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## Towards a *Pax Cubana*: revolution, socialism and development in Havana's Cold War foreign policy

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### Abstract

This paper uses a wide array of original documents collected from Bulgarian, Czech, German, Hungarian, Polish, Romanian and Serbian diplomatic, party and security services archives, reflecting Havana's foreign policy during the Cold War. The article's narrative follows Cuba's Cold War foreign policy in the 1970s. Through its multipolar archival research methodology, the paper aims to help us acquaint a more nuanced and fuller picture of the complex and evolving character of Cuba's Cold War internationalism as seen through the eyes of Moscow's East European allies, marking a clear departure from existing literature mostly engaging Soviet or American sources.

**Keywords:** Cuba; Foreign Policy; Cold War; Socialism; Development; Revolution.

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## Introduction

Cuba's international affairs in the Cold War have provoked considerable scholarly interest. The overall consensus is that Fidel Castro had his sights set on worldwide ambitions far beyond Cuba's local context throughout the Cold War (Domínguez 1989, 70). Cuba's foreign policy activism in Latin America was detrimental to the East in the 1960s when Havana regarded itself as a more devoted defender of world revolutionary interests than the Soviet Union, which, for its part, zealously defended the Leninist teachings of class and revolution. However, as Harmer (2013, 61) pointed out, in the latter part of the decade, Che's death prompted Cuba to rethink its hemispheric goals, de-emphasizing the importance of armed revolution. This momentous event for Cuba's hemispheric outlook touched off a new phase in Cuba's international affairs. Aware of its limitations, Havana substituted its acutely characteristic revolutionary plan

with a more flexible internationalist agenda for tactical purposes. As a result, historians and political observers became captivated by Cuban actions in Africa during the Cold War. According George (2005, 274), the Cuban intervention in Angola reflected one of Havana's strongest beliefs: internationalism. Moreover, it represented not just Cuba's political processes but also the current status of Soviet-Cuban ties. For his part, Katz (1982, 144-45) concluded that the Cuban leader's actions in Angola demonstrated more ambitious revolutionary goals than the Soviets'. Looking into Cuban archives, Gleijeses (2002) revealed the unique sense of mission the Cuban leaders felt in their involvement in Africa.

All of these views are legitimate and pertinent. Still, they do not fully account for the fuller socialist bloc dimension in Cuba's international calculus. A plethora of scholarly accounts on Cuba's foreign policy after Fulgencio Batista's ouster in January 1959 sought to shed more light on the complex character of Soviet-Cuban ties, but they tended to overlook Havana's dealings with Moscow's East European allies. While Eastern Europe does appear in Domínguez's (1989) and Gleijeses' (2002) seminal works, it is never afforded more than a casual mention in the context of Cuba-Soviet relations. Bain (2007) has also written extensively on Cuban-Soviet relations from a broad historical perspective, tracing the momentous changes under Gorbachev, but the East European dynamics takes secondary treatment. Yordanov also looked at the Cuba-East ties but instead focused on their cooperation in Nicaragua (2020), on the one hand, and the ideological aspects of their relations throughout the Cold War (2021), on the other. Other notable studies of Cuba-Soviet relations, including Duncan (1985) and Pavlov (1994), only touch on Cuba-East European ties. Therefore, those relations were generally perceived as contextual to the Soviet dealings with the Caribbean Island. Sixty years after the announcement of the socialist character of the Cuban revolution, we are presented with the opportunity to improve our understanding of the multifaced relations between Havana, Moscow and its East European allies during the Cold War. Following the opening of many previously hermetically shut archives from Berlin to Moscow, we can revisit those relations and acquire a more nuanced understanding of Cuba-East diplomatic affairs that accompanied the evolution of Havana's worldviews throughout the Cold War.

To partially help fill this gap, this paper uses a wide array of original documents collected from Polish, Hungarian, Bulgarian, German and Czech diplomatic, party and security services archives. The score of candid first-hand diplomatic reports consulted for this paper reflects Havana's international policies and significance for the socialist commonwealth and the world. The narrative developed in this article follows significant historical events in Cuba's post-revolutionary history through the East European diplomats' viewpoints. First, it looks at Cuba's newfound internationalist socialist activism in the 1970s; then, it focuses on Havana's broad-ranging military and diplomatic efforts in Africa and within the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in the 1970s, expressing its views of socialism-based development. It concludes with a discussion of the never openly uttered by Castro *Pax Cubana*, implicit outlines of which we see through the extensive communication between Cuba's leadership and its Eastern counterparts in seeking to amalgamate socialism and development throughout the world as a counterpoint to its narrowly-ideological revolutionary

exploits in Latin America in the 1960s and Third-Worldist visions, which paid little respect for the soviet-sanctioned tenet of “peaceful coexistence.”

By consulting numerous diplomatic records, this paper aims to help us acquaint a more nuanced and fuller picture of the complex and evolving character of Cuba’s Cold War internationalism as seen through the eyes of Moscow’s East European allies, which had first-hand experience of Cuba’s foreign dealings. Thus, this account seeks to frame Cuba’s foreign policy beyond the East-West optics, in line with the so-called “Global Cold War,” which gave a higher prominence to voices from the world’s “periphery” as the competitive superpower coexistence swirled across the world (Westad 2005; Prashad 2007). Thus, this article seeks to engage with the growing historiography, exploring South-South interaction during the Cold War that was aimed at more than just furthering Washington or Moscow’s objectives across a number of diverse regions of what we now call Global South, including, among others, Latin America and the Caribbean, South East Asia, North and East Africa (Harmer 2011; Nguyen, 2012; Moulton 2015; Byrne 2016; Yordanov 2016).

Much in the same vein, the candid East European witness accounts used for this narrative are aimed at helping us attain a more detailed picture of the complex dilemmas Havana faced in the Western Hemisphere and across the globe, in Africa and as part of its involvement in the NAM, as it sought to navigate between its grand ambitions, limited resources, Moscow’s restraint and Washington’s ever-present threat. Additionally, in hearing the voice of Moscow’s East European allies, further in line with the latest advancement in the globalized Cold War narrative, this paper casts the events in the 1970s far from the Cuban shores and beyond the Kremlin’s walls into a broader Trans-continental multipolar setting, following the effects Havana’s shifting foreign policy played on its relations with a host of international actors, including its hemispheric neighbours, African friends, non-aligned challengers like Yugoslavia, socialist allies and Soviet patrons.

Based on those views, this article argues that as improvised and as hurried as it may have seemed, Cuban internationalism in the 1970s proved remarkably consistent in its relentless search for ways to put the tiny Caribbean Island on the world map through visions so bold for a small nation, that dazzled its allies from Berlin to Sofia. Moreover, as Havana gradually emerged from the shackles of its unsuccessful revolutionary exploits in the 1960s, it found ways to punch way above its weight in the 1970s by seeking the role of a North-South, more precisely East-South, mediator which eagerly promoted socialism as a form of development rather than as a mere template of anti-colonial struggle. This position, however, never fully materialized, eventually crumbling under the implosion of the very international conjecture that made Havana’s global outreach its hottest export at the height of the Cold War.

Ultimately, the web-like network of East-South and South-South relations with Havana at the center, analyzed and interpreted by Cuba’s East European peers, provide us with a fresh look at Cuba’s multi-tiered Cold War internationalism. The new sources consulted in this paper help us reconsider Cuba’s foreign policy, which was too bold and too ambitious for a small, underdeveloped country. Havana’s international Cold War conduct proved not only reflexive and adaptable but also came to play a notable role within two major tenets in Cold War international order, namely

the Moscow-led socialist commonwealth and the NAM, in which Havana had to assert its worth beyond the accusations of acting as a mere Soviet proxy.

## Cuba's newfound socialist internationalism in the 1970s

In the 1960s, while criticizing all regimes in the Western Hemisphere, the Cuban government frequently advocated for the violent removal of Latin American governments, which drew harsh disapproval from the Soviet bloc. As a result, Havana had little interest in establishing relations with the region's communist parties, seeing them as too liberal and opportunistic. However, in the early 1970s, the Cuban leadership reconsidered its hemispheric policies, which sought to provide a more realistic appraisal of each country's situation and enhance collaboration with progressive organizations and local communist and workers' parties.

As Castro became less involved in the direct administration of Cuba's domestic political and economic matters in the 1970s, he dedicated more time to international affairs and foreign visits. For example, during his first thirteen years in power, he travelled overseas just five times, touring seven countries, including the Soviet Union, twice. However, between November 1971 and April 1977, he made six journeys to twenty-four states, including four visits to the Soviet Union and Algeria, which helped broaden his perspective of Cuba's potential future involvement in international affairs.<sup>1</sup> His trip to Eastern Europe in the spring of 1972 provided the Cuban leader with the opportunity to further explain Havana's revolutionary ideology to its socialist backers. As Castro told his Romanian counterpart, Nicolae Ceaușescu, Cuba's new revolutionary path followed the spirit of internationalism but considered Cuban and Latin American realities. Having Moscow and its allies' assistance, Cuba began to look more boldly beyond Latin America, with the Third World starting to play a more prominent role in its foreign policy agenda.<sup>2</sup> For this, Havana needed to further strengthen the ideological underpinning in its global visions, and the First Congress of the Communist Party of Cuba (*Partido Comunista de Cuba*, PCC) in 1975 served as the ideal venue for Cuba to present its internationalist elan in an acceptable form to its socialist supporters.

With the renewed advocacy of internationalism as its national philosophy, following the Congress, Havana managed to project its influence on a scale never seen before in its history. Despite the similarities in Havana and Moscow's foreign policies, however, Fidel vehemently sought to dispel any notions of Soviet domination or submission by maintaining the independence of his judgments, ultimately providing Cuba with a position in the vanguard of the socialist world that was disproportionate to its size and economic output. The improved East European perception

1 CIA Directorate of Intelligence, "Cuba's Foreign Policy Apparatus and How It Works Secret," July 1977, CIA FOIA ERR, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP79B00457A000400010001-8.pdf>, 1 (Accessed on 16 April 2021).

2 Transcript of Conversation between Nicolae Ceaușescu and Fidel Castro, 26-27 May 1972, ANR, CC al PCR - Relații Externe, 46/1972, 73 [75].

of the revived Cuban internationalism in the 1970s contrasted sharply with the 1960s, when Havana's foreign policy conflicted with the Eastern bloc, with the Tri-Continental conference in Havana in January 1966, attracting Moscow and East European countries' criticism for Castro's formally identifying Havana as the epicentre of global subversion, questioning the avant-garde nature of Latin American communist movements.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, the Bulgarians offered another highly critical analysis of the negative tendencies in Cuba's foreign policies, stemming from its leaders' "strong desire to rule the Third World" and influence the development of the global revolutionary movement by attempting to make the Cuban revolution the guiding light and the major, if not the only, objective law determining Latin America's transition to socialism.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, Cuba's decisive military efforts in Angola and Ethiopia in the second half of the 1970s boosted Havana's standing in the socialist world. At the same time, Havana's holding the Sixth Summit Conference of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in 1979 further elevated Cuba's role in the non-capitalist world. Thus, in the 1970s, Cuba's ability to project military and political power onto the African continent and within the NAM raised Havana's international prestige, elevating its relations with the Soviet bloc to a qualitatively new level, as Havana began to assert itself more authoritatively in the bloc's multilateral organizations.

Considering Cuba's increasing international involvement in the wake of the PCC First Congress, a December 1974 report for the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party (*Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza*, PZPR) provided a thorough evaluation of Cuba's foreign policy. According to the Warsaw observers, Havana founded its international conduct on three fundamental concepts. First, it intended to consolidate Cuba's sovereignty and bolster its security through a tight political, economic and military alliance with the Soviet Union and broad collaboration with the other socialist governments. Second, Cuba attempted to strengthen its international stature by guaranteeing socialist nations' political solidarity. Furthermore, Havana aspired to improve ties with the Third World by active involvement in the NAM, which included consistent support for the developing nations and normalizing relations with as many Latin American countries as possible. Third, Cuba considered speeding up its economic growth by getting extensive technical and economic support from the Soviet Union and the remaining socialist nations by gaining full membership in the Eastern bloc's leading economic institution, the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA).<sup>5</sup>

The main report of the PCC's First Congress addressed international concerns in an explicitly internationalist tone. In collaboration with the Soviet Union and the remaining communist governments, the Congress examined all fundamental issues of the world situation, the Hungarian guests at the Cuban party summit concluded. Cuba aimed to tackle domestic problems that afflicted

3 E. Noworyta, "KP Kuby a komunistyczne partie i ruch rewolucyjny Ameryki Łacińskiej" [The Cuban Communist party and Latin American Communist parties and revolutionary movements], 28 August 1968, AMSZ, D.VI-1969, 36/75, W-2, 2-3.

4 "Bulgarian Embassy, Havana, Report on the State of the Cuban Communist Party, 31 March 1966," *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, 17/18, 555.

5 "Polityka zagraniczna (Kuby)" [Foreign Policy (of Cuba)], c. December 1974, AAN, 1354 KC/PZRP, Kancelaria i Sekretarzy KC PZPR, XIA/678, 34 [53].

Latin America as a whole, thereby providing a revolutionary example for the whole continent. Thus, Havana's foreign policy was subordinated to the international battle for socialism and national liberation. The Hungarian delegates concluded that Cuba aimed to enhance the cause of socialist development in Latin America and the Third World by leveraging its revolutionary example and internationalist assistance, rather than encouraging revolutions based on its experience, as it did in the 1960s. In their report, the Hungarian envoys noted that the Congress' activity was permeated with a "spirit of socialist patriotism and internationalism."<sup>6</sup>

After the Congress, on completing his four-year ambassadorial term in Havana, the Polish envoy Czesław Limont summarized the recent successes of Cuba's socialist foreign policy. According to his analysis, despite empirical and subjective challenges and past ideological conflicts, Cuban leaders identified the "correct path" and accepted the scientific foundations of Marxism-Leninism.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, the GDR's ambassador stated that in pursuing the Congress's goals, the Cuban foreign policy became more responsible and pragmatic,<sup>8</sup> turning it into an essential factor of the international socialist community, as another East Berlin report concluded.<sup>9</sup>

The Bulgarians also applauded the Congress for its aligning Cuban foreign policy with Marxist-Leninist objectives of the Soviet Union and the other socialist countries. Furthermore, the Bulgarian analysis argued that the PCC's newfound internationalist agenda sought to further the collaboration with the socialist community to help the international unity of workers, communist parties and national liberation struggles.<sup>10</sup> Following these positive assessments, in a speech at the Federal Assembly of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic in October 1977, Czechoslovak Foreign Minister Bohuslav Chňoupek complimented Cuba's foreign policy, whose standing was "stronger than ever before." The Cuban people, remarked Chňoupek, had become a crucial revolutionary symbol, as Prague recognized Havana's importance for anti-imperialist battles across the world.<sup>11</sup>

Africa became the cornerstone of Havana's foreign policy in the second half of the 1970s, building upon its involvement in the continent in the 1960s following Havana's less successful hemispheric policies and international aspirations, which were at odds with East's. Between 1 March and 1 April 1977, in response to his growing interest in the continent, Castro conducted formal goodwill visits to eight Arab and African nations. According to a dispatch from Romania's foreign ministry, Castro's tour signaled the overall orientation of Cuban foreign policy, emphasizing Cuba's growing politico-military power and commitment to its "internationalist theory," according

6 János Berecz and Jozsef Varga, "Jelentes a Politikai Bizottsagnak a Kubai Kommunista Part I. Kongresszusáról" [Report to the Political Committee on the First Congress of the Cuban Communist Party], 29 December 1975, MNL, M-KS, 288, f. 5/681, 8-11 [24 R - 27 R].

7 "Sprawozdanie końcowe z czteroletniego pobytu na Kubie tow. Czesława Limonta w charakterze radcy ambasady PRL w Hawanie w okresie 26.VI.1972 - 15.VIII.1976r." [Final report on the four-year stay in Cuba of comrade Czesław Limont as counselor of the embassy of the People's Republic of Poland in Havana in the period of 26 June 1972 – 15 August 1976], AMSZ, D.III-1976, 20/82, W2, K. 241-3-76, 4.

8 Heinz Langer to Grunert, 13 April 1976, PAAA, MfAA, ZR 1856/81, 4.

9 "Konzeption für die Entwicklung der Beziehungen der DDR zur Republik Kuba in den Jahren 1981 bis 1985" [Concept for the development of relations between the GDR and the Republic of Cuba from 1981 to 1985], 30 December 1985, PAAA, MfAA, ZR 1922/13, 3.

10 Georgi Yonov, "Vünshnata politika na Kuba" [Cuba's foreign policy], January 1978, DAMvNR, 1978, op. 34, d. 73, a. e. 1768, 12 [26].

11 "Vybrané citáty z projevé ss. Husáka, Biřaka a Chňoupka k bilaterálním vztahům" [Selected quotes from the speech of comrades Husák, Biřak and Chňoupek on bilateral (Czechoslovak-Cuban) relations], n.d. AMZV, TO-T 1980-89, Kuba, box 1, 1.

to which, its revolutionaries must be prepared to engage not only in Cuba but also abroad.<sup>12</sup> In justifying Africa's increasing international importance in the 1970s, a Polish army secret report explained that the African governments have become more influential at the United Nations, international economic institutions and the NAM. This increased their weight in the quest for solving critical global challenges, such as defining the principles of the new economic order, disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation. Therefore, as the Polish analysis posited, political and economic reasons made Africa a venue of ideological struggle, turning it into a battleground for capitalist and socialist developmental paradigms. Resulting from the growing political and ideological conflict between the two socio-political global systems in Africa, Soviet and Cuban interest in the continent expanded dramatically.<sup>13</sup>

## Enter battleground Africa

As Eastern European diplomatic reports show, Havana's venturing into Africa was based on a complex set of motivations, mixing historical, geopolitical, ideologic and economic drivers. In his meeting with Bulgarian Communist Party head Todor Zhivkov in March 1976, Castro emphasized the pragmatic aspect of Havana's involvement. Showing his awareness of Cuba's limits of engagement, Cuba's *líder máximo* sought the assistance of Moscow and its allies not only in helping liberate countries emerging from colonial rule but also in assisting their further development under the banner of socialism.<sup>14</sup> Essentially, Castro's vision was as far-reaching as the East's willingness to commit economic resources to bolster the new alliances the Cubans had managed to forge.

Addressing the situation in Angola, providing a thorough description of Cuban motivations, Castro stated to his Bulgarian counterpart that Cuba decided to send soldiers to Angola to preserve Angola and the 400 Cuban commanders who had been dispatched to three Cuban schools to train the left-leaning People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) in its struggle against the west-sponsored National Liberation Front of Angola and the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola in Angola-proper and the Front for the Liberation of the Enclave of Cabinda in the oil-rich Cabinda exclave following the departure of the Portuguese in June 1975. As the military situation in Southern Africa deteriorated, Cuba's role intensified, and Havana became increasingly involved in saving Cabinda as part of Angolan territory.<sup>15</sup> After winning the war in Angola, paraphrasing Field Marshal Sir Bernard Montgomery, Castro told Zhivkov that they "must win the peace," implying the need of assisting Angola on its road

12 Cable, Havana to Bucharest, "Ref: aspecte ale vizitelor lui Fidel Castro în țări Arabe și Africane" [About: aspects of Fidel Castro's visits to Arab and African countries], Nr 037147, 9 April 1977, AMAE, Problema 220/G, Anul 1977, Țara Cuba, Dosar 981, 2 [8].

13 "Program Rozwoju stosunków politycznych i gospodarczych z krajami Afryki" [Programme for the development of political and economic relations with the countries of Africa], April 1978, IPN, BU 02108/5, 3-4 [112-13].

14 Transcript of Conversation between Todor Zhivkov and Fidel Castro, 11 March 1976, TsDA, f. 1B, op. 60, a.e. 194.

15 Ibid., 28-29.

to socialist prosperity. To that end, Castro concluded that the socialist bloc “must ensure that Angola becomes a socialist state.”<sup>16</sup>

According to Castro, if Angola became socialist, it would significantly impact Africa, perhaps affecting the entire continent. Angola was particularly significant because of its “vast deposits of oil, iron and diamonds.” Moreover, it would not require much material assistance from the bloc with its population of five million. Castro told Zhivkov that more cooperation from the East was needed, as Cuba could provide Angola with technical assistance, medicines and the construction of the party, army, interior ministry and public health.<sup>17</sup> To further the line expressed by Castro, two months later, Cuban Deputy Prime Minister Bravo outlined to the Hungarian Ambassador the same idea, emphasizing the importance the Cubans saw in the bloc’s economic aid to Angola. In Bravo’s words, Cuba was not driven by any economic interest in Angola, nor was it in a position to provide adequate economic assistance. However, the friendship of Angola, which was “extremely rich in raw materials” and which was strategically positioned, would be “invaluable to the entire socialist community.”<sup>18</sup>

Similarly, a complicated set of motives justified Havana’s decision to send troops to another African combat theatre just a year after the Angolan campaign. In the Horn of Africa, where Somalia and Ethiopia claimed to adhere to socialism but became entrenched in a border conflict, Castro grew fond of the Ethiopian leader, Mengistu Haile Mariam, whom he saw as a revolutionary military officer like himself.<sup>19</sup> However, noting that at the start of 1979, Cuba despatched around 600 advisers to all Ethiopian ministries, a Polish report suggested that the Cubans sought to expand on the purely ideologic and strategic motivation for their engagement in the Horn, intending to play a significant part in Ethiopia’s socio-economic life, as they had done in Angola.<sup>20</sup> Ultimately, because of Cuba’s quick backing for the MPLA in Angola and Mengistu in Ethiopia, Fidel has earned great praise in radical Third World circles as a genuine revolutionary leader willing to commit politically and militarily. A US State Department memorandum concluded that Cuba became known throughout Africa and the black Caribbean as a significant player in bolstering the anti-colonial and anti-white fight in Southern Africa. As a result of effectively working with the Soviets in a liberation struggle and outmaneuvering the US in Southern Africa, Cuba entered “the major power game,” the State Department memorandum concluded.<sup>21</sup>

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16 Ibid., 31.

17 Ibid., 31-32.

18 Vilmos Meruk, “Másolat a havannai nagykövetség 1976. május 25-en kelt jelentéséről: F. Bravo elvtárs értékelése az angolai helyzetről” [Copy of the report of the Embassy of Havana dated 25 May 1976: Comrade F. Bravo’s assessment of the situation in Angola], May 1976, MNL, M-KS, 288, f. 32, 1976/162, 4.

19 Jon David Glassman interviewed by Peter Moffat, 19 December 1997, ADST, <https://www.adst.org/OH TOCs/Glassman, Jon David.toc.pdf>, 14 (Accessed in 2 November 2021).

20 “Notatka dotycząca Socjalistycznej Etiopii” [Note on Socialist Ethiopia], 4 September 1979, AMSZ, DV, 24/85, W-3, 14.

21 US Secretary of State, “Cuba in Angola -- A Half Year Later,” 10 July 1976, NARA ADD, <https://aad.archives.gov/aad/createpdf?rid=160998&dt=2082&dl=1345, 1-2> (Accessed in 2 November 2021).

## Cuba and the Non-Aligned Movement

In addition to its successful military involvement in Africa and enhanced political relations with Latin American communist parties, Cuba improved its standing within the NAM, for which it received the consistent praise of its socialist allies. In December 1966, during a plenary meeting of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU CC), Leonid Brezhnev voiced his unequivocal support for the world's national liberation fight which transformed into a significant global front against imperialism. Moreover, the Soviet leader told the assembled Party elite that the CPSU could not abandon this new area of international struggle, urging his comrades to push forward and do all in their power to secure the victory of national and social liberation forces against colonialism.<sup>22</sup> This confrontational atmosphere got a fresh lease of life in the 1970s when Havana became a significant player in the movement. As a result, Cuba, one of the original members of the NAM and its sole Latin American member in the 1960s, emerged as a critical factor in bridging Moscow with this new arena in world politics following the Fourth Summit of the organization in Algiers in September 1973.

The growing number of governments gaining independence in the 1960s and 1970s made the NAM a significant political actor in the world's international arena. The preparatory material for PZPR leader Edward Gierek's visit to Havana in January 1975 recognized that fact, claiming that the movement's magnitude made it a major international factor. According to the document, the non-aligned states had a significant opinion-forming role in the international arena. They surfaced as a distinct pressure organization in international fora and conferences, supporting the interests of the increasing number of governments that did not openly participate in military blocs. In addition, the vast mineral reserves, energy resources and favorable strategic positions of the organization's member-states further increased their international importance.<sup>23</sup> In assessing Cuba's role in the NAM, the Polish foreign ministry stated in 1974 that Havana's popularity in the movement, combined with its "principled position" in assessing the current international situation, provided Cuba with a unique opportunity for increasing its political influence over NAM members.<sup>24</sup> Concurring with the analysis of the Polish colleagues, the Czechoslovaks expressed their admiration for Cuba by emphasizing its capacity to expand collaboration between the NAM and the socialist governments.<sup>25</sup>

22 Leonid Brezhnev, "Vneshnyaya politika Sovetskogo Soyuz a i bor'ba KPSS za splochenost' mirovogo kommunisticheskogo dvizheniya" [The foreign policy of the Soviet Union and the struggle of the CPSU for the cohesion of the world's communist movement], report for the December Plenum of CPSU CC, 12 December 1966, RGANI, f. 2, op. 3, d. 43, 47.

23 "Materiały Informacyjne do wizyty i sekretarza KC PZPR towarzysza Edwarda Gierka na Kubie w dniach 10-16 stycznia 1975: Kuba a ruch państw niezaangażowanych" [Informational materials for the visit of secretary of the Central Committee of PUWP, Comrade Edward Gierek to Cuba on 10-16 January 1975: Cuba and the movement of non-aligned states], December 1974, Zestaw Nr 2, AAN, 1354 KC PZPR, Kancelaria i Sekretarzy KC PZPR, XIA/678, 14 [79].

24 Ibid., 22 [87].

25 "Informační zpráva k odjezdu kubánského velvyslance Pedro W. Luis Torrese. V. Náměty k rozhovoru" [Information report on the departure of Cuban Ambassador Pedro W. Luis Torres. V. Suggestions for the interview], October 1980, AMZV, TO-T 1980-89, Kuba, b. 1, 1.

However, Cuba's success inside the NAM placed Havana at odds with another influential member of the organization, Yugoslavia. Like the United States and China, Yugoslavia believed that Cuba was a Soviet proxy in Africa, threatening the Non-Aligned Movement's unity.<sup>26</sup> Yugoslav officials in Beijing stressed that China and Yugoslavia had a basic agreement on maintaining the organization's unity in international affairs, fearing that the NAM would be fragmented along with world blocs, contradicting Cuba's aims.<sup>27</sup> The Chinese believed the Soviets attempted to split the NAM and modify its nature and orientation through Cuba.<sup>28</sup>

Still, Castro sought to dissuade Yugoslav and Chinese accusations by stressing that Cuba had a more comprehensive set of motivations for its involvement in the movement than merely serving the Soviet interests. Commemorating the twenty-first anniversary of the Moncada Barracks attack in Havana, Castro defined Cuba's participation in the organization as "unrelated to any military bloc with a simultaneous determined anti-imperialist attitude against colonialism, neo-colonialism and racism, while fully respecting the principles of international solidarity with nations struggling for political and social liberation." Consequently, in Castro's analysis, the Cuban notion of non-alignment, which was not identical with traditional political neutrality, served as a rationale for Havana's military and political participation in progressive African countries fighting for national and social independence from colonialism.<sup>29</sup> In September 1979, Cuba hosted NAM's sixth summit, presenting its ambitious proposals for the movement's strategic reorientation, earning East's praise for Cuba's "great revolutionary force" around the world.<sup>30</sup>

## Havana's push for Third World development

The development theme expressed at the end of 1970s was not a novel aspect of Havana's foreign policy. In 1972, Castro discussed with his Romanian colleague, Nicolae Ceaușescu, the need for significant investments in the less developed nations. Thus, he inextricably linked progress with socialism. For the Cuban leader, socialism meant development. In other words, in his views, there could be "no development without socialism."<sup>31</sup> Accordingly, as Cuba's prestige among left-leaning members of the international community grew following Havana's successful Africa campaigns, Castro sought to advance this idea at the Group of 77 and the CMEA in the latter part of the 1970s.

26 Memorandum of Conversation, Edward Gierak - Isidoro Malmierca, 2 February 1979, AMSZ, D.III-1979, 25/82, W5, K. 220-1-79, 4.

27 "Úsilí ČLR o prosazování čínských stanovisek v hnutí nezúčastněných před konferencí v Havaně" [PRC's efforts to promote Chinese positions in the non-aligned movement ahead of the conference in Havana], n.d. (c. 1979), ABS, 12828, 3 [14].

28 "Stenograma convorbirilor oficiale româno-chineze - Pekin, 15, 16, 19 mai 1978" [Transcript of official Romanian-Chinese talks - Beijing, 15, 16, 19 May 1978], ANR, CC al PCR, Secția Relații Externe, 64/1978, 58 [61].

29 Majchrzak "Sprawozdanie polityczne: Ambasady PRL w Hawanie za 1978 rok" [Political report: Embassy of the Polish People's Republic in Havana for 1978], 12 January 1979, AMSZ, D.III-1978, 24/82, W-6, K.242-1-78, 5 [6].

30 "Cuvîntarea șefului delegației cehoslovace, Gustav Husak, la Consfătuirea Comitetului Politic Consultativ al statelor participante la Tratatul de la Varșovia (mai 1980)" [Speech by the head of the Czechoslovak delegation, Gustáv Husák, at the Consultation of the Political Consultative Committee of the States participating in the Warsaw Pact (May 1980)], ANR, CC al PCR, Secția Relații Externe, 66/1980, p. 9 [91].

31 Memorandum of Conversation, Nicolae Ceaușescu - Fidel Castro, 26-27 May 1972, ANR, CC al PCR - Relații Externe, 46/1972, 73 [75].

Havana's willingness to tackle the economic concerns of the less developed countries in the international arena and inside the CMEA was also evident in its diplomatic maneuverings within the council. In December 1975, Carlos Rafael Rodríguez, Cuba's permanent CMEA envoy, formally conveyed Havana's stance on forming a new international economic order to Comecon's secretary, Nikolai Fadeev. The Cuban declaration defined the Third World movement's economic and political underpinnings. In terms of politics, the NAM, with beginnings traced back to the 1955 Bandung Conference, began to take a more anti-imperialist tone during the Algiers Summit in 1973. The other organization, known as the Group of 77, was established in 1964 after the inaugural session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) in Geneva and attempted to establish a coordinating framework for developing nations. While acknowledging the role of the countries of the socialist commonwealth, the Cubans believed they needed to further coordinate and consistently pursue their principled policies, supporting the positions of the developing countries to strengthen the links between the socialist camp and the group of the underdeveloped countries and "to isolate and weaken imperialism."<sup>32</sup>

Cuba's internationalist involvement provoked wide-ranging interpretations by Soviet and East European officials. A Yugoslav aide-mémoire on Belgrade's ties with Havana emphasized the complex calculus underlying Havana's diverse foreign policy plans. According to Belgrade's report, in the early 1970s, Cuba's defense faced challenging conditions. Moreover, amid the ever-present threat of US military intervention, Havana also had to maintain the true nature of its revolution in the face of Moscow's ongoing efforts to impose its own vision of social development and governance.<sup>33</sup> For Cuba, Africa was a place where it could further its independent foreign policies, demonstrating its courage and revolutionary spirit, reinforcing its claim to Third World leadership, as the First Deputy Director of the International Department of the CPSU CC Karen Brutents (1998, 214-5) revealed in his memoirs. This theme was also recognized by another notable Soviet foreign policy specialist, the long-serving ambassador to Washington and then chief of the International Department of the CPSU CC, Anatoly Dobrynin (1995, 362-3), who argued that Castro considered what was happening in Angola as a "Cuban show," which was under his command. Similarly, the Cuban foreign minister Raúl Roa confirmed in a conversation with his Yugoslav counterpart, Miloš Minić, the independent decision to help Angolan president Neto without any coordination with the Soviet Union.<sup>34</sup> Summarizing the numerous interpretations on Cuba's "independent policies" towards Africa, General Atanas Semerdzhiev (2004, 188-9), then chief of staff of the Bulgarian army, Castro's "noteworthy revolutionary" standing and sense of "moral obligation" in guiding the Cubans' helping those "struggling for freedom and independence."

32 "Soobrazheniya Kubinskoj storony otnositel'no ustanovleniya novogo mezhdunarodnogo ékonomicheskogo poryadka" [Considerations of the Cuban side regarding the establishment of a new international economic order], December 1975, DAMvNR, op. 32, d. 101, a.e. 1983, 2-3 [5-6].

33 "Podsetnik o Kubi i jugoslovensko-kubanskim odnosima" [A reminder of Cuba and Yugoslav-Cuban relations], 20 February 1974, AJ, KPR I-5-b/61-3, 4.

34 Transcript of Conversation, [Yugoslav Foreign Minister] Miloš Minić - Raúl Roa, 2 June 1976 AJ, KPR, I-5-b/61-3, 20.X-3.XII 1970 - 15.XI 1979 Kuba, 4.

Taking stock of the contentious ideological underpinning in Havana's foreign engagement in the 1970s, Blasier (1987, 118) concludes that the Soviet-Cuban alliance was a marriage of convenience as much as convergence. However, the Second Department of the General Staff of the Polish army pointed to the dynamic character of Cuba-East relations, arguing that the convergence between them intensified in the 1970s. The increased US presence in Africa, the growing importance of African raw materials for the American economy and the expanding international role of African nations have revived the continent's geostrategic significance in the East-West competition.<sup>35</sup> As a result, the African continent has become the primary focus of Cuban foreign policy. The disintegration of the Portuguese colonial empire in 1974 and the independence of strategically important countries such as Angola and Mozambique resulted in a fundamental shift in the balance of power in favor of national-liberation movements.<sup>36</sup> The Cubans, therefore, felt that the consolidation of the situation in Angola would pave the way for a revolution in Southern Africa. They predicted that the battle for socialism in Angola would be arduous and would need a greater engagement of the socialist community. Furthermore, they thought that the East should offer coordinated aid to Neto's administration to cement the "Angolan revolution's" accomplishments and thwart the objectives of "international reaction."<sup>37</sup>

Following Havana's bold initiatives in Africa and the NAM, Cuba's popularity among progressive Third World countries skyrocketed. Likewise, Havana's prominence rose among the East European countries, which admired Cuba's revolutionary zeal. Consequently, Cuba began to take a more prominent role in talks concerning the issues of the developing world in the East's international forums. The meeting of the secretaries of the Central Committees of the communist and workers' parties was an effective form of coordinating foreign policy, ideological and propaganda activities of socialist states, providing a convenient platform for a comprehensive and open exchange of views and experiences on international issues as well as each party's problems. According to the Foreign Department of the PZPR's CC, these sessions efficiently enhanced communist party coordination and collaboration.<sup>38</sup>

At the fifth annual conference of the secretaries of ideological and foreign affairs departments of the communist parties' central committees, held in Budapest in late February 1978, the delegation of the PCC's CC led by Raúl García Peláez took center stage. In the presence of Bulgarian, Czechoslovak, Polish, East German, Mongolian, Romanian, Vietnamese and Soviet communist party representatives, the PCC delegates placed a new item on the agenda, addressing the intellectual and political factors of Third World national liberation movements.<sup>39</sup> A few months later, in

35 "Afryka w polityce Stanów Zjednoczonych" [Africa in the politics of the United States], 7 November 1979, IPN, BU 2602/13647, 1 [55].

36 "Nowe elementy w stosunkach Kuba-Afryka" [New elements in Cuba-Africa relations], 20 April 1978, AMSZ, D.III-1978, 24/82, W-6, K. 2413-6-78, 1.

37 Ibid, 4-5.

38 "Informacja Wydziału Zagranicznego KC PZPR: Narada sekretarzy komitetów centralnych bratnich partii krajów socjalistycznych" [Information from the Foreign Department of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party: Meeting of the secretaries of the central committees of the fraternal parties of the socialist countries], 8 March 1978, AAN, KC PZPR, XI A/617, 7 [41].

39 Ibid., 1 [35].

November 1978, Cuban participation in Africa was a key topic at the Warsaw Treaty's Consultative Political Committee meeting in Moscow. Soviet leader Brezhnev applauded from the tribune the Cuban military operations during the Somali invasion of Ethiopia. In justifying Havana's actions, the Soviet Party head referred to it as "a noble and disinterested policy in support of the peoples' opposition to counterrevolutionary extortion."<sup>40</sup> Taking the floor, Czechoslovak Party leader Gustáv Husák reaffirmed his country's support for Cuban internationalism, described as being "at the forefront of the fight against imperialist aggression and colonialism."<sup>41</sup>

Despite the high praise it received at leading multilateral gatherings of the socialist world, the cost of Cuba's activism was too great, even for the Soviets. According to a British report, while Havana deliberately elevated the quality of revolution outside its boundaries, it also increased the economic costs of Cuban policy to the Soviet Union (Domínguez 1989, 78). A *Pravda* journalist told the *Los Angeles Times* correspondent in Moscow that in the early 1970s, he witnessed a conversation between Castro and Soviet officials in which the Cuban leader wanted to talk about Africa as the Soviets preferred to talk about "the million rubles a day going down the drain in Cuba." Thus, Castro had been preoccupied with Africa since the mid-1960s, and he was not a "Soviet stooge."<sup>42</sup>

However, the Soviet bloc's reluctance to quickly help peoples opposing colonialism and "imperialism" in Africa, commit soldiers and offer economic support drew harsh condemnation from Cuba. Moreover, numerous reports from Eastern delegates attested to Cuba's rising frustration with the socialist state's inactivity and lack of comprehension of the concerns of developing countries. As early as 1974, a Polish report noted that Havana considered the socialist states' knowledge of Third World conditions inadequate, as they underestimated the challenges of the undeveloped governments. As a result, Cuba wished for its socialist allies to devise a more comprehensive action plan for the rest of the world and employ more flexible tactics. Cuban critics further claimed that socialist governments did not always respond appropriately because they failed to understand the necessity of bringing Third World concerns more frequently to the socialist commonwealth's multilateral fora.<sup>43</sup>

However, there was another point of contention in Havana. The GDR's ambassador observed that as Cuba's international engagement grew in the 1970s, it began to give more material and human help and expected an even more substantial commitment from the socialist community.<sup>44</sup>

40 "Stenograma consfăturii Comitetului Politic Consultativ al statelor participante la Tratatul de la Varșovia (Cuvîntul de deschidere și expunerea delegatiei URSS), Moscova, 22-23 noiembrie 1978" [Transcript of the Consultative Political Committee of the States Participating in the Warsaw Pact (Opening Speech and Presentation of the Delegation of the USSR), Moscow, November 22-23, 1978], ANR, CC al PCR, Relații Externe, 180/1978, 22 [26].

41 "Cuvîntarea tovarășului Gustav Husak la sesiunea Comitetului Politic Consultativ al organizației Tratatului de la Varșovia, noiembrie 1978" [Speech by Gustáv Husák at the session of the Consultative Political Committee of the Warsaw Treaty, November 1978], ANR, CC al PCR, Relații Externe, 180/1978, 12 [283].

42 US Embassy Moscow to SecState, "Pravda journalist claims Cubans leaving Angola by ship," 8 April 1976, NARA ADD, <https://aad.archives.gov/aad/createpdf?rid=22847&dt=2082&dl=1345>, 1 (Accessed in 2 November 2021).

43 "Materiały Informacyjne do wizyty i sekretarza KC PZPR," 22 [87].

44 "Einige aktuelle Fragen der Innen- und Außenpolitik Kubas" [Some current issues of Cuba's domestic and foreign policies] c. January/February 1980, PAAA, MfAA, ZR 1072/87, 6.

As Gleijeses (2002, 377) and Grabendorff (1980, 8-9) pointed out, Cuban internationalism was about more than just anti-imperialism and anti-colonialism. For the success of socialism in Angola and Ethiopia, Cuba relied on material help from the East. However, as the socialist states failed to behave as expeditiously and as generously as the Cubans had expected, Havana's complaints of its eastern allies rose accordingly in the 1980s. On 5 June 1984, a Cuban diplomat confided in Colonel Mieczysław Figura, the chief of the First Directorate of the Polish Internal Military Service, that Cuba was becoming increasingly pressured by the ongoing human and material assistance it provided to other nations in Africa and Latin America. According to the Cuban official, Cuba's internationalist initiatives have had a very detrimental influence on the country's economy and people's morale. Moreover, as Cuba's internationalist mission exacerbated internal problems, the Cuban government thought the socialist states should share part of the burden.<sup>45</sup> This proved to be a fundamental schism in Cuba's alliance with the East, which became more pronounced in the second part of the 1980s, with CPSU's new leader Mikhail Gorbachev's reforms and the East's withdrawal from the South.

## Conclusion: Towards a Pax Cubana

Using intricate tactical maneuvering within the Socialist bloc and the Non-Aligned Movement, Cuba ambitiously sought to carve for itself a special role on the international scene. By reading the numerous diplomatic reports of East European envoys to Cuba who had close access to their Cuban hosts' ideological thinking, policy intentions and international concerns, one cannot help but notice certain patterns emerging.

First, Eastern diplomatic representatives saw Cuba not in any way an obedient, narrow-minded ally cherished for its geopolitical positioning. Instead, as decades went by, Havana grew from an ideological challenger to a strategic enabler for the bloc. This position, however, did not come cheap for the socialist states who had been drawn deep into the South by their ambitious Caribbean partner, who did not shy away from taking center stage at crucial multilateral fora of the socialist commonwealth and the world at large to articulate its motives openly.

Second, as this paper has shown, Cuba was also not a naïve and one-sided socialist buddy of the Kremlin's in the Western Hemisphere, as its policies proved flexible and pragmatic enough to reflect on and challenge the international interests of the Soviet bloc. However, Havana's overambitious approach, which played exclusively on the bloc's geopolitical and ideological sensitivities, lost its luster as their motivating force seized to move global sentiments in a post-Cold War world. Thus, despite the anti-climactic development of Cuba's Cold War foreign relations in the latter half of the 1980s, we see Cuba's perplexing international conduct, near home, in the US' backyard, as far as in the sands of Horn of Africa's Ogaden desert and in the Non-Aligned Movement's diplomatic front as a brazen attempt to build Havana's vision for a world.

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45 "Notatka służbowa: dot. niektórych problemów Republiki Kuby" [Service note: on some problems of the Republic of Cuba], n.d. (c. June 1984), IPN, BU 2602/16999, 2 [83].

Finally, a *Pax Cubana* was never openly pronounced but always seemed on the fingertips of Cuba's contentious leader, whose provocative, proactive and far-reaching internationalism drew the East's harsh criticisms in the 1960s, which were replaced by open astonishment in the 1970s following the First Party Congress. However, as improvised and hurried as it may have seemed, Cuban internationalism proved remarkably consistent in its relentless search of ways to put the Caribbean Island on the world map through visions so bold for a small nation that dazzled and confused its allies. Moscow and its East European junior partners alternated contempt and admiration for their prized hemispheric ally. As Havana gradually emerged from the shackles of its unsuccessful regional revolutionary exploits in the 1960s, it found ways to punch way above its weight in the 1970s, by seeking the role of a North-South mediator which eagerly promoted socialism as a form of development rather than as a mere template of anti-colonial struggle. This position, however, never fully materialized, eventually crumbling under the implosion of the very international conjuncture that made Havana's global outreach its hottest export at the height of the Cold War.

## Annex

### List of primary sources

#### Archives:

Archiwum Act Nowych (AAN) [Central Archives of Modern Records], Warsaw, Poland.

Arhivele Ministerului Afacerilor Externe (AMAE) [Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs], Bucharest, Romania.

Archiv bezpečnostních složek (ABS) [Security Services Archive], Prague, Czech Republic.

Archiwum Ministerstwa Spraw Zagranicznych (AMSZ) [Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs], Warsaw.

Archiv Ministerstva Zahraničních Věcí (AMZV) [Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs], Prague.

Arhivele Naționale ale României (ANR) [National Archives of Romania], Bucharest, Romania.

Arhiv Jugoslavije (AJ) [Archives of Yugoslavia], Belgrade, Serbia.

Diplomaticeski Arhiv na Ministerstvoto na Vūnshnite Raboti na Republika Būlgariya (DAMvNR) [Diplomatic Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Bulgaria], Sofia, Bulgaria.

Instytut Pamięci Narodowej (IPN) [Institute of National Remembrance], Warsaw.

Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár (MNL) [National Archives of Hungary], Budapest, Hungary

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