

Cuba's Position in its Alliance with the Soviet Union, 1959-1968

Subordinate, or Independent?



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Bachelor thesis
Bachelor in International Studies (Latin America)
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Leiden University, The Hague
June 2021
9428 words

*Toma, pues, Unión Soviética, te lo dejo, toma mi oscuro Corazón de par en par abierto;
Ya sabemos por ti cuál es el camino seguro,
Después de tanto mar ya sabemos por ti dónde está el puerto.¹*

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Nicolás Guillén²

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr. Sebastian Rumie Rojo for the support during the process of writing this thesis, and my friend Max de Vrieze for his useful comments on the draft version.

¹ Translations:

Image caption (front page): “Long live the eternal, indestructible friendship and cooperation between the Soviets and the Cuban peoples.” (Ohio State University and Miami University, “Origins: Current Events in Historical Perspective,” accessed June 4, 2021.)

Poem by Guillén: “Take it, Soviet Union, I give it to you, take my dark heart which is wide open; For we already know that yours is the safe road, After such a vast sea we know where the port for you is.” (Own translation.)

² Nicolás Guillén, “Unión Soviética,” *Islas* No. 2 (1967): 20-21.

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List of abbreviations

AAPSO	Afro-Asian People's Solidarity Organization
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
DT	Dependency Theory
ISI	Import-Substitution-Industrialization
LASO	Latin American Solidarity Organization
M-26-7	<i>Movimiento 26 de Julio</i>
OAS	Organization of American States
ORI	<i>Organizaciones Revolucionarias Integradas</i>
OSPAAL	Organization of Solidarity with the peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America
PCC	<i>Partido Comunista de Cuba</i>
PSP	<i>Partido Socialista Popular</i>
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

Introduction

Cuba's revolutionary struggle began on July 26, 1953, with the attack on an army barracks in Santiago de Cuba, led by Fidel Castro. Castro's revolutionary movement would bear the date of this event as its name, and became known as the July 26 movement (Movimiento 26 de Julio, or M-26-7). The revolution culminated in the overthrowing of the dictatorial regime of American-backed Fulgencio Batista, on January 1, 1959. Cuba under Castro would embark on a transition to socialism, and, amidst hostilities from the United States and other countries in the Western hemisphere, embrace the Soviet Union as its guardian and trade partner.

Cuba became economically dependent upon the Soviet Union, which supplied oil and other essential products, and provided income for the island by buying Cuba's main export product: sugar. Cuba also relied on the Soviet Union for its security. The Cold War context in which all this played out made this all the more significant, as Cuba had become part of the socialist bloc, but is in very close geographical proximity to the United States. While Cuba, at least to some extent, had a dependency upon the Soviet Union in the realms of economy and security, this is not as straightforward in the political domain. This bachelor's thesis will analyze this political aspect of the Cuban-Soviet alliance, and answer the following research question: To what extent did Cuba's alignment with the Soviet Union shape its political system and decision making between the Cuban revolution, and the low point in Cuban-Soviet relations in 1968?

In order to address this question, first of all some relevant theories and concepts will be addressed in chapter one. These are important to understand the underlying dynamics of the Cuban revolution itself, and bilateral relations in general. Chapter two will set the context in which everything took place, by addressing what led up to the Cuban revolution, how the Cuban-Soviet alliance came about in the first place, and by showing that it was not all sunshine and rainbows between the two countries. Chapter three will then finally move to the real political aspect of the relationship, and address the questions of how the alliance affected Cuban politics and decision making, as well as its political system and the Cuban brand of socialism. The aim is to examine whether Cuba's position was independent, or subordinate.

Most English-language literature on the topic, is American-based and sees Cuba simply as a pawn in the Soviet geopolitical game. Literature featuring Cuba in the Cold War, often only focuses on the Cuban missile crisis of October 1962. This bachelor's thesis aims to fill this research gap and provide the Cuban perspective on its alliance with the Soviet Union. It will call into question Cuba's subordinate position within the alliance. The Cuban-Soviet case can also serve as an example to understand future alliances between a very powerful patron and a much less powerful, yet

strategically important client state. The increasingly tense power struggle between the United States and China could produce similar features for client states that the Cuban case possessed, when allied with either one of them. Most notable is the case of contemporary Taiwan, where an alliance with the United States but an increasingly powerful and hostile China amount for a potentially very dangerous situation. Just like Cuba was in the past, Taiwan is now a place where the power struggle between the world's two most powerful countries is highly acute. The Economist recently labelled Taiwan "the most dangerous place on earth."³ Because of the research gap and potential lessons for future cases, the topic of this thesis is highly relevant.

Throughout the thesis, the labels 'Soviet Union' and 'USSR,' which stands for the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, will be used interchangeably. Cuban society and path of development will be referred to as socialist, instead of communist, in order to avoid confusion or potential incorrect labelling. Communism, after all, is inherently socialist, but socialism is not necessarily communist. Communism is regarded as the highest form of socialism. The methodology that is used, is a review of literature.

³ The Economist, "The most dangerous place on Earth," May 1, 2021.

Chapter 1: The Asymmetrical Nature of Geopolitics: Theories and Concepts

This chapter will address some academic debates surrounding geopolitical issues such as bilateral relationships - asymmetrical because one country usually has a dominant position over the other - but also concepts that stem from this asymmetry, such as anti-imperialism. The first section will address the dependency theory (DT) and the super client hypothesis. The concept of super client refers to a situation in which the client state has leverage to some extent over the patron state, due to particularities of the relationship. A desire for development on the part of the client state is one of the reasons why it aligns with a great power, which in turn stems from a status of underdevelopment, that could be explained by the dependency theory. It can be argued that Cuba was a super client. The second section will address the concepts of nationalism and anti-imperialism. These two have also been combined into one section due to a connection between them. Nationalism can be the source of anti-imperialism, because a sense of belonging to a nation inevitably leads to opposition when dominated by another nation, which in very basic terms describes imperialism. These concepts are highly relevant to the case study at hand, because they help explain why the Cuban revolution happened in the first place. The final section will address the concept of influence. This means that one country modifies its behavior in response to another country's (perceived) pressure. This concept is important in understanding the capabilities of both the Soviet Union and Cuba within the alliance, and what the dynamics between the two were.

However some concepts are bound together because of their resemblances, actually all the concepts are interrelated as well. For example, the concept of super client also links to nationalism, because nationalism is a precondition for becoming a super client. It also relates to influence, because it serves to show that under specific conditions weak states can exert influence over powerful states. Dependency is connected to anti-imperialism, because imperialist domination can lead to a dependency on the imperialist state by the subjugated state, obstructing development and forging anti-imperialist sentiment in the subjugated state, et cetera.

1.1. Dependency Theory & Super Client: Bad & Good Positions for the Less Powerful

The dependency theory had a great influence on anti-imperialist movements in Latin America and other parts of the Third World during the 1960s and 1970s.⁴ Cold War politics, lacking results from import-substitution-industrialization (ISI) policies, increased popularity of Marxism and its writings about imperialism and decolonization among the youth, dissatisfaction with

⁴ Cristóbal Kay, "Theotonio Dos Santos (1936-2018): The Revolutionary Intellectual Who Pioneered Dependency Theory," *Development and Change* Vol. 51, No. 2 (2019): 622.

modernization theory and other orthodox economic theories, but also the political impacts of the Cuban revolution across the region, which was a turning point in Latin American history, all played important roles in the increased prominence of dependency theory across the region.⁵

Theotonio Dos Santos, a Brazilian intellectual who was a pioneer of the dependency theory, described dependence as “a situation in which the economy of certain countries is conditioned by the development and expansion of another economy to which the former is subjected.”⁶ Dominant economies can grow and be self-sustaining, while dependent economies can only do this as a result of this growth of the dominant economies they are subjected to. The effect on the development of the dependent economy can either be positive or negative. However, because of this dependence, the subsequent countries remain exploited and backward.⁷

The dependency theory is a vehicle through which to understand underdevelopment and analyze its causes. Analyzing the causes of underdevelopment, is an important first step in theorizing how to overcome it. Dependency has always existed, as the world is an asymmetrical place in which the centre dominates over the subordinate semi-peripheries and peripheries. In the current capitalistic world system, this is characterized by division of labour between the three, which generates vast amounts of capital accumulation in the centre.⁸

Classical political economy, as pioneered by Adam Smith and David Ricardo, saw this as something positive, as division of labour allowed nations to focus on their comparative advantage and thus become wealthier. Marxist theory criticized this, however, because this division of labour also generated inequality. This generated an urge to understand ‘backwardness.’ The idea of dependency became widely accepted after studies of underdevelopment in Latin America in the 1960s.⁹

‘Dependency’ was coined for the first time by the ‘developmentalism approach,’ a theory that also sought to defeat underdevelopment. It criticized Ricardo’s comparative advantage, because productivity increases faster in the centre than in the periphery, thus increasing inequality. Growth and increasing price levels in the centre result in deteriorating terms of trade for the periphery and semi-periphery, meaning that with the same amount of exports it can import less, hindering growth.

⁵ Ibid; 601.

⁶ Ibid; 606.

⁷ Ibid; 606-607.

⁸ H. R. Sonntag, “Dependency Theory,” *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences* (2001), 3501.

⁹ Ibid; 3501-02.

In general, dependency theory thus sees underdevelopment as a manifestations of external factors, which is a result of the position the periphery and semi-periphery has in the world economy, more than internal factors.¹⁰

The concepts of dependency and super client are combined into one section, because they are closely connected. The DT was designed to understand underdevelopment. It sees the subjugation of a weak economy to a strong economy as obstructing development in the weak economy, and therefore as a source of underdevelopment. This theory is relevant to the case study at hand, because Cuba indeed was an underdeveloped country, who's economy was subjected to that of the United States before the 1959 revolution, and to that of the USSR afterwards. The concept of super client is interconnected with that of dependency because it precisely stems from the latter. The patron state needs to have some form of dependency on the client state for it to become a super client. An example would be investments into the client state, that the patron state cannot afford to lose.

In relations between two countries, a super client, as coined by David Ronfeldt of the Rand Corporation, refers to a situation “where the client wields power owing to its strategic location, previous investment by the patron that require safeguarding, and the consequent need to defend it.”¹¹ This concept links to both the concept of influence and the concept of dependency. It links to the concept of dependency because it serves to show that, while Cuba was dependent upon the Soviet Union, it was not in such a subordinate position that the concept of dependency alone would make it seem like, and it links to the concept of influence because it demonstrates that Cuba was able to influence Soviet policies in some ways, instead of only being influenced by the Soviets.

A super client is a regional power that has a close connection to a superpower - the latter in the timeframe of this bachelor's thesis either being the United States or the Soviet Union - as an internal determinant has a strong and centralized leadership, and as an external determinant successfully exploits the geopolitical interests of the allied superpower.¹² Important factors that allow for the establishment of an alliance between the two, are geopolitical-security interests on the part of the superpower, and intense nationalism on the part of the soon-to-be super client.¹³

¹⁰ Ibid; 3502-04.

¹¹ W. Raymond Duncan, *The Soviet Union and Cuba: Interests and Influence*, (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1985), 26.

¹² David F. Ronfeldt, “SUPERCLIENTS AND SUPERPOWERS; Cuba:Soviet Union/Iran:United States,” *The Rand Corporation* (April 1978): 1.

¹³ Ibid; 2.

Nationalism was indeed an important factor in the Cuban revolution, and nationalism as a concept will be addressed in section 1.2.

The geopolitical interests of the superpower account for its heavy military and economic investments into the client state, which satisfies the latter's nationalistic quest for security and development. However, once the client state has established a sufficient degree of security and stabilized its economy, a desire for greater independence leads to a quest to end the status of client state and subsequent dependency. The client state starts bargaining with the patron superpower for national objectives. The superpower, due to its geopolitical interests, cannot afford to lose its investments into the client state, and is prepared to pay a higher cost to preserve this. This allows the client state to exploit the investments by the superpower and gain leverage to influence the latter's policies. The client state has now become a super client.¹⁴

This phenomenon has also been labelled the 'paradox of weak state power.'¹⁵ Determining which states are weak and which are strong, is of course problematic. Power is always relative, and the perception of power can sometimes be misleading. An example of this is the French military power between the two World Wars. After its success in the First World War, it was regarded as the strongest military power on earth. It continued to be perceived in that way until the crushing defeat in 1940 showed its actual weakness. The French military was not weaker than it had been in 1919 in absolute terms, but it was overlooked how significantly weaker the French military was relative to the German one in 1940.¹⁶

However, in order to broadly categorize weak and strong states, there are two broad factors, of which one is fixed, and the other depends on the course of action by the state. The fixed factor, 'power base,' revolves around resources, and its determinants are (i) the structure and (ii) the state of the international system, (iii) international norms, and (iv) qualities of the actor in question. The dependent factor, 'alternatives of action,' revolves around bargaining, and its determinants are (i) alignment with other states, (ii) exploitation of the weaknesses of great powers, and (iii) other tactics or strategies in negotiation and diplomacy.¹⁷

¹⁴ Ibid; 5-7.

¹⁵ Ulf Lindell and Stefan Persson, "The Paradox of Weak State Power: A Research and Literature Overview," *Cooperation and Conflict* Vol. 21, No. 2 (1986).

¹⁶ Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Fifth Edition, 1973), 154-155.

¹⁷ Lindell and Persson, "The Paradox of Weak State Power," 79-81.

In order to become a super client, a ‘small’ or ‘weak’ state first needs to be of interest for a superpower. Fixed determinants such as the existence of a rivalry between two superpowers and geographical proximity of the small state to one of them are preconditions, because it means that the potential rewards for the more distant superpower, if it succeeds in incorporating the small state into its orbit, are high. When this happens, ‘alternatives of action’ by the small state are crucial. When played right, the small state can become a super client, satisfying its desire for development, security, and to some extent also autonomy. Because the rewards for the superpower are high, the damage of alienating the small state are also high.

If the Soviets were to use the Cuban revolution to their advantage, it had to fully commit to Cuba, owing to the island’s geographical location and its rapidly deteriorating relations with the United States. Because the Soviets did fully commit, there was no going back. Cuba’s domestic and foreign policy grew more ambitious than anticipated by the Soviets, due to economic and political support that the USSR had promised Cuba during the summer of 1960. For several years, this created a political dependency for the Soviet Union on Cuba, more than the other way around.¹⁸

The next section will address the concepts of nationalism and anti-imperialism. Both of these concepts are a backlash to subordination, which means that they can be seen as a reaction to dependency. (In the case of nationalism, as will become clear, this is especially true for left-wing nationalism, which is also the most relevant one in the case of Cuba.) In this sense, the concepts of the next section are related to the DT. Nationalism is also a precondition for a country to become a super client.

1.2. Nationalism & Anti-Imperialism: Rejecting Subordination

“Places are accidents, and their names ideas. The citizenship feels new ... but the identity does not.”¹⁹ This quote by Clifford Geertz nicely sums up how the existence of states is not a given, but rather a construction by mankind, however still based on a genuine feeling of belonging to a nation. This is not to say that the nation is a natural and fixed phenomenon; the nation is commonly referred to as an ‘imagined community,’ as coined by Benedict Anderson,²⁰ and refers to a group of people who regard themselves as a single unit because of cultural and historical criteria that they

¹⁸ Jacques Lévesque, *THE USSR AND THE CUBAN REVOLUTION: Soviet Ideological and Strategical Perspectives, 1959-77*, trans. Deanna Drendel Leboeuf (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1978), 20.

¹⁹ Clifford Geertz, *After the Fact: Two Countries, Four Decades, One Anthropologist*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1995), 22.

²⁰ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, (London: Verso, 1983).

share.²¹ Note here that a nation is distinct from a state: the latter is an independent and sovereign government, which is bureaucratic and limited to a territorially defined area, and is recognized by other states.²² A nation-state is the ideal of a single, homogeneous nation being ruled by its own sovereign state, but this has rarely ever been achieved. States aim to construct nations within their borders, through for example symbols and the writing of national history.²³ Pauli Kettunen describes nationalism as “the rhetoric of nation.”²⁴

While the concepts of nation and national had a longer history, the political concept of nationalism emerged during the French revolution. However, before the 1890s, it was not yet very popular. National movements did not use the concept for self-description.²⁵ Around the turn of the century, the word nationalism was mainly used in the language of the external ruler, such as the English who ruled over the Irish, to describe something that in the vernacular language was a means, or a method, rather than an ism. Contrary to for example patriotism or Catholicism, nationalism had a negative connotation to it, at least in Europe. It was a reference to politics forcing nationhood upon people, who shared Catholicism or protestantism as a commonality across different nations. In the United States, nationalism as a concept could be used to describe and promote modern progress, and thus had a more positive connotation.²⁶

Nationalism today generally describes people’s valuation of national identity, and actions people take to achieve or maintain self-determination for the nation. A distinction can be made between classical and liberal nationalism. Classical nationalists see the creation, maintenance and strengthening of the supposed nation-state as the main task of each member of the nation. Hence, *actions* are of importance here. Liberal nationalists are more moderate. Moderate strands of nationalism are sometimes labelled ‘patriotism,’ and put more emphasis on the civic community and the loyalty to the state, while more radical strands of nationalism emphasize ethnic communities,

²¹ Melissa Y. Rock, “State, Nation and Nation-State: Clarifying Misused Terminology,” *Geography of International Affairs* (PennState College of Earth and Mineral Sciences).

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Pauli Kettunen, “The concept of nationalism in discussions on a European society,” *Journal of Political Ideologies* Vol. 23, No. 3 (2018): 342.

²⁵ Ibid; 344-45.

²⁶ Ibid; 345.

which implies loyalty to the nation more than to the state. According to a liberal nationalist view, national identity promotes solidarity.²⁷

Interestingly, nationalism is used in the rhetoric of both the radical left and the radical right of the political spectrum. Radical right-wing nationalism is based on the idea of the ethnic community, whereas radical left-wing nationalism stems from the civic community. This means that right-wing nationalism aims to shield the nation from foreign influences, by for example curbing immigration. It is exclusive on cultural, ethnic, religious and political grounds.²⁸ The left is usually not associated with nationalism, but a rejection of capitalism and a desire for a large redistribution of resources that is part of the radical left, can nonetheless lead to nationalism. This inherently links it to anti-imperialism, because it is a rejection of economic exploitation. The radical left does not base its nationalist rhetoric on a desire for a homogenous nation like the radical right, but on the notion that foreign great powers exploit the domestic working class. This in turn also links left-wing nationalism to the dependency theory. As left-wing nationalism emphasizes the civic community, which can be heterogeneous, it is more inclusive.²⁹

In Latin America in particular, nationalism has, apart from national pride, a strong economic component stemming from dependency and subsequent underdevelopment. Nationalism in twentieth century Latin America was deeply connected to a rejection of American influence in the region. The US economy dominated Latin American economies, including pre-revolutionary Cuba. Between the late nineteenth century and the 1950s, the US had constructed an economic system in the Western hemisphere that suited US interests, through Reciprocal Trade Agreements, the Export-Import Bank and the creation of the Organization of American States (OAS). Simply put, this system boiled down to Latin American countries selling raw materials to the United States, which in turn sold manufactured, value-added products back to Latin America. While this indeed benefitted the United States, it did not benefit Latin America as was initially assumed.³⁰

Latin American nationalism, thus to an extent grew out of US economic imperialism. This example makes it easy to see how nationalism and anti-imperialism are interrelated. Lenin called

²⁷ Nenad Misevic, "Nationalism," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta (2020).

²⁸ Daphne Halikiopoulou, Kyriaki Nanou and Sofia Vasilopoulou, "The paradox of nationalism: The common denominator of radical right and radical left euroscepticism," *European Journal of Political Research* Vol. 51, No. 4 (2012): 510.

²⁹ Ibid; 511-512.

³⁰ James Siekmeier, "Latin American Economic Nationalism and United States-Latin American Relations, 1945-1961," *The Latin Americanist* Vol. 52, No. 3 (2008): 59-61.

imperialism the highest stage of capitalism, and titled his 1916 book accordingly.³¹ According to this view, imperialism is thus inextricably linked to capitalist societies. It is the act of one country dominating another one, by military or economic means, in order to get access to its resources. This domination thus does not necessarily have to happen through active military intervention or colonization, but can also be achieved by for example supporting rebel groups or even economic sanctions.³² Imperialism is not to be confused with colonialism, which is limited to acquiring overseas colonies.

Capitalist expansion, which fueled imperialism, has, next to for example modernization, also driven global inequality, poverty, and even wars and genocides.³³ Because imperialism was associated with capitalism, anti-imperialist sentiment, due to a history of subordination, logically leads to a rejection of capitalism. During the Cold War, capitalism and socialism-communism were deemed opposites. Therefore, anti-imperialist sentiment could help explain why a country would transition to socialism.

The original term ‘imperialism’ goes back to the age of empires, and refers to the creation of empires, or the ideological justification of why they existed. The formation of empires could involve simply subjugation of a land and its peoples, or permanent settlement through migration.³⁴ This original term is important to note, because without the building of empires in the past and European settlement in Cuba, today’s Cuba, which has a large mestizo (mixed race) population, would look vastly different.

During times of colonialism, economic exploitation of the colonies was often downplayed by the European powers, and the notion of “civilizing” the colony, who’s peoples were often regarded racially inferior, was often used as a justification for empires. But even though decolonization has ended European political domination over former colonies, economic exploitation still exists. Because of this some have criticized the label “postcolonial” to describe the current era, and stress the “neocolonial” nature of today’s world. Marx and Lenin have done important work in making the economic question more central to the discussion of imperialism. It

³¹ Jeremy Friedman and Peter Rutland, “Anti-imperialism: The Leninist Legacy and the Fate of World Revolution,” *Slavic Review* Vol. 76, No. 3 (2017): 594.

³² Tovarishch Endymion, “Anti Imperialism: What is it? Why does it Matter?,” *YouTube*, uploaded on August 28, 2017.

³³ Patrick Brantlinger, “Imperialism,” *Victorian Literature and Culture* Vol. 46, No. 3-4 (2018): 738.

³⁴ *Ibid*; 736-737.

must also be noted that military imperialism still exists. Think of for example the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan by the United States.³⁵

All the previous academic debates are in turn connected to the next one: influence. A super client has a particular relationship with its patron state that allows it to influence the latter's behavior to some extent. The dependency theory assumes that the economic state of the strong economy influences that of the weak economy. Note, however, that this is usually an unintended outcome. Anti-imperialism and nationalism are largely a rejection of foreign influence.

1.3. Influence: Why and How Countries Make Another Change its Behavior

When one country changes its behavior as a reaction to pressure from another country, there is influence at play.³⁶ A major form of influence is power, which uses negative (threats) or positive (rewards) sanctions to get the other country to do something. Sanctions make use of valued resources to put pressure on the other country.³⁷ When no sanctions are used, we speak just of influence and not yet of power.³⁸ Vital interests are the reason why countries try to exert influence. These can be in the political, economic, or security domain, and have different levels of salience (importance). *Interests* are "stable, long term and enduring." The way in which influence is being exerted, is typically through issues. *Issues* are short term, they are "acts that affect influence."³⁹ Think of the cutting of oil supplies to another country.

Influence comes in different forms and intensities. Duncan (1985) identifies 4 types of influence: 1. indirect-influence, 2. cooperative-influence, 3. assertive-power, and 4. coercive-power. In what way a country tries to influence another one, depends on multiple factors. Think for example of capabilities, the interests at stake, or the type of relationship that exists between two countries. Different types of bilateral relationships include *adversarial*, *dominant-submissive*, *allied*, *interventionist*, and others.⁴⁰

³⁵ Ibid; 738.

³⁶ Duncan, *The Soviet Union and Cuba*, xiii.

³⁷ Ibid; 4.

³⁸ David V.J. Bell, *Power, Influence, and Authority: An Essay in Political Linguistics*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 17-24.

³⁹ Duncan, *The Soviet Union and Cuba*, 9.

⁴⁰ Ibid; 4.

Influence is of course never a zero-sum game, and is always relative. It is always preceded by a cost-benefit calculus.⁴¹ This relativity of influence is important, because it can explain why a seemingly insignificant country like Cuba could in certain areas and under the right conditions influence a giant like the Soviet Union. In countries that are very powerful compared to others at some point in history, however, this relativity risks being overlooked, and gives way to a perception that power is an absolute quality.⁴² The latter could explain why in the United States people predominantly perceived Cuba as merely a Soviet pawn, or why Khrushchev believed he could get away with installing ballistic missiles in Cuba.

It must be noted that one country changing its behavior in response to another country, is not always the result of deliberate influencing by the latter. When the situation is tense, country A could interpret a statement by country B as hostile and act accordingly, even though country B might not have intended it that way.⁴³ A distinction can be made between words or statements that have an ‘object,’ or intended outcome, and those that lead to a ‘sequel,’ which is an effect that was unintended. Objects are usually predictable, sequels are not.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Ibid; 12-13.

⁴² Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, 155-156.

⁴³ Bell, *Power, Influence and Authority*, 18.

⁴⁴ J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1962), 109, 121.

Chapter 2: The History and Circumstances that Shaped the Cuban-Soviet Alliance

Before we can dive into the question of what Cuba's position was within the alliance with the USSR, we first need to know the background. This chapter will provide some of this background, using concepts that have been addressed in chapter one. The starting point is some Cuban history, in order to examine what led up to the revolution. While it is often regarded as a socialist revolution, many scholars agree that a transition to socialism was not the initial goal of the revolution. In the first place, it was a fight against the American-backed dictator Fulgencio Batista,⁴⁵ fueled by deeply rooted nationalist and anti-imperialist sentiments. The second section of the chapter will focus on how the Cuban-Soviet alliance came about, and what the nature of this alliance was. The last section will show that the alliance was not always easy, but that there were also difficulties.

2.1. Nationalist and Anti-Imperialist Aspects of the Cuban Revolution

Anti-imperialism is deeply rooted in Cuban society, as the island has struggled with its sovereignty throughout history. During times of colonization, European powers fought for control of trade routes, and Cuba was in a key location for this. As the United States rose as a regional power, it too became interested in the island, as it was in a perfect position from where to protect Florida and New Orleans, and control Central America. But perhaps most important was the economic potential that Cuba presented: its sugar industry was the largest in the world by the 1820s. Documents as Manifest Destiny and the Monroe Doctrine gave Americans a sense of having a necessity and a right to intervene in Cuban affairs.⁴⁶

The Cuban Independence Wars (1868-1878, 1879-1880, 1895-1898) had destroyed property and commerce, and combined with the embargo issued by the Spaniards for anyone involved in the independence struggle, this increasingly allowed for American ownership of the Cuban economy. As Spain lost control of Cuba in 1898, the US intervened to avoid a social revolution. A Cuban Republic was constructed in which the old elites kept their privileged positions, under subordination of the US. US domination over Cuba was consolidated with the Platt Amendment, which granted the US control over Cuban foreign policy as well as domestic politics, and enabled the US to build

⁴⁵ Rafael Pedemonte, "Birches too difficult to cut down: The rejection and assimilation of the Soviet reference in Cuban culture," *International Journal of Cuban Studies* Vol. 9, No. 1 (2017): 128.

⁴⁶ Ernesto Domínguez López and Helen Yaffe, "The deep, historical roots of Cuban anti-imperialism," *Third World Quarterly* Vol. 38, No. 11 (2017): 2518-19.

naval bases and Guantánamo Bay. US domination over Cuba's economy was reinforced by the 1904 Trade Reciprocity Treaty.⁴⁷ The US would also engage in so-called 'gunboat diplomacy.' During Franklin D. Roosevelt's administration, the Americans sent gunboats close to the Cuban coast to send a message to the Cubans: the United States would support a pro-US regime in Cuba, and the Cuban nationalist tendencies should be cautious not to hinder US economic interests on the island.⁴⁸

Cuba had all the features to accommodate the US neocolonial model: economic dependency, a co-opting and integrated upper- and middle class, and a military that was combatting revolutionaries. (In 1933, the Cuban military crushed a social revolution.) By 1955, 40% of sugar production, half of the public railways and 90% of electric and telephone services were in American hands. This and multiple US military interventions created more awareness of and protest against US imperialism and the oligarchic-imperial model of domination.⁴⁹

During the early 1950s, an anti-corruption movement arose which consisted of left-wing social democrats from the Orthodox party, former members of the nationalist *Auténticos* party and activists such as Fidel Castro. Ideas of social revolution and taking back national sovereignty came together, and support for the movement was increased by general opposition to Batista's dictatorial rule after his coup in 1952.⁵⁰

Finally, in January 1959, Fidel Castro and his July 26 Movement succeeded in toppling the Batista regime, which marks the culmination of the Cuban revolution. The revolution did have some socialist aspects to it, such as land reform and a reduction of prices for essential services.⁵¹ However, these were measures to fix pre-revolutionary problems, and do not suffice to label the Cuban revolution a full-blown socialist transformation, as it is often regarded. Indeed, nationalist and anti-imperialist sentiments were the main drivers behind the revolution. Elimination of North American domination was the initial goal.⁵² Note that we are speaking about the lead up to the revolution here, not about the course that Castro's revolutionary regime would take afterwards.

⁴⁷ Ibid; 2519.

⁴⁸ Siekmeier, "Latin American Economic Nationalism," 62.

⁴⁹ Domínguez López and Yaffé, "The deep, historical roots," 2520.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Patricia Ruffin, *Dependency, development and underdevelopment: A study of the economic and political relations involving the United States, the Soviet Union and Cuba*, (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International, 1986), 191.

⁵² Ibid; 212.

In the years leading up to the revolution, Castro seemed to be unsure of where it should lead, and he even stressed the importance of democratic institutions. But North American democracy had become associated with inequality, and could not be conceived of without American penetration.⁵³ Only in 1960 it was proclaimed that Cuba had embarked on a path of socialist development,⁵⁴ and the real transformation happened even later. The initial societal reforms had shown that only a full economic transformation could fulfill the promises that Castro and his movement had made to the Cubans.⁵⁵

Fidel Castro and his fellow M-26-7 members, during their struggle between 1953 and 1959, were certain about one thing: Cuba was headed in the wrong direction, and this needed to be changed. Throughout modern history, Cuba had been subject to political and economic domination by foreign powers. As can be explained by the dependency theory, this obstructed the island's development. This domination had fostered nationalist and anti-imperialist sentiments, something that both motivated M-26-7 and granted it popular support especially among *campesinos*. Batista, who had served a term as a democratically elected president between 1940 and 1944, but had returned to power as a dictator via a coup in 1952, allowed for even more US penetration of the Cuban economy and ruled with an iron fist. This generated more support for Castro's movement. Some social policies were part of Castro's plan, but socialist transformation was not the goal of the revolution. This happened later.

2.2 Why Cuba Embraced the Soviets: Lack of Alternatives but also Opportunity

It may seem rather paradoxical that after breaking with the United States, Cuba would move into the orbit of yet another superpower: the Soviet Union. However, it does make sense when considering that any state, but especially one which harbors widespread nationalist and anti-imperialist sentiment, as was the case with revolutionary Cuba, desires a high degree of national independence, development and security. A close geographical proximity to a great- or superpower might not grant the desired autonomy when in alliance with this power, which can lead a country to align itself with a more distant one, in order to still safeguard the development and security

⁵³ Ibid; 213.

⁵⁴ Lévesque, "THE USSR AND THE CUBAN REVOLUTION," 30.

⁵⁵ Ruffin, *Dependency, development and underdevelopment*, 191.

aspects.⁵⁶ It is also important to point out, when considering nationalist and anti-imperialist sentiment, that the Soviet Union lacked a colonial past.⁵⁷

At first, Cuba and the Soviet Union were skeptical towards each other. In fact, it took the Soviet Union a year to actually recognize Cuba as socialist, after Castro had proclaimed this in April 1961.⁵⁸ What brought the two together, were mutual interests.⁵⁹ When the decolonization movement kicked off, the USSR began incorporating “struggles of national liberation” into its framework of ideology. Decolonization, after all, was a rejection of Western imperialism. This is the time when the struggle for influence between East and West began.⁶⁰ Cuba presented a great opportunity for the Soviets, as they had not previously had much success in Latin America, and the alliance with Cuba was their first foothold in the Western hemisphere. Cuba was interested in Soviet economic and military capabilities, as well as its opposition to the US.⁶¹ Alliances are indeed often directed against one or more countries, that are a common enemy.⁶² While Cuba’s expulsion from the OAS and the imposition of the trade embargo by the US both happened in 1962, US economic warfare, which included pressure on other states to curb economic relations with Cuba, had begun as early as 1959, and confrontation with the OAS had started in 1960. This severely affected the Cuban economy, hence it needed new alliances.⁶³

When Khrushchev came to power in 1954-55, the USSR started to look at the Third World as a competition ground against the imperialist West. They were optimistic. It was thought that independence movements would be more in favor of socialism-communism than imperialism-capitalism. The Soviets could support these movements because of their own growing strength, and emerging détente with the West. It was also thought that new independent states would be inherently anti-imperialist, thus weakening the West. Nonaligned countries and communist states would create a ‘vast peace zone,’ helping to prevent world war. Khrushchev’s approach emphasized

⁵⁶ Ronfeldt, “SUPERCLIENTS AND SUPERPOWERS,” 5-6.

⁵⁷ Isabel Story, *Soviet Influence on Cuban Culture, 1961-1987: When the Soviets Came to Stay*, (London: Lexington Books, 2020), 10.

⁵⁸ Lévesque, *THE USSR AND THE CUBAN REVOLUTION*, 30-31.

⁵⁹ Duncan, *The Soviet Union and Cuba*, 21.

⁶⁰ Ruffin, *Dependency, development and underdevelopment*, 193.

⁶¹ Duncan, *The Soviet Union and Cuba*, 22.

⁶² Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, 182.

⁶³ Domínguez López and Yaffé, “The deep, historical roots,” 2521-23.

the role of bourgeois leaders, more than national communist parties, to lead the liberation movement, in order to get more economic and political independence.⁶⁴

This enthusiasm toward the Third World under Khrushchev led the Soviets to provide aid to a bunch of newly independent Third World countries. Ties with Cuba began in April 1959 with an economic agreement, and then a trade agreement in February 1960. This was not an isolated Cuban-Soviet event, but fitted in the broader context of the Soviet approach to the Third World. However, Cuba's increasing tensions with the US - Cuba had started to nationalize US property - presented a remarkable opportunity for the USSR to increase its presence in the Third World, especially, as pointed out before, because it had had very little success in Latin America before.⁶⁵

2.3. Difficulties in the Alliance: Differing Interests

The relationship between Cuba and the Soviet Union was not always as easy as it might have seemed to the outside world. It was marked by ups and downs. Cuba and the USSR saw the world differently, hence there were disagreements regarding foreign policy issues. Cuba saw a North-South struggle: the struggle of imperialist versus underdeveloped countries. The USSR saw an East-West struggle: the struggle of the socialist-communist camp versus the imperialist-capitalist camp.⁶⁶

The Third World and the question of how it should transition to socialism, was a constant point of tension. Castro was in favor of promoting armed insurrections in the Third World in order to achieve socialist revolutions, which makes sense when considering Cuba's own revolutionary experience, which had been conducted through guerrilla warfare. Khrushchev, however, was reluctant to promote armed insurrection, as it could threaten the Soviet policy of peaceful coexistence with the United States.⁶⁷ Cuba also started to dispute the USSR's leading role in the socialist world, and it can be argued that eventually Cuba did indeed become the face of Third World socialism, rather than the Soviet Union.⁶⁸ Cuba sent soldiers, and medical and technical assistance to support independence movements and new independent governments struggling against neocolonialism and foreign aggression.⁶⁹

⁶⁴ Duncan, *The Soviet Union and Cuba*, 26-27.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*; 28.

⁶⁶ Carla Anne Robbins, *The Cuban Threat*, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1983), 44-46.

⁶⁷ Story, *Soviet Influence on Cuban Culture*, 12.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*.

⁶⁹ Domínguez López and Yaffe, "The deep, historical roots," 2524.

An important event with regard to how the Third World would be approached, was the meeting of the Organization of Solidarity with the Peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America (OSPAAL), or simply the Tricontinental Conference, that was held in 1966 in Havana. The idea of OSPAAL was that the alliance of organizations, political forces and movements of the Third World should be consolidated to combat dependence and imperialism. While the Soviets were opposed to armed insurrection, Che Guevara's message to the Tricontinental, however himself absent because he was fighting in Bolivia, was to create "one, two, many Vietnams."⁷⁰

While the Tricontinental was enabled to take place in Havana because of good Cuban-Soviet relations,⁷¹ it was taken as an opportunity by Cuba to criticize the Kremlin. Castro had hoped that being part of the socialist bloc would grant Cuba more protection. He criticized the USSR for not doing enough for Vietnam, and expressed that "it should not be possible for a small socialist country to be bombed with impunity by masses of imperialist planes."⁷² The Soviets had hoped that they could use the Tricontinental Conference to undermine China's influence in revolutionary movements.⁷³ They hoped to have the same success as at the conference of Latin American communist parties in Havana in December 1964. Pro-Chinese communist parties were not invited to this conference. This indeed presented a victory for the Soviets and the Latin American pro-Soviet communist parties, and was not an important concession for Cuba.⁷⁴

The Soviet objective of limiting Chinese influence in the Third World was not really met, although bilateral relations between Cuba and China did take a hit because China reduced its rice exports to the island. The Soviets had hoped that OSPAAL would officially replace AAPSO, the Afro-Asian People's Solidarity Organization, to include Latin America in it. The Chinese and the Soviets competed for influence in AAPSO, and including Latin America in the organization would arguably have shifted the balance to the USSR. However, apart from the Tricontinental Conference of January 1966, OSPAAL would not mature in the way the Soviets had hoped. AAPSO continued to exist, and the Latin American Solidarity Organization, LASO, would be created as a parallel organization. Following the Tricontinental, mainly due to Cuba's increased militant stance, its

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Lévesque, *THE USSR AND THE CUBAN REVOLUTION*, 115.

⁷² Ibid; 120-121.

⁷³ James G. Blight and Philip Brenner, *Sad and Luminous Days: Cuba's Struggle With the Superpowers After the Missile Crisis*, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers inc., 2002), xxii.

⁷⁴ Lévesque, *THE USSR AND THE CUBAN REVOLUTION*, 103-104.

relations with the USSR would be strained at least until the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in the summer of 1968.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ Duncan, *The Soviet Union and Cuba*, 66-71.

Chapter 3: Cuba's Position Within the Alliance: Independent or Subordinate?

The first section of this chapter aims to find out whether the Cuban leadership could make its own foreign policy decisions, or whether this was strained by whatever the Kremlin had in mind. The section will put forward an example of Cuba successfully influencing Soviet policies towards Cuba, but also one that shows that Cuba's own agency could be heavily restricted by Soviet actions. The next section will address the question of whether the Cuban system and Cuban socialism was a copy of that in the Soviet Union, or distinctly Cuban. The role of the writings of Cuban intellectual José Martí in the Cuban socialist ideology will be touched upon, as well as what the establishment of the Cuban Communist Party (PCC) meant for the direction Cuba was headed.

3.1. Cuban Politics and Decision Making: The Missile Crisis and its Aftermath

There are few interpretations of what the political implications of the Cuban-Soviet alliance were for Cuba. There was a widespread perception, mainly in the US, that Cuba's economic dependency on the USSR also translated into a political one, and that Cuba could thus not make independent decisions. According to this view, Cuba is no more than a pawn in the Soviet geopolitical game. Another theory, which some scholars started to develop from the mid-1970s, assumes that Cuba was an autonomous actor that used the Soviets, to receive security, economic development, and its 'proletarian internationalism.' This view suggests that Cuba influenced the USSR instead. This is because Cuba was the most important gateway to Latin America for the Soviet Union. The latter could not afford to lose its investments into the island, which gave Cuba leverage. This view indeed suggests that Cuba was a super client. A third interpretation sees the relationship as more complex, and not necessarily Cuban or Soviet dominated. Whatever the interpretation, however, Cuba did have to operate within certain limits that were set by the Kremlin.⁷⁶ What we are interested in, is what Cuba's capabilities were within these parameters.

This section will use the Cuban Missile Crisis as a case study to examine whether the Cuban leadership could or could not make their own decisions, independent from Moscow. In short, the Cuban Missile Crisis refers to thirteen very intense days in October 1962, during the world stood at the brink of nuclear holocaust. The Soviets had started installing nuclear warheads in Cuba, but this was discovered by the Americans before they were fully operational. This led to tense negotiations between Moscow and Washington in order to resolve the crisis, until the missiles were eventually removed. US president Kennedy estimated that the odds of disaster were "between one out of three

⁷⁶ Duncan, *The Soviet Union and Cuba*, 1-3.

and even.”⁷⁷ Had disaster indeed struck, casualties would likely have run in the hundreds of millions on both the American and the Soviet side, let alone the deaths, perhaps in the millions, in places like Europe and the indirect effects of nuclear holocaust on the rest of the world.⁷⁸

The outcome of the Cuban missile crisis, made Cuba try to be as independent as possible within the parameters of the alliance with the USSR. In 1968, Castro held a secret speech for about 100 members of the Central Committee of the Cuban Communist Party, which would only be declassified decades later. The speech was about the missile crisis and how the Soviet Union had acted before, during and in the aftermath of it. Castro’s main conclusion was that, even though the Soviet Union was an ally, in the end it could not be fully trusted and so to a degree Cuba was on its own.⁷⁹

The Soviets had acted out of their own geopolitical interests in resolving the missile crisis. Settlement was between Moscow and Washington, without input from Cuba. The United States and the USSR, in the end, were the winners of the crisis. There was nothing to gain for Cuba, apart from an oral promise by US president Kennedy not to invade the island, a promise that was regarded with skepticism in Cuba.⁸⁰ Cuba was now determined to pursue its own foreign policy.⁸¹

Because of this Cuban discontent about the handling of the missile crisis, Castro engaged in acts of assertive influence against the USSR. Target were the Soviet second level salience political interests (which are: 1. political influence abroad, 2. political support against adversaries such as the US and China, 3. prestige and leadership internationally, and 4. focus on the East-West struggle).⁸² The tactics Castro used in order to exert influence were (i) using the Sino-Soviet rift by not committing to either side, (ii) focusing on armed struggle for change in Latin America, and (iii) publicly criticizing the USSR for insufficiently committing to Vietnam.⁸³ After the missile crisis these tactics were quite effective. The Soviets were already embarrassed, their global image as defender of liberation movements had taken a hit, and China criticized the USSR that it had surrendered to the imperialists. Tensions between the Soviets and the Chinese, along with Chinese

⁷⁷ Graham Allison and Philip Zelikow, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis, second edition*, (New York: Addison-Wesley Educational Publishers Inc., 1999), 1.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Blight and Brenner, *Sad and Luminous Days*, xxi.

⁸⁰ Ibid; xv-xvi.

⁸¹ Domínguez López and Yaffe, “The deep, historical roots,” 2524.

⁸² Duncan, *The Soviet Union and Cuba*, 23.

⁸³ Ibid; 43.

praise for Cuba led Castro to be neutral. Castro also attacked pro-Soviet communist parties in Latin America. They used the Cuban revolution to legitimize a peaceful transition, but Castro called these “false interpretations” of the revolution. Castro had prestige in the global communist movement and so this was widely heard.⁸⁴

Castro’s influence seems to have been successful. The terms of the February 1963 trade agreement were very favorable to Cuba. It received higher prices for sugar and the opportunity to sell more, on the open market for dollars instead of to the USSR for rubles. From late April to early June Castro visited the USSR, and Cuba was now a full member of socialist bloc.⁸⁵

In this case, Cuba clearly was able to act independently, instead of being subject to the will of Moscow. What’s more, Cuba was able to take a firm stance, thereby making the Soviet Union pay a higher price to maintain the relationship. This would affirm the super client hypothesis. But these were also admittedly very particular circumstances, and Cuba could not always handle the Soviet Union in this way. Influence, of course, ran in the other direction as well. Cuba had started to seek more political and economic independence from the Soviet Union during the 1960s in general.⁸⁶ However, the Soviets easily put Cuba back in line, in both the question of armed insurrection and the attempt at more independence, when they cut oil supplies to Cuba in 1967-68.⁸⁷

When taking a closer look at the missile crisis itself, ideas about Cuban assertiveness start to look implausible. Authors Graham Allison and Philip Zelikow (1999) present four hypotheses for why the USSR placed missiles in Cuba: 1. Cuban defense, 2. Cold War politics, 3. missile power, and 4. a tradeoff for the Berlin situation, or a trap. It seems as though only the first hypothesis really is in the interest of Cuba. According to this hypothesis, *Cuban defense*, the USSR was just a powerful country helping out a weaker ally that feared an attack from its powerful neighbor. The US had already shown its willingness to attack Cuba, during the Bay of Pigs invasion in April 1961. This was also the narrative Khrushchev and other Soviet officials maintained. Admittedly, in 1960, before Bay of Pigs invasion, both the Cubans and the Soviets had thought a few times that the US was going to invade, and thought the USSR had deterred it with rhetoric of nuclear attack, even though the US did not yet have such plans. It was also thought that Soviet rhetoric had deterred the Americans from giving the Bay of Pigs invasion military support, which was in fact conducted by

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid; 44.

⁸⁶ Story, *Soviet Influence on Cuban Culture*, 13-14.

⁸⁷ Duncan, *The Soviet Union and Cuba*, 6.

Cuban exiles based mainly in Miami. The Soviets believed their status, especially in Latin America, was tied to the survival of Castro. Assassination attempts and for example Operation Mongoose, a CIA-led plan to create a revolution in Cuba, but which was later ruled out by president Kennedy, were among the reasons for suspicion toward US intentions.⁸⁸

If Cuban defense was the objective, it succeeded. After the intense thirteen days, which some regard as having been the most dangerous in world history, Kennedy promised, be it only orally, that neither the US nor any other American country would invade Cuba as long as it did not threaten its neighbors.⁸⁹ However, this hypothesis has some flaws. Firstly, if deterrence of an American attack was the objective, stationing Soviet troops would have been better than installing missiles. This could be the equivalent of American troops in Berlin. Secondly, a public defense treaty between Cuba and the USSR could have been enough to deter the US even without deploying troops. Thirdly, tactical nuclear weapons, with a range of under 100 miles, would have been quicker and cheaper to install and less likely to be discovered before being ready than the ballistic missiles the USSR installed, and could have done the job of nuclear deterrence if deemed necessary. Fourthly, if strategic-range missiles were deemed necessary, a smaller number of medium-range ballistic missiles (MRBMs) would have been sufficient, without the expensive and more detectable intermediate-range ballistic missiles (IRBMs), nor would a base for submarine-launched ballistic missiles have been necessary. Fifthly, and most importantly, the American threat had already been answered by the Soviets: the shipment of 180 SA-2 missiles, coastal defense missiles, trainers and a regiment of Soviet troops. Nuclear weapons were not part of this, nor had Havana asked for them, and an American military exercise in the Caribbean did not generate a need to respond.⁹⁰

The Cuban Missile Crisis shows a paradox. On the one hand, during the crisis there was very little to no input from Cuba itself, suggesting that Cuba was nothing more than a geopolitical play ball and incapable of making independent choices. On the other hand, the direct aftermath of the crisis did actually grant Cuba leverage over the Soviet Union. Cuba sought to influence Soviet policies regarding the island, and succeeded. In terms of political decision making, it can be stated, Cuba was sometimes able to pursue its own will, but not always.

⁸⁸ Allison and Zelikow, *Essence of Decision*, 82-84.

⁸⁹ *Ibid*; 86.

⁹⁰ *Ibid*; 86-87.

3.2. The Cuban political system and Cuban socialism: Distinct Cuban Features

In the early years of the revolution, there was a debate as to what place the ideas of José Martí should have in it. Martí was a journalist and diplomat and was a Cuban independence hero who died in battle in 1895. Martí distinguished Anglo-Saxon North America and today's Latin America (*Nuestra America*) south of the Rio Grande. He argued that the Latin American people should unite to prevent US domination, and especially that Cuba should be independent so the US could not use it as a doorway into Latin America. Martí's ideas thus also had strong geopolitical and anti-imperialist components. Latin America had a history of dependency, and Martí theorized that unity among countries in the region was the path to self-determination and sovereignty. The incorporation of Martí's ideas into the revolutionary ideology, thus meant that the revolution had to spread beyond Cuba.⁹¹

Perhaps a parallel can be drawn with the earlier struggle in post-revolutionary Russia between Stalinism and Trotskyism. Leon Trotsky embraced the idea of a worldwide revolution of the proletariat, whereas Joseph Stalin thought that a socialist society could only be built in the Soviet Union.⁹² Stalinism prevailed in the Soviet Union, and so this is a point at which Cuba differed ideologically. It might also in part explain the tension between Cuba and the Soviet Union about the issue of armed insurrection to achieve socialist transition in the Third World. Martí's idea of *Patria es Humanidad* (Homeland is Humanity), which had a strong nationalist component to it, presented a broader alliance than Marx' working class. This made it more suitable for the Global South, because it rejects imperialist domination by foreign powers more than domination by domestic elites. The fact that Cuban socialism was not exclusively Marxist-Leninist, but also heavily influenced by the ideas of Martí, shows that it was not a mere copy of Soviet socialism, but that it had distinct Cuban features.⁹³

Some argue that the validity of Cuban socialism can be questioned, because instead of being in the hands of the populace, the Cuban state was centralized and its society militarized.⁹⁴ Tight centralization and high levels of militarization also come to mind when thinking about the Soviet system, so a parallel might be drawn there. While most Cubans backed the revolution initially in

⁹¹ Domínguez López and Yaffe, "The deep, historical roots," 2522-23.

⁹² Jason Dawsey, "Trotsky's Struggle against Stalin," *The National WWII Museum*, Last modified September 12, 2018.

⁹³ Domínguez López and Yaffe, "The deep, historical roots," 2522-24.

⁹⁴ Ruffin, *Dependency, development and underdevelopment*, 211.

order to get rid of Batista's dictatorship, this did not necessarily mean those people also were also in favor of the complete socialist transformation that Castro had in mind afterwards.⁹⁵

Still, Castro has always claimed that the Cuban revolutionary regime was democratic. This was because, according to Castro, the masses had inflicted the revolution.⁹⁶ This is a theme that can also be observed in the Soviet Union. Lenin theorized that only a communist society can become fully democratic, which emphasizes the imperfections that exist in the democracies of capitalist states. Stalin and Brezhnev have even gone so far as proclaiming the USSR the most democratic state on earth.⁹⁷

Tensions can be observed within the Cuban political organization, as to the question how Cuban or how Soviet the system should be. The Integrated Revolutionary Organizations (*Organizaciones Revolucionarias Integradas*, ORI) had been created to merge PSP (*Partido Socialista Popular*, which was the communist party before 1959) and Castro's July 26th Movement. Aníbal Escalante was organizational secretary of ORI and former leader of PSP. He wanted a more Soviet Orthodox system and criticized Cuba's deviation from it. Escalante used his position to put old communists in important ORI positions, so he could challenge Castro's leadership. In March 1962 he was exiled to Czechoslovakia, and Castro denounced his 'sectarianism' in ORI.⁹⁸ The creation of the Cuban Communist Party (*Partido Comunista de Cuba*, PCC) in October 1965, marks the departure from Soviet socialist models to a more distinctly Cuban one. The PCC was mainly made up of members of Castro's M-26-7 movement, more than members of the former PSP, the latter being much more pro-Soviet.⁹⁹

The creation of the PCC institutionalized Cuba's deviation from the Soviet Orthodox system. This presented a victory for Castro and his followers, not only towards Escalante and other more orthodox former PSP members, but also towards the Soviet Union. The nature of the Cuban system had been a point of tension between the two countries since the Cuban revolution, and it was now apparent that Cuba had been successful in warding off Soviet attempts at influencing Cuban affairs, aimed at shaping a more Soviet Orthodox style communist party in Cuba. Indeed, Soviet

⁹⁵ Ibid; 212.

⁹⁶ Juan Carlos Medel, "Cuban democracy in the speeches of Fidel Castro, 1959-1976," *The International Journal of Cuban Studies* Vol. 11, No. 2 (2019).

⁹⁷ David Priestland, "Soviet Democracy, 1917-91," *European History Quarterly* Vol. 32, No. 1 (2002): 111.

⁹⁸ Blight and Brenner, *Sad and Luminous Days*, xxiv.

⁹⁹ Story, *Soviet Influence on Cuban Culture*, 13.

officials initially were not very enthusiastic to acknowledge Cuban socialism. In 1961, Khrushchev defended this stance by emphasizing that “Castro is not a member of the Communist party.”¹⁰⁰

It is of course hard to deny that Cuba’s alignment with the Soviet Union influenced how Cuba evolved as a society. The bipolar nature of the world at the time, inevitably meant that any country that was a member of either ideological bloc had to share at least some fundamental features with the leading force of the camp it belonged to. But while the USSR was the leader of the communist bloc, Cuba, as pointed out before, became the face of Third World socialism. This is important, because the Third World had very distinct features compared to the highly industrialized Soviet Union.

¹⁰⁰ Lévesque, *THE USSR AND THE CUBAN REVOLUTION*, 31.

Conclusion

The Cuban-Soviet alliance is a highly interesting case, and studying it can provide an insight in similar bilateral relationships today and in the future. A notable case is the alliance between the United States and Taiwan. Taiwan lies geographically close to China, which sees the island as nothing more than one of its provinces, and the latter is growing increasingly powerful and hostile. The Taiwanese-American alliance could produce similar outcomes as the Cuban-Soviet alliance, especially considering that some are expecting a new Cold War, between the United States and China.

This bachelor's thesis has attempted to analyze the alliance between Cuba and the Soviet Union from the Cuban perspective, in as much detail as is possible within the limits of a bachelor's thesis. However, after studying the case, it becomes clear that this only scratches the surface. Only a selection of the most important events between 1959 and 1968 could be addressed, let alone what came after the low point in Cuban-Soviet relations in 1968 until the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991.

Cuba's alignment with the Soviet Union and its transition to socialism, meant that its political system became similar to that in the Soviet Union. This is not to say, however, that it was a mere copy of the Soviet system. Cuban socialism was heavily influenced by the writings of Cuban intellectual José Martí, and to some degree differed ideologically from that in the Soviet Union. As a result of this, the two countries had some different foreign policy agendas, which created tensions and influence seeking.

Cuba was not a pawn of the Soviet geopolitical game, as it is sometimes regarded. It certainly had a dependency upon the USSR in terms of economy and security to some degree, but it is too simplistic to imply that this translated into a complete political dependency as well. Cuba had its own agenda, and was in some occasions able to exert influence over its enormous ally. This suggests that Cuba was a super client to the Soviet Union. However, to say that Cuba was totally free and independent within the relationship, is an overstatement. It had to operate within the Kremlin's parameters, and the missile crisis of October 1962 had shown that ultimately the Soviet Union would act on behalf of its own interests, regardless of what was best for Cuba.

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