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Nicholas V. Boline
Virginia Military Institute

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Fidel Castro's Grand Strategy in the Cuban Revolution: 1959-1968

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Introduction

Hal Brands defines grand strategy broadly, as the “purposeful and coherent set of ideas about what a nation seeks to accomplish in the world, and how it should go about doing so.”¹ While this elegantly simple definition sets the boundaries for a discussion of grand strategy, Brands also identifies several defining characteristics of grand strategy which clarify its nature. The grand strategist coordinates all the instruments of national power to achieve aims which he finds to be in the vital interest of his country, while considering the relationship between means and ends.² This means that an effective grand strategist must ensure that the resources used in executing a strategy are proportional to the potential gains. From the perspective of the grand strategist, a Pyrrhic victory is no victory at all.³ Furthermore, grand strategic thinking applies as much in peacetime as it does in war, since the ultimate goal is to “link long-term interests to short- and medium-term policies.”⁴ In order to meet these criteria, the grand strategist must understand the nature of their country’s situation and the nature of any conflicts which it seeks to win.

Although Fidel Castro never developed a formal grand strategy blueprint or document, he made clear by his actions, policies, and rhetoric that he indeed engaged in purposeful and coherent thinking about Cuba’s vital interests. He conducted the various policies and initiatives through which Cuba interacted with the world in a decidedly grand strategic fashion. This paper will deduce the four aims which Castro considered vital to the success of the Cuban Revolution and examine the policies he enacted to serve those aims. It will conclude that Castro effectively broke the traditional hegemonic relationship with the U.S. and consolidated his political power domestically. He failed, however, to avoid trading one hegemonic patron for another and was ultimately unable to export the Cuban Revolution to the rest of the Third World.

Castro’s Grand Strategy: 1959-1968

During the first period of Cuban foreign relations after the success of the Revolution, roughly during the years from 1959 to 1968, Castro sought to forge a unique place for Cuba in the International Communist Movement (ICM). He rejected the notion of trading one hegemon for another in the sense that he often defied the policy of important and powerful allies within the ICM whenever he felt that it ran contrary to what was best for Cuba. He launched protracted rhetorical assaults on what were conceivably his major potential allies, the Soviet Union (USSR) and China. Owing to Castro’s contradictory rhetoric, it can be difficult to formulate a coherent policy statement from Castro himself, but based on his words, actions, and ideology, as well as the geopolitical situation of Cuba, we can discern four main grand strategic aims during this period.

¹ Hal Brands, *What Good Is Grand Strategy? Power and Purpose in American Statecraft from Harry S. Truman to George W. Bush* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014), 3.

² Paul Kennedy, “American Grand Strategy, Today and Tomorrow: Learning from the European Experience,” in *Grand Strategies in War and Peace* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991), 168.

³ This yoking of ends and means and the consideration of the nature of the peace to follow was first put forth by B. H. Liddell Hart. See *Strategy*. Second Revised Edition (New York: Penguin Books USA, 1991), 353, 357.

⁴ Brands, 5.

Castro's grand strategy can be assessed in terms of the four main strategic aims of the Cuban Revolution. First, the fledgling republic would have to break free of the traditional hegemonic relationship with the United States (US). Castro realized that in order to carry out his revolutionary struggle, he would have to ensure that Cuba's basic security needs were fulfilled, a daunting task, considering its proximity to the US. With a reasonable sense of security achieved, Castro could then address his second strategic aim, one to which he would devote a large portion of his time and energy: the maintenance of the Revolution at home. Building his domestic political base and creating a stable platform from which to accomplish his foreign policy goals was important if he was to make Cuba a significant player on the world stage. The third major aim was to manage Cuba's foreign relations in such a way as to achieve two related sub-aims: to protect himself against future aggression by the United States and, in doing so, to avoid relying so heavily upon another great power sponsor that he would have traded one hegemon for another. That is to say, Castro sought to avoid entering into another hegemonic relationship with a foreign power that would force him to act in their interest above the interests of Cuba. The fourth and final grand strategic aim of the revolution was the exportation of the Revolution to the rest of the world, particularly Latin America and Africa. If the Revolution could be exported to the rest of the Third World as a direct result of Castro's action, he would gain credibility as an independent "pole" in the emerging multipolar ICM. This would strengthen Cuba's position vis-à-vis the great powers and lend Castro greater legitimacy at home.⁵

So Far From God, So Close to the United States...

There can be little debate that Castro had achieved his first grand strategic aim by early 1960. By October of that year, Washington had severed all diplomatic ties with Havana and placed a devastating embargo on Cuba. Washington no longer had a say in Cuban foreign policy except in the sense that it was a powerful threat on Castro's doorstep, one whose intentions could not be ignored. But the strained relations between the US and Castro were by no means inevitable in the short term. They were only partially a result of ideological incompatibility. The other part had to do with the way Castro handled the break.

A central ideological tenet and strategic aim of the Cuban Revolution was to break the traditional US domination of Cuban politics. In his memoirs, Castro emphasizes the influence of the anti-US sentiment of José Martí, considered the "original Cuban revolutionary." Castro recalls Martí writing about risking his life "to prevent, by the timely independence of Cuba, the United States from extending its hold across the Antilles and falling with all the greater force on the lands of our America."⁶ Castro calls this outlook the "incredible legacy left to us Cuban revolutionaries."⁷ Castro clearly understood that he needed to gain meaningful autonomy from the United States in order to pursue his other three grand strategic aims. But this ideological desire for autonomy clearly did not manifest itself in an *immediate* rejection of all US

⁵ These grand strategic aims are derived primarily from Jorge Domínguez's *To Make a World Safe for Revolution* and Piero Gleijeses' *Cuba and The Cold War*. See Jorge I. Domínguez, *To Make a World Safe for Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 8-78. and Piero Gleijeses, "Cuba and the Cold War, 1959-1980." *Cambridge History of the Cold War*, Vol. 2, eds. Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 327-348.

⁶ Fidel Castro with Ignacio Ramonet, *My Life* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2007), 151. [Hereafter, Castro, *My Life*.]

⁷ Fidel Castro with Ignacio Ramonet, *My Life* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2007), 151. [Hereafter, Castro, *My Life*.]

involvement. Castro recognized that good relations with the US, especially at a time of high vulnerability, would give him time to consolidate his rule and implement his domestic reforms.⁸

Indeed, the prospects for friendly relations between Castro and the US appeared promising in early 1959, at least from Washington's point of view.⁹ Castro visited the US in mid-April, speaking about fostering "good relations [and] good understanding."¹⁰ About a week after this visit, the CIA advised Eisenhower that there was still a possibility "of developing a constructive relationship with [Castro] and his government."¹¹ Yet during his visit, Castro explicitly avoided the topic of potential economic aid to Cuba. He repeatedly rejected generous and assertive offers of aid from various US government agencies, viewing them as attempts by Washington to reestablish economic dependence after the war. So why then did Castro visit the United States? Historian Jorge Domínguez suggests that the purpose of the trip was never to obtain aid, since during the trip he made it clear that he would accept none of it, but to buy time while important political decisions about the nature of the new regime were made at home. Specifically, Castro needed to address the questions of whether to hold elections in the new government and whether or not Castro would in fact, ever accept Washington's aid. Ultimately, Castro decided against both, going against the tenets of his own Revolution in the former case and the traditional Cuban political model in the latter.¹² Domínguez's proposition is supported by the later account of Soviet diplomat Alexander Alexeev, the first official visitor to Cuba after Castro took power. Alexeev recalls that Castro recognized the need to tread lightly with Washington until he could establish a more stable base at home.¹³ How could Castro expect to break the traditional hegemonic mold if Cuba was on the American payroll? If he were to fall into the same vicious cycle of American interventions through economic dependency that had characterized Cuban government since 1898, he would be nothing more than Washington's next puppet in Havana.

Once the Eisenhower Administration realized that Castro could not be brought into the US fold, probably because of Castro's own anti-US ideological considerations, relations quickly soured. Castro moved to consolidate his power at home, nationalizing many properties owned by US firms without compensation. He began to jail political prisoners and publicly denounced the US.¹⁴ On October 26th, in an attempt to rally Cuban nationalist sentiment, Castro publicly condemned the United States for a bombing of Havana which never actually occurred.¹⁵ This kind of rhetoric on Castro's part shows that he was more interested in using anti-US sentiment to consolidate his tenuous grasp on power at home than in fostering a normal, if somewhat chilly, relationship with Washington. Indeed, Alexeev's memoirs confirm that Castro's intent in

⁸ Alexander Alexeev, "Cuba after the Triumph of the Revolution," 1960, trans. Elizabeth D. Ulmas. <http://isites.harvard.edu/fs/docs/icb.topic608387.files/Alexeev.pdf>, 8.

⁹ Stephen Ambrose, *Eisenhower*. Vol. II. *The President*. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1984), 527.

¹⁰ Domínguez, 18.

¹¹ Ambrose, II, 527.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Alexeev, 8.

¹⁴ Domínguez, 19.

¹⁵ Fidel Castro, "Speech to the People of Cuba at Loyalty Rally," October 26, 1959, Latin American Network Information Center, University of Texas Project Castro, <http://lanic.utexas.edu/project/castro/db/1959/19591026.html>. [Hereafter LANIC and accompanying url].

nationalizing US commercial holdings was to oust the US once and for all from the Cuban economy.¹⁶

Since Castro never seriously considered cooperation with the US, an important strategic consideration would have to be defending himself from Washington's growing hostility. Castro realized that the survival of the Revolution depended on his ability to balance domestic stability considerations with a foreign policy that would allow him the freedom of action he needed to pursue his goal of exporting Communist revolution. Before continuing the foreign policy aspect of Castro's strategy, it is important to address the ways in which he managed the Revolution at home in accordance with his grand strategy.

Maintaining the Revolution at Home

From the very beginning, Castro conducted the Revolution in such a way as to strengthen his own political position in the Cuban government. Throughout the complicated domestic political competition of the Revolution years (1953-1959), he maintained an ideological vagueness which allowed him to maneuver freely within the Cuban political scene. His ideological "flexibility" allowed him to rhetorically outmaneuver his opposition whenever the situation required it.¹⁷ Over the course of the Revolution, Castro's relationship with the Communist elements in the anti-Batista movement went from hostile to friendly.¹⁸ Despite his later claims, Castro was not always on good terms with the Communist elements in Cuba, and as such, it was not until December 1960 that any reference was made to the "first formal manifestation [of the] integration of the revolutionary forces."¹⁹ Longtime observer of Cuba Theodore Draper, best summed up Castro's political pragmatism when he noted that "Castro had never ... believed in putting all his political eggs in one basket."²⁰

This political flexibility, combined with his later ability to suppress access to information, was a factor in Castro's ability to maintain his credibility and re-tool himself as a long-time Communist believer. Indeed, Castro himself wrote in 1954: "It is not possible to organize a movement in which everyone believes that he has the right to issue public statements without consulting anyone else.... The apparatus of propaganda and organization should be such and so powerful that it would implacably destroy anyone who tries to create tendencies, cliques, schisms, or rebels against the movement."²¹ Once he announced his supposedly long-held Marxist-Leninist leanings on December 2, 1961, he claimed that all his previous anti-communist statements had been forced upon him and that he was a victim of "imperialist propaganda."²² This claim seems harder to believe when we consider that even in 1956 he had a decidedly anti-communist tone. This attitude, Draper suggests, goes above and beyond what would have been necessary to deny his involvement.²³

¹⁶ Alexeev, 23.

¹⁷ Theodore Draper, *Castroism: Theory and Practice* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1965), 16-17.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 26-34.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 35.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 29.

²¹ Fidel Castro in *ibid.*, 8-9.

²² *Ibid.*, 38.

²³ *Ibid.*, 27-29.

Despite the varied rhetoric coming from Castro during the war and in the early part of his rule, his actions show that he was clearly not interested in democracy for Cuba. After coming to power, he moved quickly to consolidate his authority. By February 7, 1959, only one month after coming to power, Castro had repealed the 1940 Constitution, the most progressive constitution in Cuba's history, and replaced it with the "Fundamental Law."²⁴ The Fundamental Law gave the executive broad powers to appoint and dismiss members of the judicial and legislative body, checked only by a Council of Ministers, who were also handpicked by the executive.²⁵ Moreover, Castro denied the need for elections, and by June 1959, he was using the slogan "Revolution first! Elections later!"²⁶ He also set about expropriating all independent media sources, firmly establishing control of access to information for Cubans. The tenure of the previously independent judicial system was removed and Revolutionary Tribunals took over implementation of the new constitution. All political organizations were forced to operate within the Integrated Revolutionary Organization, a political body which later became the Cuban Communist Party, and of which Castro became formal leader by 1965.²⁷

Castro's own words, as well as his manipulation of the new government's structure, show that he intended to have undisputed control of the political situation in the new government. He was able to project an image of control, purpose, and democratic mandate at a time when he was most vulnerable. However, it is to be noted that during the first several years of his rule, there were times when he lacked all three. But by projecting his authority in such a way, he established a political base which would keep him in power for the next half century. Having accomplished security in the domestic arena, he was free to turn his focus to foreign affairs. It is interesting to note, however, that many of the important strategic foreign policy issues which Castro addressed were contemporaneous with his domestic consolidation of power. This correlation demonstrates Castro's intellectual flexibility and political acumen, as he more or less single-handedly led Cuba through the growing pains of the Revolution, both internal and external.

Maintaining Cuban Independence in Foreign Affairs

In addition to the domestic political piece of his strategy, Castro needed to ensure the survival of the Revolution against external threats. The obvious, immediate threat was the US. Castro's fear of US intervention was understandably intensified after the failed Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961. As the task of securing a great power patron who could counter the US threat became more urgent, Castro turned logically to the USSR. The USSR was eager to provide support, but the Cuban Missile Crisis clearly demonstrated that there were limits to that support.²⁸

The main lesson Castro took from the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962 was that he could not rely on the unconditional support of the Soviet Union to defend Cuba and his regime against US

²⁴ Hugh Thomas, Georges Fauriol and Juan Carlos Weiss. *The Cuban Revolution: 25 Years Later* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1984), 6.

²⁵"Fundamental Law of Cuba, 1959," Washington, DC: Pan-American Union, 1959, <http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015011008946;view=1up;seq=3>

²⁶ Thomas, et al., 8

²⁷ Ibid, 6-10.

²⁸ Alexeev, 21-22.

invasion. While the missile crisis was a matter of life and death for Castro, the Soviets were clearly not prepared to risk general nuclear war to ensure the safety of Cuba. This is reflected by the fact that Alexeev reported Castro as having seriously suggested the use of nuclear weapons against the Americans on October 28th, the height of the crisis. This response naturally alarmed the Soviets, who then had doubts as to the reliability of their Cuban ally.²⁹

It is interesting to consider, however, that Castro benefitted from the 1962 missile crisis in two important ways. First, having suffered no actual damage to his country during the crisis, he emerged with what amounted to a guarantee by the United States not to invade Cuba. Now the US would be accountable to the *Soviet Union* for any aggressive actions toward Cuba, a much more serious deterrent than what Castro himself could provide. Second, the perceived betrayal of Castro by the USSR gave him the reason he needed to push the USSR away and assert his own independence politically. As convenient this outcome may seem, Castro seems to have felt genuinely betrayed by the outcome of the missile crisis.³⁰ Nonetheless, he used the situation to create distance between himself and the Soviets on the international stage. The period between the end of the missile crisis and 1968 would prove to be characterized by harsh criticisms of the two major players in the ICM. This period can be understood as a period of experimentation by Castro with independently approaching the foreign policy arena.

Castro put the Soviets in a difficult situation. As a result of the missile crisis, Cuba and the regime were essentially safe from invasion, barring missteps by Castro that would present direct threats to vital US interests. For Castro, this meant he could focus his resources on shoring up the domestic economy and the exportation of Revolution to the rest of Latin America.³¹ For the Soviets, this was a liability. Washington had a historical tendency to view any Communist actors as puppets of Moscow. The Kremlin did not want the US to think that the Soviets were behind Castro's overt attempts to overturn the international system in the Western Hemisphere.³² This reservation resulted in the USSR distancing itself from Castro's actions, although they maintained essential economic aid.³³ After all, the Soviets could not simply abandon their only ally in the Americas, the quality of which they were unlikely to find again, especially after the resolve Washington had demonstrated during the Cuban Missile Crisis and the 1965 invasion of the Dominican Republic.³⁴

For Castro, the USSR's attitude constituted ideological heresy. He sharply criticized the Soviet policy for its lack of insistence on armed struggle, and its general unwillingness to take a hands-on approach in the extension of Latin American Communism.³⁵ Castro could afford to be

²⁹ Graham Allison and Philip Zelikow, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis*, Second Edition (New York: Longman, 1999), 361.

³⁰ Castro, *My Life*, 277-278.

³¹ While it might seem that this would risk presenting a threat to U.S. vital interests, the U.S.'s involvement in the internal affairs of Latin American countries was seen as equally illegitimate. Furthermore, such operations were frequently conducted under plausible deniability of covert operations.

³² Adam B. Ulam, *Expansion and Coexistence: Soviet Foreign Policy, 1917-73* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1974), 648-649, 715.

³³ Domínguez, 63-66.

³⁴ William O. Walker, "The Struggle for Cuba and the Americas: The Johnson Administration and Cuba," ed. H.W. Brands, *The Foreign Policies of Lyndon Johnson: Beyond Vietnam* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 1999), 61-97.

³⁵ Domínguez, 70.

more aggressive than the Soviets; for the US, Soviet challenges in Latin America seemed far more credible than Cuban ones. Castro's insistence that armed struggle was the only way to successfully bring about a Communist Revolution put him at odds with the Soviet philosophy, but squarely in the corner of the Chinese.³⁶

The Chinese wished to be seen as a more relatable ideological alternative to the Soviets in Latin America. They contended that their common history of colonial oppression made the Chinese model much more applicable to the contemporary economic and political situations of Latin America.³⁷ Despite the obvious attraction of being able to use the Chinese as a counterweight to Soviet influence, a strong Sino-Cuban relationship never materialized. Castro initially looked to the Chinese for economic support, and Beijing did become a major trading partner of Cuba during this period.³⁸ This provided Castro with a Communist country that could insure him against Soviet unwillingness to pay the needed economic contribution of high prices for Cuba's sugar.

It seems to have been the ideological assertiveness of the Chinese which ultimately discouraged Castro from pursuing their great-power patronage. His speeches roundly criticized the Chinese for their virulent anti-Soviet opinions, warning them that "division in the face of the enemy was never a revolutionary or intelligent strategy."³⁹ Contributing to Castro's disdain, the Chinese pursued an extensive propaganda campaign in Cuba, specifically targeting military officers, aimed at creating support for the Chinese brand of communism. Castro could not tolerate the Chinese distributing propaganda in his own country any more than he could tolerate, for example, a US propaganda campaign in Cuba. Despite Castro's protests, the propaganda flowed into Cuba until mid-1965. As Cuban relations with the Chinese soured, Beijing began to reel in its economic help to Cuba, insisting that trade between the two countries be balanced.⁴⁰ Ultimately, Castro seriously considered China a viable alternative to the USSR as a great-power patron, but Beijing failed to capitalize on that interest because its actions were interpreted by Castro as threats to his independence. Still in his independent foreign policy phase, lasting until 1968, he could not make himself vulnerable to the Chinese leadership if they would not respect his autonomy.⁴¹

In August 1968, Castro had come to realize that he could no longer afford to pursue a policy of rhetorical hostility towards both China and the USSR. Earlier that year the Soviets had

³⁶ Ibid., 71.

³⁷ Cecil Johnson, *Communist China & Latin America: 1959-1967* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), 134-135.

³⁸ Sino-Cuban trade accounted for 14% of Cuba's total imports and exports in 1965. The Chinese bought Cuban sugar and sold large quantities of rice, a staple food for which Cuba could only satisfy half of its own demand. See Domínguez, 69.

³⁹ This was a somewhat ironic claim to level at the Soviets, considering Castro was also a vocal critic of both China and the USSR. See "Castro Statement on Cuban-CPR Relations, February 6, 1966, LANIC, <http://lanic.utexas.edu/project/castro/db/1966/19660206.html>.

⁴⁰ Domínguez, 69.

⁴¹ In this author's opinion, looking at the situation strategically, the Soviets were a much better choice of great-power patron than the Chinese to begin with. The Soviets needed Cuba much more than the Chinese needed it because the Soviets' foreign policy focus was more global. The Soviets had a much stronger desire for a Latin American ally, plus they had the power to back up that alliance. Assuming a close alliance with both the USSR and China wasn't possible, I'm not sure the threat of *China* going to war with the US to defend Cuba would ever have been a credible deterrent.

severely restricted oil exports and technical assistance to Cuba. This came at the same time as Castro cut various economic and technical programs from the university in Havana, deepening his reliance on foreign experts. Now isolated from the US, China, and the USSR, Castro was running out of options. The economic pressure on Cuba was enough to show Castro that economically, he simply did not have the self-sufficient capability. When the USSR and Warsaw Pact forces invaded Czechoslovakia on 21 August 1968, Castro announced his grudging support of the international obligations of socialist countries that would later in 1968 be formalized as the Brezhnev Doctrine. This acquiescence signaled the end of Castro's attempt to continue without a great power patron.⁴²

Ultimately, it was the underdeveloped Cuban economy worsened by the crippling effects of Castro's own economic reforms which made him unable to accomplish this aim. As a grand strategist, Castro ought to have recognized that due to the nature of Cuba's economic situation, it was simply impossible for Cuba to survive, much less flourish, without the assistance of a great power patron. Cuba, up to the Revolution, had never been economically independent, and as such, still had a monoproduktive economy based on sugar. Castro should be credited, however, for his strategic flexibility. Even after settling into the hegemonic relationship, this economic vulnerability did not keep Castro from attempting his fourth and final grand strategic aim: exporting the Revolution to the rest of the Third World.

Exporting Revolution: Castro's Final Aim

Castro's fourth and final grand strategic aim was exporting the Revolution to the rest of the Third World and Latin America in particular. This aim would extend Castro's influence beyond Cuba's own borders, securing a place for himself and Cuba in the history of the ICM. For Castro, this was the ultimate goal which would most dramatically legitimize his rule at home and allow Cuba to punch above its weight in the arena of international politics.

The principal means by which Castro wished to achieve this aim consisted mostly of armed struggle. As early as 1961, Castro was sending assistance in one form or another to revolutionaries in countries as far-flung as Angola, Algeria, Bolivia, Palestine, Venezuela, and Vietnam. . Castro made it clear that he would support the cause of armed revolution wherever support was needed:

The imperialists ... are everywhere in the world. And for Cuban revolutionaries the battleground against imperialism encompasses the whole world ... and so our people understand ... that the enemy is one and the same, the same one who attacks our shores and our territory [is] the same one who attacks everyone else. And so we say and proclaim that the revolutionary movement in every corner of the world can count on Cuban combat fighters.⁴³

⁴² Domínguez, 73-77.

⁴³ Fidel Castro, "Speech at the Closing Sessions of the Tricontinental Conference," February 16, 1966. LANIC <http://lanic.utexas.edu/project/castro/db/1966/19660216.html>.

Castro's concrete efforts on behalf of revolutionary movement in the Third World can be divided into operations involving Latin America and operations involving Africa.⁴⁴ Ironically, Castro had significantly less success in Latin America, despite his cultural affinity with other Latin American countries. In this sense, he failed to achieve his fourth grand strategic aim. Despite the fact that he sent extensive aid in the form of war materiel, advisers, and training support to Argentina, Brazil, Venezuela, Peru, Guatemala, Panama, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, and Nicaragua, not a single successful revolution came of it.⁴⁵ Castro's ambitions in the Latin American world backfired frequently, as Castro isolated himself diplomatically from most other governments in Latin America during the 1960's by supporting the insurgencies that were threatening them. His insistence on conducting revolutions in his own way even alienated him from other Latin American Communist parties.⁴⁶

Castro, true to his adaptable nature, was able to make use of this situation by modifying his ideology. In what Domínguez calls the "The Rule of Bargaining," Castro altered Cuba's foreign policy stance so that it would prioritize relations with states friendly to Cuba over revolutions occurring in those states. As such, Cuba would use its support for revolution as a bargaining piece in order to gain concessions from other states. Using this stratagem, Castro was able to reestablish economic and diplomatic relations with Chile, Venezuela, and Peru by 1969.⁴⁷ This strategic move allowed Cuba to participate once again in the southern hemispheric political scene and helped establish the economic ties upon which the Cuban economy so depended. It did so in a manner that was beyond the influence of any great power hegemon. It should be noted, however, that by committing Castro not to pursue it in countries which were friendly to him, this strategic use of the Rule of Bargaining undermined his grand strategic aim of exporting revolution. By pursuing this strategy, Castro showed, as he did in his initial rejection of a hegemon, that he did not understand the nature of the conflict. He severely overestimated the ability of the Cuban economy to survive without the economic support of either a hegemon or his fellow third-world countries, and as such had to trade forgoing his fourth aim in Latin America for economic concessions which might have alleviated the pressure on Cuba's economy.⁴⁸

Despite his lack of success in Latin America, Castro was very involved elsewhere in the Third World, supporting revolution in African countries whose trade could be of little use to Cuba. In 1961, Cuba sent assistance in the form of around 40 medical professionals to Algeria, then fighting an anticolonial war for independence from France. Shortly thereafter, Cuban combat troops fought alongside the Algerians in their 1963 war with Morocco. In a series of interviews with Castro conducted by Ignacio Ramonet in 2005, Castro detailed the involvement of Cuban senior leadership and combat troops in various anticolonial struggles in Africa, including Angola, the Belgian Congo, and Guinea-Bissau during many of the local wars in a period from 1963 into the mid-1980's.⁴⁹

⁴⁴ Castro's involvement in Vietnam is excluded here because Hanoi's victory in 1975 does not fall within the time period of 1959-1968.

⁴⁵ Central Intelligence Agency, *Cuban Subversive Activities in Latin America: 1959-1968*. SC No. 00757/68A. [1968], 1-3.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Domínguez, 120-121.

⁴⁸ This is, of course, much easier for us to say with the benefit of hindsight.

⁴⁹ Castro, *My Life*, 312-334.

In the end, the stakes for the West and the ICM were not very high in Africa, marginalizing the importance of any gains made by Cuba. Neither Johnson, Khrushchev, nor Brezhnev were willing to pour resources into Africa the way Castro was; all had more important commitments nearer to their own vital interests. Castro gained the rhetorical advantage of being able to say that he was on the vanguard in the fight against colonialism, but he failed to achieve the worldwide recognition and record of successes that would have made him a serious player in the ICM.

Castro's willingness to become involved in conflicts anywhere around the world gained him attention from his third-world colleagues and great powers alike, but ultimately failed to accomplish the grand strategic aim which was essential to securing the leading role which he envisioned for Cuba. He simply did not have the resources or the influence to affect the kind of change he needed to be taken seriously, especially when doing so ultimately isolated Cuba's fragile economy further.

Conclusions

Of Castro's four grand strategic aims during the first period of Cuban foreign relations, three: breaking US hegemony, maintaining the revolution at home, and maintaining freedom of action in the international arena, seemed to be simply matters of survival. The fourth aim, exporting revolution, was the aim which would help to legitimize Castro's rule at home and secure a place for Cuba as an independent pole in the ICM.

Castro accomplished the first aim adeptly. By cooperating with the Soviet Union, he was able to make his own survival in their interest. He adeptly used this leverage during the Cuban Missile Crisis to secure a pledge by the US not to seek regime change in Cuba. This guarantee has persisted even after the Cold War from which it originated. Clearly Castro achieved his first grand strategic aim by 1962.

The second aim, not in the realm of foreign policy but essential nonetheless, was to establish a secure base of political power domestically. He did so by adopting a new constitution, outlawing political opposition, and assuming the powers familiar to most Latin American dictators. His success is reinforced by the fact that his brother Raúl Castro is currently planning for the peaceful transition of power to a chosen successor upon completion of his own term as president.⁵⁰ Castro was able to keep himself in power with broad support from the people who mattered and continue down the list of aims.

The third grand strategic aim was more complicated. Castro needed to maintain his ability to act independently in the foreign policy arena. The missile crisis showed him that he could not always count on the Soviets to defend him against the US, although it was that very crisis that kept him safe for the rest of the Cold War. Pursuing this third aim, Castro tried to go at it alone in the realm of foreign policy. He failed in this effort and ultimately settled back into a subordinate relationship with the USSR. He failed because he overestimated the Cuban

⁵⁰ "Cuba: Raul Castro Sets Precedent for Two-Term Limit." *Stratfor* (February 25, 2013), <http://www.stratfor.com/analysis/cuba-raul-castro-sets-precedent-two-term-limit>.

economy's ability to function without the import/export relationship of a great power to which it had been accustomed since the early days of the Spanish Empire.

Interestingly, Castro ended up sacrificing his fourth aim to achieve his third aim, which was ultimately unachievable, and which he had given up on by the 1968. By using the Rule of Bargaining, Castro committed himself not to support revolutions in countries which would reestablish economic and diplomatic ties with Cuba. This seemed to serve the third aim by creating wealth-generating trade with other non-aligned countries, but it proved not to be enough to keep the Cuban economy afloat. By 1968, he was already committed not to support revolutions in the most economically important Latin American countries. He was involved in Africa, but his tangible successes were far from great-power attentions and could not produce any victories that would warrant his recognition as the vanguard of the ICM in the Third World. Our final assessment of Castro should be that he accomplished quite well the aims which were domestically oriented, aims one and two, but did not accomplish aims three and four. Indeed, Fidel Castro fell victim to the hubris that has befallen many grand strategists of pursuing overly ambitious goals that were incongruent with the finite power and resources available to their country.

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