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LOOKING FOR ANOTHER ANGOLA:
CUBAN POLICY DILEMMAS IN AFRICA

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ABSTRACT

Looking for Another Angola: Cuban Policy Dilemmas in Africa

Over the past five years the number of Cubans in Africa has risen from a few hundred advisors to an estimated 40,000 combat troops. The Cuban involvement in Africa has raised a large number of political and strategic issues for the United States. Not since the "missile crisis" has any Cuban policy so threatened to disrupt U.S.-Soviet detente.

While the Cuban involvement in Africa has received an enormous amount of attention in the United States, the full complexity of Cuban interests has not been explored. Much attention has been concentrated in a fruitless debate over whether Cuban policies are motivated by Cuba's dependence on the Soviet Union or by Cuba's autonomous commitments to the Third World. This paper adopts a third approach. While acknowledging Cuba's very real economic and military dependence on the Soviet Union, it points out that Cuba has historically managed to pursue strikingly autonomous foreign policies. During the mid-1960s--a period of comparable dependence--Cuban efforts to export revolution were seen as a direct challenge to Soviet interests in Latin America, and to Soviet domination of the Socialist Bloc. The paper further suggests that Cuba's foreign policy choices are informed by a dual commitment to the Socialist Bloc and to the Third World. Cuba claims to be a member of both entities, and her ability to move freely between these two worlds has won for her a degree of international prestige which far outweighs the island's size and resources. It has also given Cuba a surprising amount of leverage in her relationship with the Soviet Union. Finally, the paper suggests that, more often than not, Cuba's efforts to combine the interests of her two international constituencies have posed a major dilemma for Cuban foreign policy. During the mid-1960s, Cuba's attempts to export revolution in Latin America strained Cuban-Soviet relations almost to the breaking point. More recently, Cuba's growing accommodation with the Soviet Union has drawn sharp criticism from an increasingly "nonaligned" Third World.

The goal of this paper is not to establish either the dependency or the autonomy of Cuba's policies in Africa, but to analyze how Cuba's "dependent" commitments to the Soviet Union interact with Cuba's "autonomous" commitments to the Third World to reinforce and constrain Cuba's current policy choices in Africa.

LOOKING FOR ANOTHER ANGOLA:
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Introduction

The time has come for the Cubans to take stock of their policies in Africa. Four years have passed since Cuba first sent troops to Angola. During that time, the number of Cubans stationed in Africa has risen from a few hundred advisors to an estimated 40,000 combat troops. Although the wars in Angola and Ethiopia are officially over, there has been no sign of a pullback of Cuban troops--they remain because the fighting in Angola and Ethiopia continues. At the same time new fronts requiring Cuban attention have appeared, most notably in southern Africa.

All the evidence suggests that Cuba never intended so large, so costly, or so lengthy an involvement in Africa. Nevertheless, intended or not, the commitment of an estimated 40,000 troops continues. Before the Castro regime commits itself to another African conflict, it must take stock of the policies it has pursued over the past four years, and of the alternatives now confronting it in Africa and throughout the Third World.

Cuba has reaped definite benefits from its involvement in Africa. Nowhere have the benefits been more striking than in Angola. The commitment of Cuban troops to Angola placed Cuba at the very center of the struggle between the superpowers for influence in the Third World. This position won for Cuba a degree of attention and international prestige which far outweighed the island's size and resources. In addition, the Angolan involvement provided Cuba a rare opportunity to begin paying back its mounting economic and military debts to the Soviet Union. Finally, the Angolan involvement did much to improve Cuba's relations with the Third World.

Angola was an unqualified success for Cuban foreign policy, and observers predicted that it was only the beginning of a new era of Cuban military involvement in Africa--and perhaps throughout the Third World.

Since Angola, however, things have not gone as smoothly for the Cubans in Africa. Cuban support for the Ethiopian Dergue and the continued presence of Cuban troops in Angola have placed great strains on Cuba's relations with the Third World. Charges that the Cubans are merely pawns of the Soviets in Africa dominated last summer's meetings of the Organization for African Unity and the Conference of Nonaligned Nations. Similar charges threatened to disrupt the 1979 Havana Summit Conference of the Nonaligned.

Cuba must now search for new policies in Africa, policies which will serve Cuba's allies in the Socialist Bloc without simultaneously alienating her allies in the Third World. In other words, the Cubans must look for another Angola. Whether or not they will be able to find another Angola is not clear. The dilemmas now confronting Cuba in Africa are not new, and the history of Cuban involvement in the Third World suggests that they will not be easily resolved.

Cuba claims to be a member of both the Socialist Bloc and the Third World.¹ From the earliest days of the Revolution, the Castro regime has pursued an active foreign policy intended to join and further the interests of its allies in both communities. Cuba's ability to move freely between the Socialist Bloc and the Third World has given her a surprising amount of leverage in her relationship with the Soviet Union. At times it has also earned Cuba a recognized position of leadership among the more "progressive" states of the Third World.

Yet, more often than not, the effort to combine the interests of these two international constituencies has posed a serious dilemma for Cuban foreign relations. In the mid-1960s, Cuba's attempts to export revolution in Latin America strained Cuban-Soviet relations almost to the breaking point. In the early 1970s, Cuba's abandonment of guerrilla tactics and her growing accommodation with the Soviet Union drew sharp criticism from an increasingly "nonaligned" Third World. Today, in Africa, the Cubans are again caught between their allies in the Socialist Bloc and their allies in the Third World.

Although the presence of Cuban troops in Africa has received an enormous amount of attention from scholars and journalists, the full complexity of Cuban interests has not been explored. With a few notable exceptions,² most analyses have been trapped in an overly dichotomized debate over whether the Cuban involvement in Africa is motivated by Cuba's dependence on the Soviet Union or Cuba's autonomous commitments to the Third World. Proponents of the autonomy thesis focus on the ideological and historical bases for Cuba's role in Africa, emphasizing particularly Che Guevara's links to African liberation movements, such as Angola's MPLA, which pre-date the Soviet involvement by nearly a decade.³ Those who subscribe to the dependency thesis argue that Cuba's overwhelming military and economic dependence on the Soviet Union has inevitably placed major constraints on Cuba's ability to determine her domestic and foreign policies. According to this thesis the Cubans in Africa are simply pawns of the Soviet Union.⁴

Both positions are unrealistic. The autonomy thesis ignores the very real material constraints on Cuban foreign policy. For all its revolutionary pronouncements, Cuba is still a small state, a weak state, a militarily and economically dependent state. The Cubans could never mount and sustain military campaigns of the complexity of the Angolan and Ethiopian involvements without extensive support from the Soviet Union. The dependency thesis is, on the other hand, glaringly ahistoric. It ignores the fact that during a period of comparable economic and military dependence--the mid-1960s--the Cubans pursued similar foreign policies independent of their alliance with the Soviets, even when such policies brought them into direct conflict with the Soviets.

Recent revisions within the dependency literature suggest a third, more productive approach for the analysis of Cuban foreign policy in Africa--that of "bargaining" or "dependency management."⁵

According to such theorists as Albert O. Hirschman and Theodore H. Moran, the term "dependency" was developed to describe an overall relationship of "structural inequality" between states. It was never intended to predict the outcome of specific foreign policy interchanges. At the policy-making level--what Hirschman calls the bargaining level--negotiating skill, political conditions, even the strength with which interests are held, may give the dependent state more power to choose policy than the overall structure of inequality would suggest.

When viewed from the dependency management perspective, Cuba's involvement in Africa can be seen as an attempt to combine a dependence on the Soviet Union with the pursuit of long-standing commitments to the Third World. What then becomes significant for the policy analyst is how the interests of these two constituencies interact to reinforce and constrain Cuban policy choices in Africa.

An Independent Cuban Interest

There can be little doubt that the Cubans are in important measure promoting Soviet interests in Africa. The Cuban-backed victories in Angola and Ethiopia have already given the Soviet Union unprecedented influence in two of the most strategically important regions of Africa. Still, it must be recognized that Cuba has real interests of its own in Africa--interests which, so far, have coincided with and reinforced Soviet interests. Acknowledging the existence of independent Cuban interests, and outlining the nature of these interests, are two essential steps in any attempt to understand the policy alternatives presently facing the Cubans in Africa.

The Castro government's willingness to commit troops and scarce resources to Africa can first be explained in terms of Cuban ideology. The responsibilities of what the Cubans call "proletarian internationalism" are a central tenet of the Cuban Revolution. The First Constitution of the Cuban Communist Party, adopted in 1976, contains a resolution on foreign policy which reads in part:

Cuba, in carrying out its foreign policy, subordinates its interests to the general interests of socialism and Communism and national liberation of the peoples, to the purpose of the defeat of imperialism and elimination of colonialism, neocolonialism, and all forms of exploitation and discrimination of nations and peoples.⁶

More importantly, the independence of Cuba's commitment to "proletarian internationalism" and to the Third World can be demonstrated historically. Cuba's involvement in Africa pre-dates both Castro's communism and the Cuban-Soviet alliance. The Cuban Revolution came to power in 1959. Castro declared the Revolution to be Marxist-Leninist in 1961. The Soviets waited until 1962 to acknowledge that Cuba was actually on the road to building socialism and to fully commit themselves to the support and defense of the Cuban Revolution. The

first Cuban military aid to Africa arrived in 1960 when the Cubans sent arms and medical personnel to the Algerian National Liberation Front. Cuba's first permanent military mission--a guerrilla-training camp--was established in Ghana in 1961. Cuban troops first saw active combat in the Algerian-Moroccan border dispute of 1963, during which Cuba committed some 300-400 troops as well as tanks and field artillery to support the Algerians.⁷ In 1964, Che Guevara, the leading theoretician of Cuban-style guerrilla warfare, set off on a three-month tour of Africa, visiting Algeria, Guinea, Ghana, and Congo-Brazzaville. In 1965, when Castro pledged the Cuban Revolution's support for revolutionary movements throughout the Third World, Guevara identified Africa as one of "the most important, if not the most important, battlefields against all forms of exploitation in the world." He called on all progressive forces to support the rebels fighting in Zaire, Mozambique, Portuguese Guinea, and Angola.⁸

During the 1960s, the Cubans played a wide variety of roles in Africa. They sent combat troops only once, to Algeria. They trained presidential guards and militias in Congo-Brazzaville, Guinea, and Equatorial Guinea. They provided arms and military personnel to train guerrillas fighting in Portuguese Guinea, Angola, and Mozambique. At the high point in 1966, Cuba had some 1,000 men stationed in its Congo-Brazzaville mission advising and training guerrillas.⁹

During the mid-1960s, the Soviets also developed an increasing interest in Africa. The Soviet involvement, however, was not primarily directed towards the support of revolutionary and national liberation movements. The Soviets instead concentrated their aid on already-established African regimes. This divergence in Cuban and Soviet aid policies was the result of a major divergence in Cuban and Soviet analyses of the revolutionary potential of Africa. By the mid-1960s, when Che proclaimed Africa to be the most important battlefield in the Third World, the Soviets had already abandoned all hope for genuine revolution in Africa. Thus, while Cuba sent aid to Africa to promote international revolution, the Soviets used their African aid merely to further their own state commercial and diplomatic interests. (The nature of the Soviet involvement in Africa is discussed more fully below.)

The historical record suggests that, during the 1960s, Soviet and Cuban efforts in Africa, while overlapping at times, were apparently not centrally coordinated. Although both states were committed to the goals of socialism and national liberation throughout the Third World, they held very different views on how these goals could be attained in Africa. These different views led the Cubans and Soviets to support different movements and regimes in Africa during the 1960s.

A Conflict of Cuban
and Soviet Interests

Beginning in the mid-1960s, the Cubans attempted to pursue similar "internationalist" policies in Latin America. Here, however, their efforts brought them into a direct confrontation with the Soviets. Cuba's attempts to export revolution were seen as a direct challenge to the political power of the many established pro-Soviet Communist parties of Latin America, and a challenge to Soviet influence itself in Latin America.

The Cubans and Soviets first came into conflict over the issue of the correct strategy for promoting revolution in Latin America. Cuba advocated armed struggle, and provided ideological and material support to guerrilla groups in Guatemala, Colombia, Bolivia, Venezuela, and Peru. The Soviet Union sought change in Latin America through the more incremental and political "United Front" strategies followed by the Latin American Communist parties.¹⁰ The Cubans charged that the Soviet position on Latin America was outright failure to honor a basic principle of Communism: that it is the duty of a Communist to make revolution.¹¹ The Soviets replied that the Cuban commitment to revolution at all times and in all places was adventurism, inappropriate for the conditions of Latin America, dangerous for the parties involved, and ultimately disruptive of the unity of the international movement.¹²

This conflict over strategy in Latin America was really only part of a growing split between the Cubans and the Soviets over the revolutionary potential of ex-colonial states, and over the nature of the Socialist Bloc's responsibilities to the Third World. The Cubans claimed that the many struggles for national liberation being waged in Africa, Asia, and Latin America were the death-knell of international capitalism, and that as a result, the Socialist states had not only an ideological responsibility to aid these struggles but a vital interest in their success.¹³ Thus, in the Cuban view, Socialist states must provide extensive military aid to national liberation movements wherever they arose.

In addition, the Cubans claimed that the Socialist Bloc's responsibilities to the Third World did not end with the struggle for national liberation. The Bloc must also guarantee that the newly liberated states did not fall into the trap of neo-colonialism. Thus, according to the Cubans, the Socialist Bloc would also have to pay for the economic development of these new states.

Finally, the Cubans insisted that the Bloc's support should not be limited to those emerging states and movements which chose to join the Socialist camp. Since any struggle for national liberation was a blow against imperialism, the Bloc should extend aid to all Third World states wishing to break away from the imperialist system, regardless of their decision to join the Socialist Bloc or remain non-aligned.¹⁴

The Soviet Union was not nearly as sanguine as the Cubans about the prospects for revolution in the Third World. As a result, it tended to be much more cautious in extending aid to the Third World. Soviet theorists had traditionally minimized the significance of political movements in Third World states. When the number of anti-colonial movements increased dramatically in the years following World War II, the official position of the CPSU dismissed the movements as "formalistic and essentially meaningless"¹⁵--with or without formal independence, imperialist control would persist.

After the 1955 Bandung Conference of African and Asian states and the emergence of a Third World ideology of anti-imperialism, the Soviets began to show a new interest in anti-colonial struggles. For the first time the Soviets were willing to entertain the notion that the disintegration of the traditional colonial empires might actually lead to a loss of control for the capitalist powers. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, the Soviet Union initiated a program of extensive economic and military aid to Third World movements and regimes. But Soviet relations with these emerging states were at best uneasy. Many Third World leaders were suspicious of any offers of aid from a foreign power, even an anti-imperialist power like the Soviet Union,¹⁶ while Soviet leaders, long accustomed to the discipline of the Comintern, were uncomfortable with nationalists who were willing to take Soviet aid but insisted on their own ideological stance and organizational style.

In Africa, the Soviets concentrated their efforts on those regimes which they perceived to be truly committed to a revolutionary and socialist path: Guinea, Ghana, Mali, Morocco, and the U.A.R. But the Soviets soon ran into trouble. First the Moroccan regime took a conservative turn. Then Guinea broke with the Soviet Union over alleged Soviet efforts to push the Sekou Touré regime toward "extremist policies."¹⁷ At the same time, the revolution failed to progress in the rest of Africa. Contrary to Soviet expectations, the more conservative nationalist leaders were not swept from power, and Marxist-Leninist ideas failed to take hold in any of the African states. In many of the new states, the Communist party was outlawed.¹⁸

The Soviets then broadened their aid. In addition to supporting revolutionary regimes, they now also gave aid to those "revolutionary democratic" regimes which sincerely advocated noncapitalist solutions for their national problems. Instead of encouraging the organization of independent Communist parties, the Soviet Union now advocated "United Front" strategies, encouraging Marxist-Leninist cadres to work "from within" nationalist coalitions. By the mid-1960s, however, the overthrow of the Ben Bella regime in Algeria and the ouster of Ghana's Kwame Nkrumah forced the Soviets to acknowledge the failure of even this "accommodationist" strategy. These failures led the Soviets to reject the possibility of any real revolutionary change in the Third World for the foreseeable future.

This reassessment of the revolutionary potential of the Third World did not, however, result in a Soviet withdrawal. If anything, during the mid-1960s, the Third World became increasingly important to the Soviets, not because of its revolutionary potential, but rather as a result of the Sino-Soviet split.

In the early 1960s, the Chinese began to challenge the Soviet Union's right to lead the international Communist movement. The Chinese claimed that the arena for the revolutionary struggle had shifted from Europe to the Third World, and that the revolutionary leadership had in turn shifted from Moscow to Peking. The Chinese based their claims on the growing popularity among national liberation movements of the Maoist theory of "People's War."

The Soviets sought to counter this growing Chinese influence wherever it appeared in the Third World. While the Chinese could offer ideological support and an important new strategy for revolution, the Soviets could offer more--in particular, massive infusions of economic and military aid for the emerging states. During the period of 1954-1966, the Soviets sent four times as much aid to Africa as did the Chinese.¹⁹

While the Soviet rejection of the revolutionary potential of the Third World did not lead to a cutback in aid to the Third World, it did have a major effect on who in the Third World the Soviets now chose to support. By the mid-1960s, the Soviet Union had apparently decided to pursue alliances with those movements and regimes which could promote Soviet political, strategic, and economic interests, rather than with those states which appeared to be promoting Third World revolution.

The Cuban-Soviet debate on the revolutionary potential of the Third World did not long remain in the realm of ideology. In 1966, the Cubans and Soviets found themselves on opposite sides of the barricades. The Castro government openly supported the Venezuelan FALN guerrillas led by Douglas Bravo in their efforts to overthrow the Leoni regime. At the same time, the Soviet Union sought to extend its influence in Latin America by establishing diplomatic relations with Leoni's Venezuelan government. The Cubans reacted strongly. They accused the Soviets of playing "big power politics," of betraying the international revolution in order to further their own state interests.²⁰

Over the next three years, the Cubans returned again and again to this criticism of Soviet policy toward the Third World. They charged that the Soviets were failing to give adequate support to the North Vietnamese in order to avoid a confrontation with the United States. They charged the Soviets with allowing Sino-Soviet differences to take precedence over Soviet responsibilities to the Third World. And they accused the Soviets of maintaining exploitative and imperialist economic relations with Third World countries.²¹

The response of the Third World was enthusiastically positive. During the mid-1960s, Castro and Guevara became two of the acknowledged leaders of a new bloc of "progressive" Third World states committed to finding an independent road to national development. In 1966, the goals of this bloc were formally outlined in Havana at the First Tri-Continental Conference of the newly expanded Afro-Asian-Latin American People's Solidarity Organization.²²

The exact nature of the Soviet response to these Cuban challenges remains unclear. In the international arena, the Soviets countered Cuban charges of big power conservatism with their own charges of Cuban adventurism. But there was no threat of Soviet intervention in Cuba (in contrast to Eastern Europe), or any termination of Soviet aid (as had occurred in China). Some authors suggest that the Soviets tried to control Cuban policy-making through Soviet-leaning "agents" in high positions of the Cuban party: members of the so-called "microfaction." In late 1967, 30 members of the party were thrown out and 17 were charged with treason for passing information to the Soviet Union, advocating pro-Soviet positions, and seeking "political and economic pressures by the Soviet Union to force the revolution to draw nearer to that country."²³

Some authors suggest that the Soviets then used more direct economic pressure, by delaying the 1968 Cuban-Soviet trade agreement and limiting deliveries of oil to Cuba during the first quarter of 1968.²⁴ Although there is disagreement in the literature about how drastic the actual oil cutback was, there can be little doubt that for Cuba, which has almost no oil of its own, any cutback must have severely threatened its already weak economy.

Nevertheless, the Cubans did not immediately give in to Soviet pressure. They began to ration gasoline as early as October 1967.²⁵ In March 1968, Castro spoke of Cuba's desire for "maximum independence" from foreign aid and of the political vulnerability of dependence, saying:

We have known the bitterness of having to depend to a considerable degree on things which come from outside and how that can become a weapon and at least create the temptation to use it against our country.²⁶

In April, Castro announced an agreement with Romania for personnel and equipment to develop Cuba's own oil resources.²⁷ In May, in the face of continued Soviet pressure, the Cubans took another strong, anti-Soviet policy stance, denouncing the Anti-Nuclear Proliferation Treaty co-sponsored by the Soviet Union and the United States.

Cuba's resistance to Soviet pressure did not last much beyond the summer of 1968, when Castro is said to have signalled a new Cuban-Soviet accommodation with his endorsement of the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia. Despite this apparent capitulation, however, Cuba's commitment to an independent and revolutionary role in the Third World must not be minimized. That commitment was real and important to the Cubans--real enough to directly challenge Soviet policies in the international arena and important enough to risk severing Cuba's alliance with the Soviets in a dramatic, if fleeting, moment of courage.

Why "Proletarian Internationalism"?

Why are the Cubans so committed to the Third World? Why have they felt it necessary to give aid to so many foreign regimes and movements? Why have they been willing to sacrifice their own scarce resources? Why did they continue to support Third World revolution even when it jeopardized their alliance with the Soviet Union, and the security of their own revolution? Why does Cuba, more than any other Socialist state, take its commitment to "proletarian internationalism" so seriously?

From the beginning, the Cuban revolution looked outward, beyond its own borders. In 1947, twelve years before the revolution came to power, Castro participated in his first "internationalist" mission: waiting on Cayo Confites, a rock halfway between Cuba and Santo Domingo, to launch an attack against the Trujillo dictatorship in the Dominican Republic (an attack that never came about). Later, while fighting in the mountains, Castro spoke of a time after the revolution when Cuba would help liberate the rest of Latin America, turning the Andes into the Sierra Maestra of Latin America. And, indeed, in the first months after seizing power in 1959, the Cubans launched expeditions against Panama, Nicaragua, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic.

A first explanation for the Cuban commitment to "internationalism" can be found in the island's history. Cubans learned early that their own revolution was unavoidably an international affair. From the 1895-1898 Cuban revolution against Spain--what is known in the United States as the Spanish American War--on down to the Bay of Pigs invasion, United States intervention in Cuban affairs has been a harsh fact of Cuban political life. It is this awareness of Cuba's vulnerability to international intervention which led Che Guevara to state in 1965:

There are no boundaries in this struggle to the death. The practice of proletarian internationalism is not only a duty for all people struggling for a better future, it is an inescapable necessity.²⁸

The Cubans have also known the benefits of foreign support. Two of their most famous revolutionary heroes were not Cuban nationals: Máximo Gómez, a hero of the revolution against Spain, was from the Dominican Republic; Che Guevara was an Argentine. In a recent speech Castro invoked the memory of Máximo Gómez to illustrate Cuba's unusually inclusive notion of nationalism:

The unfortunate thing about Máximo Gómez is that all throughout his life, he was bothered by the fact that he was not born here when he should have regarded himself as Cuban through and through from the first day he wielded a weapon on behalf of Cuban independence.²⁹

An explanation for Cuba's strong commitment to an independent foreign policy can be found in the very nature of the Cuban Revolution. The Cuban Revolution was first and foremost a nationalist revolution. And although the Cubans would later ally themselves with the Soviet Union, they have always retained a fear of outside domination and a commitment to independence that is more common to the Third World than to the Socialist Bloc. In 1959 Castro expressed this fear of outside domination when he rejected the Soviet-controlled Cuban Communist Party, saying:

It is good to be a Communist pure and simple, but to be a Communist in a party that belongs to the Cominform is something else again, for it undoubtedly means adopting a type of Marxism compromised by the interests and needs of a metropolis that one blindly believes will bring about the establishment of socialism in the entire world.³⁰

An explanation for Cuba's attempts to export revolution can be found in the nature of Marxist-Leninist systems. Marxism pointed to a future of world revolution. Leninism taught that that future would be made by men. Since the Russian Revolution, every independent Communist leader--Tito, Mao, Ho, and Castro--has offered a theory and strategy for making that revolution based on his own revolutionary experience. Castro's attempts to export his Cuban brand of revolution fit clearly within this revolutionary tradition.

Cuba's international role is also an important source of Cuban pride. From the very beginning of the Revolution, Cubans learned that their international position as the first socialist revolution in the Western Hemisphere guaranteed them world attention which far outweighed their nation's size and resources. In 1960, Che voiced the pride and the irony of Cuba's international position:

Sometimes we even thought it was rather pompous to refer to Cuba as if it were in the center of the universe. Nonetheless, it is true or almost true. If someone doubts the revolution's importance he should read the newspaper. "The U.S. threatens Poland because of the Pact with Cuba." Man, we're strong and dangerous. We have poisoned the American environment and threatened the sweet democracy of Trujillo and Somoza so now the champions of freedom threaten Poland because it signed an agreement with Cuba. . . .

Oh it is so great and comfortable to belong to such a strong world power as dangerous as Cuba!³¹

Cuba's commitment to internationalism has its pragmatic sources as well. Cuba's attempts to export revolution can be explained as an effort to develop new allies in Latin America. The Cubans have always felt dangerously isolated in the Western Hemisphere. Only 90 miles from the United States, cordoned off by a trade embargo, surrounded by hostile Latin American regimes, the Cubans have felt as isolated in Latin America as the Russians felt in Europe after their 1917 revolution. Over the years, the Cubans have tried to overcome that isolation in a variety of ways. First, like the Russians in

Germany in the 1920s, they attempted to overthrow the hostile governments surrounding them and to replace them with more sympathetic regimes. Recently they have tried to overcome their isolation through more conventional diplomatic initiatives.

Cuba's commitment to "internationalism" has also played a central role in Cuban-Soviet relations. The Cuban campaign for "proletarian internationalism" can be explained as an attempt to strengthen the Soviet commitment to Cuba. At least since the 1962 missile crisis, the Cubans have been painfully conscious of their military dependence on the Soviets, and unsure of the fidelity of the Soviet commitment to Cuba's defense. If the Soviets could pull their missiles out of Cuba because of American pressure, what was to stop them from someday pulling out of Cuba altogether? If the Soviets could renege on their commitment to Latin American revolutionaries, what was to stop them from reneging on their commitment to Cuba's national defense? If the Soviets could abandon the Vietnamese in their fight against the U.S., might they not someday abandon the Cubans in a similar situation? In an article addressed to the Tricontinental Conference, Che voiced precisely these fears:

This is a sad reality; Vietnam--a nation representing the aspirations, the hopes of a whole world of forgotten peoples is tragically alone. . . . It is not a matter of wishing success to the victim of aggression, but of sharing his fate; one must accompany him to his death or to his victory. U.S. imperialism is guilty of aggression--its crimes are enormous and cover the whole world. We already know that gentlemen! But this guilt also applies to those who when the time came for a definition hesitated to make Vietnam a part of the Socialist world; running of course the risks of war on a global scale, but also forcing a decision upon imperialism.³²

Finally, Cuba's campaign for "proletarian internationalism" can be seen as an attempt to make sure that Cuban-Soviet ties, while strong, were not also overly binding. Cuba's role as a leader of Third World revolution has given her a surprising amount of leverage in her relations with the Soviet Union. In the 1960s, the Sino-Soviet split placed the Soviet Union in a weak position in the international arena, particularly in the Third World. At the same time, Castro's position as the leader of the first socialist revolution in the Western Hemisphere earned him an enormous amount of respect with the same movements and regimes. Under these conditions Cuba's position in the Third World gave her a degree of leverage in her relationship with the Soviet Union. In exchange for even moderate endorsements of the Soviets' international position, the Cubans were able to obtain military protection and economic aid without having to seriously compromise their international autonomy.³³

For Soviet leaders, long accustomed to the absolute discipline of the Comintern, Cuba's insistence on such autonomy, and her outright criticisms of Soviet policy, must have been galling. But Cuban autonomy was also necessary. Without such recognizable autonomy, Cuba would lose all credibility among the states and movements of the

increasingly nonaligned Third World. And without such credibility, the Cubans could do little to promote Soviet interests at Third World forums.

Abandoning Their International Stance

Despite the importance of "proletarian internationalism," the Cubans were forced to abandon their strong international role in the late 1960s. The first sign of a change in Cuban foreign policy came in August 1968, when Castro endorsed the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia. This action--supporting a big power's attack on a small state--appeared to be a complete reversal of Cuba's previous international stance.

After the initial shock and charges of betrayal and hypocrisy had died down, one explanation for Castro's position emerged (an explanation which has dominated subsequent analyses): Castro had finally bowed to Cuba's dependency. Once this judgment was made, it was sealed with the grim fatalism of the disillusioned. It really was only a matter of time, the argument went, before Castro had to realize that Cuba is, after all, only an island, small, weak, and dependent, and that the autonomous role it sought to play in international affairs was elusive or impossible.³⁴ Much of the writing on Cuba since 1968 has adopted this dependency argument in its simplest form. Cuba is economically dependent on the Soviet Union. This dependency has inevitably allowed the Soviet Union to impose major constraints on Cuba's national autonomy. And the only way that Cuba could act autonomously would be to overcome her dependency.³⁵

Since 1968, the Cubans have, indeed, significantly changed their policies. They have abandoned the export of revolution in Latin America. They have generally taken a much less active international role. They have refrained from openly attacking Soviet policies. And they have become increasingly integrated into the Soviet economic system. Nevertheless, the simple dependency calculus that has been so widely accepted does not tell the whole story. First, Castro's endorsement of the invasion of Czechoslovakia was not as complete a capitulation as the literature suggests. His 1968 speech endorsing the Soviet action contains much which could be interpreted as further reinforcing Cuba's independent internationalist stance. In addition to affirming the necessity of the Soviet invasion, Castro suggested that the Brezhnev Doctrine should be extended to include Latin America as well. If the Soviets must remove the counter-revolutionary regime in Prague, then they must also withdraw their support from the reformist and counter-revolutionary Latin American Communist parties. If the Soviets must intervene against the "rightist" regime in Czechoslovakia, then the Cubans must be allowed to intervene against the rightist regimes of Latin America:

I ask in the light of the facts and in the light of the bitter reality which led the Warsaw Pact countries to send their forces to crush a counter-revolution in Czechoslovakia and to support a minority there . . . against a majority with rightist positions; I ask if they will cease supporting also in Latin America

those rightist reformist, submissive and conciliatory leaders, enemies of the revolutionary army, struggling in opposition to the peoples' liberation?³⁶

There is a variety of other explanations for Castro's subsequent decision to abandon "proletarian internationalism" in Latin America. A brief review of these alternative explanations is not intended to substitute any one of them for the more widely held dependency approach, but only to suggest that Cuba's decision to abandon the export of revolution in Latin America was not as necessary, as inevitable--and this is the most important point--or as irreversible as the dependency paradigm would suggest.

The simplest explanation for Cuba's decision to stop exporting revolution to Latin America is that--quite simply--the policy wasn't working. First, Bravo's FALN suffered a number of crushing defeats in Venezuela. And then the capture and execution of Che Guevara in Bolivia in October of 1967 cast serious doubts, even in the minds of Cuban leaders, on the relevance of the Cuban brand of revolution for the rest of Latin America.

A second explanation is that, by the early 1970s, Cuba could no longer afford an independent foreign policy. Failures in its domestic development programs demanded the country's full resources and Castro's full attention. In the 1960s, the Cubans not only tried to pursue an independent foreign policy, they also tried to develop their economy according to what they considered an appropriately Cuban model: relying on moral rather than material incentives, seeking to improve productivity through guerrilla-like offensives and sacrifices. These domestic development policies produced nearly as much conflict with the Soviets as did Cuba's foreign policies. And by 1970--and the Ten Million Ton Debacle--they were apparently as much of a failure.³⁷

A third explanation for the change in Cuba's foreign policies is that by the early 1970s new policy options had become available. The election of the socialist Allende regime in Chile and the appearance of a leftist-oriented military junta in Peru held out a new chance for the Cubans to put an end to their isolation without overthrowing hostile regimes. These developments in Latin America also placed a new premium on the issue of national sovereignty. It was one thing for the Cubans to ignore the sanctity of national boundaries when they had no diplomatic relations to maintain in Latin America. But with a growing number of states seeking to normalize relations with Cuba, the Cubans had to face up to the norms of a more conventional style of international behavior.

Still, the Cubans did not find it easy to abandon their activist role. First, they were attacked by those Latin American guerrillas who continued to fight--most notably in Colombia and Venezuela. Ironically, these attacks--which charged the Cubans with abandoning the revolution in favor of their own state development--were strongly reminiscent of earlier Cuban critiques of Soviet policy in Latin America.³⁸

Abandonment of Cuba's revolutionary foreign policies also alienated many Third World leaders. In 1965, when Che spoke to the Conference of Afro-Asian Solidarity about the "natural alliance" between the Third World and the Socialist Bloc, the independence and sincerity of his words were legitimated by Cuba's revolutionary policies. Cuban adherence to "proletarian internationalism" was seen as proof of Cuban independence. In 1965, Cuba's efforts to mediate relations between the Soviet Union and the Third World were viewed more as an attempt to guarantee Soviet support for the Third World than as an attempt to secure Third World support for the Soviets.

By the early 1970s, however, the situation had changed. The Cubans had abandoned the policies which had challenged Soviet domination and demonstrated Cuba's independence. And the Third World had changed as well. With detente, a growing number of states in the Third World had come to see nonalignment as signifying independence from both blocs. Cuban statements about a natural alliance between the Socialist Bloc and the Third World were now seen as proof of Cuba's dependence on the Soviet Union and as a denial of Cuba's nonalignment. At the 1973 Conference of the Nonaligned, Cuba's right to participate was challenged by two leaders of the new bloc of progressive and nonaligned states, Cambodia's Sihanouk and Libya's Quaddafi:

We are against Cuba's presence in this Conference of Non-aligned Nations. There is no difference between Cuba or for that matter Uzbekistan and the Soviet Union itself.³⁹

Cuba Returns to the International Arena

In retrospect, Cuba's decision to enter the Angolan conflict appears to have been the beginning of a new, more activist era for Cuban foreign policy. In light of the tempestuous history of Cuba's foreign relations, no more auspicious beginning could be imagined. In Angola, for the first time, the Cubans were able to pursue their "internationalist" responsibilities while simultaneously serving the interests of both the Socialist Bloc and the Third World.

Nevertheless, historical accounts suggest that the Cubans did not originally see the Angolan involvement as a new departure for Cuban foreign policy. The first commitment of Cuban troops to Angola came in response to a request from the MPLA for technical military advisors. The MPLA had been receiving large shipments of Soviet arms since October of 1974. In May of 1975, Neto asked the Cubans for advisors to train his troops in the use of the sophisticated Soviet weaponry. A month later, some 230 Cuban advisors arrived in Angola and established four training camps.⁴⁰

While Cuban links to the MPLA can be traced back to the more activist days of Cuban foreign policy--the mid-1960s--the initial commitment of advisors in 1975 was no different from other Cuban advisory missions in Africa during the "quiescent" period of the early 1970s: in Sierra Leone (1972), Equitorial Guinea (1973), South

Yemen (1973), and Somalia (1974). If anything, the Angolan mission was smaller than the others.⁴¹

Available evidence further suggests that the eventual escalation in commitments, to some 14,000 Cuban troops in Angola, was the result of a series of incremental decisions--and was more of a reaction to a rapidly changing military and international situation than the result of any conscious Cuban decision to embark on a new phase of military involvement in the Third World.

Cubans claim that they decided to commit combat troops to Angola only after the intervention of South African regulars on the side of the FNLA. This claim is borne out by the historical record. The South African troops first crossed the border into Angola on October 23, 1975. Within a week, four Cuban troop ships had left for Angola. An airlift of Cuban troops began on November 7th. In December, some 400 troops per week began to arrive in Angola. By January, that rate had increased to 1,000 troops per week.⁴² In late January, the South African troops pulled back to positions north of the Angola-Namibia border. Two months later, on March 27th, the South Africans withdrew from the conflict completely.⁴³ The MPLA, with Cuban support, had won control of Angola.

Despite the continued and growing power of the MPLA, and major losses suffered by its opposition (most notably the loss of South African, Chinese, and U.S. support), fighting continues in Angola, as does the Cuban presence, at levels apparently not anticipated by the Cubans. Over the past two years, there have been numerous reports of Cuban plans to withdraw from Angola. The resolution of the Zaire-Angola conflict and the anticipated resolution of the Namibian conflict promised an end to the fighting in Angola. (Zaire and Namibia have served as bases for the opposition forces.) Nevertheless, the fighting continues today, and some 20,000 Cuban troops are reportedly still stationed in Angola.⁴⁴

Categorizing the Angolan Involvement

In recent years, a new paradigm has virtually dominated the field of Cuban studies--one which divides post-1959 Cuban history rather neatly into two periods: the activist and autonomous period of the 1960s and the quiescent and dependent period of the 1970s. Although analysts have drawn on a wide variety of Cuban policies to illustrate this transition from autonomy to dependency, Cuba's foreign policies have played a particularly important role in all such analyses.⁴⁵

Nevertheless, for the student of Cuban politics, Cuba's involvement in Angola resists easy categorization. On the one hand, many aspects of the involvement--particularly the alliance of Cuban and Soviet interests in Angola--suggest that the commitment of Cuban troops to Angola is a natural and logical, if somewhat more active, continuation of the dependent policies of the 1970s. On the other hand, there are aspects of the Angolan involvement which bear a striking resemblance to Cuba's earlier "internationalist" commitments

of the autonomous 1960s. The Angolan involvement thus raises some serious questions about the division of post-1959 Cuban history into autonomous and dependent periods. It also raises broader questions about whether specific policy choices--in the domestic or the international realms--can be used to predict the more general "structural" tendencies of "autonomy" and "dependency."

The most striking difference between the Angolan involvement and the policies of the pre-1968 era is that the Cuban commitment to Angola was not an attempt to export the Cuban brand of revolution. In Angola, the Cubans provided military and technical advice rather than political direction. Second, in contrast to their Latin American experiences, the Cubans were not fighting an established, sovereign regime in Angola. Third, they had come at the request, if not of a sovereign regime, at least of a movement that was widely viewed in Africa as the most legitimate political force in Angola. And finally, in Angola the Cubans were acting in concert with, rather than in opposition to, the Soviets.

Still, there are many similarities between the Angola involvement and the earlier activist phase of Cuban foreign policy. Cuban propaganda has done much to establish a link between the Angolan commitment and the "Guevaraist" period. "International responsibility" has again become a major theme in Cuban rhetoric, receiving vast amounts of coverage in newspapers and official speeches.⁴⁶ And Cuba has once again taken an active role in Third World cultural and political organizations. Last year the Conference of Nonaligned Nations established a new Nonaligned News Agency in Havana, and last summer the International Festival of Youth met in Havana.

Perhaps the most significant similarity between the Angolan commitment and the activist era is the role that the Cubans have played in mediating and reinforcing the Soviet commitment to a Third World national liberation movement. The Soviets obviously did not oppose Cuba's involvement in Angola, as they had in Latin America. The Soviet Union had been provisioning the MPLA for at least two years prior to the arrival of Cuban advisors. And yet, there is much evidence to suggest that the decision to commit troops on the scale of the Angolan commitment was a Cuban and not a Soviet decision. The evidence also suggests that it was this Cuban commitment which led the Soviet Union to increase its aid to the Angolans to the level necessary to guarantee an MPLA victory.

In June 1975, when it became clear that the MPLA would need outside military support, MPLA leader Neto travelled to Moscow. His reception, according to observers, was "chilly."⁴⁷ Neto then turned to the Cubans for further troop commitments. The Soviets have never been particularly enthusiastic about Cuba's overseas military involvements. They have never provided the Cubans with military aircraft capable of transporting troops or heavy equipment great distances, although they have provided such equipment to many other allies--including Egypt, India, Syria, Iraq, Poland, Yugoslavia, and Algeria.⁴⁸ As a result, Cuban troops initially had to be transported to Angola on

merchant ships. When the troop airlift was begun in early November 1975, the Cubans had to rely on two Batista-vintage Bristol Britanias to transport troops to Angola.⁴⁹ These planes were highly inefficient, requiring two refueling stops--once in Barbados and then in Bissau--on their way to Brazzaville. It was not until January 1976, two months after the Cuban airlift began, that the Soviet Union finally decided to commit transport planes: 2 aeroflot IL-62s (which required only one refueling stop).

This role in Angola, supplementing and reinforcing Soviet support for a Third World movement, is not a new one for the Cubans. During the activist period, they assisted Third World revolutionary movements even when that assistance brought them into direct conflict with the Soviets. During the recent, more quiescent, phase the Cubans have continued to play this role, albeit more quietly and in areas where it would not bring them into direct conflict with their Soviet allies. In 1973, during the height of the ostensibly quiescent phase, Cuba responded to a request from the South Yemeni PDRY for aid to support the Dhofari rebellion in Oman. According to PDRY leader Isma'il, Cuban aid was much more extensive than the aid they received from the Soviets, which he described as "inadequate."⁵⁰ The Cubans remained silent on the issue.

When the similarities and differences between the Angolan involvement and the two phases of Cuban foreign policy are weighed, it is difficult to place Angola solidly in one phase or the other. The Angolan commitment was without a doubt an activist and autonomous policy decision in terms of Cuban ideology and willingness to commit men and resources. But it can also be seen as dependent because it served Soviet interests in bringing the Soviet-leaning MPLA to power. This confusion may stem from the inadequacy of the periodization itself, which, relying on a dependency-autonomy dichotomy, ignores the continuity of Cuba's commitment to a strong "internationalist" role in the Third World.

The dependency-autonomy categorization also misinterprets the causes of changes in Cuban foreign policy. Cuba's decision to abandon the export of revolution while continuing to play a strong role in the Third World is not necessarily a result of Cuba's growing economic dependency on the Soviet Union. It may instead be the result of a learning process with respect to what policies will best serve Cuba's relations with both the Soviet Union and the Third World. The success of this learning process was borne out in Angola, where the Cubans were able to pursue a strong "internationalist" role which simultaneously served the interests of her allies in the Socialist Bloc and her allies in the Third World.

The Angolan Success: A New Era for Cuban Foreign Policy?

Looking back, Angola appears to have been an unprecedented success for the Cubans--so great a success, in fact, that almost all observers predicted that the Angolan involvement was only the beginning of a new era in Cuban foreign policy.

The Cubans were able to pursue a wide variety of interests in Angola. First, they successfully brought the MPLA to power, fulfilling a long-standing "internationalist" commitment while helping to defeat their long-standing enemies in the United States, South Africa, and Zaire.

Second, since the Angolan involvement, Cuba appears to have strengthened its ties with the Soviet Union. Trade relations with the Soviets have improved steadily over the past four years.⁵¹ More significant is the improvement in Soviet military aid. For the first time since the Soviets withdrew their missiles from Cuba, the Cubans are receiving the most advanced military technology that the Soviets have to offer. In November 1978, the State Department confirmed that Cuba had received an estimated 15 to 18 MIG-23 fighter planes. At a time when the Soviets are actively seeking an arms limitation treaty with the United States, this is a bold and dangerous move. Although U.S. officials believe that these planes have not been modified to deliver nuclear weapons, there are many members of Congress who see this shipment of planes as a direct violation of the 1962 U.S.-Soviet agreement prohibiting the deployment of offensive weapons in Cuba. The planes will undoubtedly be an issue in the Senate debates over the SALT agreement.⁵² The fact that the Soviets would be willing to jeopardize the agreement in this manner suggests an unprecedented Soviet desire to strengthen their ties with Cuba.

Third, the Cubans have apparently succeeded in committing the Soviets to a more active role in Africa, first in Angola and more recently in Ethiopia and southern Africa. From the earliest days of their alliance with the Soviets, the Cubans have alternately lectured, cajoled, and castigated the Soviets in an effort to enlist their support for such Third World struggles.

And finally, as a result of its involvement in Angola, Cuba appears to have also recovered much of its lost standing in the Third World. Three years after Sihanouk and Quadaffi tried to have Cuba ejected from the Conference of the Nonaligned, the Cubans were not only securely back among the members of that conference, but they had once again been cast into a leadership role. In 1976, at the Fifth Conference of the Nonaligned Nations, a unanimous declaration was adopted commending the Cubans for their role in Angola. The role played by the Soviets was not even mentioned by name:

The conference congratulated the Government and people of Angola for their heroic and victorious struggle against the South African racist invaders and their allies, and commended the Republic of Cuba and other States which assisted the people of Angola in frustrating the expansionist and colonialist strategy of South Africa's racist regime and of its allies.⁵³

A further acknowledgement of Cuba's reinstatement among the nations of the nonaligned was the choice of Havana as the site for the 1979 conference.

While Cuba may have only "backed into" its new activist role in Angola, the rewards for that role were nevertheless very real. When viewed from either the dependency or autonomy perspectives, the lesson of the Angolan involvement appeared to be that the Cubans could pursue a new, more active role in Africa and satisfy a wide variety of national interests. Both sides predicted that Angola was only the beginning of a new era of Cuban military involvement throughout Africa, and perhaps throughout the Third World.

Ethiopia: A New Lesson in Africa?

In November 1977, Cuba got its chance to put the Angolan lesson into practice--in Ethiopia. But this time the benefits were not as clear. In Ethiopia, the Cubans successfully upheld the principles of national sovereignty, turning back the Somali invasion of the Ogaden. They further cemented their relations with the Socialist Bloc by guaranteeing the stability of the Soviet-leaning Ethiopian regime. But Cuba's involvement in Ethiopia also placed great strains on her relations with a significant number of Third World states, and raised serious doubts about the validity of the Angolan lesson for Cuba's future foreign policy choices.

The sequence of events leading to the commitment of some 17,000 Cuban troops to Ethiopia is similar to the Angolan case. Cuba's relationship with the military regime in Ethiopia--the Dergue--was established only recently, in February 1977. At that time, Castro was one of the first heads of state to congratulate Ethiopia's Col. Mengistu Haile Mariam after his successful seizure of power. Cuba acted quickly to cement its relationship with this new Third World Marxist-Leninist regime. That same month, a Cuban military delegation led by Gen. Arnaldo Ochoa, a veteran of the Angolan conflict, arrived in Addis Ababa for a week of consultation with the Ethiopian leader.⁵⁴ In March, Castro followed with an unpublicized two-day visit. This visit came at the end of a seven-week tour of Africa, which also included visits to South Yemen, Mozambique, Angola, Algeria, and, significantly, Somalia.

The first Cuban military mission arrived in Ethiopia in early May. This mission was composed of some 200 military and technical advisors. Its purpose was to train the Ethiopian People's Militia to use their newly acquired Soviet weaponry.⁵⁵ This is the same role that Cuban advisors played in Angola in 1975, and in numerous other African states throughout the 1960s and 1970s.

According to the Cubans, that was all they wanted to do in Ethiopia. But again international events forced a larger role on Cuba. The massive invasion by Somali forces across the Ethiopian border into the Ogaden region in November led the Cubans to commit some 17,000 men to help defend Ethiopia. Castro described the decision in a speech to the Cuban people:

Initially we decided to send a few dozen, maybe a few hundred advisors to teach the Ethiopians how to handle Soviet weapons. . . .

If the Ethiopians had had a little more time they would have learned how to handle all those tanks, artillery pieces, and other modern weapons! We, along with other socialist countries, would have contributed to training personnel. But the critical situation created by the invasion in late November led the Ethiopian government to make an urgent request that we send tank artillery and aviation specialists to help the army to help the country, and did so. . . .⁵⁶

Even after the Somali invasion, the Cubans, Soviets, and Ethiopians all denied that Cuban troops were fighting in Ethiopia, claiming that Soviet and Cuban "technical and medical personnel" were helping with the defense effort.⁵⁷ It was only after the Somali invasion had been turned back and it had become clear that the Ethiopians would not in turn violate Somalia's border in pursuit of the retreating troops that Castro acknowledged the full extent of the role played by Cuban pilots, Cuban artillery units, and Cuban motorized infantry units.⁵⁸

Despite the success of its involvement in Angola, however, Cuba had apparently been hesitant to make such a large commitment of troops to Ethiopia. Even after the Somali invasion and Ethiopia's request for aid had legitimized Cuba's involvement, the Cubans remained reluctant to acknowledge the extent of their involvement in Ethiopia. This reluctance can be explained in one way: the Ethiopian situation apparently posed a number of major policy dilemmas for the Cubans and raised serious doubts about the benefits of a strong Cuban commitment.

The first dilemma confronting the Cubans in Ethiopia was that of shifting alliances. Somalia and Ethiopia are both Socialist states, and Cuba's ties to Somalia predated her ties to Ethiopia (Cuba first established a military mission in Somalia in 1974). Traditionally, alignments on the Horn of Africa have been divided between the two superpowers: Somalia looked to the Socialist Bloc for arms and aid, Ethiopia to the United States. That pattern was disrupted in 1974 when the Haile Selassie regime was overthrown by a leftist-oriented military coup. After the coup, the United States tried to maintain its 20-year relationship with the Ethiopians. As the new regime moved Ethiopia steadily to the left, however, that relationship became increasingly strained. In December 1976 the Soviet Union reportedly offered to replace the United States as Ethiopia's chief arms supplier. Four months later, in April 1977, Ethiopia formally cut her ties with the U.S.⁵⁹

For eleven months, the Soviet Union found itself supporting both Somalia and Ethiopia. Although both are Socialist states, they are traditional enemies caught in a long-standing dispute over territory. The Somalis claim that the ethnically-Somali Ogaden region of Ethiopia is rightfully a part of Somalia. For a while it appeared that the Soviets might succeed in walking a tightrope between the Somalis

and the Ethiopians, and thereby gain an absolute strategic superiority on the Horn and around the Red Sea. The Soviets reportedly attempted a reconciliation of their two allies. Castro is said to have arranged a secret meeting between the two sides in Aden in March 1977 during his tour of Africa, appealing to socialist solidarity and proposing a plan for a federation on the Horn.

By late spring/early summer, it became apparent that such efforts at negotiation had failed when the Somalis stepped up their attacks on the Ogaden. The Soviets then brought direct pressure to bear on the Somalis by cutting back arms supplies. By July, Soviet pressure had become so obvious that the Western powers--most notably France and the U.S.--approached the Somalis with offers of military aid for defensive purposes. A month later, the Soviets openly accused Somalia of acts of aggression in the Ogaden.⁶⁰ In November 1977, Somalia officially severed its ties with the Soviet bloc over the issue of the increasing flow of military arms to Ethiopia. Although the Somalis shifted their international alignment, they did not abandon socialism.

It is a basic tenet of Cuban ideology that "internationalist" responsibilities must take precedence over narrower state interests or bloc commitments. Siding with the Ethiopians against the Somalis because of the shift in bloc alignments--when both are socialist states--would be a direct violation of the principles of "internationalism." Only after the Somalis had invaded Ethiopia and violated the basic tenet of national sovereignty could the Cubans justify a full commitment to Ethiopia against Somalia. Even then, the Cubans were apparently hesitant to admit the full extent of their involvement in the Ethiopian-Somalian conflict.

A second possible explanation for Cuba's hesitation was the nature of the Ethiopian leadership. Ethiopia is ruled by a military junta notorious for its instability and brutality. If there was any lesson that the Cubans should have learned from their failure to negotiate a settlement on the Horn, it was that neither the ties of "internationalist solidarity" nor the ties of military dependence can guarantee an identity of interests between allies, or even a willingness to compromise. The fear that the Cubans might not be able to control their Ethiopian allies may explain Castro's refusal to acknowledge Cuban participation in the war in the Ogaden until he was certain that Ethiopia would not adopt a program of territorial aggrandizement and thereby place Cuba in the uncomfortable position of aiding in a violation of Somalia's national borders.

The first sign of Cuba's dissatisfaction with the Ethiopian leadership came with the military regime's refusal to establish a civilian Communist party in Ethiopia. Reports from Ethiopia in May 1978 claimed that the Cubans were pressuring the Dergue to form a civilian political party. The Cubans were even reported to have smuggled an opposition leader--Dr. Negede of the All Ethiopian Socialist Movement--into the country to promote this end. Shortly thereafter, the Cuban ambassador, José Nereda, abruptly left the country.⁶¹

The greatest policy dilemmas facing the Cubans in Ethiopia involved Eritrea and arose only after the victory in the Ogaden. For 17 years the Eritreans have been fighting to secede from Ethiopia. When Haile Selassie was emperor, the Marxist branch of the Eritrean front received support from many "progressive" states, including Cuba. When the Socialist Dergue seized power in Ethiopia, the bloc of Eritrean supporters was thrown into confusion. The Cubans and Soviets broke with the Eritreans, while the "progressive" regimes in Syria, Algeria, and Iraq continued their support. In addition, the more conservative branch of the Eritrean front gained new support from Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Iran, countries committed to opposing the Dergue and containing what they see as a growing Communist influence on the Horn and in the Red Sea region.

Once the Somali invasion was defeated, the Ethiopians turned their Soviet-equipped, Cuban-trained forces on the Eritreans. From the beginning, the Cubans refused to become involved. Cuba's Vice-President, Carlos Rafael Rodríguez, stated that Eritrea was an internal Ethiopian problem and one for which Cuban aid could not be used. He urged the Ethiopians to seek a political solution.⁶²

But the Dergue rejected a political solution. Eritrea has a large strategic importance for Ethiopia, providing Ethiopia with its only access to the Red Sea. But more important, the Eritrean situation has become a question of Ethiopian national honor. An important issue behind the overthrow of the Haile Selassie regime was its inability to put down the Eritrean secessionists. A victory in Eritrea was thus indispensable to the Dergue's continued regime legitimacy.

At the end of April 1978, the Dergue mounted an all-out offensive on the Eritrean front, deploying a reported 35,000 troops.⁶³ At the same time, Ethiopia's Col. Mengistu travelled to Havana, where he received Cuba's Playa Giron medal and lobbied for Cuba's support in Eritrea:

Having triumphed in the East and gained the upper hand over the international reactionary force, the Ethiopian revolution has not yet defeated the plotting of the secessionist groups in the North that are now guided by, organized and supported by imperialism and Arab reaction. . . . I have absolute confidence that the people of revolutionary Cuba and the progressive forces of the world will support our struggle to overcome the secessionists.⁶⁴

Castro responded with an endorsement of Ethiopia's right to "defend its territorial integrity and its unity against Eritrean secessionists." But Castro still held back from committing Cuban aid or troops to the Eritrean front.⁶⁵

Still, two months after the defeat of the Somali invasion, an estimated 17,000 Cuban troops remained in Ethiopia. Throughout the spring and summer of 1978, reports of active Cuban involvement filtered out of Eritrea. These reports were often confused and confusing. Cuba's involvement was said to range anywhere from a small number of pilots flying Soviet fighter planes⁶⁶ to mechanized columns of from 500 to 6,000 Cubans actually engaged in the fighting.⁶⁷ Cuba refused to acknowledge any active participation in Eritrea. Thus far, no such participation has been proven. But Cuba's credibility had been strained by the repeated denials of an active role in the Ogaden.

Whatever Cuba's actual role in Eritrea, these allegations have placed new strains on Cuban relations with a significant number of nonaligned states. By the end of June, Cuba reportedly had received strong warnings from the Algerians, Yugoslavs, Portuguese, and Angolans to stay out of Eritrea.⁶⁸ By the July meeting of the Nonaligned, Cuba's alleged role in Eritrea had become one of the underlying issues in a growing movement to boycott the upcoming Havana meeting and have Cuba ejected from the conference.

The dilemmas confronting the Cubans in Ethiopia are not new to the Ethiopian situation or new to the Cubans. They are dilemmas of the sort which any state must confront while trying to pursue a consistent foreign policy in the face of the ever-shifting alliances of the Third World. In the Cuban case, these dilemmas were exacerbated by a desire to pursue foreign policies which were not only consistent with Cuba's ideology, but which also managed to combine and balance the interests of her two constituencies in the Socialist Bloc and the Third World. When viewed from the perspective of Cuba's long history of "internationalist" missions, the absence of such policy dilemmas in Angola suggests that the Angolan involvement was an anomaly, and that the Angolan lesson was not really applicable to Cuba's foreign policy decisions elsewhere in the Third World. From the very beginning, the lesson of Ethiopia was that a strong foreign policy stance could have its costs.

Cuba and the Nonaligned

In the summer of 1978--only two years after the Angolan resolution was adopted by the Colombo Conference of the Nonaligned--the presence of Cuban troops in Africa was once again a major topic at the meetings of the Third World. But this time, conflict rather than accord underlay the discussions.

The lines were drawn early and rather predictably. At the Organization for African Unity in mid-July, the Somalis attacked the Cuban presence in Africa, claiming that the Cubans were merely pawns for the Soviets. The Somalis then moved to have the Cubans ejected from the upcoming Nonaligned Conference. Similar positions were taken by a variety of Western-leaning states, including Egypt, Mauritania, and Zaire. This offensive was met by counterattacks from

the "progressive" and Soviet-leaning states in Africa: Mozambique, Ethiopia, and Libya. These states first defended the Cuban and Soviet right to be in Africa, and then launched counterattacks, charging that the French and Belgians had displayed imperialist and neo-colonialist intentions in Africa by airlifting peacekeeping troops into Zaire's Shaba province in May. The interchange was predictable. As one delegate reportedly summed it up: "Those who have Cuban troops attacked the West. Those with French troops attacked the Cubans."⁶⁹

The most serious questions for Cuban relations with the Third World were raised by the Nigerians, who took a third, truly non-aligned, position on the Cubans in Africa. Nigeria's Obasanjo began his speech by thanking the "Russians and their friends" for their support in Africa. He pointed out that they had been "invited into Africa for a purpose," and that in each country they "intervened as a consequence of the failure of Western policies. . . ." But Obasanjo went on to warn the Russians and Cubans not to "overstay their welcome . . . lest they run the risk of being dubbed a new imperialist presence in Africa."⁷⁰

Two significant points emerged from the Nigerian's speech. First, the continued presence of some 40,000 Cuban troops in Africa was obviously becoming a source of concern to the nonaligned states. Second, the Cubans were no longer seen as acting independently of the Soviets in Africa. When the 1976 Colombo Conference passed the resolution on Angola it was the Cubans who had been thanked; Soviet support was not even mentioned by name. Now, two years later, the situation was completely reversed. The Russians got first billing and the Cubans were referred to as "their friends."

This pattern was repeated at the Nonaligned Conference in Belgrade. A number of Western-leaning states spoke of boycotting the upcoming Havana conference and of ejecting Cuba from the movement. Cuba's position was supported by a number of Soviet-leaning states. The nonaligned position was taken by Yugoslavia and India.⁷¹

The Yugoslavs and the Indians, like the Nigerians, are truly nonaligned. Both are founders of the Nonaligned Movement. Both are socialist states which have managed to maintain their relations with the two blocs while remaining outside either bloc. Their interests are thus beyond reproach in such debates, and both were highly critical of the presence of Cuban troops in Africa.

India advocated peaceful resolutions to the conflicts in Africa, warning of the danger to nonalignment posed by the presence of outside troops:

The rights of national self-defence cannot be questioned. We should not allow a situation to develop which will lead to a vicious cycle of external military dependence or involvement. If we do we may well bring the Cold War in by the back door, having all but succeeded in defeating it frontally.⁷²

The Yugoslavs also counselled the African states to look for peaceful resolutions, resolutions that would keep the bloc conflict out of the Third World. In addition, the Yugoslavs returned to an earlier point of ideological contention with the Cubans: the issue of the supposed "natural alignment" of the Socialist Bloc and the nonaligned Third World:

Struggling against neutralism they propose another equally unacceptable extreme--the unity of the non-aligned countries with the Socialist Bloc--representing quite a definite alignment.⁷³

It is a basic tenet of Cuban ideology that the Third World and the Socialist Bloc are "natural allies." From the earliest days of the Revolution, Cuba has promoted this line at all meetings of the Socialist Bloc and the Third World. In the mid-1960s, as noted above, this ideological campaign was seen as an attempt to guarantee Soviet support for the Third World. But in the early 1970s, after the Cubans had abandoned their autonomous foreign policy stance, this message became an increasing source of friction between Cuba and many of her allies in the Third World. It was Cuba's motion to redefine the non-aligned as the "natural allies" of the Socialist Bloc that led Sihanouk and Quadaffi in 1973 to call for Cuba's ejection from the Nonaligned.

At the 1976 conference, riding on the euphoria of victory in Angola, Cuba's motions to redefine the meaning of nonalignment were generally ignored. By the 1978 conference, however, such efforts, coupled with the tensions of the Ethiopian situation, once again provoked a movement to have Cuba ejected from the Nonaligned. In the end, Yugoslavia saved Cuba's membership in the movement by skillfully maneuvering to table all motions to have Cuba ejected. It appears, however, that the Yugoslavs did so more to preserve the unity of the Nonaligned Movement, which they had founded, than out of any conviction that the Cubans were truly nonaligned. Each criticism of Cuba was tempered with a plea for unity and the warning that the movement had, over the years, "only grown and never diminished in size."⁷⁴

What Had Changed?

What has changed since Angola? The difference is really quite simple. Two years earlier, the Third World saw the Cubans acting independently of the Soviet Union in Angola. Now in the eyes of all involved--whether pro-East, pro-West, or nonaligned--the Cubans are in Africa as representatives of, and proxies for, the Soviet Union. The independence of Cuba's interests in Africa is no longer acknowledged. The history of Cuba's independent and revolutionary policies in Latin America and Africa seems to have been forgotten.

There are a number of reasons why this change has come about. First, the Ethiopian situation has seriously tainted Cuba's reputation for independence and ideological commitment. Even if the Cubans did hesitate before committing themselves in Ethiopia, and for all the right reasons, their eventual commitment seemed motivated by the expediency of bloc alignment.

Once the judgment had been made that Cuba was merely serving Soviet interests in Africa, subsequent deeds could not redeem Cuba's reputation for independence. In September, an Eritrean Front spokesman announced a Cuban pledge to stay out of Eritrea. Nevertheless, unsubstantiated reports of Cuban involvement continue to filter out of Eritrea. It has been hard for the Cubans to deny such involvement when they still have an estimated 17,000 troops stationed in Ethiopia.

The continued presence of Cuban troops is probably the biggest source of Cuba's problems with the Third World. More than four years after they first entered Angola, an estimated 40,000 Cubans remain in Angola and Ethiopia. They remain because the fighting continues.⁷⁵ Reports from Cuba suggest that on several occasions the Cubans have attempted to extricate themselves from Angola. Yet the continued instability of the Neto regime's territorial control has required the continued presence of Cuban troops. Cuba has learned a hard lesson in Africa. It is the same lesson the United States learned in Vietnam: that in the Third World, there are no quick victories.

Although the Cubans show no desire to remain in Africa past their usefulness, their continued presence has come under increasing criticism. Obasanjo's warning about "overstaying their welcome" and being dubbed "an imperialist presence" summed up a growing sensitivity and ambivalence felt by the African states about the presence of foreign troops. Even as these states call on outside forces for help in defending their national boundaries, they fear military dependence. They fear what India's foreign minister called "bringing the Cold War in by the back door." While very few African states can afford the nonalignment advocated by India, Yugoslavia, and Nigeria, each fears alignment. Proxy war may be a new phenomenon in Africa. Yet it is an old trap, and one that these states recognize. Each nonaligned state calls on one bloc or the other for outside help only because it knows that its adversary will do the same.

There was a time when the presence of Cuban troops would not have provoked this response, this fear, in the Third World. There was a time when Cuba was recognized not only as a member of the non-aligned, but as a leader of the independent Third World. In those days, Cuban aid to the Third World was accepted without question. But those days are long past. They were past history before the Cubans became involved in Angola.

The problems faced by the Cubans at last summer's Nonaligned Conference were really no different from the problems they faced at the 1973 Conference of the Nonaligned. The Third World still defines nonalignment as independence from both blocs (as chimerical as that may be for most Third World states). And the Cubans are still pursuing policies which reinforce rather than deny the impression that they are working for the Russians.

Whether or not Cuba is actually following Soviet orders is not the point here. It is a question of appearances. In fact, one could argue that the Cubans have done too good a job in Africa by guaranteeing

and reinforcing the Soviet commitment to the Third World. They have done so good a job that the independence of their interest and involvement in the Third World has been overshadowed by the Soviet presence.

The Cubans are trapped as well. They cannot play a strong international role without Soviet aid. Yet if they act in concert with the Soviets, they are indistinguishable from the Soviets. If they do not pursue a strong international stance, they have no chance of regaining their position of leadership among the "progressive" and nonaligned states. But they really have no chance of pursuing a strong international stance without aligning themselves with the Soviets.

Does this mean that Cuba has no chance to regain its status among the countries of the Third World? Does this mean that Cuba must abandon its constituency in the Third World, lose face, and give up its one remaining bargaining chip in its relationship with the Soviets? Or are there other policy alternatives?

Looking for Another Angola: Future Policy Alternatives in the Third World

No matter how many policy dilemmas Cuba must face in Africa, it will continue to pursue a strong international stance. "Proletarian internationalism" is too much a part of Cuba's ideology, history, and national pride, and too central to Cuba's ability to manage her dependence on the Soviet Union, for Cuba to abandon. Nevertheless, Cuba's experience with the Third World since the Ethiopian involvement suggests that the Cubans will have to choose their future policies very carefully if they wish to maintain their constituency in the Third World. They will have to look for another Angola, another situation where they can pursue their "internationalist" responsibilities and combine and balance the interests of the Socialist Bloc and the Third World.

The situation in southern Africa may offer such an opportunity. The one issue on which most African and Third World states seem to agree is that the Rhodesian and South African regimes must be defeated. Recent statements from Cuba's leaders suggest that Cuba would be willing to provide strong military support to the Zimbabwe revolutionaries.⁷⁶ But there is no guarantee that, in the long run, such a role in southern Africa will not have the same negative effect on Cuba's relations with the Third World. Neither fight will be won easily or quickly, and neither fight can be fought without Soviet support. And, although many Third World states agree on the need to fight the southern African regimes, these states are not going to overcome their ambivalence toward outside intervention, even if such intervention is absolutely necessary.

Another Angola-style Cuban military involvement may not be possible. The Cubans may have to bolster their relations with individual

"progressive and nonaligned" states through other policies, policies more easily identified as Cuban and Cuban alone. Cuba has little in the way of financial or material resources to offer these states, but it does have an abundance of well-educated, technically-skilled personnel, and could provide important medical and technical, as well as military, advice to these states.

There is some evidence that the Cubans may have learned this lesson. According to State Department reports, of an estimated 45,000 Cubans in Africa at present, some 7,000 are non-military personnel: doctors, construction engineers, agricultural technicians, teachers.⁷⁷ And at last summer's Nonaligned Conference in Belgrade, Cuban Foreign Minister Malmierca stressed Cuba's non-military role in Africa when he responded to charges that Cuba's proxy role in Africa meant that she no longer had the right to participate in the conference:

The imperialists and their allies and servants never mention the oldest and most important cooperation Cuba has given other peoples, especially the African peoples. Thousands upon thousands of our doctors, teachers, construction workers, technicians and civilian specialists of all kinds have been contributing their knowledge and efforts for 15 years to the peoples of Africa.⁷⁸

Although a technical advisory role would improve state-to-state relations, it would do little to reassert Cuba's independence from the Soviets in the eyes of the Third World. The Cubans are not going to oppose the Soviets simply for the sake of proving the independence of their interests in Africa, certainly not at a time when the Soviets are supporting national liberation movements and progressive regimes in the Third World--which is exactly what the Cubans want and exactly what they demanded that the Soviets do in the Third World during the 1960s.

Still, if the Cubans are to maintain their constituency in the Third World, they will have to do something to distinguish themselves from the Soviet Union. A first step would be to abandon their ideological campaign concerning the "natural alignment" of the Socialist Bloc and the Third World.

The Third World has passed the Cubans by. It has a very different notion of nonalignment that now means independence from both blocs. Even some Socialist states have learned this lesson. As early as 1964, Romania rejected Soviet control of the Socialist Bloc and proposed a redefinition of the bloc as anti-imperialist.⁷⁹ Last summer's visits by the Chinese leader Hua Kuo Feng to Romania and Yugoslavia held out a new future of accommodation and an end to sectarian alignments. The Romanians are passing the Cubans by. The position now advocated by the Romanians is not all that different from Cuba's earlier commitment to an "internationalism" above sectarian bloc alignments.

If there is one lesson that the African experience since Ethiopia must teach the Cubans, it is that the interests of the Socialist Bloc and the Third World are not inevitably and naturally in alignment. They were not in Latin America in the mid-1960s, they were not in Czechoslovakia in the late 1960s, and they certainly are not in Africa today. If Cuba is to maintain its relations with both the Socialist Bloc and the Third World, it may have to abandon its efforts to reconcile these interests. Only then will it have the freedom to pursue its "internationalist responsibilities" in the Third World.

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