

CUBA IN THE INTERNATIONAL ARENA

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- FIDEL CASTRO SPEECHES, 1984–85: WAR AND CRISIS IN THE AMERICAS.* By FIDEL CASTRO. (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1985. Pp. 272. \$23.00 cloth, \$6.95 paper.)
- THE SOVIET UNION AND CUBA: INTERESTS AND INFLUENCE.* By W. RAYMOND DUNCAN. (New York: Praeger, 1985. Pp. 220. \$12.95.)
- CUBA'S INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS: THE ANATOMY OF A NATIONALISTIC FOREIGN POLICY.* By H. MICHAEL ERISMAN. (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1985. Pp. 203. \$34.00 cloth, \$13.95 paper.)
- CUBAN FOREIGN POLICY: CARIBBEAN TEMPEST.* By PAMELA S. FALK. (Lexington, Mass.: Lexington Books, 1986. Pp. 336. \$29.00.)
- THE CUBAN THREAT.* By CARLA ANNE ROBBINS. (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1985. Pp. 355. \$12.95.)
- CUBA Y ESTADOS UNIDOS: UN DEBATE PARA LA CONVIVENCIA.* Edited by JUAN GABRIEL TOKATLIAN. (Buenos Aires: Grupo Editor Latinoamericano, 1984. Pp. 247.)
- RESPONSE TO REVOLUTION: THE UNITED STATES AND THE CUBAN REVOLUTION, 1959–1961.* By RICHARD E. WELCH, JR. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985. Pp. 243. \$24.00 cloth, \$9.95 paper.)

One paradox in the study of Cuba's role in international affairs is that although scholars agree on the central questions and issues, this consensus has had negligible influence on how U.S. government officials or other commentators in public debate characterize that same role. Although scholars commonly have little impact on U.S. policy toward Latin America, their inability to affect even the terms of discussion of Cuban issues surpasses their usual political irrelevance.

A new generation of scholars is trying afresh to change thinking about Cuba. Although Cuba's irruption into world affairs over a decade ago was discussed in various publications,¹ a new wave of books are now seeking to interpret the reasons why this small country looms so large on the world stage.

Cuba's public image in the United States tends to be that of a Soviet puppet or satellite. Only at moments do columnists or U.S. gov-

ernment officials recognize that Cuban foreign policy contains more substance, according to the “hyphenated rank” of Soviet-Cuban policies. But none of the scholars under review nor other knowledgeable analysts would agree with such a characterization. They all would argue, although from differing perspectives, that Cuban foreign policy stands on its own.

THE SCHOLARLY LANDSCAPE

The seven books under review provide a full account of Cuba's role in international affairs since 1959. Richard Welch has written the single most lucid account of the break between the United States and Cuba after the victory of the revolution. Recognizing his accomplishment does not demean the works of his predecessors, however, because he has built on their efforts. Welch's *Response to Revolution: The United States and the Cuban Revolution, 1959–1961* thoughtfully synthesizes a quarter-century of scholarly work:

It is possible to accept two seemingly contradictory propositions: (1) Castro's revolution probably would have turned leftward whatever the United States did or did not do. (2) Although U.S. policy did not force Castro to establish a revolutionary dictatorship, a socialized economy, or a communist state, it did have very real influence on the evolution of the Cuban Revolution. Actions by the United States do not furnish the primary explanation for the course of the Cuban Revolution but they facilitated its radical transformation. (Pp. 24–25)

Consistent with the mainstream of evolving scholarship, this formulation accords Cuban leaders the historical responsibility that is their due: their foreign policies have been their own from the start. Nor did Cuban leaders have to be “pushed” to act according to their beliefs. This view “de-Washingtonizes” explanations of the course of Cuban history while still calling attention to the nearly flawless stupidity of U.S. policy toward Cuba. The U.S. government did not cause, but contributed mightily to, the very outcome it sought to prevent—a Communist Cuba tightly allied with the Soviet Union.

Michael Erisman's *Cuba's International Relations* and Pamela Falk's *Cuban Foreign Policy* are short, general books on Cuban foreign policy that can serve as good textbooks. Their generous selection of Cuban documents enables them to be assigned to students for making individual assessments of Cuban foreign policy. Because Falk and Erisman stress Cuban policies toward the United States and the Third World, their works somewhat resemble Carla Robbins's *The Cuban Threat*, now reissued with a brief new appendix on events in Grenada in 1983. Robbins focused explicitly on U.S.–Cuban relations, taking a broad look at their rivalry in bilateral and third-party settings. The most vigorously written of the lot, *The Cuban Threat* is a pleasure to read. Robbins's

summary of this “threat” identifies a shared scholarly perspective that also “de-Washingtonizes” the years after 1961:

[T]he United States must stop overestimating the Cuban threat. . . . Except for the missile crisis, Cuba does not now and has never posed an objective threat to American power or security in the hemisphere. The few hundred guerrillas the Castro regime was able to muster and send to Latin America during the 1960s were not the cause of the region’s instability. Nor has the limited amount of Cuban military aid sent to El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala been the cause of the instability in those countries. (P. 300)

The main features of Falk’s *Cuban Foreign Policy: Caribbean Tempest* are its strengths as well as its weaknesses. No other book in the group covers so much, but no other covers it so briefly. No other author is as fair to contending schools of thought, giving each their due, but no other is as reluctant to resolve important disputes. For example, Falk cites both sides of the debate on whether the understandings that ended the 1962 missile crisis are “binding” but does not state her own opinion (pp. 162–63). My view is that they are binding and have been observed.

Erisman highlights the centrality of nationalism in *Cuba’s International Relations’* subtitle, *The Anatomy of a Nationalistic Foreign Policy*. He puts forth the thesis that “nationalism has remained a crucial dimension of Cuban globalism.” The recognition of nationalism as a significant factor underpins the scholarly consensus that Cuba has its own foreign policy, but Erisman pushes this argument to its furthest. More than other analysts, he plays down the significance of the Soviet-Cuban tie and the ideological “socialist” content of Cuban foreign policy, notwithstanding statements by Cuban leaders and Articles 11 and 12 of the Cuban constitution, which hold these elements to be central to Cuban foreign policy. If many analysts can be criticized for turning Cuban foreign policy into a mere reflection of Soviet shadows, Erisman may have fallen into the opposite trap.

What to make of the Soviet-Cuban relationship also bedevils Carla Robbins’s *The Cuban Threat*. At times she appears to reject the importance of Soviet pressures on Cuba, arguing plausibly that Cuba might have chosen the policies advocated by the Soviet Union, especially after 1968, because they made sense in themselves. She then criticizes those who have emphasized the significance of Soviet pressures (pp. 205, 253). At other times, however, she seems to endorse the arguments she criticizes: “even an observer sympathetic to the Cuban revolution finds it hard to avoid the impression of Soviet domination—because the changes in Cuba in 1968 were so great and so abrupt, and because the docile tone of the new Cuban rhetoric was so different from the Castro regime’s earlier style” (p. 182).

Raymond Duncan comes to the reader’s rescue on this complex

issue with a valuable analysis of "who influences whom" in Soviet-Cuban relations. His taxonomy of influence and interests goes beyond the obstacles that have stymied other works. He makes the simple but crucial point that influence is not a dichotomous but a continuous variable and that it takes various forms.

According to Duncan's analysis, while some influence is coercive, most is not. First, influence may be indirect. He notes that "Cuba may have reverted to the path of armed struggle in Nicaragua in 1979, not because the Soviets urged them to do so, but in part because the Cubans anticipated Soviet support" (pp. 4–5). Second, influence may be cooperative, when one country "induces, persuades, cajoles, or bargains" with another "to encourage it to cooperate . . . on an issue of mutual benefit" (p. 5). Cuban-Soviet decisions to intervene on Ethiopia's side in the war against Somalia in 1977–78 may be of this kind (pp. 132–36). Third, an "assertive-power relationship is influence with the introduction of sanctions, . . . when one country wishes to modify the behavior of the other on a specific interest. . . . The Soviets used assertive power against Cuba in 1967–68 when they cut back on their oil supplies to Havana in an effort to encourage Fidel Castro to drop his insistence on armed struggle as the path to change in Latin America, when the Soviets were stressing peaceful state-to-state relations" (pp. 5–6). Fourth, "coercive power characterizes a situation of high power politics, associated with the capacity to affect strongly, to control, or to compel obedience to one's orders through the use of strong positive or negative sanctions" (p. 6). All of Duncan's examples of this kind of influence are taken from U.S. government policies. He argues that the exercise of Soviet influence over Cuba has not been coercive.

On the whole, Duncan's analysis is the most thorough and sensible interpretation of Cuban-Soviet relations of the books under review. I differ only with his characterization of the crucial events of 1967–68. That sequence was not a mere dispute about how revolutionaries and communists might come to power in Latin American countries but a comprehensive divergence that touched most issues in Soviet-Cuban relations—and the Soviet Union coerced Cuba at that point.

In late 1967 and early 1968, the Soviet Union imposed sanctions on Cuba in order to change many Cuban policies. The Soviets slowed down the rate of petroleum deliveries to Cuba while increasing shipments to Latin American governments at odds with Cuba. Castro had to impose drastic rationing on petroleum products. The Cuban press published without comment articles from the Soviet press indicating that the Soviet Union was experiencing a boom in oil production and exports while curtailing supplies to Cuba. Some Soviet government and party officials gave comfort to members of a Cuban Communist party "microfaction" that sought to change Cuban government policies if not

also its personnel. Those Soviet officials were implicated harshly by name in the report to the Cuban Communist Central Committee. The Soviets suspended military weapons transfers and froze all technical assistance programs. The Cuban government responded at first in anger and defiance but later retreated, most publicly in August 1968 when Fidel Castro endorsed the Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia. Is this sequence of events not “coercive”?

Duncan as well as Robbins rightly emphasize that this strategy has never been repeated. They stress that the Soviets were patient and restrained rather than rejecting and grossly heavy-handed. Duncan and Robbins also point out accurately that many of Cuba’s subsequent changes in policy were rational from the Cuban perspective and that Cuba need not have been coerced to adopt sensible policies. But none of these arguments can invalidate the key conclusion that should be made clearer in the literature: the USSR did coerce Cuba in 1967–68. That acknowledgment does not imply that subsequent Cuban policies have not been its own but that the Soviet Union set hegemonic boundaries to limit the scope of Cuban foreign policy. Those boundaries have not been transgressed since that time.

In *Cuba y Estados Unidos: un debate para la convivencia*, Juan Gabriel Tokatlian brought together some of the papers presented at a conference in Bonn in May 1983, sponsored by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation. This publishing event includes chapters by U.S. and Cuban government officials and scholars. The first three chapters—by Cuban Deputy Foreign Minister Ricardo Alarcón, U.S. State Department Coordinator for Cuban Affairs Myles Frechette, and former Chief of Mission Wayne Smith of the U.S. Interests Section on Cuba—provide an exemplary summary of the differences between the U.S. and Cuban governments, with the U.S. position appropriately represented by two partially overlapping but divergent points of view.

Particularly worth reading is the long chapter by Carlos Martínez de Salsamendi, Principal Advisor to Cuban Vice-President Carlos Rafael Rodríguez. This essay is a work of advocacy, not scholarship, but it is first-rate advocacy. Martínez de Salsamendi has read what outsiders have written about Cuba and proceeds to address it. Informative even as it refutes, his account of Cuba’s “internationalist cooperation” is the fullest ever offered by a Cuban official, revealing what Cuba has done as well as what it has not done (pp. 143–52). His discussion of Cuban-Soviet relations on the decisions to intervene in wars in Angola and in the Horn of Africa is unusually candid: Cuba led the Soviet Union into Angola but responded to Soviet wishes by coordinating much more with them in Ethiopia (pp. 188–96). Martínez de Salsamendi’s account stresses not merely that Cuban policy is its own but that it is “socialist” and collaborates closely and boldly with the Soviet Union.

As a result, the autonomy of Cuban foreign policy should give no comfort to the United States and its allies, a conclusion that one rarely finds in the literature. Those in the United States who envision Cuba as a puppet view it as hostile to U.S. policies, while those who perceive Cuba as being more autonomous believe that good diplomacy could make it more benign. In fact, Cuba is both autonomous and firmly opposed to U.S. policies, and its being autonomous makes for a more complex, dangerous world, not one that is simpler or more benign. Cuban autonomy makes diplomacy possible, to be sure, but also very difficult.

Finally, let us consider the collection of speeches of the grand master himself. Eloquent as ever, Fidel Castro's statements during 1984–85 ranged over many aspects of Cuban affairs, but the selections in *Fidel Castro Speeches* emphasize international relations. Several of Castro's long interviews with foreign journalists in 1985 are republished or excerpted here. They contain valuable information because Castro is typically more forthcoming with foreign journalists than with their Cuban counterparts (the interviews also reveal that the MacNeil-Lehrer team dealt more skillfully with Castro than did the *Washington Post* team). Noteworthy are Castro's comments on the lessons drawn from the Grenada crisis in 1983 regarding Cuban relations with Nicaragua (pp. 129–30), his accounting of the material worth of Cuban aid to Nicaragua (pp. 89–90), the dimensions of Cuba's continuing military support for Angola (pp. 132–35), and Cuba's relations with the fugitive Robert Vesco (pp. 141–42). It is regrettable that Doug Jenness's introduction is so uncritical in all senses that it offers the reader little help in sorting through this material.

SOME SHARED PROBLEMS

The Lack of Evidence

I began by noting the debate over whether or not Cuba dictates its own foreign policy, with most scholars concluding that it does. In fact, no one really knows. Duncan is most forthright in discussing problems of evidence and causality because his concern in *The Soviet Union and Cuba* is "who influences whom." Although his answers and those of others are persuasive, a fair criticism of all of this scholarship (including my own) would be that authors often write with more confidence than the sources warrant.

One disappointment in all the books by U.S. authors under review is their modest use of Cuban primary sources. Non-Cuban authors sometimes cite each other so much that they seem to lose sight of the need to find out for themselves what Cuba's role in the world actually is. This comment does not imply that only one good source exists

in international relations; analysts should also find out what other governments say about Cuba's role. But the books by Duncan, Erisman, Falk, Robbins, and Welch risk not taking Cuba's description of its own policies into account either to confirm or to refute what others report. When these authors use Cuban sources, they are typically in translation, often Cuba's *Granma Weekly Review* (GWR). Although quite useful, these translations should not substitute for scholarly work in Spanish-language primary sources, nor can the GWR translations of some technical subjects always be trusted.

Another problem is the lack of interviews being conducted in Cuba. Although most authors refer to interviews with Cuban government and party officials, such interviews play an insignificant role in these works. This outcome is somewhat understandable in that all governments are secretive about foreign policy, and Cuba's much more so than most. The Cuban press does not ferret out information; neither does it facilitate access to well-placed sources willing to leak data to scholars. Thus researchers should not be faulted for failing to overcome impossible obstacles, but it is proper to recognize these typical shortcomings and their impact on the works being published on the subject.

Scholars: Too Few and Too Cautious

Until recently, few Cuban scholars worked on international affairs. The emergence of several new think tanks such as the Centro de Estudios sobre América (CEA) and the Centro de Investigaciones de la Economía Mundial (CIEM), which are formally subordinate to the supervision of the Cuban Communist Central Committee, has only partially changed the situation. In short, few Cuban scholars examine their country's foreign policy and even fewer publish anything on it; most focus instead on other countries.² Until recently, Cuba's lack of a scholarly community on international affairs had impeded international collaboration for research on these topics. Moreover, Cuba has only recently begun to develop an academic community that understands scholarly research and is willing to collaborate with foreign scholars in joint endeavors.

U.S. and other foreign specialists on Cuba as well as Cuban scholars are often timid. They do not engage enough in the necessary task of questioning what Cuban officials say, at times incorrectly or misleadingly, about Cuba's international role. The Cuban government deserves scholarly criticism. Scholars should not leave criticism to shrill partisan polemicists, although they should take care to make their criticism objective. Nor does scholarly criticism imply disrespect—it is a scholar's best gift.

The field surely needs criticism, as two examples of scholarly failure in these books under review demonstrate. Cuba's own statistics contradict President Castro's frequent statements that Cuba's trade prices with the Soviet Union "are protected by agreements against deterioration in the terms of trade" (p. 222). Not only have the prices of imported petroleum and other goods increased faster than the prices of Cuba's exports, but the Soviet Union in 1981 actually cut the nominal price paid for Cuban sugar.³ Although measuring terms of trade is difficult for any country and especially so for Cuba, it is virtually impossible that Castro's statement was accurate at the time he made it. Yet the only detailed reference in these books to this central issue is in Silvia Pérez's article, "La participación de Cuba en la comunidad socialista y su ejemplo para el tercer mundo," in Tokatlian's collection, *Cuba y Estados Unidos*. An official in the Central Committee's international relations department of the Communist party, Pérez simply reports calculations made by the UN's Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLA) showing a dramatic improvement in Cuba's terms of trade with the Soviet Union between 1970 and 1975 and a substantial but smaller improvement until 1981 (p. 118). Those calculations are also difficult to sustain when compared with data published in Cuba. It is likely that Cuba's terms of trade changed little from 1975 to 1980 but unlikely that they improved, as ECLA claims.

The subject of the Cuban-Soviet terms of trade is essential to understanding this relationship. The USSR undoubtedly pays Cuba more for its exports than it could obtain in the world market. The bilateral terms of trade probably were fairly well protected in the late 1970s. Both of these accomplishments are impressive tributes to Cuban diplomacy and Soviet relations with Cuba. But export prices undoubtedly were most favorable in the immediate aftermath of Cuba's successful participation in the Angolan war in 1975–76, probably as a Soviet reward for Cuba's military triumph. The story of what has happened since then, which is significant economically and politically, has been told misleadingly by President Castro, inaccurately by ECLA, and not at all by any of the scholars under review.

On another major issue, non-Cuban scholars perform better. In his interview with Robert MacNeil, President Castro argued that "the Soviets have never imposed any conditions on us, on their assistance. They have never attempted to tell us what we should do" (p. 149). No Cuban scholar or government official has ever discussed in print the serious Soviet-Cuban dispute of 1967–68. Duncan and Robbins discuss these events thoughtfully, Erisman ignores them, and Falk tucks them cursorily into a section on Latin American ideological trends (p. 30). In my judgment, even Duncan and Robbins greatly understate the signifi-

cance of these decisive months in Cuba's relations with the Soviet Union. The international scholarly community must attempt to elucidate what happened as best it can, leaving to Cuban scholars and officials the task of rebutting or confirming the findings. But the mission of seeking the truth wherever it may lead is not well served by omission or by pulling punches.

The Lack of Theory

Many works on Cuba's role in the world are written as if scholarship on international affairs had not moved beyond the narration of diplomatic history. On the whole, a reader would infer from these writings that governments are unitary actors that calculate costs and benefits rationally and maneuver for gain in a Hobbesian international system. This view may be a fine hypothesis, but as the complete theoretical apparatus of scholarship, it is sorely deficient.

Little attention has been paid to bureaucratic issues and surprisingly little to ideology. One finds no sustained analysis of economic questions, despite occasional reference to economic issues, as if no one had ever heard about transnational relations. Research on "international regimes" has burgeoned, and yet none of the authors reviewed here wonder about what kind of "international regime" characterizes Cuba's relations with the Soviet Union. Falk comes closest in her useful discussion of Cuba's role in the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA), but Duncan barely mentions it.

Cuban organizations are active in much of the Third World, and yet no one discusses parallels with or differences from the operations of multinational firms. As Martínez de Salsamendi reminds us, some Cuban "internationalist collaboration" is for profit. Even most of Cuba's nonprofit ventures could have been subjected to analytical scrutiny as organizations operating overseas.

Most of these works contain some discussion of "dependency," generally acknowledging Cuba's need for massive Soviet aid, but they do not link that observation to the theoretical corpus of dependency literature. This subject deserves sustained discussion, whether to support or refute that link. Indeed, apart from Duncan's book, the discussion of Soviet-Cuban relations is disappointing.

Finally, comments about Cuba's "internationalist solidarity" with revolutionary movements (or of Cuba's "subversive export of revolution") are scattered throughout these seven books, but the issue is never addressed on its own terms. The reader is left with the (mistaken) impression that this commitment is just an idiosyncrasy in Cuban foreign policy. The subject continues in search of an explanation.

CONCLUSIONS

The scholarly study of Cuba's role in the international arena has made great advances. A fairly full record now exists of the evolution of Cuban foreign policy since 1959 in most geographic settings and on most issues. For older subjects, such as the period from 1959 to 1961, the field is fortunate enough to have Richard Welch's synthesis. On more recent subjects, such as the Cuban-Soviet relationship, Raymond Duncan's subtle conceptual and empirical discussion of influence is a giant step forward when compared with earlier simplistic characterizations of this relationship.

Scholars agree that one must look in the first instance to Havana, not to Moscow, in order to understand Cuban policies. As Erisman states forcefully and others echo, Cuban nationalism did not end in 1959, although it has assumed new forms. Documentation of Cuban autonomy in the international arena continues to mount. Scholars also agree that "the Cuban threat" is not all that great. As Robbins eloquently argues, most of the issues that legitimately trouble the United States and its allies have causes other than Cuba and require treatments other than blaming Havana or Castro.

But much work remains to be done on various subjects—from a more precise understanding of political and economic relations between the Soviet Union and Cuba to the patterns and rationale of Cuban support for revolutionary movements. Scholars need to pay more attention to Cuban sources—both the primary sources long available and the promised new Cuban scholarship. Scholars of Cuban foreign policy need to rediscover the theoretical concerns of the wider discipline of international relations and to integrate these concerns into their empirical findings.

Finally, scholars must seek to regain their role as effective citizen-participants in public discussions of issues within their areas of expertise. This goal requires adopting appropriately critical postures toward all observable behavior, institutions, and governments wherever they may be found in order to restore scholarly criticism to its properly useful function.

NOTES

1. For example, *Cuba in the World*, edited by Cole Blasier and Carmelo Mesa-Lago (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1979); *Revolutionary Cuba in the World Arena*, edited by Martin Weinstein (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1979); *Cuba in Africa*, edited by Carmelo Mesa-Lago and June Belkin, Latin American Monograph and Document Series, no. 3 (Pittsburgh: Center for Latin American Studies, University of Pittsburgh, 1982); and Barry B. Levine, *The New Cuban Presence in the Caribbean* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1983).

2. This point should not be exaggerated. Some works on Cuban international relations have been published in Cuba beyond the journals of the think tanks. Noteworthy are Julio A. Díaz Vázquez, *Cuba y el CAME* (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1985) and his useful articles in *Economía y Desarrollo*. Similarly, former Foreign Trade Minister Marcelo Fernández Font has published the valuable *Cuba y la economía azucarera mundial*, *Estudios e Investigaciones*, no. 5 (Havana: Instituto Superior de Relaciones Internacionales "Raúl Roa García," 1986). Nor should Soviet scholarship be ignored. A good recent work is E. Grinevich's and B. Gvozdariov's *Washington contra La Habana* (Moscow: Editorial Progreso, 1986).
3. Comité Estatal de Estadísticas, *Anuario Estadístico de Cuba*, various years.