

CUBA AND THE ARMED CONFLICTS (1956-1989): LOCAL ACTOR OR CAUGHT BETWEEN BIPOLAR AND COLONIAL PATTERNS OF POLITICS

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Since the 16th century, when the geographically small island served as a military base for the devastation of the Aztec empire by the Spanish conquerors, Cuba has always played a strategic role for the empires of the world. Although Cuba's economic performance depended in general on its integration in the economic structures of the prevailing empires, during the last centuries the cosmopolitan elites of Havana always had some influence on the imperial officials in Madrid, Washington or Moscow.¹

¹ Allan J. Kuethe, "Guns, Subsidies, and Commercial Privilege: Some Historical Factors in the Emergence of the Cuban National Character, 1763-1815", in: *Cuban Studies*, Núm.16, 1986, pp. 130-154.



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Whereas from 1820 to 1870 Cuba was one of the leaders of a world -which in this period conceived itself as “one world”- Cuba’s special role being an important player in international politics from 1960 to 1990 is mainly because of the fact that in this era the island represented the so-called Third World as well as the Second World. In reality Cuba never was a typical “Third-World-country”. But Cuba succeeded in using the emerging Third World for the maintenance of its own revolutionary impetus. Moreover around 1960, in the era of decolonization, it served as a model for many young states in the Southern hemisphere in asserting their true independence² as the following lines from Tanzania’s government newspaper show:

Cuba today is a unique example of a little state that has refused to be bullied by any major world power. How was it that a little state such as Cuba... has been able to resist powerful external influences and has survived in a hostile hemisphere without flinching one inch from the path it has set before itself? That is what interests us. And perhaps a look at the Cuba scene should provide a guide, if one is needed at all, to the young independent African states to assert their true independence without being used as pawns in present world politics.³

In the 1970s Cuba was known as a small country with the foreign policy of a great power.⁴ Cuba was unique: It was the first Latin American state to play an independent international military role and to intervene in Africa or other overseas territories.⁵ In the 1960s Cuba acted like a great power, not only facing the United States,

² In this sense I apply the concept of the “national liberation process” including social developments or guerrilla movements in the Southern hemisphere. The concept is meant not only for struggles before official independency status but also for struggles after having achieved official independency.

³ *The Nationalist: Freedom and unity* (Dar-es-Salaam: Mwanachi), 13/1/1965, p. 4. The editorial was published in the context of Ernesto Guevara’s visit to Africa.

⁴ Wolf Grabendorff, *Kubas Engagement in Afrika*, Ebenhausen bei München: Stiftung Wissenschaft & Politik, 1978, p. 5.

⁵ There has, of course, been Latin American participation in U.N. peace-keeping forces: e.g. the Colombian battalion in the Korean War, Brazilian involvements in the Italian campaign in World War II, and the participation of a few Mexican aviators in the Philippines in World War II.

but also the Soviet Union. The beginnings of this anti-imperialist tradition were set with the Cuban struggles against Spanish colonialism from 1868 to 1898. When Cuba was just about to achieve political independence from Madrid Washington intervened and it seemed to be condemned to a dependent status.⁶ The heroic *lucha* of 1868-1878 was followed by American neo-colonialism, with a humiliating tendency towards accommodation and a desire for annexation by Cuban themselves and the ambiguities of a love-hate relationship with the metropolis. The effects of a single product dependency and the benefits led many Cubans to accept their satellite status.

One can consider Cuba's violent armed conflicts between 1956 and 1990 as an intrinsic part of the general political and global strategic context of the Cold War. Therefore it is interesting to scrutinize the individual factors which determined the course, structure and mechanisms of these armed conflicts. Global strategic considerations were -to a certain extent- a factor in Cuban struggles. To be more precise: Cuba's relationships with Washington and Moscow and the structure of Cuba's armed conflicts reflect to some extent the patterns of the Cold War but also other themes which primarily are the colonial and imperial relationship between a single great power and a so-called Third World political entity of the Southern hemisphere. Cuba served as a client state or satellite for the Eastern superpower in the Cold War in only few instances. In general Cuba was not acting as a Soviet proxy. Instead Cuba was -to a certain extent- an independent local actor in the Cold War exploiting the superpower confrontation to its own advantage. I will go into details in the following considerations focussing in the first part on the internal Cuban struggles from 1956-

⁶ Antoni Kapcia, *Cuba. Island of Dreams*, Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2000. Louis A. Pérez Jr., *Cuba and the United States: Ties of Singular Intimacy*, Athens: University of Georgia press, 1990. Morris T. Morely, *Imperial State and Revolution: The United States and Cuba, 1952-1986*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987. Louis A. Pérez Jr., *Cuban between Empires, 1878-1902*, Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1986. Emilio Roig de Leuchsenring, *Historia de la enmienda Platt. Una interpretación de la realidad cubana*, La Habana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1973 (1935). Lejenue Cummins, "The formulation of the 'Platt Amendment'", in: *The Americas* XXIII, (April 1967), pp. 370-389.

1965 and the involvement of the superpowers. In the second part I will concentrate on the international dimension of Cuban politics in the 1960s and 1970s in Africa and Latin America.

The Superpowers and the internal Cuban Struggles, 1956 - 1965

In June 1956 Castro and his rebels were arrested by Mexican authorities and accused of communism which Castro denied.⁷ Although the July 26 Movement originally was not anti-capitalistic, the Eisenhower administration had an eye on Fidel Castro and his group. In early 1957 Washington, which was even less poorly informed as Moscow, sent an official mission to the island to find out whether the leader and his rebel group were communists or whether there had been connections between them and Moscow.⁸ The initial suspicion could not be corroborated but Washington's distrust of the rebels continued as well as their support for the reliable puppet Batista. In summer 1958 the rebels protested against the U.S. arms supplies for Batista by kidnapping several U.S. citizens under the command of the secret member of the Cuban communist party Raúl Castro. As a consequence of the release of all the hostages the U.S. administration stopped the delivery of further military equipment to Batista and agreed that Batista would not be allowed to use the U.S. military base at Guantánamo bay for attacks against the rebels.⁹ In the second half of 1958 the CIA, which had been requested by the State Department to keep Fidel Castro out of power, failed to build a new regime without Batista and Castro. On New Year's Day 1959 Richard Rubottom, the assistant secretary of state for inter-American affairs, spoke about the Cuban leaders to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and expressed his surprise about Batista's overthrow and the takeover by the Castro brothers and the 26th of July Movement.¹⁰

⁷ *Bohemia*, La Habana, 15th of July 1956, pp. 63-84.

⁸ Thomas G. Paterson, *Contesting Castro, The United States and the Triumph of the Cuban Revolution*, New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994, p. 63, 84.

⁹ Aleksandr Fursenko/Timothy Naftali, "One Hell of a Gamble", *Khrushchev, Castro and Kennedy, 1958-1964*, New York/London: Norton & Company, 1997, p. 7.

¹⁰ Paterson, *Contesting Castro, The United States and the Triumph...*, p. 252.

During his tour along the American East Coast in April 1959 Fidel Castro tried to assuage the Conservative suspicion that he would sympathize with the Communists. Fidel Castro recognized that the acceptance of any Latin American regime by Washington depended upon its being perceived as non-communist. Both sides -the Eisenhower administration and Castro and his group- had strong memories of the U.S. intervention in Guatemala (1954).¹¹ In Guatemala President Jacobo Arbenz, who carried out agrarian reform and distributed fallow land, did not dissolve the traditional army which would later facilitate his overthrow by the CIA. In 1954 Washington decided to update the Monroe doctrine of 1823 and the Organization of American States (OAS) agreed at a meeting in Caracas on joint actions against any communist regime in the American Hemisphere. But was Castro a communist?

The Cuban rebels never received any Soviet weapons even though their representatives approached the Czech embassy in Mexico in December 1958. Moscow knew very well the risk of a disclosure and the consequent harm to the young rebel group. Washington would not accept interference in their zone. In Moscow's eyes exposure of such manoeuvres would have had not only serious consequences concerning U.S.-Soviet relationship but also provided an occasion for active U.S. interference in Cuba and the internal affairs of other Latin American countries. The same situation arose in September 1959 when Cuba tried to buy weapons from the Polish government and the bureaucrats in Moscow feared endangering their good relations with Washington.¹² So far Moscow had accepted Latin America as Washington's sphere of influence as Eastern Europe was Moscow's backyard. In April 1959 on request of Raúl Castro the International Department of the Central Committee in Moscow approved sending

¹¹ Piero Gleijeses, *Shattered hope: the Guatemalan revolution and the United States, 1944-1954*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991. Nick Cullather, *Secret history: the CIA's classified account of its operations in Guatemala, 1952-1954*, with a new introduction by the author and an afterword by Piero Gleijeses, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999. Donald C. Hodges, *The legacy of Che Guevara, a documentary study*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1977, pp. 14-16.

¹² Fursenko/Naftali, "One Hell of a Gamble"..., pp. 23-24.

military advisers of Spanish origin to the American backyard.¹³ But Moscow was not yet willing to approve further cooperation such as training pilots or strengthening economic cooperation. Moscow's attitude towards Cuba changed after Khrushchev's return from his visit to the United States in September 1959 when the Soviet leader grasped the importance and the growing anti-American character of the Cuban Revolution. In contrast to the International Department Khrushchev decided to engage Moscow in Latin America and to risk international tensions supplying the Cuban army with Warsaw Pact weapons in September 1959.

Geo-strategic Considerations, Washington, Moscow and the Cuban Counterrevolution

The communist Spaniards, who Moscow sent to Cuba, were paid by the Soviet Union and the civilian members of the Cuban government were not informed about the Soviet assistance. One of the first Soviet Spaniards who came to the island was Angel Martínez, better known as Francisco Ciutat as he was called during the Spanish Civil War. Angel Martínez, who never returned to Russia, delivered Cuban weapons to the fighting rebels in Algeria, trained an Argentine guerrilla group and from 1960 to 1962 instructed the Cuban rebel army in fighting against internal resistance.¹⁴ In the provinces Camagüey and Las Villas, especially in the Escambray mountains and around Bayamo, stockbreeders had difficulties with the agrarian reforms (and the "intervenciones") and supported the armed struggle against the new Cuban government. Outside Cuba, the fight against the counterrevolutionary bands centred in the Escambray ("lucha contra bandidos") from 1959 onwards is not very known. The bands were not be eliminated until 1965.¹⁵ Jorge "Papito" Serguera, who in those

¹³ Fursenko/Naftali, "One Hell of a Gamble" ..., p. 12.

¹⁴ Jorge Serguera Riverí, *Caminos del Che. Datos inéditos de su vida*, México: Plaza y Valdés, 1997, pp. 25-29, 55, 154-156, 395-397. Jon Lee Anderson, *Che. Die Biographie*, München: List Verlag, 1997, p. 467.

¹⁵ In August 1959, a plane bearing counterrevolutionary fighters coming from the Dominican Republic was captured after landing at the airport of Trinidad in south-central Cuba. Mary-

days was military chief of the provinces Matanzas and Las Villas, remembers those struggles in the Cuban *Vendée*:

...recibí instrucciones de enviar diez batallones de milicianos del Camagüey en la provincia de Las Villas, para perseguir, cercar y aplastar las bandas contrarrevolucionarias que pululaban por aquel lomerío... El jefe military del Escambray era entonces el comandante Dermidio Escalona. La situación estaba en su apogeo. Nos dividimos el territorio en zonas aproximadamente rectangulares, a nosotros nos tocó una especie de cuadrado de unos 20 kms de lado, cuyos vértices superiores eran Topes de Collantes y Naraño y cuyos lados dirigidos al sur desde estos puntos terminaban en el mar, al oeste se hallaban tropas de la provincia de Matanzas, al norte tropas de La Habana y al oeste tropas orientales.¹⁶

In a basic policy paper of March 1960 about clandestine infiltration by sea of small groups Eisenhower's administration estimated the troop strength in Las Villas about 17,000 to 60,000 men.¹⁷ Víctor Dreke, a leading Rebel Army fighter and a commander of the volunteer battalions that defeated the counterrevolutionary bands in the Escambray mountains of central Cuba, recalled that 50,000 combatants, most of them from Havana province, participated in the first clean-up operations between the end of 1960 and April 1961.¹⁸ Because of the economic reforms (agrarian reforms, nationalisation of the most productive and financial enterprises etc.) conflicts arose

Alice Waters (ed.), *From the Escambray to the Congo. In the whirlwind of the Cuban Revolution. Interview with Víctor Dreke*, New York: Pathfinder, 2002, pp. 77-78, 86, 89-117. Mary-Alice Waters (ed.), *Making history: Interviews with Four Generals of Cuba's Revolutionary Armed Forces*, New York: Pathfinder, 1999. Juan and Verena Martínez Alier, *Cuba: economía y sociedad*, Paris: Ruedo Ibérico, 1972, pp. 109-125. Huber Matos, *Comó llegó la noche. Memorias. Revolución y condena de un idealista cubano*, prólogos de Hugh Thomas y Carlos Echeverría, Barcelona: Tusquets Editores, 2002, pp. 320-334. Hugo Chinae, *Escambray 60*, Havana: Unión de Escritores y Artistas de Cuba, 1970. Enrique Encinosa, *Unvanquished: Cuba's Resistance to Fidel Castro*, Los Angeles: Pureplay Press, 2004.

¹⁶ Serguera, *Caminos del Che...*, p. 26.

¹⁷ Peter Kornbluh (Ed.), *Bay of Pigs declassified. The secret CIA report on the invasion of Cuba*, New York: The New Press, 1998, p. 116.

¹⁸ Waters, *From the Escambray to the Congo. In the whirlwind of the Cuban Revolution. Interview with Víctor Dreke*, p. 98.

among the different groups which almost led to a civil war. Former guerrilla leaders like Eloy Gutiérrez Menoyo in the Escambray mountains and other groups which earlier combated Batista and refused the radicalisation of Cuban politics began to fight against Castro's leadership. At the end of October 1959 Comandante Huber Matos in Camagüey was arrested by Camilo Cienfuegos because he was accused of being against the revolution.¹⁹

In October 1959 President Eisenhower authorized the State Department "to support elements in Cuba opposed to the Castro government while making Castro's downfall seem to be the result of his own mistakes"²⁰. The U.S. State Department had hopes of a civil upheaval inside Cuba. Clandestine paramilitary maritime and air operations were organized in order to destabilize the new Cuban government by sabotage and psychological operations and to back an invasion by the United States.²¹ Air raids attacking sugar refineries in January 1960 furnish an example of the CIA sabotage program.²² In March 1960 the French vessel "La Coubre", which had arrived in the harbour of Havana with weapons from Belgium, exploded. U.S. authorities trained about 1,500 Cubans and some U.S. citizens in military bases in Guatemala, Panama and inside the U.S. territory. Although the U.S.-financed propaganda, sabotage operations and support of autonomous anti-Castro groups continued, from 1962 onwards efforts concentrated on destroying Cuba economically by an international embargo.²³ In February 1961 the CIA concluded in a briefing for President Kennedy that

¹⁹ Matos, *Comó llegó la noche...*, pp. 337-358.

²⁰ Discussion at the 432nd Meeting of the National Security Council, 14.1.1960/31.3.1960, cited by: Piero Gleijeses, "Ships in the Night: The CIA, The White House and the Bay of Pigs", in: *Journal of Latin American Studies* Núm. 27, 1995, p. 5.

²¹ Kornbluh, *Bay of Pigs declassified...*, pp. 23-132. Waters, *From the Escambray to the Congo. In the whirlwind of the Cuban Revolution*. Interview with Víctor Dreke, pp. 99-100.

²² According to a CIA memorandum 300.000 tons of sugar cane were destroyed by sabotage activity between October 1960 and April 1961: Memorandum by Jack Hawkins-Paramilitary action against the Castro Government of Cuba (5.5.1961), in: National Security Archive (Washington D.C.), p. 8.

²³ Memorandum for the Record—Cuban Operations (12.11.1963), in: Edward C. Keefer/Charles S. Sampson/Louis J. Smith (Eds.), *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963*,

...the Cuban paramilitary force, if used, has a good chance of overthrowing Castro or at the very least causing a damaging civil war without requiring the U.S. to commit itself to overt action against Cuba. Whatever embarrassment the alleged (though deniable) U.S. support may cause, it may well be considerably less than that resulting from the continuation of the Castro regime or from the more drastic and more attributable actions necessary to accomplish the result at a later date.²⁴

Meanwhile -by October 1960- the CIA had changed the original plan to rely only on infiltration of local guerrilla groups in favour of amphibious invasion plans.

The cited CIA briefing of February 1961 also argued that many Latin American governments were expecting stronger measures by the U.S against Cuba. Pro-U.S. governments such as in Venezuela would be weakened if Washington hesitated to take decisive actions.²⁵ It seemed that Kennedy was not only the captive of his campaign rhetoric but also simply a victim of the hubris of the CIA. The question of why the U.S. could not accept Cuba, as the USSR, Turkey, Austria and Finland had, is not only a geo-strategic but also a psychological problem and strongly connected with the U.S. traditional claims on Latin America. And vice versa the anti-Yankee spirit of the Hispano-Americans has nothing to do with the Cold War, but with the U.S. claims in the region. In his speech about the "Alliance of Progress" on 13th of March 1961 Kennedy referred to the anti-colonial Independence Wars in Anglo- and Hispano-America and explained that the aims of the "Alliance of Progress" were "to complete the revolution of the Americas -to build a hemisphere where all men can hope for a suitable standard of living- and all can live out their lives in dignity and in freedom... But we all call for social change by free men -change in the spirit of Washington and Jefferson, of Bolivar and San Martin and Marti- not change which seeks to impose on men tyrannies which we

Vol. XI, Cuban Missile Crisis and Aftermath, Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1996, pp. 885-888.

²⁴ Kornbluh, *Bay of Pigs declassified...*, p. 115.

²⁵ Kornbluh, *Bay of Pigs declassified...*, p. 114.

cast out a century and a half ago".²⁶ The U.S. President emphasized the intellectual unity of the independence movements in North and South America and then speaking about Cuba as a tyranny he defined the limits of the Cuban national liberation one month before invasion in the Bay of Pigs started. Already in early 1960 when Kennedy was the junior Senator from Massachusetts he wrote about Castro as a man "who led his men over the Andes Mountains, vowing 'war to the death' against Spanish rule, saying, 'Where a goat can pass, so can an army'"²⁷. Fidel Castro himself explained the long struggles of the Cuban people to the plenary assembly of the United Nations in New York in September 1960: "Treinta años lucharon los cubanos solos, por su independencia. Treinta años que también constituyen sedimento del amor a la libertad y a la independencia de nuestra patria. Pero Cuba era... como una manzana pendiente del árbol español, llamada a caer, tan pronto madurara, en manos de los Estados Unidos."²⁸ During 1968 in Cuba the impetus of the Revolution lived on the theme "Cien años de lucha" ("One hundred years of struggle") and a national myth was created which combined an explicit identification of the internationalist and socialist transformation that the Revolution then represented with the particularities of a Cuban tradition of struggle.²⁹

Modifying the originally anti-colonial Monroe Doctrine in the first half of the 20th century the U.S. announced the hegemony over the former European colonies in Latin America.³⁰ Cuban people knew that the formula "America for Americans" meant "America for North

²⁶ John F. Kennedy, *President Kennedy Speaks*, Washington, D.C.: United States Information Service, 1962, pp. 51-52.

²⁷ John F. Kennedy, *The Strategy of Peace*, Ed. by Allan Nevins, New York: Harper & Brothers, 1960, pp.132-133.

²⁸ Fidel Castro, *La Revolución Cubana*, Ed. by Adolfo Sánchez Rebolledo, México, Ediciones Era, 1975 [1972], p. 248.

²⁹ *Sobre la Guerra de los 10 Años 1968-1878*, Ed. by the Universidad de La Habana, Havana: Instituto Cubano del Libro, 1971,

³⁰ Ernest R. May, *The Making of the Monroe Doctrine*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975. Dexter Perkins, *A History of the Monroe Doctrine*, Boston: Little Brown, 1955.

Americans".³¹ In July 1960 a member of Eisenhower's National Security Council argued in a meeting about Cuba that "the U.S. should charge that the Monroe Doctrine had been violated and should go in and take over"³². But the imperial logic of the colonial empires was overshadowed by the ideological and block structure of the Cold War. The traditional way of action in conformity with the Monroe Doctrine were put to a severe test in the Caribbean because of the logic of the East-West conflict. Already at the end of 1959 it was clear to U.S. strategists that they should think of the Cuban national liberation movement not only as a national and regional conflict but also as part of global strategic considerations. In November 1959 Secretary of State Herter had recommended to Eisenhower that a continuation of the Castro regime caused great damage to the position of the U.S. in Latin America and was favouring the interests of the Soviet Union and China.³³

Cuba never presented a direct military threat to the United States, but the island in the Caribbean provided first a model and second an effective and solidly defended base for Soviet operations and expansion of influence in the Western Hemisphere. Military, financial, organizational and other support could be provided from Cuba to dissident leaders and groups throughout Latin America in order to create new political leftist movements and weaken the prestige of the U.S. But the most dangerous factor for the U.S. was the radiation role of the Cuban model in Latin America stimulating further revolutionary movements. A CIA briefing of February 1961 for President Kennedy emphasized this factor: "For the Communist powers, Cuba represents an opportunity of incalculable value. More importantly, the advent of Castro has provided the Communists with a friendly base for propaganda and agitation throughout the rest of

³¹ Serguera, *Caminos del Che...*, p. 38.

³² Fursenko/Naftali, "One Hell of a Gamble...", p. 52.

³³ Ernst-Otto Czempel/Carl-Christoph Schweitzer, *Weltpolitik der USA nach 1945. Einführung und Dokumente* (Studien zur Geschichte und Politik, 276), Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 1989, p. 234.

Latin America and with a highly exploitable example of revolutionary achievements and successful defiance for the United States.”³⁴ In February 1961 Washington saw in the continuance of the new Cuban government a substantial victory for the Sino-Soviet Bloc which could use Cuba for increased activity throughout the Western Hemisphere.³⁵

In August 1960, at a meeting with Latin American foreign ministers in San José the U.S. Secretary of State Herter attempted to get the support of Latin American governments for U.S. measures against Cuba but in the end could not refer explicitly to the Soviet Union and China in a declaration condemning any extra-hemispheric intervention. In the aftermath of the Cuban oil dispute with U.S. companies it had become clear to Moscow that they should support Cuba with military equipment and economical help nearly without reservation. As a consequence in July 1960 Khrushchev announced before a group of Soviet teachers a capability to defend the Caribbean island with Soviet weapons: “Soviet artillerymen can support the Cuban people with their rocket fire should the aggressive forces in the Pentagon dare to start intervention against Cuba... we have rockets which can land precisely in a preset square target 13,000 kilometers away.”³⁶ Washington could no longer accept Moscow’s revolutionary ally in the Western Hemisphere and in mid April 1961 preparations for the invasion, authorized by President Eisenhower in march 1960 and known as Operation Zapata, were ready.³⁷ After an air raid attacking Cuban aircraft, the 1,400 invaders, mostly mercenaries, were crushed by the Cuban military and militia in under 72 hours. There were over 1,800 casualties total. All that Washington

³⁴ Kornbluh, *Bay of Pigs declassified...*, p. 111.

³⁵ Kornbluh, *Bay of Pigs declassified...*, p. 115.

³⁶ U.S. State Department, “Principal Soviet Public Statements on Defense of Cuba”, Cuban Missile Crisis Collection, in: National Security Archive, cited in: Fursenko/Naftali, “One Hell of a Gamble”..., p. 52.

³⁷ Piero Gleijeses, “Ships in the Night: The CIA, The White House and the Bay of Pigs”, in: *Journal of Latin American Studies*, Núm. 27, 1995, pp. 1-42. James G. Blight/Peter Kornbluh (Ed.), *Politics of Illusion: The Bay of Pigs Invasion Reexamined*, Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1998. Luis E. Aguilar, *Operation Zapata: The ‘Ultrasensitive’ Report and Testimony of the Board of Inquiry on the Bay of Pigs*, Maryland: University Publications of America, 1981.

achieved was a strengthened relationship between Havana and Moscow. The invasion attempt in the Bay of Pigs succeeded in helping the Cuban government to strengthen its regime internally and enhanced Cuba's image as David defeating Goliath. On April 16th, Fidel Castro officially declared Cuba as a socialist state and, fearing a second Bay of Pigs, in June 1962 the Cuban government accepted the covert installation of Soviet missiles on the island, also known under the name "Operation Anadyr", as protection from U.S. aggression.

After the debacle of April 1961 the U.S government was a captive of its own Cuba policy and under heavy pressure to find a solution concerning the revolutionary island. Many people thought that the U.S. President had to stop the so-called Communist infiltration in Cuba and Latin America. Since the failure of the Bay of Pigs invasion Cuba was "the top priority in the United States government -all else is secondary-no time, money, effort, or manpower is to be spared" as Robert Kennedy explained to CIA and Pentagon representatives in January 1962.³⁸ At the end of November 1961 the U.S. President had approved "Operation Mongoose", a more ambitious and more massive paramilitary activity than the Bay of Pigs operation. Kennedy felt obliged to take those measure not least to justify the failed invasion. Soviet military support to the anti-imperialist Revolution was certainly not only based on the opportunity of correcting the strategic and nuclear inferiority between the USSR and the USA.³⁹ In Cuba the Soviet Union had a stake in Latin America. Cuba was a strong model for a prospective socialist transformation and decreasing U.S. influence in Latin America. Whereas for the Cuban government the Soviet military support was vital as it would not had survived the following months.

Nevertheless the Soviet leaders were also acting during the Caribbean Missile Crisis in October 1962 as a colonial power. Over the Cubans' head Soviet and U.S. leaders negotiated about the missiles

³⁸ Kornbluh, *Bay of Pigs declassified...*, p. 16.

³⁹ Interview with Sergio Mikojan (Moscow, 13.10.1987), in: Bernd Greiner, *Kuba-Krise. 13 Tage im Oktober. Analyse, Dokumente, Zeitzeugen*, Nördlingen: Greno, 1988, p. 404.

which had been offered by Khrushchev a few months prior on fixed conditions even though the Cubans had made no request for them.⁴⁰ The negotiations between the global superpowers resembled an international game of chess and culminated in a silent agreement between the two powers marking the respective geopolitical boundaries for a policy of coexistence. For the U.S., which had to respect the Soviet claim to the island, the missiles in Cuba were primarily a political problem and the military threat secondary.⁴¹ Khrushchev made use of Cuba in getting the geo-strategic interests of the USSR in the Cold War accepted. Cuba turned out to be a pawn because the Soviets proposed to dismantle the installations in Cuba if the other superpower would do the same in Turkey. In these negotiations Cuba objectively played the role of a military base for the U.S.S.R. as Turkey did for the U.S. Moreover Cuba's sovereignty was violated because both superpowers agreed on inspections by the United Nations monitoring the removal of the outgoing equipment and missiles on Cuban ground without having consulted the Cuban government.⁴²

At the same time both superpowers turned out to be captives of their Cuba policy. The balance of power on the international stage and the geo-strategic situation of the island gave Cuba the opportunity to tip the scales and have the superpowers in its grip. The two empires shortly before were destroying themselves because the Cuban revolutionaries tried to exploit the superpower confrontation in its own interests. On a meeting at the United Nations Soviet and U.S. representatives discussed their relationship with Cuba realizing that they should coordinate their Cuba politics with each other. As U.S. ambassador Stevenson reported: "Kuznetsov said that his assignment

⁴⁰ Cuba accepted because they wanted to strengthen socialism on the international level (see Claude Julien, "Sept heures avec M. Fidel Castro", in: *Le Monde*, 22/3/1963, p.1).

⁴¹ Greiner, Kuba-Krise. 13 Tage im Oktober, p. 43.

⁴² Telegram From the Department of State to the Mission to the United Nations (1.11.1962) / Summary Record of the Meeting of the 19th Meeting of the Executive Committee of the National Security Council (3.11.1962), in: Keefer/Sampson/Smith (Eds.), *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963*, Vol. XI, pp. 342-344, 356-358.

was to assist... in resolving Cuban problem as speedily as possible... McCloy expressed hope Castro would be less recalcitrant and observed US and Sovs (Soviets, T.N.) might find themselves united vis-à-vis Castro. Kuznetsov smiled".⁴³ Neither superpower could change the Cuban government and both had to accept Castro's leadership. In spite of Cuba's flirtation with China, which condemned Soviet manoeuvres during the missile crisis as traitorous, Moscow had to support Havana because Khrushchev needed the prestige of the Cuban Revolution and feared that Cuba would seek for a new ally in China: Since the aggravation of the Sino-Soviet dispute Cuba had tried to mediate between the two powers and hold a neutralist position. After the missile crisis and Khrushchev's deposition in 1964, Cuban revolutionaries were very sceptical about Moscow's peaceful coexistence strategy and became more and more sympathetic to the Chinese positions.⁴⁴ Beijing seemed to be more in tune with the small countries of the Third World and supported armed struggle as a strategy of national liberation in Latin America. By playing the Soviets off against the Chinese (and vice versa) Cuba strove to avoid becoming a Russian vassal or a satellite. The national internationalist Fidel Castro neither became a communist nor did he obey any party discipline. When Havana proclaimed the socialist character of the revolution Moscow was neither informed nor enthusiastic but ignored it. Perhaps Moscow would had preferred if Havana had taken more time declaring Cuba socialist because for the Soviet bloc Cuba was not part of the socialist camp. For the Soviets Cuba not either belonged to the non-aligned Third-World-countries but represented its own category.⁴⁵

⁴³ Telegram from the Mission to the United Nations to the Department of State (31.10.1962), in: Keefer/Sampson/Smith (Eds.), *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963*, Vol. XI, p. 338.

⁴⁴ "We tend more to the Chinese assessment of the situation. The comrades are right, when they are talking about the necessity to continue revolutionary struggle consequently", explained the Cuban ambassador Ibarra in Warsaw to his homologue from the GDR, in: Note about a conversation with the Cuban ambassador (Warsaw, 20.9.1963), in: SAPMO-BArch (Berlin), NY 4182/1241, pp. 54-57. See also: Report of the GDR embassy in Havana about the development of the Untited Party of the Socialist Revolution (*Havana*, 20.8.1964), in: Political Archive of the Foreign Ministry (PAAA, Berlin), collection MfAA, VS-68, pp. 12, 14, 17, 20, 26.

⁴⁵ Kewes Karol, *Les Guérilleros au Pouvoir*, Paris: Robert Laffont, 1970, p. 192.

Satellite or Local Actor: the external Cuban struggles

In September 1963, the former U.S. ambassador in Conakry wrote a memorandum proposing a new course concerning the Cuban issue but discreet contacts between the sides were stopped after President Kennedy's assassination two months later.

According to neutral diplomats and others I have talked to at the U.N. and in Guinea, there is a reason to believe that Castro is unhappy about his dependence on the Soviet bloc; that he does not enjoy being a satellite; that the trade embargo is hurting him -though not enough to endanger his position; and that he would like to establish some official contact with the U.S. and go to some length to obtain normalization of relations with us -even though this would not be welcomed by most of his hard-core Communist entourage, such as Che Guevara.⁴⁶

The Cuban policy of the U.S. administrations had mainly negative effects for the U.S. interests on the global stage. It caused the U.S. trouble and embarrassment as well as aggravated Castro's anti-Americanism. In the eyes of a world largely made up of small countries, it froze the U.S. in the unattractive posture of a big country bullying a small anti-imperialist nation. The Soviets had also forgotten the national dimension. The Cubans did not want to lose their hard-won dignity and autonomy again by submitting to the Soviet geopolitical logic in the global superpower confrontation. The pride of the Cuban revolutionaries was much offended. The Cuban revolutionaries were shocked by the US-Soviet agreement which provoked a strong and lasting criticism by the Cuban revolutionaries of the Soviet model. For Cuba the missile crisis was the beginning of emancipation from Moscow.⁴⁷ In August 1964 the GDR embassy referred to the deep

⁴⁶ Memorandum by William Attwood (Washington, 18.9.1963) / Memorandum from William Attwood to Gordon Chase of the National Security Council (New York, 8.11.1963), in: Keefer/Sampson/Smith (Eds.), *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963*, Vol. XI, p. 868-870, 879-883. Kewes Karol, "Castro entre les deux K.", in: *Les Temps Modernes*, No. 199 (December 1962), pp. 1072-1093.

⁴⁷ James G. Blight/Philip Brenner, *Sad and luminous days: Cuba's struggle with the Superpowers after the Missile Crisis*, Lanham (USA): Rowman & Littlefield, 2002. Tomás Diez Acosta,

crisis of confidence between Cuba and the Soviet Union since the missile crisis and warned in a report not to overestimate Fidel Castro's two visits to the Soviet Union: only a "complicated clearing up-process within Cuba" would mean real progress in the relationship between Havana and Moscow.⁴⁸ But Cuba tried all means to escape from Soviet dependency and became in the 1960s a fierce opponent of the coexistence policy of the superpowers. A hoped-for solution for Havana was permanent revolution in Latin America and in other countries of the Southern Hemisphere. Moscow should be forced to support Cuba's strategy. In their eyes the Soviets could try to get Cuba's influence in Latin America under control. However, Moscow would not go so far as to oppose Havana. Through an anti-imperialist and genuine manifest of the revolution, the second Declaration of Havana of February 1962, the world had already become acquainted with the revolution's international strategy.⁴⁹ The focus of Cuban internationalism was not restricted to the guerrilla movements in Latin America. Cuban foreign policy took shape as a sustained strategy to support revolution throughout the Southern Hemisphere, by funding, training and arming a variety of Latin American guerrilla groups, as well as civilian and military support for African and Asian national liberation movements.⁵⁰ In the Cuban point of view it seemed to be the sole way to secure the continued existence of the revolution.

October 1962: The missile crisis as seen from Cuba, New York: Pathfinder, 2002. Fidel Castro/Nikita Khrushchev, "La correspondance des dirigeants cubains et soviétiques", in: *Le Monde*, 24/11/1990, pp. 2-3. See also Blight/Bruce J. Allyn/David A. Welch, *Cuba on the brink: Castro, the missile crisis and the Soviet collapse*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1993. "More new evidence on the Cuban missile crisis", in: *Cold War International History Project*, Bulletin No. 8-9 (Winter 1996/1997), pp. 270-347.

⁴⁸ "Einschätzung zur Entwicklung und zum gegenwärtigen Entwicklungsstand der Einheitspartei der Sozialistischen Revolution (PURS)", p. 11, in: PAAA (Political Archive of the Foreign Ministry, Berlin), MfAA, VS-68.

⁴⁹ Castro, *La Revolución Cubana...*, pp. 458-486.

⁵⁰ Jorge I. Domínguez, *To make a world safe for revolution: Cuba's Foreign Policy*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989. Jorge I. Domínguez (Ed.), *Cuba: internal and international affairs*, Beverly Hills: Sage Publ., 1982. H. M. Erisman, "Cuban development Aid, South-South Diversification and Counterdependency Politics", in: H. Michael Erisman/John M. Kirk (Eds.), *Cuban Foreign Policy Confronts a New International order*, Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1991, pp. 119-138. Carmelo Mesa-Lago (Ed.), *Cuba in the world*, Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1979.

In the settlement of the missile crisis and the correspondence of its aftermath the U.S. made clear to Moscow that they would not permit another Cuba in their Hemisphere but they would also not plan another invasion of the island.⁵¹ Washington blamed the Cuban government for training Latin Americans in guerrilla tactics and sending them back to their countries to engage in the overthrow of the governments.⁵² Their complaints to the Soviets about Cuban subversive activities in Latin America apparently should have an moderating effect on Havana. But Kennedy was not willing or able to make any assurances to the Soviets in 1963 concerning the sabotage activities of Cuban exiles in the U.S. In November 1963 the State Department raised questions in respect to the continuous sabotage activities by Cuban exile groups. That there might be a connection between air attacks, the constant hit and run attacks on Cuba and the delay of American convoys on route to Berlin was discussed.⁵³

During the 1960s the destabilizing impact of the Cuban Revolution swept the American Hemisphere. By the 1970s Cuba's

⁵¹ Memorandum of Conversation, Nixon-Mikoyan (Washington, 26.11.1963) / Memorandum from Gordon Chase of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs, Bundy (Washington, 3.12.1963) / Memorandum of a Meeting With President Johnson (Washington, 19.12.1963), in: Keefer/Sampson/Smith (eds.), *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963*, Vol. XI, pp. 894, 899, 908,

⁵² Telegram from the Mission to the United Nations to the Department of State (New York, 31.12.1962) / Oral statement, Department of State (Washington, 13.9.1963) / Memorandum for the Record (Washington, 5.11.1963) / Memorandum of Conversation, Nixon-Mikoyan (Washington, 26.11.1963) / Memorandum from Gordon Chase of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs, Bundy (Washington, 3.12.1963), in: Keefer/Sampson/Smith (Eds.), *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963*, Vol. XI, pp. 337, 867-868, 879, 895, 899. In the oral statement was referred to a Peruvian group captured in May 1963 on their return to Peru.

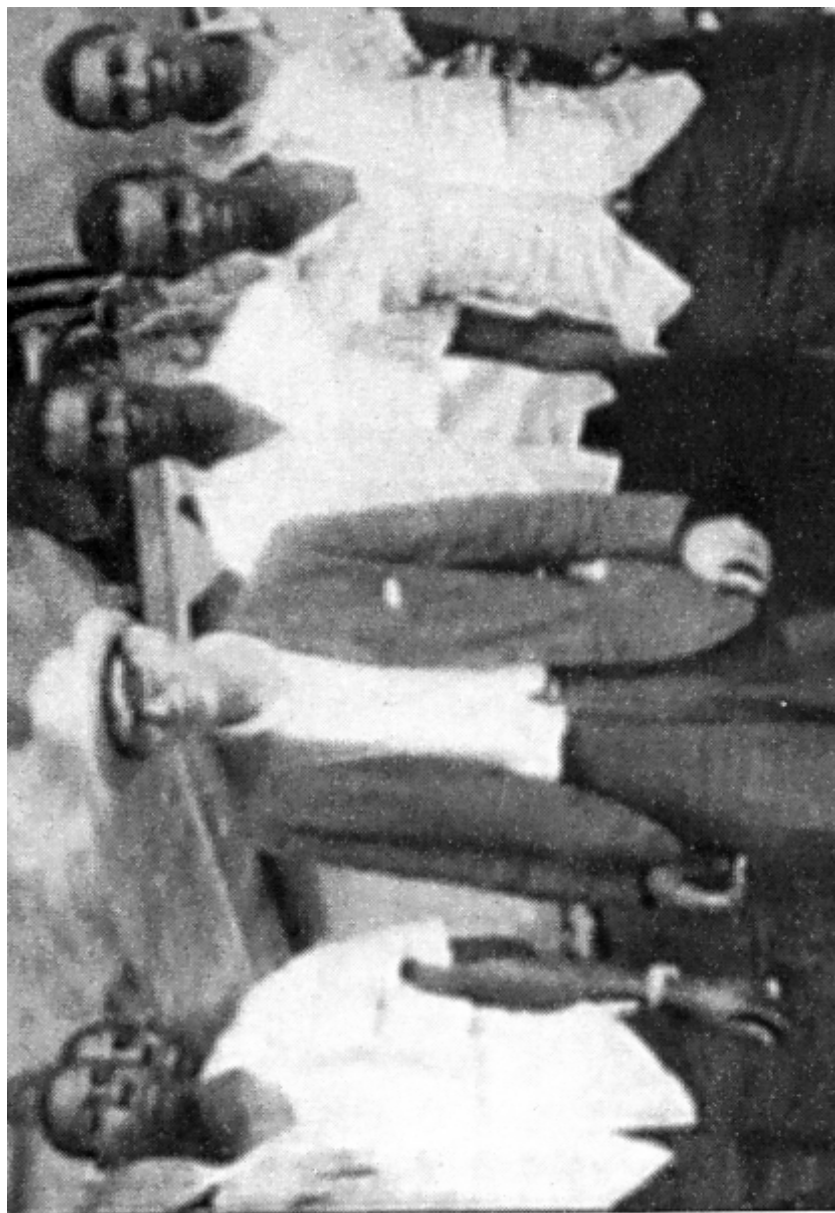
⁵³ Memorandum of Conversation, Kennedy-Gromyko (Washington, 10.10.1963) / Memoranda of a meeting, Kennedy-McNamara-Rusk etc. (Washington, 12.11.1963), in: Keefer/Sampson/Smith (Eds.), *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963*, Vol. XI, pp. 876, 884-887. In November 1962 Anastan Mikoyan described the Soviet strategy to the Cuban leadership: "We let the *yanquis* know that we were going to solve the Berlin problem, in order to distract their attention from the other problem. We did not intend to act on Berlin. [...] When the North Americans learned about the transports to Cuba, they also concentrated their campaign on Berlin. Both sides had their principal interest in Cuba, but appeared as if concentrated on Berlin." See Cuban Record of Conversation—Mikoyan and Cuban Leadership (Havana, 4/11/1962), in: Cold War International History Project, *Bulletin* 8-9 (Winter 1996/1997), p. 340.

insurrectionary foreign policy focused on Africa. In the 1980s attention shifted again to Latin America, specifically the Caribbean and Central America. The Cuban Revolution owed its vast influence in Latin America to a dramatic growth of demands for change and to the fact that -most evident in its early years- it embodied the aspirations and captured the imagination of Latin America's masses as no other political movement had ever done. Between 1959 and 1962, each step in the social transformation of Cuba and each clash with Washington set off an aftershock. But the Cuban impetus ran into the traditional resistance of the United States to radical change in Latin America. U.S. training and arming of Latin American militaries and police for counterinsurgency and the countless instances of overt and covert U.S. military and CIA intervention generally proved effective in keeping revolutionaries and suspect reformers from power.

Algeria

In Africa U.S. resistance was not as consequent as in Latin America and therefore the activities of Cuba were not as much impeded and were more successful. Already in the first half of the 1960s Cuba had a special relationship with Algeria, which was Cuba's first major contact with Africa since the end of the slave trade in the 1860s. Cuba's moral, military and civilian assistance to the Algerian people began in 1961 before the victory of Algerian national liberation movement FLN over French colonialism. Thanks to Cuba the Algerian rebels were supplied in 1961-1962 with U.S. weapons sent to Batista in 1958.⁵⁴ The Hispano-Soviet exile Angel Martínez, the Argentine and former director of the Cuban news agency "Prensa Latina", Jorge Ricardo Masetti, organized Cuba's first military aid in Africa which had nothing to do with the global superpower confrontation of the Cold War. Moreover Algerian wounded and war orphans were received in

⁵⁴ Prologue by Gabriel Molina (in 1963 director of the Prensa Latina Office in Algiers), in: Serguera, *Caminos del Che...*, p.17. Interview with Jorge Serguera (Havana, 6.3.1985), in: Serguera, *Caminos del Che*, pp. 397-398.



Ernesto Guevara se encamina hacia el Congo. Tanzania, abril de 1965. Tomado de Kalfon Pierre, *Che, Ernesto Guevara, una leyenda de nuestro siglo*, México, Plaza y Janés, 1997, p. 474.

Cuba. In October 1962 Cuba's civilian internationalism began, as Fidel Castro decided during the visit of the Algerian prime minister Ben Bella to send a group of Cuban doctors to Algeria after many French doctors had left the country when Algeria became independent in July 1962.⁵⁵

The Cuban ambassador in Algiers, Comandante Jorge "Papito" Serguera, recalled: "Cuba ocupaba un lugar privergiado en el tablero político por nuestra situación *sui generis*: éramos un país pequeño, no una potencia, no teníamos intereses económicos en Africa ni en Asia. Nuestra posición antiimperialista era muy clara. En el diferendo éramos, evidentemente, víctimas. De ello resultó que la embajada de Cuba en Argelia se convirtió en un club tercermundista."⁵⁶ For Havana Algeria not only served as a bridge to Africa but also to Latin America:

Es en Argel donde va a surgir un poco la idea tercermundista, del Tercer Mundo, por la influencia que tuvo allí Frantz Fanon de un grupo de gente de izquierda con estas concepciones un poco antisoviéticas, un poco arabistas... Casi todos los movimientos de liberación anticolonistas afroasiáticos y hasta de Venezuela e Islas Canarias, tenían oficinas allí y sus dirigentes viajaban frecuentemente al país... Trataron de mantener equidistancia frente al bloque capitalista y al bloque socialista.⁵⁷

The friendship between Cuba and Algeria and the shared objectives of the young revolutions led to a secret collaboration, as the Algerian President at that time, Ahmed Ben Bella, remembered:

During one of his visits to Algiers, Che Guevara informed me of a request from Fidel. Since Cuba was under close surveillance, there was no real chance of organizing the supply of arms and military cadres trained in Cuba to other Latin American countries. Could Algeria take over? Distance was no great handicap. On the contrary, it could work in favor of the secrecy vital for the success of such a large-scale operation. I agreed, of course, without hesitation. We immediately began to establish

⁵⁵ Piero Gleijeses, "Cuba's first venture in Africa: Algeria, 1961-1965", in: *Journal of Latin American Studies*, No. 28, 1996, pp. 162-167.

⁵⁶ Serguera, *Caminos del Che...*, p. 37.

⁵⁷ Interview with Jorge Serguera (Havana, 6.3.1985), in: Serguera, *Caminos del Che...*, p. 367. Prologue by Gabriel Molina, in: Serguera, *Caminos del Che...*, p.13.

organizational structures, placed under the direct control of Che Guevara, to host Latin American revolutionary movements. Soon representatives of all these movements moved to Algiers, where I met them many times together with Che. [...] He was very worried that the secret site of the preparations for armed action would become known and that our enemies would discover the true nature of the import-export companies we had set up in South America.⁵⁸

Together with the Algerians Cuba shipped weapons to the Venezuelan communist party which tried to come into power by armed struggle.⁵⁹ In 1962 and 1963 Masetti and his group trained especially in urban guerrilla warfare in Algeria for their planned guerrilla movement in Argentina.⁶⁰ It seems unlikely that Havana informed Moscow about Algiers' help for the coordination of Latin American activities because after the missile crisis the Soviet Union opposed the concept of armed struggle in Latin America.

When Algeria was attacked by Morocco in October 1963 and Ben Bella asked for urgent military assistance—because Algeria lacked the necessary military equipment—Cuba's first military venture in Africa had begun. Within only a few days a battalion of several hundred troops, 22 tanks and other military equipment disembarked in Oran to stop the Desert War.⁶¹ With the immediate arrival of the Cuban forces Morocco's military superiority had gone and the border crisis was settled peacefully; a Cuban attack against Moroccan troops was not necessary. Washington was surprised by the Cuban intervention. The U.S. feared that the Soviet Union also could enter

⁵⁸ Ahmed Ben Bella, "Le trentième anniversaire de la mort d'Ernesto Guevara - Ainsi était le 'Che'", in: *Le Monde Diplomatique*, October, 1997, p. 3.

⁵⁹ "La experiencia internacional. La Realidad del Ejército de Liberación Argelino", in: *Principios*. Revista del Comité Central del Partido Comunista de Venezuela, Vol. 3, March/April 1965, pp. 55-57. Serguera, *Caminos del Che...*, pp.143-147.

⁶⁰ Interview with Jorge Serguera (Havana, 6.3.1985), in: Serguera, *Caminos del Che*, pp. 386-387. Gleijeses, "Cuba's first venture in Africa: Algeria, 1961-1965", in: *Journal of Latin American Studies*, No. 28, 1996, pp. 187-188.

⁶¹ Ahmed Ben Bella, "Le trentième anniversaire de la mort d'Ernesto Guevara - Ainsi était le 'Che'", in: *Le Monde Diplomatique*, October, 1997, p. 3. Interview with Jorge Serguera (Havana, 6.3.1985), in: Serguera, *Caminos del Che...*, pp. 371-373 y 154-155.

Algeria and the conflict could become polarized.⁶² According to the memories of Serguera and the researches of Piero Gleijeses, who worked on the subject, Moscow did not guide Havana's engagement in Algeria. Moreover in one document the Cuban deputy commander in Algeria lamented about the lack of Soviet involvement and criticized the Soviet Union for having supplied Morocco with weapons.⁶³ Cuba took several risks in supporting Algeria against Morocco. One was involvement in a hot war thus again coming to attention of the UN only one year after the missile crisis. Another was deterioration of its relationship with the French government, a third a rupture of its sugar trade agreement with Morocco. As Fidel Castro explained had explained a few years later:

Hacer la menor insinuación de que seguimos una política mezquina de intereses en nuestra postura internacional, es el olvido de lo que ha costado a este país sus indoblegables posiciones, su solidaridad con numerosos países, entre ellos con Argelia, no obstante que ello dio pretexto para que otro país -que era uno de los más grandes compradores de azúcar de Cuba- encontrara argumentos para justificar las presiones del imperialismo para que no nos comprara más azúcar.⁶⁴

So, although Havana was looking for solidarity and international support in the Third World, the rationale of Cuba's support of Algeria predicated far more on idealism than on "Realpolitik".

⁶² Gleijeses, "Cuba's first venture in Africa: Algeria, 1961-1965", in: *Journal of Latin American Studies*, No.28, 1996, pp. 180-181.

⁶³ Flavio Bravo, deputy commander of the Cuban forces in Algeria to Raúl Castro (Algiers, 21.10.1963), in: Cold War International History Project, *Bulletin* No. 8-9 (Winter 1996/1997), p.13.

⁶⁴ Fidel Castro, Discurso pronunciado en la clausura de la primera conferencia de la organización latinoamericana de solidaridad (OLAS), Havana, 10.8.1967, in: *Primera Conferencia de la Organización Latinoamericana de Solidaridad*, Havana, Instituto del Libro, 1967, p. 132. Interview with Jorge Serguera (Havana, 6.3.1985), in: Serguera, *Caminos del Che*, p. 395. Serguera, *Caminos del Che*, p. 156. Angel Martínez who in October 1963 came to Algeria with the Cuban troops feared that the Spanish troops in Melilla could intervene against the Cuban forces.

Latin America

The focal point of Cuban foreign policy was in Latin America in the 1960s despite Soviet opposition. The Soviets disapproved of the armed struggles in Latin America and preferred, conforming to their coexistence policy, to enter into economic agreements with the Latin American governments; these were the same governments against which the guerrillas fought with Cuban support.⁶⁵ Nevertheless Cuba defiantly and doggedly supported the armed struggles in almost every Latin American country.⁶⁶ During the 1960s Cuban-Soviet relations had many ups and downs reaching a low in 1967-1968. There had been many controversies during the period of Cuban heresy with Moscow, for instance the disagreements about how the Cuban economy ought to be managed. But the crucial differences were about the role of armed struggle in foreign policy: “Esa bizantina discusión acerca de los medios de lucha y los caminos, si pacíficos o no pacíficos, si armados o no armados.”⁶⁷ There were serious disputes about how to assess the revolutionary verve of communist parties in Latin America. The Cuban ideology predicated on armed struggle as a key

⁶⁵ Fidel Castro, Discurso pronunciado en la clausura de la primera conferencia de la organización latinoamericana de solidaridad, OLAS, (Havana, 10.8.1967), p. 131: “Y si el internacionalismo existe, si la solidaridad es una palabra que merece ser pronunciada, lo menos que nosotros podemos esperar de cualquier Estado del campo socialista es que no le preste ayuda financiera ni técnica a ninguno de esos gobiernos.” Marcel Niedergang, “Le débat entre Cuba et l’U.R.S.S. M. Fidel Castro critique les accords conclus entre Moscou et certains gouvernements d’Amérique latine”, in: *Le Monde*, 22/12/1967, front page.

⁶⁶ Timothy P. Wickham-Crowley, *Guerrillas and Revolution in Latin America: a comparative study of insurgents and regimes since 1956*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992. Richard Gott, *Guerrilla Movements in Latin America*, Garden City, N.J.: Doubleday, 1972. Georges Fauriol (Ed.), *Latin America insurgencies*, Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 1985. Georges Fauriol (Ed.), *Security in the Americas*, Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 1989. Luis Mercier Vega (Ed.), *Guerrillas in Latin America*, New York: Praeger, 1969. James Petras, *Revolution and Guerrilla Movements in Latin America*, in: James Petras/Maurice Zeitlin (Eds.), *Latin America. Reform or Revolution?: a reader*, Greenwich, Conn.: Fawcett, 1968. León E. Bieber, “Lucha antiimperialista y unidad latinoamericana, la experiencia revolucionaria Castro-Guevarista”, in: *Homines*, Vol. 12, March 1988/January, 1989, pp. 258-276.

⁶⁷ Fidel Castro, Discurso pronunciado en la clausura de la primera conferencia de la organización latinoamericana de solidaridad, OLAS, (Havana, 10/8/1967), p. 121.

point for a revolutionary movement clashed with the Soviet revolutionary theory.⁶⁸ Guevara criticized the different application of the principle of peaceful coexistence between countries in a speech to a UN Conference on Trade and Development:

Que no puede haber coexistencia pacífica entre poderosos solamente, si se pretende asegurar la paz del mundo. La coexistencia pacífica debe ejercitarse entre todos los estados, independientemente de su tamaño, de las anteriores relaciones históricas que las ligera... Por eso, expresamos nuestra solidaridad hacia los pueblos, hoy coloniales, de la Guinea llamada portuguesa, de Angola o Mozambique, masacrados por el delito de demandar su libertad y estamos dispuestos a ayudarlos en la medida de nuestras fuerzas...⁶⁹

In January 1966 the Tricontinental Conference of Solidarity of the Peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America was held in Havana which marked the formal globalisation of the anti-imperial struggle. It gathered together representatives from the entire non-Western world, the three continents and though located firmly in the socialist camp it was independent of any direction from Moscow or Peking. In the first issue of the magazine "Tricontinental" Amilcar Cabral, the leader of the liberation movement of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde, stated: "The creation in free and socialist Cuba of a Tricontinental Organization of unity and struggle is one of the most far-reaching -if not the greatest- defeats that the people who struggle for their national liberation have inflicted upon imperialism, particularly the US imperialist."⁷⁰

⁶⁸ "Analyse der Politik der Kommunistischen Partei Kubas" by Manfred Kossok's Cuba working group, in: SAPMO-BArch (Berlin), DY 30/ IV A2/20/273. Régis Debray, *¿Revolución en la Revolución?* (Cuadernos de la revista Casa de las Américas 1), Havana, Casa de las Américas, 1967. Ernesto Guevara, *Guerra de guerrillas*, Havana: I.N.R.A., 1960. Ernesto Guevara, "Guerra de guerrillas", in: *Cuba Socialista*, Vol. 25, September 1963.

⁶⁹ Ernesto Guevara, "Discurso en la XIX Asamblea General de las Naciones Unidas" (Geneva, 11.12.1964), in: Ernesto Che Guevara, *Obras 1957-1967*, Vol. 2, Havana: Casa de las Américas, 1970, pp. 542-544.

⁷⁰ Tricontinental Bulletin , English Ed. by the Executive Secretariat of the Organization of Solidarity of the Peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America (Havana), Volol. 1, 1966, pp. 6-7.

In October 1966, half a year before Guevara's call to create a new Vietnam in Latin America, the concerned GDR foreign minister Winzer reported to General Secretary Ulbricht. The minister warned against Cuba's Latin American guerrilla activities supported by the previously founded Organization for Solidarity with Latin America (OLAS): "There needs to be a plan to concentrate all available forces on Venezuela and create there a beacon in form of a Latin American Vietnam... Cuban projects in Latin America are linked with violation of non-interference principle. The projects should not be any more within the competence of the tricontinental movement."⁷¹ But the tensions between Cuba and the socialist camp still grew. Even before it was proclaimed by Fidel Castro in July 1967, Cuban people knew since the missile crisis that the headquarters of Latin American guerrilla coordination was alone and could not rely on the support of the Soviet Union.⁷² Most dramatically, Moscow slowed down the level of petroleum deliveries to Cuba in late 1967. On January 2, 1968 in front of the Cuban people and his international guests of the Cultural Congress of Havana Castro attributed Cuba's fuel rationing to Soviets' refusal to deliver more.⁷³ In his speech Castro indicated that Cuba would get more oil if it was willing to surrender its "dignity" and its "decorum". In the historical context of the 1960s Cubans had to

⁷¹ Note of the Minister of Foreign Affairs Otto Winzer to W. Ulbricht, W. Stoph, E. Honecker, H. Axen (Berlin, 22/10/1966), in: SAPMO-BArch (Berlin), NY 4182/1241, pp. 162-163.

⁷² Fidel Castro, Speech on the anniversary attack on Moncada barracks (Santiago de Cuba, 26.7.1967), in: <http://www1.lanic.utexas.edu/la/cb/cuba/castro/1967/19670726>: "We will not talk about how many planes they can fly over our heads or how many soldiers they can deploy. We will not speak about the foreign support which realistically we must admit would come from countries lying several thousand miles from us. In the face of an invasion here, we must get used to the idea that we are going to fight alone."

⁷³ Fidel Castro, Speech on the ninth anniversary of the Cuban Revolution (Havana, 2.1.1968), in: <http://www1.lanic.utexas.edu/la/cb/cuba/castro/1968/19680102.1>. "Informationsbericht des ADN-Korrespondenten" (Havana, 24.2.1968), in: SAPMO-BArch (Berlin), DY 30/ IV A2/20/285. The Cuban newspaper "Granma" published face to face two articles at that time: One article -taken from Pravda- showed how there were record Soviet petroleum production increases and how disposed the Soviet Union was to sell to customers like Brazil. The other article was a statement from the Cuban government announcing that drastic fuel rationing procedures would have to be established because Moscow's economy could not supply the little island's petroleum needs.

understand that the price for enough oil would have been their political principles, that is their national independence.

Another obstacle to the success of Cuba's insurrectionary Latin American policy came from Washington's efforts to support Latin American governments, in defeating the guerrilla movements not only in Bolivia, where Guevara was captured and executed by a CIA-trained unit of the Bolivian army, but as well in other Latin American countries. The imperial structure of the strained relationship between the great Soviet power and the rebellious little island reached its peak in July 1968 according to the Soviet ambassador in Havana, Soldatow. He informed his opposite number from the GDR that he was considering the option of stopping the Soviet aid and support which so far had been granted to Cuba. GDR foreign minister Winzer reported to Ulbricht that this measure was planned because Fidel Castro fundamentally distrusted the Soviet willingness to support Cuba.⁷⁴ Subsequently Cuba had to pay tribute to "Realpolitik" acknowledging that its own economic resources were too limited and therefore it could not continue a foreign policy of a great power in opposition of both superpowers.

Cuba in Africa: From the Congo to Angola

But it would be a simplification to present the 1970s as "Sovietized" in all respects. Havana's policy was determined in the 1970s by a new understanding of the economic and political costs of its overseas activities. For example, Cuban revolutionaries did not intervene in the 1970s in Nicaragua which would have directly provoked Washington. In Cuban foreign policy, pragmatism may have determined an abandonment of revolution in Latin America but opportunities in Africa allowed the ethos of revolution to emerge as the little island in the Caribbean aided liberation struggles and

⁷⁴ Note of the Minister of Foreign Affairs Otto Winzer, to W. Ulbricht, W. Stoph, E. Honecker, H. Axen (Berlin, 11.7.1968), in: SAPMO-BArch (Berlin), NY 4182/1241, pp. 185-186.

empathetic governments in the Congo, in Zaïre, in Guinea-Bissau, in Angola and in many other successor states of the Iberian empires. The troops which Cuba had dispatched under Guevara's leadership in 1965 in support of the popular Lumumbist forces in Zaïre failed not only because of corruption and cultural conflicts; they failed also because of the U.S. intervention and their army of white mercenaries even though after Vietnam Washington's policy towards wars in Africa seemed to be a little paralysed.⁷⁵ In 1975 Havana had sent troops on request of the Angola national liberation movement MPLA to support the struggling people against colonialism, racism and apartheid. In Angola Havana intervened on its own initiative and without consulting Moscow, although Moscow supplied weapons during the Angola war and a loose coordination between Havana and Moscow took place.⁷⁶ Because of the prestige of the Cuban Revolution Agostinho Neto had asked for Cuban military instructors in January 1965, at a meeting in Brazzaville between Guevara and the MPLA leaders.⁷⁷ The Western media criticized Moscow for intervening in an African conflict and accused it of using Cuban "mercenaries" to carry out its aggression. To counter the international reproaches for being at war in Angola as a Soviet proxy, in 1977 Castro declared in Luanda that Cuba was a "Latin African nation" and therefore they were

⁷⁵ Piero Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions*. Havana, Washington and Africa, 1959-1976, pp. 57-159. Waters, From the Escambray to the Congo. In the whirlwind of the Cuban Revolution. Interview with Víctor Dreke, pp. 121-151. Already in the first half of the 1960s the U.S. had sent a team of anti-Castro Cuban pilots to fly air strikes in the Congo.

⁷⁶ Editor's introduction, in: Cold War International History Project Bulletin 8-9 (Winter 1996/1997), p 1: "In January 1976, during several days of negotiations in Moscow with Kremlin leaders, U.S. Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger pleaded for a Soviet gesture to ease the superpower confrontation in Angola, where the USSR's airlift of military equipment and Cuban troops had allowed the leftist government in Luanda to withstand an assault by guerrilla forces backed by South Africa... Soviet communist Party General Secretary Leonid I. Brezhnev and Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko rebuffed the American's increasingly plaintive entreaties with the curt response that any complaints should be taken up with Havana, since the Cuban intervention was the result of decisions made between two sovereign states, Angola and Cuba, and the USSR could not speak for them."

⁷⁷ Pierre Kalfon, *Che Guevara, una leyenda de nuestro siglo*, Barcelona, Plaza & Janés, 1997, pp. 428-429. Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions*. Havana, Washington and Africa, 1959-1976, pp. 82-83, 161, 246-255.

obliged to help their black brothers.⁷⁸ After his visit to Africa Castro informed the GDR leadership about the Cuban involvement in Angola: "We are giving Angola a great deal of military support. At the end of the liberation war, 36,000 Cuban troops and 300 tanks were deployed. The South African mercenaries were quickly demoralized. The USA talks about 12,000 Cuban soldiers... The number of our civilian advisers and experts will rise to 4,000 this year. Until now this aid has been provided free of charge."⁷⁹ The number of military personnel subsequently declined, but only slightly.⁸⁰ Between 1975 and 1990 more than 300,000 Cuban troops were involved in supporting the liberation movements in Angola and Ethiopia.⁸¹

Cuba could not accomplish its successful intervention in African national liberation struggles without Soviet support and subsidies. However in the 1970s Moscow became dependent on the geographically small island for some important elements of its foreign policy. This is perhaps the most unusual achievement of the communist experiment in the 20th century: Cubans from Havana and Russians or Cossacks from the Ukrainian soil developed something like a common policy. Between Havana and Moscow there was a reciprocal dependence in essential aspects of their policies: the success of important Soviet foreign policy goals in Africa was conditioned on Cuban activities in that continent. For instance that was the case when Moscow and Berlin were interested in 1977 in getting the Cubans to Ethiopia because of the strategic role of the Red Sea. The deputy director

⁷⁸ Martin Franzbach, "Angola im Schnittpunkt von Afrika, Europa und Amerika: Das Echo des Angola-Krieges in der kubanischen Literatur", in: Hella Ulferts/Martin Franzbach (Eds.), *Togo, Kamerun und Angola im euro-afrikanischen Dialog*. Dokumentation des 1. Bremer Afro-Romania Kolloquiums vom 26.-28. Oktober, 1995, Bremen: Universität Bremen, 1996, pp. 126-127.

⁷⁹ Conversation between F. Castro and E. Honecker, H. Axen, W. Lamberz, P. Verner, P. Markowski (Berlin, 3.4.1977), in: SAPMO-BArch (Berlin), DY 30/ J IV 2/201/1292.

⁸⁰ Sergio Roca, "Economic Aspects of Cuban Involvement in Africa", in: *Cuban Studies*, No. 10 (January 1980), pp. 50-80.

⁸¹ Jorge I. Domínguez, "Cuba as superpower: Havana and Moscow, 1979", in: *Cold War International History, Project Bulletin* 8-9 (Winter 1996/1997), p. 216: "In any year, relative to its population, Cuba had more troops posted overseas every year than the United States had posted in Vietnam at the peak of its engagement in that war."

of the International Department of the Central Committee in Berlin, Friedel Trappen, recalled that in early 1977 he had been sent to Havana to inform the Cubans about Mengisto's takeover and to lure them to send Afro-Cuban troops to the Horn of Africa: "I should instruct the Cuban government about what we had experienced in Ethiopia and make them interested in the so-called socialist construction in Ethiopia... We thought ... that the support should be partially done by blacks... The support of the Cubans was essential."⁸²

Conclusion

In the second half of the twentieth century local armed conflicts took place in the general political and global strategic context of the Cold War. The structure and course of these conflicts were very often determined by the traditional imperial logic of the colonial powers and the ideological pattern of the Cold War, either simultaneously or consecutively. Also the external and internal Cuban struggles as well as Washington's covert and overt subversion and its economic sanctions against the Caribbean island were part of this global confrontation. The rationale behind the involvement of the United States in Cuban struggles was common to both the imperial logic of the colonial empires and the global superpower confrontation of the Cold War. Also civil war and international conflict between Cuba and the U.S. were intensified by Cuban émigrés warning of communist apocalypse. Cuban émigrés were part of the Cold War structure by determining U.S. domestic politics and in this way influencing global affairs. Whereas the rationale behind the involvement of the Soviet Union in Cuban struggles generally was not common to the imperial logic of the colonial empires (exception: the missile crisis). Although the island always had held privileges within the socialist camp, for a country in the sphere of influence of

⁸² Interview with Friedel Trappen (Berlin, 19.5.1999), in: Hans-Joachim Döring, "Es geht um unsere Existenz", *Die Politik der DDR gegenüber der Dritten Welt am Beispiel von Mosambik und Äthiopien*, Berlin: Links-Verlag, 1999, pp. 282, 285.

one of the two superpowers the path of neutrality was closed in the Cold War. But Havana -thousands of miles from Moscow- could avoid an unconditional dependence on the Soviet Union and equally succeeded to abolish the postcolonial dependency on the United States.

This was possible because of the economic agreements with the socialist countries and during the 1960s because of the trade with Western European countries like Spain, France and the United Kingdom.⁸³ Moreover in the early years -the beginning of the Sino-Soviet dispute-Moscow had to acknowledge the international prestige of an until then unthinkable Revolution. Last but not least Cuba's national pride was very sensitive to all kind of violations concerning the national independence. Cuba's revolution was not only socialist but also nationalist as Che Guevara characterized it: "Se podría esquematizar llamándole Nacionalismo de Izquierda."⁸⁴ In the context of the decolonization era in the 1960s the Cuban Revolution was so internationalist in its projection that it challenged both superpowers co-opting the power of the Soviet Union and the Third World for its own interests.

So, not every armed conflict fought or supported by countries of the Northern hemisphere in the Cold War era was governed from the outset by the logic of the East-West confrontation (Angola, Algeria). The logic of Cuba's intervention in Africa was more based on idealism and international solidarity. Cuba's support for SWAPO's struggle in Namibia against South African apartheid regime is another example.

Although Cuba had not fallen out of the socialist camp in the dramatic year of 1968, the anniversary year of Cuban revolution in 1868, Havana tried in the 1960s to exploit the superpower

⁸³ Dieter Coburger, "Gute Beziehungen Kuba-Frankreich. Der Vertrag mit Berliet ist nur ein Beispiel", in: Neues Deutschland, 24.8.1966. George Lambie, "Anglo-Cuban commercial relations in the 1960s: A case study of the Leyland Motor Company contracts with Cuba" and "De Gaulle's France and the Cuban Revolution", both in: Alistair Hennessy/George Lambie (ed.), *The Fractured Blockade. West European-Cuban Relations during the Revolution* (Warwick University Caribbean Studies), London/Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1993, pp. 163-233.

⁸⁴ Ernesto Guevara, in: Interview by Carlos M. Castañeda, in: *Bohemia* (Havana), 30.1.1960, p. 49.

confrontation in its struggles against U.S. imperialism and bipolar coexistence. Cuban revolutionaries became some of the most persistent critics of the world system and acted as an opponent of neoliberal globalisation “avant la lettre”. Havana’s struggle against the global superpowers overshadowed the ideological and bloc structure of the Cold War. Cuba’s relations to the superpowers illustrate that the bipolar confrontation allowed the island temporarily to break through the imperial logic of the colonial empires. Although Havana’s foreign policy and overseas activities advanced Soviet imperial interests in the 1970s and 1980s, Moscow generally could not shape Havana’s involvements in Latin America or Africa (exception Ethiopia). Both superpowers had become dependent on a little island for some central aspects of their foreign policies. So, Cuba as a little island had become a great power during the Cold War.



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