

FICTION AND NONFICTION:
Problems in the Study of Cuban Foreign Policy

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- CUBA: LA SITUACION INTERNACIONAL*. By Fidel Castro. (Buenos Aires: Editorial Anteo, 1983. Pp. 136.)
- PRESENCIA DE CUBA EN EL MOVIMIENTO DE PAISES NO ALINEADOS*. (Havana: Editora Política, 1983. Pp. 39.)
- CASTRO, CUBA, AND THE WORLD*. By Edward González and David Ronfeldt. (Santa Monica, Calif.: Rand Corporation, 1986. Pp. 133. \$10.00.)
- CASTRO, SUBVERSION Y TERRORISMO EN AFRICA*. By Juan F. Benemelis. (Madrid: Editorial San Martín, 1988. Pp. 588.)
- THE SOVIET UNION AND CUBA*. By Peter Shearman. (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1987. Pp. 103.)
- TO MAKE A WORLD SAFE FOR REVOLUTION*. By Jorge I. Domínguez. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989. Pp. 365. \$35.00.)

Jorge Luis Borges readily could have written a book on Cuban foreign policy, an easy task for a writer who fictionalizes footnotes. He would have had no difficulty in reconciling contrasting interpretations of the island's international relations or speculating about possible future scenarios. Indeed, the author of *Ficciones* would have felt right at home in this field of study. The rest of us, however, cannot resort to poetic license and are therefore limited by reality, notwithstanding Jorge Domínguez's apt observation that "much of the story seems a fantasy" (p. 1).

During the past five years, several books and dozens of articles and chapters have been published on Cuba's role in world affairs. Michael Erisman (1985) and Pamela Falk (1986) led the way with their studies. While Erisman emphasized the nationalism enshrined in Cuba's contacts with the United States, the USSR, and the Third World, Falk approached the topic from an empirical perspective in order to allow the facts to speak for themselves. Raymond Duncan (1985) scrutinized the mutual, if asymmetrical, relationship between Cuba and its Soviet benefactor. Finally, Jaime Suchlicki and I edited a collection of essays covering a range of issues and geographical areas under the rubric of Cuba's new internationalism in the 1980s (Suchlicki and Fernández 1985).

In short, Cuban foreign policy has become the best studied of all

Latin American foreign policies. No doubt, Cuba's dramatic deployment of troops in Africa and extensive development assistance to Third World countries have intrigued researchers. Cuba broke the mold into which small, underdeveloped states had been cast in international relations. The island's relations with the United States, the USSR, Africa (particularly Angola and Ethiopia), and Central and Latin America have received most of the attention, a predictable pattern given the high priority of these areas on Havana's foreign-policy agenda. Cuba's incursion into regions far removed from its shores and of dubious relevance to the island's national interest has also been analyzed (Fernandez 1988). Nevertheless, gaps, dilemmas, and debates persist.

One unavoidable problem that arises in studying Cuba's foreign policy is the issue of sources. The two main difficulties are locating information and analyzing the nature of the sources. On the first point, what are the available sources? Are they adequate and for what purposes? How reliable and thorough are *Granma*, *Verde Olivo*, *Colaboración Internacional*, *Bohemia*, and the other Cuban periodicals? What about the publications of the Cuban American National Foundation, the Center for Cuban Studies, and the State Department? Do the recent academic publications from Cuba, such as *Cuadernos de Nuestra América*, and the monographs and journals published by specific research centers represent scholarship or echoes of the party line? How should analysts interpret the statements of former Cuban officials (such as General Rafael del Pino)? Do we take their words at face value now or believe what they said before, when they held posts in the Cuban government? Where is the truth to be found among all these conflicting sources? The economists who study Cuba have tackled this issue, but it has escaped resolution thus far.

The second dimension of the problem regards primary sources, most of which are published by the Cuban government. Researchers must wrestle with this issue head-on. Analysts would probably agree that government documents contain valuable information (perhaps as useful for what they conceal as for what they reveal) mixed in with a dose of propaganda. How should researchers approach such a source? The answer should be "critically or with positive skepticism, regardless of the government that produced the text," but this simple rule has not always been observed.

Studies of Cuban foreign policy have tended toward the polemical and the journalistic rather than the theoretical for several reasons. First, foreign policy is a young field of study, particularly in the case of Latin America and the Third World. Second, the immediacy of the topic lends itself to reporting sensational events. Third, lack of information makes theory-building risky and speculation tempting. Fourth, like Cuban studies in general, foreign-policy topics have been excessively politicized

along ideological lines, to the detriment of methodological and theoretical rigor. Nonetheless, the field has made remarkable strides in recent years.

The literature on Cuban foreign policy poses several key questions. Did the United States push Cuba into the arms of the Soviets? Is Cuban foreign policy independent from, dependent on, or convergent with Soviet interests? Is Cuban foreign policy driven by ideology or by pragmatism? To what extent is Fidel Castro the architect and engineer of the island's foreign policy? What are the domestic roots of Cuba's international relations? Additional concerns have arisen recently regarding the Cuban bureaucratic dimension and the decision-making process as well as Cuba's foreign-policy model. Since the mid-1980s, observers have been debating whether Havana has tempered its radicalism in the face of international odds and Soviet reforms.

At this point in the development of the scholarship, the consensus is that Havana acts in the world as neither an independent actor nor a proxy. Agreement also exists on the point that the Cuban leadership has more leeway (or relative autonomy) in its relations with the Caribbean and Latin America (areas of limited strategic importance for the Soviets) than in regions where vital Soviet interests are at stake (like the Middle East). Other issues are still being contested, such as Castro's role in shaping foreign policy. In general, divergence, rather than consensus, has been a trademark of Cuban foreign-policy studies.

These methodological, substantive, and interpretational dilemmas are all brought to the fore in the books under review here. These six books go beyond presenting old issues, however, to clear the path for new research tasks ahead. They also present, albeit unsystematically, the dimensions that when analyzed together form a skeletal model of Cuban foreign policy: leadership and ideology or worldview, the domestic political regime, Cuba's connection with the Soviet Union, and the international context.

La situación internacional, Fidel Castro's report to the Third Congress of the Partido Comunista de Cuba (PCC) held in 1986, presents Cuba's official foreign-policy line in the 1980s. This invaluable document covers a wide range of issues from the global economy and foreign debt to nuclear arms and liberation theology. The coverage of geographical areas is equally broad: from Central America and the Malvinas to South Africa and Lebanon. Although the first hundred pages deal with internal developments and many of the concerns and assumptions presented in the report are not new, *La situación internacional* reveals how Cuba adapts to changing world circumstances.

The report is descriptive, analytical, and policy-oriented as well. Its policy recommendations carry a sense of urgency based on the sense that the world is living precariously: if measures are not taken quickly, political

and economic disaster is imminent throughout the Third World (p. 107). This assessment of global conditions is neither atypical nor original to Cuba. Nor is the analytical perspective—dependency and emphasis on the nefarious influence of the United States—exclusive to Havana's world-view.

La situación internacional is most revealing when it addresses new issues rather than staid ones like U.S. hostility toward Cuba. The question of which path Latin America should pursue toward liberation seems to have been resolved, at least for the time being. Castro observes that "non-Marxist currents" can contribute to the emancipation of their societies (p. 115). He also points out that revolutions will not survive without the participation of Christians, "ni podría construirse el socialismo al menos que se cuente también con ellos" (p. 115).

Resolution of the foreign-debt crisis has become a banner of Havana's foreign policy in mid-1980s. In *La situación internacional*, Castro proposes that the developed countries cut their military spending by 12 percent and use the savings to pay off Third World debt (p. 118). To solve the other major crisis affecting the region, *el líder máximo* advocates peaceful settlement of disputes in the Central American conflict via the Contadora process (p. 114). On Central America, the nuclear arms race, and the global economy, Castro's views on paper converge with those of Gorbachev. Yet the report has little to say about the Soviet Union and Cuban-Soviet affairs. One possible explanation for this omission could be the flux, if not strain, occurring in bilateral relations during this period. Not discussing the Soviet Union at length in the report to the PCC may also signal Havana's attempt to underscore the independent nature of the island's international behavior.

In 1979 Cuba reluctantly endorsed the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, a stance that tarnished Cuba's credentials among nonaligned nations. *Presencia de Cuba en el Movimiento de los Países No Alineados* does not address this issue, however, highlighting instead Cuba's leadership role in the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). The only Latin American country present at the movement's founding in Belgrade in 1961, Cuba has become one of its most influential members. The island has distinguished itself by assuming the positions of mediator between moderates and radicals in the NAM and go-between in international conflicts (between Ethiopia and Somalia and between Iraq and Iran). Cuba's membership has strengthened the NAM (despite the 1973 controversy between Castro and Muammar Khaddafi) and vice versa. For instance, the NAM has at times offered Cuba moral and diplomatic support in opposing the United States (pp. 7–8).

Presencia de Cuba discusses, albeit schematically, Cuba's role in situations that have been neglected thus far by researchers. Information on Zimbabwe's independence, the African National Congress, Palestine,

Puerto Rico, and Surinam reveals the versatility of Cuba's international involvement. The pamphlet also provides a particularly useful glimpse of how a small country has benefited from its involvement in an international organization.

Like *La situación internacional, La presencia de Cuba en el Movimiento de los Países No Alineados* covers regional issues such as the Middle East, Southern Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean. The documents call for a renewed offensive on behalf of the New International Economic Order and appeal to the solidarity of the members of the NAM. Both sources encapsulate valuable official statements on foreign policy. But foreign policy comprises more than statements. Rather, it must be understood as a process of decision making, action, and reaction to the domestic situation and the external environment.

Edward González's and David Ronfeldt's *Castro, Cuba, and the World* views foreign policy as originating in the minds of individuals. Their purpose is to offer "a new look at Castro's political mind-set" (p. 3) and *modus operandi*. The authors analyze Castro's foreign-policy options in the late 1980s from a psychological perspective. Their central question is whether after thirty years in power, a new, less revolutionary, and increasingly reasonable Fidel has evolved. To answer this question, González and Ronfeldt elaborate a psychohistorical-mythical concept that they call "hubris-nemesis." They define hubris-nemesis as "a set of idiosyncratic behaviors for dealing with adversaries" (p. 2). Hubris is "the capital sin of personal pride, a pretension to act like a god while failing to observe the established balance of man and nature" (p. 5). Nemesis is "the obscure goddess of divine retribution, righteous anger, Olympian vengeance . . . a destructive force" (p. 5). According to González and Ronfeldt, "the two forces coalesce to reinforce each other as compatible contradictions" (p. 6). Although the authors deny that their approach is "psychological, psychiatric or psychoanalytic" or a "personality assessment" (p. 5), the reader will be hard-pressed not to place it in one or several of these categories. González and Ronfeldt state, "Our purpose is to identify key patterns of thinking and acting that have characterized Castro as a political actor" (p. 5). If this approach is not psychological, what is it? *Castro, Cuba, and the World* is certainly not a traditional study of Castroism and is the better for it.

González and Ronfeldt identify four basic characteristics of Castro's thinking and praxis: a destructive-constructive personality; high ideals and the moralization of violence; a need for absolute power, loyalty, and attention; and a fierce sense of struggle to the point of self-sacrifice. The authors analyze these traits, which they find to have developed early in Castro's life partly as a result of the *niño malcriado* syndrome. They then consider how these attributes have related to Cuba's foreign policy and how they are likely to determine the course of events well into the 1990s.

According to *Castro, Cuba, and the World*, Castro's hubris-nemesis complex has been epitomized since 1959 in Cuba's antagonism toward the United States. In the 1980s, however, reduced opportunities in Central America and the Third World and improved relations between the super-powers have left Cuba in an ambiguous and precarious position. Although "the Third World becomes the operational target of Castro's ambitions . . . , he keys his operations to the position of the United States and especially the USSR" (p. 92). Two factors that make an overseas triumph pressing for Castro are domestic difficulties and friction with the Kremlin. According to González and Ronfeldt, Castro is faced with two options: a minimalist track of tactical pragmatism or a maximalist track of offensive radicalism. They conclude that the constraints imposed by the international system will force Castro and Cuba to choose the path of tactical pragmatism. This option does not imply a "new Castro," however. Such a conclusion seems to undermine the authors' approach by underscoring that the determinant variable is the external objective reality, not the subjective one of Castro's mind-set.

Cuba, Castro, and the World is nevertheless an original piece of thought-provoking analysis. As with other research on the cutting edge, it raises more questions than it answers. First, the psychological dimension is particularly murky. Cause and effect are not firmly established, and the argument at times falls into tautology. It can be agreed that Castro has been the architect of Cuba's domestic politics and foreign policy and has consequently left his imprint. It can also be agreed that, as pointed out in Wolfenstein's study of the revolutionary personality (1966), childhood experiences (especially the relationship with the father) leave an indelible mark on individuals. Because politics is a human activity, the personality of individuals influences politics. González and Ronfeldt, however, conclude that Castro's hubris-nemesis takes a back seat to pressure from the outside world, as exemplified by fewer opportunities in the Third World and improved U.S.-Soviet relations.

Second, in focusing primarily on the leader, González and Ronfeldt neglect analyzing the followers. One cannot be explained without the other. For example, anti-U.S. attitudes are not exclusive to Castro. Furthermore, Cuba's hostility to the Colossus of the North has resulted in part from U.S. policies toward the island since 1898. Bilateral relations are a two-way street. Third, by framing the issues in the form of dichotomies—revolutionary versus reasonable, tactical pragmatist versus revolutionary maximalist—the authors might be missing the nuances of what in reality are continuums, not dichotomies. Fourth, the authors claim (in the vein of Theodore Draper) that Castro has no ideology. Yet they found that Castro's pattern of thought and behavior has been quite consistent over time. What, then, is their definition of ideology? What is *fidelismo*, a term González and Ronfeldt employ but do not define. Other scholars

working from a different perspective, such as Andrés Suárez, have analyzed convincingly the fixed set of beliefs that determine Castro's political behavior (Suárez 1985). The works of scholars like David Apter (1963) on political religion and Clifford Geertz on ideology as a cultural system (1964) also shed light on this issue. Finally, what is the explanatory value of the labels *raúlista* and *fidelistá* as tools that supposedly differentiate among various groups within the top circle of revolutionary leaders?

In *Castro, subversión y terrorismo en África*, Juan Benemelis provides insight into the personalities and groups that help shape foreign policy in Cuba. A Cuban government official until his exile in 1980, Benemelis also provides a historical account of the island's relations with African countries from 1959 to the 1980s. Although this work is sketchy at times and laborious at others, it is valuable on two counts. The book offers insider information heretofore unavailable, based on the author's government service in Africa and the Middle East, and it presents Cuba's activities in Africa within the larger context of African politics.

Castro, subversión y terrorismo en África is often frustrating reading because of its hopscotch structure and inordinate length (six hundred pages). The book nevertheless merits scholarly attention. Its introductory chapter offers a group-centered view of policy making in Cuba. Benemelis describes who in the circle of the top leadership has been in charge of implementing policies for different regions—a first peek into the black box of decision making in Cuba, where individuals, groups, and agencies somehow participate jointly in the process. According to Benemelis, Castro is the great synthesizer of the various currents flowing at lower levels. Benemelis also drives home three valid points that have been neglected previously. First, the revolutionary government has been sowing seeds in Africa since the early 1960s. Second, Castro has cultivated these seeds through personal friendships with many leaders of the region (like Kwame Nkrumah). Third, the Cuban intelligence apparatus has played a larger role in the island's relations with African countries and groups than most of the existing literature has acknowledged.

Castro, subversión y terrorismo en África is written in the Latin American social science tradition, with few footnotes. One finds scant references throughout the text but a free hand at interpretation, in contrast with standard academic writing in the United States, which is built on notes (at least while the writer is making his or her name in the field). The testimonial nature of Benemelis's book lends itself to what seems to be slack footnoting. Yet one should not forget that footnotes per se do not constitute proof.

Lying at the heart of research on Cuba's international relations in the revolutionary era has been the relationship between Moscow and Havana. In *The Soviet Union and Cuba*, Peter Shearman examines the pattern of interaction between the two countries from the perspective of a

Western European. In his opinion, "Western Europeans have not sought to gain a full understanding of the relationship" (p. 1). Shearman's concern is whether Cuba "acts as a satellite, surrogate, or proxy for Moscow in conducting its policies in Africa and Central America" (p. 2).

The Soviet Union and Cuba examines the history of Soviet-Cuban relations, which the author divides into three phases: the initial expansion of Soviet influence on Cuba between 1959 and 1964; increasing Soviet pragmatism and tension between the Soviets and the Cubans from 1964 through the early 1970s; and the integration of Cuba into the Soviet bloc from the early 1970s on. After presenting the historical background, Shearman analyzes four case studies of international conflicts in which the USSR or Cuba or both have played a significant role: the Angolan Civil War, the Ethiopia-Somalia War, the Grenadian Revolution, and the Nicaraguan Revolution. The concluding chapter outlines a policy position for Western European countries.

Shearman's study incorporates Soviet and Cuban sources as well as the interviews he conducted during research trips to both countries. All this information is not placed into any theoretical framework, however. Although Shearman is well aware that measuring Soviet influence on Cuba is problematic and that "it is not sufficient simply to measure quantifiable objective power attributes" (p. 21), he never attempts to resolve the problem. Nor does Shearman discuss the model developed by Raymond Duncan (1985) or Robert Packenham's work on socialist dependency (1986).

The analysis presented in *The Soviet Union and Cuba* is questionable on several counts. First, Shearman supports the thesis that the United States pushed Cuba into the arms of the Soviets: "As Castro's overtures to the United States were not reciprocated, Moscow's overtures to Havana became increasingly attractive" (p. 7). He comments elsewhere, "A succession of U.S. policies had produced a self-fulfilling prophesy" (p. 10). Although this assessment was once popular in explaining Castro's turn toward the Soviets, it has since been undermined by evidence from several former Cuban officials. Alan Luxenberg has dealt with this issue from a historiographical perspective in a superb recent article (1988).

Second, Shearman claims to have found no evidence of Soviet reward for Cuba's participation in Angola and Ethiopia. But the 300-percent increase in weapons delivery in 1981 surely constitutes a sign of Soviet approval, at the least. Third, the author attempts to strengthen his case by depicting the contending perspective in simplistic and extremist terms: "The argument that Castro was sending Cuban troops to die for Soviet interests is absurd" (pp. 43-44). Finally, Shearman argues that Cuba deployed troops in Angola without collaborating or coordinating with the Soviets (p. 40). Such an approach would have been highly unlikely, as many of the top Cubanists have argued. Domínguez, for one,

claims that Cuba “could not have carried out its effective assistance to the MPLA in 1975–76 without Soviet help” (pp. 144–45). Given the close Cuban-Soviet alliance, it is unrealistic to think that Cuba would have ventured into Angola without a green light from Moscow and a promise of the logistical support that Cuba needed. Unfortunately, Shearman’s work does not address how change in the Soviet Union might affect (or have affected) Cuba’s international relations. The study of Cuban foreign policy in the age of “new thinking” remains to be done.

Jorge Domínguez has written a classic work on Cuban foreign policy. *To Make a World Safe for Revolution: Cuba’s Foreign Policy* is masterful in its wealth of information, scrupulous historical details, insightful analysis, elegant prose, and well-balanced perspective. Although one can quibble with the organization of the book (which at times seems convoluted) and with the lack of a theoretical framework for the discussion, Domínguez’s study is the best one available thus far on Cuban foreign policy. It combines a chronological account of Cuba’s foreign policy since 1959 with topical chapters such as “Support for Revolutionary States.”

Domínguez argues that from the beginning, “a specifically Cuban foreign policy” has been shaped by four main elements: factors within Cuba, the international system, early crises in U.S.–Cuban relations, and Castro’s ideas and tactics (p. 3). Domínguez claims that Cuban foreign policy would not have been as far-reaching without Soviet support and that without Castro, the island’s foreign policy would not be what it is. But Domínguez is quick to point out that Cuba’s foreign policy is no mere creation of the Soviet Union or of Castro. The origins of Cuban foreign policy are to be found within the island, rooted in anti-Americanism. Domínguez adds that the fruits of the island’s international activities have been produced at great costs to the population.

Regarding the Cuban-Soviet relationship, Domínguez would agree with Shearman that mutual interests determine the course of Cuba’s activities abroad. But unlike Shearman, Domínguez underscores the constraints that the Soviet connection place on Cuba. He develops the concept of “tight hegemony” to describe the interaction between the two countries, especially since the early 1970s, and takes it a step further by arguing that Cuba is “in search of autonomy under Soviet hegemony” (p. 5). Domínguez’s analysis of this relationship concludes with an original twist: although Castro “endorsed the exercise of power by a big country over a little one” (p. 76), the result has been that “since the early 1970s, there has been an increasing convergence of Soviet and Cuban views. Of the two governments, the USSR’s has changed the most” (p. 144). Thus the smaller power has influenced the superpower.

Domínguez discounts the thesis that Washington forced Havana into Moscow’s orbit. After consulting the information available, he concludes that Castro changed his mind regarding aid from the United States

in 1959: "It is clearly not true that Cuba turned toward Marxism-Leninism or toward the Soviet Union because the United States refused to provide economic aid" (p. 18). Yet the question remains as to why Castro refused U.S. aid and turned to the Soviets. The answer may rest on ideology and the ambition for power—and scholars may never discover the real reason.

On U.S.–Cuban relations, Domínguez comments, "The U.S. could bargain with Cuba, although this approach is difficult because U.S. interests go beyond purely bilateral relations. No other policies have worked for the United States" (p. 145).

In addition to analyzing Cuba's position vis-à-vis the superpowers, *To Make a World Safe for Revolution* concentrates on Cuba's efforts to support revolutionary movements and states while trying to conduct state-to-state diplomacy with nonrevolutionary governments. Domínguez outlines the rules behind Cuba's endorsement of revolutionary groups (pp. 115–24) and charts the island's overseas development program (p. 173). The book's coverage—from Algeria to Zimbabwe—is exhaustive and rich in footnotes and references. No one else can match Domínguez's obsessive control (in the positive sense) of Cuban sources.

To Make a World Safe for Revolution does not deliver as much as we have come to expect from its author in only in one major area: the subject of how Cuban foreign policy is made (Chapter 9). The problem remains one of lack of information. How can scholars penetrate the black box? How can we identify the processes of decision making in Havana? These dimensions and others remain to be incorporated into a model of Cuban foreign policy. The tasks that lie ahead would challenge even Jorge Luis Borges.

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