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CURRENT
CUBAN-SOVIET
RELATIONSHIPS
THE CHALLENGE TO U. S. POLICY

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July 21, 1974, Castro Cuddles Up to Moscow.
EARLY THIS MONTH it was revealed that Senate Foreign Relations Committee chief of staff, Pat M. Holt, was visiting in Cuba, an event which led to revived speculation regarding an imminent resumption of US relations with Cuba.

Asked about the Holt visit, Fidel Castro said on July 2 he was “willing to talk to” US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger provided the economic embargo against Cuba was “unconditionally lifted.”

US officials are reported to interpret this and other Cuban developments as indicative of a change in Castro’s position. The assumption appears to be that Castro is in effect ready to meet the conditions the US has always insisted must accompany any reconciliation: ending efforts to interfere in the affairs of other American states, and severing close political and military ties be-
tween Cuba and the USSR.

Attention has focused particularly on the change in Castro's behavior toward his neighbors and a corresponding change in some of his neighbors' attitudes toward him. Presumably this change implies other and deeper changes related to Castro's domestic purposes and to Cuba's dependence on the USSR.

But like the traditional shell game, people have been looking in one direction while the pea moves elsewhere. While speculation about a new Castro has been building, the Soviet Union and the Castro regime have been tying Cuba closer and closer to the USSR and the Soviet system.

Since 1968 a new phase has been underway in Soviet-Cuban relations. The chief features of this phase are the tightening of the Soviet grip over every aspect of Cuban life, the increasing integration of Cuba into the "socialist community of states" led by Moscow, and a shift of the Cuban regime to almost complete subservience to Soviet positions on international questions and on disputes within the world communist movement.

In return, the Soviet Union is pouring more aid into Cuba and committing itself more than ever before to the fate of the Castro regime. Cuba has become increasingly costly to the Soviet Union but the stakes are high: the establishment of the Soviet Union as a permanent fixture not merely in Cuba but in Latin America, where Moscow sees new opportunities to damage US interests in an area regarded by the Soviet Union as the "strategic rear" of "US imperialism" as well as to obtain important direct strategic benefits for the USSR as against the US.

Castro had had many positions in the past on the specific issues which need to be resolved before renewed
relations with the United States can be considered. But regardless of variants as to details, certain points have been treated as absolutes. One is the return of Guantánamo: every communiqué Castro signs with visiting dignitaries demands that the US surrender Guantánamo. Another is that there can be no discussion of Cuba’s internal order, its ties with the Soviet Union, or its support for revolutionary movements. These are matters, Castro says, of Cuban sovereignty and beyond the bounds of international discourse, especially with the United States.

The Soviet Union has committed itself to full support of Cuban positions as against the US. Soviet party leader Brezhnev during his January-February 1974 visit to Havana fully subscribed to the Guantánamo return dictum. He also stressed in public statements that the Cuban revolution has become “irreversible,” and that “revolutionary Cuba has never been and will never be alone.” He gave the Soviet stamp of approval to the Marxist-Leninist qualities of the Castro regime and to its domestic as well as foreign policies, and reflected Soviet satisfaction with the process of Cuba’s integration into the Soviet bloc. And in the June 1974 issue of the Soviet journal Latinskaia Amerika, Deputy Chairman of the Soviet Council of Ministers, Vladimir Novikov, wrote: “In the struggle for the construction of socialism, Cuba is not alone. Cuba is an integral part of the Socialist system. The interests and security of Cuba and its international positions are faithfully defended, not only by the firm policy of the Communist Party and the heroism of its revolutionary people, but also by the multifaceted support of the Soviet Union and other socialist countries.”
Within the context of US acceptance of Cuban terms, the USSR would doubtless be more than happy to see the resumption of relations between the US and Cuba. Moscow would consider this as US acceptance of the irreversibility of communism in Cuba and its ties with the USSR as well as attainment by the Soviet Union of a permanent voice in the affairs of Latin America. Restoration of US-Cuban relations would be interpreted as a US "defeat" or, if Moscow felt benevolent, it might be described as a US concession to "realism." It would be seen as meaning that the Monroe Doctrine, long since described by the Kremlin as dead, was being formally buried with US concurrence.

The decisive factor which has made possible the enhanced Soviet position in Cuba has been the series of failures suffered by Castro in foreign and domestic policy. For ten years after the Castro takeover Moscow had had to contend with Castro's revolutionary pretensions and gambles in Latin America, his attempts to manipulate Soviet relations with the United States, his freewheeling in the Sino-Soviet dispute and the world communist movement, and with his scatterbrained economic experimenting and resultant waste of Soviet and Cuban resources. After ten years of conflict interspersed with temporary accommodations with Moscow, Castro lost his room for maneuver and had to make peace on Soviet terms.

Not only has Castro had to adjust in his foreign policy positions and in his political relations with the USSR, but also in internal affairs.

For the Cuban economy, a basic deal has been worked out: in exchange for increased Soviet outlays in Cuba, Moscow has demanded — and received — a much pro-
founder orientation of the Cuban economy toward the Soviet system.

Cuba more than ever is dependent economically on the USSR and the Soviet bloc. In 1972 Cuba’s trade with the Soviet Union amounted to $992.5 million or 47.9 percent of Cuba’s total foreign trade, while the share of all communist countries in Cuban trade amounted to 69.2 percent ($1.45 billion). In 1973, Cuba’s volume of trade with the Soviets reached some $1.4 billion or more than 50% of all Cuban trade. In 1974, Cuban-Soviet trade is projected to reach $1.6 billion. Cuba remains completely dependent on the Soviet Union for oil, with deliveries now amounting to nearly 7 million tons per year (a total of 62.9 million tons from 1960 to 1972). Cuba is also dependent on the Soviet Union for machinery, rolled ferrous metals, non-ferrous metals, fertilizer, lumber, grain, flour and other foods.

Cuba’s balance of trade with the Soviet Union has consistently been unfavorable to Cuba. At present the accumulated deficit exceeds $3 billion which along with other obligations incurred means that Cuban indebtedness to the Soviet Union totals some $5 billion, a sum that by agreement Cuba will begin to repay only in 1986 and over a 25-year period. In short, the Soviet Union subsidizes the Cuban economy at the rate of $1.5 to $2 million dollars per day.

In an important but little noted event, Cuba in July 1972 became a full member of the Soviet-East European Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CEMA), the economic counterpart of the Warsaw Pact military relationship. Cuban economic activity and foreign trade, it is asserted in both Moscow and Havana, will be geared through a coordination of five-year plans to a division of
labor within the socialist community. Cuba's contribution will be to concentrate on sugar and nickel which it will supply to the other communist countries, thus finally ending the once dearly held dream of the Castro brothers to transform Cuba into a balanced, industrialized state free forever from any "colonialist" enslavement to sugar. In exchange, the other communist countries and particularly the Soviet Union are stepping up their help to Cuba to improve the sugar industry and to greatly expand nickel production.

These various arrangements commit Cuba to give first call on its production to its communist partners. This precludes Cuba from taking full advantage of the current high sugar and nickel prices on the world market and prevents it from gaining a significant degree of economic independence from the Soviet bloc. While the present price structure allows Cuba to buy a little more in the West, as for example in Canada, this does not mean that Cuba is free to substantially increase the volume of its exports to the non-communist world. Between its domestic requirements, limitations on its international sugar quota to some 2.4 million tons, and its commitments to the communist world, Cuba clearly cannot earn enough from exports to the free world to meet its own pressing import requirements.

Furthermore, in a period of global oil shortage, Cuba cannot afford to buy at current prices on the world market the oil it now receives from the USSR. Also, of course, free world prices of other goods which Cuba imports are also rising in parallel with sugar prices, leaving Cuba's present and potential exchange situation essentially as it has been in the past. Thus currently Cuba's trade with the non-communist world still remains
at less than one-third total Cuban trade, and large purchases, such as its arrangement to buy trucks in Argentina, still have to be financed on the basis of long-term credits.

Along with economic assistance, the Soviet Union over the years has equipped and reequipped the Cuban armed forces, most of it free of charge, to the tune of some $2.5 to $3 billion. And although there is no suggestion that Moscow will sign a mutual aid pact with Cuba, it implies an increased commitment to the security of Cuba as a result of Brezhnev’s declaration in 1972 that Cuba is an “integral part” of the socialist community and his statement in 1974 that it “will never be alone.” Meanwhile a closer Cuban relationship with the Warsaw Pact is indicated by high level Eastern European military visits to Cuba. In addition to Soviet Defense Minister Marshal Grechko, the head of the Polish Air Force and Bulgaria’s Deputy Defense Minister appeared in Cuba in March 1973, and the Hungarian Defense Minister in April 1974.

On the political side, the Cubans with enthusiastic Soviet approbation are moving rapidly to expand the Communist Party of Cuba so that it can play its appointed role as the leading force in Cuban society. The process is reminiscent of the technique used in the early years of communist rule in Eastern Europe. Soviet journals report with great satisfaction that “with every year, the party is politically and organizationally reinforcing its ranks and strengthening its influence over every major area of social life.”

In the past two years, high Soviet and East European functionaries have been coming to Cuba to advise and undoubtedly to monitor the organization of the Cuban
Communist Party. Five delegations from Soviet and Eastern European party work organization sections, four from propaganda, two from party building and one from an education section went to Cuba. The Soviet Minister of Internal Affairs, Minister of Education, Minister of Culture, Chairman of the State Labor and Wages Committee, Chairman of the State Television-Radio Committee, Chief of the Trade Union organization, and members of the Central Committee Secretariat all headed groups to the island. Large numbers of Cubans in turn are studying in the Higher Party School of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

Not only the party but all other Cuban institutions are being remodeled along Soviet lines. In November of last year, a trade union congress was held in Cuba after years of delay. Soviet Politburo member and head of Soviet trade unions Aleksandr Shelepin attended, thereby reflecting the importance Moscow gave the occasion and the satisfaction it felt it would get from the results.

In 1971, the small farmers organization was convened to restrict the role of the few remaining uncollectivized farmers. In 1972 the First National Congress of Education and Culture was held and a harder line proclaimed toward intellectuals. Later this year, it will be the ladies' turn with the holding of the Second Congress of the Federation of Cuban Women. The recent local elections in Matanzas Province were not a step toward democracy as some people in the US appear to believe but an exercise in the Soviet practice of utilizing a single slate of party-approved candidates as a subterfuge for popular participation in government. And perhaps most portentous of all, systematic courses on Marxism-Leninism are being introduced under Soviet tutelage at all levels of the
Cuban educational system and in the armed forces.

While all of this intertwines Castro more closely with the communist world, it also is designed to show him that his international role has been enhanced by joining that world. Soviet propaganda has been reiterating constantly that Cuba's international prestige has soared in consequence of its new orientation. A sharp increase in top-level communist pilgrimages to Cuba has taken place. In addition to Brezhnev and other high-ranking Soviets, they have included the number one leader of Outer Mongolia, Czechoslovakia, Romania, East Germany, the Premiers of Bulgaria and North Vietnam, and hosts of second rung officials. In 1972 the heads of the Communist parties of Argentina, Ecuador, Uruguay, Chile, Canada and the US came. In 1973 and up to mid-1974, the list extended to Colombia, Brazil, Mexico, Great Britain, Peru, Panama, Argentina, Spain and Portugal. Fifteen Latin American parties sent delegations to the "July 26" festivities in 1973. Havana has also become the site for a growing number of international communist conferences.

What does Moscow get from all this, especially from the admittedly costly continuing military and economic support and the special innoculations it periodically has to give the Cuban economy?

The consolidation of communist rule in Cuba strengthens the legitimacy and aspirations of the Soviet regime itself. It is used perhaps more than any other single development to demonstrate to the Soviet people and to the rest of the world the validity of the Soviet claim that victorious communism is irreversible and is indeed "the wave of the future."

The Soviet presence in Cuba is yielding important
strategic gains. It strengthens the image of Soviet power in the overall East-West context. It reinforces the impression of a Soviet counterweight to the United States in Latin America and provides a physical capability for Soviet access to other areas of the continent. It has made Cuba militarily one of the strongest countries in the area. Thanks to its access to Cuban ports and facilities, the USSR itself is on its way to becoming a Caribbean power.

The Soviet effort in 1970 to establish a nuclear submarine base in Cienfuegos demonstrated the military potential the Soviets see in Cuba. The frequent naval visits as well as the staging of Soviet long-range reconnaissance aircraft through Cuba are not meant to be lost either on the US armed forces or on Latin America. While the Soviet Union is thus creeping in, it sees the buildup of nationalist pressures to evict the US from the Panama Canal, which it is strongly encouraging, as an important new possibility for further weakening the US political, economic, and strategic position in the crucial Caribbean crossroads area.

Moscow also continues to assign a key revolutionary role to Castro. The new era of "peaceful coexistence," according to Moscow, does not apply to the world wide national liberation struggles, or the "struggle against imperialism" which Moscow claims is now surging forward in Latin America. "We know," Moscow's man in charge of world revolutionary activities wrote in Kommunist, the most authoritative of Soviet policy journals, "the tremendous role which the Cuban Revolution has played in the development of the revolutionary process in Latin America," a process which is said to be growing "at a faster pace than in other parts of the nonsocialist world" and which has transformed Latin
America into "a continent in upheaval."

The Soviets, however, view the impact of Cuba as going beyond Latin America. It is viewed as having produced "a particularly strong impression on the democratic intelligentsia and youth of the West," and to be affecting the anti-imperialist movement in Asia and Africa. "Thus," an authoritative commentary in a late 1973 issue of *Latinskaia Amerika* asserted, "during the years of the new upsurge that has started in the world revolutionary movement, the Cuban Revolution and the Cuban experience have become a channel that brings together and connects all of this movement's main currents."

Meanwhile, Moscow sees other gains. Cuba has used its new ties in Latin America in efforts to add fuel to growing antagonism toward the US. Castro has sought to form opposition blocs against the United States in the UN and related international organizations. He has also strongly urged the formation of a Latin American system from which the US will be excluded, an aim devoutly shared by the Soviet Union. The USSR sees it and Cuba as mutually reinforcing their common aims in Latin America. Serious quarrels have been over means, not ends. Seeming "respectability" for Cuba furthers respectability of the Soviet Union. A Communist Cuba integrated into the world communist system and accepted in Latin America is viewed as a direct channel for a Soviet input into the affairs of Latin America.

Also, Castro has become Moscow's most adulatory and effective champion in the Third World as a whole. Thus, at the Algiers Non-Aligned Conference in September 1973, Castro attacked those who support Chinese efforts to equate the USSR and the US as "imperialists," and told the non-aligned nations that they could remain so
only in "closest alliance" with the Soviet Union.

None of the foregoing is to say that difficulties do not lie ahead for Moscow. The year 1975 is earmarked to become the high point of Cuban integration into the Soviet system. It is then that the first Congress of the Cuban Communist Party is to be held, and the first Cuban Five-Year Plan developed in coordination with the Five-Year Plans of the USSR and other countries of Eastern Europe. These epoch-making events will involve difficult decisions and maneuvers which can be expected to bring tense moments in the relationship between Moscow and Havana and to provide an extreme test of Castro's willingness to fit into the mold of a disciplined follower of Moscow. Moscow is of course aware of these difficulties but appears to consider them outweighed by ongoing and prospective gains in Soviet prestige in Latin America and globally as well as by the steadily increasing leverage it is acquiring to make Cuba now and after Castro a dependable fixture in the Soviet scheme of things.

In the end there may be persuasive reasons for the United States to reestablish relations with Cuba. But it is clear that if it does, it will have to abandon one of the principal conditions previously put on such a move: Cuba's rejection of the establishment of a lasting foothold in the Western Hemisphere of a fundamentally hostile extra-continental power. The basic issue the US has to face up to is whether it is best to accept that the Soviet camel is already in the tent and has to be lived with on his own terms, or to continue a difficult, and in political terms perhaps increasingly costly, effort to discredit the animal in the hope of minimizing his potential for damage and perhaps of ultimately dislodging him.