

Us cuban relations an analysis



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From the implementation of the Monroe Doctrine, to today's embargoes, relations between the US and Cuba have always been fairly complicated. Cuba originally a colony of Spain, became contested in 1823 when the US adopted policies which sought to back colonial resistance against Spain. Of course this was not entirely altruistic, as the Ostend Manifest of 1854 came about as a way which the US would purchase Cuba. In this secret diplomatic arrangement, it was stated that “ an immediate and earnest effort ought to be made by the government of the United States to purchase Cuba from Spain at any price for which it can be obtained, not exceeding the sum of \$ (...) It must be clear to every reflecting mind that, from the peculiarity of its geographical position, and the considerations attendant on it, Cuba is as necessary to the North American republic as any of its present members, and that it belongs naturally to that great family of states of which the Union is the providential nursery” (Sierra, n. d.) However, despite the efforts made by the American diplomacy, the offer was eventually rejected and the Cuba territory would remain under the Spanish rule for a few decades more.

The independence from Spain however, took place in the early 20th century with the direct help of the United States. The Cuban people were becoming aware of the continuous subjugation attempts by the Spanish crown and were unable to support the pressures, both political and financial that Spain was making. Thus, it launched a liberation movement that would eventually result on Cuba's independence in 1908. However, this could not have been achieved without the direct involvement of the US. In this sense, by the end of the 19th century, both the political factions as well as the public opinion were in agreement relative to the future situation of the Cuban island. More

precisely, the majority argued for an independent Cuba that would no longer be forced to consider the difficulties of the Spanish crown. (Deere, 1998, 730-1)

At the same time however, there were also political and economic reasons which motivated President McKinley to send troops in Cuba in the late 19th century to stop the ongoing war between the Cuban insurgents and the Spanish rule. Therefore, studies have pointed out that “ In 1898 the United States became an empire (...) that would include noncontiguous colonial territories. By 1903 there were 37 American colonies in Cuba; a decade later there were 64. 2 and by the end of the second decade of the twentieth century there were approximately 80 foreign colonies in Cuba” (Deere, 1998, 730-2). Therefore, the interest for the US were related to the establishment of an increased power post in Cuba largely because of the business conducted with sugar, tobacco, and slaves. In this contest, the issue of an independent Cuba was addressed by the US president who opted for the Teller Amendment which represented a diplomatic means of justifying the intervention in Cuba “ for pacification” (Sierra, n. d.)

The independence of Cuba in 1902 represented an important history point in the development of the relations in the region from more points of view. On the one hand, an independent Cuba implied the fact that the Spanish rule was no longer an issue for the country itself as well as for the region. Taking into account the fact that even though colonialism was losing its intensity especially after the end of the British rule in the US, the European influence was still a matter of debate in the American hemisphere, Cuba’s independence was another proof that Spain and in general the countries

from the continent were starting to be faced with strong opposition from nation countries rather than colonies. On the other hand, Spain was the European country which in time challenged the American supremacy in North and Latin America. Thus, when Spain was forced to give up Cuba, it signified the ceding of its influence in Latin America and a success of the Monroe Doctrine. Little by little, the US would extend its political protection over countries, a process which included however Cuba as well.

From the political point of view, the situation in Cuba after its independence can be characterized by a state of dependence on the US. More precisely, after the war with Spain, Cuba relied heavily on the protection of the United States against a possible retaliation from Spain. This attitude was even considered in the official papers of the time. More precisely, “ the government of Cuba consents that the United States may exercise the right to intervene for the preservation of Cuban independence, the maintenance of a government adequate for the protection of life, property, and individual liberty and for discharging the obligations with respect to Cuba imposed by the Treaty of Paris on the United States, now to be assumed and undertaken by the government of Cuba” (Editorial Comment, 1907). Therefore, it can be said that the early history of the independent Cuba was strongly related to the influence of the United States; at the same time, the security of Cuba was an essential issue for the US.

From an economic point of view, Cuba was also part of a wider strategic framework conducted by the United States. Although the level of economic dependency in the world was a small part of the degree of interdependence at the moment, the economic relations of Cuba was strongly related to the <https://assignbuster.com/us-cuban-relations-an-analysis/>

policy of the United States. The best considered areas of trade were the sugar and the tobacco industry. In this sense, in the 19th century, Cuba was one of the leading sugar producers in the world, an element for which Spain was reluctant to give up its claims on the island. However, “ the rise of sugar also linked Cuba to the United States, a thriving market with limited domestic sugar production. In 1884, when a collapse in international sugar prices pushed many Cuban sugar mills into bankruptcy, capital from the United States poured into the island, consolidating and modernizing the sugar sector (...) The subsequent US occupation of the island tied its economy ever closed to the United States as US military governors promulgated laws giving US firms concessionary access to the Cuban market. By the late 1920s US firms controlled 75 percent of the sugar industry and most of the mines, railroads, and public utilities.” (Leogrande and Thomas, 2002, 325-6)

The economic dependence on the United States and in particular the high degree of American control over the Cuban industry and natural resources determined a massive reaction even at the social level. For the public in Cuba, the massive US presence represented the symbol of the colonial rule identified with the previous Spanish rule. From this point of view after the gaining of independence, in Cuba a certain sense of opposition towards the US was created. At the same time, one of the most obvious areas of the social aspect which saw the increased influence of the US was the American attempt to reconsider the colonies and their social structure. In this sense, they tried to substitute most of the Spanish names and ways of organization not with local ones but rather with the ones familiar to the American side.

As part of the war reconstruction effort, the Cuban government often appealed to the United States to provide resources to rebuild the society. In this sense, “ well-financed North American syndicates and land companies retained teams of attorneys, foreign and Cuban, and descended on local communities to press new claims to title, challenge existing property deeds and boundaries, assess new land values and taxes, and inaugurate judicial surveys” (Deere, 1998, 9). These attempts not only influenced the way in which economic affairs would be further conducted in the benefit of the US, but also it established the framework for a social organization that did not come at the initiative of the Cuban government but rather as an American suggestion.

By the early decades of the 20th century the issue of the American presence in Cuba came to be seen as a problem in most of the areas of activity. There are several causes that are related to this matter which can be considered to be determinant for the revolution.

On the one hand, there was the increasing nationalist spirit. The Cuban nation had never established itself as a truly independent country throughout its history. The influence of the Spanish and then of the Americans had left the native societies of the Cuban island lacking any sense of national identity. In this sense, it is considered that there was a need for a revolution in a country from which “ African- influenced culture was almost entirely excluded” (Moore, ?, 2) At the same time however, this emancipation attitude must be seen even from the perspective of the changes that were taking place at the time of the revolution, in the 50s and 60s. Therefore, after the Second World War the colonial powers realized that

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the nationalist flagellum would eventually destroy their grip on the colonies and they came to consider giving their independence. The case of Great Britain and France are relevant in this sense. However, Cuba was not officially a colony; still the pressure of the American side was felt just as intense.

There was also the economic fact which played a key role in reconsidering the needs and desires of the Cuban people and its economy, a shift in perspective which set in question the need for the US's support or monopoly. However, this was a longer process, as “ the 1920s was a period of tremendous upheaval and unrest in Cuba (...). The island experienced a severe depression after World War I. Unemployment and poverty was exacerbated first by the dramatic deflation of world sugar prices in 1920s, then by the US stock market crash of 1929” (Moore, 3).

The result of the economic backlash also led to serious social struggles. In this sense, “ material desperation among Cuba's agriculturalists and urban working classes led to a constant succession of strikes and activism that disrupted what remained of the economy” (Moore, 3). These social movements also reflected a new direction for the perspective on the role of the Cuban worker and on the economic philosophy of the country.

Another essential issue that offered a positive environment for the revolution was the wider context of the Cold War. In fact, the influence of the communist ideas came to be felt even before the end of the war. However, it was after the end of the conflagration that the situation of the workers, of the common people, but most importantly, of the political system that in

most cases in Cuba was related to the United States. Therefore communism played a crucial role and the Cuban Revolution represented yet another step in the process of the export of the communist revolutions throughout the world (Hobsbawm, 1996) and at the same time it promoted the Marxist beliefs related to the issue of social equality and the class struggle. In the conditions of the Cuban society, these elements catered their needs to rebel against the regime and to adhere to Castro's urge for overthrowing the regime in power at the time of Fulgencio Batista.

Finally, it is precisely the Batista regime that played a major part in the eruption of the revolution. In this sense, he was one of the strongest supporters of the US's presence in Cuba because it allowed him to control the legal power, despite the fact that the means through which this was acquired by Batista were as well violent ones. However, the simple fact that the US had encouraged a regime that supported corruption and misappropriation of funds represented a negative image in the face of the society which came to support more and more the revolutionary spirit of people such as Castro or Che Guevara.

The initial response to the series of attempts from Castro to get the power from Batista was positive in terms of the American side. This was largely due to the fact that the acting president in the 50s had fallen on the path of the authoritarian rule and in the end was even determined to contact the Soviet Union. This was the result of the constant pressures made by the United States to reduce the level of control on the population, on the economy, and in the end on the political scene in Cuba. The Batista regime had come to be considered as one of the most authoritarian regimes in the region and of the

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world. He came to deny its citizens their basic rights, he proclaimed himself president for life, and ended up nationalizing parts of the Cuban industry. From this perspective, the event of a revolution appeared to be a good resolution of the growing tensions between the US and Cuba.

There is a particular element which must be taken into account when considering the Cuban Revolution from a wider perspective. The contribution of Che Guevara was an essential factor in determining the revolutionary image of the events led by Fidel Castro. In this sense, at the time, the war in Vietnam was already an issue known worldwide and it was viewed as a fight against the remains of the colonial rule, in the beginning of the French power and afterwards of the American one.

From this historical perspective, it must be pointed out that Che Guevara often used the rhetoric of a war of liberation in the description of the revolution. In his view, it was more than liberation from the rule of Batista; it was an attempt to reconsider the relationship with the United States and with the world at large. More precisely, “ Ernesto “ Che” Guevara in the 1960s he called on revolutionaries to create “ two, three Vietnams” in order to confront and weaken the United States and its allies” (Dominguez, 1997, 1). Therefore it can be said that aside from the main ideas related to the issues of the Marxist revolution on which the discourse of all major parts in the revolution were based, there was also a certain sense of independence not from a general superior force, but a practical one that had exercised its power and authority for decades on the Cuban soil.

The revolution in itself followed a series of steps. In 1953 Castro made the first attempt to eliminate Batista from power; however the 26th of July Movement's leader was imprisoned. However, the action of Batista only transformed him into a martyr and allowed him the possibility to increase his popularity. Therefore, aware of this eventuality, Batista released him two years later. Following a series of consecutive attempts to overthrow Batista from power, in the end, on January 1, 1959, he eventually resigned and Fidel Castro became the leader of a free yet communist Cuba.

The first reactions of the US were, as stated before, positive. In this sense, there were even pressures made to release Fidel Castro. This was largely due to the fact that the measures taken by the Batista regime affected directly the interests of the US. At the same time, the fact that he has started contacts with the URSS threatened to endanger the equilibrium of the area.

Another element which had gained the support of the US for the Castro cause was the fact that in his speeches he often advocated the rights of the people, using a somewhat democratic rhetoric. This was very useful for gaining the American support for the revolutionary cause. However, as Castro gained the power in Cuba, this rhetoric was gradually annulled. In time, Fidel Castro came to have an offensive attitude towards the United States in particular and most importantly however, he adopted the communist perspective on economics, social norms, and especially in the political area.

In this sense, the immediate follow up of the Revolution took into account the fact that the Cuban leader was in the end a skillful political figure who

managed to convince the American side to offer its support in over throwing of the Batista regime. Moreover, the change that took place resulted in the end in the replacement of one dictator with another.

The outcome of the Cuban Revolution must be seen from a double perspective. On the one hand, the internal effects are important; on the other hand, however, the international effects, as well as the way in which the American interests were affected by the rise to Fidel Castro.

Concerning the internal outcome of the revolution it must be pointed out that the situation of the Cuban people, as well as the different areas of industry. Therefore in the very beginning he tried to implement a socialist model that would aim at reconstructing the country. Thus, the immense popularity of the early Cuban Revolution — especially in the years of the great transformation from 1959 through 1961 — is easy to understand. During these years Castro constantly made headlines with his social reforms and his measures to throw off what Latin Americans regarded as the yoke of Yankee imperialism. The Bay of Pigs invasion, the improbable victory of a Cuban David against a Yankee Goliath, cemented Castro's hold over the Latin American masses"(Wright, 2001). Therefore, Castro created for himself an image of a savior of a people from the toughness of history.

Fidel Castro was unlike many of the communist leaders during the Cold War. His success is largely the consequence of the way in which he managed to consider the nationalist spirit and the needs of his people and adapt the socialist precepts to it. In this sense he introduced what would later be called Castroism. This term was stated from the beginning of his political career

and his attempt to seize power in Cuba. In this sense, his initial manifest of 1953 “ offers the best illustration of Castroism in its guerrilla phase. Its tone was nationalistic, reformist, and vaguely socialistic, and its goals were free elections, constitutional government, agrarian reform, increased industrialization, and the exclusion of all forms of foreign intervention. Its demands found their origin in the past history of Cuban left-wing democratic, nationalist movements.” (Welch, 1984, 4). Thus, from this point of view, it is clear that Fidel Castro had an appropriate politics to gain the support and determination of his people and at the same time to become one of the most feared leaders of the South.

From an international perspective, the Cuban Revolution marked a moment of relief and concern at the same time. The reference point for the success or failure of the Revolution must be considered the United States, taking into account the history between the two countries. Therefore, on the one hand, it represented a sign of relief because Fidel Castro had come at a time when the regime of Batista was one of the most autocratic regimes of the world. He was viewed in the early beginnings as a possible partner of dialogue and a positive change that would enable the US to reconsider its power in Latin America. Especially from the perspective of the democratic discourse he was promoting in his revolutionary years, he was regarded as potential democrat leader.

The concern was related to certain economic factors. On the one hand, there was the issue of the general structure of the economy and the way in which the Marxist views considered the development of the economy. In this sense, the planned economy often took into consideration the nationalization of

important branches of the industry. Therefore, the US was somewhat concerned about the possible economic reactions of the Castro regime.

The concerns soon became a reality soon after Castro gained the power. In this sense, he constantly tried to reduce the dependency on the US and in this sense, “ by 1960, Cuba’s revolutionary leaders had concluded that the path to economic independence and development was socialism and before the year was out one billion of US direct investment had been nationalized”. Thus, the state regained control of its industry, and especially of the sugar industry which afterwards became the leading branch of the Cuban economy.

Another consequence of the Cuban revolution that was felt at the international level was the reconsideration of the balance of power in the area. In this sense, the nationalization of parts of the industry had determined economic reactions and sanctions from the United States. All these notwithstanding, the Cuban government continued to put in practice its socialist reform. However, this could have not been achieved without the help of the Soviet Union who saw in Cuba a strategic place for communism (1). It can therefore be considered that the revolution in Cuba enabled the USSR to win an important point inside the security area of the US.

Overall, it can be said that indeed the Cuban revolution was an important element in the history of the Cold War. Considering the causes, the historical background, the evolution, as well as the results, the revolution can be viewed also as a means of rejection of the historical American interference in Cuba.