiang Shixue, Latin America's left-leaning leaders during this period were "full of new ideas about socialism but lacking any coherent, guiding, and long-term principles. In China, the approach to socialism has been more carefully thought out over decades" (interview, December 10, 2007).

The respondents viewed China's approach to resolving the tensions of a mixed economy as exemplary: nineteen strongly agreed and thirty-four agreed with the statement that "Cuba can learn from China how to balance state control with market forces." This is perhaps not surprising for a cohort of students familiar with China's developmental achievements: 700 million people lifted out of poverty since 1980, reduction of extreme poverty from 84 to 10 percent over the same period, average GDP growth of more than 9 percent since the mid-1980s, among others. The students perceived Cuba as walking the Chinese path, introducing reforms that China has been trialing and refining for more than three decades (*ibid.*).

The cohort's confidence that China has paved the way for Cuba to emulate some of its achievements contrasts with more ambivalent responses to our open-ended question: "Describe in a few sentences your vision of China's socialist development today." Common themes in response to this question were the need to strengthen individual rights and overcome growing inequality, evident in answers like these:

- "China's government has made projects to develop our country quickly and reduce poverty. . . . China's future has to find a better way to listen to normal people because they often are forgotten and left behind."
- "People who work in big factories like the ones in Shenzhen sometimes suffer a lot and do not see their families. We are the 'factory of the world' because we have the most efficient and cost-effective way. Cubans can learn from China about efficiency and economic growth but we are not an equal society. We have to try not to teach Cuba to be unequal like us." (*Ibid.*)

Such responses indicate a belief that China's pursuit of socialist development has been uneven and at times unjust. The subordination of personal

interests to large government-mobilized development projects was recognized not as a necessary sacrifice for the greater good, but as a contradiction to the core values of socialism.

How Cuba might emulate China's industrial achievements while avoiding the injustices that have accompanied them was identified as a challenge for the future of bilateral relations. Practical expression of this challenge may emerge in the Mariel Free Trade Zone, which like Shenzhen is prioritizing "efficient and cost-effective" production. But labor conditions in the processing plants of Southern China are a far cry from Cuban experiences of work and visions of socialism. As Cuban anthropologist Yenisel Rodríguez writes, "we are not so economically desperate that a *maquiladora* can bring us the taste of liberation" (Hernández, Rodríguez, and Triana 2011, 39). Cuban formulations of socialism, it seems, may not align with Chinese modalities of work and will no doubt temper any such encounters with local values.

In 2016 China's leading newspaper *Xinhua* appointed prominent journalist Ma Guihua as its chief correspondent in Cuba. We asked Ma about Chinese perceptions of Cuba and the media's role in shaping these. Her response resonated with the finding of our survey that Cuba is seen by many as an unspoiled nation that can learn from China's developmental advances, avoid its mistakes, and even inspire fresh Chinese visions of socialism:

China's economy is now transitioning, with abundant manufacturing capacity searching for an outlet to benefit other countries that want to modernize. Cuba could take advantage of China's expertise to jumpstart its economy and develop its own national industries. But China's remarkable development has not come without costs. Environmental pollution is a case in point, which Cuba, whose economy relies on tourism and sustainability, should steer away from. Also, China has witnessed huge disparities between rich and poor owing to market-oriented reforms of the education and health systems. Through our reporting we tell the Chinese people Cuba's story of cultural preservation, social justice, free education and health, and innovations in drugs and medicine. Cuba's story inspires Chinese people to improve their own circumstances. (Interview, December 4, 2016)

As noted above by Cheng Yinghong, many Chinese people view Cuba as an example of "socialism purer than China's." Cheng argues in a later article that Cuba has come to function as "a mirror for China's own reflection" because sensitive topics such as inequality and political dissent are not easily broached within China unless projected onto a foreign "other" (Yinghong 2012). This discursive tactic has opened spaces for debate about governance models that could overcome the contradictions of socialism as practiced in China and elsewhere.

CONCLUSION

The convergence of Cuban and Chinese policies in global affairs and domestic governance is a relatively new feature of their relations. Although they established diplomatic relations in 1960, the subsequent three decades were marked by differences over the leadership of the Non-Aligned and national liberation movements, the Sino-Soviet split, Cuba's close relationship with the Soviet Union and Vietnam, and competing interests in Asia and Africa. The Soviet collapse favored Sino-Cuban rapprochement, which set in motion what one Chinese newspaper called a "period of completely new and steady development" that saw China become Cuba's largest trade partner and political ally (People's Daily 1996).

In relation to the United States, since the 1970s China has developed a more cooperative relationship than Cuba. Despite the current tensions around trade that characterize Sino-U.S. relations under Trump, bilateral dialogue remains stronger than can be said for Cuba and its northern neighbor (Domínguez, Hernández and Barberia 2017). Cuba and China have nevertheless both tended to diverge from U.S. positions on international issues while converging with each other, for instance in relation to Venezuela. The tendency is also evident in their approaches to Africa, where complementary Chinese and Cuban interests have replaced the opposing alliances forged in the 1970s and 1980s. Africa's profile in China's global strategy has grown exponentially to become a prominent feature of Beijing's emerging Belt and Road Initiative. For Cuba, twenty-eight countries of the continent are now important partners for education and health cooperation. Cuba and China also converge with each other, and diverge from the United States, in their deepening relations with Russia over the past decade. Soviet competitive tensions with China during the Cold War, and acrimonious estrangement with Cuba at its conclusion, have given way to a renaissance of trade and diplomacy with both (Hernández and Hosek 2019).

The post-Cold War period has seen Cuba and China pursue economic and political reforms according to their distinct yet related socialist models. Questions have arisen for both nations about the capacity of socialism to provide an overarching framework for blending state and market inputs and for serving citizens' interests. Chinese officials interviewed by the authors between 2016 and 2019 recommended that Cuba "not go too fast" so that it might soften the side effects of reform, including inequality and corruption. However, in Cuba, the consensus in the recent years has been to "not go too slow." Looking at China and Vietnam, many Cubans, including some scholars and government officials, envy their Asian socialist friends' big leaps forward in generating economic growth and diminishing poverty. While they

wish to achieve comparable advances, the same individuals do not support privatization of education and healthcare, social security restrictions, working hours that exceed eight hours, and systemic discrimination that ties women and Afro-descendants to low incomes. Balancing the tensions implicit in socially inclusive economic reform has been a priority in Cuba, evident in the nation's 2019 Human Development Index score of 0.778, positioning it seventy-second in the world. This puts Cuba ahead of Mexico, Thailand, Brazil, and China, which scores 0.758 (eighty-fifth in the world) (United Nations Development Program 2019).

Updating the socialist model in Cuba is widely understood as meaning more than catching up with China and Vietnam in economic terms. It also means building a prosperous, sustainable, sovereign, and democratic socialism with a higher degree of civic participation and public sphere vitality. As numerous scholars in Cuba and China have pointed out, local participation should entail not only voting and supporting political institutions but also exercising control and influence over them. This is widely recognized as a foundation of accountability, transparency, and effective struggle against bureaucratic power and corruption.

Teaching in China between 2016 and 2019 gave us, the coauthors, a unique opportunity to learn about the challenges facing Chinese politics and society. Hearing students discuss the meaning of socialism, the history of China's revolution, the policies of Reform and Opening, the role of the Party, and the lights and shadows of transition opened a window into the complex fabric of Chinese society that revealed the tips of challenges hardly perceptible from afar. Our survey helped to clarify how young Chinese people understand socialism as a platform for national development and international cooperation, illuminating the attitudes of a demographically specific but potentially influential cohort. While the results cannot be generalized, they suggest that visions of socialism are far from uniform. Responses on the capacity of socialism to blend state and market forces were mixed, as were those on participation and democracy, but there was a consensus that economic and political ties with Cuba are strong enough to allow communication about best practices in both directions.

The ambivalent responses to the survey's open question (soliciting reflections on the trajectory of China's socialist development) suggest that insights into best practices may be drawn as much from China's mistakes as its successes. Just as Cuba may draw lessons from China to better coordinate development planning, it should avoid the socioeconomic inequalities, regional contrasts, and ecological damage generated by rapid growth. Local solutions to local challenges will be more important for Cuba than strategies gleaned from afar, and may ultimately generate fresh approaches to reconstructing socialism both at home and overseas.

The Chinese students in one of our courses watched the classic 1966 Cuban film “Memories of Underdevelopment” by Tomás Gutiérrez Alea. After a fascinating debate about the problems, contradictions, and achievements of socialism in Cuba and China, one student asked a question whose implications remained implicit and floating in the air at the end of class: “Was that film really able to be shown in Cuba in those years?” Conveying a Chinese perception of relative freedom of expression in Cuba, the question evokes a fruitful topic for future debate, communication, and mutual learning between the two socialist societies.

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Chapter 10

Cuba–European Union Relations

A Complex and Multifaceted Relationship

Liliana Fernández Mollinedo and Mervyn J. Bain

Since the Spanish conquest of Cuba in 1492, the island has had close relations with several outside powers, a number of which have been European. Beginning with over four centuries of Spanish colonial rule, this European influence was followed for a much shorter period of time by Great Britain. During this period of time, when London had control of Havana for a ten-month period from August 1762 until May 1763, Cuban society was radically impacted, not least the Cuban economy being opened to a mercantilist economic system.¹ Third, from 1960 until 1991 the Soviet Union, and ensuing Cold War era involving the United States (U.S.), again reshaped much of Cuba.

The foundation of U.S. influence cannot be overlooked when considering relations with Europe. From December 1898, when Cuba was no longer governed by Spain until the emergence of the Cuban Revolution in January 1959, the island experienced a period of “pseudo democracy” due to economic and political control that the United States had over Cuba. The complexities of the relationship between Havana and Washington is thoroughly examined in the first section of this book. However, since January 1959, Cuba’s relationship with the United States has, in general, impacted the island’s relationships with third-party countries and will be discussed further in this section of the book. Thus, Cuba’s relations with individual European countries, as well as Cuban-European Union (EU) relations, have been no different.

This chapter will examine Cuba’s relationship with Europe throughout the revolutionary period but will largely omit Havana-Moscow relations which are examined in a later chapter. This chapter’s structure will follow a general chronological order with the first section focusing on the Cold War period and the second section examining the years since 1992. Key bilateral relationships will also be examined in the first section as will the growth of the European integration project from the early 1950s onwards because both

its expansion in terms of member states and remit, particularly concerning a coordinated foreign policy among its members were fundamental for the organization's relationship with Cuba. Additionally, Cuban trade with the European members of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA) will also be scrutinized. Much attention in the second section of the chapter will be given to not only the tension which emerged between Cuba and the European Union in the mid-1990s but also the apparent contradictions and pressures within the organization's common policy toward the island. The reasons for the removal of the common position will also be examined before some thoughts on both the present robust nature of Cuban-EU relations and possible future scenarios are offered.

COLD WAR RELATIONS

Tension between Havana and Washington quickly emerged after January 1959 with United States aggression toward Cuba being both political and economic. In the autumn of 1960, a partial embargo against Cuba was instigated, before in February 1962, a complete economic, commercial, and financial embargo was implemented. The embargo's goal was to "prevent money and supplies to Cuba, which will cause real salaries to fall resulting in financial problems and desperation for the population with this ultimately causing the government to be overthrown" (Memorandum del gob estadounidense de 1961). Although this was the case, the island's relationship with Europe was somewhat different. Cuba's relationship with Eastern European countries (several of which would gain membership to the EU at the beginning of the twenty-first century) was within the parameters of the socialist block. Trade between Cuba and the Eastern European countries increased after Cuba gained membership to the CMEA, or the socialist trading community, in June 1972 (Granma 1972, 1).² By 1988, Cuban trade with the CMEA in its entirety exceeded 80 percent of the island's global trade and Cuban-Eastern European trade was over 14 percent of Cuban global trade (Mesa-Lago 1993, 139).

However, the situation with Western Europe was somewhat different, despite the U.S. embargo very quickly acquiring an extraterritorial nature. Washington applied pressure on various western European governments in an attempt to curb trade with Cuba which, by the mid-1960s, resulted in a drop in number of cargo ships traveling from western Europe to the island. Furthermore, in 1966 France, under duress from Washington, stopped the sale of \$35m USD of heavy equipment, which was to be paid in credits, to Cuba (Morley 1984). Although this was the case, trade between Cuba and Western Europe grew from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s. In 1965, trade with Western Europe constituted 14.4 percent of the island's global trade

before rising to 17.6 percent in 1970 and reaching 21 percent of Cuba's global trade in 1975. Subsequently, trade levels fell before rising again in the late 1980s, detailed below (Mesa-Lago 1993, 139).

The outcome was that Cuba continued to trade with Western Europe throughout the revolutionary period despite U.S. pressure on Western Europe to curtail its trade with the island. Moreover, misgivings had been apparent about possible more nefarious U.S. influence on European trade with Cuba. First, there were the mysterious events surrounding the explosion of the French freighter *La Coubre* in Havana harbor which was carrying munitions to Cuba in March 1960. Second, in October 1964, there was the accident on the River Thames in London, UK, between the East German freighter, *MV Magdeburg*, which was leaving the United Kingdom destined for Cuba with a cargo of British Leyland Buses, and the Japanese ship, *Yamashiro Maru*.³ Subsequently, Cuba's relationship with Western Europe has been described as a "fractured blockade" as it had not adhered to pressure from the United States to limit trade with Cuba and that "without European links the revolution might well have foundered" (Hennessy and Lambie 1993, 11–63). Additionally, unlike the United States, Western European countries displayed a level of empathy for the Cuban Revolution and did not break diplomatic relations with Cuba.

Moreover, just prior to the appearance of the Cuban Revolution the European integration project, with its foundations in post–World War II, had materialized. The basis of the European integration project was the desire to create increased economic, social, and political ties in order to foster greater pan European collaboration, prosperity, and military security in order to avert the possibility of future wars. Consequently, on April 18, 1951, the Treaty of Paris was signed which created the European Coal and Steel Community with six founding members: Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands (Dinan 2014). At first this organization was primarily focused on economics, but over time, the organization's infrastructure increased (a Council of Ministers, Common Assembly and Court of Justice were established) and on March 25, 1957, the six members signed the Treaty of Rome that created both the European Atomic Energy Community (Euratom) and the European Economic Community (EEC).

The creation of the EEC resulted in the establishment of the Common Assembly (renamed the European Parliament in 1962), that also eliminated several barriers to the movement of goods, services, capital, and labor. Moreover, a common external trading policy was also created which subsequently generated pressure for common foreign and development policies. Consequently, in the early 1970s, the European Political Cooperation (EPC, which in the early 1990s was renamed the Common Foreign and Security Policy) was founded with the organization's foreign ministers meeting on a

regular basis. On July 1, 1987, the Single European Act (SEA) was signed which provided the EPC with legal status and furthered coordination of foreign policies among member states (Dinan 2014). The existence of common trading policies (specifically the common foreign policy) would be vital for the organization's relationship with Cuba, detailed below.

In a similar vein, the ongoing expansion of the organization (on February 7, 1992 the EEC officially become the European Union with the signing of the Maastricht Treaty) would also impact its relationship with Cuba. On January 1, 1973, this process resulted in Denmark, Ireland, and the UK gaining membership with further enlargement in the 1980s taking place. On January 1, 1981, Greece became a member of the EEC and on January 1, 1986, Portugal and Spain joined the organization (Dinan 2014). It has been argued that Spain's membership to the EEC was particularly crucial to the organization's relationship with Cuba due to the shared histories between the two countries (Roy 2018, 202). Bilateral Cuban-EU relations were further impacted by the organization's continuing enlargement in the twenty-first century.

In 1986, when Spain gained membership to the EEC, the government in Madrid was the Spanish Socialist Workers Party (PSOE) headed by Felipe González. This was significant for the organization's relationship with Cuba because of the high degree of sympathy for the Cuban Revolution that existed in Madrid at this time. The ideological alignment between the Madrid and Havana governments, in combination with other Western European countries which chose not to break diplomatic relations with Cuba (as noted above), as well as continual trade with the island throughout the revolutionary period, were all foundationally important for the creation of Cuban-EEC relations in September 1988 (Roy 2018, 202).

Also significant for the creation of Cuban-EEC relations were the changes sweeping through Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union at the time resulting from the effects of the Soviet reforms instigated by Mikhail Gorbachev (as detailed in a later chapter). These reforms had started to adversely affect the economies of the European members of the CMEA and consequently the non-European members' economies, including Cuba. Put simply, Cuba needed alternative trading partners and the EEC provided this opportunity. The result was that trade between Cuba and the EEC countries increased from 7.0 percent of the island's total trade in 1988 to 8.4 percent in 1989, while simultaneously Cuba's trade with the Eastern members of the CMEA fell sharply in the same period (Mesa-Lago 1993, 139). Moreover, this upward trend in Cuban-EU trade would continue in the post-Cold War period and is detailed below.

Cuba has a long and complex relationship with Europe. After the emergence of the Cuban Revolution, this relationship was further complicated by U.S. aggression toward the island with U.S. policy containing extraterritorial

elements. Although this was the case, Eastern Europe (aided by Cuba's membership of the CMEA in the summer of 1972) and Western Europe both continued to trade with Cuba and were also more politically sympathetic toward Cuba than the United States was. Additionally, the continuous enlargement of the European integration project both in terms of membership and remit aided the creation of Cuban-EEC relations in September 1988. Cuba's desire for alternative trading partners due to deteriorating trade levels with Eastern European countries, resulting from adverse effects of the Soviet reforms of the mid to late 1980s, was also important for the creation of Cuba-EEC relations. During the Cold War, Cuba's relationship with Europe aided the survival of the revolution due to ongoing tension in Cuban-U.S. relations. The island's relationship with the EU would become even more important, albeit complicated, in the post–Cold War era.

POST–COLD WAR RELATIONS

As noted above, Cuba began facing increased economic difficulties shortly after the adverse and unforeseen effects of the mid-to-late 1980s Soviet reform process. The changes taking place in Eastern Europe and Soviet Union were part of dramatic geopolitical changes regarding Cold War tension between Washington and Moscow which receded before eventually disappearing. Also constituting part of the altered geopolitical arena was the emergence of the EU as a major global economic trading block. However, as detailed in earlier chapters of this book, such change did not occur in Cuba-U.S. relations due to the October 1992 Cuban Democracy Act, or Torricelli Bill, becoming law. This bill intensified the U.S. economic embargo against the island with the EU being unhappy at the extraterritorial nature of the bill. Concerning this bill, the European Commission stated that it was a “violation of the general principles of international law and the sovereignty of independent nations [with] the potential to cause grave damage to the transatlantic relationship” (CubaINFO 1992, 2).

Moreover, the EU appeared to ignore the Torricelli Bill with bilateral Cuban-EU trade increasing in the early to mid-1990s with EU trade comprising 38 percent of Cuba's imports and 29 percent of the island's exports by 1994 (Roy 2006, 101). As noted above, throughout the revolutionary period, trade with Western Europe had been significant for Cuba. However, due to the collapse of trade with the former CMEA countries and the continuing U.S. embargo, trade with EU member states became even more vital for the revolution from the early to mid-1990s. In addition to bilateral trade, a number of EU companies (the majority of which were Spanish followed by French and Italian companies) began to invest in the Cuban economy as it

was opened to the world economy (Bell Lara 2002). Again, this was crucial for the Cuban revolution.

However, conversely to this, the EU response was different regarding the U.S.'s Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity Act, also known as the Helms-Burton Act. This Act became law in the aftermath of the February 1996 shooting down of two planes belonging to the Cuban exile group "Brothers to the Rescue" by the Cuban air force. The Helms-Burton Act further tightened the U.S. economic embargo against Cuba and, although the EU was again unhappy at its extraterritorial nature and subsequent further challenges to the principles of free market economics, the U.S. pressured the EU to form a common position on Cuba (McGillon 2005, 102–103). Crucial for the emergence of the common EU position was lobbying by Washington as well as by conservative Spanish Prime Minister José María Aznar, who had replaced the socialist Felipe González.

On December 2, 1996, the Council of the European Union ratified the organization's common position. Article J.2 would be crucial for Cuban-EU relations as it set several conditions. These conditions included changing Cuba's political and economic systems, implementing democracy, respecting human rights, as well as improving Cuban living standards. This Article meant that the Cuban government would have to meet these conditions before the EU's common position could be changed (Tvevad 2015, 21–22). The result of this implementation aligned the EU's common position on Cuba much more with U.S. policy toward the island despite the history of economic and political differences that had existed between Europe and United States over Cuba throughout the revolutionary period (as detailed above).

Although this was the case, a disconnect appeared to exist between the EU's political and economic position. Companies from EU countries continued to both trade with Cuba and invest in the island's economy. Significantly, though the EU common position may have called for internal change in Cuba, embassies from various EU countries remained open in Havana, once again differentiating its position from the U.S. one. Moreover, and despite the EU's common position, Fidel Castro announced on December 2002 that Cuba would seek admittance to the Cotonou Agreement which had first been signed in June 2000 in Benin between the EU and the seventy-eight members of the African, Caribbean, and Pacific Group of States (ACP) (Associated Press 2002). Cuba had originally refused to sign this act which aimed to eradicate poverty, strive for sustainable development, and facilitate the ACP countries entry into the world economy. Castro's announcement resulted in the opening of an EU representative office in Havana by the EU commissioner, Poul Nielson, in March 2003 (Nielson 2003). It appeared that both the EU still wanted to engage Cuba and that cracks were apparent in the EU's common position.

The apparent inconsistency of EU's policy toward Cuba was further evident in the spring of 2000 when the EU decided that Cuba was no longer in a state of emergency after the disappearance of the island's socialist trading partners and therefore ceased sending Cuba emergency aid. Between 1993 and 2003, the EU had provided Cuba with 145 million Euros in assistance (Tvevad 2015, 21). Although this was the case, the EU provided considerable financial support for Cuba in the aftermath of Hurricane Michelle which hit the island in early November 2001 (Tvevad 2015, 21; European Parliament 2001). Notwithstanding this financial aid, Castro's announcement in December 2002 of the desire to sign the Cotonou Act, as well as the subsequent opening of an EU representative office in Havana, all do not downplay the seriousness of implementing the EU's common position. This implementation heightened the significance of human rights in Cuban-EU relations, which further increased in 2003 with the advent of the "black spring" on the island.

In the spring of 2003, Cuba arrested and imprisoned seventy-five opponents of its government, persistently accusing many of those arrested for having received clandestine support from the United States. Moreover, in April 2003, three people were arrested and shot by firing squad for trying to hijack a Havana harbor ferry in an attempt to travel to the United States.⁴ The Cuban government received a significant amount of criticism for this turn of events from governments, intellectuals, and media from around the world, including the EU. Greece, at this time holding the presidency of the EU, was particularly scathing in its comments and demanded the release of political prisoners as well as the end of perceived "internal political repression" and stated that all future EU assistance was dependent on political and economic reform on the island (European Commission 2003). Moreover, dissident Cuban leaders, including Osvaldo Payá, requested EU assistance in trying to secure reform within Cuba (Catholic News Agency 2010).

Tension between Cuba and the EU further intensified as Fidel Castro and members of the Cuban administration reacted angrily to EU criticism of these internal Cuban events, with protests occurring outside a number of EU countries' embassies in Havana. Furthermore, on July 14, 2003, opponents of the Cuban government were invited to the reception in the French embassy in Havana for the celebrations for Bastille Day (Gibbs 2003). Moreover, a number of European countries, including France and Italy, terminated several cooperative projects. On June 13, 2003, events continued to escalate as the Cuban government canceled the bilateral agreement for the creation of the Spanish Cultural Center which, since 1997, had been restoring a prominent building on Havana's Malecon (Roy 2006, 110–111).

In the aftermath of tense Cuban-EU relations due to the 2003 "black spring" in Cuba, the EU underwent another period of enlargement. As noted previously, this enlargement would have a significant impact on Cuba-EU

relations. On May 1, 2004, the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland gained membership to the EU which subsequently caused human rights to have even more prominence in Cuba-EU relations. This resulted from the sensitivities within all three new member states of the EU toward human rights due to their socialist pasts. Moreover, the situation between Havana and Prague concerning human rights was even more complicated resulting from the Cuban government's acquiescence over the actions of the Warsaw Pact in August 1968 that had ended the reforms of the "Prague spring" (Castro 1968). Cuban acquiescence occurred despite global criticism to the Warsaw Pact measures. Additionally, the fact that Fidel and Raúl Castro had been in power in Havana in 1968 and remained in power in May 2004, when the Czech Republic gained membership to the EU, intensified the issue of human rights in Cuban-Czech relations.

The contentious nature of human rights in Havana-Prague relations had been evident prior to May 2004 and Czech membership of the EU. In 1990, the Czech Republic had backed a United Nations (UN) resolution in New York City that had condemned Cuba's human rights record. (Human Rights Watch 1991). Furthermore, in March 2000 at the Fifty-Sixth Commission of the UN, the Czech Republic and Poland presented another resolution condemning the island's human rights record. This resolution was supported by all EU members and resulted in further tension between Havana and Prague, evidenced by a demonstration of a 100,000 people outside the Czech embassy in the Cuban capital. Furthermore, high-level government visits between Cuba and EU countries were ended (Human Rights Watch 2001). Additionally, once internal discussions within the EU commenced about amending its policy toward Cuba, a Polish Member of the European Parliament compared Cuba's human rights record to that of Belarus (Euractiv 2010). Moreover, in February 2013, during a trip to the Czech Republic, the Cuban dissident blogger Yoani Sánchez stated, "I would like to thank the Czechs for their solidarity which however should be maintained for a long time to come" (Richter 2013).

The outcome of the EU expansion complicated the organization's relationship with Cuba because animosity existed between a number of the new members of the EU and Cuba, not least over human rights due to their socialist pasts. Moreover, this also resulted in fissures within the EU's common position on Cuba because some countries (France, Italy, and the UK) desired a more moderate policy, while other countries (the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland) did not. As noted, cracks already existed in the European position toward Cuba, not least economically, as companies from several EU countries had continued to trade and invest in the Cuban economy.

The ambiguous nature of Cuban-EU relations (detailed above) was further evident in the aforementioned opening of an EU representative office in

Havana in March 2003, despite the existence of the EU's common position. Moreover, this office was upgraded in 2008 to an official EU delegation notwithstanding the deterioration in relations after the "black spring" of 2003 in Cuba (Delegation of the European Union to Cuba 2017). As noted previously, the EU common position may have desired change within Cuba; however, the way this change was sought was very different from the United States because the EU continued to engage with Cuba.

Furthermore, in the final years of the 1990s and the first years of the 2000s, a new dynamic appeared in Cuban-EU relations with the Catholic Church becoming ever more significant. In 1998, Pope John Paul II made a historic trip to Cuba which facilitated a softening of EU's policy toward Cuba. Very importantly, this softening included the EU's common position which had been implemented two years prior to the pontiff's visit to the island (Xalma 2008). Moreover, in May 2010, a set of discussions mediated by the Spanish government between the Cuban government and the Catholic Church commenced. These discussions were more successful than the EU's common position because they resulted in the seventy-five political prisoners who had been incarcerated since the "black spring" of 2003 being both released from prison and being allowed to leave Cuba for Spain (Franks 2011).

As has been detailed, fissures existed in the EU's common policy with the situation being further nuanced because a number of companies continued to trade with Cuba. Cuba-EU trade has increased in importance in the twenty-first century. In 2013, Cuban-EU trade was a little over 2.5 billion Euros, making the EU Cuba's second largest trading partner with 13 percent of total trade, only superseded by Cuban-Venezuelan trade (European Commission 2019, 3. Anuario Estadístico 2019, 11). Since 2013 trade between Cuba and the EU has remained at a moderately similar level with trade in 2019 being just over 2.4 billion Euros (European Commission 2019, 3). Of this 2019 level of trade, 85 percent comprised the export of goods from the EU to Cuba (food, chemicals, plastics, basic metals, machinery, household appliances, and transport equipment) with Cuban exports to the EU being agricultural products, beverages, tobacco, and mineral fuels (Delegation of the European Union to Cuba 2017). Although the level of Cuban-EU trade has remained moderately stable, trade with the EU has increased in importance for Cuba, particularly as Cuban-Venezuelan trade has fallen due to the current crisis in Venezuela. Moreover, Cuban-EU trade became even more important for Cuba due to Title III of the Helms-Burton Act being activated in early 2019 under the presidency of Donald Trump.

Similarly to trade, the EU is also the second largest source of tourists for Cuba. Tourism has been vital for the Cuban economy and over 2.8 million tourists vacationed on the island in 2013. Canadian tourists are the largest number of foreigners visiting Cuba and dwarf the number of EU citizens

vacationing on the island. However, in 2013, 20 percent of those visiting the island came from EU countries (Anuario Estadístico 2019, 9). By 2018, the number of tourists visiting the island rose to over 4.2 million with, again, Canada being the principle source of tourists. The EU continues to be an important source of tourists for Cuba, with its percentage of tourists remaining at roughly 20 percent, while there has been an increase in tourism to Cuba from countries such as Australia, Brazil, China, Philippines, and Russia (Anuario Estadístico 2019, 9).

As has been examined throughout this chapter, the EU has had a complicated relationship with Cuba, and one which at times appears to contradict itself. Although this is the case, in the late 2000s, the EU's commitment to its common position began to wane as many within the EU wanted a more pragmatic Cuba policy, evidenced by the aforementioned opening of an official EU delegation in Havana. Not only had fissures with some countries expanded (especially former members of the CMEA taking a more hard-line stance toward Cuba than others) while Cuban-EU trade had also increased, but the common position had also failed to achieve its goals: change in Cuba. The realization formed in the EU that it did not have influence in Cuba to herald the goals of the common position and that a less ideological and more economically driven policy was desired.

Furthermore, the pragmatism of Cuban foreign policy pursued by Raúl Castro and Miguel Díaz-Canel, partly underpinned by a need to help mitigate a decrease in Cuban-Venezuelan trade due to Venezuela's deteriorating situation, also helped to facilitate change in Cuban-EU relations. Moreover, after the historic thaw in Cuban-U.S. relations in December 2014 under the presidencies of Raúl Castro and Barack Obama (subsequently rolled back by President Donald Trump), the EU's common position appeared outdated. In December 2016, after two years of negotiations which included six high-level political dialogues between Cuba and the EU (several different EU Commissioners had met Cuban government representatives), Cuba and EU signed the Political Dialogue and Cooperation Agreement (PDCA) highlighting the EU's changed position (Tvevad 2015). This agreement ended the common position and was ratified by the European Parliament in July 2017.

The PDCA has provided an infrastructure for improved relations with specific attention being given to (1) political dialogue with focus on amongst other issues human rights, migration, drugs, the fight against terrorism, and sustainable development; (2) cooperation and dialogue in the areas of human rights, governance, social and economic development, environment, and regional cooperation; and (3) trade and trade cooperation (Delegation of the European Union to Cuba 2017). The upshot has been increased political dialogue between Cuba and the EU with attention being given to supporting

the strategic partnership between the European Union and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC).

This improvement in Cuban-EU relations was further demonstrated with the resumption of EU development aid to Cuba. As noted above, this had taken place in the 1990s and early 2000s as well as during the period from 2014 to 2020. During the most recent period, the EU assigned a further fifty million Euros to assist “sustainable agriculture and food security, environment and support for a better use of key natural resources for sustainable development, as well as support to sustainable economic and social modernisation” (Delegation of the European Union to Cuba 2017). Furthermore, the EU provided 1.6 million Euros of further financial support for Cuba in the aftermath of Hurricane Irma that hit the island in September 2017 (Delegation of the European Union to Cuba 2017).

In addition to this, in November 2018, the upturn in Cuban-EU relations was again evident when the Spanish President Pedro Sánchez visited Cuba. This was the first such high-level visit in thirty-two years (González 2018). This improvement in relations was again evident in the aftermath of the aforementioned application of Title III of the Helms-Burton Act in early 2019 by U.S. President Donald Trump, which threatened a number of European companies with U.S. legal action over their investments in Cuba.⁵ In May 2019, following talks between the Foreign Ministers of Cuba and the EU, Bruno Rodríguez and Federica Mogherini, a joint press release stated, “The decision of the United States to end the suspension of Title III of the Helms-Burton Act was also on the agenda. Regretting the US decision, both the EU and Cuba believe the extraterritorial application of the Act is contrary to international law” (European Union External Action 2019). As noted above, trade between Cuba and the EU has remained relatively stable over the last decade and this, in conjunction with Rodríguez and Mogherini’s joint press release, make it unlikely that Cuban-EU trade will be adversely affected by the enactment of Title III of Helms-Burton Act. Moreover, it is only likely to make trade with the EU more significant for Cuba.

This upturn in relations was further evident in November 2018 when Cuban President Díaz-Canel, accompanied by vice president of the Council of Ministers Ricardo Cabrisas and Foreign Minister Rodríguez, traveled to Europe as part of a global tour. In Europe, the Cuban delegation visited Russia, France as well as made a two-day “transit stop” in the United Kingdom. Upon visiting London, Díaz-Canel became the first Cuban president to visit the UK capital. Although he did not meet UK Prime Minister Theresa May, he did meet the UK Chancellor of the Exchequer, Phillip Hammond, Jeremy Corbyn (the leader of the opposition), Emily Thornberry (the shadow Foreign Secretary), as well as Prince Charles (the Prince of Wales). While there, Díaz-Canel also laid a wreath at Karl Marx’s tomb in

London's Highgate cemetery (The Caribbean Council 2018). Furthermore, in March 2019, Prince Charles visited Cuba with his wife and again met Díaz-Canel, becoming the first member of the UK Royal Family to travel to the island in sixty years. During this visit the UK ambassador to Cuba, Antony Stokes, commented,

We and the European Union have a very strong policy of engaging with the Cuban government, and we believe that is the right way—not only to talk about the more difficult issues, but also to identify ways we can work together. It is a very special moment. Cuba has never seen anything quite like this before. There have been important senior-level visits. President Obama was here in 2016, but a royal visit is something really special. (Tominey 2019)

Prince Charles's visit to Cuba as well as Stokes's subsequent comments are indicative of contemporary Cuban-EU relations in general. BREXIT as well as political changes in several European countries have called into question the long-term future of the European integration project. However, regardless of its long-term future, Cuba appears as though it will continue to have cordial relations with a number of European countries.

CONCLUSIONS

Cuba has had a long and complex relationship with Europe which since January 1959 has often been overshadowed by the island's relationship with the United States. During the Cold War period, Cuba's relationship with Eastern Europe was within the parameters of the socialist block. However, despite U.S. attempts to influence Western Europe, countries from Western Europe never broke diplomatic relations with Cuba and also continued to trade with the island. Trade would become ever more important in the late 1980s (formal diplomatic relations between Cuba and the then EEC were created in September 1988) as Cuban-CMEA trade decreased due to reform processes in Eastern Europe. Moreover, this coincided with the expansion of the European integration project, importantly both in terms of its membership and remit.

The EU's expanding remit, in terms of foreign policy, was significant for the implementation of the EU's common position in December 1996 which aligned the EU's position toward Cuba much more with that of the United States as it called for internal reform within Cuba. Moreover, the Cuban government reacted angrily to calls for change within Cuba. High-level political visits between Cuba and the EU ceased with the situation becoming more fraught after the "black spring" of 2003 in Cuba when the EU heavily

criticized the imprisonment of seventy-five Cuban dissidents. Moreover, several joint projects between Cuba and European countries were canceled and emergency relief to Cuba stopped.

However, despite these tensions, EU countries continued to trade with Cuba. In December 2001, the EU provided disaster relief after Hurricane Michelle hit the island and in March 2003 an EU representative office was opened in Havana which in 2008 was upgraded to an official EU delegation. In short, the European position toward Cuba was far from being one-dimensional with the complexities increasing in May 2004 as several former CMEA countries gained membership to the EU. Crucially, these new members desired a harder stance toward Cuba, especially with regards human rights, due to their sensitivities on this subject resulting from their socialist pasts. In the case of the Czech Republic, this was intensified due Cuba's acquiesce in the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968 which ended the "Prague spring." In sum, the EU common position was complex, had fissures in it which were increased due to some other European countries (most notably France, Italy, and the UK) wanting to engage Cuba more and employ a more liberal policy toward the island. Moreover, the common position had failed in its objectives. When combined with the pragmatic foreign policies pursued by Presidents Raúl Castro and Miguel Díaz-Canel, as well as the historic reform within Cuban-U.S. relations, the common position appeared outdated. After a series of bilateral meetings between Cuba and the EU, the common position was ended in December 2016.

In some respects, the EU's common position was emblematic of Cuba's relationship with Europe as the relationship was complex and multilayered. At various times, the relationship had undergone different internal and external pressures but continued to function. This has been crucial for Cuba throughout the revolutionary period with its importance increasing due to issues in the Havana-Caracas relationship resulting from Venezuela's deteriorating internal situation as well as the enduring tension in the island's relationship with the United States, heightened under Donald Trump's Presidency. The EU is not only politically important for Cuba but also economically important due to trade and tourism. BREXIT may have produced a new dynamic within the EU, but the permanency of Cuban-EU relations, despite the various pressures detailed throughout this chapter, postulates that the relationship will remain important for the island in the foreseeable future.

NOTES

1. On the changes to the Cuban economy Louis Pérez has written, "The British occupation of Havana was the first in a series of events to transform the Cuban

economy, and with it, all of Cuba. After 1762, Cuba would never be the same” (Pérez 2006, 44). Shamefully part of this change to the Cuban economic system was an increase in the Transatlantic slave trade.

2. Yuri Pavlov, former head of Latin American department of the Soviet Foreign Ministry, has written, “Another important consideration, namely, the desire to share the burden of sustaining the Cuban economy with Eastern European socialist countries, was also present” (Pavlov 1994, 94).

3. Evidence has emerged from archives in the former German Democratic Republic (GDR) that a Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) plot may have existed for the East German freighter to be rammed the Japanese ship therefore making it impossible for the MV Magdeburg to sail to Cuba (McVeigh 2008).

4. The Cuban government took this drastic measure to avoid potential future kidnappings which they feared could be used as pretence by George W. Bush’s government to confront the island.

5. The enactment of Title III of the Helms-Burton Act has been analyzed in earlier chapters of this book.

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Chapter 11

Havana and Moscow

Now, the Future, and the Shadow of the Past

Mervyn J. Bain

The Cuban Revolution marked its sixtieth anniversary on January 1, 2019, with May 8, 2020, marking another important milestone in Cuban history; the sixtieth anniversary of the recommencement of diplomatic relations between Havana and Moscow.¹ At this important juncture, the bilateral relationship remains significant for both Havana and Moscow, demonstrated during Dmitry Medvedev's, Russian Prime Minister, October 2019 visit to Cuba when Miguel Díaz-Canel, the Cuban President stated,

I would like to once again confirm to you and your Government that we highly appreciate the excellent bilateral relations between our countries and the alignment of our stands on major issues of the international agenda. We also confirm our intention, during your visit, to promote the development and strengthening of our economic, trade and financial relations as well as our ties in other areas of cooperation. (Russian Government 2019a)

Díaz-Canel would continue, "As part of today's talks, we also noted progress in Russia's effective participation in Cuba's plan for socioeconomic development to 2030 in areas such as energy, transport (four types), industry, biotechnology, agriculture and others" (Russian Government 2019a). Such comments were not expected in the immediate post-Soviet era when Havana-Moscow relations deteriorated to such a level that in the summer of 1995 at the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations (UN), it was uncertain if Fidel Castro and Boris Yeltsin, President of Russia, would even shake hands.

This chapter will examine contemporary Cuban-Russian relations before scrutinizing the pressures and issues within it. This will be achieved by an examination of Cuban and Russian foreign policies, analyzing how changes in both countries' foreign policies impacted the relationship in the post-Soviet

era. The chapter will finish with a comparison between the contemporary relationship and the one which developed between Havana and Moscow in the late 1950s/early 1960s. This comparison will highlight both differences and commonalities between these two very different eras. Consequently, it will also allow this chapter to conclude that, due to the relationship being mutually beneficial for both countries and its long heritage (which extends from before May 20, 1960), in the short to medium term, it is highly likely the bilateral relationship will continue in its present form.

CONTEMPORARY CUBAN-RUSSIAN RELATIONS

Havana-Moscow relations are vibrant, important for both countries, and multifaceted. Medvedev's October 2019 trip to Cuba was indicative of the contemporary relationship in general not only demonstrated by Díaz-Canel's quotes above but also the eight agreements signed during this visit which covered a number of different areas of the relationship, including trying to update Cuba's infrastructure and particularly the island's railway system (Russian Government 2019a). As noted previously, improving Cuba's energy sector was the focus of much attention during Medvedev's trip. While in Cuba, Medvedev visited the oil drilling site at Boca de Jaruco where the joint project between Cupet and Zarubezhneft has started to produce oil (it is estimated that this deposit could contain 3.7 billion tons of oil). Medvedev inspected three new horizontal wells and commented that "this is a step towards energy independence of the Freedom Island" (Russian Government 2019b). This is a highly important as energy security has been problematic for Cuba for prolonged periods of time, exacerbated by the tightened United States (U.S.) economic embargo (the enactment of Title III of the Helms-Burton Act) under the presidency of Donald Trump and the deteriorating Venezuelan economic and political situation.

Further examples of Russian attempts to improve Cuba's energy and food security are that Moscow plans to invest USD \$769 million in modernizing three thermal power plants in Cuba with other ways of providing Cuba with reliable sources of oil and wheat also being discussed while Medvedev was on the island (RT 2019; Russian Government 2019d). Additionally, Russia has also been involved in renovating Havana's Capitol Building (Russian Government 2019c).

Moreover, the importance which Cuba attaches to trade with Russia was highlighted in September 2019 with the staging of the First National Exhibition of Cuba in Russia which showcased the island's goods to a Russian audience. Additionally, Russia regularly participates in the International Trade Fair in Havana held in the autumn of every year (ACN 2019a). Bilateral trade will

be examined below, and reached 451 million pesos in 2018 (97 percent which comprised the Russian export of goods to Cuba), the largest level of bilateral trade conducted since 2000. In 2018, Russia was Cuba's seventh largest trading partner (*Anuario Estadístico de Cuba* 2018, 8.4). Additionally, bilateral Cuban-Russian trade has more than doubled since 2016 with Yuri Borisov, Deputy Russian Prime Minister, stating that he believes Cuban-Russian bilateral trade will further increase (*Associated Press* 2019). Cuban-Russian trade may be dwarfed by the trade that Cuba conducts with China and Venezuela, but this upward trajectory in bilateral trade with Russia is highly significant for Cuba due to the aforementioned increased U.S. economic aggression under Trump's presidency.

The relationship's political aspect was highlighted in July 2019 when the Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov visited Cuba, during which he met both Díaz-Canel and Raúl Castro, First Secretary of the Communist Party of Cuba. While in Cuba, speaking about the deterioration in Cuban-U.S. relations under Trump's presidency Lavrov stated:

By imposing a trade embargo on Cuba, through Title III of Helms-Burton Act, the U.S. has once again shown the world its disregard for international law. An overwhelming majority—over 190 states—votes each year for a resolution demanding the lifting of the trade embargo against Cuba. . . . I see no future for such a policy. (*TeleSur* 2019)

In turn, Cuba voiced its rejection of western sanctions against Russia (*TeleSur* 2019). Moreover, reciprocal invitations have been sent by both governments; for Vladimir Putin to visit Cuba in 2020; and for Cuban participation in the seventy-fifth anniversary celebration of the end of World War II due to be held in May 2020 (*Russian Government* 2019a). This trip and celebrations were both curtailed due to the Covid-19 global pandemic that appeared in 2020.

The robust nature of the bilateral relationship is further evident with Díaz-Canel's visit to Russia in late October 2019 which further developed the talks which had taken place earlier that month when Medvedev had visited Cuba, detailed above. Moreover, such frequency of visits to Russia by the Cuban leader have not been since the 1960 to 1991 era of the relationship. Furthermore, in November 2018, during Díaz-Canel's trip to Moscow Havana received a \$50 million loan from the Russian government for the purchase of Russian military goods (*Cubadebate* 2018). Additionally, in July 2019, while in Moscow Ricardo Cabrisas, Vice President of Cuba, signed an agreement with Sergei Shoigu, Russian Defence Minister, for bilateral cooperation between their countries which would help preserve security within the Caribbean (*Cubadebate* 2019a). Moreover, in February 2020, Raúl Castro

met commander in chief of the Russian Navy Admiral Nikolai Yevmenov while Yevmenov visited Cuba (Cubadebate 2020a). Collaborations in geophysics and astronomy, technologies, paleontology, and metallurgy were signed in September 2018 with increased collaboration between Cuban and Russian universities being agreed in November 2018 (Prensa Latina 2018b). Additionally, in February 2020, an agreement of intent was signed by Cuban and Russian universities for a Russian language training school in Havana to open which will provide Cuban students with the necessary language skills to study at Russian universities (Prensa Latina 2020). Cabrisas returned to Russia in the autumn of 2020 with his trip highlighting the multifaceted nature of the contemporary relationship. During this trip, Cabrisas held over thirty meetings with Russian government officials and members of both the Russian Duma and the business sector with this including Lavrov and Valentina Matviyenko, chairwoman of the Federation Council (Cubadebate October 2020b).

Furthermore, the 2010s have seen increasing numbers of Russian citizens returning to Cuba to vacation on the island. The result is the highest number of Russians traveling to Cuba since the end of Cuban-Soviet relations in 1991. The significance of Russian tourists will be detailed below as 189,813 Russians vacationed in Cuba in 2018, a rise of over 250 percent when compared to 2013. Moreover, in 2018, Russia was the sixth highest source of tourists for Cuba (Anuario Estadístico de Cuba 2018, 15.6). Additionally, in August 2019, an air route from Moscow to Varadero was announced which will further facilitate the ease of travel for Russian tourists visiting Cuba (Cubadebate 2019b).

A reconceptualization process of the relationship has also emerged in the 2010s with both governments making links to the relationship's heritage. Significantly, these links are not just to the 1960 to 1991 era of the relationship, but also to the pre-1959 relationship (Bain 2013). This reconceptualization process will be examined in greater detail below and was apparent during Medvedev's October 2019 trip to Cuba when, at the Tomb of the Unknown Mambi (Cuban Independence fighter), Medvedev stated,

In 1896 three Russian volunteers—Pyotr Streltsov, Yevstafy Konstantonovich and Nikolai Melentyev—joined General Antonio Maceo's group that fought against the Spanish army in western Cuba. Their heroism and their support was a vivid example of Russians being always ready to come to the aid of Cubans to defend common values together. In memory of Russian volunteers, we now present the Russian flag to Cuba to be installed at the Mausoleum dedicated to the unknown fighters for Cuba's independence. (Russian Government 2019c)

Moreover, cultural links between the two countries also exist, evident with November 14, 2019, marking the start of a Cuban film week being in Russia

(Prensa Latina 2019) and also in November 2019 when the St. Petersburg ballet performed in Havana's Gran Teatro de la Habana "Alicia Alonso" (Acosta and Pérez 2019). Furthermore, at the end of November 2019, an exhibition of Cuban art was staged in the Academy of Arts in Moscow to celebrate the 500th anniversary of Havana (Cubadebate 2019c), with this further evidencing the robust nature of the contemporary relationship which has been impacted by changes to both countries' foreign policies in the post-Soviet era.

CUBAN AND RUSSIAN FOREIGN POLICIES

Since January 1959, Cuban revolutionary foreign policy has attracted great interest, not least because Cuba was able to project itself on the world stage, a remarkable feat for a Caribbean island. Consequently, in *Cuba's Foreign Relations in a Post-Soviet World*, Michael Erisman has written that Cuba's foreign policy has been based on five key concepts: the idea of a revolutionary crusade, the superclient/surrogate thesis, *Fidelista peronalismo*, dependency, and counter-dependency, as well as realist pragmatism (Erisman 2000, 33–47).

The principles of the revolutionary crusade are that Havana strove to stimulate other global revolutions, while the superclient/surrogate thesis, which appeared prominent in the years from 1960 to 1991, postulated that Cuba merely acted on directives sent from the Kremlin. *Fidelista peronalismo* is the specific Cuban version of the Great Man Theory, when one person can dominate their country's political arena and act without recourse. Since the late fifteenth century outside powers have dominated Cuba. However, Erisman has written that, during Cuban-Soviet relations, counterdependency materialized due to Havana's continued endeavors to reduce its dependency on the Soviet Union. Additionally, Erisman has written that realist pragmatism has been fundamental to Cuban foreign policy since January 1959, because the survival of the revolution has always been the Cuban government's principal consideration (Erisman 2000, 33–47).

Realist pragmatism is closely related to the principles of defensive realism, which proposes that state security is countries' most important interest. Subsequently, states are security maximizers due to the essentially anarchic nature of the international system, with Kenneth Waltz having stated that "the ultimate concern of states is not power, rather security" (Waltz 1979, 4). Offensive realism also supposes that security is a country's chief concern, but it differs from defensive realism in the method of achieving state security. Offensive realists believe security is obtained by states maximizing their power at the expense of other states (Mearsheimer 2010), with the

logical endpoint of this belief being countries endeavors to become regional hegemons.

Erisman has written that due to the complexity of revolutionary Cuban foreign policy, a single one of these concepts has not come to dominated the others. The ideas of the revolutionary crusade were highly significant during the radicalism of the 1960s and subsequently fluctuated in importance with Pierro Gleijeses having emphasized its significance in Cuban involvement in Africa in the 1970s (Erisman 2000, 33–47; Gleijeses 2001, 374–379). Any semblance of the superclient/surrogate thesis vanished with the end of Cuban-Soviet relations in December 1991. Moreover, Fidel Castro's deteriorating health after 2006 resulted in the significance of *Fidelista peronalismo* waning and it completely disappeared with his passing in November 2016. Notwithstanding this, Erisman has stated that counter-dependency and realist pragmatism have continuing resonance for Cuban foreign policy (Erisman 2000, 33–47).

The continuing relevance of realist pragmatism within Cuba's foreign policy was highly evident in the early 1990s when Havana was faced with a new world order and continuing U.S. aggression (exemplified by the Cuban Democracy Act, or Torricelli Bill of 1992 which further tightened the U.S. embargo against Cuba), but bereft of its socialist partners. Concerning this, John Kirk has written, "The greatest single task in terms of foreign policy facing the Cuban government in the early 1990s, however, was how to keep the traditional (self-declared) enemy at bay" (Kirk 2006, 334). Erisman has stated that Havana achieved this by changing its foreign policy which created greater economic and political space (Erisman 2006, 3–5). Moreover, Julie Feinsilver has written

that Cuba's foreign policy initiatives have been geared toward ensuring Cuba's security in an adverse geopolitical situation through support of progressive governments and the creation of a Third World constituency, to gain not just diplomatic support in international organisations but also economic or trade benefits. (Feinsilver 1993, 13)

Jorge Domínguez believes that a four-part strategy was used by Cuba to achieve this; the results of a neorealist perspective were that endeavors to balance the United States were made, the diversification of economic policy negated the possibility of the emergence of economic dependence, Havana desired both cooperation with Washington concerning common security issues, and a "constituency abroad" (particularly in the Global South) (J. Domínguez 2008, 203). These changes to Havana's foreign policy detail how the Cuban Revolution was able to survive this highly difficult period for the island. Importantly, these changes, underpinned by the principles of

defensive realism and realist pragmatism, would impact Havana's relationship with Moscow.

Moscow's foreign policy also underwent significant change in the immediate post-Soviet era. Not only did the influence of Marxist-Leninism disappear but Russian foreign policy also pivoted toward the west, on which Bobo Lo has written, "During the Yeltsin period, America represented the single greatest external influence on Russian foreign policy" (Lo 2002, 8). Cold War tension between Moscow and Washington had been removed from this relationship, and the Yeltsin government hoped U.S. assistance in the Russian economic transition would also subsequently materialize. In short, Liberal Westernizers had come to preeminence in Russian foreign policy and had side-lined both the Pragmatic Nationalists and Fundamental Nationalists (Light 1996, 33–100; Malcolm and Pravda 1996, 537–552; Kubicek 1999–2000, 547–550). Russia's internal situation, principally the Yeltsin government's desire to transition to a market economy as swiftly as possible, was also closely connected to the foreign policy debate (White 2004, 222–229; Shevtsova 2007, 107).

Moscow's pivot to the west did not endure with further change in Russian foreign policy taking place in the mid-1990s, highlighted in December 1995 when Yevgeny Primakov replaced Andrei Kozyrev as Russian Foreign Minister. Significantly, Primakov believed much more in "spheres of influence" than Kozyrev who had been closely associated with Moscow's western orientated policies (White 2004, 229–230).

Central to this foreign policy change was a resurgence in nationalism within Russian society. Crucially, the sentiment that the Kremlin's western-looking foreign policy had failed emerged within Russia. This sentiment formed because not only had the level of hoped for economic assistance not materialized, but many Russians blamed the West and organizations such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank for the economic problems which they continued to endure (Kanet 2011, 204–206). Additionally, the actions of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) had further offended Russian nationalism. First, by NATO's enlargement to the east, and second, by its treatment of Russia's fellow Serbs in the former Yugoslavia.² Tellingly, Yeltsin has called the NATO bombing of Belgrade in March 1999 "undisguised aggression" (*Rossiiskaya Gazeta* 1999, 2) and the Russian President has also commented that "the Kosovo crisis increased the anti-Western sentiment in society" (Yeltsin 2000, 271).

This alteration in Moscow's foreign policy also manifested itself in a Russian desire for a more prominent role in global politics having been marginalized for several years. Linked to this was Moscow's desire for an end of the unipolar international system of the early to mid-1990s. This desire for a multipolar international system has continued in the twenty-first century

with Putin strengthening relations with many former Soviet allies. The result is the belief that Russian foreign policy has been underpinned by offensive realism due to its apparent assertiveness and that a “Putin Doctrine” within it has emerged (Aron 2013). The “Putin Doctrine” covets Russia’s return to great power status, desires a multipolar world, is expansionist by nature, but it is not driven by a belief in offensive realism. Rather defensive realism is key due to Moscow’s seeming aggressiveness being an attempt to garner support for the Russian government (Aron 2013 2). These changes in Cuban and Russian foreign policies would profoundly impact Cuban-Russian relations in the post-Soviet era.

CUBAN-RUSSIAN RELATIONS IN THE POST-SOVIET ERA

Moscow’s turn to the west in the early to mid-1990s detailed above would greatly affect its relationship with Havana. On Moscow’s pivot to the west Professor Eugenio Larin, Director of Latin American Studies at the Institute of Cold War History of the Russian Academy of Sciences has written, “In order to improve political ties Washington demanded of B.H. Yeltsin that he must cut ties with Cuba. This course of action dominated the 1990s” (Larin 2007, 164). Simply, this negated cordial relations between Russia and Cuba, which were evident both politically and economically.

Russian voting behavior at various international fora demonstrated the political downturn. In November 1992, Moscow abstained in the UN vote which denounced the aforementioned Torricelli Bill that further tightened the U.S. economic embargo against Cuba (Izvestia 1992b, 5). Additionally, from 1992 to 1994, the Kremlin ceased voting with Cuba at the UN Convention on Human Rights in Geneva (Granma 1992, 3–6; Izvestia 1992a, 7; Izvestia 1993).

Economically, bilateral trade crashed. In 1992, bilateral Russian-Cuban trade was 825,977 million pesos before in 1993 falling to 533,131 million pesos, with the downward trend continuing in 1994 when a mere 322,882 million pesos of trade was conducted (Anuario Estadístico de Cuba 2000, VI-5-VI-7). In comparison in 1985, bilateral Cuban-Soviet trade had reached 10 billion pesos with the 1994 level of bilateral trade being under 50 percent of that which had taken place in 1965, the first year of the original five-year Cuban-Soviet trading plan (Vneshiaia Torgovliia SSSR v 1989–1990, 5; Anuario Estadístico de Cuba 1965).

Although this was the case, the downturn in bilateral relations did not persist. As noted previously, the further alteration in Moscow’s mid-1990s foreign policy and the evolution of Cuba’s foreign policy in the post-Soviet era

were key for the subsequent upturn in relations. Critically, Russia provided backing in various UN fora for the Cuban government once again in the mid-1990s following Russia's turn away from the west. As noted in the previous section, since 1995 Moscow returned to voting with Cuba at the Conventions on Human Rights.

On July 26, 1996, at the UN meeting in New York City to debate the February 1996 incident when the Cuban air force shot down two planes that belonged to "Brothers to the Rescue" exile organization, Russia criticized both the UN resolution as well as the actions of this exile group (United Nations 1996). Furthermore, Moscow also criticized the Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity (Libertad) Act, or Helms Burton Act, that became law in the aftermath of this incident. This act was both extraterritorial in general, and also contained a section which focused singularly on Russia's continued use of the Lourdes listening post on the outskirts of Havana in the 1990s. Regarding this law, a Russian Foreign Ministry declaration stated, "We confirm our intention to develop and broaden mutually beneficial cooperation with Cuba as well as sectors of mutual interest, particularly in the commercial and economic sphere" (Granma International 1996, 13).

Such Russian support has continued to be vital for Cuba due to the ongoing U.S. economic embargo against the island, despite the historic improvement in Havana-Washington relations which took place under the Presidencies of Raúl Castro and Barack Obama (Lavrov 2015). Feinsliver's previous quote is important to consider regarding the improvement in Cuban-Russian relations. Although Russia may not constitute part of the Developing World, an upturn in Havana's relationship with Moscow was not contrary to the process detailed by Feinsliver above. Furthermore, improved Cuban-Russia relations also reflect Erisman's ideas that Havana's foreign policy was diversified as the Cuban government attempted to create greater economic and political space. Additionally, this renovation in Havana-Moscow relations illustrates Domínguez's ideas that, since 1992, Cuba attempted to balance both the United States within the international system as well as acquire a "constituency abroad."

Politically the upturn in relations was also important for Moscow as the improved relationship permitted Russia to project itself on the world arena and once again demonstrate its global influence. As noted, the return of global influence was an important feature of the alteration in Russian foreign policy which occurred in the mid-1990s. In short, it appeared that Cuba's geostrategic importance for Moscow was increasing. This is not to posit that it returned to the level of the Cold War, which will be detailed, but the Kremlin did wish to "tickle the Americans' underbelly" (Sosnovsky 1996, 5). Improved Cuban-Russian relations achieved this aim.

Cuba's geostrategic significance for Moscow increased further in the twenty-first century with the emergence of the aforementioned "Putin

doctrine” in Russian foreign policy. As noted, the “Putin doctrine” appears expansionist by nature with this expansionism supposing the importance of offensive realism in Russian foreign policy. In the 2000s, Moscow took an increased interest in Latin America, first illustrated by the sale of military hardware to Latin America.³ Nevertheless, since the year 2014 and the Ukrainian situation an improved relationship with Latin America has formed part of Moscow’s strategy to counter western sanctions against Russia (Mander 2015). This demonstrates the importance of defensive realism within the “Putin doctrine” specifically and Russian foreign policy generally because Moscow is not attempting to increase its power at the expense of the west, but rather counter western actions against Russia. Furthermore, Moscow’s relationship with Havana has been a key part of Russia’s reassertion into Latin America as it was logical that the process would commence with the country that Russia knows best in the region; Cuba. Moreover, as Havana enjoys cordial relations with most Latin American countries, Havana has been able to facilitate Moscow’s desire for improved relations with Latin America. In sum, Cuba’s geostrategic significance for Russia has increased.

As listed above, Moscow has been able to provide important backing for Havana in various international fora. Cuba reciprocates this process for Russia, which is highly significant because, as noted, Russia’s relations with the west have deteriorated throughout the twenty-first century. In 2008, Cuba backed Russia at the UN over the situation in Georgia. Cuba also publicly supported Moscow over the Crimean situation in 2014 as demonstrated on March 27, 2014, when Cuba was one of eleven countries to vote against the UN resolution condemning the Russian referendum held in the Crimea (United Nations 2014).

The return of visits by both countries’ political elites to the other’s country also evidenced the upturn in relations. The absence of such visits in the years from 1992 to 1995 highlighted the downturn in the relationship, but their return was marked in May 1995 when Roberto Robaina, Cuban Foreign Minister, visited Moscow (MINREX 1995). In June 1996, Primakov reciprocated this visit when he traveled to Havana (Granma International 1996, 3). Additionally, in the twenty-first century, the frequency of these elite political visits increased. In December 2000, during the infancy of his presidency, Putin visited Cuba. This would be followed by Raúl Castro’s first visit to Moscow since the end of Cuban-Soviet relations in January 2009 (Granma 2009, 1).

The upturn in relations from the mid-1990s was not just political but also economic. Russia was once again Cuba’s largest trading partner by 1996, something which experts had not expected in the immediate aftermath of the end of Cuban-Soviet relations. The level of trade (616 million pesos), however, was a fraction of what had been conducted during the Soviet era

(Anuario Estadístico 2000, VI-5-VI-7). What was fundamental for bilateral trade was the colossal legacy of the 1960 to 1991 period. Very quickly, it had become apparent to both Havana and Moscow that in many ways it was cheaper and easier to continue to buy goods from each other, particularly for Cuba to buy Russian oil and for Russia to buy Cuban sugar, than purchase these on the world market. This was somewhat ironic because in the final years of the Soviet era, the purchase of Cuban sugar had been highly unpopular in the Soviet Union due to its perceived inflated price. Additionally, Cuba still needed to buy spare parts for Soviet-era machinery that it continued to use. In sum, quickly after 1991, the realization formed that the vast Soviet investment in the Cuban economy was being wasted and Moscow's wished to address this (Glasov, Kara-Murza and Batchikov 2007, 111; Bain 2008, 83–106).

Bilateral trade with other countries, particularly China and Venezuela, quickly exceeded Cuban-Russian trade which has been at a comparatively low level in the twenty-first century. However, increasing political will for economic cooperation is evident in both countries as bilateral trade has climbed to its highest levels in 2018 since the year 2000. Significantly, in July 2014, an agreement on Cuban debt incurred during the Soviet era was agreed which has possibly removed a “block” to bilateral trade as it had been such a contentious issue between the two countries throughout the post-Soviet era. Moreover, 10 percent of the debt was paid by Russian investment in the Cuban economy, demonstrating Moscow's interest in the island's economy.⁴

The motivation for bilateral Cuban-Russian trade to increase returns to the principles of defensive realism, realist pragmatism, and the Cuban Revolutionary elite's historical desire to avoid forms of dependency appearing. Increased trade with Russia would help mitigate a form of economic reliance on Venezuela that appeared in the early 2010s when Cuban-Venezuelan trade constituted almost 50 percent of Cuba's total global trade (Anuario Estadístico 2018, 8.4). Put simply, an increase in Cuban-Russian trade would be part of the Cuban desire to diversify its economic trading partners which is important due to continuing U.S. economic sanctions. Moreover, this desire to try and lessen an economic reliance on Caracas has been both highly prudent, and accelerated by, Venezuela's deteriorating economic situation since the mid-2010s onwards.

Furthermore, the same rationale for Cuba trying to attract Russian tourists also exists as it would reduce a reliance on Canadians vacationing on the island. The number of Russian tourists traveling to Cuba has risen from 10,653 in 2003 to 87,518 in 2012 and, as detailed, 189,813 in 2018 (Anuario Estadístico 2018, 15.6). This number may be dwarfed by the over one million Canadian tourists who visit Cuba each year, but the significance which the Cuban government attaches to increasing the number of Russian tourists

is evidenced by Russian being one of four language options on the Official Portal of Tourism, *Cubatravel.cu*. Moreover, Cuba attended both the Seventh International Tourist fair held in March 2012 in Moscow, and the twenty-fifth international tourist fair, MITT, staged in Moscow in March 2018 (*Prensa Latina* 2018a; Rondón García 2012).

The aforementioned Soviet legacy that impacted the post-1991 relationship extended beyond economics because it also has a cultural aspect which has become more pronounced in the 2010s. Again, there is a level of irony in this due to the perception that Cuban-Soviet cultural links in the 1960 to 1991 period of the relationship had been “engineered” for political reasons (Pavlov 1994, 249). The increase in cultural links is demonstrated by Russia being the “guest of honor” at the 2010 Havana International Book Fair which Lavrov visited during a trip to Cuba and in October 2012 the Moscow theater company “*Et Cetera*” performed in the Cuban capital. Moreover, the week starting September 21, 2015, was dubbed “Russian Cinema Week in Cuba,” held at the “Charles Chaplin” cinema in Havana. Furthermore, in September 2017, the Contemporary Dance of Cuba (DCC) performed at an international dance festival in Moscow (*Edicion de la Embajada* 2012; *Edicion de la Embajada* 2015; *Cubadebate* 2017).

In addition to these cultural events, in 2008 Our Lady of Kazan Russian Orthodox Cathedral was opened in Havana Vieja. In November 2008, Medvedev visited this church while in Cuba and both Fidel and Raúl Castro have received honors from the Russian Orthodox Church. Additionally, while in Moscow in May 2015 Raúl Castro met Patriarch Kirill, the Patriarch of Russian Orthodox Church. Patriarch Kirill reciprocated this visit when in February 2016, he visited the Russian Orthodox Church and met Raúl Castro (*Edicion de la Embajada* 2010; *The Russian Orthodox Church* 2015). The opening of this church and these visits not only show the improvement in the bilateral relationship but are also highly interesting due to the agnostic pasts of both countries for large parts of the twentieth century.

An element of nostalgia for the past (further evidenced by the opening of two Soviet themed restaurants in Havana) may have relevance for this increase in cultural ties. Also important, and linked to these cultural ties, is the aforementioned reconceptualization of the relationship’s past that has taken place by both governments. This was most evident in January 2009 when Raúl Castro visited the permanent exhibition at the Museum of the Great Patriotic War in Moscow to Jorge and Aldo Vivo and Enrique Vilar who fought for the Red Army during World War II (*Edicion de la Embajada* 2010). Similarly, on August 7, 2015, Mikhail Kamynin, Russian Ambassador to Cuba, visited the new permanent exhibition to Marina de Gontich, the Russian ballerina who had lived in Havana in the early twentieth century, in the Museo de la Revolución in Havana (*Edicion de la Embajada* 2015), and as

noted, in October 2019 Medvedev referenced the three Russians who fought in the Cuban wars of independence.

This reconceptualization process demonstrates the longevity of the bilateral relationship over a protracted period, its interconnected nature and significantly its continuation. This is highly important as a complete generation of citizens have now been born in both countries since the end of Cuban-Soviet relations in 1991 who could question the relationship's continuation due to the geographical distance between the two countries. In sum, Havana-Moscow relations have dramatically improved from the mid-1990s onward with this being underpinned by changes in both countries' foreign policies. The outcome is that several commonalities exist between the relationship that has evolved from the mid-1990s onward and the relationship that developed between Havana and Moscow in the late 1950s/early 1960s.

JANUARY 1959 TO DECEMBER 1991

As noted previously, the geopolitical situation when bilateral Cuban-Russian relations began to improve in the mid-1990s was very different from May 1960 when Havana-Moscow diplomatic relations had been recreated in the aftermath of the Cuban Revolution. Chief among these differences was the Cold War setting of the early 1960s. Notwithstanding this, a key commonality that exists between the two eras was U.S. opposition to the Cuban Revolution.⁵ Cuban-U.S. relations quickly deteriorated after January 1959 with Washington attempting to remove the government in Havana, most infamously demonstrated in April 1961 with the failed Bay of Pigs invasion. Defensive realism was evident in the aftermath of this attempted invasion with Castro's announcement on December 2, 1961, that he, and thus the Cuban Revolution, were Marxist-Leninist. It is believed that Castro's motivation had been to try and gain security guarantees from Moscow, essential due to U.S. hostility toward Cuba (Shearman 1987, 10–11). The outcome was that a relationship with Moscow, underpinned by defensive realism, would counter U.S. aggression.

Similarly, the United States impacted Moscow's attention in Cuba both in the late 1950s/early 1960s and, as detailed above, also from the mid-1990s onward. During the Cold War, this attention was for geopolitical reasons due to Cuba's geostrategic location and shared pre-1959 history with the United States. Consequently, Moscow could utilize the relationship with Havana to increase its power vis-à-vis Washington. Moreover, the burgeoning relationship demonstrated to Washington that not only could Moscow challenge U.S. hegemony in Latin America, but also even the Caribbean. As outlined above, due to the apparent assertiveness of the "Putin doctrine" in Russian foreign

policy, offensive realism appeared important for Russian interest in Cuba in the twenty-first century to counter the United States. Moreover, this was both repeated, and intensified, during the Cold War due to the idea that Cuba could act as a beachhead for further Soviet penetration in the region (Morley 1987, 135–162; Andrew and Mitrokhin 2005, 33–58). However, mirroring the argument in the previous section of this chapter, defensive realism was vital because during the Cold War Moscow could use the flourishing Cuban-Soviet relationship to counter Washington's anti-Soviet policies elsewhere in the world, including by the early 1960s Berlin.

In addition to these, other reasons, specific to the late 1950s/early 1960s, also existed. This included how the Soviet political and economic models were appealing for the new government in Havana in their endeavors to create a new society in Cuba. Moreover, the Soviets lack of a traditional colonial past only increased their appeal in the Developing World, with Cuba being no different (Bain 2007, 20–21). Additionally, the close personal affinity that quickly materialized between Fidel Castro and Nikita Khrushchev was also important for the blossoming relationship of the early 1960s with it also answering Chinese accusations of Soviet revisionism (E. Domínguez 1995, 72). Furthermore, the timing of the Cuban Revolution was not only significant because it was at the height of Cold War tension, but the victory of the Cuban Revolution also coincided with Moscow taking an increased interest in the Developing World in general (Light 1988, 99–124).

Cuban-Soviet relations developed rapidly, not least economically with bilateral trade increasing exponentially. Importantly, many of these original reasons for the relationship's creation would continue to impact it over the next thirty years. However, over time other pressures would also affect the bilateral relationship. This included the relationship being between two Marxist-Leninist states after December 1961; the effects of the Cuban Missile Crisis which prevented Moscow severing ties with Cuba; and that vast Soviet economic investment (both monetary and the number of Soviet specialists who had worked in Cuba) would be lost if the relationship was terminated (Velekhov 1995, 3; Lavrentyev 1985).

Tension may have appeared in Cuban-Soviet relations, not least in the 1960s over the correct path to socialism in Latin America, but Cuba retained geostrategic significance for Moscow throughout the Cold War period. Cuba's geostrategic significance for the Kremlin was heightened in the early 1980s with the onset of the second Cold War with Moscow providing increased economic and military security for the Cuban Revolution in the face of ongoing U.S. aggression against the Caribbean island.⁶ Cuba's geostrategic importance for Moscow only receded with the implosion of the Soviet Union which simultaneously ended close Havana-Moscow relations. However, as detailed previously, this decrease in the geostrategic significance

of Cuba for Moscow was not long-term because it reemerged, albeit at a lower level, in the mid-1990s.

In sum, the bilateral relationship that developed between Havana and Moscow in the late 1950s/early 1960s was underpinned by a variety of different reasons and pressures, not least the timing of these events which were at the height of the Cold War. Moreover, what was fundamental was the impact of the United States on both bilateral Cuban-Soviet relations, but also Washington's individual relationships with Havana and Moscow. Consequently, realism was significant for the relationship, with offensive realism appearing to have resonance due to apparent Soviet assertiveness. Conversely, defensive realism was central for Havana's interest in Moscow and Moscow's interest in Havana.

CONCLUSIONS

The outcome is that, although the geopolitical situation in the late 1950s/early 1960s was vastly different from contemporary geopolitics, several commonalities exist between the two different eras concerning the relationship between Havana and Moscow. Chief among these commonalities is U.S. hostility toward both Havana and Moscow which shows no signs of abating under Trump's presidency. Subsequently, defensive realism has also impacted both eras with the geostrategic significance of Cuba for Moscow, although at a reduced intensity compared to the Cold War period, resurfacing in the post-Soviet era. Defensive realism also underpins Cuba's desire to increase both bilateral trade (likely to increase in the future and aided by the 2014 agreement on Cuba's Soviet era debt) and the number of Russians vacationing on the island. An increase in both trade and Russians visiting Cuba would help respectively mitigate reliance on Chinese and Venezuelan trade as well as a reliance on Canadian tourists. Additionally, both trade and tourism help Cuba to offset the impact of the U.S. economic embargo.

Alterations in both Havana and Moscow's foreign policies in the post-Soviet era have also impacted the bilateral relationship with the Kremlin's pivot to the west in the early to mid-1990s having a subsequent negative affect on Havana-Moscow relations. However, from the mid-1990s onwards, the foreign policy goals of both countries have aligned with both providing support for the other in international fora. The upshot is that the relationship remains mutually beneficial and has a long heritage that extends long before May 20, 1960. Both these factors make the continuation of the relationship in the short-to-medium term highly probable with this only liable to change if significant alteration in either government occurs. At the time of the sixtieth anniversary of the recommencement of diplomatic relations between Havana

and Moscow, this appears unlikely with the relationship and its immediate future being defined by the shadow of its past.

NOTES

1. Diplomatic relations between Havana and Moscow had existed for a ten-year period between October 1942 and March 1952.

2. Interestingly in April 2016 during his speech to the Seventh Congress of the Cuban Communist Party (PCC), Raúl Castro criticized the expansion of NATO to the edge of Russia's borders (Castro 2016). Additionally, Díaz-Canel returned to this topic during Medvedev's October 2019 trip to Cuba when he said, "We strongly condemn NATO's attempts to surround the Russian Federation and close in on its borders." (Russian Government 2019a).

3. Russia selling military goods to Latin America has been an important aspect of Russia's increased interest in the region in the twenty-first century. This was demonstrated in April 2007 when Rosoboronexport participated in the Latin America Aero and Defense (LAAD) arms exhibition held in Rio de Janeiro (Russia to Exhibit Buk-M2 air Air Defense System at LAAD 2007). Moreover, in June 2007 Venezuela bought 100,000 (Juventud Rebelde 2007).

4. Granma July 12, 2014, 5. The idea that Cuba's Soviet era debt had acted as "block" to increasing Cuban-Russian trade was given more credence during an interview that Medvedev gave to the All-Russian State Television and Radio Broadcasting Company during his October 2019 visit to Cuba. When discussing his visit meeting with Raúl Castro Medvedev said, "I talked with him about cooperation, we recalled the past, our first meeting. Our relations have come a long way since then. I will be frank with you—when we met for the first time, things were really difficult with us, to be honest. That is, we had good relations but economic exchange was minor, and there was practically no investment. And the decisions that we made back then that solved the situation with the debt, a whole number of decisions, deals concluded by large Russian companies, led to a situation where our vehicles are here again, as are our locomotives, and now the subject of railways is getting high on the agenda." (Russian Government 2019d).

5. The U.S. embargo remained in place even with the rapprochement in Cuban-U.S. relations under Raúl Castro and Obama.

6. In the early 1980s Moscow had informed Havana that it would no longer deploy troops to the Caribbean to provide Cuban security, but Cuba did receive state-of-the-art Soviet military hardware (Leonov 2015, 201–203).

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Chapter 12

Havana and Caracas

Counter-Hegemonic Cooperation and the Battle for Sovereignty

Chris Walker

[P]ower centers formed by institutional complexes can be classified as hegemonic, meaning that they produce ideas and policies with enough theoretical depth and financial backing that they dominate thought over wide fields of power (New York, London, Frankfurt, etc.) . . . or counter-hegemonic, meaning centers, institutions, and movements founded on opposing political beliefs that contend against the conventional, exercise counter-power, and advocate policy alternatives (Havana, Caracas, etc.). (Peet 2015, 267–268)

INTRODUCTION

The current Cuban flag was initially conceived by Cuban poet, Miguel Teurbe Tolón, as well as Venezuelan, Narciso López. López, who along with other Venezuelans, including Calixto García de Luna e Izquierdo, sought to help liberate Cuba from Spanish colonial rule in the 1800s and had the flag accompany him on his unsuccessful attempts (Chaffin 1996; Thomas 1998; Rice 2013). Calixto García de Luna e Izquierdo's grandson, General Calixto García Íñiguez, would later become a hero of Cuba's future wars for Independence alongside Cuba's most famed leader of independence, José Martí (Pérez 1979; Martí 2002; J. Kirk 2012; Rice 2013).

This allyship and solidarity—against colonialism, imperialism, and hegemony—was not always the case. At the time of the 1959 Cuban revolution, Venezuela (and all other South American countries), shunned contact with Cuba, many in favor of appeasing or succumbing to pressure from the United

States (U.S.) and allies. The sixtieth anniversary of the Cuban Revolution in 2020 marked several significant milestones for the Cuban government. Under the leadership of Fidel Castro, it has managed to transform previous hostile or absent international relations into allies. Only two countries in the Western Hemisphere, Canada and Mexico, acknowledged Fidel's 1959 government after it overthrew U.S.-backed dictator, Fulgencio Batista. As of 2019, 187 countries voted at the United Nations (UN) in support of Cuba and against the U.S. embargo (with two countries abstaining, Colombia and Ukraine). Only three countries voted for a continuation of the embargo: the United States, Israel, and (newcomer) Brazil (UN 2019).

Currently, Caracas maintains one of the closest relations with Havana despite geopolitical pressure from the United States and allies, political polarization, material shortages, hyperinflation, as well as cyclical and historic oil dependence issues. Few countries have been as enmeshed politically, economically, and cooperatively as Cuba and Venezuela for the past twenty years. This relationship has benefited both countries, mainly in economic terms for Cuba, while Venezuela has benefited from increasing human capital as well as the expansion of its welfare state services/institutions (especially to the benefit of poor and marginalized communities).¹ Venezuela's former leader, Hugo Chávez considered Fidel his mentor and, upon Chávez's death, Fidel lamented that Chávez was the "best friend" the Cuban people have had in their history (Castro and Prensa Latina 2013).

This chapter analyzes the significance and challenges of the close relationship between Havana and Caracas from an international development perspective of "hegemony" and "counter-hegemony" (Pieterse 2010, 9).² While relations between Havana and Washington have fluctuated in the past ten years, relations between Caracas and Washington have been consistently at odds since the election of Chávez, appearing to escalate with each U.S. president: from George W. Bush, to Barack Obama, to Donald Trump. Despite this, Havana and Caracas have committed to advancing their counter-hegemonic solidarity, through good times and bad, as well as continue to pursue social-egalitarian policy alternatives to neoliberalism and inequality.

Reflections from two separate research trips to Venezuela in 2013 and 2015/2016 as well as numerous trips to Cuba from 2014 to 2019, highlighted the geopolitical significance of their south-south solidarity as an alternative to neoliberal hegemony and development. After situating pre-1998 Venezuela, this chapter will then focus on the Chavista government era and rise of Cuban-Venezuelan cooperation throughout leadership changes in both countries. Under his leadership, Chávez significantly expanded relations with Cuba and became one of Fidel's main allies in the counter-hegemonic vacuum left from the 1991 fall of the Soviet Union (USSR) as noted in Paolo Spadoni's chapter, table 12.1.³

Table 12.1 Cuba's Largest Merchandise Trading Partners, 1990–2018 (Percentage of total bilateral trade)

Year	Venezuela	China	Spain	Canada	Mexico	Brazil	Russia
1990	0.5	4.7	2.1	1.3	1.5	1.6	67.9
1995	5.4	8.2	10.2	10.3	9.2	1.4	5.7
2000	14.1	8.1	13.8	9.1	5.2	2.3	6.7
2004	19.0	8.4	10.3	9.5	3.3	2.8	2.5
2008	27.3	12.1	8.0	7.9	2.1	3.6	1.8
2012	44.2	8.7	6.0	4.8	2.6	3.9	1.8
2014	40.6	9.1	6.5	5.2	2.6	3.6	1.1
2016	17.7	20.5	10.4	4.8	3.6	4.0	1.8
2018	22.4	14.4	10.0	6.3	3.9	3.4	3.3

Sources: Spadoni 2020 based off ONEI 1996, 2001, 2007, 2013, 2019.

Though economic exchange and the creation of their regional inter-governmental organization—the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America/*Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra América* (ALBA)—will be highlighted, the main focus of this chapter will be their bilateral cooperation (with a particular focus on medical solidarity). The chapter will detail various social missions, including the *Misión Sucre* education mission, the *Misión Barrio Adentro* / Mission Inside the Neighborhood (MBA) parallel public health care system, as well as one of their most successful regional missions to restore eyesight, *Misión Milagro*/Mission Miracle. Most of these missions were carried out primarily with a mix of Venezuelan material resources coupled with Cuban human resources in education and health care.

However, after 2013 challenges increased as Venezuela became increasingly politically polarized and entered a period of deepening crisis following Chávez's death and sustained drop in oil prices, creating significant economic hardship as well as a return to 2006–2008 levels of bilateral trade (3.104 million USD in 2018), down from their peak level in 2012 (8.563 million USD) as seen in Spadoni's table 12.2.

Chavista leader, Nicolás Maduro, narrowly won the 2013 presidential election after Chávez's passing. Additionally, Venezuelan opposition, including leaders who are against Cuban cooperation, won their first election in sixteen years, taking control of Venezuela's National Assembly in 2015.

The 2015 election highlighted a significant reduction in support which took the Chavista government by surprise. Consequently, Venezuela's two-party political system, deep polarization, and decreasing support have created unique challenges to the politicized collaboration between Caracas and Havana. Additionally, after 2013, the positive health outcomes from 2000

Table 12.2 Cuba's Merchandise Trade with Venezuela, 1998–2018 (US\$ Million)

<i>Year</i>	<i>Exports</i>	<i>Imports</i>	<i>Bilateral Trade</i>
1998	2	386	388
2000	14	898	912
2002	19	725	744
2004	367	1,143	1,510
2006	409	2,232	2,641
2008	414	4,473	4,887
2010	1,717	4,302	6,019
2012	2,484	6,079	8,563
2014	2,069	5,189	7,258
2016	642	1,583	2,225
2018	462	2,642	3,104

Sources: Spadoni 2020 based off ONEI 2007, 2013, 2019.

Table 12.3 Venezuelan Health Statistics from 1980s pre-Chávez Venezuela Present

<i>Years</i>	<i>Total Population</i>	<i>Life Expectancy at Birth</i>	<i>Maternal Mortality Ratio (Modeled Estimate, per 100,000 Live Births)</i>	<i>Infant Mortality Rate, Infant (Per 1,000 Live Births)</i>	<i>Literacy Rate among the Population Aged 15 years and Older</i>
1980	15,182,611	68.542		35.2	84.732 (1981)
1985	17,319,520	69.715		29.5	
1990	19,632,665	70.658		24.7	89.825
1995	21,931,084	71.321		22.1	
# 2000	24,192,446	72.112	119	18.4	92.98 (2001)
# * 2005	26,432,447	72.852	113	15.8	95.155 (2007)
# * 2010	28,439,940	73.134	117	14.6	95.512 (2009)
^ * 2015	30,081,829	72.584	115	16.8	96.605
^ * Most recent	28,515,829 (2019)	72.128 (2018)	125 (2017)	21 (2019)	97.127 (2016)

* Cuban support for the Venezuelan health and education systems.

Venezuela led by Hugo Chávez: 1999–2013.

^ Venezuela led by Nicolas Maduro: 2013–present.

Source: World Bank 2020a, <https://data.worldbank.org/>

to 2010, due, in part, to their bilateral agreement and drop in inequality, has been partially reversed as noted in table 12.3.⁴

Despite this, Maduro promises to maintain Venezuela's strong relations with Cuba as noted in his praise on the date of the anniversary of the revolution: "We commemorate the anniversary of the triumph of the Cuban Revolution led by Comandante Fidel Castro. 60 years of sacrifices, struggle and blockade; the heroic Cuban people, an example of resistance and dignity before the world. Long live Cuba!" (Maduro as quoted in Granma 2019).

Thus, while leadership has changed in both countries, Maduro has carried on the warm relations (despite declining support domestically) with previous Cuban president, Raúl Castro, as well as current president, Miguel Díaz-Canel—continuing the legacy that Fidel and Chávez initiated.

The final section will detail the strain on both countries triggered by the collapse of oil prices, material shortages, hyperinflation, and continued political polarization within Venezuela, as well as geopolitical pressure by United States and allies that have tightened embargos, frozen assets, and expanded sanctions. This chapter will then conclude by briefly detailing future considerations in the current geopolitical uncertainty (highlighted by COVID-19 and U.S. administrative changes).

NEOLIBERALISM, HEGEMONY, AND COUNTER-HEGEMONY

When traveling and researching Cuba and Venezuela, there is an interesting contrast with other countries. Alongside material shortages and economic challenges, they have few international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), fewer U.S. and Global North industries/corporations/products, as well as a high degree of state-led services/industries/products. As noted in the quote at the beginning of the chapter by Richard Peet, Cuba and Venezuela are among the last counter-hegemonic countries to exercise “counter-power” as well as advocate for “policy alternatives” to the current neoliberal hegemony (2015, 267–268).⁵

The World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), and U.S. government, together known as the Washington Consensus, geopolitically advance neoliberalism. As noted by Peter Evans and William Sewell, neoliberalism functions as economic theory, policy paradigm, political ideology, and social imaginary (2013, 36). When combined, they reinforce each other to promote: “entrepreneurship, self-reliance, and sturdy individualism;” equate “untrammelled pursuit of self-interest and consumer satisfaction with human freedom;” glorify “personal wealth;” see “volunteerism [and NGOs] as the appropriate way to solve social problems;” as well as associate “government programs with inefficiency, corruption, and incompetence” (37–38). Thus, there is a significant concern about how power, coupled with this kind of discourse, is concentrated in “a few spaces that control a world of distant others” (Peet 2015, 265). While there has “been little serious effort to reconsider the theoretical rationale for these policies or to ask who gains and losses from their implementation,” this paradigm continues (Quiggin 2010, 182).

Cuba, Venezuela, and their counter-hegemonic ALBA allies, involving other left-leaning nations in Latin America and the Caribbean, operate in

direct “opposition to the Free Trade Area of the Americas, the Washington Consensus, and neoliberalism” (Azicri 2009, 99). Despite the passing of Fidel in 2015 and Chávez 2013, these countries remain counter-hegemonic outliers attempting to chart a more social egalitarian approach to governance, policy, health care, and geopolitical solidarity. Thus, this chapter will outline how the foreign relations between these countries are aided by understanding the current neoliberal hegemony, as manifest in the Global North by multinational institutions as well as the United States and allies.

HARD POWER, SOFT POWER, AND THE WAR ON IDEAS

This is because, as noted by Steve Brouwer, their counter-hegemonic example elicits responses from the United States and allies that might best be understood as a “war on ideas” (2011, 201–214). This “war on ideas” involves the use of both “soft power” (culture, media, and aid) as well as “hard power” (sanctions, embargos, blockades, coup attempts, and the threat of overt military action) (Nye 1990, 2012; Dukes 2002). During research trips to Venezuela and Cuba, it was apparent that the governments of both Cuba and Venezuela, along with significant segments of their populations, were aware of Global North threats to their counter-hegemonic examples. When coupled together, Cuba and Venezuela appear to constitute what Noam Chomsky (1992) has conceptualized as the “threat of a good example.” Cuba and Venezuela’s imperfect counter-hegemonic projects face strong geopolitical pressure, and their relationship is under intense scrutiny.

It must be emphasized that any analysis of Venezuela (and its relationship with Cuba) is challenging due to the unique degree of political polarization (Walker 2015, 3–4). Venezuelan opposition has their academics, media, and leaders, while Chavistas (followers of the government established by Chávez) have their own. Often attempting to investigate complexities, gray areas, and rich context of Venezuela can leave a person ignored or distrusted by both sides of the political spectrum. “Are you Chavista or opposition?” is a question that appears to be a staple of most interactions when conducting research as well as navigating everyday life in Venezuela.

Interviews with various left-leaning Cuban and Venezuelan scholars and politicians as well as community focus group interviews with community organizations in the rural Torres region of Venezuela (pers. comm. 2013; 2015), highlighted their understanding of Global North “hard” and “soft power.” Alongside a range of literature (Galeano 1997; Chomsky 1992, 2003; Perkins 2004, 2016; Hanieh 2013), left-leaning Cubans and Venezuelans noted examples in other countries where national/

nationalized industries were decimated due to dumping of Global North aid. These countries then became aid-dependent and indebted to neoliberal knowledge- and policy-producing institutions such as the World Bank and IMF (George 1988; Hanieh 2013; Perkins 2004, 2016). Conditionalities were attached to the process of incurring World Bank and IMF debt in the form of Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs)—of which revolutionary Cuba was one of the few Global South countries spared while Venezuela was devastated by a particularly brutal one called *El paquete* (Muntaner et al. 2006, 804–806).⁶

SAPs focused on three main areas. The first area included the reduction of government spending by laying off workers (especially in education and health care), disempowering labor unions, cutting government programs, and ending subsidies for poor populations (housing, water, food, and transportation). The second area attempted to improve the environment for foreign corporate investment, increase exports through currency devaluation, reductions/freezing of wages (which diminished labor power and rights), and reduced taxation (which meant that governments had less ability to spend on public services and infrastructure). Lastly, SAPs extended free market capitalist reach through privatization and suppression of state regulation which expanded private education and private health care approaches as well as left the market to regulate prices, often resulting in increases (Muntaner et al. 2006; Brunelli 2007; Quiggin 2010, 181–182; Pieterse 2010; Evans and Sewell 2013, 37; Hanieh 2013; Forster et al. 2019).⁷

Yet hard power was also a significant tool, and foreign interest has played a significant role in Latin America as the United States would back many brutal dictators to control the regions wealth. This Latin American blueprint is historically best exemplified by “Juan Vicente Gómez in Venezuela, Gerardo Machado in Cuba, and Porfirio Díaz in Mexico” where an “exclusionary political alliance between export elites, foreign investors, and the state” were mostly maintained by force with the backing of military institutions (Karl 2003, 143). For Venezuela, much like other Latin American countries, inequality was further embedded by huge disparities in land titles. In 1997, only 5 percent of the population, mostly from elite Venezuelan families, controlled 75 percent of Venezuelan land (much of it farmable yet unused and known as *latifundos*) (Nakatani and Herrera 2008, 293; Edwards 2010, 22). Awareness of this is highlighted by Chávez’s 2006 speech before the UN General Assembly, where he praised Chomsky’s 2003 book, *Hegemony or Survival: America’s Quest for Global Dominance*, as well as when he gifted Eduardo Galeano’s 1973 book, *Open Veins of Latin America*, to Barack Obama shortly after Obama’s electoral victory in 2009—which shot both books to the tops of best seller lists (Rich 2006; Clark 2009).

While similar examples are documented in the Middle East by Adam Hanieh (2015), it remains a significant part Latin American history that was witnessed by the leaders of the Cuban Revolution as well. Fidel, Raúl, and Ernesto “Ché” Guevara were very aware of U.S.-backed coups as well as the weaponization of Global North aid that devastated many countries’ industries, from mining in Peru to agriculture in Guatemala (Anderson 2010). Countries who did not abide by Global North aid, debt, and the neocolonial reach of neoliberal development, often faced “hard power” of United States and ally sanctions, embargos, coups, and interventions.

PRE-CHÁVEZ: SAPS AND INEQUALITY

Before Chávez’s 1998 election, Venezuela was in turmoil and facing deep social inequities, further exacerbated by SAPs (Muntaner et al. 2006, 804–806), which had spread into health care.

Until the early 1980s, [Venezuela] was one of the only four Latin American countries certified by the World Bank as an upper-middle-income economy. It was also a stable, center-left democracy, quite an oasis in a region plagued by authoritarianism, insurgency, or unrest. Today [1999], Venezuela is in ruins. . . . Inflation remained indomitable and among the highest in the region, economic growth continued to be volatile and oil-dependent, growth per capita stagnated, unemployment rates surged, and public sector deficits endured despite continuous spending cutbacks. Real wages today are almost 70 percent below what they were 20 years ago. In eight of the last 12 years, Venezuela suffered some sort of economic emergency—a critical fiscal deficit, a banking crisis, a currency crisis, an economic recession or a combination of these. More than two-thirds of the population now live below poverty levels. (Corrales 1999, 26)

Given the current state of the Venezuelan crisis, a reader could mistake the above analysis by Javier Corrales as being written in the past few years.⁸ Prior to the Chavista government, response capacity of the health care network had become “critically insufficient” (PAHO 2006, 11). Though all Venezuelans were supposed to be “ensured access to a basic list of drugs through the Venezuelan Social Security Institute,” the reality was that availability was very limited due to the “lack of progressive public funding of the Institute itself” (10). Thus, in pre-Chávez times, by 1999 poor Venezuelans comprised almost “three-quarters of the population, with a very limited access to health care services through a precarious public system” (Muntaner et al. 2006, 806).

Much like the current material, resource, and health care challenges faced in Venezuela today (Page et al. 2019), these challenges were primarily faced only by the bottom three-quarters of the population. When reviewing the history of Venezuela and its struggle with single resource Dutch Disease, outside of a golden area in the 1950s, the rise and fall of government support and economic strength has been strongly associated with oil prices. As noted by Gregroy Wilpert, oil “has shaped practically every aspect of the country, its history, its economy, its politics, and its culture” (2003). Much like medical internationalism for Cuba, Venezuelan oil has played a very significant role in its international relations.

The reduction of health care access at that time also exacerbated already high levels of poverty. This is a cyclical challenge as the health/wealth nexus highlights, where “ill health begets poverty and poverty begets ill health” (Walker 2015, 29). Brouwer highlights that even Moses Naim, a strong critic of Chávez as well as Venezuela’s Minister of Trade and Industry from 1989 to 1990, acknowledged the extent of poverty. He noted in 2001, that in the past twenty years, critical poverty had “increased threefold and poverty in general” had more than doubled. Even real wages “were 70 percent below what they were in 1980” (Brouwer 2011, 76). This is why, as one wealthy opposition academic noted in an interview: “if we had paid more attention to the poor *before* Chávez came to power, we never would have had to deal with the problem of Chávez *being in power*” (pers. comm, 2013). Thus, these issues were some of the most difficult challenges for Chávez when he was first elected through a liberal democratic process. It would also mean that these poor and marginalized populations—constituting a significant majority of the Venezuelan population—were ready for change.

CHÁVEZ, VARGAS, AND THE RISE OF THE CHAVISTAS

During Chávez’s inauguration in 1999, Venezuela was mired in the “deepest economic crisis in more than a decade” with the poor representing “80 percent of the population” despite being the world’s second largest petroleum exporter and the largest source of foreign oil to the United States. His inauguration ceremony included sixteen heads of state and delegations from forty-five nations while, tellingly, the United States sent Energy Secretary, Bill Richardson, as its representative (Kovaleski 1999). As noted by former-president Donald Trump’s previous National Security Advisor, John Bolton, the focus on Venezuelan oil for U.S. interests would not fade in the years to follow (Rowell 2019; Telesur 2019; Wilkins 2019).

Though oil would eventually be nationalized under the Chavista government (much to the chagrin of U.S. foreign policy and ruling elite) as an engine for the social missions developed with the purpose of reducing poverty/inequality, much of the agriculture, manufacturing, production, and distribution remain controlled by the dominant ruling families and their companies. When Chávez came to power, approximately 90 percent of imports were under control of private corporations. This meant that the Chavista government lacked an “efficient means to provide the people with basic goods in the hardest moments of class struggle” (Nakatani and Herrera 2008, 293).

Shortly after Chávez’s inauguration, the Vargas tragedy struck Venezuela. Between December 14 and 16, 1999, Venezuela suffered one of its worst national disasters when mudslides, debris flows, and flash floods in Vargas State killed up to an estimated 30,000 people (only 1,000 bodies were recovered), displacing approximately 114,000 people and affecting, directly or indirectly, 600,000 people (USAID 2000). Instead of relying primarily on Global North aid, NGOs or multinational development institutions for help (who are often directed by wealthy Global North donors and philanthropists), Cuban medical personnel were some of the first and most effective responders (who were directed by the Venezuelan government to meet the immediate needs of its most health-vulnerable populations).

Reflecting on the work of Mark Duffield (2007) and Hanieh (2013), Chávez, like Fidel, was weary of Global North power. Through crisis, aid, and decimation of public services (largely by SAPs), the Global North development industry often positions itself as arbiters over noninsured “surplus life” in the Global South, while simultaneously expanding free-market interests and profits (Duffield 2007, 17–18; Hanieh 2013, 14–73). This life is considered “noninsured” because of the lack of access to welfare state services and supports (often devastated by SAPs) that many Global North populations take for granted such as public education, social services, worker insurance programs, respect for labor and environmental rights, and—particularly significant to the contexts of Venezuela and Cuba—universal public health care (Duffield 2007, 17–24; Hanieh 2013, 14–73).

The Vargas tragedy became the spark where, as Max Azicri observed, “Socialist Cuba and Bolivarian Venezuela” embarked on a “historic journey of hemispheric dimensions” (Azicri 2009, 99). After the disaster, Cuba sent a team of 454 Cuban health care personnel which began providing medical care to many of the marginalized and poor who were living on the hillside peripheries. These *barrio* (neighborhood in Spanish but slang for slum specifically in Venezuela) dwellers became the focus of Cuban medical teams as a part of Cuba’s international solidarity program which would then become a major part of the development of Venezuela’s parallel health care system, *MBA* (Muntaner et al. 2006, 806).

Many Venezuelan physicians from the conventional health system refused working in poor areas to help the most affected populations from the landslide, often citing a lack of infrastructure and security concerns. In contrast, Cuban medical personnel responded to the request for help, assisted these vulnerable populations, and lived among them while doing so (2006, 806). Thus, “under the collaborative and solidarity alliance between Havana and Caracas a complex web of bilateral trade and services . . . developed, including Venezuelan oil and Cuban medical expertise” (Azicri 2009, 99). Fidel and Chávez’s solidarity formed the “bedrock of the alliance” and is based upon the “vision of a united Latin America free of Washington’s control, turning Simón Bolívar’s legacy into a new reality” (99).

SOUTH-SOUTH SOLIDARITY TAKES OFF

Before 1998, Venezuela was only Cuba’s fourth largest trading partner. After Chávez’s election, trade increased significantly, and Venezuela leaped past other countries to become Cuba’s main economic collaborator by 2000. Under one of the first agreements signed by Chávez, Cuba would import approximately 53,000 barrels of oil a day which amounted to approximately 29 percent of Cuban needs (Mesa-Lago 2003, 104). After the collapse of the Soviet Union and Eastern European countries, Cuba was forced to diversify their trading partners with Venezuela taking a significant proportion of the trade, from 8 percent in 1999 to 13.9 percent in 2000 (104).

After the ink dried on their bilateral relationship and establishment of the *MBA* Cuban-supported parallel health care system for poor and marginalized populations in 2003, cooperation truly took off with the help of a newly nationalized oil industry. Spadoni (2020) highlights that, driven by Cuba’s special deals with Venezuela in the area of *MBA* medical assistance, a significant portion of Cuba’s total exports of goods and services (when accounting for nontourist services) nearly tripled from 21 percent in 2004 to 57.5 percent in 2013, and 63.1 percent by 2018. Their bilateral solidarity involves a range of programs beyond oil for doctors. While their cooperation has fluctuated (as noted in Spadoni’s table 4), it has included “development aid, joint business ventures, large financial transactions, exchange of energy resources and information technology, and cooperation in the fields of intelligence service and military.” One of the defining characteristics of their cooperation is that, instead of dumping leftover/obsolete materials, charity in the form of aid, or issuing loans tied to conditionalities, “both nations are exchanging assets among each other which are inexpensive for the sending country but of high significance for the receiving country” (Corrales 2005, 2).

The *MBA* agreement, along with the other social missions, contributed to the significant increase in health outcomes. Between “2000 and 2009, Venezuela’s infant mortality rate fell from 27 per 1,000 births to 15 (beating Brazil and Colombia).” Child mortality rate under “5 fell from 32 to 17 per 1,000 (trumping Brazil, Colombia, and Peru), and the adult mortality rate fell from 148 to 146 (edging out both Brazil and Colombia)” (Docksai 2012, 46). Most of the significant increases benefited the poor and marginalized majority.⁹

As of 2018, there had been 22,793 Cuban medical professionals (of whom 6,154 are doctors) serving in Venezuela. Connor Gorrry documents that:

Since its inception, the scope of [*MBA*] has broadened to include centers for ophthalmologic services, high-tech diagnostics and laboratory analyses, comprehensive rehabilitation services, and a hospital staffing and modernization program. All [*MBA*] services are free of charge. In order to build sustainability into [*MBA*], the two countries launched an aggressive bilateral medical education program. Using Cuban curriculum taught by Cuban and local medical professors, Venezuela’s National Community Medicine Training Program graduated 2130 new physicians and 4251 family medicine specialists in 2018. An additional 38,045 Venezuelan students are currently studying medicine in their home country, with Cuban professors and curricula (2160 are in postgraduate degree-conferring programs). (2019, 10)

Thus, out of all of Cuba’s medical internationalist programs, currently numbering fifty-nine countries involving approximately 28,000 personnel (Augustin 2020), Venezuela’s *MBA* remains the largest, and yet, potentially most controversial do its unique politicization.¹⁰

ALBA AND COUNTER-POWER

Much of the trade and details of their agreements, like other agreements between ALBA nations, involve nonfinancialized flows of goods and services. As noted by Maribel Aponte-García:

The concept of sovereignty is increasingly being constructed around the international political economy marked by the differentiation and the dynamic between national (including state and private enterprises) and international companies, particularly in the cases of Venezuela, Bolivia and Ecuador. Furthermore, in a political economy that seeks to construct alternatives to the neoliberal trade and financial mechanisms and institutions, this quest is taking form within the context of the triple crisis of food, energy and finance . . . the concept of sovereignty

within the ALBA-TCP has been articulated around the re-nationalisation of hydrocarbons, the curbing of capital flight and the redistribution of profits generated from resources (especially hydrocarbons) toward social projects at the national levels, as well as in the creation of regional mixed state projects and enterprises. This means hydrocarbon sovereignty in Venezuela, Bolivia and Ecuador being tied to inclusive development, as redistribution can be said to focus on access to land, production, consumption, work and credit. (2013, 124)

These nonfinancialized flows serve the purpose reversing reliance on U.S. dollars for transactions, which is especially problematic for both countries given their limited access to U.S. currency as well as how financial assets have been seized or frozen in Global North financial institutions, such as London's seizure of one billion U.S. dollars in Venezuelan state-owned gold (BBC 2020).

However, this also creates an interesting dynamic as oil generated by Venezuela's PDVSA and other industries which are exchanged for Cuban medical services/pharmaceuticals or Bolivian quinoa are not documented or accounted for under the World Bank's World Integrated Trade Solution (WITS) website (2020b). This, in turn, can make these industries appear as inefficient and highly unprofitable as well as making evaluation about their performance complicated. Thus, they are simultaneously "underperforming," inefficient, and clearly in trouble, while at the same time contributing to the expansions of social services and expansion of benevolent policies for poor and marginalized populations.

DISSENT FROM WITHIN

As happened in Haiti, Brazil, and Bolivia, when *MBA* began expanding, protests against Cuban doctors also took place throughout Venezuela (Walker and E. Kirk 2017). Robert Huish noted how "private sector doctors swarmed the streets in protest against 19,000 Cuban healthcare workers offering free care in parts of the country where no Venezuelan doctor had ever worked before." Several protesters, "consumed by nationalist pride and free-market passion, went as far as to lob tear gas and concussion grenades at the Cuban embassy in Caracas in protest of the presence of medical workers" (2013, 19).

In this context, doctors from Venezuela's conventional and private health care system, at times, believed their profession (along with professions such as banking, law, and politics) entitles them to live in certain areas. It becomes a human rights issue for them when doctors—as is the case of Cuban doctors—live in places traditionally occupied by underemployed, service industry personnel, laborers, informal workers, and marginalized people of limited income-generating backgrounds. Thus, neoliberal affluence and inequality

have ideologically and culturally constructed geographic allocations depending on socioeconomic classes. For these protesting doctors (mainly from wealthy backgrounds), poor and marginalized “uninsured” populations are allowed to live, work, and die—often with shorter life spans—in environments that are more insecure, dangerous, and health vulnerable than “insured” populations employed as doctors, lawyers, and politicians. Similarly to their wealthy counterparts from legal and political backgrounds, these doctors have rarely filled the streets in protest against disparaging conditions faced by their own poor and marginalized populations—for whom the Cubans are there to provide care for, and live along side of (Walker and E. Kirk 2017).

During interviews with officials in charge of implementing *MBA* (pers. comm. 2015–2016), the protests and street demonstrations targeting Cuban health care personnel lasted for about three years—though many opposition voters and doctors from the conventional health system still feel that Cuban doctors, as well as the Venezuelans they have trained, are at a substandard level. After significant criticism of Cuban doctors and of their south-south collaboration in general, Chávez decided to confront those who thought Venezuela was being exploited by Cuba. In 2010, he stated that Cuba’s contribution “is priceless” and hypothetically asked what it would cost if Venezuela instead contracted the “services of 30,000 medics from the United States or Europe to work in the barrios and the poorest towns,” live alongside the indigenous populations, “build the medical facilities, bring the equipment for the medical laboratories and operating theaters, and provide” medicine? He continued: “How much would a capitalist country charge us to bring that size of an army of doctors and that sea of medicines for our people, and be on call 24 hours a day?” (ABN 2010).

HARD POWER: THE 2002 COUP, SANCTIONS, EMBARGOS, AND OIL

Evidence of U.S. interest in Venezuelan oil is perhaps most clearly articulated by former National Security Advisor, John Bolton, who stated that it was in America’s interest to gain control of Venezuelan oil and bring it under control and production by U.S. oil companies (Telesur 2019). In January 2019, Bolton told Fox News: “We’re in conversation with major American companies now. I think we’re trying to get to the same end result here. . . . It will make a big difference to the United States economically if we could have American oil companies really invest in and produce the oil capabilities in Venezuela” (Rowell 2019). Due to the lack of success in “regime change” of the Maduro Government (Limitone 2019), via starving and destroying the Venezuelan economy through sanctions and asset freezes, the U.S. threat of

military action “in defense of human rights” was dismissed for what the clear goal of intervention was: oil (Wilkins 2019).

And yet, it is clear that Venezuelan oil is in trouble and potentially mis-managed as highlighted by Venezuela’s perplexing need for Iranian oil. In another “hard power” endeavor, Iran’s oil tankers (carrying approximately 1.1 million barrels), in an act of counter-hegemonic south-south solidarity with Caracas, were seized by the United States “with the assistance of foreign partners” en route to Venezuela (BBC 2020).

Venezuelan struggle with U.S. hegemony has significant connections to the pattern set by other U.S.-backed coups. Maduro often highlights the coup against Chile’s socialist president, Dr. Salvador Allende, as one such parallel. Despite a number of key differences highlighted by Ariel Dorfman (who worked alongside Chilean President Allende), the alliance between Venezuelan elites and U.S. foreign policy bears a number of similarities to how Chilean elites helped pave the way for discontent built upon economic hardship and U.S. backing (Dorfman 2019).

Azicri highlights Fidel’s “fatherly” concern in this regard when, before Chávez’s death in 2013:

Castro admitted his fear that Chávez’s enemies (domestic and international) would try to kill him. This was credible because by then Chávez had won the 1998 and 2000 presidential elections and survived the 2002 coup d’état. (Among the decisions made by Pedro Carmona, head of the business association FEDECAMERAS, during his two-day presidency was to cancel oil shipments to the island, disregarding the 2000 Cuban-Venezuelan convention on oil.) Chávez outlived the 2002 and 2003 general strike and oil stoppage and won the 2004 recall referendum, the 2005 National Assembly elections, and the 2006 presidential election. His only electoral defeat has been the narrowly decided 2007 referendum. (2009, 102)

This has made many Venezuelans feel as if they are stuck between a rock and a hard place (pers. comm. and email 2015–2020). Between U.S. military intervention fallout (as evidenced by Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya), and continued economic hardship under Chavista leadership.

THROUGH THICK AND THIN: POLITICIZATION, POLARIZATION, AND DOLLARIZATION

While there are many similarities to Venezuela’s cyclical oil-dependency crises, the Chávez era (from 1999 to 2013) highlighted a particularly important period of time when nationalized wealth and Cuban support generated

interesting publicly funded policy alternatives that challenged the neoliberal status quo for poor and marginalized populations, even if only temporarily. The Chavista government's focus on decreasing inequality, addressing structural violence, and improving social services are significant reasons why, despite severe material and resource challenges, the current Chavista government (led by Nicolás Maduro) still has significant support from various populations—especially rural, poor, and marginalized populations who had been historically disregarded, ignored, or repressed.

And yet this cooperation has come under fire, both internally for the politicization of health care cooperation, and externally, as Cuba has become a target of U.S. pressure in an effort to topple the Maduro government (Fagenson, Spetalnick, and Wroughton 2019; Schlenker 2020). Venezuela's two-party system appears to have created a significant ideological divide which has, in turn, created physically separate environments along party lines. Many respondents in both research trips noted "Chavista cafés," "opposition neighborhoods," "Chavista parks," and even "opposition beer." The spaces of *MBA* have also been politicized.

Though the goal of *MBA* was to overcome medical exclusion, the images of Chavista leaders, Maduro and Chávez, alongside Cuban leaders and heroes such as Ché, Martí, and Fidel, has reinforced this divide. It has meant that local first-contact primary-care clinics (known as *consultorio médicos populares* or *CPs*), primary care mini-hospitals (*centros de diagnósticos integrales*/integrated diagnostic centers or *CDIs*), and high technology diagnostic centers (called *centros médicos diagnósticos de alta tecnología*), have become aligned with the Chavista-led United Socialist political party branding. Therefore, *MBA* has become a de facto part of the "politics of the government" rather than the politically neutral realm of the "politics of the state" (Walker and E. Kirk 2017, 7). This politicization of the public health care system has meant that Cuban personnel have become branded as part of the Chavista government, politicizing their presence more than other Cuban medical solidarity efforts throughout Latin American.

The politicization of free public health spaces in *MBA* has added an element of "exclusion" in spaces that were ideally meant to be "inclusive." While *MBA*, as well as *Misión Sucre*, has helped overcome geographic, socioeconomic, racial, and gendered exclusion for many people since its integration into the public health care system in 2003; those who wish to vote for another party other than the Chavista party, or hope for a third-party option, or abstain from voting altogether, might find the public health care environments of *MBA* and *Misión Sucre*, uncomfortable or even hostile.

This may not have been as apparent or as significant when the Chavista government was enjoying 60 percent to 75 percent of popular support prior to the 2013 presidential election. The majority against the Chavista government

were mostly wealthy, often urban, populations that could afford high-quality care at private facilities. However, this changed drastically. Not all who currently need the free health care services of *MBA* are inclined to vote for the Chavista government for any number of reasons. The *MBA* Cuban parallel health care system was uniquely politicized in contrast with Cuba's other medical internationalist endeavors such as South Africa, Pakistan, Qatar, Honduras, Nicaragua, the Gambia, among others. Though public health care spaces included portraits of Simon Bolívar (as most public spaces in Venezuela do), the Cuban-supported *MBA* public health care spaces were thus politicized along party lines.

Additionally, economic troubles are mirrored by other issues such as the outmigration/brain drain of a significant segment of the population—including health care personnel. During the first trip, most health care outmigration was from the conventional system. It became very apparent throughout the second research trip that *MBA* staff as well as graduates from *Misión Sucre* were leaving as well. It should be alarming to the Chavista government that “around 50 per cent of medical doctors and 37 per cent of nurses emigrated to other countries of the region, mainly due to their low wages and the lack of conditions to provide adequate health services” (OHCHR 2018, 40). Those that were not leaving were often taking additional jobs as well as shifts in the conventional system or in private clinics to make ends meet.

Throughout the course of interviews, it was clear that the transfer of public health supplies being sold through private care facilities, a significant problem in 2013, had also increased. This is reflective of a broader problem. Venezuela's “imports represented 95 per cent of the health supplies needed to run the public health care system” (OHCHR 2018, 40). Infant mortality increased by 30 percent and maternal mortality increased 65 percent in 2016 as well as other pathologies that were previously contained or under relative control (Hodal 2019).

Today, hardship now appears to permeate most aspects of life in Venezuela. Inflation witnessed during the 2013 trip had clearly transitioned into hyperinflation by 2015/2016. As noted in Figure 12.1 (from the black-market currency estimation website, *DolarToday* 2020), Venezuelan health outcomes began to decline around the same time as Venezuela's inflation transitioned to hyperinflation.

During the 2013 trip, there was an active exchange of USD for Venezuelan Bolivars. At the beginning of the trip, the official exchange was approximately one for six while the black-market exchange was approximately one for twenty. Within three months, that jumped to one for 29. By the end of the following year, it was one for 100. Upon returning, the very active exchange had exploded to one for 900 and then to 1000 in very short order. The 2015 Christmas in Caracas included gifts wrapped in newly discontinued five and

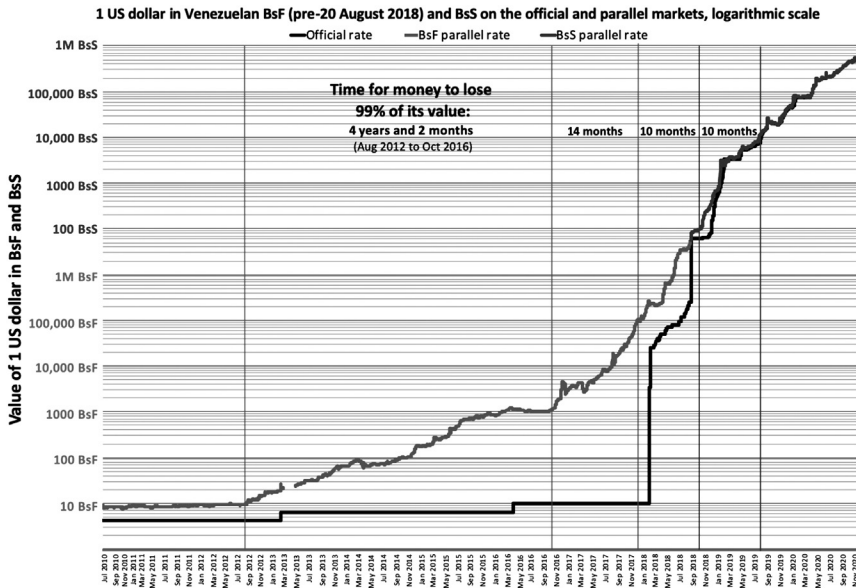


Figure 12.1 Venezuelan Currency Hyperinflation from 2010 to 2020. *Source:* Black market exchange rates from DolarToday (2020): <https://dolartoday.com/indicadores> Official government-approved exchange rates (in black on the graph) from <http://www.bcv.org.ve/estadisticas/tipo-de-cambio>

ten Bolivar notes. The biggest bill at the time of both research trips, the 100 Bolivar, was discontinued by the following December 2016.

At this point, not even Cuban solidarity has been able to mitigate the fallout from broader economic and material issues. Problematically, their counter-hegemonic example and consequences from the politicization of the Cuban medical program in Venezuela may be significant. During the 2015 National Assembly election in Venezuela, while observing the run up to the election in Caracas as well as four different polling stations in Carora on election day, several opposition nominees took aim at the Cuban involvement in the country. Signs and slogans included “no to the Cubanization [of Venezuela]!” were evident in a few places around Venezuela, especially in Caracas’s affluent neighborhoods. Thus, only time will tell if the Cuban medical program in Venezuela would survive a potential change in government in Venezuela—from Chavista to opposition—knowing that for many, Cuba equals Chavista.

CONCLUSION

Chavistas as well as successive Cuban leaders have attempted to retain, reinforce, and expand their welfare states through benevolent public policies

funded by national resources/nationalized industries as well as by limiting Global North influence and aid. As noted in personal participant-observations during 2016 g7+ meetings of fragile state countries in Dili, Timor-Leste, the development industry not only diminishes the control of host Global South governments but also makes their sovereignty “contingent” on the Global North (Duffield 2007).

Cuba and Venezuela have attempted to curb the Global North’s neocolonial hegemony as well as control their national resources to expand their welfare states. Though imperfectly, they continue to buttress their welfare states through the implementation of policies aimed at harnessing national resources, industries, expertise, and education. The goal of this is to reduce inequality, improve health and education outcomes, as well as retain wealth produced within their borders, for the support of their own populations, their allies, and those countries, allied or not, who benefit from their expansive medical and educational internationalist missions (J. Kirk 2015). However, the politicization of their counter-hegemonic solidarity may have ramifications as it has already made Cuban cooperation a political target among Venezuelan opposition. If, and when, power in Venezuela changes, from Chavista to opposition, whether this politicized and polarizing cooperation continues will remain to be seen (Walker and E. Kirk 2017).

The result is that, currently, the reach of the Global North development and aid industry is limited in both countries. They also have limited outstanding debt to neoliberal institutions like the IMF and World Bank as well as other financial institutions located in North America and Europe. Their lack of debt, nationalized industries, resources, and services gives them a higher degree of sovereignty from the Global North not felt by many other countries in Latin America, Africa, and Middle East (Hanieh 2013). This chapter posits that this is precisely what makes their counter-hegemonic examples so “dangerous” (Chomsky 1992): they are sovereign, have limited the expansion of Global North corporations, are allied, and keep surviving against significant odds. This has drawn not only the attention of other Global South countries but also the ire of hegemonic power centers in Washington, New York, and London.

Additionally, neoliberal development, aid, and privatized health care approaches appear to be facing a reckoning evidenced by the COVID-19 pandemic. As noted by Miguel Díaz-Canel at the UN General Assembly’s annual general debate: “Unlike . . . neoliberalism, which puts aside and discards millions of human beings and condemns them to survive on the leftovers from the banquet of the richest one per cent, the COVID-19 virus does not discriminate” (Díaz-Canel 2020, 5). Díaz-Canel continues by noting that during Cuba’s

decade-long experience of facing terrible epidemics, some of which were provoked deliberately as part of the permanent war against our political project, we

immediately implemented a series of measures based on our main capabilities and strengths, namely, a well structured socialist state that cares for the health of its citizens, a highly-skilled human capital and a society with much people's involvement in its decision-making and problem solving processes. (2020, 6)

Thus, their counter-hegemonic example may be most applicable today given the COVID-19 crisis. The pandemic has exposed the need for strong universal health care systems, working in cooperation and solidarity with other countries (not in contestation), as well as pursuing public policy “alternatives” rather than responding to the dictates of neoliberal market logics, policies, and power. While the rapprochement between the United States and Cuba—involving an admirable amount of effort and sacrifice by personnel on both sides (including authors in this book)—appeared as if a new leaf was turned, future uncertainty as well as hope under a Joe Biden presidency might be instore. While the period of Chavista governance highlights that any fleeing rapprochement might only be reserved for Cuba, both hard and soft power has not driven a wedge in their counter-hegemonic efforts.

Spadoni highlights in his chapter that, although Caracas' oil shipments to Havana have decreased since 2013 (due to falling oil prices and economic hardship), and Havana's revenue generation from professional services has also decreased, the “economic lifeline” that Caracas has thrown to Havana since 2000 is “beyond question” (2020). Thus, despite material shortages, economic hardship, hyperinflation, internal strife, polarization, collapsing oil prices, and transitions of power, they appear united in their solidarity. As such, Havana and Caracas's counter-hegemonic example appears to be able to advance, retain, and survive—with their sovereignty intact—through thick and thin.

NOTES

1. Cuba also supplied medical resources and pharmaceuticals where needed and increasingly, Venezuelan physicians have joined the ranks as well, many who are graduates of *Misión Sucre*. Importantly, *Misión Milagro's* program in Venezuela has transitioned from primarily being run by Cuban personnel to Venezuelan personnel as more and more graduates have filled the ranks (J. Kirk 2015, 112–117; Walker 2015).

2. Hegemony, a concept originally developed by Antonio Gramsci, helps understand how to locate power—as well as the construction of power—in societies. He outlines how social classes or groups gain supremacy. Significantly, Gramsci explains how the public is often conditioned into accepting various political systems through complex mechanisms of coerced consent. These forms of consent are created through the means of moral and intellectual production. Gramsci argues that this “consent,” which he considers “social control,” operates on two levels: externally through

material behaviors and actions, and internally by “moulding personal convictions into a replica of prevailing norms” (Femia 1981, 24).

3. Also see Mervyn Bain’s chapter on Moscow-Havana relations for more details.

4. It should be noted that, as argued in previous research as well as discussed in various conversations with Cuban medical personnel, health care is inherently political. Previous publications have argued for a need to repoliticize medical personnel/systems with a “health-in-all-policies” approach as advocated by the World Health Organization (WHO 2008, 69–71) as well as utilize political economy perspectives in public health initiatives and analyses (Walker 2015; Walker and E. Kirk 2017). However, as noted by research experiences in Venezuela, the Cuban parallel health care system was uniquely politicized in contrast with Cuba’s other medical internationalist endeavors such as South Africa, Pakistan, Qatar, Honduras, Nicaragua, The Gambia, Italy, among others.

5. After the retreat of left-leaning “Pink Tide” governments in Latin America, some by coup and others through electoral losses, Cuba and Venezuela lost significant counter-hegemonic allies. However, it appears that a left-leaning government is returning to Bolivia (Eulich 2020).

6. Timon Forster et al. examined “income inequality using multivariate regression analysis corrected for non-random selection into both IMF programs and associated policy reforms (known as ‘conditionality’)” in 135 countries from 1980 to 2014. Perhaps unsurprisingly, they found that, overall, “policy reforms mandated by the IMF increase[d] income inequality in borrowing countries” (2019, 83). Thus, the “socio-economic consequences of these reforms [were] extensive—ranging from economic growth to reductions in the public sector wage bill, and from environmental degradation to reductions in health expenditures . . . demonstrate[ing] how international institutions may be an important international-level determinant of income inequality in developing countries” (84).

7. As noted in Liliana Fernández as well as William LeoGrande’s chapters, similar conditionalities, were proposed by the United States regarding the privatization of Cuba’s economy in exchange for lifting the U.S. embargo.

8. The challenges and decline of Venezuela’s health system in recent years—especially from 2014 to 2020—are well documented as rates of infection are on the rise and some health indicators are on the decline. This decline is noted in the 2017 Health in the Americas report by PAHO as well as other reports (PAHO, WHO, UNAIDS, and Gobierno Bolivariano de Venezuela 2018; Page et al. 2019; Mesones Rojo and Collins 2020) and various other sources including neoliberal think tanks such as the Center for Strategic and International Studies (Rendon and Fernandez 2020).

9. These health-in-all policy Bolivarian missions, which attempt to address structural violence and inequality, are wide-ranging. A few examples include *Misión Árbol* which is an initiative to halt deforestation (mostly due to slash and burn practices) as well as promote sustainable agriculture and reforestation; *Misión Ché Guevara* focuses on employment and skills training; *Misión Guaicaipuro* is an initiative to restore communal land titles and human rights to Venezuelan indigenous communities as well as protect their rights against corporate interests; *Misión Hábitat y Vivienda* is

a housing initiative that develops pro-poor housing units with access to a full range of social services; *Misión Mercal*, aimed at improving Venezuela's food sovereignty, is an initiative to ensure that even the most vulnerable and poor populations have access to high-quality, organic, and locally grown food at discounted prices; *Misión Negra Hipólita* seeks to help drug addicts, homeless, and street children with assistance and support; *Misión Ribas* is a nighttime education initiative for students that left high school before graduating; *Misión Robinson*, similar to Cuba's post-revolution literacy campaign, utilizes volunteers to teach adults math, reading and writing; and *Misión Zamora*, which focuses on land redistribution and reform to help generate economic activity for the poor as well as stimulate the agricultural sector (Alvarado et al. 2008; Edwards 2010).

10. A total of 4,000 Cuban medics are specifically being deployed in nearly forty countries in response to COVID-19 (Marsh and Zodzi 2020).

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Chapter 13

Cuba's Struggling External Sector

Internal Challenges and Outside Factors

Paolo Spadoni

INTRODUCTION

The Cuban economy has always been an open economy with significant dependence on external sector activities, especially on those involving foreign trade. With export operations no longer concentrated on sales of primary goods, today's Cuban economy is essentially a service-based economy in which international tourism and exports of professional services (along with remittances from abroad) have replaced the once-thriving sugar industry as the country's main sources of hard currency. Services currently account for about 75 percent of Cuba's gross domestic product (GDP), generate the vast majority of foreign exchange earnings, and receive the largest share of all investments.

Besides major structural shortcomings of the Cuban economy adversely affecting trade activities, Cuba's external sector suffers from serious weaknesses linked above all to the failure to diversify production and markets for export, a strong sensitivity to international price swings, and insufficient cross-sectorial spillovers. Moreover, although the value of imports of goods and services as a share of GDP at market prices is today less than half of its level in 1990,¹ Cuba's dependence on purchases from abroad of oil, food products, and other critical goods remains quite high. A large merchandise trade deficit generates considerable negative effects on the current account of Cuba's balance of payments and complicates the country's efforts to meet its financial obligations to foreign traders, lenders, and investors. Cuba's external environment also has deteriorated markedly over the past few years, in particular, due to the economic (and political) crisis in Venezuela and because of president Donald Trump's commitment to roll back the United States (U.S.) policy of engagement toward Havana initiated by his predecessor, Barack Obama, in December 2014.

Along with a quick review of structural changes since 1990, this study describes and evaluates the current conditions of the external sector of the Cuban economy. In particular, the study examines Cuba's annual GDP growth rates, its merchandise and service trade patterns, its largest sources of hard currency, its external debt and general financial situation, and its recent attempts to attract foreign investment. It also identifies key problems that pose major challenges for the future and suggests necessary reforms to improve the performance of Cuba's external sector and its overall economy. Finally, the study analyzes the recent weakening of economic ties between Cuba and Venezuela and the negative effects on the Cuban economy of stiffer sanctions enacted by the United States, and offers some brief considerations on the adverse economic consequences of the new coronavirus pandemic.

STRUCTURAL CHANGES AND CURRENT CONDITIONS

The Cuban economy has recovered noticeably from the devastating meltdown of the early 1990s after its former benefactor, the Soviet Union, collapsed. During the deep recession that started in 1990 and reached its lowest point in 1993, Cuba's real GDP shrank by an annual average rate of about 10 percent (ONEI 1996). Since then, economic growth has been positive even though the rate has fluctuated markedly from year to year. The island's economy witnessed a considerable expansion around the mid-2000s. As shown in figure 13.1, Cuba reported a GDP growth of 11.2 percent in 2005, 12.1 percent in 2006, and 7.3 percent in 2007. This performance was triggered by the dynamism of the internal demand due to increased public investment, government spending, and private consumption, and most of all by rising exports of goods and services. As for the latter, booming exports of medical and other professional services under a comprehensive agreement with the government of Venezuela (involving large supplies of Venezuelan oil to Cuba) and, to a smaller extent, substantial revenues from nickel exports and international tourism activities were key stimulating factors.

After 2007, nevertheless, the Cuban economy suffered a notable deceleration that was caused by a combination of both internal and external factors. On the internal front, an important factor was the slowness of progress with productivity and efficiency largely determined by the systemic constraints of Cuba's state-dominated and highly centralized economy. On the external front, the negative effects of the global financial and economic crisis that erupted with full force toward the end of 2008 came on top of damaging natural disasters and the cumulative effects of the long-standing U.S. embargo against Cuba.² More recently, following the death of Venezuelan President

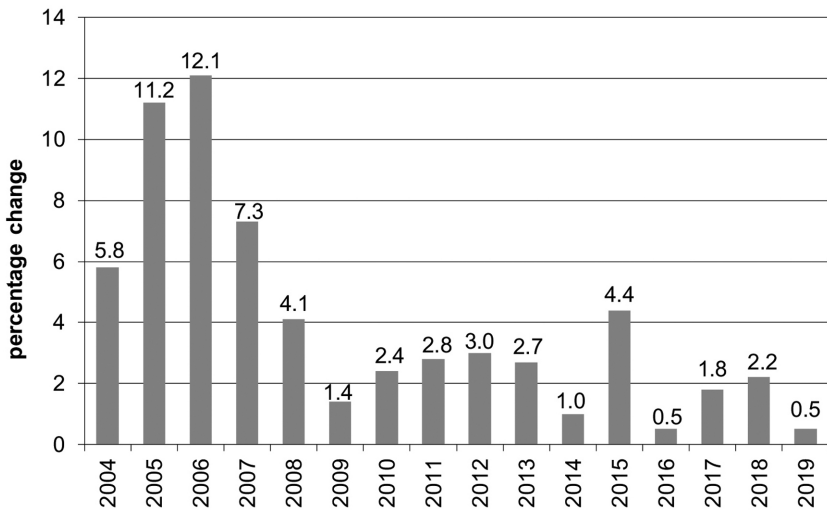


Figure 13.1 Cuba's Real GDP Growth, 2004–2019a (At constant 1997 prices). *Sources:* ONEI 2007, 2013, 2019; CEPAL 2019. Note: a. Preliminary estimate for 2019.

Hugo Chávez in 2013, a severe economic crisis in Venezuela aggravated by a fall in the international price of oil significantly weakened the economic ties between Caracas and Havana. The U.S.-Cuba rapprochement officially launched in late 2014 during the administration of Barack Obama created new business opportunities and helped Havana minimize the negative impact from the Venezuelan crisis, but the tightening of U.S.-based travel and other embargo restrictions with respect to Cuba during the administration of Donald Trump exacerbated the island's economic problems. Cuba's annual GDP averaged 2.7 percent in 2008–2013 and approximately 2 percent in 2014–2018. Preliminary data for 2019 put Cuba's GDP expansion at just 0.5 percent and prospects, at least in the short-term, are much grimmer as the unfolding coronavirus pandemic is bound to hit especially hard developing economies like that of Cuba whose GDP is projected to shrink by no less than 8 percent in 2020 (CEPAL 2019, 2020; EIU 2020b).³

During the 1990s, the Cuban economy also experienced a striking transformation from an economy centered on agriculture, in particular sugar production, to one based on services such as international tourism. It witnessed yet a new crucial change in the post-2004 period largely because of Venezuela's financial largesse and its booming ties with Cuba (Sánchez Egozcue and Triana Cordoví 2008). Exports of professional services mainly offered by Cuban doctors, nurses, and health technicians to Venezuela quickly became (and still are) the top generator of hard currency for Cuba even though in recent years the island has provided for-profit medical services to a number

Table 13.1 Exports of Goods and Services by Sector in 1990, 2004, and 2018 (Percentage distribution)

1990	Percent	2004	Percent	2018	Percent
Sugar	72.6	Tourism	37.5	Other services	63.1
Nickel	6.7	Other services	21.0	Tourism	20.5
Tobacco	1.9	Nickel	19.0	Nickel	5.1
Pharmaceuticals	1.4	Sugar	4.8	Pharmaceuticals	2.8
Other goods	8.6	Tobacco	3.8	Tobacco	1.8
Tourism	4.1	Pharmaceuticals	2.9	Sugar	1.3
Other services	4.7	Other goods	11.0	Other goods	5.4

Sources: ONEI 1996, 2005, 2019.

of countries, among them Brazil, Portugal, and oil-rich nations in Africa and the Middle East (Torres Pérez 2015, 168). As for exports of goods, whereas in 1990 they represented over 90 percent of Cuba's total exports, by 2018 they accounted for less than 20 percent (ONEI 2019).

Table 13.1 highlights the aforementioned changes by presenting annual data on the sectoral composition of Cuban exports (percentage distribution in terms of earnings) between 1990 and 2018. In 1990, when the Soviet Union was about to disintegrate, Cuba's sugar industry brought in over \$4 billion worth of exports representing 72.6 percent of the island's total hard currency revenues. Nickel exports and an incipient tourism industry made a modest contribution. While sugar fell on hard times during the 1990s, gross revenues from international tourism grew markedly and by 1996 had surpassed those from sugar exports. Overseas sales of nickel also expanded during this period. By the early 2000s, nickel had become the leading foreign exchange earner among Cuban goods (Pérez-López 2011, 439). In 2004, right before Cuba stepped up the deployment of medical personnel and other professionals abroad, gross revenues from tourism activities represented 37.5 percent of Cuba's total exports of goods and services. That year, nickel exports accounted for 19 percent of total earnings while the share of sugar, the mainstay of the Cuban economy for most of its history, was less than 5 percent. The share of tobacco, another traditional export sector, was less than 4 percent, and that of pharmaceuticals did not reach 3 percent.

But almost everything has changed since then due to the Venezuelan factor. Mostly driven by Cuba's special deals with Venezuela in the area of medical assistance, the share of Cuba's total exports of goods and services accounted for by services other than tourism almost tripled between 2004 and 2013 from 21.0 percent to 57.5 percent (ONEI 2014), and by 2018, it had reached 63.1 percent. Meanwhile, revenues from international tourism dropped to approximately 20 percent of the total, a figure that was considerably lower than its level of 2004 and less than half its peak level of 2002.⁴ The relative

contribution of nearly every other sector of the Cuban economy underwent a similar downward trend. In 2018, nickel exports generated 5.1 percent of Cuba's foreign exchange income from all trade activities and sugar exports accounted for just 1.3 percent. International sales of tobacco products (mainly cigars) provided 1.8 percent of all hard currency earnings while exports of pharmaceuticals accounted for 2.8 percent. Although Cuba's revenues from the sale of professional services to Venezuela and the latter's oil shipments to Havana have declined since 2013 due to the South American nation's economic crisis amid falling oil prices (Whitefield 2019), the economic lifeline that Venezuela has thrown to Cuba for over a decade is beyond question.

Cuba's annual trade balance in goods and services regularly ran deficits between 1990 and 2004. Cuba remained a net importer of resources from abroad during this period as rapidly expanding tourism earnings failed to offset a mounting merchandise trade deficit. It was only after 2004, when exports of professional services rose steeply, that the overall trade balance began to post surpluses, though not every year (figure 13.2). Exports of goods and services jumped from \$5.6 billion in 2004 to \$18.6 billion in 2013, when a sizable surplus of around \$3 billion was achieved. Since then, exports have decreased noticeably to some \$14.5 billion in 2018, but even that year there was a trade surplus of nearly \$2 billion as import levels had fallen as well. According to estimates from the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), Cuba's exports of goods and services plunged to about \$13.4 billion in 2019 and they

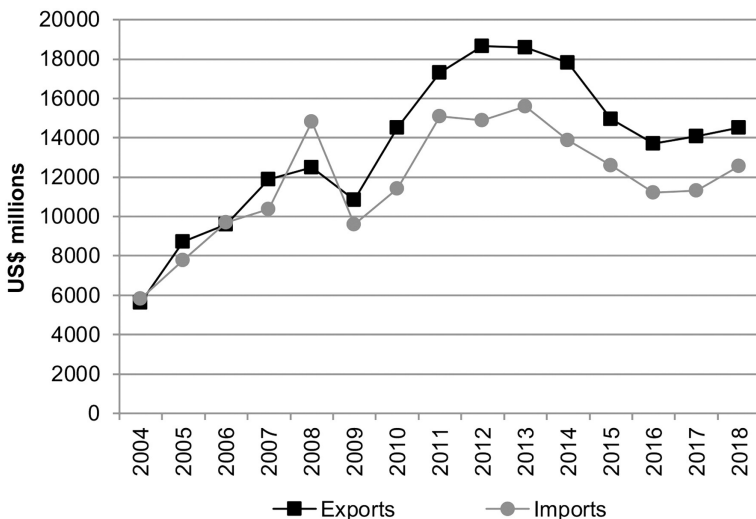


Figure 13.2 Exports and Imports of Goods and Services, 2004–2018. Sources: ONEI 2007, 2013, 2019.

are expected to drop even further in 2020 to push once again the country's overall trade balance into a deficit (EIU 2020b).

For decades, notwithstanding continuous requests by foreign business partners, Cuba has refused to publish disaggregated statistics on the service trade, with the only exception being tourism activities. Hard currency revenues generated by nontourism services skyrocketed from \$1.2 billion in 2004 to \$10.7 billion in 2013 and, albeit on a declining trend, still stood at approximately \$9.2 billion in 2018 (ONEI 2005, 2014, 2019). The values of Cuba's exports of services other than tourism practically refer to revenues from exports of various professional services and, to a lower extent, telecommunications services given that official data on gross tourism earnings already include earnings from international transportation services. At their peak level around 2013, Cuban sales of medical and other professional services abroad possibly brought in as much as \$9 billion annually in foreign exchange earnings.

At any rate, in its 2018 statistical yearbook, Cuba's Office of National Statistics and Information (*Oficina Nacional de Estadísticas e Información*, ONEI) reported for the first time critical details of its external service trade, offering evidence that the sale of professional services overseas (overwhelmingly provided by Cuban doctors) is the island's single-largest source of hard currency revenues. As shown in table 13.2, health services alone generated \$6.4 billion in foreign exchange earnings in 2018, followed by undefined "support services" (\$1.3 billion), hotel and food services (\$970 million), telecommunications (\$722 million), and transportation and related services (\$606 million).⁵ Exports of health services represented more than 40 percent of Cuba's total exports of goods and services and garnered more than double its revenues from both goods and international tourism. And if we add teaching, financial, legal, cultural, sports, and other types of services, close to \$7 billion may have come from the sale of Cuban professional services overseas in 2018 (ONEI 2019; Frank 2019b; EIU 2019a). While acknowledging that comparisons are technically improper because of the use of different

Table 13.2 Exports of Services by Sector in 2018 (US\$ millions)

<i>Sector</i>	<i>Value</i>
Health care	6,398
Support services	1,319
Hotel and food services	970
Telecommunications	722
Transportation and related services	606
Teaching	250
Financial	156
Others	869
Total	11,290

Source: ONEI 2019.

calculation methodologies, Carmelo Mesa-Lago (2019a, 11) estimated that the actual value of Cuban exports of professional services in 2018 was noticeably higher than ONEI's figure and amounted to approximately \$8.8 billion.

A considerable increase in exports of professional services in the post-2004 period also led to an improved position in Cuba's balance of payments (BOP), at least with respect to the current account. The three principal components of a country's BOP are the current account, the capital account, and the financial account. The current account records the net flow of money arising from trade of goods and services, factor income like dividends paid to foreign investors, and other cash transfers such as remittances and donations. The capital and financial accounts gauge the net change in foreign assets, including foreign investment, loans, and reserves. Put simply, the first component establishes the international exposure of an economy while the other two components explain how this exposure is financed. In the second half of the 1990s and early 2000s, the deficit in the current account of Cuba's BOP was partially mitigated not only by tourism revenues but also by remittance inflows whose estimated amount at that time ranged between \$500 million and little more than \$1 billion per year (Spadoni 2010, 148; Spadoni 2014, 61; Barberia 2004, 368; CEPAL 2002; Orozco 2002). Since then, except in 2008, the current account has recorded surpluses or remained practically balanced.⁶ Cuba does not provide information on the capital account and scarce official statistics on the financial account have not been updated since 2001, making it difficult to measure the country's access to foreign financing.

Cuba's chronic cash shortages and recurrent failures to respect its debt payments are well documented though. On this issue, it is worth emphasizing that the government-backed credits Cuba receives from China and other strategic partners and a hefty portion of its earnings from the export of professional services to Venezuela are funds committed to the purchase of products from these countries. The Cuban government must rely to a significant degree on exports of nickel and a few other products, tourism income, and remittances from abroad to build foreign exchange liquidity and reserves. In effect, after a difficult period in 2008–2009 during which Havana's authorities delayed payments to foreign creditors and froze hundreds of millions of dollars in the Cuban bank accounts of many foreign suppliers and partners in joint ventures (Frank 2008; Arreola 2009), Cuba's liquidity problems began to improve thanks primarily to record numbers of international visitors and associated tourism earnings and to a sharp growth of remittances from abroad (sent in particular by Cuban Americans).

Annual gross revenues from tourism activities jumped from \$2.1 billion in 2009 to nearly \$3 billion in 2018 (ONEI 2019, 2010). Remittances, according to unofficial estimates exhibited in figure 13.3, more than doubled during this period to around \$3.7 billion per year and possibly emerged as Cuba's second

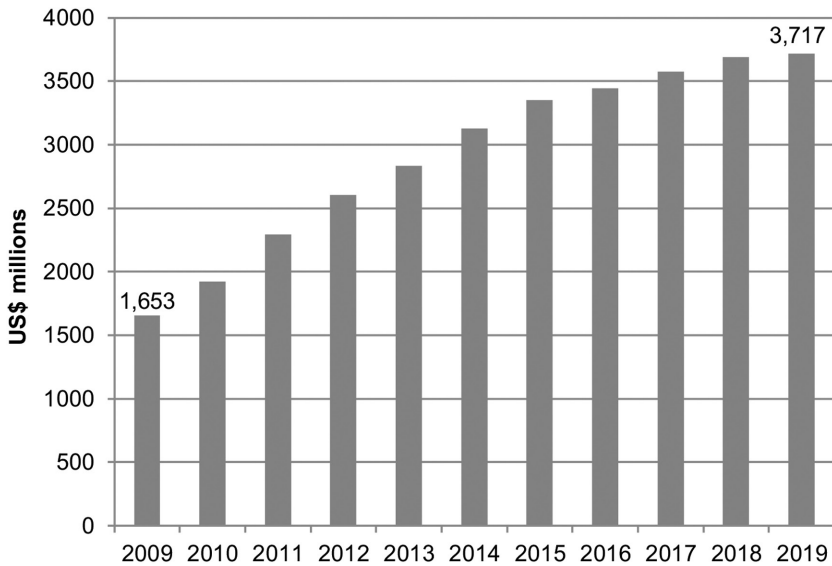


Figure 13.3 Estimates of Remittances to Cuba, 2009–2019. *Sources:* Morales 2019, 2020.

largest source of hard currency revenues after exports of professional services (Morales 2019, 2020).⁷ Unofficial sources also revealed that the international reserves of Cuba rose considerably from \$7.4 billion in 2011 to \$12 billion in 2016. Yet, by the end of 2019, these reserves reportedly had fallen to less than \$10 billion as Cuba felt the blow of intensified U.S. sanctions and once again struggled to pay its debt to foreign firms and creditor countries (AFP 2020; EIU 2016, 2020b).

It should be stressed that Cuba has accumulated a sizable external debt in hard currency adding yet another burden to the country's struggling economy. Cuba's active or performing debt increased from \$5.8 billion in 2004 to \$11.6 billion in 2008 as Venezuela and China started to extend extensive credits to Havana on far better terms than those granted by their competitors (Morris 2008, 788). Since then, this debt has kept growing at an alarming rate even if Cuba was able to obtain sizable debt relief in the meantime. Major write-offs of Cuban debt included \$6 billion by China in 2011, some \$1.4 billion by Japanese commercial creditors in 2012, and nearly \$500 million by Mexico in 2013 (Frank 2013; Reuters 2013; Rapoza 2019). Cuba's active debt was last reported at \$18.2 billion in 2016, of which \$10.8 billion was medium and long-term debt owed primarily to foreign governments (ONEI 2019).

Furthermore, until the mid-2010s, there was an inactive or nonperforming debt of \$7.6 billion mainly owed to the Paris Club of wealthy creditor nations that Cuba had not serviced since 1986,⁸ and a huge outstanding debt

with the former Soviet Union in old transferable rubles that Russia claimed but the Cuban government did not recognize. In 2014, Russia cancelled 90 percent of Cuba's \$35.2 billion debt to the Soviet Union with the understanding that Havana paid the rest within ten years. In late 2015, Cuba reached an accord with fourteen of the nineteen creditor nations of the Paris Club (several Western European countries, Japan, Canada, and Australia) whereby the creditors agreed to forgive \$8.5 billion of Cuba's \$11.1 billion defaulted debt (including interests, service charges, and penalties) and restructure payments on the reminder over a period of eighteen years with easy terms but stiff penalties for late or missed payments (Lammey 2014; Frank 2015). Cuba also reached follow-up bilateral deals with some Paris Club members involving additional debt forgiveness and debt conversion into development projects on the island (ABC 2016; Japan Times 2016; Reuters 2016).

Cuba's external financial situation eased after 2015 as debt restructuring pacts with the Paris Club and other creditors resulted in major reductions in what the country owed in exchange for payment plans it could meet. In addition, foreign bank lending to Cuba somehow restarted as the Paris Club agreement and the individual debt renegotiation deals gave a much-needed boost to Cuba's international creditworthiness (Palacios Cívico 2019, 180; Pérez-López 2017, 36; Luis 2017, 48).⁹ In December 2015, the credit rating agency Moody's confirmed Cuba's "Caa2" rating (meaning its "obligations are judged to be of poor standing and are subject to very high credit risk") but raised the country's outlook from stable to positive. As for the rationale for the outlook change, Moody's cited manageable risks associated with Cuba's reduced economic dependence on Venezuela since 2014 that had prompted Havana to adopt various measures to diversify trade and financial links. Another critical driver of the agency's rating action was continued cautious reform momentum in Cuba under the leadership of Raúl Castro along with increased rapprochement with the United States during the Obama administration that supported a favorable performance of the Cuban economy and possibly a further weakening of U.S. economic sanctions against the island.¹⁰

An improved access to external financing is very important for Cuba. Because it is considered a high credit risk, Cuba has virtually no access to medium- and long-term commercial financing other than from official lenders in friendly nations like Venezuela, China, Russia, and, until Jair Bolsonaro assumed the presidency in early 2019, Brazil. As for short-term financing, Cuba has some access to it but at high interest rates and with serious constraints. Trade credit from international banks is usually tight and requires deposits from Cuban banks as collaterals (Luis 2019, 184). The availability of supplier credits instead is limited by Cuba's repeated missed and late payments. In effect, Cuba reached a deal with the Paris Club but has made little progress in other debt renegotiation discussions like those with the London

Club, a group of private European banks to which Havana owes \$1.4 billion in unpaid commercial debt from the 1980s. Cuba also is still in arrears with many suppliers, is officially in default on about \$700 million it owes to Brazil's public lenders, and even failed to meet payments to some Paris Club members in 2019 (EIU 2019b; Frank 2020a).

Moreover, Cuba is not a member of U.S.-led international financial institutions such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the Inter-American Development Bank whose wealth of knowledge and financial resources would serve well the current needs of the island (Vidal Alejandro and Brown 2015; Sánchez Gutiérrez 2015). In short, although it did secure some new credit lines in 2019 (Luis Rodríguez 2020), Cuba has seen its financial conditions deteriorate recently amid Venezuela's economic collapse, lower revenues from commodity exports, new restrictions put in place by the United States, and now the global coronavirus crisis. Settling the debt is a crucial hurdle for Cuba if it wishes to strengthen its ability to obtain credit from private and official lenders and to attract desperately needed large-scale foreign investment.

PRINCIPAL CHALLENGES

Together with a liquidity crunch and other mounting financial difficulties exacerbated by a worsening external environment, Cuba faces several key problems that limit the adequate functioning of the external sector and its ability to promote economic growth and development. These include a large merchandise trade deficit, excessive trade concentration in terms of both products and markets, vulnerability to external trade shocks (particularly to international price swings), overreliance on export activities with low cross-sector spillover effects, inadequate levels of foreign investment, and critical systemic flaws that stifle trade competitiveness.

With respect to the external trade in goods, Cuba's trade deficit has risen considerably since the mid-2000s (figure 13.4). Due above all to rapidly worsening terms of trade in connection with the global economic crisis, the island's merchandise balance posted a deficit of more than \$10 billion in 2008, the largest ever. A combination of dramatic import cuts and soaring export receipts drove the trade deficit down to approximately \$6 billion in 2010, but this level was still three times higher than that of 1990 (CEPAL 2000). Cuba keeps relying on large amounts of imports (primarily fuels, foodstuffs, machinery and equipment, and manufactured goods) to supplement insufficient domestic production and alleviate the needs of its society. It will likely continue to do so in the future since government efforts to invigorate productive forces and recapitalize key national industries require sizable

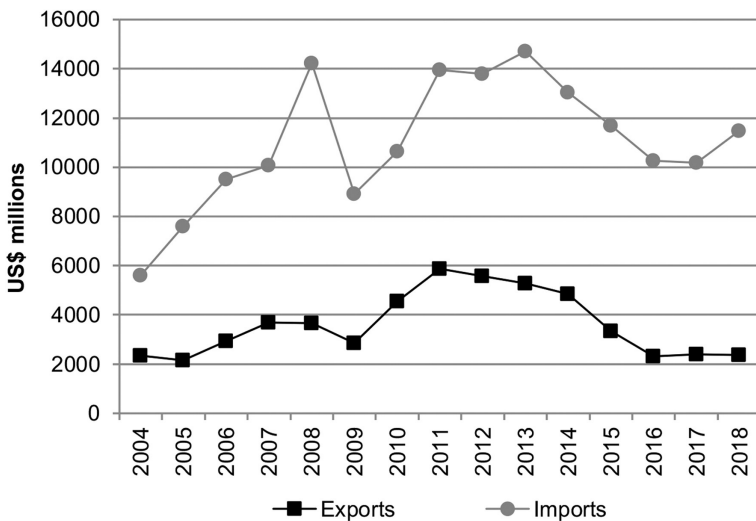


Figure 13.4 Exports and Imports of Goods, 2004–2018. Sources: ONEI 2007, 2013, 2019.

purchases from abroad. In the first half of the 2010s, despite annual export earnings (worth more than \$5 billion) similar to the record levels of the second half of the 1980s when Havana focused almost completely on trade with the Soviet Union and other socialist countries,¹¹ Cuba's trade deficit in goods averaged over \$8 billion per year. This deficit surpassed \$9 billion in 2018 as exports plunged to approximately \$2.4 billion while imports, albeit noticeably lower than their peak value in 2013, approached \$11.5 billion.

Over the past three decades, cumulative revenues from exports of goods were just about one-third of what Cuba had to pay to satisfy its import needs. Not surprisingly, with such a weak export performance, Cuba struggled to finance its merchandise trade deficit and frequently fell behind on its payments to foreign business partners (Feinberg 2016, 42). Cuban exports also have remained concentrated in just a few commodities. Only four products (nickel, sugar, cigars, and medicines) accounted for nearly 70 percent of the island's total merchandise export earnings in 2018. Even more strikingly, when Venezuelan oil deliveries to Havana thrived in 2012–2013, close to 50 percent of Cuba's total export revenues came from oil exports that consisted not only of various types of fuels produced at a joint venture refinery with Venezuela in Cienfuegos but also, most likely, of significant amounts of re-exported Venezuelan oil (Mesa-Lago and Pérez-López 2013, 82–83).¹²

Moreover, notwithstanding significant reforms aimed to bolster agricultural output and substitute expensive food imports, Cuba imports more than 60 percent of the food it consumes at a cost of roughly \$2 billion each year,

besides critical farming supplies such as fertilizers, machinery, and animal feeds (Frank 2020b). The country's industrial sector has severe problems as well and has yet to fully recover from its collapse in the early 1990s. Despite some progress in certain subsectors, the physical output of the Cuban manufacturing industry in 2018 was still about 22 percent below its level of 1989 (32 percent below if the sugar industry was included). Domestically, produced equipment has almost entirely disappeared today, and intermediate goods in 2018 stood at little more than one-third of their volume in 1989 (ONEI 2019). It thus comes as no surprise that Cuba must purchase a great deal of machinery and equipment from abroad and that intermediate products account for the lion's share of the country's merchandise imports.

Crucial trade vulnerabilities should not be overlooked. The international prices of Cuba's key export and import goods tend to experience wide swings and, to further complicate things, major Cuban export sectors like nickel and sugar lack the ability to boost output to react to higher prices (Sánchez Egozcue 2011). Due almost entirely to price fluctuations since production levels had changed little (between 70,000 and 75,000 tons of nickel plus cobalt per year), the island's earnings from nickel exports rose from \$600 million in 2000 to \$2.1 billion in 2007 and plunged to \$1.4 billion in 2011 (Spadoni 2014, 66). Since then, despite the steady contribution of the Pedro Soto Alba plant in Moa run as a joint venture with the Canadian company Sheritt International,¹³ Cuba's annual nickel output has fallen to around 50,000 tons due to the closing of an aging state-owned plant in Nicaro and to reduced production at another state facility in Punta Gorda. Yet a sharp drop in nickel prices has exacerbated the impact of low output on financial results, pushing export revenues (some \$700 million in 2018) down to about half their level in 2011 and forcing the Cuban nickel industry to step up its efforts to lower costs and achieve greater efficiency (Marsh 2016a; Frank 2018b).¹⁴

Growing losses caused by plummeting international prices also played a major role in Cuba's decision in the early 2000s to downsize its sugar industry and convert massive amounts of land to other uses as part of a restructuring process aimed at achieving greater efficiency and promoting agricultural diversification. The original plan called for closing around half of the island's 156 sugar mills, in theory the most inefficient units, while maintaining existing production levels (Alvarez and Pérez-López 2005, 161; Peters 2003, 4–5). However, a sustained decline in sugar production after the restructuring process meant that the Cuban sugar industry was largely unable to take advantage of the spectacular rise in prices that took place a few years later. When Cuba's sugar output hit historic low levels of about 1.2 million tons in 2010 and 2011 (down from 4.1 million tons in 2000) and annual export revenues were, respectively, \$257 million and \$361 million, prices were more than three times higher than a decade earlier. Conversely, sugar output rose

substantially during the 2010s to reach 1.9 million tons in 2017 but prices meanwhile witnessed a downward trend. As a result, annual sugar export earnings varied relatively little (between \$350 million and \$470 million) during this period. Amid depressed sugar prices, Cuba reportedly produced only 1.1 million tons of sugar in 2018, when export revenues slumped to just \$180 million, and approximately 1.3 million tons in 2019 (AFP 2010; Frank 2018a, 2019a).¹⁵

Furthermore, regarding the potential role of the external sector in fostering economic expansion and development, it must be underscored that over the past three decades, to a large extent, Cuba has simply replaced one engine of growth with another instead of diversifying its economic anchors and promoting new dynamic manufacturing activities. If anything, in recent years, the Cuban economy has moved steadily toward professional services with fewer linkages with the production sphere than sugar and international tourism, the two previous leading sectors. Except for some emerging ties to the biotechnology industry, Cuban exports of medical services are largely unlinked from the rest of the domestic economy (Gabriele 2011, 660). Even nickel production has minimal ripple effects on the rest of the economy because nickel is extracted on the island but refined abroad. On the contrary, services such as tourism and certain industries involved in producing goods (e.g., sugar) have considerable multiplier effects (A. Romero 2016, 151–152). Medical internationalism is providing substantial material benefits to Cuba (hard currency earnings are nonetheless on a downward trend), but it can hardly constitute a tool for stimulating long-term economic development. Sustained growth requires a more diversified export base, improvements in productive capacities, and above all the enactment of structural reforms to enhance the role of market forces in the Cuban economy.

In fact, the Cuban economy suffers primarily from severe structural problems. Among them are a weak capacity to generate domestic savings to support investment, relative price distortions stemming from government controls that stifle market mechanisms, and a dual currency system with multiple exchange rates that creates strongly segmented spheres of economic activity, diminishes linkages between enterprises, and discourages foreign investment. A monetary arrangement that Havana's authorities have vowed to eliminate (Figueredo Reinaldo, Izquierdo Ferrer and Carmona Tamayo 2019), the dual currency system also reduces the stimulating effect of salaries,¹⁶ underestimates the economic contribution of exporting firms while making imports seem artificially cheap, generates a number of hidden subsidies, and produces distortions in almost all economic measurements to the point that it is practically impossible to gauge the true profitability of enterprises (Nova González 2019, 28; Pérez Villanueva 2017a, 4). All of the aforementioned problems conspire against achieving higher efficiency

and productivity and improving the quality of Cuban goods and services, thereby diminishing the country's competitiveness in the area of foreign trade (Alonso and Vidal Alejandro 2013). Put simply, internal factors weigh even more heavily than external ones on the performance of Cuba's external sector and that of its general economy.

Insufficient gross capital formation, which refers to domestic investment in factories, machinery, tools, equipment, and other productive capital goods, is a major debilitating factor for the Cuban economy and needs to be discussed further. Over the past thirty years, the annual accumulation rates have been consistently and notably lower than during the 1970s and 1980s. Remarkably, the ratio of gross capital formation to GDP was 25.6 percent in 1989, but since then it has never surpassed 15 percent and it actually averaged only 10.3 percent between 2000 and 2018 (Figure 13.5). Annual results similar to those of 1989 are required to reverse the decapitalization of key sectors and spur adequate rates of economic growth, yet they will be difficult to achieve without improved efficiency. Besides, a large share of domestic investment is in low productivity sectors such as construction, infrastructure works, commerce, and various services, which are necessary but absorb too many scarce resources that could provide greater economic benefits if channeled into critical sectors such as agriculture and the manufacturing industry (Pérez Villanueva 2017b, 21–22; Mesa-Lago 2019a, 4). Despite its low levels, foreign investment has made a decisive contribution to all of the industries (oil,

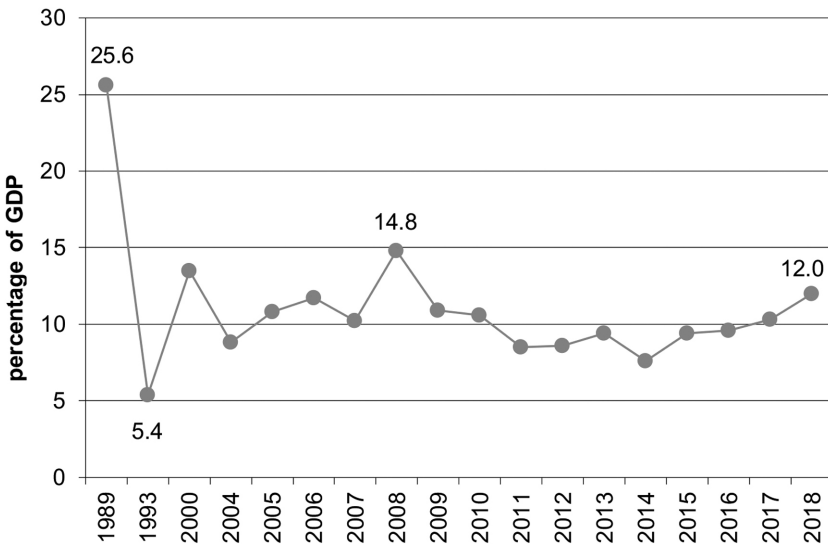


Figure 13.5 Gross Capital Formation, 1989–2018. Sources: ONEI 1996, 2001, 2007, 2013, 2019; CEPAL 2000.

electricity, nickel, tourism, and telecommunications) that have experienced the highest growth since the early 1990s and enhanced the performance of Cuba's largest export sectors (Spadoni 2014, 104–109). However, the number of economic associations with overseas partners (in particular joint ventures) on the island has fallen sharply since the early 2000s. Hoping to boost its centrally planned economy starved for cash and plagued by widespread inefficiencies, Cuba has intensified efforts in the last few years to attract badly needed foreign investment.

Along with declarations by Havana's officials that foreign investment would no longer play a complementary role to domestic investment efforts and occupy instead a major role in the economy (Opciones 2014; Prensa Latina 2016), Cuba enacted a new foreign investment legislation (Law 118) in June 2014 that beefed up investment security and offered more attractive tax incentives to foreign investors (Gaceta Oficial 2014). Constructed in partnership with Brazil's engineering group Odebrecht and with financial backing from the Brazilian government, Cuba also opened in late 2013 its first special development zone (Zona Especial de Desarrollo Mariel, ZEDM) around a new container terminal at the port of Mariel. As established by Decree Law 313, investors in the ZEDM receive even better tax breaks and other incentives than those under Law 118 (Gaceta Oficial 2013). What remained unchanged is that foreign firms operating in and outside the ZEDM cannot directly hire Cuban workers and must rely on a government employment agency for their labor needs. A country that has received no more than \$7 billion in foreign direct investment (FDI) since the first joint venture with a foreign partner was authorized in the late 1980s, Cuba is now seeking \$2 billion to \$2.5 billion in FDI per year to achieve annual capital accumulation rates of 20–25 percent of GDP and annual economic growth rates of more than 5 percent (Pérez Villanueva 2018).

There are no recent official data on the annual values of foreign direct investment in Cuba as the only available data are those included in the country's balance of payments that have not been updated since 2001. Cuban authorities revealed that from the passage of Law 118 in 2014 until November 2019, some 150 foreign investment projects worth \$5.5 billion were authorized in Cuba, with forty-five additional projects worth \$2.6 billion receiving approval in the ZEDM (J. L. Rodríguez 2020).¹⁷ However, these figures simply refer to the total value of the deals agreed, many of which either could materialize over several years or may never come to fruition. In other words, a substantial portion of the amount of FDI committed in the aforementioned deals has yet to be delivered to Cuba. While some scholars have reported even lower estimates,¹⁸ the EIU calculated that annual FDI flows into Cuba (capital actually delivered to the country) increased from around \$400 million in 2014–2015 to over \$800 million in 2017–2019. Between 2014 and 2019,

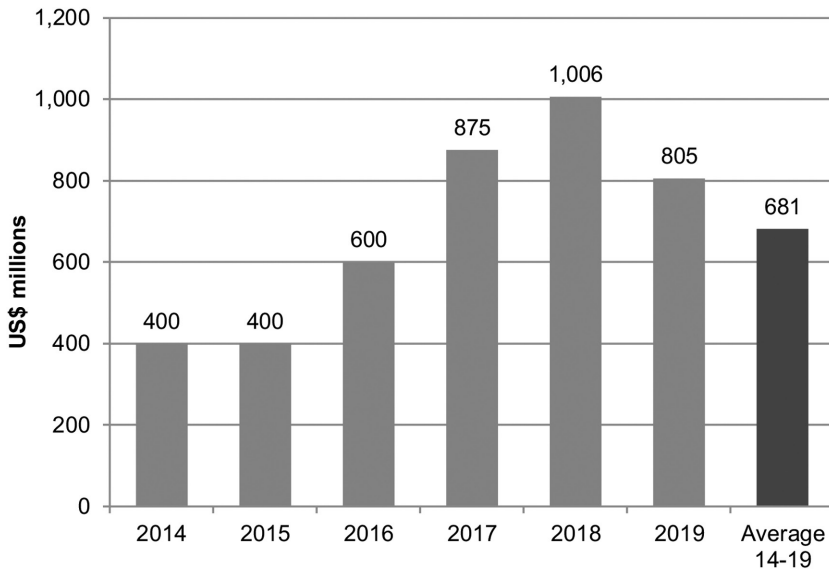


Figure 13.6 Annual Foreign Direct Investment in Cuba, 2014–2019. Sources: EIU 2019, 2020a.

as displayed in figure 13.6, Cuba received approximately \$4 billion in FDI or an average of \$681 million per year, well below the \$2.5 billion officially required for sustainable economic development (EIU 2019a, 2020a). The annual targets of FDI inflows and GDP growth envisioned by the Cuban government may prove impossible to reach without deeper economic reforms, significant improvements in Cuba’s business environment, and without moving beyond entrenched ideological prejudices toward foreign investment (Pérez-López 2015, 231–232).

In general, when it comes to fomenting economic growth and translating it into development and improved living standards, Cuba undoubtedly needs major economic reforms aimed to boost domestic production and efficiency, substitute costly imports, and stimulate and diversify exports. First of all, Cuba must reform its heavily centralized agricultural model by dismantling the vast and highly inefficient state network responsible for providing supplies to farmers, purchasing most farm output, setting prices, and distributing products (González-Corzo and Nova González 2019, 36–37). At the same time, greater efforts should be made to promote knowledge-intensive and high value-added production activities that take advantage of the high level of education of Cuban workers. A true deregulation of state enterprises is also necessary. The rigid regulatory framework under central planning curtails the ability of Cuban state firms to compete, innovate, assume risks, and express their full production

potential (Díaz Fernández 2015, 154–155). Additional critical measures should include the end of the dual currency system and of multiple exchange rates, the expansion of the incipient private sector and of nonagricultural cooperatives, a real change of mentality in creating the conditions to attract foreign investment, and a greater use of market mechanisms and incentives to govern the economy.

A TRIPLE PUNCH: VENEZUELA, TRUMP, AND THE CORONAVIRUS

Regarding Cuba's international trade and its dependence on external economic assistance, the potential loss of Venezuela as a strategic partner is another issue of concern (Pérez Villanueva 2016, 35). This problem, though, is not new as Cuba's overreliance on a single economic partner, despite different mechanisms of dependency, changed little from the prerevolutionary to the revolutionary era and eventually resurfaced in the post-Cold War period when Fidel Castro and Hugo Chávez forged a close alliance based on mutual interests and a common enemy, the United States. In 1958, the last year of Fulgencio Batista's government, 68 percent of Cuba's bilateral merchandise trade was with the United States, which had invested close to \$2 billion in the Cuban market to control over 30 percent of the sugar industry, one-third of public utilities, and large shares of petroleum refining, nickel mining, and other manufacturing sectors (Zimbalist 1978, 51). After the revolution, trade with the United States ended abruptly because of the U.S. embargo and was quickly replaced by trade with the Soviet Union. The latter already accounted for nearly 45 percent of Cuban trade of goods in 1961 (an additional 30 percent was with other communist nations) and continued to dominate the island's international trade throughout the Cold War with peaks of 70 percent or more in the second half of the 1980s. Mainly through Moscow's supply of low-cost oil (also machinery, technology, and credits) to Havana and its purchase of Cuban sugar at above world market prices, cumulative Soviet subsidies to Cuba have been estimated at around \$62 billion between 1960 and 1990 (LeoGrande 2015, 953; LeoGrande and Thomas 2002, 340–341).¹⁹ That kind of dependency proved ruinous for the Cuban economy when the Soviet Union dissolved in the early 1990s.

Owing to the disappearance of the economic and financial system to which it belonged during the Cold War era,²⁰ Cuba suffered a debilitating blow and was forced to devise new and effective strategies to reinsert itself into the global market economy. Along with an expansion of international tourism and the enactment of limited capitalist-style reforms like the promotion of foreign direct investment, Cuba worked actively to diversify markets for exports and imports. Albeit with much lower levels of trade than in the

Table 13.3 Cuba's Largest Merchandise Trading Partners, 1990–2018 (Percentage of total bilateral trade)

<i>Year</i>	<i>Venezuela</i>	<i>China</i>	<i>Spain</i>	<i>Canada</i>	<i>Mexico</i>	<i>Brazil</i>	<i>Russia</i>
1990	0.5	4.7	2.1	1.3	1.5	1.6	67.9
1995	5.4	8.2	10.2	10.3	9.2	1.4	5.7
2000	14.1	8.1	13.8	9.1	5.2	2.3	6.7
2004	19.0	8.4	10.3	9.5	3.3	2.8	2.5
2008	27.3	12.1	8.0	7.9	2.1	3.6	1.8
2012	44.2	8.7	6.0	4.8	2.6	3.9	1.8
2014	40.6	9.1	6.5	5.2	2.6	3.6	1.1
2016	17.7	20.5	10.4	4.8	3.6	4.0	1.8
2018	22.4	14.4	10.0	6.3	3.9	3.4	3.3

Sources: ONEI 1996, 2001, 2007, 2013, 2019.

previous decade,²¹ Cuba successfully rebuilt its international economic relations in the 1990s by strengthening commercial ties at first with some Western European nations, Canada, and Mexico whose companies were the most active foreign investors on the island. By 1995, trade with Russia had fallen to a small fraction of its levels during the Soviet era while Spain, Canada, and Mexico together accounted for nearly one-third of Cuba's total bilateral merchandise trade (table 13.3). These countries remain today among Cuba's main trading partners. Yet since 2004, there has been a strong reorientation of foreign trade toward emerging market economies such as China, Russia, and Brazil (currently on a collision course with Havana),²² and especially Venezuela that provide government-backed credits with generous repayment terms (Feinberg 2017, 307). In 2018, bilateral trade with these four nations represented more than 40 percent of Cuba's total trade of goods. Still the island's largest trading partner despite severely weakened commercial ties, Venezuela accounted for 22.4 percent of Cuba's total merchandise trade in 2018 (down from a peak of 44.2 percent in 2012) and for the vast majority of its service trade.

Even at its highest level in the early 2010s, Cuba's economic dependence on Venezuela was nowhere near the level of dependence on the Soviet Union during the 1970s and the 1980s. Unlike the complex aid relationship with the Soviet Union centered on nonrepayable loans, highly subsidized trade, and technical and military assistance, Cuba's ties with Venezuela mainly consist of state-to-state trade arrangements involving both products and services. Havana's relationship with Caracas is basically focused on Venezuelan oil shipments to the island and exports of Cuban professional services to Venezuela besides lesser elements such as direct investments by Venezuelan state firms in Cuba as well as military and security cooperation (Luis 2019, 182). This does not mean, however, that the Cuban economy has suffered little from the spiraling economic and political crisis in Venezuela and that it

would not be dealt a major blow if Cuba-Venezuela relations fell apart completely. Two prominent Cuban economists calculated that the value of the bilateral trade of goods and services between Cuba and Venezuela as a share of Cuba's GDP at constant prices (adjusted for an import deflator)²³ decreased from 20.8 percent in 2012 to 12.4 percent in 2017. They also claimed that the end of the government of Nicolás Maduro in Venezuela would cause Cuba's GDP to plunge an additional 8 percent. Without the Venezuelan lifeline, Cuba most likely would experience serious economic and social problems. These might include a sizable drop in the sale of professional services, the suspension of crude oil shipments under favorable terms and a major reduction of other key imports, a balance of payments crisis, double digit inflation and monetary instability, the return of massive blackouts, a deterioration of transportation services, and acute food shortages (Mesa-Lago and Vidal Alejandro 2019, 22).

Official data in table 13.4 indicate that the total value of merchandise bilateral trade between Cuba and Venezuela grew remarkably from \$388 million in 1998, the year before Hugo Chavez took power, to a record of nearly \$8.6 billion in 2012, the year before Chavez passed away. During the same period, Cuban exports to Venezuela increased from just \$2 million to almost \$2.5 billion while imports rose from \$386 million to about \$6.1 billion. The import spike was largely driven by a combination of higher prices and higher volumes of oil products. Crude oil prices jumped from less than \$30 a barrel in the early 2000s to over \$100 a barrel a decade later. Meanwhile, Venezuelan supplies of crude oil and derivatives to Cuba practically doubled from 53,000 bpd (barrels per day) to 105,000 bpd.

Cuban exports instead consisted of medicines, electronic equipment, various types of machines for the food, and beverage processing industry and, most likely, several hundred million dollars worth of re-exported Venezuelan

Table 13.4 Cuba's Merchandise Trade with Venezuela, 1998–2018 (US\$ Million)

<i>Year</i>	<i>Exports</i>	<i>Imports</i>	<i>Bilateral Trade</i>
1998	2	386	388
2000	14	898	912
2002	19	725	744
2004	367	1,143	1,510
2006	409	2,232	2,641
2008	414	4,473	4,887
2010	1,717	4,302	6,019
2012	2,484	6,079	8,563
2014	2,069	5,189	7,258
2016	642	1,583	2,225
2018	462	2,642	3,104

Sources: ONEI 2007, 2013, 2019.

oil products that were sold right away to third countries without being processed in Cuba and simply reported as exports to Venezuela (Spadoni 2014, 22). Cuba's exports of professional services to Venezuela also grew notably after 2003 as the oil-for-doctors barter deal between the two countries originally signed in late 2000 was amended to establish hard currency payments for the services offered by Cuban physicians, nurses, paramedic, sports trainers, educators, and other professionals. These service exports reached an estimated \$7.5 billion in 2012 and included substantial Venezuelan subsidies to Cuba that the latter could use to compensate for the deficit in merchandise trade (Mesa-Lago and Vidal Alejandro 2019, 18; Hernández-Catá 2019, 25).²⁴

Venezuela's economy has been in free fall since Maduro assumed the presidency in April 2013, making it impossible for his government to maintain the close economic connections with Cuba built by Chavez.²⁵ Venezuela's merchandise bilateral trade with the island was \$3.1 billion in 2018, little more than one-third its level in 2012. By 2018, Cuban exports to Venezuela had fallen more than 80 percent to \$462 million, while imports had plunged nearly 60 percent to \$2.6 billion. The decline in exports to Venezuela accounted for close to two-thirds of the reduction of Cuban total exports of goods between 2012 and 2018, which means that Cuba was largely unable to replace Venezuela with other markets. As for imports, Venezuela's economic troubles and its falling crude production exacerbated by plummeting oil market prices caused a major drop in oil supplies to Cuba to just 35,000 bpd in the first half of 2019, forcing the Cuban government to enact austerity measures and step up its purchases of crude from alternative suppliers like Russia and Algeria (Reuters 2018; Marsh and Parraga 2019).

Venezuelan oil shipments to the island rebounded in the second half of 2019 to some 50,000 bpd and reached 80,000 bpd in mid-2020, but supplies remained unreliable as the Trump administration imposed sanctions on Venezuela's petroleum industry and on tankers shipping Venezuelan crude to Cuba (Parraga 2019, 2020; Kassai and Bartenstein 2019). Cuba's revenues from the services of its professional workers in Venezuela also decreased to an estimated \$6 billion in 2018.²⁶ Moreover, several Venezuelan investment projects in Cuba that were announced over the past fifteen years never moved beyond the drawing board. Even the most publicized joint venture that brought online in 2007 the previously defunct Soviet-era oil refinery in Cienfuegos dissolved a decade later when Venezuela pulled out of the partnership (Marsh and Parraga 2017). Put simply, Cuba is slowing losing a lifeline as Venezuela teeters on the brink of collapse and it is unlikely that this trend will be reversed.

To further complicate the situation for Cuba, the start of the Trump presidency in January 2017 put an end to two years of warming relations between Washington and Havana under the Obama administration and led to the

resumption of the traditional U.S. policy of confrontation with the island. On December 17, 2014 (17D), Barack Obama and then-Cuban president Raúl Castro announced in simultaneous televised speeches the beginning of a historic process toward the normalization of U.S.-Cuba relations after more than a half-century of unrelenting hostility. Most importantly, the U.S. president announced a series of measures aimed at fostering economic ties with Cuba and urged Congress to start working to lift the long-standing embargo against Cuba whose main provisions are codified under the Torricelli law of 1992, the Helms-Burton law of 1996, and the Trade Sanctions Reform and Export Enhancement Act (TSRA) of 2000. Obama issued six sets of amendments to the Cuba sanctions regulations after the 17D, (in January and September 2015, in January, March, and October 2016, and one set of amendments in June–July 2015 linked to the rescission of Cuba's designation as a state sponsor of terrorism), easing restrictions on travel, remittances, trade, investment, banking, and other commercial dealings with Cuba (Federal Register 2015d, 2015e, 2015f, 2016a, 2016b, 2016c, 2016d, 2016e, 2016f).²⁷ Progress after the 17D was substantial. Besides notable achievements like the re-establishment of full diplomatic relations between the United States and Cuba and the reopening of embassies in each other's capital in July 2015, Obama's measures boosted U.S.-based travel and remittances to Cuba, producing tangible economic benefits for the island and creating business opportunities for U.S. companies even if relatively few commercial deals were completed (Spadoni 2017, 243–247).

A considerable increase of travelers to Cuba from the United States, especially U.S. citizens of non-Cuban origin, was indeed one of the most visible direct effects of Obama's regulatory changes, as seen in table 13.5. Although tourist travel to Cuba by persons subject to U.S. jurisdiction remained

Table 13.5 U.S. Visitors to Cuba, 2009–2019

<i>Year</i>	<i>Cuban Americans</i>	<i>U.S. citizens of non-Cuban origin</i>	<i>Total US visitors</i>
2009	163,019	52,455	215,474
2010	262,963	63,055	326,018
2011	284,942	73,566	358,508
2012	268,803	98,051	366,854
2013	261,084	92,346	353,430
2014	258,837	91,254	350,091
2015	292,692	161,233	453,925
2016	329,430	284,552	613,982
2017	432,642	619,777	1,052,419
2018	521,059	638,365	1,159,424
2019	552,895	498,538	1,051,433

Sources: Perelló Cabrera 2015, 2018; ONEI 2015, 2017, 2019; Cuban Ministry of Tourism (MINTUR) data obtained by the author in February 2020.

prohibited, all specific licenses in the twelve existing categories of authorized travel (family visits, educational activities, religious activities, professional research, journalistic activity, support for the Cuban people, and humanitarian projects, among others) were converted into general licenses, which do not require prior approval from the U.S. Treasury Department. Cuban official statistics make a distinction between Cuban Americans who travel to Cuba with a Cuban passport and American citizens entering the island with a U.S. passport.²⁸ This latter segment of visitors has remained well below its potential due to travel restrictions imposed by Washington's government. Annual trips to Cuba by U.S. citizens of non-Cuban origin did not reach 100,000 until after 2014 (ONEI 2015). On the other hand, the Cuban-American segment experienced notable dynamism following Obama's announcement in April 2009 that he would eliminate all restrictions on family visits (and family remittances) to Cuba.²⁹ The annual number of Cuban Americans traveling to Cuba rose from 163,019 in 2009 to 258,837 in 2014 (Perelló Cabrera 2015).

The post-17D growth of U.S.-based travel to Cuba was impressive. Annual trips to the island by U.S. citizens of non-Cuban descent tripled between 2014 and 2016 from 91,254 to 284,552. During the same period, Cuban-American trips grew nearly 30 percent to reach 329,430 in 2016. Actually, with the notable exception of the largest source market, Canada, international arrivals to Cuba from virtually all countries increased, to some extent to anticipate a looming avalanche of U.S. tourists. The flow of U.S. visitors to Cuba received further stimulus in 2016 from revised rules allowing Americans to travel to the island on their own under the popular people-to-people category for nonacademic educational activities, from the launch of nonstop daily commercial flights between the U.S. and Cuba (Gomez 2016a),³⁰ and from the resumption of cruise services between the two countries.³¹ All of this made it easier for Americans to go to Cuba, reduced travel costs, and greatly diluted the ban on tourism since U.S. officials, despite some monitoring, practically used the honor system to regulate authorized travel to the island. Mainly due to a spike in arrivals from the United States and European markets, Cuba attracted four million foreign visitors in 2016, about one million more than in 2014 (ONEI 2017). Highlighting the significant role of the United States in fueling a tourism boom in Cuba, the share of U.S.-based travelers in the total number of international visitors to Cuba shot up from 11.6 percent in 2014 to 15.3 percent in 2016.

There is no question that the spectacular increase of U.S. visitors to Cuba after 2014 meant higher revenues for the Cuban government as well as more money in the hands of ordinary Cubans through various private activities (restaurants, bed and breakfasts, and taxi services, among others) geared toward tourists. American companies also reaped sizable economic benefits from improved U.S.-Cuba relations. By the end of 2016, six U.S. air carriers

(Delta, United, JetBlue, American Airlines, Southwest, Alaska Airlines) offered commercial flights to Cuba and four U.S. cruise companies (Carnival, Royal Caribbean, Pearl Seas, Norwegian C.L.) sailed to the island. Starwood Hotels and Resorts signed deals to refurbish and manage two state-owned hotels in Havana and opened its first facility, Four Points by Sheraton, in the Cuban capital in June 2016 (Marsh 2016b). The online hotel reservation services Booking.com (owned by the Priceline Group), TripAdvisor, and Expedia all reached agreements with Cuban hotels to join their booking system (Dwyer 2016; Lieberman 2016; Marsh 2017).

The online home rental service Airbnb began operating in Cuba in April 2015, initially offering services only to U.S. travelers but opening up its bookings to all international travelers a year later. The American business incursion into the Cuban market was not limited to the travel and hospitality industry. New York-based IDT Corporation reached a deal with Cuba's state telecommunications monopoly ETECSA to resume direct telephone connections between the United States and Cuba. Verizon, Sprint, T-Mobile, and AT&T signed agreements with ETECSA to offer roaming services on the island. Google signed a deal to bring high-speed Internet to Cuba. In the financial sector, Florida-based Stonegate Bank and Puerto Rico-based Banco Popular issued credit cards (MasterCard) for use in Cuba by U.S. travelers. Stonegate reportedly also set up a correspondent account in Cuba and issued a debit card (Trotta 2015; Gomez 2016b; Whitefield 2016; Venugopal 2016).

The U.S. demand for travel to Cuba in reality continued to rise in 2017 as it was only in November of that year that the Trump administration tightened rules on travel to the island. Implementing policy changes he had announced earlier in June to roll back parts of what he called Obama's "terrible and misguided deal" with Havana (Hirschfeld Davies 2017), Trump banned individual people-to-people trips to Cuba and reintroduced the requirement for Americans traveling under this category to be part of licensed groups. He also prohibited U.S. companies and citizens from doing business with firms owned or controlled by the Cuban military (the list of restricted Cuban entities has been updated and expanded several times since then) whose tentacles reach deep into the Cuban economy (Federal Register 2017a, 2017b).³² In addition to the loss of significant business opportunities for U.S. entities, this meant that American visitors to Cuba were now barred from patronizing numerous military-owned hotels, restaurants, stores, and other enterprises.

Moreover, the regulatory changes came at a complicated time for prospective travelers to Cuba as the State Department had warned U.S. citizens in late September not to travel to the island because of mysterious acoustic attacks against the personnel of the U.S. embassy in Havana (Mohammed and Marsh 2017). Together with 432,644 trips by Cuban Americans, trips to Cuba by U.S. citizens of non-Cuban origin more than doubled in 2017 to 619,777 to

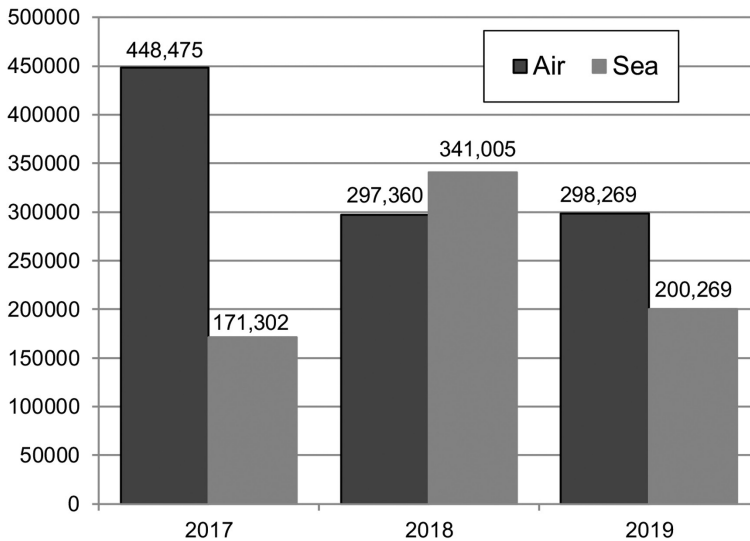


Figure 13.7 U.S. Visitors to Cuba by Mode of Transportation, 2017–2019 (Excludes Cuban Americans). *Source:* Cuban Ministry of Tourism (MINTUR) data obtained by the author in February 2020.

bring the total number of arrivals from the United States to over one million (Perelló Cabrera 2018). In 2018, both groups of travelers increased their visits to Cuba as the island welcomed a record-breaking 4.7 million international visitors (ONEI 2019). However, forcing people-to-people trips to be taken with an authorized group did stifle U.S.-based travel to Cuba by making those trips more expensive and less appealing to independent travelers who prefer to design their own itineraries.

As displayed in figure 13.7, which excludes Cuban Americans, the slight increase of arrivals to Cuba from the United States in 2018 was due entirely to a spectacular growth of cruise visitors whose Cuba-bound voyages had to focus on cultural and educational exchange programs to avoid the ban on tourism. The number of U.S. overnight visitors traveling to Cuba by air fell more than 30 percent from 448,475 in 2017 to 297,360 in 2018. Arrivals of U.S. cruise passengers, on the other hand, grew from 171,302 to 341,005. Put simply, nearly two in every five international cruise travelers to Cuba in 2018 was American. Except for the addition in November of more than a dozen hotels and a few other properties to the list of Cuban entities that Americans are prohibited from patronizing because they are owned by the Cuban military, no new U.S. restrictions on travel and business with Cuba were enacted in 2018. In August, the State Department also softened its travel warning for Cuba from Level 3 (“reconsider travel”) to Level 2 (“exercise increased caution”) (McBride 2018). As 2018 came to a close, major Florida-based

cruise lines such as Carnival, Royal Caribbean, and Norwegian were expanding their Cuba offerings and even U.S. agencies that brought groups of U.S. citizens to Cuba saw their bookings bouncing back as a downgraded travel advisory had perked up Americans' interest in visiting the island. In the first four months of 2019, compared with the same period in 2018, arrivals of U.S. cruise travelers to Cuba more than tripled and arrivals of U.S. overnight visitors rose by nearly 25 percent.³³

But traveling to Cuba from the United States would soon become much more difficult. In early June 2019, making good on his promise to reverse Obama's policy toward Havana, Trump ended the general license authorizing people-to-people educational activities in Cuba and banned U.S.-based cruises to the island effective immediately. Furthermore, he suspended commercial flights between the United States and Cuban destinations other than Havana in October and did the same for all U.S. charter flights three months later (Federal Register 2019a, 2019b, 2019c; US Department of State 2020). Whereas Cuban-American visits to Cuba increased about 6 percent to 552,895, trips by U.S. citizens of non-Cuban origin plummeted by more than 20 percent in 2019 to 498,538 (roughly the same number of arrivals by air as in 2018 and a 41 percent drop in cruise arrivals). This translated into a 9.3 percent fall in all U.S. arrivals to Cuba in 2019 that mirrored exactly the percentage decrease in total international arrivals to the country that year to 4,275,558 (ONEI 2020). The decline in United States and total visitors continued in the early months of 2020.

To intensify economic pressure on Cuba, the Trump administration also capped Cuban-American family remittances to \$1,000 per quarter, restricted Cuba's access to the U.S. financial system by denying authorization for so-called "U-turn" transactions,³⁴ and most notably, allowed Title III of the Helms-Burton law to go into effect for the first time since its enactment in 1996. Title III enables Americans, and Cubans who later became U.S. citizens, to sue in U.S. courts foreign companies that "traffic" in properties in Cuba confiscated from them by the Castro government after the revolution. The activation of this provision in May 2019, which unleashed a number of lawsuits against foreign and U.S. firms, made doing business in Cuba more risky and stifled the flow of foreign direct investment to the country (THCG 2020).

It was against the backdrop of reduced Venezuelan aid and oil supplies along with the economic squeeze from tightened U.S. sanctions that the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic hit Cuba in 2020 to complete a triple punch of potentially devastating impact. In other words, the Cuban economy was in trouble even before the pandemic, but the latter without a doubt sparked a completely new level of uncertainty by halting tourism, slowing down remittances, increasing shipping costs, and exacerbating food shortages.

Cuba closed its airports and stopped admitting foreign visitors in March. It was only in July, and very cautiously, that it began to reopen to international tourism. Meanwhile, in June, the Trump administration had ordered Marriott International (the owner of Starwood) to end its hotel operations in Cuba, removing another Obama-era symbol of engagement with the island (Marsh 2020). Furthermore, between June and September, the Trump administration blocked private charter flights to Cuba from the United States, prohibited Americans from staying at over 400 Cuban government-owned hotels on the island, banned U.S. travelers from bringing home rum or cigars, and sanctioned two Cuban military-owned entities (Fincimex and its unit American International Services) that control the remittance business to Cuba (A. Rodríguez 2020; Shepardson 2020; Woodyard 2020).

The suspension of air due to the coronavirus outbreak travel also shuttered the ability of Cuban Americans to hand-carry goods to their relatives in Cuba and stopped the underground business of entrepreneurs (“mules”) who regularly travel to Cuba from the United States to deliver food, clothes, other goods, and cash to people for a fee. In normal times, nearly half of remittances make it to Cuba via informal channels while the rest is sent through official money transfer services like Western Union in partnership with Fincimex. Western Union, for the time being, reportedly continues to operate in Cuba despite the new U.S. measures. Yet, given the widespread job losses in the U.S. triggered by the Covid-19 crisis and the strict travel restrictions in place, industry experts estimated that Cuba could suffer a decline of approximately \$1.2 billion in remittance inflows in 2020 (Morales 2020).

Exports of medical services, Cuba’s top source of hard currency revenues, are insufficient to make up for the shortfall in foreign exchange earnings caused by the coronavirus pandemic. They too have taken a hit in recent years, and not only because of diminished activities in Venezuela. The number of Cuban doctors and nurses abroad plunged from more than 50,000 in 2015 to around 28,000 in 2020, mainly because they had to leave countries such as Bolivia, El Salvador, Ecuador, and especially Brazil (8,300 left after Bolsonaro won the presidency in October 2018) where leftists presidents lost power (The Economist 2020). Cuba’s initial response to the coronavirus-led collapse in tourism was to cut imports, revive its food rationing system, open dollar stores to capture hard currency, and suspending or delaying some payments on foreign debt.

Among a few bright spots, at least from Havana’s perspective, Covid-19 gave Cuba an opportunity to send its doctors overseas for cash, lower oil prices offered some relief by reducing import costs, a lawsuit against Carnival filed under the Helms-Burton law was dismissed by a U.S. federal court, and a deal with the Paris Club granted Cuba a one-year moratorium on the payment of its debt (EIU 2020b). In July 2020, to boost the economy

amid Covid-19 and stiffer U.S. embargo restrictions, the Cuban government unveiled sweeping economic reforms that include the promotion of small- and medium-sized private enterprises that will be allowed to form partnerships with state and foreign companies and to perform import and export operations. The reform plan also called for the creation of a wholesale market for the private sector, the expansion of nonagricultural cooperatives and self-employment, and for granting greater decision-making and operational autonomy to state firms (Vicent 2020). However, most of these measures had been announced in the past and it remains to be seen when and how they will finally be implemented.

CONCLUSION

Today's Cuban economy is fundamentally a service economy with a weak production base, severe systemic flaws, and an external sector that cannot stimulate and sustain high rates of economic growth. Cuba's external sector has witnessed important changes over the past three decades, particularly in the area of foreign trade. Service trade has overshadowed merchandise trade. A special oil-for-doctors arrangement with Venezuela has converted exports of medical and other professional services into Cuba's largest hard currency earner and principal engine of growth. International tourism is another vital source of foreign exchange earnings besides family remittances. Significant changes to the structure of merchandise trade also took place. Sugar relinquished its traditional leading role within exports to nickel, and Venezuela became Cuba's top trading partner.

Some recent positive developments should be acknowledged. Sizable exports of professional services produced surpluses in Cuba's overall trade and current account balances. The island welcomed a record 4.7 million international visitors in 2018, and despite stricter rules for Americans traveling there, still managed to attract nearly 4.3 million visitors in 2019 along with large volumes of remittances from abroad. Moreover, new foreign investment businesses were formed in Cuba as the terms for overseas investors have improved. There are nonetheless serious challenges.

Merchandise, and to a lower extent service exports, have experienced a downward trend since the early 2010s. Heavily dependent on imported goods, Cuba continues to run a huge merchandise trade deficit that places significant strain on the country's external finances. The Cuban external sector also suffers from little export (and market) diversification, critical exposure to volatile swings in the international prices of key products like sugar, nickel, and oil, inadequate levels of domestic and foreign investment, and overconcentration on activities with low multiplier effects. Finally, a

combination of three major external factors such as the profound economic crisis in Venezuela, Trump's hardline approach, and the coronavirus have hit Cuba extremely hard, raising the need for systemic economic reforms aimed to unleash productive forces and increase efficiency, stimulate growth, and foster sustainable development.

NOTES

1. In 1990, the total value of Cuba's imports of goods and services as a share of GDP at market prices was 31 percent. In 2018, that same share was about 13 percent (ONEI 1996, 2019).

2. For a comprehensive analysis of the impact of the global crisis of 2007–2008 on the Cuban economy, see Mesa-Lago and Vidal Alejandro 2010.

3. Primarily due to the adverse effects of the coronavirus global pandemic, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (*Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe* or CEPAL) estimated an 8.0 percent drop in Cuba's GDP in 2020 (CEPAL 2020). The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) forecasted a GDP contraction of 8.3 percent and warned that an even sharper downturn could occur (EIU 2020b).

4. The share of tourism revenues in Cuba's total exports of goods and services peaked at 45.7 percent in 2002 (ONEI 2003).

5. ONEI's 2018 statistical yearbook (*Anuario Estadístico de Cuba 2018*) did not give the values of exports of services distributed by type for years prior to 2018.

6. See Oficina Nacional de Estadística e Información (ONEI), "Series Estadísticas Sector Externo 1985–2018," <http://www.onei.gob.cu/node/14870>.

7. Besides cash remittances, Morales (2019) estimated that Cubans received \$2,975 million worth of in-kind remittances (made up primarily of clothing, medicines, and electronics products) in 2018.

8. The Paris Club is an informal group of nineteen creditor nations (including the United States) providing debt relief and other kinds of financial assistance to debtor countries, mostly developing nations. Unlike the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, the Paris Club does not issue multilateral loans.

9. For data on foreign bank loans to Cuba, see Bank for International Settlements (BIS), Locational Banking Statistics, <https://www.bis.org/statistics/bankstats.htm>.

10. See "Moody's Changes Cuba's Outlook to Positive from Stable; Caa2 Rating Affirmed," *Moody's Investor Service*, December 10, 2015. Of the three top international credit rating agencies such as Standard and Poor's, Fitch, and Moody's, the latter is the only one to assign grades to Cuba.

11. A record value of around \$6 billion worth of merchandise exports was attained by Cuba in 1985. Exports to the Soviet Union alone accounted for 75 percent of the total. See *supra* note 8.

12. Calculations of the author from ONEI 2019 and ONEI 2014. After ten years of joint management with Cuba of the Cienfuegos oil refinery, Venezuela pulled out of the partnership in late 2017 (Xinhua 2017).

13. Annual nickel production at Sherritt's Pedro Soto Alba plant in the province of Holguín in Cuba decreased slightly from 34,572 tons (plus 3,853 tons of cobalt) in 2011 to 33,108 tons (plus 3,376 tons of cobalt) in 2019. For additional information, see the annual reports of Sherritt International Corporation at www.sherritt.com.

14. For historical nickel prices (1960–2020), see “World Bank Commodity Price Data (The Pink Sheet),” at <https://www.worldbank.org/en/research/commodity-markets>.

15. For historical sugar prices (1989–2020), see data collected by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/sugar-and-sweeteners-yearbook-tables/>.

16. Cuban workers in state enterprises receive their wages in regular Cuban pesos (CUPs). Yet due to generalized shortages of goods available, they are compelled to buy convertible Cuban pesos (CUCs) to purchase many products they need. The CUC is valued at par with the U.S. dollar and currently equals 24 CUP.

17. In August 2018, Cuba modified the 2014 foreign investment law with the enactment of new rules designed to reduce bureaucracy and speed up the approval of investment projects (Gaceta Oficial 2018).

18. Carmelo Mesa-Lago (2019b) claimed that only \$500 million worth of foreign direct investment were delivered to Cuba between 2014 and 2018.

19. The Soviet Union's economic assistance to Cuba intensified in the second half of the 1980s. In addition to “coordinated supply plans” and exports, Ernesto Hernández-Catá (2001, 4) estimated that Soviet subsidies and aid to Cuba averaged \$4.3 billion a year between 1986 and 1990.

20. After years of operating a centrally planned economy, in 1972 Cuba joined the Council of Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA), an organization of communist states specifically designed to foster cooperation among planned economies under the leadership of the Soviet Union. The integration of the Cuban economy into CMEA restructured Cuba's trade relations with the Soviet Union and several Eastern European nations.

21. It was only in the second half of the 2000s that the annual values of Cuba's merchandise bilateral trade returned to the levels of the 1980s (ONEI 2019).

22. The most emblematic sign of deteriorating relations between Cuba and Brazil was the latter's historic vote (the first Latin American country to do so in twenty-six years) against condemning the U.S. embargo on Cuba at the United Nations General Assembly in November 2019 (Nichols 2019).

23. Deflators are used for calculating the real value of imports (and exports), that is adjusted for the effects of price changes.

24. Sizable Venezuelan subsidies to Cuba, especially in the early 2010s, resulted from the fact that oil market prices at that time were significantly higher than the fixed price of Venezuelan oil supplied to Cuba (a preferential \$27 dollar per barrel of oil) that Caracas and Havana had agreed-upon years earlier as a protection to price volatility (C. Romero 2011, 427). Furthermore, although this arrangement might have been modified at some point to reflect changing market conditions, Venezuela's hefty average annual payment for the services of each Cuban healthcare worker denoted a subsidy that Venezuela granted Cuba “through the employment of professionals that

Cuba could not easily duplicate by exporting its professionals to other countries” (Mesa-Lago and Pérez-López 2013, 99).

25. Venezuela’s GDP shrank by a cumulative 62.2 percent between 2013 and 2019 (CEPAL 2019).

26. Estimate of the author from ONEI 2019, Mesa-Lago and Vidal Alejandro 2019.

27. See also: Federal Register 2015a, 2015b, 2015c.

28. Anyone who left Cuba after December 31, 1970, is considered a Cuban citizen by Cuban authorities and required to travel to the island with a valid Cuban passport (Spadoni 2014, 56).

29. President Obama’s measures of 2009, which were announced in April but went into effect in September, also broadened the range of relatives that Cuban Americans can visit and removed limitations on the duration of their trips and related expenditure amounts (Franks and Fletcher 2009).

30. Previously limited to charter flights, regularly scheduled passenger jet services between U.S. cities and Cuban cities other than Havana started at the end of August 2016. Commercial flights to Havana began in October 2016.

31. The resumption of cruise trips to Cuba from the United States officially began in May 2016 when the Carnival cruiseship *Adonia* became the first U.S. cruise vessel to dock in Cuba in almost four decades (Frank 2016).

32. The most recent list (September 2020) of restricted Cuban entities can be found at: <https://www.state.gov/cuba-restricted-list/list-of-restricted-entities-and-subentities-associated-with-cuba-effective-september-29-2020/>.

33. Cuban Ministry of Tourism (MINTUR) data obtained by the author in June 2019.

34. U-turn transactions refer to the transfer of funds from a foreign bank that are cleared by a U.S. financial institution and then transferred out to another foreign bank.

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Chapter 14

Cuba as a Petropower?

*Foreign Relations Implications**

H. Michael Erisman

In 2008, reports began to circulate about the potential for significant oil deposits north of Cuba in the island's offshore exclusive economic zone.¹ The estimates ranged from approximately five billion barrels (USGS [United States Geological Survey] 2020) to 20 billion barrels (Cuba's state oil company—CUPET [Cubapetroleo] 2020). If the mid-to-higher range of these estimates prove to be correct, Cuba will enter an exclusive club as one of the top twenty countries of the world in terms of total oil reserves as well as becoming one of the top three hemispheric nations with respect to per capita reserves.²

This chapter will focus primarily on exploring such issues related to Havana's potential emergence as a petropower. This includes analyses of the technical problems to be encountered in extracting the oil; the potential impact of developing the sizable reserves on relations with the United States (U.S.); and, the potential impact of developing the sizable reserves on Cuba's role in hemispheric and international affairs. But before addressing these issues, let us look at the island's evolving petroleum situation in terms of consumption, production, and external supplementary resources.

CUBA'S EVOLVING PETROLEUM PROFILE

During the Cold War, Cuba did not have a petroleum problem given its special economic relationship with the USSR and the COMECON group of Eastern European nations. The influx of oil assistance from the Soviet bloc, which was provided on terms that were extremely favorable to Havana, was not only sufficient to assure that Cuba could meet its current needs, but at times flowed so profusely that the island had a surplus which it exported in order to acquire hard currency that could be applied to payments for various

Table 14.1 Total Petroleum Production (Thousands of Barrels Per Day)

2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013– 2018
52	52	51	52	48	53	55	52	50

Sources: Data from the US Energy Information Administration (EIA) (2020) and Cuba's National Office of Statistics and Information (ONEI—*Oficina Nacional de Estadística e Información*) (2020).

Table 14.2 Total Petroleum Consumption (Thousands of Barrels Per Day)

2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
156	151	150	162	164	189	171	185	176	177	181	153	165	160

Sources: Data from EIA (2020) and ONEI (2020).

Table 14.3 Total Petroleum Imports (Thousands of Barrels Per Day)

2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
97.9	192.0	100.0	98.0	98.3	109.5	101.8	112.7	113.8	114.4	112.4

Source: Data from CEIC (2020).

imports. But when the USSR and its influence over its Eastern European allies disintegrated, so also did the Cold War petroleum lifeline that had served Havana so well. Thus, as was the case in practically all international dimensions of the island's economic activities, Havana had to face the challenge of dealing with a radically different and much more difficult petroleum situation.

The following tables (14.1, 14.2 and 14.3) provide an overview of Cuba's evolving petroleum profile, focusing primarily on developments during Raúl Castro's tenure as the country's president.³

Given the persistent discrepancy between consumption and domestic production, Havana's challenge was to find a replacement for the defunct USSR as the primary supplier of its vital oil imports. This was accomplished with the emergence of Hugo Chávez's government in Venezuela (1999) with whom arrangements were soon made whereby Cuba sent large numbers of medical personnel to serve there and in return received substantial shipments of subsidized Venezuelan oil. Consequently, as noted by John Kirk, under Chávez Venezuela became Cuba's largest trading partner, "with over one hundred thousand barrels of oil arriving daily, while at its peak some sixty thousand Cuban medical personnel were working in Venezuela" (Kirk 2018, 9). But Chávez died in 2013 and under his successor, Nicolás Maduro, the Venezuelan economy sunk into crisis, one casualty thereof being its Cuban oil shipments. William LeoGrande, writing in 2016, reported that

for several years Venezuela continued to meet its obligation to ship some 80,000 to 90,000 barrels of oil daily to Cuba at subsidized prices in exchange for the

services of some 40,000 Cuban medical and educational professionals. Cuba resold some of the Venezuelan oil on the world market for a tidy hard currency profit. . . . Now, however, the inevitable has come to pass: Venezuelan oil shipments to Cuba are declining, down 20 percent this year, impacting both Cuba's domestic energy supply and its hard currency reserves.⁴ (LeoGrande 2016)

By early 2020, due to Caracas' continuing economic problems as well as sanctions imposed by the Trump administration to disrupt Havana's oil imports, Venezuelan shipments had declined to approximately 50,000 barrels per day (Argusmedia 2020).

It has, to a great extent, been Putin's Russia that stepped in to help fill this breach. This initiative was launched in May 2017 when Moscow once again began shipping large quantities of oil to the island to help replace its Venezuelan losses. The first tanker to arrive contained 240,000 barrels, with much more on the way according to an agreement that provided for Rosneft, the Kremlin's state oil company, to supply 250,000 tons of various petroleum products which was estimated to be the equivalent of approximately 1,865,000 barrels worth \$105 million at current prices (Frank 2017, 2020a). Subsequently, in October 2019, Moscow announced that Zarubezhneft, its state-run oil company, is planning to drill thirty wells costing approximately 100 million euros in Cuba's North Shore fields (Marsh and Parraga, 2019). Such assistance from Russia or anyone else would, of course, be rendered totally anachronistic if indeed the projections about Cuba's potential massive offshore reserves prove to be accurate and, equally important, if that oil is commercially exploitable.

TECHNOLOGICAL CHALLENGES

In 2010, Havana began to enter into leasing agreements in its North Shore zone with various foreign partners who had offshore drilling and extraction experience, but the results of these ventures have generally been inconclusive at best and disappointing at worst. In 2012, the Spanish firm Repsol launched the drilling operations with two more wells being sunk later in the year, one for a Malaysian/Russian consortium and another for Venezuela's state-owned enterprise PDVSA, but none of these efforts uncovered sufficient amounts of oil to support commercial operations. Consequently, in May 2012 Repsol said that it was discontinuing its operations there. Shortly thereafter, in July 2012, the PC Gulf (Indonesia) and GAZPROMNEFT Oil (Russia) companies concluded that the active oil system that their exploratory well had uncovered was not at this point exploitable due to the layers of very compact hard rocks covering it which seriously restricted the ability to recover commercially viable amounts of oil and gas.

Finally, in late 2015, the Australian corporation Melbana acquired drilling rights from Havana for one of the North Shore blocks which they planned to undertake through an agreement with a Chinese firm to sink three exploratory wells over the next few years (Amuchastegui 2017; George 2018).⁵ In an interesting related development, the Cuban national oil company Cubapetoleo (or CUPET) announced in late 2019 that it had made a significant discovery of lighter than typical crude oil on the Bacuranao prospect (which represents the highest quality yet discovered in the area) (CUPET 2020). The Bacuranao wells are on a trend line consistent with Melbana's Block 9 lease, which it has estimated to contain 15.7 billion barrels of (high quality?) oil. The bottom line, however, is that despite ongoing attempts to tap the island's seemingly vast North Shore petroleum potential, no major undertakings have yet (early 2020) been able to recover sufficient amounts of oil to support commercial operations. The problem which has plagued all of these exploration efforts is threefold.

First, more than 80 percent of Cuba's international waters are considered deep and ultradeep, which means most oil wells will have to be drilled at more than 3,000 meters (9,843 feet) below the sea; one 2012 exploratory effort, for example, operated at 4,666 meters (15,308 feet). Second, as noted above, the deposits are located under extremely hard rock which is very difficult to penetrate, quickly wearing down drilling bits, and is so dense that oil does not easily flow through it. These two factors combine make exploratory drilling a technologically daunting and very financially risky proposition—a dry hole can mean that investors will lose at least 200 to 250 million US dollars. Finally, the sanctions that Washington has in place make it exceedingly difficult for international firms interested in working with Havana to overcome the two foregoing problems since much of the state-of-the-art technology available to do so is under U.S. authority and hence cannot by and large be used in projects involving Cuba.

FOREIGN RELATIONS IMPLICATIONS

Throughout Cuba's history, managing its relations with the United States has always been at or certainly near the top of its foreign affairs agenda. A major consideration here, especially in the post-Cold War era, has been the disparity in economic power between the two countries which has rendered the island vulnerable to the economic sanctions that Washington has long employed in its efforts to destroy the Revolution. Energy is, of course, the backbone of any modern economy and unfortunately Cuba does not have much in the way of domestic sources. Cuba's hydroelectric capabilities are quite limited, the nuclear option is not particularly viable (political considerations being a

major deterrent factor), and alternative technologies such as solar, tidal, or geothermal are not yet sufficiently sophisticated to make a significant contribution to the country's national needs. Consequently, Washington has always looked at Havana's oil imports as a vulnerable, highly tempting target in the economic war it has been waging in its efforts to once again impose its political will on the country via regime change.

After a brief hiatus during the Obama administration, the White House under President Trump returned to the traditional U.S. sanctions stance for dealing with Havana with a particularly heavy focus on shipping companies whose tankers were transporting Venezuelan oil to Cuba. These sanctions included a block on all U.S.-based assets of such companies and prohibited any dollar transactions involving them or any specifically named vessels. In March 2019, the administration applied these new restrictions to a Greek and a Liberian firm which thereby joined thirty-four already sanctioned ships owned by Venezuela's state-owned petroleum company. In September companies from Cyprus and Panama were added to the list, contributing further to an energy crisis on the island (Caribbean Council 2019; Chiacu and Parraga 2019).

The developmental potential (admittedly long-term) of the North Shore reserves represents an opportunity for Cuba to radically reconfigure the equation of its relations with Washington. Table 14.4, especially the twenty billion barrels column, clearly illustrates this point. Recognize, of course, that not all of the oil in any particular deposit can be extracted, so the figures for "recoverable oil" are purely illustrative as are the "life span years" that flow from the calculations. Nevertheless, particularly when looking at the first column of figures, it is clear that substantial development of such North Shore deposits would transform Cuba into a hemispheric petropower enjoying energy self-sufficiency and an export capacity that could serve to finance various imports and developmental projects for many years to come. Such oil independence would, at a minimum, greatly reduce Cuban vulnerability to U.S. economic sanctions, thereby strengthening the position of critics in Congress that the

Table 14.4 Life Span of North Shore Reserves (Using the 2018 Consumption Rate of 160,000 Barrels Per Day as the Base Figure).

<i>At</i>	<i>20 Billion Barrels</i>	<i>7 Billion Barrels¹</i>
Current Consumption	342 years	119 years
Double Current Consumption	171 years	60 years
Triple Current Consumption	114 years	40 years

Source: Data from Moore Mira (2011).²

¹ In April 2011, Cuba issued a low estimate of five to nine billion barrels. The seven billion figure represents the middle of this range. See Leslie Moore Mira, "Cuba lowers its resource estimate to 9 billion barrels: official," *Platts Commodity News* (April 5, 2011).

² On April 2011, Cuba issued a low estimate of five to nine billion barrels. The seven billion figure represents the middle of this range (Moore Mira 2011).

sanctions regime is ineffective, counterproductive, and needs to be replaced by a more normal relationship. Basically, then, the North Shore reserves represent a potential “silver bullet” that could serve to transform Washington’s sanctions from what at their worst could represent an existential threat to the island’s economic and even its national security into an obsolete item of history’s trash bin.⁶

Shifting from a long to a more short-term perspective, the North Shore issue is already beginning to have an impact on the dynamics of U.S./Cuban relations. There are, of course, those elements within the American body politic that remain frozen in the past and hence do not want to see any change in Washington’s traditional suspicion of and hostility toward the Revolution. These sentiments quickly surfaced as reports of Cuba’s petropower potential began to circulate, as illustrated by a report of the U.S. Congressional Research Service stating that

Opponents of US support for Cuba’s offshore oil development . . . argue that such involvement would provide an economic lifeline to the Cuban government and thus prolong the continuation of the communist regime. They maintain that if Cuba reaped substantial economic benefits from offshore oil development, it could reduce societal pressure on Cuba to enact market-oriented economic reforms. Some who oppose US involvement in Cuba’s energy development contend that while Cuba might have substantial amounts of oil offshore, it will take years to develop. They maintain that the Cuban government is using the enticement of potential oil profits to break down the US economic embargo on Cuba. (Nerurkar and Sullivan 2011, 15)

The tactics suggested by anti-drilling elements in Congress have included such measures as: requiring the State Department to punish executives of foreign companies that cooperated with Cuba by withholding their visas; fining foreign investors in Cuban oil; directing the Interior Department to deny licenses necessary to drill in U.S. waters to companies involved in Cuban oil operations; pressuring the home governments of such firms to compel their nationals to forego any Cuban initiatives; and holding foreign offshore oil developers liable for damages from Cuban oil spills that enter U.S. waters (Nerurkar and Sullivan 2011; Sandels 2011).

There are, however, some countervailing forces within the United States for which the North Shore reserves represent a compelling rationale for a loosening (if not a complete lifting) of the sanctions and greater cooperation between the two governments. For example, many U.S. environmentalists, haunted by memories of the destruction wreaked by the 2010 Deepwater Horizon experience, fear that a similar disaster could result from a North Shore oil spill because current U.S. sanctions not only restrict Havana’s

access to the technology needed to deal with such issues, but also greatly limit the ability of the United States well as international companies to assist the Cubans in dealing with them (Krauss 2010; Voss 2011).⁷ Also, operating from a more entrepreneurial perspective, American oil companies have lobbied Congress for years (so far unsuccessfully) to allow them to bid for oil and natural gas deposits in waters off Cuba, arguing in particular that: “The last thing that American energy companies want is to be trapped on the sidelines . . . while European, Canadian, and Latin American rivals are free to develop new oil resources at the doorstep of the United States” (Romero 2004). The petroleum lobby also stresses that in addition to providing the United States with a major new option in terms of vital energy supplies, a cooperative relationship with Havana could result in thousands of jobs being created if American drilling equipment suppliers and cleanup contractors along the Gulf Coast were licensed to do business with Cuba.

Recognize, of course, that for Havana the foreign affairs implications of the petropower scenario go far beyond the bailiwick of its U.S. relations. Here the key consideration in most cases flows from the fact that once the commercial potential of the North Shore reserves becomes commercial reality, Havana should be able to develop a petroleum export industry generating significant amounts of vital hard currency revenues which could then support international as well as domestic programs. For example, Havana has gained considerable international stature and influence (or to use a popular contemporary concept, “soft power”⁸) due to its broad menu of developmental aid that it has undertaken primarily in the Global South, the centerpiece of these efforts being its medical assistance programs that are unmatched in scope, effort, and effectiveness by any other country or international organization. Cuba has a long history of sending tens of thousands of doctors and related personnel all over the world to serve communities that have traditionally received little or nothing in terms of public health programs as well as providing free medical educations to thousands of poor students from developing countries (Erisman and Kirk 2009; Kirk 2015).⁹ For many years, this aid was offered gratis, but due to the country’s recent economic problems, Havana has begun asking countries which have the ability to do so to pay something for these services (although others without such wherewithal continue to receive free assistance). These and other considerations have led to a situation where the trend line for the scope of professional participation in these activities (underwritten by the Cuban government) that had been rising for quite a few years has recently reversed rather dramatically (see table 14.5).¹⁰ A petroleum bonanza could, of course, allow Havana to re-expand the programs and revert to its prior policy of free medical aid, thereby insuring maximum soft power benefits for its efforts.

Table 14.5 Cuban Medical Aid Personnel Abroad

2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
36770	38000	37000	40000	38000	50715	52000	55000	60000	42000	39582	29000

Sources: Data for this table is created by the author using a large variety of academic and news sources.

An influx of oil export revenues could also have implications for the military dimension of Cuba’s hard power which, as noted by Hal Klepak (a leading authority on the Cuban armed forces—the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias* [FAR]), was severely diminished by the onslaught of the “Special Period” triggered by the disintegration of the Soviet Union:

The [armed forces] budget fell by nearly half in five years. . . . The country could no longer afford the size of defense establishment it had maintained for thirty years, and national service was reduced to two years instead of the long-established system of three years. In the vital area of fuel provision to units for training and operations, some less essential formations saw their allocation fall by up to 90 percent, while even forces vital to deterrence found themselves with 30 percent or even more of a reduction in this crucial area. Training at home dried up considerably and abroad entirely. (Klepak 2018, 28)

Oil revenues could not only give Havana a greater ability to modernize its armed forces and related organizations, thereby increasing its hard power and its national security capabilities, but it could also find itself in a stronger position in international negotiations flowing from its enhanced soft and hard power postures.

Another international challenge confronting the Cuban government is its international debt. Admittedly, Havana has made some progress in reconfiguring/rescheduling its obligations, one outstanding example occurring in 2014 when Moscow agreed to write off 90 percent of the debt that the island incurred with the USSR during the Cold War era (The Moscow Times 2014). Subsequently, other nations would follow suit, with Reuters reporting that:

Cuba’s long-term trading partners are using debt forgiveness, swaps and new financing to try to win investment opportunities on the island. . . . In December [2015], Cuba struck a general accord with the Paris Club of wealthy nations to forgive \$8.5 billion of \$11.1 billion in defaulted debt and it has since reached follow-up bilateral deals with most members. France, which is Cuba’s largest creditor in the Paris Club, agreed in February [2016] to drop more than \$225 million of outstanding debt in a swap arrangement. (Frank 2016)

Nevertheless, the island's external debt, which was estimated to stand at 30.06 billion (U.S. dollars) in 2017 (CIA World Factbook 2020),¹¹ remains a major concern, as illustrated by the fact that

Cuba failed to meet payments last year on its restructured debt to wealthy nations, putting a deal with the Paris Club of creditors in jeopardy. . . . The 2015 agreement, seen by Reuters, forgave \$8.5 billion of \$11.1 billion, representing debt Cuba defaulted on in 1986, plus charges. Repayment of the remaining debt in annual installments was backloaded through 2033 and some of that money allocated to funds for investments in Cuba. . . . However, the agreement states if Cuba does not meet an annual payment schedule in full it will be charged 9% interest until payment, plus late interest for that portion in arrears. . . . Cuba owed an estimated \$80 million last year, paying some countries in full, but not others, including the largest creditors Spain, France and Japan. (Frank 2020b)

Obviously, Havana would like to be able to negotiate favorable borrowing agreements (e.g., such as those noted above) with existing and future partners, an option that might become more viable if lenders are confident that development of the North Shore reserves will indeed generate a reliable flow of hard currency export revenues to help underwrite repayment. Moreover, such an enhanced ability to service its foreign debts should have a favorable impact on Cuba's international credit rating, which is an important factor influencing the perception of a country as a dependable trading partner.

Finally, should Cuba emerge as a hemispheric petropower, the stage would be set for it to resume a more vigorous leadership role in South-South affairs. Fidel's tenure was characterized by very high-profile Third World initiatives, as exemplified by the fact that Cuba was twice chosen to serve as the head of the Non-Aligned Movement (1979 and 2006). Subsequently, however, one hears little of Havana playing a leading role in such organizations. Cuba remains, of course, a member, but it is rather clear that leadership has not been a high-priority item on its post-Fidel foreign relations agenda. One prime venue where this tendency could be reversed is ALBA (the Bolivarian Alliance for the Americas), which was founded by Cuba and Venezuela in 2004 as an antidote to Washington's efforts to promote the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) (Erisman 2011).¹²

ALBA, however, is more than just a free trade or an economic integration organization. Instead, while including these components, it also pursues a broad menu of cooperative social developmental programs in such areas as health care, literacy and education, land reform and food security, student and workers organizations, and environmental protection. The division of labor between the two founding members was basically as follows: Havana assumed primary responsibility for staffing and overseeing many of these

social programs while Caracas' main contribution, given its oil wealth, was to bankroll them. Subsequently, however, the deterioration of the Venezuelan economy undermined its ability to play that role, thus jeopardizing ALBA's viability. Cuba cannot at this point assume that financial responsibility, but it obviously could do so if it became a hemispheric petropower and thereby would enhance its leadership role in what represents its most ambitious venture into the complicated realm of regional integration.

CONCLUSION

It is, of course, quite possible that the Cuban North Shore fields will never fully fulfill their promise and that Havana therefore will never become a petropower. Deep sea oil exploration and development is, after all, a rather fickle enterprise where "gushers" are by no means guaranteed. But should Cuba prevail, the implications, both in terms of domestic and foreign policy, are indeed substantial and in some instances huge.

Domestically, Havana would not only enjoy energy security for the foreseeable future (see table 14.5) but also would be able to generate a secure flow of hard currency from petroleum exports to cover the costs of vital imports (e.g., food), to support and expand social programs (e.g., health care), and to finance various economic development initiatives (e.g., health tourism, pharmaceutical research and development, alternative energy). In short, Cuba would have the resources to construct the kind of society that the founders of the Revolution envisaged, but whose efforts have often been impeded by financial constraints.

In the international arena, developing its petroleum resources almost certainly would, in addition to enhancing its soft power (see above), allow Havana to make significant progress in resolving what has long been the greatest threat to the Revolution's very survival—Washington's determination to impose its political will on the island by engineering regime change. U.S. military action is, of course, an option that most observers agree has long been off the table, the result being that economic warfare (i.e., sanctions) has become Washington's primary strategy to achieve its hegemonic aspirations. However, petropower status for Havana would in all likelihood function to a great extent to neutralize such efforts, thereby fundamentally altering the essential nature of the relationship and ushering in a new era wherein the most realistic, most viable alternative for Washington would be full normalization of relations based on the key principles of sovereign equality and mutual respect. As such, the vision of patriotic Cubans like José Martí and Fidel Castro with regard to their country's dealings with the colossus to their north would finally be fully vindicated.

NOTES

1. An earlier version of this chapter entitled “Cuba as a Hemispheric Petropower: Prospects and Consequences” which did not focus as heavily on the foreign relations implications of the topic appeared in the *International Journal Of Cuban Studies* (London), Vol. 11, No. 11 (2019), pp. 43–60.

2. Venezuela ranks number one at approximately 9,300 barrels per capita, Canada is number two with approximately 4,600 barrels, and Cuba would be number three at approximately 1,800 barrels per capita based on adding the potential 20 billion barrels to its current reserves of approximately 124 million barrels (EIA 2020).

3. Data provided by the Cuban government’s National Office of Statistics and Information (ONEI—*Oficina Nacional de Estadística e Información*) regarding the following tables are significantly lower than that provided by various international organizations. These discrepancies arise from the different units of measurement employed—ONEI uses metric tons while international agencies use thousands of barrels. Since the latter unit is more common and produces similar results from multiple agencies, it is used here.

4. This 20 percent decline translates into Venezuelan shipments of approximately 72,000 barrels per day.

5. For a good 2017 overview of the Cuban oil situation, see Amuchastegui’s article: “At Conference, Cuba Tries to Reawaken Interest in its Oil.”

6. On April 2011, Cuba issued a low estimate of five to nine billion barrels. The seven billion figure represents the middle of this range (Moore Mira 2011).

7. For more information on these concerns, see Nerurkar and Sullivan, op. cit.; “Drilling Plans Off Cuba Stir Fears of Impact on Gulf,” *New York Times* (September 29, 2010), available on the Internet at <<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/09/30/world/americas/30cuba.html?r=1>>; and “Cuban oil project fuels US anxieties,” *BBC* (November 15, 2011), available on the Internet at <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-15737573>>.

8. The soft power concept was popularized by Joseph S. Nye. A good summary can be found in Nye’s 2004 book, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*. New York: PublicAffairs.

9. For comprehensive overviews of these programs, see H. Michael Erisman and John M. Kirk’s 2009 book, *Cuban Medical Internationalism: Origins, Evolution, and Goals*, as well as Kirk’s 2015 book, *Healthcare Without Borders: Understanding Cuban Medical Internationalism*.

10. Another contributing factor to this reversal has been the emergence of conservative governments hostile to Havana in Brazil and Bolivia which decided that they no longer wished to host Cuban medical aid delegations.

11. Index Mundi, available on the Internet at <<https://www.indexmundi.com/g/g.aspx?c=cu&v=94>>.

12. For an extensive discussion of ALBA by the author, see H. Michael Erisman’s 2011 book chapter, “Cuba, Venezuela, and ALBA: The NeoBolivarian Challenge” in Gary Prevost and Carlos Oliva Campos (eds.), *Cuban-Latin American Relations in the Context of a Changing Hemisphere*.

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Conclusion

Reflections on Cuba's Global Connections

Mervyn J. Bain and Chris Walker

As detailed in the introductory chapter to this book, this book's origin was the international conference "Cuba's Revolution at 60" held in the autumn of 2019 at Dalhousie University in Halifax, Canada. During the conference activists, ambassadors, experts as well as scholars of Cuba from around the world examined and discussed the Cuban Revolution and its progress in several different areas. Specifically, the goal of the book is to examine and reflect on Cuba's global engagement and foreign policy since January 1959. To conduct this examination, experts, including two Ambassadors, have explored the island's key international relationships as well as included their thoughts and conclusions on the principal pressures and influences relating to their areas of study. This final concluding chapter will synergize these conclusions to offer some final thoughts on Cuba's global activities for the last sixty years.

Throughout history, island nations have engaged with the world (primarily through trade with neighboring countries). However, Cuba's level of engagement with the world throughout its sixty-year revolutionary period is extraordinary given few island nations in the Global South can claim such influence or notoriety. The diversity of themes throughout chapters in this book are testaments to Cuba's extensive foreign relations. Moreover, as noted in the introduction of this book, this level of influence stands in stark contrast to the pre-1959 period when Cuba most certainly did not have such global presence. Contributors to this book have also grappled with the complex and multifaceted nature of Cuba's different, and at times contradictory, foreign policy.

However, Cuba's global presence is not just remarkable, complex, and multifaceted, but (at times) appears to defy logic. This is best highlighted by two examples. First, the continuation of a post-Cold War era program which provided

a period of convalescence in Cuba for child survivors of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster which was paid for by the Cuban government. The second example that defies logic is Havana's continued internationalist efforts that send medical practitioners throughout the Global South while simultaneously struggling to survive the loss of its socialist trading partners in the late 1980s and early 1990s. These evidence a very different logic as many assumed such programs would have been halted due to Cuba's significant material, financial, and resource constraints.

Moreover, Cuba's refusal to yield to the power of the United States (U.S.) throughout the revolutionary period further demonstrates the island's ability to contest preconceived assumptions. It could be supposed that the much more powerful United States could bend its smaller and less powerful island neighbor to its political will, especially given their geographic proximity. This, however, has not been the case. With the first section of this book focusing on Havana-Washington relations, Bill LeoGrande charted the "coercive engagement" employed by U.S. administrations predominantly over a sixty-year period in contrast to the "constructive engagement" utilized by Barack Obama. In conjunction with the foreign policy of Raúl Castro, this constructive engagement led to historic changes in their bilateral relationship during a two-year period starting December 2014.

In the concluding remarks of their addresses at the conference "Cuba at 60," which are contained in the first section of this book, Ambassadors Josefina Vidal from Cuba and Jeffrey DeLaurentis from the U.S., both of whom had been involved in this normalization process/rapprochement, state their continuing commitment to engagement between Cuba and the United States. Moreover, in the conclusion to his chapter on the U.S. embargo against Cuba, Robert Muse makes a very pertinent and important point when he states that change will come to Cuban-U.S. relations as, at some point in the future, the embargo will be lifted (though it may not be possible to state when this will happen, or which U.S. President will end the embargo).¹ When this does occur, it will dramatically change Cuban-U.S. relations.

Washington's "coercive engagement" has not only failed to achieve its goal of political change in Cuba, but has also resulted in the island having to work within its own parameters. While all countries must operate within the idiosyncrasies of their own situations, Cuba has engaged with the world throughout the Cold War and post-Cold War era while the United States, as the only global super power to emerge, continues to attempt to curb the island's global engagement. The result is that Cuba's global presence both further defies logic and is also more extraordinary due to the examples of many Global South countries, including most of Latin America, having succumbed to United States "soft" and "hard" power.

In the introductory chapter, it was posited that the deterioration of Cuban-U.S. relations in the late 1950s/early 1960s, as well as the timing of the

Cuban Revolution at the height of the Cold War, helped propel the island onto the world stage. While these suppositions are undoubtedly correct, Cuba's global presence is not merely the product of geopolitics. Geopolitics has, and remains, important. However, Cuba's willingness to follow its own path concerning its global interactions, which at times may appear to be contradictory to conventional international relations approaches, was most noticeable in the immediate aftermath of the Cold War. In sum, Cuba's global interactions cannot merely be framed as a response to geopolitical events, but rather that the island's global commitment is underpinned by its own philosophy which guides its unconventional approach to international relations and solidarity.

Although this is the case, the reasons for Cuba's continuing global presence have not remained static. Isaac Saney's chapter on Cuba-Africa relations details the changing nature of the island's engagement with the continent. In the 1960s, this relationship focused on supporting anti-colonial national liberation movements which transitioned, in the 1970s, to the deployment of Cuban personnel to Africa. During the post-Cold War period, Cuban involvement in Africa concentrated on nation building and development projects. Each era of Cuban involvement in Africa has been important, but what cannot be overlooked is Cuba's continuous engagement with Africa throughout the revolutionary period. Saney's specification of the reasons for Cuban engagement with Africa, in turn, reflect Cuba's global presence during the past sixty years. The basis for Cuba's international presence may evolve and change, but what does not waver is the island's commitment to global engagement. This is made even more remarkable due to difficult geopolitical parameters which Cuba continues to operate under.

Cuban involvement with Africa demonstrates another important aspect of revolutionary Cuba's global policy. For sixty years, Cuba has acted as champion for the Developing World. In January 1966, this resulted in Havana hosting the Tricontinental Conference as well as twice hosting the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) conference. Significantly, Fidel Castro and Raúl Castro both served as NAM presidents for three-year periods, in September 1979 and September 2006, respectively. Again, Cuba advocating for the Global South shows no signs of abating and has been a constant feature of Cuba's global presence since January 1959 through to the current global COVID-19 pandemic.

Cuba's disproportionately large international profile often results in questions about the underlying motivations of the Havana government. As detailed in the introductory chapter, Michael Erisman outlined the importance of realist pragmatism within Cuba's revolutionary foreign policy. As he noted, realist pragmatism supposes that the key driver within Havana's foreign policy is the survival of the revolution. Consequently, at times the

island's interactions on the world stage can be seen as being motivated by self-interest. This self-interest has both economic and political manifestations. Economically, Cuba requires trading partners with a reliable source of energy and oil being a constant issue throughout the revolutionary period.

As noted in the introduction, Soviet Union economic guarantees were comparatively higher than China. This was a key reason for Havana siding with Moscow in the Sino-Soviet split in the early 1960s despite closer ideological affinity between Havana and Beijing. Furthermore, Cuban need for both oil and trade has also been an important component in contemporary bilateral relationships with Canada, China, Russia, and Venezuela (all scrutinized throughout this book). In the previous chapter, Erisman examined the possibility of Cuba becoming an oil producer due to potentially significant oil discoveries in Cuban territorial waters. As Erisman noted, if Cuba becomes an oil producer, this would considerably change the dynamic of its relationship with the United States. While this is undoubtedly true, it would not only change the dynamics of Cuban-U.S. relations, but also with Cuba's global engagement in general. Politically, Cuba acting with self-interest can also be seen in Havana attempting to cultivate a number of "friends" or political allies within the international system. Again, this has been a recurrent theme in a number of the chapters in the second section of this book.

Acting out of self-interest is not unique to Cuba. What is unusual is that, at other times, self-interest most certainly does not drive Cuba's global engagement. The aforementioned continuation of the program for children affected by the Chernobyl nuclear disaster had little economic or political benefit for Cuba because the Ukraine was unable to offer Cuba any obvious benefits as it also struggled to adjust to the new political situation of the early to mid-1990s. Moreover, while the majority of Cuban medical solidarity, through the deployment of medical personnel, has occurred throughout the Global South, it has also occurred in, or been offered to, more wealthy and powerful countries. Additionally, Cuba acting a mediator in the discussions which brought an end to the Colombian civil war also had no direct positive result for the Caribbean island. Consequently, both selfish and selfless motivational factors underpin Cuba's global relations.

As noted in several chapters in this book, change has taken place in Cuba in the late 2010s. This is evident in April 2018, when Miguel Díaz-Canel succeeded Raúl Castro as the President of Cuba, as well as in February 2019, with the ratification of a new Cuban constitution. However, as has also been noted, these changes did not result in significant change in the island's engagement throughout the world. Subsequently, the question of what underpins this continuous commitment arises.

In the chapter focusing on Cuban-Chinese relations, written by Adrian Hearn and Rafael Hernández, they identified Cuba's "independent political

agency” (which, albeit conceptualized differently, has been discussed in other chapters). Cuba’s “independent political agency” is key to answering the above question on the foundations of the island’s engagement with the world. Also, as emphasized by various authors in the book, Cuba’s revolutionary desire for independence is driven by nationalism and pride. As detailed throughout the book, this has intermittently led Cuba to engage with the world for its own benefits while at others more altruistic reasons underpin this engagement. The desire for independence, powered by nationalism and pride, highlights why Cuba’s continuous global engagement over the last sixty years shows no signs of waning.

These final concluding thoughts, examining and reflecting on Cuba as a significant international actor during the last sixty years of its ongoing revolution, highlight the multifaceted, complex, and at times contradictory reasons for the island’s global engagement. However, what cannot be questioned is Cuba’s revolutionary commitment to its international endeavors since January 1959. This commitment is notwithstanding and appears to operate within very constrained parameters while simultaneously seeming to make little financial sense or align with conventional foreign policy rational. Moreover, this commitment shows no signs of abating despite ongoing challenges (material and economic) as well as the chaos of a global pandemic. In fact, it appears that Cuba will continue to expand its internationalist efforts through thick and thin, particularly for both Global North and Global South countries suffering from COVID-19. It is not just this commitment, which is extraordinary, but also how Cuba’s global outreach surpasses many larger and more powerful countries. In sum, Cuba’s global presence since January 1959 has been remarkable for a Caribbean island, is unparalleled, and is likely to continue for the foreseeable future.

NOTE

1. As noted in the introduction by Liliana Fernández the 2020 U.S. Presidential election could mark a turning point in Washington’s policy toward Havana because, during the electoral campaign, Joe Biden detailed that his Cuba policy would be very different from the policy pursued by the Trump administration.

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