Chapter II

CUBA'S CHANGING RELATIONS WITH UNITED STATES IN 1970s: IMPERATIVES AND INITIATIVES
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Having survived a decade of unremitting US hostility, the Cuban revolution during the 1970s appeared to have moved into a new phase. Internally, the revolution was sought to be consolidated through a process of institutionalization. Cuban foreign policy, too, was marked by a new sense of moderation and pragmatism, uncharacteristic of the first decade of the revolution.

Most scholars on Cuban affairs regard these radical changes in Cuban policies, particularly in the realm of its foreign relations, as the inevitable consequence of "Sovietization of Cuba" in the post-1968 period. According to this view, having bargained for greater Soviet economic and military aid in return for Cuba's endorsement of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, Castro in the subsequent years was forced to tailor his domestic and foreign policies along Soviet lines. Accordingly, Cuba not only abandoned its support for radical revolutions in the Western Hemisphere and endorsed the Soviet position in the Sino-Soviet debate, but following Soviet lead towards détente, it also made attempts to normalize its relations with the United States.

After a brief appraisal of the "Sovietization of Cuba" thesis, the present chapter attempts to show that notwithstanding overwhelming Soviet influence over Cuban affairs in the 1970s, Cuba continued to retain its freedom of manoeuvrability in foreign affairs. In fact, if the desire to break with the past, especially Cuba's dependence on the US had been the guiding
principle of Cuba's foreign policy in the 1960s, the desire to avoid a similar dependence on its Soviet patron was the most characteristic feature of Cuban foreign policy in the following decade. This would explain Castro's efforts to seek normalization of relations with the US even while trying to integrate Cuba more firmly into the Soviet camp. If the former was needed to avoid the danger of becoming a Soviet satellite, the latter was equally essential to counter the rigours of US hostility. However, neither the trend towards nor the logic behind the Cuban strategy was always obvious.

But on closer examination, and by establishing a pattern in the seemingly contradictory policy postures of Cuba, it would be apparent that efforts to normalize relations with the US were essentially an exercise in what may be described as dependency management. Indeed, self-preservation continued to remain the paramount concern of Cuba's foreign policy even during the 1970s. All other considerations were secondary.

"Sovietization of Cuba" Thesis

The year 1970 was a watershed for the Cuban revolution.¹ As Castro announced in August 1970: "The Revolution is now entering a new phase; a much more serious, mature, profound phase."² This new phase of the Cuban revolution was marked not only by major transformations in Cuba's domestic order but Cuba's foreign policies were also dramatically altered. Internally, the failure of Castro's much-publicized attempt to attain a ten-million-ton sugar harvest and the consequent economic chaos led to a

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complete reorganization of government and party structures—a process thereafter known as the "institutionalization of the Revolution".3

Equally significant changes took place in Cuba's external postures. The strained relations between Cuba and the Soviet Union of the earlier period were replaced by a new and mutually supportive harmony.4 At the same time, a less idealistic, more compromising foreign policy was adopted vis-à-vis Latin America whereby support for revolution in the hemisphere was given up in favour of restoring diplomatic ties and developing closer relations with a host of countries in the region. Indeed, Cuba's new moderation paved the way for the lifting of sanctions by the OAS at the San Jose conference in August 1976. Elsewhere the Cuban government moved to diversify its economic ties with Japan, Canada, Western Europe and other non-Communist countries in an apparent effort to lessen the island's dependence on the Soviet Union.5 Most astonishing of all, however, were Havana's moves to normalize its relations with the US despite Castro's earlier insistence that Cuba would never approach the "imperialist" government of the US.

Such radical changes in Cuban policies, particularly its foreign policies, were prompted by forces operating at both international and domestic level. However, given the fact that Cuba during the 1960s became an important factor in Cold War politics, there was a tendency until recently among scholars to explain changes in Castro's domestic and external behaviour


5. Jorge Domínguez referred to this trend as the "Japanization of Cuban foreign trade". See Jorge Domínguez, "Cuba, the United States and Latin America After Détente", SAIS Review (Washington, D.C., vol. 19, no. 1, 1975, p. 25.
almost solely in terms of international developments. Thus Castro’s abandonment of the revolutionary strategy in Latin America in the late 1960s was seen primarily as Cuban convergence under Soviet pressure to the latter’s strategy in the hemisphere.6

Similarly, given the fact that relations between Cuba and United States are not strictly bilateral but trilateral, involving the Soviet Union as well, it is hardly surprising that most scholars trace the origins of the new, more moderate phase in Cuba’s foreign relations especially vis-a-vis the United States in the 1970s, to Castro’s endorsement of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 and the subsequent increase of Soviet influence in Cuban affairs.7

Over the next few years as part of its efforts to tailor its domestic and foreign policies according to Soviet precepts, Cuba followed the Soviet lead towards détente and made efforts to normalize its relations with the US. In fact, some scholars even maintain that Cuban efforts in this direction were primarily a response under Soviet prodding to US initiatives at rapprochement during the years of international détente.8 Either ways, the predominantly held view saw Cuban efforts at rapprochement with the US as essentially a fall out of détente between the super powers during the early 1970s.

6. The most extreme form of the dependence argument was offered by two Cuban defectors who arrived in the US soon after the Czech invasion with lucid tales of Soviet economic blackmail that included a secret pact, in which Castro sold Cuba’s sovereignty for continued Soviet economic support. See Brian Crozier, “Soviet Pressures in the Caribbean: The Satellisation of Cuba”, Conflict Studies (London), vol. 35, May 1973, pp. 5-18.


Cuban capitulation to Soviet pressure, according to this view, was triggered off by the major policy defeats Castro suffered on both internal and external fronts during the late 1960s. Che Guevara’s death in Bolivia in 1967 discredited Havana’s radical foreign policies. Together with the socio-economic malaise prevalent in Cuba in the late 1960s, the failure of the much-touted 1970 drive to produce ten million tons of sugar completely undermined the Castro regime’s domestic policies. As a result of these failures, according to veteran Cuba-watcher Carmelo Mesa-Lago, the Cuban model “suffered a mortal blow, Castro’s prestige and strength were eroded and the Soviet Union increased its bargaining power”. At that point, “the only real alternative open to Castro was to yield to the Soviets. He would have to relinquish part of his power and Cuba its independence, but he and the revolution would continue.”

It is no doubt true that after 1968 the Cubans did make significant policy changes that brought about greater conformity of the Cuban system with the Soviet model. Two factors in particular—Cuba’s repeated economic failures and Castro’s critical challenges to Soviet foreign policies—were sought to be corrected to put Cuban-Soviet relations on an even keel. Thus on 26 July 1970, admitting that the “ten-million-tons” campaign had been a fiasco, Castro pledged a complete overhaul of the Cuban economy. Subsequently, Castro delegated most economic powers to President Osvaldo Dorticós, a moderate whom the Soviets trusted and to Carlos Rafael Rodríguez, chief economist, planner and former member of the PSP who was put in charge of foreign relations. In December 1970, Rodríguez led a delegation to Moscow for a meeting with economists from the Soviet Central Planning Board, which

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9. For full discussion of Cuba’s radical development policies, their failure and the effect on the Cuban-Soviet alliance, see Edward González, n.7.


11. Granma Weekly Review, 2 August 1970. For details on how Cuban economy was reorganized along Soviet lines see Mesa-Lago, n.1, chapter 2, pp. 30-61.
resulted in the establishment of the Cuban-Soviet Commission of Economic, Scientific and Technical Collaboration through which the USSR institutionalized its supervision over the use of its economic and military aid to the island. Further Cuban commitment to the Soviet economic line came in July 1972 when Cuba petitioned and was admitted into the COMECON. Numerous agreements and joint communiques signed between the two countries, concerning trade, technical aid, repayment of debts, credits etc. completed the integration of Cuban economy into the Soviet bloc. Most important in this respect was the December 1972 Cuban-Soviet agreement under which the Soviet Union agreed to pay Cuba a substantially higher price for its exports. The agreement also promised increased technical aid to help Cuba mechanize its sugar harvesting and improve its oil refineries. It also deferred repayment of Cuban debt until 1986.12

Cuban foreign policy was similarly modified to ensure greater conformity with the Soviet line.13 Some of the basic--and most defiant--precepts of Cuban internationalism were replaced by more moderate pro-Soviet attitudes. Beginning in 1970, Castro began publicly to praise the USSR in marked contrast to his defiant postures in the late 1960s.14 At the same time, he moved to strengthen Cuba's relations with other countries of the Soviet bloc.15 Cuba's participation in the Conference of Communist Parties held in Moscow in June 1969 at which it was expected that the USSR would attempt

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13. For this new cooperative phase in Cuban-Soviet relations see González, n. 4.

14. Honouring Lenin's birth on 22 April 1970, Castro thus paid public tribute to the Soviet state without which "it would have been impossible for Cuba to become the first socialist country in Latin America", and he harshly attacked Moscow's critics abroad who had condemned the USSR for the intervention in Czechoslovakia. Granma Weekly Review, 3 May 1970.

15. See Mesa-Lago, n.1, pp. 16-17 and 22.
to expel China, was proof of Cuban endorsement of Soviet position in the Sino-Soviet debate.\textsuperscript{16} Castro even stepped forward as the Soviet Union's most stalwart champion in the Third World and attacked the theory of two imperialisms at the conference of the Non-aligned countries in Algiers in September 1973—a performance that provoked sharp rebukes from Prince Sihanouk of Cambodia and Premier Qaddafi of Libya, and discredited him among other delegates at the conference.

One of the most dramatic changes, however, was in Havana's commitment to armed struggle in Latin America. After years of ridiculing the Latin American Communists for their "fatalism" and cowardice, Castro began to express doubts about the immediacy of the Latin American revolution. In July 1969 he said:

"We are not impatient, we are not in a hurry. We will wait while one by one they break with the past, while one by one they develop their revolutions. How long will we wait? For as long as necessary—ten, twenty, thirty years if necessary—though nobody thinks even remotely that it will take that long."\textsuperscript{17}

The following April, he took an even more surprising position when he acknowledged the possibility of different roads to progressive change. Although he had once claimed that the only way to overcome the bonds of imperialism and neo-colonialism was through Cuban-style armed struggle, Castro now conceded that the Cuban model of focoism might not be universal. Different circumstances may well require different strategies:

Cuban support does not necessarily have to be expressed in favour of guerrilla movements...There will not be two revolutions that will develop in the same way, new possibilities and new forms will appear.\textsuperscript{18}

\textsuperscript{16} China, Albania, North Korea and North Vietnam did not attend the conference.

\textsuperscript{17} \textit{Granma Weekly Review}, 20 July 1969.

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 3 May 1970.
While not completely forsaking support for revolutionary movements, Castro considerably toned down his adventurism of the late 1960s. He warned that in future Cuba would apply very strict criteria to any guerrilla movements seeking Cuban aid:

...Cuba has never refused nor will she ever refuse support to the revolutionary movement. But this is not to be confused with support for just any faker...just because some have put out their signs claiming to be revolutionaries. And the saddest thing about it is that in some cases we have believed them. And some of them we have even known.19

By muting its public stance on armed revolutions, and curbing its activities in support for guerrillas after 1968, the Cuban regime was no longer out of phase with the Soviet Union's primary objective of broadening relations with individual Latin American countries. In fact, whereas Castro had once condemned Soviet overtures to Venezuela and Colombia as collusion and a selfish betrayal of internationalist solidarity, by mid-1969 he began to show renewed interest in diplomatic and trade relations with his Latin American neighbours.20 Cuba thus resorted to diplomatic and commercial relations with such important countries, in addition to Allende's Chile, as Argentina, Peru, Venezuela and Colombia, despite the fact that the latter three were once targets of fidelista revolutionary activities. By 1975 as many as nine members of the OAS had restored diplomatic and commercial relations with Cuba, notwithstanding the existence of hemispheric sanctions against the island country.

19. Ibid.

20. Cuba's new line was clearly enunciated by Castro on 22 April 1970, when he referred to Cuba's policy towards the new Peruvian military government. "[Cuban] support does not necessarily have to be expressed exclusively in favour of guerrilla movements, but [can be extended] to any government which sincerely adopts a policy of economic and social development and of liberating its country from the Yankee imperialist yoke; no matter by what path that government has reached power, Cuba will support it." Granma, 3 May 1970.
Following the Soviet lead, Cuba also became more supportive of the policy of détente after Brezhnev's visit to Cuba in January-February 1974. As a result it began to soften its postures toward the United States. In fact, normalization of relations with the US was seen by Cuba as an integral part of détente. Carlos Rodríguez when asked during an interview whether the resumption of US-Cuban relations would delight the Soviets, replied: "Absolutely. The improvement of our relations with the United States would be written into the détente process. The continuation of a source of tension such as Cuba is not encompassed in Soviet policy".21 Beginning in 1974, therefore, Granma began to use less critical language with respect to the United States, while Castro himself considerably toned down his invectives against the US. Additionally, Cuba evidently signalled its readiness to move toward an accommodation with the US, if not influence US policy making indirectly, by allowing influential US citizens to visit Cuba for the first time. Several Congressmen as well as members of the American press and academic community were able to visit Cuba during this period. During the same period several other gestures were also made by Cuba with a view to facilitate normalization of relations with the US.

Even with respect to the 'imperialist' United States, Cuba's new foreign policy therefore seemed to be in phase with the Soviet policy of détente. Some proponents of the dependency argument, in fact, maintain that aspects of the US-USSR efforts for an overall détente pointed to arrangements that, with the acquiescence of Castro, could encourage the Soviets to favour a minimal Cuban-US rapprochement.22 According to them, there are reasons


22. An example of this was a proposed wide-ranging US-USSR shipping agreement, according to the provisions of which the US would permit Soviet vessels departing from Cuban ports to pick up cargo at US ports, see Washington Post, 28 April 1972. It may be recalled that according to the US economic denial policy toward Cuba, any ship carrying cargo to or from Cuba was black-listed and prohibited from visiting US ports or
to believe that the Soviet Union might have encouraged a US-Cuban rapprochement. For, while rapprochement between Cuba and the United States did not threaten the political benefits enjoyed by USSR in Cuba, particularly in view of Castro's more secure hold over the island in the 1970s, it did seem as though it could go a long way in relieving the Soviet Union of some of its economic burden vis-a-vis Cuba. The rapprochement would also have solved one of Moscow's major strategic dilemmas. The USSR had for long posed as the protector of Cuba, trying to give the impression that its armed forces would rush to Cuba's defence if it were attacked by the US. Yet the USSR had been careful not to commit itself formally to do so, and Cuba's exclusion from the Warsaw Pact is not an accident. Underlying the Cuban-Soviet alliance therefore, has been the unspoken question of how far the Soviets would be willing to go to defend Cuba against an American attack. Should Cuban-American hostilities ever escalate to open confrontation, Moscow would be in the untenable position of either having to abandon its Cuban ally and completely lose its international credibility or face a nuclear confrontation with the US. This being a choice that Moscow would well like to avoid, a Cuban-American rapprochement might serve the interests of the Soviet Union.

23. A Tass commentary on this topic stated: "The wide movement for normalization of relations with Cuba that spread in the Western Hemisphere causes extreme irritation in Washington circles...they refuse to reconcile themselves to the bankruptcy of their policy of isolation of Cuba and now resort to every means to make Latin American countries continue to follow their anti-Cuban course." See Washington Post, 22 December 1971.


25. For interpretation of this slippery subject and the events leading up to the Missile Crisis of 1962 see Herbert S. Dinerstein, The Making of a Missile Crisis, October 1962 (Baltimore, Md., 1976), esp. pp. 232-238.
In fact, published Soviet statements about the normalization of relations between the two Atlantic countries, while avoiding an explicit approval or disapproval for the process, have expressed approval for its implications.\textsuperscript{26} The Soviet position maintained that the propagation of the principles of peaceful co-existence had played a significant role in bringing about a revision of US policy towards Cuba.\textsuperscript{27}

The dependency argument, however, does not entirely explain the moderation brought about in Cuban foreign policy in the early 1970s, certainly not the Cuban efforts at rapprochement with the United States. For one, this approach regards the Cuban regime as simply a dutiful surrogate of the Soviet Union. It is no doubt true that in the post-1968 period, the Soviets exhorted the Havana regime to rationalize both its domestic and foreign policies.\textsuperscript{28} To say, therefore, that changes in Cuban policy after 1970 can be explained without relying so heavily on the dependence paradigm is not an attempt to minimize Cuba's susceptibility to Soviet influence. In fact, Castro himself spoke of Cuba's need, in the light of the decisiveness of Soviet support, to adjust its policies and draw closer to the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{29}

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\item[(26)] For instance see, Piotr Litavrin's "El Pensamiento Político Norteamericano acerca del Problema de la Normalización de las Relaciones entre Estados Unidos y Cuba", América Latina (Moscow), no.3, 1979, pp. 183-94.
\item[(27)] It should be noted that when Brezhnev made his historic visit to Cuba in 1974 (and cabled a greeting to President Nixon en route), he stated that Cuba did not stand "alone" and participated in the brotherhood of the socialist countries. Yet he did not mention any military commitments. In fact, his talks stressed peace, opposition to "export" of revolution and support for the improvement of Soviet-American relations. "Brezhnev in Cuba, Talks with Castro", Current Digest of the Soviet Press (Ann Arbor, Mich.) vol. 26, no. 5, 27 February 1974, pp. 1-10.
\item[(29)] Granma, 3 May 1970.
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But this does not mean that Cuba was reduced to the role of a passive client state and that Castro therefore had to abandon for ever all hopes for autonomy. Particularly so, in view of the fact that Castro had bargained for and won Cuba's freedom in the past--choosing his own policies independent of his Soviet allies and even in opposition to them--while remaining economically dependent on them. There is little reason therefore, to believe that Castro, especially after his bitter experience with the Soviets during the late 1960, would surrender all autonomy to Moscow. Instead there is evidence to support that Castro was not only aware of the disadvantages of relying too heavily on Soviet support but also a little weary of it.30 Not surprisingly therefore, even while acknowledging Cuban economic dependence on the Soviet Union in the post-1968 period, the Cuban leadership took pains to emphasize that this did not imply political dependence. Carlos Rafael Rodríguez, for instance, categorically stated in an interview:

"...this economic dependence is not tantamount to political dependence. At no time during the revolution have our relations with the USSR implied any political dependence with regard to the USSR, and I am certain that they will never imply such a dependence."31

The following section develops the argument that having learnt from the past experiences, Castro in the post-1968 period constantly explored options that would keep Cuba from relying too heavily on Soviet support. Thus Cuba reordered its relations with Latin American countries, sought closer identification with the Third World as also expanded its economic ties with countries of Western Europe and Japan. Importantly, it also explored possibilities of a rapprochement with the United States. Cuban efforts to seek an accommodation with the US, therefore, predated the emergence of international detente. As such, they were not so much in response to Soviet

30. K.S. Karol recalls Castro regretting that the Soviet Union should make so much of its support to Cuba saying: "They give us nothing for nothing, and then act as if they were our greatest benefactors, as if they were showering us with gold !". See Guerrillas in Power: The Course of the Cuban Revolution (London, 1970), pp. 425-426.

blandishments and pressures to follow the latter's lead towards détente with the US, but rather a means to circumvent such pressures during a period of overwhelming Soviet influence in Cuban affairs.

More specifically, Cuba in the post-1968 period was haunted as much by fears of US invasion as of direct Soviet abandonment. It was this twin fear that accounted for two visibly contradictory trends in Cuban foreign policy during this period: attempt at soliciting greater commitments from Moscow and also exploring possibilities of negotiations with the US. The following develops this argument by showing how Cuba used the threat of a major exile raid from the US both to seek greater Soviet support as also to signal its desire for talks with the US.

Cuba's Threat Perception

In the period immediately following Cuban endorsement of the Soviet's Czech invasion in 1968, Castro used his bargaining advantage with the Soviet Union to elicit greater commitments from the latter to buttress Cuban defence against the US. In view of the fact that Richard Nixon was likely to be the next President of the US, Castro had sufficient cause to worry about Cuban security.32 Regarded as a quintessential anti-Communist and having close links with the Cuban exile community in the US, Nixon had a long history of animosity toward Castro.33 Even as early as 1959 while still a Vice-President, Nixon had been one of the earliest advocates of Castro's

32. It should be noted that there was a great personal animosity between Castro and Nixon. The former commonly deprecated the latter as a "war criminal" and a "fascist" while the Cuban press always spelt Nixon's name with a swastika in place of an X.

33. Nixon's strong views against the Latin American Communists were perhaps a legacy of his bitter experience during his Latin American tour of April-May 1958, which he regarded as a result of a "central Communist conspiracy" against him. See Richard Nixon, Six Crises (New York, 1962), pp.218, 219 and 223. Most important among his Cuban contacts was Nixon's intimate friend, Charles "Bebe" Rebozo, an American of Cuban parentage who had close links with the Miami Cuban community. See William Saffire, Before the Fall: An Inside view of the Pre-Watergate White House (Garden City, N.Y., 1975) p. 614.
overthrow. Some even maintain that Nixon suffered from a "psychological hang-up" against Castro ever since his defeat in the 1960 Presidential campaign in which Cuba had figured as "the major foreign policy issue." Even in the subsequent years Castro's overthrow continued to remain as Nixon's preferred line of action. During his 1968 campaign too, he had called for a tightening of US overt policy on Cuba. While acknowledging that on account of the "no invasion" pledge of 1962, the US could no longer do in Cuba "what we could have done much earlier" and thus "to mount any kind of a military operation [against Cuba] would be extremely hazardous, and might risk a confrontation with the Soviet Union", he nonetheless maintained that the US had to "find other areas, economic and diplomatic, other than military, in order to effect a change in the Cuban regime". More specifically, he favoured a tightening of the economic quarantine. He noted that while efforts to boycott Cuba had not been highly successful, the "new leadership in the United States is committed to do better." It was, therefore,


35. In a televised debate with Kennedy, Nixon was compelled to attack the latter's proposal of aiding anti-Castro exiles in an attempt to protect the covert operations already underway. He was thus, rather unwittingly, made to appear "to be 'softer' on Castro than Kennedy--which was exactly the opposite of the truth. Convinced that this had caused his electoral defeat, he later called this "the most difficult and, as it turned out, the most costly decision of my political career". See Richard Nixon, "Cuba, Castro and John F. Kennedy", Reader's Digest (New York), November 1964, pp. 283-86.

36. In 1964 he wrote an article on Cuba in support of the Goldwater Presidential campaign in which he favoured whatever action was necessary to eliminate Castro, arguing that despite Kennedy's "no invasion" pledge, he would "find a legal cover" to invade Cuba. Ibid, pp. 283, 291 and 297.

natural that even as President, Nixon would remain strongly hostile toward Cuba.38

Castro undoubtedly knew of Nixon's hostile predisposition. Little wonder, therefore, that in his historic speech of 23 August 1968, he used the Czech crisis both to air Cuban grievances against the Soviet bloc and to demand a redefinition of Cuban-Soviet ties in exchange for his endorsement of the Warsaw Pact invasion.39 Specifically, he asked for greater military commitments from the Soviet Union. Basing his justification for Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia on ideological and not geo-political grounds, Castro, by inference, seemed to suggest that the US also had a legal right to intervene in Cuba. But if the US did aggress Cuba or if it provoked a counter-revolution, he pointed out, then the Soviet Union was equally obligated to rescue socialism in Cuba as it had done in Czechoslovakia:

"Will they send the divisions of the Warsaw Pact to Cuba if Yankee imperialists attack our country or even in the case of the threat of a Yankee imperialist attack on our country, and if our country requests it?"40

As events were to subsequently prove, Castro's fears were not totally unfounded. For there is evidence to suggest that once Nixon became

38. Both White House and other sources have confirmed that Castro was a "bastard" and a "son of a bitch" in the President's eyes. For instance, Roger Morris reports that Nixon once told his adviser "There'll be no change toward that bastard [Castro] while I'm President". Roger Morris, Uncertain Greatness: Henry Kissinger and American Foreign Policy (New York, 1977), p. 106. Similarly the Kalbs maintain that the President "saw red" at the very mention of Castro's name. See Marvin Kalb and Bernard Kalb, Kissinger (London, 1974), p. 210.

39. Castro, for instance, noted that the tendencies toward degeneration visible in the Czech society which had made the intervention necessary also existed, to some extent, in the Soviet Union. This led him to ask if the intervention in Czechoslovakia meant that the Soviet Union intended to rectify its own situation. He also used the occasion to criticize Soviet policies in Latin America. It is for this reason that some scholars believe that Castro's capitulation "was not nearly as complete" as is often suggested. See Carla Anne Robbins, The Cuban Threat (New York, 1983) pp.171-72.

President, US operations against Castro's regime in the covert area were resumed. Specifically, this meant the formation in 1969 of an important new movement among Cuban exiles in Miami under the leadership of José de la Torriente with plans of a "major assault" against Castro on the pattern of the Bay of Pigs. Overwhelming exile response to the Torriente cause seemed to imply CIA support to the movement, especially in view of Torriente's background as also the existing US ban on such activities. In addition, Torriente's CIA connection probably helps explain the welcome accorded to him by President Anastasio Somoza of Nicaragua and President José Figueres of Costa Rica on his visit to the two countries in mid-1970. Castro undoubtedly knew of these plans, for in a speech on 23 August 1970, he expressed concern about "plans" being made in Nicaragua and Costa Rica, and warned that Cuba "will feel free, in so far as it is in our power to bring

41. According to the Senate's Final Report on foreign and military intelligence, the paramilitary budget of the CIA "reached an all-time high in 1970". US Senate, Congress 94, session 2, Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities, Final Report, Book I: Foreign and Military Intelligence, (Washington, D.C., 1976), p. 147. Nixon administration's support for covert paramilitary operations against Cuba could also be inferred from the unusual interest shown by senior officials during this period in Kennedy's "no-invasion" pledge of 1962. For details on the studies undertaken by various departments on the "no-invasion" pledge see Donald Furse Herr, "Presidential Influence and Bureaucratic Politics: Nixon's Policy Toward Cuba" (Ph.D thesis, Yale University, New Haven, Conn., 1978).

42. On Torriente's plan and promise to invade, see Miami Herald, 13 April 1974 and 16 April 1971.

43. For a background on Torriente see ibid., 13 April 1974. For US warning against exile activities see Department of State Bulletin, vol. 62, p. 752. The FBI had followed up this warning with a raid on the Miami headquarters of another exile group known as Alpha 66. See New York Times, 27 May 1970.

44. Ibid., 24 August 1970.
war to the territory of that country which lends itself to the organization of any invasion of our country."\(^{45}\)

To counter any such moves against his regime on the part of the Nixon administration, Castro concentrated on two lines of action. On the one hand, he used his new-found bargaining advantage with the Soviet Union to solicit greater Soviet military commitments. This is suggested by the warming of military relations between Cuba and the USSR in 1969.\(^{46}\) In fact, a new and significant element was added to Cuban-Soviet relations when a flotilla of eight vessels, including a submarine tender and two diesel-powered submarines visited Cuba for the first time in July 1969. The event would have had little importance except for the fact that it was the beginning of a regularly repeated operation. Thus on 8 May 1970 another seven vessels, including a submarine with nuclear capability arrived in Cuba for a stay of nearly a month. In September 1970, another nine ships arrived and spent four months in Cuba.\(^{47}\) Notwithstanding, Soviet Union's strategic objectives behind these visits, it would appear that the USSR had probably acted in part to reassure an uneasy Castro.\(^{48}\) In fact, shortly before the first naval visit in July 1969, Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko told the Soviet Parliament that the USSR "does everything to help the republic of Cuba, its

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47. For further details on the kind of ships and the frequency of their visits to Cuba from 1969 to 1972 see Russia in the Caribbean, part 2, Special Report Series no. 13 (Washington, D.C., 1973), pp. 97-120.

peoples to withstand the pressure and provocations". 49 When the ships arrived, Castro on his part intimated that the visit had lessened his fears of a US invasion. 50

At the same time, Castro also made as much propaganda as possible about US covert activities against his regime. In August 1969, he lodged a formal protest at the UN against "new subversive activities" by the CIA. The protest probably was not merely in retaliation for the expulsion from the US of two Cuban representatives to the UN. 51 Then on 22 April 1970, Castro once again publicly raised the Torriente threat and said that Cuba would "always be ready" for closer military ties with the USSR. His comments on Torriente were made following a discussion of a raid by an exile group, Alpha 66, a few days earlier. He charged that "Mr. Nixon has been hatching...still more serious plans" than those of Alpha 66. Specifically, the US was preparing "a new, imminent adventure against our country" led by José de la Torriente. Castro quoted a UPI dispatch on the Torriente plan and on the group's hopes to have an exile army ready before the end of the year. He went on to note that Nixon "who is largely responsible" for the Bay of Pigs had claimed that the invasion would have succeeded if he had been the President in 1961. Turning to the question of Cuban-Soviet military ties he then asked:

"With whom else can we have these ties? With Yankee imperialism?...We shall never break our political ties with the Soviet Union or even what they


50. Ibid., 28 July 1969.

51. One of the Cubans was expelled for trying to gather information from exiles concerning the security of the office of the President. According to the State Department spokesman, the "physical" security of the President was not involved. It is likely that Cuba wanted information on Nixon's contacts with the exile community because of the new subversive activities in Miami. Cuba charged in the protest note that the US was organizing "small groups of Cuban mercenaries to make lightning raids." New York Times, 30 August 1969.
call military ties. On the contrary! So far as we are concerned, we will always be ready to increase our military ties with the Soviet Union.”

Castro’s emphasis of Soviet military ties with Cuba while discussing US covert activities perhaps reflected his strategy for countering US threat. In fact, it would appear that aware of US activities in the covert area, Cuba egged the Soviet Union to deliberately move at Cienfuegos in the fall of 1970 in order to challenge and counter US violations of the 1962 no-invasion pledge. The manner in which the Cienfuegos crisis unfolded and was ultimately resolved, particularly the air of unreality lent to the crisis by the failure of either side to push the other very hard, seems to strongly suggest a linkage between the Torriente plan and the Cienfuegos crisis.

Cienfuegos Crisis

Planning between Cuba and the Soviet Union to set up a Soviet nuclear submarine base at Cienfuegos appeared to have begun as early as April 1970 when Raúl Castro visited Moscow at the invitation of his Soviet counterpart, Marshal Grechko. Upon his return in mid-May the Soviets arrived at the Cuban port of Cienfuegos for a second naval visit. It is likely that this naval visit, which signalled the crisis to follow, reflected a tentative agreement between Raúl Castro and his Soviet counterpart. Included among the Soviet vessels was a nuclear powered submarine of the "E-II" class which though did not carry strategic ballistic missiles, was armed with cruise


missiles with a range of approximately 450 nautical miles.\textsuperscript{55} Such a submarine had never before visited a port outside the USSR. It is, therefore, possible that by taking such a step the Cubans and the Soviets were deliberately trying to probe the US for reactions. It is likely that public speculation about a submarine base after the July 1969 naval visit had influenced the planning of the Cienfuegos move by giving the Soviets ideas about how to worry the US.\textsuperscript{56}

An examination of the motives behind Cuban and Soviet moves at Cienfuegos further seem to confirm the argument that it represented a deliberate strategy to challenge the 1962 agreement calculated to counter US violations of the no-invasion pledge. Surely Castro, though eager for closer military ties with the Soviet Union, would not have agreed to the Soviets building a facility for nuclear submarines only on the basis of unfounded fears. Particularly so in view of the loss of face he had suffered after a similar exercise in 1962. Castro's very concern for Cuba's defence moreover, might have led him to worry about the US reaction.\textsuperscript{57} After the embarrassment of 1962, the Soviet leadership too was not likely to approve the Cienfuegos idea with only minor gains in view. A probable reason behind Soviet actions might have been the establishment of a submarine base with important strategic or Cold War objectives in mind. This is the interpretation, for example, in the semi-official account of the crisis by Kalbs.\textsuperscript{58}

\begin{enumerate}
  \item See US House of Representatives, Congress 92, session 2, Committee on Foreign Affairs, Hearings, Soviet Activities in Cuba, part 3, (Washington, D.C., 1972), p. 3.
  \item The seriousness of Castro's concern is suggested by two aspects of the crisis itself: 1. No leading Cuban official made any comment on Cienfuegos either during or in the wake of the crisis. 2. Cuba seemed to signal an interest in hijacking talks at the height of the crisis. New York Times, 25 September 1970. It would appear, therefore, that Castro perhaps wanted to avoid giving any provocations to the US at the same time curry the favour of the US public because he feared a US invasion.
  \item Kalbs, n. 37, pp. 209-15.
\end{enumerate}
hypotheses, however, do not seem very convincing. For, whereas the Soviet Union stood to gain strategically little from Cienfuegos, its policies toward Latin America during the period did not favor a confrontation with the US in the region.59

The missile power and Cold War hypothesis both make the questionable assumption that the Soviet Union miscalculated the US reaction to Cienfuegos. This is the Kalbs' argument. They suggest, for example, that Kissinger's "special brand of tough talk" during the crisis made the USSR "see light".60 A miscalculation is conceivable since the 1962 understanding did not specifically cover submarines. Soviet leaders surely knew, however, that Cienfuegos would touch a highly sensitive US nerve. They also knew that President Nixon was inclined to take a tough approach. In fact, it would appear that the Soviets had a very good idea of what the US reaction would be, given the reactions provoked in the US following the Soviet naval visits on two earlier occasions.61


60. Kalbs, n. 37, p. 212.

In addition, Kissinger had reportedly discussed Cuba with the Soviet ambassador, Anatoly Dobrynin after the May 1970 visit. A miscalculation, therefore, seems all the more unlikely with this conversation in view. Perhaps, the Soviets believed that the US—weakened by Vietnam and no longer enjoying a clear overall nuclear advantage—could hardly afford to back up a Missile Crisis stand with strong action. But the Soviets, as will be seen, pulled back too readily for this argument to have much credibility.

In short, the argument that the Cuban-Soviet moves in Cienfuegos were intended to counter Torriente seems more convincing than the other alternatives discussed above. Important objectives aside from countering Torriente could not be achieved unless the US accepted a submarine base. That would imply that the Cubans and the Soviets probably miscalculated and yet they probably did not. A compelling explanation for Cienfuegos has to involve a generally accurate estimate of the US reaction. The precedent of 1962 was simply too salient for both Castro and the Soviets to believe that they could easily get away with a base in Cuba for nuclear submarines. Why, then, did they decide to challenge the precedent of 1962? The answer is probably that they wanted to press the US to reaffirm its no-invasion pledge.62 The USSR possibly intended to pull back, that is, provided that it received assurances from the US on Torriente.

If Cuban-Soviet motivations behind the Cienfuegos move point towards the Torriente factor, so does the manner in which the crisis actually unfolded and the responses of the parties concerned thereafter. The crisis was triggered

62. In fact, on an earlier occasion too the Soviets seemed to have approached the US for a reaffirmation of the no-invasion pledge. Kissinger reveals in his memoirs that on 4 August 1970 the Soviet Charge d’Affaires, Yuly M. Voronstov had approached him for such a reaffirmation, which in turn had been given to the Soviets on 7 August. See Kissinger, n. 53, pp. 632-35. Garthoff in his account of the crisis informs that a senior Soviet official directly involved in the matter at the time, later revealed to him that the Soviets had raised the matter because of Cuban concern over a possible American attack. The Soviets, according to him, wanted to reassure Castro by seeking a reaffirmation of the no-invasion pledge from the US because they wanted to avoid participating in a new crisis centred on Cuba. Only two years earlier Castro had agreed to return to the Soviet fold and the Soviets did not wish to arouse Cuban fears at being endangered by their rapprochement with the US. See Garthof, n. 53, p. 80.
off when a Soviet flotilla of seven ships, including a submarine tender but no submarine, arrived in Cuba in September 1970. Soviet submarines had visited Cuba on earlier occasions too, this being the third Soviet naval visit in a period slightly over a year. The important new factor in September 1970 was the arrival of two barges. The Soviet Union brought the barges on a tank landing ship, offloaded them at Havana and towed them to Cienfuegos.

The move with barges appeared to be consistent with a Cuban-Soviet concern to counter Torriente. It reflected their intention to go far enough to raise the issue of the 1962 understanding on the one hand while exercising caution to avoid giving the US an excuse for dramatic action. Thus, while the barges might suggest plans to service nuclear submarines, indications of caution included Soviet failure to send a submarine to Cienfuegos with the tender and barges and the lack of construction of land facilities for submarine servicing. The Soviets could therefore claim that they were simply building a rest and recreation facility on Cayo Alcatraz. They clearly had not begun to construct a submarine base such as the US maintained at Holy Loch, Scotland, or at Rota, Spain. If the Soviets should later service a submarine at Cienfuegos, they could plead special circumstances and readily withdraw their tender.

The manner in which the crisis was handled and ultimately resolved through quite diplomacy also seems to confirm the Torriente hypothesis. Curiously enough no sharp public clash or crisis arose. That a covert threat to Cuba was involved probably explains the lack of strong action on both sides.


64. Although reconnaissance photographs taken on 16 September had revealed Soviet activity at Cienfuegos, the matter was made public only on 25 September through an inadvertent leak in the New York Times. See New York Times, 25 September 1970. Even so President Nixon proceeded to Europe on a visit from 27 September to 5 October, apparently assured, as Kissinger pointed out that "nothing very rapid or dramatic [was] likely to occur." New York Times, 26 September 1970.
throughout the crisis. Particularly curious in this respect was the lack of any planning for overt action on the part of the US against the Soviet submarines. The crisis was ultimately resolved in October when following the Kissinger-Gromyko-Dobrynin parleys, the Soviet tender left Cienfuegos and both the US and the Soviet Union pledged their adherence to the no-invasion pledge.

Surprisingly, however, although most vessels involved in the September crisis departed Cuba on a staggered basis, the tender remained until the end of December. It may be recalled at this point that Torriente had promised to invade Cuba before Christmas. Possibly, therefore, the Soviet tender remained in Cuba through December to move against any effort by Torriente. For a similar reason perhaps, the Soviet barges too remained in the Cienfuegos harbour, though they were not used. In fact, in May 1971 an E-II submarine was reportedly serviced at the Cuban port of Antilla. Probably in retaliation for this perceived violation of the Cienfuegos agreement, the US

65. The US response came from Kissinger on 25 September who while reaffirming Kennedy's no-invasion pledge warned that US viewed the establishment of strategic base in the Caribbean with "utmost seriousness", Ibid. The Soviet Union responded through a public statement by Tass, the official Soviet news service, which said that the Soviet Union had always and would continue to adhere to the 1962 understanding provided of course the US also strictly fulfilled the understanding. See FBIS, Daily Report : Soviet Union, 13 October 1970.

66. Most of the US bureaucracy was not only cut off from further intelligence on Cienfuegos developments after Kissinger's 25 September warning, but the group ordinarily responsible for crisis management under Nixon--the Washington Special Actions Group (WSAG) was also excluded from "handling the crisis". See New York Times, 15 November 1970.


68. On the deployment of the tender and other December activities, see US House, n. 63, pp. 5-6.
approved a raid by Torriente in October 1971. This was a hit and run raid on the fishing village of Boca de Sarna in Cuba. The professional nature of the raid and unusual White House interest in it gave sufficient reason to suspect that the US was behind it. The White House, in fact, requested a report on the raid from the State Department. No similar requests for reports on exile activity had ever been made. The White House, it would appear, probably wanted to ascertain if their message to the Soviets had gotten across.

Cuba, in turn, retaliated to the Boca de Sarna incident in December 1971 after Castro returned from Chile. It seized two Panamanian flag freighters owned by exiles in Miami—the Lyla Express and the Johnny Express. The Soviet Union lent its implicit support to this Cuban action through an extended deployment of one of its F class submarines (as in December 1970) and a Soviet destroyer from late October 1971 through January 1972. In addition, a Soviet G class submarine visited Cuba from March through mid-May 1972. President Nixon, in turn, reacted to the Cuban actions with a personal intervention and a US military alert.

Although on the face of it, all these actions and reactions appear to be over-reactions they were not really so. Cuba’s retaliation was hardly exaggerated because in its eyes US support for Torriente made Boca de Sama a serious matter. Similarly, the Soviet’s concern for Cuba’s defence possibly helps to explain why their Navy stayed around for several months. On the other hand, President Nixon felt special obligation to intervene and take strong action because he knew a covert operation was involved.

Dilemma of New Dependency

Interestingly enough, even while seeking to integrate Cuba more firmly into the Soviet bloc, Castro also made efforts to normalize relations with the US. Thus, even at the height of the Cienfuegos crisis Cuba signalled


an interest in talking to the US on the issue of hijackings.\footnote{The evidence can be found in the first return of a hijacker directly to the US on 24 September 1970, and a statement by Foreign Minister Raúl Roa two days later that Cuba was ready to subscribe immediately to an anti-hijacking accord. The initiatives are dealt with in detail in the next chapter.} Fear of Soviet abandonment most likely explained such seemingly contradictory foreign policy postures on Cuba's part.

Perhaps, what Castro most of all wanted to avoid during the Cienfuegos episode was a repeat of the Missile Crisis experience when Cuba rather unwittingly, had become a pawn in the trial of strength between the two super powers. Castro knew well that should such a situation arise, Cuban interests could and would be easily expendable, notwithstanding the promises of fraternal support from its Soviet patron. If at the height of Cold War tensions in 1962 the Soviet Union had not risked a confrontation with the United States over Cuba, it was less likely to do so in an era of détente during the 1970s. Not wishing to depend solely upon Soviet goodwill for Cuban defence Castro, therefore, wanted to keep open his channels of communication with the US.

Additionally, talking to the US in Castro's calculations might also help him counter the island's excessive dependence on the Soviet Union. The new style of Soviet orthodoxy in Cuban domestic and foreign affairs in the post-1968 period seemed to have heightened Cuban vulnerability. Specifically, the ascendancy within government and party structures of a new class of pro-Soviet, pragmatic, technocratic managerial elite had greatly circumscribed Castro's political leverage as also restricted his control over policy making in domestic and foreign economic fields.\footnote{In the early 1970s not only were a number of Castro's close associates politically eclipsed while old guard Communists from the former Moscow oriented Popular Socialist Party (PSP) rose in prominence, but between November 1971 and December 1973 Castro absented himself from governmental affairs for a total period of four months by extending his stay abroad several times. Even during his 1972 trip to Moscow while he devoted himself to building up his own image, it was Carlos Rafael Rodríguez, a former PSP member, who discharged all serious business, including that of formalizing Cuba's entry into COMECON. See Mesa-Lago, n. 1, pp. 16-17. For details on the process of institutionalization and how it affected foreign policy, see Edward González,}
among the new breed of leaders was Carlos Rafael Rodríguez who, after long service as minister without portfolio, became in a rapid sequence of successes in the early 1970s the founder and chairman on the Cuban side of the Cuban-Soviet Commission of Economics, Scientific and Technical collaboration; the deputy prime minister of foreign relations; the chief negotiator of foreign trade agreements; the Cuban delegate to several socialist transnational committees on planning, trade and electronic computation and the man with defacto control of domestic planning.73

More importantly, heightened Soviet influence had also imposed new constraints on Cuban foreign policy. The normalization of relations with a number of Latin American countries, for instance, had resulted in loss of Cuba's international leverage, previously generated through the "export of revolution", in its dealings with both the US and the Soviet Union. Consequently, Castro posed little revolutionary threat to the US nor did he deviate any longer from the Soviet line. For both super powers, therefore, Cuba was now a less salient issue and concomitantly its capacity to extort concessions had diminished. Similarly, Cuba's faithful endorsement of the Soviet position in the Sino-Soviet debate had resulted in yet another loss of bargaining counter with the Soviets.

Under such circumstances, seeking normalization of relations with the US seemed not only a way to guarantee continued Soviet commitment but also a way out of the dilemma of a new dependency confronting Cuba. In a renewed attempt to recover lost autonomy or at least to minimize the status and image of Cuba as a dependent client state, Castro therefore began to

73. Others among the new elite included President Osvaldo Dorticós who took over supervision of the Central Planning Board, the National Bank and Ministries of Foreign Trade, Labour and Justice; Marcelo Fernández (Foreign Trade); Marcos Lage (Sugar Industry); Rafael Francia (Agriculture) and Hector Rodríguez (State Committee for Economic Collaboration). Some scholars like González maintain that it was this new elite that was chiefly responsible for the subsequent reorientation of Cuban foreign policy towards greater pragmatism which included normalization of relations with the US. Ibid.
explore possibilities of negotiating with the US in late 1969. In fact, throughout this period Cuban foreign policy continued to follow its two seemingly contradictory lines of action of seeking closer integration into the socialist camp as well as exploring avenues for talks with the US.

Cuba's Foreign Policy Strategy in an Era of Détente

Such a trend in Cuban foreign policy became more marked with the emergence of international détente in the early 1970s. Despite the general euphoria of détente, Castro viewed this development with skepticism, as something which might presage a weakening of the ideological struggle and a sell-out of allies in the Third World by the Soviet Union in return for US concessions.74 Far from following the Soviet lead towards détente with the US, Castro, therefore, emphasized the ideological struggle between imperialism and socialism and pleaded for solidarity within the socialist camp. Castro's fears and suspicions about détente were aggravated by the circumstances under which détente had emerged between the superpowers. Particularly disturbing in this respect was the US blockade of the North Vietnamese coastline which had not hindered the Moscow Summit in any way; in fact, Soviet-US détente had taken a considerable leap forward during the meeting.75 This gave Castro good reason to fear that small countries like his own and North Vietnam, which were most seriously at odds with the US and which greatly depended on Soviet support would pay at least part of the price for super power détente.

74. Castro's first "friendly" reference to détente also contained what must be described as Freudian slip. In his 26 July 1973 speech, after predicting the swift decline of the American empire, Castro added: "In the present conditions of criminal détente (he then corrected himself) international détente that criminal blockade appears even more an unjust, ridiculous and untenable act in the eyes of the world." FBIS, Daily Report : Latin America, 27 July 1973.

75. For circumstances under which the Moscow Summit took place see Kalbs, n. 37, pp. 284-335.
To counter such an eventuality, throughout this period Castro attempted to force the Soviet Union to increase its responsibility toward Cuba. Barely a month after Nixon’s visit to the Soviet Union (in late June 1972) Castro travelled to Moscow, no doubt on his own behest. Before arriving in Moscow, however, he toured Eastern Europe where a large portion of his speeches were devoted to attacking the United States and pledging solidarity with the Vietnamese. For instance, in his speech on arriving in Poland, Castro in an obvious reference to the Warsaw Pact pointed out that Cuba was not part of any security pact or military alliance and thus had to depend only on its own power. Perhaps, this was an attempt by him to apply pressure on the Soviets to elicit greater commitment toward Cuban defence.

It was, therefore, clear that he was seeking reassurance and the Soviets painstakingly provided it. In a speech delivered at the Kremlin during a reception in honour of the Cuban Prime Minister, Brezhnev pointed out that it was out of "respect for the legitimate interests of all countries and peoples that we have undertaken talks at the Soviet-American Summit." He then assured Castro that the policy of peaceful coexistence would not weaken the ideological struggle, that the confrontation between capitalism and communism would become more acute rather than weaken, and that small socialist nations would be defended and treated equally by the Soviet Union.

He went on to add:

"Socialist Cuba is a stable component of the world socialist system. Its international positions, its interests and its security are fully guaranteed, not only by the Cuban Communist Party's firm policy and by the heroism of its revolutionary people, but also by the political support and weight of the USSR and the rest of the socialist community. We have already said this several times and we shall repeat it today in the most responsible manner."76

In reply Castro pointed out that for twelve years the United States had exerted pressure on Cuba to break its ties with the USSR but that, instead, the relations between the two countries had consolidated, reaching a level never attained before and that Cuban confidence in the USSR had been

strengthened. Then he pledged that Cuba would never accept "opportunism, neutralism, revisionism, liberalism or capitalist penetration". This might have been an hint that the Soviet Union ought to do the same. In fact, in the same speech Castro used Brezhnev's own words as though to lock him into his promise when he said:

"We received with deep gratitude your statement on Vietnam and the assurance that the Soviet Union would continue to give all necessary help and support to the heroic people of Vietnam, until the victory of their just cause."

Close identification of Cuba with North Vietnam remained a part of Castro's strategy to remind his Soviet allies of their commitment toward Cuban defence throughout the period of US-Soviet détente. Thus it was on Castro's insistence that the joint communiqué signed at the end of his Moscow visit mentioned North Vietnam and North Korea at the top of the list of those countries toward which the Soviet Union and Cuba reaffirmed their duty of solidarity.

It was perhaps to allay Cuban fears of a Soviet sell-out that the latter made some significant concessions to the island country during this period. It was speculated that Cuba's admission into the COMECON in July 1972 was one such concession given to reassure Castro that Moscow's improved ties with Washington would not be detrimental to Cuba. However, the fact that Castro left Moscow just five days before Carlos Rodríguez made the formal request for admission into COMECON led to the speculation that what Castro probably wanted was Cuba's admittance into the Warsaw Pact. Whatever

77. For instance, in a speech in October 1972 he said "We fail to see how our relations with the United States can possibly improve, considering our solidarity with Vietnam, our constant relentless consideration of the crimes being perpetrated there..." Granma Weekly Review, 22 October 1972.

78. For an analysis of the costs and benefits of Cuba's admission to COMECON see Cole Blasier, "COMECON in Cuban Development", in Mesa-Lago and Blasier, eds., n. 1, pp. 225-55.

may have been the case, following Cuba's admission to COMECON, the Soviet Union offered other significant economic concessions as also military and political support to Cuba.

**Diminishing Returns from Soviet Ties: Cuba's Need for Trade and Technology**

It was only after receiving significant assurances from the Soviet Union that Cuba reluctantly but finally accepted détente as a positive development. By this time, however, normalising relations with the West had become attractive to Cuba for more than one reason. Internally the process of institutionalization was nearly complete and had, paradoxically, resulted in strengthening Castro's domestic power base.\(^80\) Castro's renewed political dominance at home after 1973 naturally allowed him greater flexibility and leverage in his foreign policy than at any time since the late 1960s. Together with the island's improving economic situation in the mid-1970s and stronger commitments from the Soviet Union, his political resurgence allowed Castro to pursue innovative and accommodative policies which only a few years ago might have weakened the revolutionary elan among his followers and sapped the revolution of its identity. In particular, Castro could now safely talk of reaching an accommodation with the US without fearing that the internal political balance might shift against him if more moderate elements within the regime were strengthened by new ties with the US.

Accordingly, a new sense of self confidence was now evident in Cuba's relations with the world at large and especially with the Soviet Union. This was reflected in the Cuban leadership's insistence on Cuban independence from the Soviet Union. For instance, speaking of Cuban-Soviet ties, Carlos Rodríguez asserted: "Our bonds are ideological: that does not imply dependence, we do not accept directives."\(^81\)

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80. For details on how Castro turned the process of institutionalization to his advantage see González and Ronfeldt, n. 1, pp. 22-29.

81. Ibid., p. 57
By the mid-1970s, moreover, an accommodation with the US had not only become possible but also necessary for pressing economic reasons. Castro had already learnt a hard lesson from the "ten million tons" debacle, namely that no matter how pure the consciousness of the Cuban revolutionaries, no matter how committed the people, the material constraints on Cuban development were formidable. The complete overhauling of the Cuban economy that followed in accordance with Soviet organizing principles had, however, failed to satisfy the Cuban need for maximising production and productivity in order to improve the country's underdeveloped status.

In fact, there was a growing realization by the Castro regime of the diminishing returns from the Soviet economic ties. For, Cuban developmental needs required not only that productivity be increased but that it be done as efficiently as possible. This required not only encouragement of higher labour output, but also substitution of capital for labour in key sectors of the economy. Given Cuba's natural resources and economic structure, capital intensive technology seemed the most viable means to increase agricultural productivity, upon which the island's general development depended. Emphasizing this fact, President Osvaldo Dorticós pointed out in 1984 that since land is limited in Cuba and the planning of land use nearing completion, "it is impossible to think in any other terms than of highly intensive agricultural stock-raising." Only the most modern of the scientific tools and techniques were thus required--a need which it was increasingly realized that Cuba's socialist benefactors could hardly fulfill. Carlos Rodríguez admitted as much when he pointed out that "a whole range

82. For a useful discussion on how Soviet economic ties, despite producing some positive impact, have continued to perpetrate Cuban dependency in terms of export concentration, monoculture, trade partner concentration, capital dependency and external debt burden, see William M. LeoGrande, "Cuban Dependency: A Comparison of Pre-Revolutionary and Post-Revolutionary International Economic Relations", Cuban Studies/Estudios Cubanos, vol. 9, no. 2, July 1979, pp. 1-28; and Carmelo Mesa-Lago, The Economy of Socialist Cuba: A Two-Decade Appraisal (Albuquerque, N.Mex., 1981).

of technologies is not yet available in the socialist camp". In fact, neither the USSR nor the Eastern Europe could match the West in agricultural technology, especially that found in the US. Cuba had learnt this from its own bitter experiences with Soviet agricultural technology.

Above all, given Cuba's dependence on the sugar sector, it needed to modernize its sugar industry if sufficient export earnings were to be generated to accelerate development in other sectors. This point had been driven home to Cuba in the 1970s when Brazil began to overtake Cuba as the world's leading producer of sugarcane. Since its record 1970 harvest, Cuba's sugar production had lagged, fluctuating from a low of 4.4 million tons in 1972 to a high of about 5.8 million tons in 1974. This had prevented it from fully exploiting the prevalent high world price for sugar. The Cuban leaders had therefore become convinced of the need for some degree of dependence upon

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85. Acknowledging this fact, Castro is reported to have told Senator George McGovern during the latter's trip to Cuba in May 1975: "The United States is critical in the development of agriculture world wide...you can help guide the development of other countries". US Senate, Congress 94, session 1, Committee on Foreign Affairs, Report, *Cuban Realities*, (Washington, D.C., 1975), p. 11.

86. In this respect, Cuban experience with a redesigned KTP-1 harvester for sugarcane had been particularly bitter leading Castro to remark that it was a "great destroyer; where it has been, nothing will grow for a long time." Quoted in Karol, n. 30, p. 412.

87. Although soon after the revolution, the Cuban government in an attempt to reduce its dependence on sugar did try to diversify agriculture and promote import substitution industrialization for various reasons the programme ran into problems. In 1963, therefore, it once again decided to promote export production, especially sugar, and to postpone industrialization. Useful works in this respect are Edward Boorstein, *The Economic Transformation of Cuba* (New York, 1968); Mesa-Lago, n. 82. As a result, the sugar percentage of export earnings rose from 79 per cent in 1958 to an estimated 89 per cent in 1975, fluctuating between about 75-89 per cent in the interim. See US Department of Commerce, *United States Commercial Relations with Cuba: A Survey* (Washington, D.C., 1975), p. 42.

88. Ibid., p. 62
the advanced capitalist nations. Not surprisingly, they were no longer averse to exploring an opening with the West.

In December 1972, Castro personally indicated to a Latin American diplomat that he was ready for a rapprochement with the US in order to be able to purchase US agricultural technology. While he "made it clear that he can still get along without US technology", the Latin American official added, "he is willing to open relations because he is convinced that they would be good for Cuba's economic development programs".89 In fact, Cuban interest in Western technology was not limited to sugar sector alone. Other sectors which required "vanguard" technology were constructions, communications, health, education and management.90

Besides technology, Cuba also needed trade with the West to stimulate its economic development. In this respect, close economic ties with the Soviets were not only disadvantageous to Cuba in terms of price and/or quality of goods exchanged but also restricted Cuba's ability to either buy or sell its goods elsewhere.91 In other words, the growing integration of Cuban and Soviet economies through bilateral as well as COMECON agreements imposed structural constraints on Cuba's range of foreign trade options. Cuba's export commitments to the Soviet Union, for instance, restricted its freedom to exploit opportunities at the world market.92 Besides, the preponderantly


90. For a fuller discussion on the economic advantages that might accrue to Cuba from resuming relations with the US, see Carmelo Mesa-Lago, "Economics of US-Cuban Rapprochement" in Mesa-Lago and Blasier, eds., n. 1, pp. 199-224.

91. See Mesa-Lago, n. 82, pp. 91-99.

92. Even after an adjustment to 20 cents per pound in 1974, the Soviet price for Cuban sugar lagged far behind the world price, which reached a historic high of 66 cents in November 1974 and averaged 30 cents for that year. This prevented Havana from greatly reducing its indebtedness through sugar sales on the booming world markets during 1973-1975. See Jorge F. Pérez-López, "Sugar and Petroleum in Cuban-Soviet Terms of Trade" in Mesa-Lago and Blasier, eds., n. 1, pp. 273-96.
barter-like character, around 80 per cent of Soviet-Cuban trade restricted Cuba's ability to generate hard currency earnings for trade with Western countries and Japan.93 The Cuban leadership was aware of the potential long-range disadvantages of a trade relationship that was locked to the Soviet bloc. It is for this reason perhaps, that Castro himself while explaining Cuba's entry into COMECON in 1972 had clearly indicated that he would have preferred economic integration with Latin America instead of the Soviet bloc, had such an alternative been feasible.94 Economic ties with the West, especially the US had thus become imperative.

In the first half of the 1970s a series of factors combined to favour the fulfillment of Cuban aspirations for trade with the West. World demand for sugar increased, sugar harvests in the US declined while world inflation reached unparalleled heights. The net result was a phenomenal increase in the price of sugar from 4 cents (annual average) in 1970 to 5 cents in 1971, 7 cents in 1972, 10 cents in 1973 and 30 cents in 1974. With a high-priced commodity to trade in 1974-1975, Cuba could now afford to expand its trade with the industrialized non-socialist countries. Thus, in 1975, ten ministers of foreign trade of market economies visited Cuba, some from countries that had previously participated in the embargo.

Above all, there was a growing realization in Cuba that despite its integration into the Soviet bloc, the island's economic prospects still hinged on world market forces. The parameters within which Cuban socialism was developing were, in part, set by trade and credit opportunities in capitalist markets.95 Specifically it was the impact of the energy crisis and global

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93. This was evident from the fact that during the mid-1970s when Cuba sold a larger proportion of its sugar to the West, its hard currency earnings tripled to about $1.4 billion. See US Department of Commerce, n. 87.


inflation which had made Cuban leaders actually aware that their own economy was dependent upon and terribly vulnerable to developments in the "international capitalist system". Notwithstanding the disastrous impact of the oil crisis on the capitalist world, it was oil-poor underdeveloped countries like Cuba that had borne the brunt of the crisis. For, as Castro lamented, not only had they to bear higher oil prices but also suffer indirect costs, as capitalist countries in response to the crisis raised "to unprecedented heights the price of technology, equipment, manufactured and semi-manufactured products, fertilizers, synthetic materials and many others that developing countries must import." 96 It is for this reason that though the Cubans may have rejoiced over the international economic crisis triggered off by the oil price hike and its debilitating impact on the US--seeing it as a confirmation of the Marxist prophecy regarding the ultimate collapse of capitalism--the leadership flatly rejected the advisability of such a development. Commenting on this at the 1974 FAO conference in Rome, Carlos Rodríguez said:

Such an economic collapse...which would confirm the predictions of Karl Marx...can be viewed as a decisive step toward the future. However, such a catastrophe...from which countries that have embarked upon the road to socialism and whose economies are coordinated could emerge without being dragged down...would result in a great deal of suffering for the workers in the capitalist countries and would also involve the risk of a prolonged period of backwardness for the peoples struggling for development. Therefore, we cannot declare ourselves in favour of such a doomsday solution to the economic and social contradictions...This is why we are willing to work with all those who are trying to avert such a world economic crisis... 97

By mid-1970s, therefore, there was a growing realization within the Cuban leadership that Cuba must, of necessity, chart a foreign policy that recognized the reality of global interdependence. Cuba could thus restrict and regulate but not eliminate relations with the West. Besides, the gradual expansion of


97. Ibid., 24 November 1974.
economic ties with the West had, by this time, brought into sharp focus the high costs to Cuba of the US embargo. Cuba had come to realize that though the imports from the Western and other capitalist countries were advantageously priced in comparison with socialist bloc options, they were not so in comparison with US market prices. For example, the automobiles that Cuba purchased from Argentina might have been less expensive if purchased from the US. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that early in 1976 a high Cuban official in the Ministry of Foreign Trade told Business Latin America that a desirable distribution of future Cuban trade should be: 40 per cent with socialist countries, 30 per cent with the US and 30 per cent with the non-socialist countries.98

Convinced of the advantages of normalizing relations with the US as well as having received repeated assurances of the Soviet Union, Castro finally endorsed the Soviet position on détente during Brezhnev’s visit to the island in 1974. Détente was now viewed as an indication of the so called forces of imperialism in retreat and the shift in international balance of power in favour of socialism. Welcoming the Soviet leader, Castro in his speech noted that "the balance of forces has never been so favourable for the international revolutionary and progressive movement as it is now."99 Détente was a characteristic of a changed world situation, one no longer marked by American predominance but by a political parity of the Soviet Union with the US that had been precipitated by a military parity. Castro declared that the "Yankee Empire" was falling apart, and the time had passed when the US government could make and unmake governments as it saw fit. Apart from reversals in Vietnam and demoralization due to the Watergate scandal, Castro contended that the American economy seemed ill with a run away inflation rate and due to the crippling blow dealt by the OPEC oil embargo of


1973. For the Cubans all these events portended the declining influence of the "imperialist forces".

Rhetorical rationalization apart, from the Cuban point of view, détente had become more acceptable now as compared to the early 1970s for a host of reasons. Firstly, there was a growing disenchantment with détente in the Soviet Union, especially since leaders in the Kremlin were beginning to see limits to the Sino-American rapprochement that had earlier pushed them into seeking détente with the US. Such a mood was reflected in Brezhnev's hard-line speech in Cuba in 1974 when he affirmed: "We are not pacifists. We are not in anyway for peace at any price...". Referring to the situation in Vietnam and the Middle East he went on to warn that "imperialism has in no way changed its aggressive nature".100

At the same time, with the onset of détente there was a considerable shift in American public opinion as regards relations with Cuba. The formula—if big red China then why not little red Cuba—seemed to have become the unexamined wisdom of foreign policy specialists.101 Above all, the Watergate scandal had thoroughly discredited Nixon and Castro could look forward to negotiating with a new President.

Given the crisis faced by the US, Castro may have calculated that it was perhaps the best time to exploit the spirit of détente and engage with the US in some hard bargaining. This could both help him to procure Western trade

100. Ibid., p. 5.

101. A useful summary of this shift in American public opinion—as discussed by the American press, academics and politicians—is found in Roger Fontaine, n. 8, pp. 51-58. See also "Mesa Redonda sobre el Restablecimiento de Relaciones entre Cuba y los Estados Unidos", Areito (New York), September-December 1975, pp. 58-64. A great interest in resuming relations with Cuba was also shown by top corporate leaders in the US during this time. For details see Kirby Jones, "Trade Winds A' Changing", Cuba Review (New York), vol. 6, no. 1, March 1976, pp. 14-18; and "Cuba Our Next Communist Trade Partner", Industry Week, 24 March 1975, pp. 89-90. See also William Watts and Jorge Domínguez, The United States and Cuba: Old Issues and New Directions (Washington D.C., 1977), pp. 23-43.
and technology as also mitigate Cuba's dependence on the Soviet Union. Interestingly enough, throughout the period of détente Cuba appeared to emphasize its image as a Latin American/Third World country more, than as a Soviet bloc member. This undoubtedly represented a calculated move to retain its leverage with both the Soviet Union and the US in the "trying times" of détente. While giving some credit to the Soviet Union and the socialist bloc for helping to weaken the forces of imperialism, Castro stressed that it was mainly the result of struggles mounted by the Third World countries. Cuba and Vietnam represented one such admirable kind of Third World struggle for revolutionary change. The Cubans also pointed out that it was the OPEC countries who, through their defence of one raw material who had shifted the balance of power in favour of the Third World as well as the socialist bloc.102

At the same time caution was a better part of the Cuban valour. Anxious that Cuban participation in détente should not compromise Cuban security, Castro repeatedly raised the issue of Cuban defence. In particular, Castro feared that the Soviet Union may use détente as an argument to restrict military assistance to Cuba. The fact that Defense Minister Raúl Castro had returned empty-handed or nearly so from Moscow in February 1974, may have rendered these fears credible. Additionally, Castro also feared that in the context of détente, Soviet backing may not be forthcoming in the event of a new local crisis. Developments in Chile during 1970-1973 had probably aggravated Castro's apprehensions.103 Certainly, this is suggested in his statement:

"We are a small country and our enemy is powerful. And how long will imperialism remain our enemy? As long as imperialism existed. Our

102. Castro pointed out "...for the first time in the history of international relations a group of underdeveloped countries have managed to set their own trade terms for their basic materials vis-a-vis the developed capitalist world..." Granma Weekly Review, 30 March 1975.

103. For an account of the restrained Soviet support to the Allende regime in Chile see Dahl, n. 59, pp.33-48.
relations with the imperialist government of the United States are anything but good. But even if one day there should be economic and even diplomatic relations between us, that wouldn't give us the right to weaken our defence because our defence can never depend on the imperialist good faith".104

In Castro's hands, the Third World card was a double edged weapon. If Castro used it to bargain for greater Soviet commitments during détente, he also used it to obtain leverage over the US through so-called Third World\Latin American "confrontations with imperialism". Though of course, he did not jeopardize the efforts towards normalizing some commercial and diplomatic ties with the US in order to obtain the needed technology and trade. The Cuban leadership was aware of its weak bargaining position vis-a-vis the US, irrespective of the favourable sentiment among some Congressional circles. Cuba could neither offer major trade offs in exchange for renewed relations, as Egypt had in 1972 through its "reversal of alliances" or as China had done by opening up a potentially large market for US business and by balancing off Soviet power. The little leverage that Cuba had over the US through its "export of revolution" was also a thing of the past.

The Cuban leadership, therefore, realized that the country's future influence over the US would depend largely upon their ability to form Third World alliances and to play leadership roles in regional forums while upholding "anti-imperialist" postures toward the US. Consequently, the Cubans no longer advocated Latin American emulation of the Cuban revolutionary experience as the model for the defiance of the US. Instead, they now claimed that Cuba's earlier successes in overcoming "imperialist aggressions" could serve as an inspiration for various Latin America countries to join together in turning back US domination through non-violent confrontation. In other words, they now stressed on a multilateral approach for selective non-violent "confrontation with imperialism". By confrontation, the Cubans apparently meant peaceful but forceful pressure exerted through coalition and within regional and international

organizations. In fact, according to the English translation of the Spanish phrase, the term very often used by them was "facing up to imperialism" rather than "confronting imperialism".

This approach seemed to be based on a belief that Third World progress required the preservation of the advanced capitalist system for the 'time being' and that imperialistic US policies could be checked and even reversed. Particularly instructive to them in this regard was the experience of the OPEC countries. The ideal confrontation to them thus appeared to consist of the entire Third World, or at least a unified Latin America, mounting a diplomatic offensive against the US in order to wrest maximum concessions.

The Cubans, thus, neither advocated violent or uncompromising opposition to US policies nor did they call for the Soviet Union to confront the United States as part of the strategy. Instead, the strategy of confrontation seemed to represent a way for Cuba, Latin America and the Third World to maximise their leverage within the framework of détente and coexistence, even to take advantage of the growing Soviet might and presumably the peaceful Soviet-US balance. This new strategy was reflected, for instance, in Cuban treatment of the US trade law proposed in 1975. It originally contained exclusions against preferential tariffs for member nations of OPEC, as well as for nations that expropriated US property without proper compensation; or those that applied certain marketing or other restrictions on trade with the US. In the Cuban view, the law constituted an overt form of economic aggression. Yet Cuba only called for Latin American unity in response, thus endeavouring to identify with Venezuela and other neighbouring countries that were similarly opposing the proposed law. This call for unity was explicitly based on a strategy of anti-imperialism through peaceful confrontation and negotiation; it did not urge defiance and rejection of the US, nor did it call for Latin American countries to re-orient their trade to the Soviet Union and the socialist bloc.

Changes in the regional environment were particularly favourable for the pursuit of such a strategy. Fortunately for Castro, the rising trend of nationalism in Latin America in the 1970s afforded him the opportunity both
to foster closer relations with countries of the region as also to form broad anti-imperialist alliance. As Castro himself noted:

...the sovereign will of a majority of Latin American countries that assert the right to control their wealth, that declare themselves in favour of independent economic developments, for relations with the socialist countries...(and) that disregard imperialism's dictates and exercise a sovereign foreign policy is making itself felt with a relentless force.105

Certain specific changes in this respect were welcomed by the Cubans: political and structural changes in Peru, the Venezuelan stand on natural resources issues, Panamanian efforts to recover the canal, the international policy of the Mexican government, the rise of military regimes that were anti-imperialist and a spirit of co-operation in the Caribbean.106 To take advantage of the Latin efforts to forge some sort of unity, Castro replaced all the preconditions he had set in mid-1969 for Latin American countries to restore relations with Cuba with a new one: that the country behave independently of the United States.107

At the same time, Castro repeatedly emphasized Latin American identity as distinct and separate from the US. According to him:

The United States on one side and the peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean on the other side form two worlds as different as Europe and Africa. They do not belong in the same community...The United States already is a great community; the peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean have before them the great historic task of forming their own as the indispensable condition for liberation, development, and survival...108


107. The earlier conditions included, rejection of the OAS sanctions and condemnation of the 'crimes' committed against Cuba by "Yankee imperialism".

Cuba, therefore, strongly appealed for a coalition with the oil-rich Venezuelan government as also with the Peruvian, Panamanian and Mexican governments. At the same time it also sought to expand its relations with the English speaking Commonwealth countries of the Caribbean—Barbados, Guyana, Trinidad and Tobago, and Jamaica. The Latin Americans were also urged to form their own community organizations without US participation, just as the Africans had formed theirs without the participation of the European countries or Rhodesia or South Africa. The Cubans were especially interested in the creation of a new Latin American economic organization that would exclude the US, and from their perspective, offer greater security guarantees than the Rio Pact or the OAS against "the domination, aggressions, and interventions of the United States". They thus lent their enthusiastic support to the formation of Sistema Economico Latinamericana (SELA) in 1975 and also joined other regional groups like Multinational Caribbean Shipping Enterprise (NAMUCAR).

To conclude, one can maintain that although the heightened Soviet influence over Cuban affairs after 1968 did compel Castro to moderate his foreign policy, Cuba had reasons of its own--both in terms of timing and extent--for exploring renewed relations with the United States. Unlike the dependency argument, it can be said that the Soviet pressure was only one variable--although an important one--in the calculations behind the Cuban policy. Even though the Cubans often cloaked the prospects of normalization in the language of détente, they seemed to regard the Soviet-US détente and the Cuban-US détente as fairly distinct processes. Each may have facilitated the other, yet neither necessarily required the other. Efforts to normalize relations with the US were undertaken prior to the emergence of international détente. It could therefore be safely asserted that détente or no détente, efforts at normalization would have been initiated by Castro in the 1970s. Besides, Cuban responses to super power détente more as a Third World country than as a Soviet bloc member also made explicit the distinctiveness of the two processes from the Cuban point of view. Indeed, as has been shown, Castro used negotiations with the US in this period not only as a means to counter US hostility but also to bargain for some autonomy vis-a-vis the Soviet Union.

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