

# Two, Three, Many Revolutions? Cuba and the Prospects for Revolutionary Change in Latin America, 1967–1975

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*Abstract.* Drawing on interviews, published sources and archival documents, this article examines Cuba's policy towards Latin America after Ernesto 'Che' Guevara's death. It argues that as a result of this event and other setbacks in the region, Cuba reconceptualised its priorities, de-emphasised armed revolution and embraced new revolutionary processes. The results were mixed. By the mid-1970s, Havana was more disillusioned about revolutionary prospects in Latin America than ever before. However, it had also rejoined the inter-American system after more than a decade of isolation. This article asks how, why and with what consequences for Fidel Castro's stated pledge to 'make revolution' these shifts in Cuba's Latin American relations took place.

*Keywords:* Cuba, foreign policy, revolution, Latin America

In late 1974, the CIA noted that Cuban levels of subversion in Latin America had reached their 'nadir'. It considered Cuba's support for revolutionaries to be 'negligible' and concluded that 'training in clandestine and guerrilla methods' had been 'sharply reduced'.<sup>1</sup> Another CIA report six months later reached similar conclusions, arguing that Cuban support for armed revolution was at its 'lowest ebb' in 15 years.<sup>2</sup>

These conclusions – and the reality they depicted – contrasted sharply with Cuba's Latin American policies during the 1960s. In February 1962, Fidel Castro proclaimed that it was 'the duty of every revolutionary ... to make

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<sup>1</sup> United States Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), 'The Limits of Cuban Subversion in Latin America', 28 Aug. 1974, CIA Records Search Tool, National Archives II, College Park, MD (hereafter CREST).

<sup>2</sup> Office of Current Intelligence and Directorate of Operations, 'The Status of Cuban Subversion in Latin America', 2 May 1975, CREST. See also Interagency Intelligence Memorandum, 'Cuban Support for Nationalist Movements and Revolutionary Groups', July 1977, CREST; and Defense Intelligence Agency observations, 1975, quoted in Lars Schoultz, *That Infernal Little Cuban Republic: The United States and the Cuban Revolution* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), p. 271.

revolution'.<sup>3</sup> Cuba's international position then became increasingly radical after the Cuban Missile Crisis and the Organization of American States' collective sanctions against the island in 1964.<sup>4</sup> Havana's leaders diverged from the Soviet Union's advocacy of peaceful coexistence and gradual revolutionary change. While the Soviets instructed communist parties to focus on non-violent means of gaining influence and feared drawing Washington further into the region, the Cubans advocated urgent revolution by force of arms, not least because they believed that revolutionary upheaval throughout the region would lessen US hostility against Cuba by dividing the United States' attention.<sup>5</sup> Castro's public criticism of pro-Soviet Latin American communist parties as being too 'reformist' embodied these differences and provided an indirect way of attacking the Soviet Union's approach to Latin America. In Castro's view, those who did not advocate armed revolution or support its premise were 'pseudo-revolutionaries'.<sup>6</sup>

Meanwhile, Havana's leaders and their followers held up the Cuban Revolution as the vanguard of revolution in Latin America.<sup>7</sup> The Cuban-inspired revolutionary Organización de Solidaridad con los Pueblos de Asia, África y América Latina (Organisation of Solidarity with the Peoples of Asia, Africa and Latin America, OSPAAAL), established in Havana in 1966, declared that the Cuban Revolution had shown revolutionaries 'the correct road'.<sup>8</sup> The Organization of Latin American Solidarity (OLAS), established in Havana a year later, then issued a general declaration describing Cuba as 'a rich source of experience, inspiration and encouragement, an optimistic image of the future ... the vanguard of the anti-imperialist movement in Latin America'.<sup>9</sup>

There was no hiding the fact that both organisations and their Cuban patrons also saw armed struggle as the essential ingredient for revolution. Underpinning OLAS was the idea that 'armed struggle constitutes the fundamental line of the revolution and all other forms of struggle must promote rather than delay the development of the fundamental line'.<sup>10</sup> To Castro, who gave the inaugural OLAS conference's closing address, this

<sup>3</sup> Fidel Castro, 'The Second Declaration of Havana', 4 Feb. 1962, available at [www.walterlippmann.com/fc-02-04-1962.pdf](http://www.walterlippmann.com/fc-02-04-1962.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> James Blight and Philip Brenner, *Sad and Luminous Days: Cuba's Struggle with the Superpowers after the Missile Crisis* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002), p. 19.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 35, 87–8, 96–7.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 86, 104.

<sup>7</sup> Jorge Domínguez, *To Make a World Safe for Revolution: Cuba's Foreign Policy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), pp. 124–6.

<sup>8</sup> 'Cuba: A Fitting Answer to Latin America', *Tricontinental Bulletin*, 28 (July 1968), p. 3.

<sup>9</sup> 'Revolutionary Struggle: The Fundamental Line of the Revolution in Latin America', *Tricontinental Bulletin*, 18 (Sep. 1967), p. 15.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 17–18. See also Fidel Castro's address to OSPAAAL, 7 June 1966, quoted in Blight and Brenner, *Sad and Luminous Days*, p. xxii.

was quite simply a question of wanting to make revolution as opposed to trying to 'curb' it.<sup>11</sup> Not only did OLAS's members argue that revolutionaries should adopt this approach themselves, but they also defined 'solidarity' as support for 'guerrilla warfare and revolutionary struggle in all the countries of Latin America'.<sup>12</sup> Earlier that year, the Cubans had also published Ernesto 'Che' Guevara's famous call for revolutionaries to create 'two, three, or many Vietnams' and be 'uncompromising' in their 'great strategic objective, the total destruction of imperialism by armed struggle'.<sup>13</sup>

The question, therefore, is: what changed? To be sure, at the end of the 1970s support for armed revolution would pick up again, primarily in Central America.<sup>14</sup> But in 1975, its decline was obvious not only to US intelligence services but also to Latin American armed revolutionaries who sought Cuban help. Castro had abandoned his earlier refusal to deal with 'pseudo-revolutionaries' and had ties with a variety of left-wing groups. He was also focusing on building up diplomatic ties and trade with countries that had previously supported sanctions against Cuba. In 1975 the majority of the OAS then voted to allow member states to establish relations freely with the island.<sup>15</sup> Castro's Cuba was rejoining the inter-American system after a decade of relative isolation at precisely the same time that it was reducing its support for armed revolution in Latin America.

At first glance, these facts suggest that Cuba made a straightforward swap between making revolution abroad and diplomatic relations.<sup>16</sup> However, the way this played out was more nuanced than a straight substitution of one for the other. As Michael Erisman has argued, Cuba's foreign policy since 1959 has always combined 'revolutionary messianics' and realist pragmatism and has been 'constantly evolving in response to both internal and external stimuli'.<sup>17</sup> The late 1960s and 1970s were no exception to this evolutionary pattern. In response to serious setbacks and mounting obstacles, Cuba's leaders became increasingly pragmatic about their options and retreated tactically from supporting revolutionary movements in Latin America. This did not mean that the Cubans abandoned their ultimate goal of freeing Latin America from

<sup>11</sup> Fidel Castro, 10 Aug. 1967, quoted in Blight and Brenner, *Sad and Luminous Days*, p. 128.

<sup>12</sup> 'Revolutionary Struggle', p. 16.

<sup>13</sup> Ernesto 'Che' Guevara, 'Message to the Tricontinental', 16 April 1967, available at [www.marxists.org/archive/guevara/1967/04/16.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/guevara/1967/04/16.htm).

<sup>14</sup> Department of State Bureau of Public Affairs Special Report No. 90, 'Cuba's Renewed Support for Violence in Latin America', 14 Dec. 1981, CREST.

<sup>15</sup> Schultz, *That Infernal Little Cuban Republic*, pp. 262, 271.

<sup>16</sup> On the idea that Cuba swapped 'idealism' for 'Realpolitik', see Carmelo Mesa-Lago, *Cuba in the 1970s: Pragmatism and Institutionalization* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1974), pp. 107–32.

<sup>17</sup> H. Michael Erisman, *Cuba's Foreign Relations in a Post-Soviet World* (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 2000), pp. 4, 20, 42, 48, 83.

its dependence on the United States and seeing socialist revolution spread through the region. Instead, Cuba's leaders altered the way in which they conceived of this occurring.

From the late 1960s onwards, they realised that making revolution abroad in Cuba's image would not be as quick or as practicable as first hoped. They therefore gave up their insistence on one 'fundamental line' when it came to supporting revolution in Latin America and began reaching out to different revolutionary processes that had concurrently emerged in the region. Seeing many of these fail and the dangers involved in 'making revolution' rise significantly in the early 1970s, they then refocused their energies on expanding diplomatic relationships in the hemisphere and improving relations with the Soviet bloc. They never renounced their ideological belief in Latin America's need for revolutionary change and the benefits that this would bring to Cuba, but they decided that, for now, this would be best served by preserving the remnants of the region's revolutionary potential and protecting them until a more suitable moment arose. In the meantime, Havana's leaders focused on Cuba escaping its previous isolation, undercutting US influence where possible and ensuring that the Cuban Revolution remained a viable model for future generations of Latin Americans to follow. In short, the Cubans did not mechanically exchange support for revolution for diplomatic relations, or 'revolutionary messianics' for 'pragmatism', both of which remained present in Cuba's foreign policy. Instead, as a result of complex developments between 1967 and 1975, they came to believe that state-level ties were the best way of advancing their long-term revolutionary goals until more suitable circumstances presented themselves, as they would in Central America at the end of the decade.

Examining this evolutionary moment in Cuba's policy towards Latin America, this article uses new interviews as well as published and archival sources to ask precisely when, why and how these shifts occurred. Although scholars to date have already helped us understand the general evolution of Cuba's approach to Latin America during this period, the processes and turning points by which it occurred need clarification. Detailed histories of Cuban foreign policy have tended to focus on Che Guevara's mission in Bolivia before this moment or Havana's involvement in Southern Africa after it.<sup>18</sup> Exceptions include James Blight and Philip Brenner's study of Cuba's relationship with the Soviet Union, which deals with Castro's approach to Latin America in the context of Havana's relationship with Moscow between 1962 and 1968. As the authors conclude, Castro's support

<sup>18</sup> For example, see Jorge Castañeda, *Compañero: The Life and Death of Che Guevara* (London: Bloomsbury, 1997); and Piero Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington, and Africa, 1959–1976* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

for Latin American revolutionary movements during this period was at least in part a means of resisting pressure to conform to the Soviet Union and of retaining control over Cuba's quest for security. Their argument, that the Cubans' Latin American position in 1967–8 was part of a calculated readjustment of Cuban–Soviet relations, is persuasive. However, Cuba's relationship with Latin America itself is comparatively overlooked in their analysis, as is the period after 1968, begging the question as to what happened next.<sup>19</sup> Other scholarship on Cuba's foreign policy shifts has focused more on the 1970s. Erisman, for example, notes that 'there was a reversal of ... priorities' in Cuban foreign policy around 1972 that resulted in 'a delicate, complicated balancing act' when it came to Latin America, 'involving both a broad normalization campaign and highly concentrated radicalism'. Despite noting that a 'cacophony of defeat' in Latin America led Cuba to pragmatically 'reconfigure its international priorities' in 1968, he does not go into details and, for the most part, frames his arguments in relation to Soviet–Cuban ties and Havana's global role rather than Latin America.<sup>20</sup> Jorge Domínguez also underlines that the early 1970s were a time of 'great breakthrough' for Cuban foreign policy. He argues that an improvement in diplomatic relations with Latin America and the 'diplomatic space' this provided helped Cuba to foster better relations around the world. However, he does not explain what this meant in practice and emphasises that it was 'softened' US views of Cuba during the early 1970s, as a result of the Vietnam War and détente, that afforded Havana's leaders the opportunity to reposition Cuba in the hemisphere.<sup>21</sup>

The point here is not to refute these contributions when it comes to understanding why Cuba's support for revolution declined in Latin America (although Nixon's commitment to détente in Latin America is questionable based on new evidence of his regional policies).<sup>22</sup> Rather, it is to build on them by looking at the whole period between 1967 and 1975 and focusing on Cuba's relationship with Latin America itself. As we shall see, Cuba's evolving relationship with Moscow during this period was an important factor in the Cuban leadership's decisions, and perhaps more importantly, the Cubans' shifting perceptions of the prospects of revolutionary change in Latin America also fed into Havana's growing emphasis on improving relations with Moscow. However, only by examining Cuba's relationship with different Latin American countries and movements during this period is it possible to fully comprehend why – and with what significance for inter-American

<sup>19</sup> Blight and Brenner, *Sad and Luminous Days*, pp. 129–31, 138–9.

<sup>20</sup> Erisman, *Cuba's Foreign Relations*, pp. 73, 75, 82–3.

<sup>21</sup> Domínguez, *To Make a World Safe for Revolution*, pp. 224–7.

<sup>22</sup> See Tanya Harmer, *Allende's Chile and the Inter-American Cold War* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), pp. 39–46, 56–64.

relations – Havana's support for armed revolution had declined to such an extent by the mid-1970s.

### *Traumas*

Che Guevara's death in Bolivia in October 1967 has been cited as a watershed in Cuba's Latin American policies.<sup>23</sup> But it was neither an immediate nor a singular turning point. His mission had been the culmination of Cuba's efforts to 'make revolution' in Latin America since 1959. Fidel Castro and the Cuban Ministry of the Interior had supported it, and it had built on previous operations.<sup>24</sup> However, it also reflected the limited options that the Cubans had for helping revolutionary struggles. Havana's involvement in trying to support rural *focos* had already failed in the Dominican Republic (1959), Argentina (1963–4) and Peru (1964–6), while ongoing guerrilla struggles in Nicaragua, Venezuela, Guatemala and Colombia were under severe pressure.<sup>25</sup> Bolivia had therefore been the best option available rather than a golden opportunity. Nevertheless, after Che's death, Havana actually continued and increased its support for guerrilla operations through training, logistical support and public rhetoric. Indeed, those who conducted and received this type of training in 1968 recall that it was intense, involving months of marches and instruction on shooting, explosives, communications, exploration, tunnelling and building camps.<sup>26</sup> Meanwhile, Castro called on revolutionaries to emulate Che, and OSPAAAL's Executive Secretariat proclaimed that the conditions in Latin America were 'ripe ... for stepping up to the maximum the struggle of liberation'.<sup>27</sup> It was only after successive failures in the following 18 months that Castro began questioning this assertion and changing course.

<sup>23</sup> See Richard Gott, *Cuba: A New History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004), p. 235; and Thomas C. Wright, *Latin America in the Era of the Cuban Revolution* (revised edition, Westport, CT: Praeger, 2001).

<sup>24</sup> Luis Suárez Salazar (ed.), *Manuel Piñero: Che Guevara and the Latin American Revolutionary Movements* (Melbourne: Ocean Press, 2001), pp. 45–6.

<sup>25</sup> *Focos* were central to Che Guevara's widely disseminated theory of guerrilla warfare, published after the Cuban Revolution and formalised by Régis Debray. This theory argued that small mobile guerrilla forces (*focos*) could ignite revolutionary conditions in countries where they did not necessarily exist and generate mass support among the population, thereby leading to large-scale guerrilla warfare and the seizure of power. See Ernesto 'Che' Guevara, *Guerrilla Warfare* (London: Harper Perennial, 2008); and Régis Debray, *Revolution in the Revolution? Armed Struggle and Political Struggle in Latin America* (Middlesex: Penguin, 1968).

<sup>26</sup> Interviews with Patricio de la Guardia, senior member of Cuba's Tropas Especiales, Havana, 21 April 2011; and Felix Huerta, Chilean member of the ELN, Santiago, 23 March 2010. On rhetoric, see Domínguez, *To Make a World Safe for Revolution*, p. 125.

<sup>27</sup> Message of Executive Secretariat of OSPAAAL, 28 March 1968, *Tricontinental Bulletin*, 27 (June 1968), pp. 3–5. The message mentioned Venezuela, Guatemala and Colombia as being 'active scenes' of revolutionary struggle. On reactions to Che's death, see 'The Death of Che



In the meantime, the most concrete manifestation of Cuba's ongoing commitment to armed revolution was its support for a second guerrilla front in Bolivia. Leading this operation was the Bolivian Ejército de Liberación Nacional (National Liberation Army, ELN), led by Guido Álvaro Peredo Leigue, otherwise known as 'Inti'. Having fought alongside Che, Inti proclaimed that he would 'return to the mountains' in July 1968, thereby offering an explicit continuation of his fallen leader's mission. Almost immediately after Guevara died, Havana had also privately made it very clear to the ELN that it should continue. And in January 1968, prior to their escape from Bolivia, the three Cuban survivors of Che's guerrilla column – 'Pombo' (Harry Villegas), 'Urbano' (Leonardo Tamayo Núñez) and 'Benigno' (Daríel Alarcón Ramírez) – had personally pledged to support a renewed guerrilla campaign.<sup>28</sup>

Inspired by Che's death and Fidel's call to follow in his footsteps, Latin American internationalists joined the second Bolivian guerrilla campaign. Among them was an important group of Chileans comprising Salvador Allende's daughter, Beatriz, and the Chilean socialist Elmo Catalán, whom the Cubans introduced to each other in February 1968.<sup>29</sup> Crucially, Chile served as a rear-guard base for Bolivian operations and provided a route by which a newly assembled guerrilla force could return to Bolivia after undergoing training in Cuba. Benigno and Pombo, who conducted this training in coordination with members of Castro's Tropas Especiales during the latter half of 1968, were also due to take part in the guerrilla operation after training was complete. In short, Cuba was directly involved and highly committed to the operation. As Patricio de la Guardia, one of the Tropas Especiales involved in training, recalled, it was bigger and far more carefully planned and institutionally supported than Che's initial mission.<sup>30</sup>

In mid-1969, however, Cuban support was abruptly withdrawn. So sudden was the decision that Benigno was en route to Bolivia when he was instructed to go home. Cuba would not be sending its own men and was withdrawing much of its support. The reasons for this decision are hard to pinpoint until Cuba's archives are opened, but it is clear that the Cuban leadership now viewed the ELN's operation pessimistically. Not only had members of the

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Guevara' and 'World Repercussion on the Death of Che', *Tricontinental Bulletin*, 21 (Dec. 1967), pp. 5, 11.

<sup>28</sup> Gustavo Rodríguez Ostria, *Sin tiempo para las palabras: Teoponte, la otra guerrilla guevarista en Bolivia* (La Paz: Grupo Editorial Kipus, 2006), pp. 22–5, 31, 42, 60.

<sup>29</sup> Interview with Luis Fernández Oña, Cuban intelligence official, Ministry of the Interior (MININT), Santiago, 6 April 2011.

<sup>30</sup> Interview with Patricio de la Guardia. On Chile's involvement, guerrilla training in Cuba and Cuban support, see also Rodríguez Ostria, *Sin tiempo para las palabras*, pp. 45–52, 68–83, 112–34, 137–50.

guerrilla column that had returned to Bolivia been killed and arrested shortly after their arrival, but also the ELN's urban network had been uncovered, the group's organisation was in disarray and Bolivia's president, General René Barrientos, had died in April, changing the balance of power in the country. Devastatingly, only a few weeks after Begnino was recalled to Cuba, security forces also killed Inti and an ELN leadership struggle commenced amidst yet more arrests and deaths of its members.<sup>31</sup> It therefore seems that the Cubans were right to have worried about the campaign's potential and retreated.

This new caution also related to a review of Cuba's Latin American policies that had been taking place since Che's death. Quite simply, the conclusion reached was that Havana's regional approach to date had not worked and that Cuba's position in the Americas was in crisis. Immediately prior to the deterioration of the ELN's position in Bolivia, the Cubans suffered other defeats in Venezuela and Guatemala, where they had been supporting a guerrilla insurgency since the early 1960s. For the guerrillas fighting in Venezuela, 1968 had been a 'difficult year ... a year of hard tests and arduous existence'. 'We have not been able to unify forces; we have not been able to persuade people', a Venezuelan delegate to OSPAAAL publicly acknowledged.<sup>32</sup>

Earlier in 1968, OSPAAAL's Executive Secretariat had tried to instil optimism: 'In the cruel process of their struggles the Latin Americans have confronted many setbacks, but these have never been an insurmountable obstacle for them.'<sup>33</sup> The reality that rural guerrillas faced at the end of the 1960s was nevertheless bleak. By 1969, Venezuela's guerrilla movement had collapsed. A string of rural guerrilla insurgencies had been defeated by the military regime in Brazil, and an attempt to establish a guerrilla foco in Tucumán, Argentina, had failed in its initial phase. Cuban-supported guerrilla forces in Guatemala were also mired in repression.<sup>34</sup> As the CIA observed, Guatemalan rebels had been 'soundly thrashed by government security forces' at the end of the 1960s, leading Cuba to 'sharply reduce its assistance'.<sup>35</sup>

As Cuba's foreign minister would admit to Polish leaders in August 1971, Havana's leaders accepted that the Cuban Revolution had contributed not only to 'the growth of social and political awareness in Latin America', but also to 'the deepening of the archaic social and economic structures'.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 183–235.

<sup>32</sup> 'Venezuela: A Difficult Year', *Tricontinental Bulletin*, 33 (Dec. 1968), pp. 14–19.

<sup>33</sup> Message of Executive Secretariat of OSPAAAL, 28 March 1968, p. 3.

<sup>34</sup> Wright, *Latin America*, pp. 77–8, 103, 104.

<sup>35</sup> See Interagency Intelligence Memorandum, 'Cuban Support for Nationalist Movements'. On Cuba's failed support for guerrilla insurgencies, see also Hal Brands, *Latin America's Cold War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), pp. 52–6.

<sup>36</sup> Urgent Note, 'Notes on the Conversations with Roa', 30 June 1971, wiazka 3/40/75, Archiwum Ministerstwa Spraw Zagranicznych, Warsaw (hereafter AMSZ). My thanks to



The National Security Doctrine had been adopted by armed forces throughout the region, the Brazilian coup of 1964 had been a major counter-revolutionary victory and the United States had invaded the Dominican Republic while increasing its intervention elsewhere in Latin America. Richard Nixon's electoral victory in November 1968 also caused Cuba's leaders to worry that the worst was still to come.

They therefore decided not to sacrifice more personnel in Bolivia and began distancing Cuba from rural guerrilla insurgencies.<sup>37</sup> As one Cuban official put it in 1972, 'We've been too generous with our blood and our lives before ... The Cuban people have paid a very high price for our too hasty support of every group that picks up a gun. We can't afford to be romantic revolutionaries anymore.'<sup>38</sup> US analysts drew similar conclusions but were unsurprisingly less charitable. According to a report drawn up by the CIA's Office of National Statistics at the beginning of 1971, rural guerrillas had proven themselves 'to be remarkably inept in their efforts to ferment revolution'.<sup>39</sup>

Aside from past failures and the risk of more costly sacrifices ahead, Havana's relations with Moscow contributed to the rethinking of Cuba's Latin American policies at the end of the decade. In part, Cuba's continued support for revolution after Che's death had been a way of affirming autonomy within the Cuban–Soviet relationship at a moment when Moscow was putting increasing pressure on Havana to toe its line. Having been furious when they learned that Che Guevara was in Bolivia – and 'sick and tired of Fidel Castro's criticism', in the words of the head of Cuban affairs for the Soviet Communist Party's Central Committee<sup>40</sup> – the Soviets had explicitly warned Castro in June 1967 that if he did not reduce his support for armed revolution or stop his public attacks against pro-Soviet communist parties (and by implication the Soviet Union), he would no longer be able to count on Soviet support. When Castro had refused to capitulate to Soviet demands, and even stepped up his call to make revolution in Latin America after this, the Cuban–Soviet relationship had reached breaking point. Castro had not attended the 50th anniversary celebrations of the October Revolution and the Soviets had scaled back deliveries of oil to Cuba, prompting Castro to announce emergency rationing at the start of 1968. At the end of January, a 'micro-faction' of pro-Soviets had then been purged very publicly from the

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Anita Prazmowska for her help in locating Polish documents used in this article and translating them for me.

<sup>37</sup> Rodríguez Ostria, *Sin tiempo para las palabras*, pp. 220–1.

<sup>38</sup> Anonymous source quoted in Karen Wald, 'Cuban Line Stays Revolutionary', *National Guardian*, 8 Aug. 1972.

<sup>39</sup> CIA Office of National Estimates, 'The Changing Revolutionary Process in Latin America', Memorandum, 23 Feb. 1971, CREST.

<sup>40</sup> Oleg Darusenkov, quoted in Blight and Brenner, *Sad and Luminous Days*, pp. 110–11.

Cuban Communist Party, demonstrating the Cuban leadership's rejection of Soviet interference. Simultaneously, Castro had also delivered a two-day 'secret speech' to the First Plenary Meeting of the Party's Central Committee detailing the Soviets' betrayal of Cuba during the Cuban Missile Crisis and their lack of support for revolution in the third world. Having shown that Cuba would not be blackmailed by the Soviet Union or reduced to the position of a malleable client, Castro nevertheless accepted that he needed continued Soviet assistance and moved towards qualified rapprochement with the Soviets when he endorsed the Soviet Union's invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968.<sup>41</sup> As Blight and Brenner have argued, 'Cuba was ready to live and let live with the Soviets, so long as the Soviets were willing to do the same. This was going to be a relationship based on mutual respect and reciprocal benefit, not a parent-child relationship.'<sup>42</sup>

This realignment between Cuba and the Soviet Union would subsequently have a significant impact on Havana's economic and political structure over the following two decades.<sup>43</sup> Cuba's review of its policies towards Latin America also undoubtedly factored into the process of rapprochement, and vice versa. From early 1970, Soviet diplomats proudly began talking about a 'new Castro' who was 'prepared for a more responsible role in international affairs'.<sup>44</sup> However, as Castro had so clearly demonstrated, he would not let the Soviets dictate Cuba's Latin American policies. True, Castro reduced his attacks on pro-Soviet communist parties and accepted that the Cubans were not necessarily 'the most perfect revolutionaries' in mid-1968 as he began a process of conditional bridge-building with Moscow.<sup>45</sup> But Cuban support for revolutionary struggle in Bolivia continued past this date and his symbolic approval of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. The Soviet-Cuban crisis and subsequent rapprochement nevertheless coincided with the Cuban leadership's broader concerns and soul-searching when it came to Latin America, thereby making it simpler for Castro to change course. By 1968-9, regional developments also offered Havana opportunities to support different types of revolutionary change, increase its influence and retain autonomy from Moscow.

<sup>41</sup> Blight and Brenner, *Sad and Luminous Days*, pp. xxii-xxiii, 33-4, 35, 121-45.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 139.

<sup>43</sup> See Gott, *Cuba*, pp. 235-48; Mesa-Lago, *Cuba in the 1970s*; and CIA Directorate of Intelligence, Latin America Division, Office of Regional and Political Analysis, 'Cuba's Foreign Policy Apparatus and How It Works', July 1977, CREST.

<sup>44</sup> Memcon, Igor Bubnov (counsellor, Soviet embassy), Madison M. Adams Jr. (economic officer, Office of the Coordinator of Cuban Affairs) et al., State Department, 11 May 1970, Box 223, Record Group 59, National Archives II, College Park, MD.

<sup>45</sup> Blight and Brenner, *Sad and Luminous Days*, pp. 138-9.

*Shifting Latin American Dynamics*

At the end of the 1960s, the Cubans grew particularly attuned to new Latin American developments. Revolutionary impulses in the Catholic Church and urban guerrilla movements grew, Kennedy's Alliance for Progress had failed to solve development needs, and the Dominican Republic crisis of 1965 had sparked resentment and calls for OAS reform. The revolutionary nationalist military elites that seized power in Peru, Panama and Bolivia between 1968 and 1970 also caught Havana's attention. For Cuba's leaders, who strove to undermine Washington's hemispheric role in Latin America, their anti-US stance was particularly important. Where these developments would lead was unclear for the time being, but at least they offered alternatives to beleaguered rural guerrilla insurgencies.

The emergence of liberation theology was one such alternative. In part, this reflected developments in Europe, where a series of Papal encyclicals and the Second Vatican Council (1962–5) had underscored the Church's dedication to the poor and its social, pastoral and educational role. However, it also responded to the Cuban Revolution, to poverty and inequality in Latin America and to the impulse for social and developmental change in the 1960s. Latin American bishops, priests and theologians had increasingly framed their discussions in terms of revolution, rebellion, oppression and 'liberation', and the Latin American Bishops' Council's 1968 meeting in Medellín was a watershed in this respect.<sup>46</sup> Moreover, liberation theology tended to advocate peace but the issue of violence was ambiguous, which allowed Cubans to identify with it more readily. Colombia's 'guerrilla priest', Camilo Torres, who had died fighting for a rural insurgent group in 1966, was seen by Havana as evidence that even the clergy was following its line. Meanwhile, Dom Hélder Câmara, Archbishop of Olinda and Recife in Brazil and a key figure at Medellín, spoke of his 'respect [for] those who feel obliged in conscience to opt for violence', explicitly evoking the 'memory of Che Guevara'.<sup>47</sup> Responding to these trends in 1969, Castro now stated that 'Revolutionary change of Latin American societies is an enterprise and a task in which all men of good will have to participate.' As he put it, 'It doesn't matter if they are Marxists or Christians.'<sup>48</sup>

<sup>46</sup> David Tombs, *Latin American Liberation Theology* (Leiden and Boston, MA: Brill Academic Publishers, 2002), p. 110.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 93, 99, 110.

<sup>48</sup> Fidel Castro, quoted in 'Latin America: The Rebellion [sic] of the Clergy', *Tricontinental Bulletin*, 43 (Oct. 1969), p. 30. See also 'Solidarity with Latin America', *Tricontinental Bulletin*, 50–1 (May–June 1970), p. 44; 'Christianism and Marxism', *Tricontinental Bulletin*, 66 (Sep. 1971); and Fidel Castro and Frei Betto, *Fidel Castro and Religion: Castro Talks on Revolution and Religion with Frei Betto* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), pp. 18, 245–7.

Simultaneously, the Cubans grew especially interested in the development of urban guerrilla movements in Uruguay, Argentina and Brazil. Having previously emphasised the primacy of the rural foco, the Cubans inspired, and were inspired by, the idea that armed struggle could also be carried out in populous cities.<sup>49</sup> Although urban guerrilla warfare had originated in the mid-1960s, it had since grown as a direct response to failed rural insurgencies and country-specific circumstances. Indeed, in 1968 and 1969, Uruguay's Tupamaros, Brazil's Carlos Marighella and urban guerrilla groups in Argentina embarked on a series of operations that brought them to national and international prominence.<sup>50</sup> Through *Tricontinental*, Cuba ensured that Marighella's June 1969 *Minimanual do guerrilheiro urbano*, detailing instructions for would-be followers, was distributed in Latin America, and the Cubans hailed him as a hero.<sup>51</sup> True, the ideological foundations of these movements were often underdeveloped, relying on the idea that violence would generate revolutionary conditions and theories rather than the other way round. But as the CIA reflected, Fidel Castro 'was impressed' by their 'headline-grabbing exploits'.<sup>52</sup>

Peru's military leaders, who seized power in October 1968, also impressed Cuba's leaders. In January 1970, the *Tricontinental Bulletin* made its first subtle, encouraging reference to what was happening in Lima. The military had ushered in a 'new stage' of Peruvian history, it stated, proving that there had been 'increasing deterioration of North American policies in the hemisphere'.<sup>53</sup> As it turned out, Cuban efforts to befriend Peru's new leader, General Juan Velasco Alvarado, had begun almost immediately after he came to power.<sup>54</sup> Within a few months, analysts at the Ministry of the Interior (MININT) sent a report to Castro noting the new military leaders' criticism of the National Security Doctrine as well as their nationalist stance regarding

<sup>49</sup> On urban guerrillas, see Brands, *Latin America's Cold War*, pp. 101–4.

<sup>50</sup> See Wright, *Latin America*, pp. 99–199, 103, 104–7; and Brands, *Latin America's Cold War*, pp. 97–105.

<sup>51</sup> See *Tricontinental*, 16 (Jan. 1970), pp. 15–56; and 'Minimanual of the Urban Guerrilla', *Tricontinental Bulletin*, 56 (Nov. 1970). On support for urban guerrillas, see also message of Executive Secretariat of OSPAAAL, 28 March 1968, pp. 5–6; 'Brazil: The Armed Struggle will Oust the Dictatorship', *Tricontinental Bulletin*, 30 (Sep. 1968); and 'Tupamaros: If There Isn't a Homeland for All, There Won't be a Homeland for Anybody', *Tricontinental Bulletin*, 57 (Dec. 1970). Marighella's *Minimanual* was also published in Santiago (Prensa Latinoamericana, 1971) and London (*Survival: Global Politics and Strategy*, 13: 3 (1971), pp. 95–100) as well as being reviewed in *Time*, 2 Nov. 1970.

<sup>52</sup> CIA Office of National Estimates, 'The Changing Revolutionary Process'.

<sup>53</sup> 'Latin America: Rebel Presence in the Valleys and Mountains', *Tricontinental Bulletin*, 46 (Jan. 1970), p. 35.

<sup>54</sup> It has been suggested that Castro established contacts a month before the coup, although it is not clear what impact this had. See Daniel Alarcón Ramírez, *Memorias de un soldado cubano: vida y muerte de la revolución* (Barcelona: Tusquets Editores, 2003), pp. 195–9.

the United States and foreign investment. Fidel's response, according to one of the authors of this report, was cautious but positive. In 1969 Cuba issued its first official statement in support of Peru's nationalist military government.<sup>55</sup> Then, in mid-1970, after an earthquake hit the country, MININT took the opportunity to send intelligence specialists clandestinely to Peru as part of an earthquake assistance group led by the Cuban Ministry of Public Health and Ministry of Construction. As one of those involved explained years later, it was an 'ad-hoc' programme of engagement with Lima's new leaders.<sup>56</sup>

This process of engagement evolved enthusiastically in the early 1970s. As Fidel Castro privately told one Chilean diplomat, he was 'especially interested' in Velasco Alvarado, whom he considered to be a man of the Left.<sup>57</sup> This was also the Cuban foreign minister's opinion. In his view, Peru's military government was neither Marxist nor equipped with 'clear political doctrine' but it was 'revolutionary', 'progressive' and capable of gaining mass support.<sup>58</sup> Cuba also received benefits in return for supporting Velasco Alvarado. On 13 June 1971, for example, it agreed to purchase 150,000 tons of fishmeal from Peru, which the latter offered to sell to Havana at a lower than world market price.<sup>59</sup>

For Cuba, this agreement was a symbolic victory against hemispheric sanctions. True, Castro warned Peru's leaders not to re-establish full diplomatic relations with Cuba so as to avoid international hostility, but this did not preclude other ties with Lima. After all, breaking the inter-American system's isolation of Cuba was deeply important to Havana's leaders. In the context of failed rural guerrilla insurgencies, a difficult domestic context and the process of realignment towards Moscow, the Cuban leadership therefore held out hope for the rise of revolutionary nationalists, and supported them.

Chile offered another opportunity for Cuba to break free of inter-American sanctions. In 1969, Eduardo Frei's centre-left Christian Democrat government – a one-time Alliance for Progress poster child and previously a target of Fidel's fierce criticism of reformists – embarked on negotiations with Havana to re-establish commercial relations.<sup>60</sup> As the Cubans involved in brokering this deal would remember, it first meant Cuba buying poor-quality Chilean wine in which the Cubans had very little interest. However, Castro's instructions were now to welcome all opportunities to break inter-American sanctions.<sup>61</sup> Cuba benefited from the re-establishment of commercial relations

<sup>55</sup> See Domínguez, *To Make a World Safe for Revolution*, pp. 121, 225.

<sup>56</sup> Interview with Luis Suárez Salazar, Cuban intelligence analyst, Havana, 10 Dec. 2004.

<sup>57</sup> Jorge Edwards, *Persona non grata* (4th edition, Santiago: Tiempo de Memoria, 2000), pp. 55–6. <sup>58</sup> 'Notes on the Conversations with Roa', AMSZ. <sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> See Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions*, p. 221; and Mesa-Lago, *Cuba in the 1970s*, pp. 110–11.

<sup>61</sup> Interview with Juan Carretero, Cuban intelligence official, MININT, Havana, 18 April 2011. On the negotiations themselves, see also interview with Michel Vázquez Montes de Oca and Nelly A. Cubillas Pino, Cuban Ministry of Foreign Commerce, Havana, 11 Sep. 2005.

in early 1970, the first agreement to break OAS sanctions. In addition to trade, academic and cultural exchanges eased logistical contact with Chilean left-wing parties.<sup>62</sup>

Overall, then, Cuba's approach to Latin America in 1969–70 opened it up to a range of different regional actors. Fidel Castro publicly and loudly proclaimed that nothing had changed, promising that 'Cuba has never nor will it ever deny support to a revolutionary movement.'<sup>63</sup> Yet, critically, the Cubans' conceptualisation of revolutionary movements was now broadening out to include nationalist groups that advanced progressive change and effectively undercut US influence. As an article appearing in OSPAAAL's monthly bulletin put it in mid-1970, 'The process of change and structural transformations of an anti-imperialist and anti-oligarchic nature which have shaken Peru, and which eventually may be directed towards even more revolutionary aims, is also a part of the deepening of the crisis of imperialist domination on the Latin American continent ... different trends, especially within the Catholic Church, are ... visible symptoms of a growing crisis [of imperialism].'<sup>64</sup>

In this context, Castro explained that individual revolutionary processes should be examined on a case-by-case basis and that Cuba had to approach them in a differentiated way.<sup>65</sup> For now, this new, untried flexibility offered a way to transcend previous setbacks. It also dovetailed with Cuba's realignment with the Soviet bloc and domestic circumstances. Having failed to produce a ten-million-ton sugar harvest in 1970 as promised earlier, the Cuban leadership was scaling back earlier optimistic hopes of imminent revolution. As Castro admitted on 26 July 1970, Cuba's leaders had been 'minimizing difficulties'. 'Building socialism is difficult', he went on, '[and] learning to build the economy is much more difficult for revolutionaries than we imagined.'<sup>66</sup> As an official Polish delegation to Cuba nearly a year after this speech reported, the Cubans had since made significant changes to overcome their mistaken approaches to economic and social development.<sup>67</sup> These

<sup>62</sup> Castro also oversaw plans for an exhibition about Cuba in Chile which coincided with Salvador Allende's election. This exhibition then provided cover for Cuban intelligence officials to travel down to Chile by boat with exhibition materials in October 1970. See interview with Carretero.

<sup>63</sup> Fidel Castro, April 1970, quoted in Schoultz, *That Infernal Little Cuban Republic*, p. 249.

<sup>64</sup> 'Solidarity with Latin America', *Tricontinental Bulletin*, 50–1 (May–June 1970), pp. 43–4.

<sup>65</sup> Interview with Luis Suárez Salazar, Havana, 12 Sep. 2005; Mesa-Lago, *Cuba in the 1970s*, pp. 107, 115.

<sup>66</sup> Fidel Castro, speech at Plaza de la Revolución, Havana, 26 July 1970, Castro Speech Database, available at <http://lanic.utexas.edu/la/cb/cuba/castro.html>.

<sup>67</sup> 'Account of the delegation of the PZPR [Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza, Polish United Workers Party] in the Republic of Cuba', 24 June 1971, wiazka 5/40/75, AMSZ.



changes would also subsequently have an impact on the advice and support that Cuba gave different revolutionary groups in Latin America.

### *New Dynamics in Practice*

The most important relationship Cuba had in Latin America during the early 1970s was the one it established with Chile after Castro's long-term ally, Salvador Allende, won the country's presidential elections at the head of a left-wing coalition government in September 1970. As Castro saw it, Allende's election was the most significant revolutionary victory in Latin America after his own, despite being very different. The new flexibility in Cuba's approach to revolutionary processes in Latin America by this point also meant that Havana was more ready and willing to embrace Chile's peaceful, democratic road to socialism. True, Chile had always been regarded as an exception by Cuba in relation to the need for armed struggle. There were also many within the Cuban leadership who were sceptical about Allende's chances of building socialism by peaceful, democratic means. But in a broader regional context, Allende's Chile became another new opening and a sign that the nature of revolution was changing.<sup>68</sup>

The Cubans were not the only ones to notice this change. In the context of Allende's victory, the CIA's Office of National Estimates argued that violence was 'becoming less important as a factor in the revolutionary process'. Instead, it regarded the 'main impetus' as increasingly being 'generated within institutions of the established power structure' while the peasantry was on the 'sidelines'.<sup>69</sup> In this new context, both the United States and Cuba had to adjust. When it came to devising a policy for Chile, Castro reacted cautiously in order to avoid giving Allende's enemies reasons to attack him. He also issued instructions to work *with* and *for* the new Chilean president, thereby departing from previous Cuban attempts to act as the vanguard for other revolutionary processes. It helped that Allende re-established formal diplomatic relations with Havana a week after assuming the presidency, despite Castro having advised him to wait. With a new formal relationship, Chile and Cuba opened a direct flight between Santiago and Havana in June 1971. And when Cuba opened its embassy in Chile, it also sent officials down to Santiago who worked not only on Chilean affairs but also on neighbouring countries such as Bolivia, Argentina and Uruguay.<sup>70</sup>

<sup>68</sup> For a detailed study of Cuba's relations with Allende, see Harmer, *Allende's Chile*.

<sup>69</sup> CIA Office of National Estimates, 'The Changing Revolutionary Process'.

<sup>70</sup> Interviews with Michel Vázquez Montes de Oca and Nelly A. Cubillas Pino, and Luis Suárez Salazar. See also interviews with Luis Fernández Oña, Havana, 3 Sep. 2005; and Luis Fernández Oña and Neida Guerra, Havana, 19 April 2011.

The Cubans were particularly interested in Bolivia and Uruguay. In Bolivia, Alfredo Ovando and Juan José Torres had come to power in September 1969 and October 1970 respectively, being regarded by the Cubans as potentially progressive nationalist military leaders. In Uruguay, meanwhile, the country was gearing up for elections that would determine whether Chile's road to socialism could be replicated. The Tupamaros even put their operations on hold and offered support to a left-wing coalition, the Frente Amplio (Broad Front). As a statement issued by the group in December 1970 explained, 'We maintain our differences of method with the organizations that make up the front and the tactical validity of its declared and immediate objective: the elections. Nevertheless we consider it desirable to give our support.'<sup>71</sup>

The Cubans encouraged this decision. As they surveyed developments, they were also now more reluctant to support armed action than they might have been three years before. CIA analysts reported a 'more realistic' and 'less violent approach that is more likely to diminish Cuba's isolation than continuation of support to guerrilla groups.' Although US officials kept very quiet about these changes – preferring to maintain rhetoric in public about Cuban subversion – they had a good grasp of them:

Training in guerrilla warfare and other paramilitary subjects is now given only to small, select groups. Logistical support still continues to some rebel groups but it is restricted to very small amounts of arms, ammunition, and communications equipment ... [Meanwhile,] Chile, Peru, Uruguay, Bolivia and Guatemala, in that order [are] ... the most important Latin American countries in Havana's foreign policy scheme ... Fidel Castro has issued instructions to maintain complete cooperation with Chile at all costs. In the case of Peru, where the situation is very promising, no [guerrilla] operations are to be undertaken for fear of upsetting the favourable trend of events. Subversive groups in Nicaragua, Colombia, and Venezuela are considered too disorganized, undisciplined, and untrustworthy to merit more than token Cuban support.<sup>72</sup>

The Cuban leadership also appears to have quickly grown disillusioned with urban guerrilla movements. Marighella was killed in November 1969, and the Brazilian urban guerrilla movement was so undermined by divisions and military-led reprisals that it had ceased to be a significant force by 1971. In Uruguay and Argentina the prominence of the urban guerrilla movements was also eliciting fierce response.<sup>73</sup> CIA analysts thus concluded that despite being a continuing reality, guerrilla groups were unlikely to overthrow governments.<sup>74</sup>

<sup>71</sup> See 'MLN Position on the Broad Front', *Tricontinental Bulletin*, 62 (May 1971), p. 44; and Wright, *Latin America*, p. 100.

<sup>72</sup> Directorate of Intelligence, *Central Intelligence Bulletin*, 28 Aug. 1971, CREST.

<sup>73</sup> Wright, *Latin America*, pp. 99–100, 104, 106.

<sup>74</sup> CIA Office of National Estimates, 'The Changing Revolutionary Process'.

There is also evidence to suggest that the Cubans were disparaging about the Tupamaros' ideological basis and ability to seize power.<sup>75</sup>

As urban guerrilla movements ran into increasing difficulties, other setbacks undermined Cuba's courtship of different revolutionary processes in late 1971. The Bolivian coup in August that overthrew Torres was one such significant blow. As the Polish ambassador in Havana reported back to Warsaw, the Cubans saw the coup not only as a Bolivian setback but also as a 'wider problem' for Latin America's revolutionary chances given the significance of Bolivia's geographical position and its centrality in past revolutionary struggles, Che Guevara's included.<sup>76</sup> The coup's leader, General Hugo Banzer, had close ties to Brazil's military dictatorship and the United States. He also quickly embarked on a crackdown on the Left, arresting and disappearing ELN members and sending the surviving remnants of the organisation fleeing into exile. Moreover, his counter-offensive was read as a sign of worse to come.<sup>77</sup>

The Cuban leadership responded to the Bolivian coup by re-establishing ties with the ELN and publicly calling on revolutionaries to offer 'support and moral and material encouragement to the Bolivians in their struggle for liberation'.<sup>78</sup> In reality, however, the CIA could find 'little evidence of Cuban subversive actions against Bolivia' after Banzer's coup.<sup>79</sup> US analysts also observed that Castro was 'at pains to emphasize that his prescription of armed struggle as the "only alternative" now for Bolivia did not imply diminution of Cuban support for peaceful revolutionary processes in Chile and Peru'.<sup>80</sup>

Even so, the Frente Amplio's defeat only a few months later diminished the idea of Chile's process being repeated. Uruguay's new government also increasingly called in the military to clamp down on urban guerrilla activities. When, in April 1972, the Tupamaros killed four men that they accused of belonging to Uruguayan death squads, the country's new president, Juan María Bordaberry, used the incident as a pretext to retaliate. The Tupamaros' safe houses were raided, over 100 of them were killed and the group's leaders were imprisoned or fled to Chile. In June 1973, Uruguay's Congress was also closed, ushering in a right-wing civilian-military dictatorship.<sup>81</sup>

<sup>75</sup> 'Notes on the Conversations with Roa', AMSZ.

<sup>76</sup> Ambassador Marian Renke, Polish embassy, Havana, to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, memorandum, 15 March 1972, wiazka 3/12/78, AMSZ. See also 'Notes on the Conversations with Roa', AMSZ.

<sup>77</sup> See 'Bolivia: People Aplenty, but They Lacked Arms', *Tricontinental Bulletin*, 68 (Nov. 1971), p. 7; and Harmer, *Allende's Chile*, pp. 125–6.

<sup>78</sup> See Fidel Castro, 27 Aug. 1971, quoted in Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS), 'Trends in Communist Propaganda', 1 Sep. 1971, CREST; and Rodríguez Ostria, *Sin tiempo para las palabras*, pp. 582–3.

<sup>79</sup> Interagency Intelligence Memorandum, 'Cuban Support for Nationalist Movements'.

<sup>80</sup> FBIS, 'Trends in Communist Propaganda'. <sup>81</sup> Wright, *Latin America*, pp. 100–1.

The situation in Chile was also worrying. From mid-1971, a growing economic crisis and opposition to Allende's administration, sponsored heavily by the United States, was undermining the government. When Castro had visited Chile at the end of 1971 – calling his visit a 'symbolic meeting between two historical processes' – he had openly warned of a confrontation.<sup>82</sup> Castro had therefore hoped to persuade his Chilean comrades of the value of Cuba's own experience and to suggest that they might draw important lessons from Cuba's ability to defend itself militarily.<sup>83</sup> As he put it, Chileans had to 'arm the spirit' in preparation for a future confrontation with the opposition.<sup>84</sup> Although Castro believed that 'each country must undergo its own distinct revolutionary process', the CIA observed, 'he clearly is not discounting violence as a means to maintain revolutionary impetus'.<sup>85</sup>

However, Castro now advocated preparatory defensive violence in Chile rather than proactive guerrilla warfare as he might have done in previous years. Beyond Chile, Castro's reluctance to support armed insurgencies also continued. For example, he now tried to persuade the Dominican Republic's exiled leader, Colonel Francisco Caamaño, not to launch an armed attack on his home country despite Caamaño having been in Cuba training for precisely such an operation since 1967. Caamaño's failure and death in February 1973 served to confirm that Castro had been right in trying to stop him. As the Cuban leader later recalled, 'We merely wanted him to stay alive'.<sup>86</sup>

In the context of these setbacks, Juan Velasco's Peru was a welcome distraction and received increasing coverage in Cuban newspapers. Not only did it appear more secure than Allende's Chile, but the Peruvians had also tabled a motion in the OAS to allow members to re-establish relations with Cuba. When this failed, Peru followed Chile's example in unilaterally re-establishing diplomatic relations with Cuba on 8 July 1972.<sup>87</sup> Unlike Havana's more ideological relationship with Santiago, which was handled primarily by Castro and Manuel Piñeiro, who headed the General National Liberation

<sup>82</sup> Fidel Castro, press conference, Havana, 10 Nov. 1971, published as 'Entrevista', in Castro, *Cuba–Chile* (Havana: Ediciones Políticas, Comisión de Orientación Revolucionaria del Comité Central del Partido Comunista de Cuba, 1972), p. 14.

<sup>83</sup> Fidel Castro, speech, Santiago, 25 Nov. 1971, published as 'Teatro Municipal', in Castro, *Cuba–Chile*, p. 380; Castro, speech, 25 Nov. 1971, published as 'Santa Cruz, Colchagua', in Castro, *Cuba–Chile*, p. 365; and Castro, speech, 2 Dec. 1971, published as 'Acto de Despedida', in Castro, *Cuba–Chile*, p. 480.

<sup>84</sup> Castro, dialogue with students, 29 Nov. 1971, published as 'Universidad Técnica del Estado', in Castro, *Cuba–Chile*, pp. 439, 444.

<sup>85</sup> Directorate of Intelligence, *Central Intelligence Bulletin*, 4 Dec. 1971, CREST.

<sup>86</sup> Fidel Castro, press conference, Caracas, 1989, quoted in Fred Halliday, *Caamaño in London: The Exile of a Latin American Revolutionary* (London: Institute for the Study of the Americas, 2011), p. 50. On the reduction of Cuba's support for Caamaño, see also Alarcón Ramírez, *Memorias*, pp. 213–19.

<sup>87</sup> Domínguez, *To Make a World Safe for Revolution*, pp. 225–6.

Department at the Ministry of the Interior, Cuba's relations with Peru were handled by Cuba's armed forces on account of Lima's military government. The Cuban leadership nevertheless nurtured the new state-level relationship. As Cuba's foreign minister, Raul Roa, proclaimed, Cuba was no longer isolated in the hemisphere. There were now three types of revolution in Latin America: Cuba's, Chile's and Peru's.<sup>88</sup>

Cuba's rapprochement with the USSR was also picking up pace and was consolidated when Castro visited Moscow as part of a lengthy tour of Africa, Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. Although Castro distanced himself and left others to negotiate the finer details of Cuba's economic relationship with the Soviet bloc, Cuba nevertheless gained membership of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance in mid-1972 and signed five new major treaties with Moscow.<sup>89</sup> This did not mean Cuba was turning its back on Latin America, Castro insisted, but rather that Latin America's 'hour of revolution' had not yet arrived, which confirmed the need for realignment towards the East.<sup>90</sup>

Indeed, consolidating the Cuban Revolution and reducing Cuba's isolation through engagement with Peru and Chile, as long as Allende's government lasted, seemed the best Havana's leaders could hope for. As Piñero told intelligence officers in August 1972, the 'prospects for Latin American liberation now appear to be medium- or long-term. We must prepare ourselves to wait – to wait as long as necessary: 10, 15, 20 or even 30 years.'<sup>91</sup> Meanwhile, Cuba explored opportunities for engaging with other nationalists such as Panama's General Omar Torrijos and Juan Domingo Perón, who returned to Argentina in mid-1973. With the prospect of diplomatic opportunities, Cuba's Foreign Ministry also reopened its Latin American Department in mid-1972 (this department had been closed for eight years following OAS sanctions). Castro and Piñero still retained control of policy toward the region, but Cuba was nevertheless signalling that it was ready for new diplomatic openings.<sup>92</sup>

<sup>88</sup> Raul Roa, cited in Oficio, Chilean embassy, Havana, to Señor Ministro, 10 July 1972, Oficios Conf., Cuba, 1972, Archivo General Histórico, Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Santiago.

<sup>89</sup> See Mesa-Lago, *Cuba in the 1970s*, pp. 16–21; and Schoultz, *That Infernal Little Cuban Republic*, p. 250.

<sup>90</sup> Fidel Castro, 26 July 1972, quoted in H. Michael Erisman, *Cuba's International Relations: The Anatomy of a Nationalistic Foreign Policy* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1985), pp. 53–4.

<sup>91</sup> Manuel Piñero, speech to the Departamento General de Liberación Nacional (General National Liberation Department, DGLN) at the Cuban Ministry of the Interior, 5 Aug. 1972, in Suárez Salazar (ed.), *Manuel Piñero*, p. 98.

<sup>92</sup> Interviews with Carlos Amat, Cuban diplomat, Ministry of Foreign Relations (MINREX), Havana, 24 April 2006; and José Viera, Cuban diplomat, MINREX, Havana, 28 April 2006.

When explaining how this fitted in with Cuba's broader revolutionary goals in mid-1973, Piñeiro encouraged intelligence officers to look at the context they faced. He warned that Cubans could no longer 'deceive' themselves 'with the idea of a sweeping victory throughout Latin America':

The revolutionary process inevitably advances, taking the most diverse forms, but it must confront very complex situations and powerful enemies ... we must be prepared to struggle as long as necessary and oppose the enemy on any terrain ... Life teaches us that revolutions don't go along beaten paths. We see this now in Latin America. Chile, Peru, Argentina and Panama are expressions of extremely varied, complex and convulsive political situations.<sup>93</sup>

In the short term, Chile's situation proved most convulsive. As the CIA noted, the country was seen as a 'weather vane' in Latin America, and the right-wing Chilean coup on 11 September certainly had regional consequences. US analysts were not immediately sure what the implications were. 'With more than half of the countries of Latin America controlled by military-dominated governments, youths will be strongly tempted to turn to violence', the CIA posited. 'Castro, who in recent years has also pursued a more cautious line, has new cause to reappraise his position and could decide to increase the amount and types of support to revolutionary groups.'<sup>94</sup>

Castro drew the opposite conclusion, however. True, the coup had been devastating for Cuba's approach to working with different Latin American revolutionary processes. Not only was Cuba's main hope dashed, but when Cuban personnel stationed in Santiago fled the country, Havana was also logistically frozen out of the Southern Cone. Uruguayan, Bolivian and Argentine far-Left exiles residing in Chile during the Allende years were now also hunted down by the repressive new Chilean regime. The Cubans therefore essentially resigned themselves to a position of retreating. When the leaders of the far-Left Chilean group, the Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria (Movement of the Revolutionary Left, MIR), the Uruguayan Tupamaros and the Bolivian ELN pledged to kick-start a new continental insurgency, Castro reportedly urged them not to embark on suicidal operations.<sup>95</sup> Similarly, when Chilean exiles arrived in Cuba and sought assistance to be able to return to Chile and fight against the dictatorship, Havana's leaders were reluctant. As the CIA observed, the Cubans felt force would be needed to overturn the coup, but were 'cautious about the time and place ... The Cubans are not sanguine about the prospects for converting the

<sup>93</sup> Manuel Piñeiro, speech to the DGLN, 8 June 1973, in Suárez Salazar (ed.), *Manuel Piñeiro*, p. 102.

<sup>94</sup> Intelligence Memorandum, 'Latin America: The Aftermath of the Chilean Coup', 15 Sep. 1973, CREST.

<sup>95</sup> John Dinges, *The Condor Years: How Pinochet and His Allies Brought Terrorism to Three Continents* (New York: The New Press, 2004), p. 56.



Chilean exiles into guerrilla fighters but they have tried to induce a combative spirit ... some exiles have been provided training for eventual infiltration into Chile.<sup>96</sup>

Why did Cuba not train more Chilean exiles to return immediately? Ulises Estrada, Piñero's then second-in-command, explained years later that the conditions were extremely difficult. Infiltrating revolutionaries into Chile involved immense risk and took a long time to organise. In his words, the situation in the aftermath of the coup was 'crazy' and the resistance movement was 'fragile'.<sup>97</sup> The Cubans were also concerned that acute divisions among Chilean left-wing parties would undermine any support that the Cubans were able to offer.<sup>98</sup> Beatriz Allende, who had escaped from Chile to Cuba after the coup, was one of those desperate to return to Chile; she reportedly got on her knees to beg Piñero to help her go back and fight the dictatorship, but he refused because of the low feasibility of such an operation.<sup>99</sup>

In weighing up the practicability and cost of such ventures, the Cubans were not turning their backs on the merits of armed struggle or their revolutionary duty. On 28 September 1973 Castro announced that there was 'no longer any alternative except armed struggle', and in early 1974 Piñero reaffirmed that socialism would never triumph with 'bloodless revolutions'.<sup>100</sup> Particularly after the 1971 Bolivian coup and the growing crisis in Chile, references to armed struggle had also already reappeared in official Cuban speeches.<sup>101</sup> The Cubans were therefore essentially back to square one in emphasising that armed struggle would ultimately be necessary for revolutions to succeed. The difference now was that the Cubans were anxious not to encourage risky revolutionary ventures that were doomed to failure from the outset. If the odds had been stacked against them and their allies in the 1960s, the situation a decade later was even more dangerous. 'Today's Latin America', Piñero told intelligence officers in early 1974, 'doesn't have the same panorama as Latin America had in the past when revolutionary combatants from its different

<sup>96</sup> Interagency Intelligence Memorandum, 'Anti-Junta Activity Outside of Chile', 12 Aug. 1974, CREST.

<sup>97</sup> Interview with Ulises Estrada, Cuban intelligence official, MININT, Havana, 19 April 2011.

<sup>98</sup> Interagency Intelligence Memorandum, 'Cuban Support for Nationalist Movements', July 1977; and 'Anti-Junta Activity Outside of Chile', 12 Aug. 1974. On Chilean left-wing divisions, see also Victor R. Figueroa Clark, 'Chilean Internationalism and the Sandinista Revolution, 1978–1988', unpubl. doctoral diss., London School of Economics, 2010, pp. 75–83.

<sup>99</sup> Interview with Ulises Estrada. See also interview with Luis Fernández Oña, 6 April 2011.

<sup>100</sup> Fidel Castro, speech at Havana's Plaza de la Revolución, 28 Sep. 1973, Castro Speech Database; and Manuel Piñero, speech to DGLN, 28 April 1974, in Suárez Salazar (ed.), *Manuel Piñero*, pp. 112, 107, 114.

<sup>101</sup> See Carlos Rafael Rodríguez, quoted in Karen Wald, 'Cuban Line Stays Revolutionary', *National Guardian*, 8 Aug. 1972.

countries and the heroic representatives of our people [such as] Che ... risked their lives for its freedom.<sup>102</sup>

Instead, the Cubans waited for better times ahead, emphasising the need for consolidation, discipline and military fortitude.<sup>103</sup> As the CIA observed in 1975, 'guerrilla training that Cubans still offer to foreign revolutionaries is aimed at maintaining small nuclei of paramilitary specialists for future contingencies, rather than as part of on-going plans to infiltrate guerrillas back into their countries for the purpose of armed subversion.'<sup>104</sup> Indeed, Havana's leaders, mindful of Latin America's unfavourable conditions, now distanced themselves from the previously celebrated idea, propagated by Che Guevara, that armed struggle itself could automatically generate revolutionary conditions where they did not exist.

### *Diplomacy and Trade*

While the Cubans prepared to wait, they placed ever more emphasis on reducing hemispheric isolation. Indeed, Piñeiro explained to Cuban intelligence agents that there were 'sectors of some national bourgeoisie' that Cuba could work with. 'It would be a childish mistake' not to do so while waiting to fight a 'final battle to seize political power', he argued.<sup>105</sup> Specifically, he pointed to the role that Latin American 'progressives' could play, and to Peru, Panama, Argentina, Venezuela and Colombia as countries that recognised 'the need to adopt certain independent positions' vis-à-vis the United States.<sup>106</sup> His comments reflected the broader rise of Latin America's 'diplomatic challenge' to US positions in North-South debates and the region's growing role in third world forums.<sup>107</sup> In short, while the Cubans waited for revolutionary conditions to re-emerge, they would seize the opportunities available in Latin America to strengthen the Cuban Revolution and engage others that opposed US positions in the hemisphere.

This approach bore fruit. Between 1973 and 1975, Argentina, Panama, Venezuela and Colombia followed Chile and Peru in re-establishing commercial and diplomatic relations with Havana. In December 1972,

<sup>102</sup> Manuel Piñeiro, speeches to DGLN, 28 April and 2 March 1974, in Suárez Salazar (ed.), *Manuel Piñeiro*, pp. 109, 105.

<sup>103</sup> Manuel Piñeiro, speech to DGLN, 28 April 1974, in Suárez Salazar (ed.), *Manuel Piñeiro*, pp. 112, 107, 114.

<sup>104</sup> Office of Current Intelligence and Directorate of Operations, 'The Status of Cuban Subversion'. See also Interagency Intelligence Memorandum, 'Cuban Support for Nationalist Movements'.

<sup>105</sup> Manuel Piñeiro, speech to DGLN, 25 July 1975, in Suárez Salazar (ed.), *Manuel Piñeiro*, p. 120.

<sup>106</sup> Piñeiro, speech to DGLN, 28 April 1974, in Suárez Salazar (ed.), *Manuel Piñeiro*, p. 113.

<sup>107</sup> Brands, *Latin America's Cold War*, pp. 129–63.

Barbados, Guyana, Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago had also all established diplomatic relations, providing Cuba with new openings in the English-speaking Caribbean. Meanwhile, pressures mounted within the OAS to redress the issue of collective sanctions. As the CIA noted, there appeared to be a growing 'trend towards [Cuba's] reintegration'. 'The Castro regime has not merely been a passive beneficiary of this trend', analysts observed, 'but has sought at every turn to strengthen it.'<sup>108</sup>

The United States initially tried to resist the trend, insisting on the dangers of Cuban subversion in the Americas despite intelligence to the contrary, but its officials faced an uphill challenge. 'I have the impression that continued reiteration of our policy will fall on increasingly deaf ears', Ambassador Robert McClintock wrote home to Washington from Caracas. 'We are really no longer "consulting" with governments but repeating what they have heard many times over and [with] which they are increasingly disposed not to agree.'<sup>109</sup> El Salvador's government did not want to re-establish relations with Cuba, for example, but the director of international organisations at the country's Foreign Ministry told the US ambassador that 'the facts no longer justified the sanctions and that, to preserve the OAS as a viable institution, they should be ended'.<sup>110</sup> Indeed, for many Latin American governments, the question was not whether they wanted to re-establish relations with Havana or whether Cuba was an agreeable hemispheric actor, but whether the continuation of sanctions was realistic, capable of containing Castro or beneficial to inter-American security and cooperation. As Latin American diplomats told their US counterparts, as long as unilateral moves to normalise relations with Havana existed, not reviewing sanctions risked damaging the OAS. Even Guatemala's right-wing military regime, which renounced all interest in renewing relations with Cuba, privately affirmed that it was 'prepared to go along with the lifting of sanctions'.<sup>111</sup> On assuming the presidency of Venezuela, which had been trading with Cuba since the end of 1973, Carlos Andrés Pérez bluntly told the US ambassador that if something was not done to deal with the deadlock regarding Cuba, it could 'wreck the inter-American system'.<sup>112</sup>

Finally, at the end of 1974, fearing that it would lose the power to influence events, Washington began secret negotiations with Havana. A week after

<sup>108</sup> Directorate of Intelligence, *Central Intelligence Bulletin*, 16 July 1973, CREST.

<sup>109</sup> Robert J. McClintock, American embassy, Caracas, to secretary of state, 13 July 1974, Electronic Telegrams, Department of State, Central Foreign Policy Files, NARA, available at <http://aad.archives.gov/aad/series-description.jsp?s=4073> (hereafter DOS/CFP).

<sup>110</sup> Sam Moskowitz, American embassy, San Salvador, to secretary of state, 30 Aug. 1974, DOS/CFP.

<sup>111</sup> Francis E. Meloy, American embassy, Guatemala, to secretary of state, 13 Sep. 1974 and 20 June 1975, DOS/CFP.

<sup>112</sup> McClintock, American embassy, Caracas, to secretary of state, 13 July 1974, DOS/CFP.

Gerald Ford assumed the presidency, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger had urged him to move on the issue. Preparing for an OAS foreign ministers' conference in Quito that November, Kissinger argued that the United States had to 'keep the initiative' and urged Ford to abstain from voting rather than oppose a motion to end sanctions against Cuba. When those proposing the motion fell short of acquiring a two-thirds majority at Quito, the issue did not disappear. Perhaps more importantly, US policy-makers readily admitted that unilateral diplomatic and trade moves by OAS members meant Cuba was no longer effectively isolated.<sup>113</sup> In July 1975, the United States therefore voted with the majority of the OAS to allow a simple majority to end collective inter-American sanctions against Cuba (only Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay opposed the vote, with Brazil and Nicaragua abstaining).<sup>114</sup> The Ford administration's decision rested on fears of isolation and very preliminary US–Cuban contacts. However, as Lars Schoultz has argued, Cuba's evolving approach to Latin America was also crucial in persuading Ford and Kissinger to relax the United States' position on Cuba within the inter-American system.<sup>115</sup>

The Cubans embraced their new position within the inter-American system. Cuba was readmitted into the group of Latin American countries at the United Nations for the first time since 1964 and assumed a seat on the UN Economic and Social Council.<sup>116</sup> Meanwhile, Cuba gained economically. In late 1973, for example, Argentina announced that it would offer Cuba US\$ 200 million in credits to buy Argentine goods, with the promise of more to come. Subsidiaries of US firms in Argentina also began exploring trade with Cuba, thereby putting pressure on the US-led trade embargo on the island and straining Washington's relations with other subsidiaries throughout the hemisphere. Crucially, Washington subsequently backed down in Argentina's case, offering special permission for subsidiaries of Ford, General Motors and Chrysler to trade with Cuba.<sup>117</sup> The United States then granted Mexico and Canada exceptional trading rights, leading Mexican sales to Cuba to double between 1972 and 1975. And on 21 August 1975, the United States ended sanctions on all foreign subsidiaries trading with Cuba.<sup>118</sup>

Given the vastly circumscribed prospects for revolutionary change in the region, the Cubans had very little choice but to make the most of these developments. As a result of the deteriorating possibilities available

<sup>113</sup> Schoultz, *That Infernal Little Cuban Republic*, pp. 262–3.

<sup>114</sup> Domínguez, *To Make a World Safe for Revolution*, p. 227.

<sup>115</sup> Schoultz, *That Infernal Little Cuban Republic*, pp. 263, 271. <sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 262.

<sup>117</sup> Office of Current Intelligence and Directorate of Operations, 'The Status of Cuban Subversion'. See also Schoultz, *That Infernal Little Cuban Republic*, pp. 271–3.

<sup>118</sup> Domínguez, *To Make a World Safe for Revolution*, p. 227. See also Schoultz, *That Infernal Little Cuban Republic*, p. 226.

for autonomous Cuban action in Latin America, they now stressed the importance of unity within the international communist camp and attached themselves to Soviet analyses of détente though they had been privately outspoken in their opposition to it with Soviet bloc allies a few years earlier.<sup>119</sup> Castro also acknowledged errors in believing that Cuba could construct socialism independently. 'Had we been humbler', he told the Cuban Communist Party's First Congress in 1975, 'had we not over-estimated ourselves, we would have been able to understand that revolutionary theory was not sufficiently developed in our country.'<sup>120</sup> He also told delegates that Latin America was not now on the eve of socialist transformation; instead, there was 'a general awareness' of 'a contradiction of interests' between the United States and Latin America that required the broadest united resistance to North American imperialism. In other words, instead of striving for immediate, definitive socialist revolution, Cuba had to work with Latin American countries of different ideological and political persuasions in order to resist US influence in the hemisphere. Or, as Castro put it, 'The application of principles of peaceful coexistence in foreign policy means that our relations are not restricted by ... ideological differences.'<sup>121</sup>

It was not until the late 1970s and 1980s that Castro's support for armed revolution in Latin America grew again, this time in Central America.<sup>122</sup> Cuba was also by then heavily stretched and involved in Africa, where it had tens of thousands of soldiers fighting in Angola and Ethiopia. The decision to turn to Africa at the end of 1975 had not been an accident. Instead, it responded to the circumstances that opened up as a result of Portuguese decolonisation following the collapse of Portugal's dictatorship in 1974, the shift in Cuban approaches to revolution and Latin American developments themselves, Cuba's previous engagement with Africa, and the Cuban leadership's ongoing commitment to revolutionary internationalism that had characterised Cuba's foreign policy in the 1960s. Indeed, Castro's belief in every revolutionary's 'duty' to make revolution had been redirected rather than abandoned in the late 1960s and 1970s. Cuba's leaders had tactically retreated and changed

<sup>119</sup> On Castro's fierce opposition to détente, see Foreign Ministry report, 'Initial Assessment of Comrade Fidel Castro's Visit to Poland', 13 June 1972, wiazka 3/13/78, AMSZ.

<sup>120</sup> Gott, *Cuba*, p. 245.

<sup>121</sup> 'Informe del Comité Central del Partido Comunista de Cuba al Primer Congreso, presentado por el Comandante en Jefe Fidel Castro Ruz, Primer Secretario del Comité Central del Partido Comunista de Cuba y Primer Ministro del Gobierno Revolucionario. Teatro "Carlos Marx", in *Memorias: Primer Congreso del Partido Comunista de Cuba* (Havana: Departamento de Orientación Revolucionaria del Comité Central del Partido Comunista de Cuba, 1976), pp. 142–4, 149.

<sup>122</sup> On Cuba's support for the Sandinista National Liberation Front and the Nicaraguan Revolution of July 1979, see Gary Prevost, 'Cuba and Nicaragua: A Special Relationship?', *Latin American Perspectives*, 17: 3 (1990), pp. 120–37.

course, smoothing over relations with the Soviet Union, preserving their forces and opening state-level relations with other countries of the hemisphere while they waited for the prospects for revolutionary change to improve.

### *Conclusions*

Castro's position in 1975 can only be understood with reference to the tumultuous years that preceded it and the broader inter-American context in which Cuba operated. As is to be expected in the making of any foreign policy, the Cuban leadership responded and adjusted to the context it faced, seizing opportunities that presented themselves and safeguarding resources and personnel where they did not. As we have seen, and as the CIA would reflect in 1977, the 'break away from large-scale support of violent revolution was neither quick nor clean'.<sup>123</sup> Cuba's leaders had first embraced the idea of two, three, many different revolutionary options in Latin America at once that included armed struggle, but then downplayed its necessity and resisted its use in the context of changed circumstances.

All was not lost in Latin America when initial hopes for multiple revolutions dissipated. True, Peru moved to the right in 1975–6. Yet at the same time as the Cubans had interacted with different revolutionary processes and reduced support for armed insurgency in the period between 1969 and 1975, they had also undergone a period of considerable introspection and adaptation that left them far less formally isolated and vulnerable than they had been at the end of the 1960s. As far as we know, this approach had more to do with internal Cuban reviews regarding prospects in Latin America and the situation in the region than instructions from Moscow, although Cuban and Soviet interests increasingly converged in the region as Cuba's options shrank. US policy also tended to respond to shifting Cuban approaches to Latin America rather than the other way around during this period. Certainly, Washington's ongoing Cold War in Latin America appears to have had more of an effect on Cuba than did its policy of détente with the Soviet Union.

The significance of these conclusions is fourfold. First, they show that Cuba's policy towards Latin America cannot be understood without close attention to relations between Havana and other regional actors. As we have seen, the Cuban leadership and the Latin American political leaders with which it interacted were also primarily the protagonists of their own foreign policies and the international relations they pursued. Second, these conclusions challenge the view that Che Guevara's death was the pivotal turning point in Cuba's approach to revolution in Latin America. Instead, it should be seen as having contributed towards wider processes of

<sup>123</sup> Interagency Intelligence Memorandum, 'Cuban Support for Nationalist Movements'.



disillusionment and setbacks that reinforced each other at the end of the 1960s. Third, a close look at Cuba's policy and the prospects for revolutionary change in Latin America during the 1960s and 1970s shows how much the Southern Cone's dictatorships exaggerated in subsequently claiming that armed revolution was around the corner. Their dirty wars and Operation Condor – framed as a necessary battle against armed extremists poised to seize power – were premised on a fantastical reading of an acutely asymmetrical balance of forces in the region that favoured them and not their enemies, as the Cubans themselves acknowledged. Finally, the story of Cuba's shifting approach to Latin America in the late 1960s and early 1970s has a direct relevance for debates regarding Cuba's more recent relationships. While successive US governments continue to wilfully misunderstand and misrepresent Cuba as part of an axis of evil and relentless instability, Havana is currently conducting a nuanced, carefully considered and responsive policy in the region, as it has done since 1969. Having adapted to changed circumstances, it did not significantly revitalise support for armed struggle in South America. It has long supported social programmes aimed at improving health and education across the region, and in 2012 offered its good offices in the Colombian peace process. To be sure, it is not entirely accurate to state that Cuba's foreign policy towards Latin America has *always* been flexible towards different progressive and revolutionary processes as the Cuban historian Luis Suárez Salazar argues.<sup>124</sup> Cuba's approach to the region has been neither static nor linear since 1959. Yet, at least from 1968–9, Castro certainly became more flexible than he had been, choosing a line of careful adaptation and selective engagement with Latin American left-wing groups.

We will have to wait until Cuba's archives are open to fully grasp the details of Cuba's readjustment towards the prospects for revolutionary change in the region since 1959. For now, published sources, interviews, newly declassified US intelligence material and glimpses of what the Cubans were saying to their Soviet bloc allies, such as those offered by declassified Polish sources in this article, shed considerable light on a transformative period in Cuba's Latin American policy. US intelligence analyses, in particular, are invaluable; when cross-referenced with the other sources, they show how accurate Washington's information on Cuba's broad foreign policy directions was. But they also highlight the disjuncture between the intelligence that US policy-makers had and their ongoing efforts, even in the mid-1970s, to persuade Latin American governments that Cuba needed to be isolated precisely because of its extensive

<sup>124</sup> Luis Suárez Salazar, 'The Cuban Revolution and the New Latin American Leadership: A View from Its Utopias', *Latin American Perspectives*, 165: 36 (2009), pp. 114–27. While acknowledging that tactical shifts occurred in Cuba's Latin American policies, Suárez Salazar cites Che's message to OSPAAAL as 'the total destruction of imperialism' (p. 124), omitting the original reference to achieving this through armed struggle.

support for armed insurgency. This misinformation about the potency of Cuban support for revolution was dangerous because it fed into right-wing dictatorships' anti-communist crusades, with toxic results. And this, in turn, leads to even more questions about how exactly Cuba was perceived throughout the hemisphere, why and how regional actors responded to it and what effect this had on the ideological Cold War struggle to determine Latin America's future.

These questions feed into a wider discussion as to how we examine Latin America's twentieth-century revolutionary and counter-revolutionary upheavals. Newly emerging scholarship on the Cold War in Latin America has stressed the need for a multidimensional, regional approach as opposed to a concentrated focus on bilateral relations, superpower interventions and regional 'puppets'. Quite simply, events in one part of the region affected what happened elsewhere. Revolutionaries and counter-revolutionaries did not frame their aims in purely national terms; their interactions with each other were fluid, dynamic and changing, and different events coincided with each other rather than occurring in a sequential form.<sup>125</sup> Cuba's shifting policies on revolutionary change in Latin America demonstrate this well. Looking at them as a whole – as opposed to isolated responses to high-profile events such as Che's death or the Chilean coup – adds to our understanding of the broader contours and dynamics of the Cold War conflict in Latin America between those who wanted to encourage socialist revolution and those who opposed it. Yet, there is far more to be learned about these overlapping international and transnational relationships – both on the Left and on the Right – if we are to get a fuller sense of what the Cold War in Latin America meant, how it developed and the extent to which its legacies continue to shape the present.

### *Spanish and Portuguese abstracts*

*Spanish abstract.* En base a entrevistas, publicaciones y archivos, este artículo examina la política cubana hacia América Latina tras la muerte de Ernesto 'Ché' Guevara. El trabajo señala que como resultado de tal evento y de otros reveses en la región, Cuba reconceptualizó sus prioridades, le quitó importancia a la revolución armada y adoptó nuevos procesos revolucionarios. Los resultados fueron mixtos. Para mediados de los años 70, La Habana estaba más desilusionada que nunca acerca de las posibilidades revolucionarias en América Latina. Sin embargo, también se había reintegrado al sistema interamericano luego de una década de aislamiento. Este artículo se pregunta cómo y por qué se dieron estos cambios en las relaciones de Cuba con América Latina, y qué consecuencias tuvieron estos en la intención declarada de Fidel Castro de 'hacer la revolución'.

<sup>125</sup> On the idea of the Cold War as 'a series of overlapping conflicts', see Brands, *Latin America's Cold War*, p. 7.

*Spanish keywords:* Cuba, relaciones internacionales, revolución, Latinoamérica

*Portuguese abstract.* Baseado em entrevistas, publicações e documentos de arquivo, este artigo examina a política de Cuba em relação à América Latina após a morte de Ernesto 'Che' Guevara. Nele se argumenta como o resultado deste evento e outros revezes na região fez Cuba reconceituar suas prioridades, tirando a ênfase da revolução armada e adotando novos processos revolucionários. Os resultados foram variados. Nos idos dos anos setenta, Havana estava mais desiludida sobre as perspectivas revolucionárias na América Latina do que nunca, no entanto ela havia se reaproximado do sistema inter-americano após mais de uma década de isolamento. O artigo questiona como, por que e com quais consequências para o empenho de Fidel Castro em 'fazer revolução' se deram estes ajustes na relação de Cuba com a América Latina.

*Portuguese keywords:* Cuba, política externa, revolução, América Latina