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DIRECTORATE OF  
INTELLIGENCE

# WEEKLY SUMMARY

*Special Report*

*Cuba's Changing Relations With Latin America*

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# **Cuba's Changing Relations with Latin America**

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For nearly a decade, Cuba's policy toward Latin America was based almost entirely on an unequivocal support of armed revolutionary violence. The consistent failures of this approach, combined with economic difficulties and Soviet pressure, apparently convinced Castro of the necessity for a more rational approach. Since 1968, Cuba has reduced its support to insurgent groups and has been cautiously trying to resume friendly contacts with selected Latin American nations. As a result of these policies, as well as the changing political climate in Latin America, Havana has regained respectability with a number of Latin American nations and has succeeded in undermining the efficacy of the economic and political sanctions imposed by the Organization of American States. Castro has often stated that Cuba is interested in establishing full relations with only those nations that follow policies "independent of US imperialism," but this has not kept him from developing contacts with countries that fail to meet this criterion. As long as Fidel is convinced that the present political trend in Latin America is in his favor, he will be less likely to risk an all-out return to violent subversive operations. Nevertheless, Castro's new policy does not mean that he has relinquished his belief in the validity of armed struggle, and it does not represent an abandonment of other forms of subversion, including propaganda support, limited insurgent training, and funding, which Castro still views as useful political tools.

### Background



"We promise to continue making Cuba the example that can convert the cordillera of the Andes into the Sierra Maestra of the American continent."

Castro, 26 July 1960

Virtually from the beginning of the Castro regime, Cuba's foreign policy toward Latin America has been principally guided by a simple and radical objective: duplication of the Cuban revolution throughout the hemisphere. The tactics used by Castro in his efforts to achieve this goal were developed from his own experiences as well as the influence of Che Guevara. Political power, he argued, could be achieved only through armed struggle. During 1959, unsuccessful armed expeditions from Cuba were launched against Panama, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, and Nicaragua.

After the dismal failures of the expeditions in 1959, the Cuban subversive effort was not stopped but became more carefully organized and wider in scope. The General Directorate of Intelligence was established in 1961 under Soviet guidance and given the principal responsibility for directing the effort in Latin America. Support

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from Cuba, although sometimes on a small scale, was made available to rebel groups in Venezuela, Brazil, Paraguay, Argentina, Colombia, Peru, Central America, and the Caribbean. This support—arms, equipment, money, training, propaganda, and in some cases Cuban personnel—ran Cuba afoul of the Organization of American States, which voted in 1964 to impose diplomatic and economic sanctions against Havana.

The death of Guevara forced Castro to reassess his policy. His dedication to subversion had not only been costly in terms of men and money, it had also given his opponents justification for further isolating Cuba, and he had no great success to point to. He also faced mounting domestic problems growing largely out of his mismanagement of the economy. Castro therefore chose to drop his aggressive tactics. In 1968, he began to re-establish his ties with the Latin American Communist parties and project a more responsible image in the hemisphere.

Prior to this shift, he had carefully maintained relations with Mexico, the only member of the OAS that refused to implement political and economic sanctions. The relationship was never especially warm or cordial, but both governments felt that it was in their interests to keep these ties. The advantages for Cuba were obvious: the air connection with Mexico was Havana's sole window on Latin America

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The Tricontinental Conference, held in Havana in January 1966, marked the resumption of heavy Cuban involvement in armed revolutionary movements. At this conference, Castro issued an explicit call for violent revolution in the hemisphere, a call he has repeated on numerous occasions. Following the conference, Havana announced the formation of the Latin American Solidarity Organization as a hemispheric revolutionary front. This period marked the peak of Cuba's efforts to export revolution. While the solidarity organization was holding its first conference in Havana during the summer of 1967, Che Guevara and 16 other Cubans were establishing a guerrilla movement in Bolivia. Cuban advisers were also operating with insurgent groups in Guatemala and Venezuela.

In May 1967, the Cuban effort received a sharp setback when four Cubans were captured on the Venezuelan coast trying to smuggle arms into the country. A far more damaging blow occurred the following October when Guevara's band of guerrillas was rolled up by the Bolivian armed forces. Guevara's death made it appear that the Cuban experience was in essence unique and could not be duplicated in other countries.

As for the Mexicans, the maintenance of ties served to underline Mexico's "Estrada Doctrine," which calls for the maintenance of diplomatic relations with a friendly country regardless of the origin or nature of its government. In addition, pressure from Mexican leftist groups was reduced.

Events elsewhere in Latin America helped make Cuba's shift to a more pragmatic policy something of a success. October 1968 saw the accession to power of a highly nationalistic government in Peru. This was followed by a leftward drift (until August 1971) in Bolivia and the election of Salvador Allende in Chile. In addition, other Latin American leaders have come to favor some form of renewed contacts with Cuba. These leaders share an intense desire to demonstrate independence from the US, a decreased concern with the threat of Cuban subversion and a fear of being last to jump on the bandwagon.

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**Cuban Contacts With Latin America Since 1968**

	Visited by Cuban athletic teams	Sent athletic teams to Cuba	Technical delegations from Cuba	Sent technical delegations to Cuba	Trade delegations from Cuba	Sent trade delegations to Cuba	Trade	Other
Argentina								
Bahamas								
Bolivia								
Brazil								
British Honduras								
British West Indies								
Chile	•		•	•	•	•	•	Castro visit; Air agreement; Diplomatic relations
Colombia		•	•	•				Cuban-Colombian Friendship Institute
Costa Rica								
Dominican Republic			•					
Ecuador	•							Castro visit
El Salvador								
French West Indies					•			
French Guiana								
Guatemala								
Guyana						•		
Haiti								
Honduras								
Jamaica			•	•	•	•	•	Consular relations; Frequent Cubana charter flights
Mexico	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	Diplomatic relations; Air agreement; Fishing agreement
Netherlands Antilles						•		
Nicaragua			•	•				
Panama		•	•	•	•			
Paraguay								
Peru	•		•	•			•	Castro visit
Surinam								
Trinidad & Tobago				•	•			
Uruguay								
Venezuela	•		•					Cuban-Venezuelan Friendship Institute

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### Breaking Out of Isolation

Castro launched his efforts to reduce Cuba's isolation in the Caribbean. His initial successes were in the French territories of Martinique, Guadeloupe, and French Guiana. In mid-1968, the Cubans negotiated an agreement permitting their fishing boats to use service facilities in the port of Cayenne in French Guiana. At about the same time, Cuba arranged for the sale of cement to Martinique and Guadeloupe and agreed to purchase pineapple seedlings from Martinique. Although these ventures had little importance for the Cuban economy, they were a foot in the door. By 1969, several Cuban delegations had visited Martinique, Guadeloupe, and French Guiana; Cuban merchant ships were calling regularly at Martinique and Guadeloupe; Cuban fishing boats were being serviced in Cayenne; and cargo flights from Cuba were landing frequently in Martinique. Cuban contacts with the three French departments continue. The level of trade has not been significantly expanded, but visits by technical and trade delegations occur with fair regularity. The Cuban fishing fleet has been granted certain port privileges in French Guiana that enable the boats to remain on station off the northeast coast of South America for extended periods of time.

In November 1969, Prime Minister Williams of Trinidad-Tobago called for greater trade cooperation between Cuba and other Caribbean nations. Cuba responded the following month by sending an agricultural delegation, and Trinidad reciprocated in February 1970 by sending a similar delegation to Cuba. Contacts with Jamaica have also increased. Jamaica, not a member of the OAS when the sanctions were imposed, now maintains consular relations with Cuba. Cubana Airlines uses Kingston as a transfer point for charter flights transporting passengers between Cuba and Latin America, but no meaningful trade has developed.

A change of government in Peru provided Cuba with its first opportunity to cultivate a

major nation in South America. Following the assumption of power by a nationalist military regime in Peru in October 1968, Castro altered his definition of "revolutionary" to include governments that follow policies independent of "US imperialism" and implement basic reforms. In a public speech in July 1969, Castro expressed his approval of the Peruvian Government. In early 1970, Cuba succeeded in establishing a Prensa Latina office in Lima in return for an implicit promise not to publish items embarrassing to the Peruvian Government. A generous response to the mammoth May 1970 earthquake significantly improved Cuba's image in Peru and made propaganda points elsewhere in Latin America as a display of the responsible and humanitarian side of Cuba's new foreign policy. The Cuban assistance, arranged through the Prensa Latina office, consisted of medical supplies, medical teams, mobile kitchens, and clothing. In October, Havana announced that it would build six hospitals in the areas devastated by the earthquake.

The inauguration of President Salvador Allende in November 1970 provided Castro with perhaps his greatest opening to date to break Cuba out of its hemisphere isolation. Although some trade between Cuba and Chile had developed during the Frei administration (1964-70), ties were quickly expanded under Allende. On 12 November 1970, Chile and Cuba re-established diplomatic relations. In February 1971, they signed a two-year commercial agreement and a bilateral civil air agreement. There were cultural and technical exchanges, and Fidel Castro was invited to visit.

During 1969, Ecuadorean officials, including President Jose Velasco Ibarra, began to make public statements critical of the hemispheric policy of isolating Cuba. In September, Ecuador very nearly shipped 10,000 tons of surplus rice to Cuba. The deal fell through when Havana refused to return the persons responsible for the murder of a pilot during the hijacking of two Ecuadorean Air Force planes. The climate later improved, however, and in June 1970 Cuba was permitted

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**THE TRAVELS OF FIDEL**

- in Chile with Allende
- in Peru with Velasco Alvarado
- in Ecuador with Velasco Ibarra



to station a Prensa Latina correspondent in Quito.

[REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] Following the Cuban seizure of two Panamanian-flag merchant vessels in December 1971, Castro went out of his way to assure the Torrijos government that Cuba had no hostile intentions toward Panama. He welcomed a Panamanian delegation to Cuba to negotiate the release of the captured crewmen. Cuban spokesmen in recent months have been giving heavy propaganda support to the Panamanian position in the canal talks. Castro's interest in Panama is somewhat unusual since the Torrijos administration does not come close to meeting Castro's definition of a "revolutionary" government. The critical factor in this case revolves around Torrijos' attitude toward the 'JS.

The past year was marked by further gains for Castro and his policy. In June, Peru agreed to sell Cuba 105,000 tons of fishmeal in contravention of the 1964 OAS economic sanctions. Cuba

gained substantial hemispheric attention from the achievements of its athletes during the VI Pan American games in Cali, Colombia. Sponsored by Peru, Cuba became a member of the UN organization of underdeveloped nations, the Group of 77. Probably the most satisfying event for Castro personally, however, was his trip to Chile, and its brief post-script stops in Peru and Ecuador. The trip, which lasted from 10 November to 5 December, enhanced his image as a Latin American leader. In December, Peru undertook an initiative within the OAS to permit member states who so desire to re-establish relations with the Cuban Government. The initiative was postponed but will probably be brought up again by the Peruvians. Even if it is defeated, Peru will probably re-establish diplomatic relations with Cuba.

Cuba also experienced some disappointments during 1971, notably the overthrow of the Torres regime in Bolivia and the electoral defeat of the leftist front in Uruguay. Although Castro reacted to both events by stating that armed struggle was the only road to power in those nations, thus far there has been no conclusive evidence that Castro is departing in a significant way from the more moderate course he has set for Latin America as a whole.

Castro has long viewed himself as a modern-day Bolivar, destined to lead Latin America in its

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"second war of independence." And by this he means independence of the US. In his eyes, the US is responsible for all of Cuba's economic difficulties and has replaced Spain as the colonial power in the hemisphere. Castro's policy of aggressive support for insurgency movements was designed to reduce if not eliminate US influence in the hemisphere. Having discovered that these tactics were not yielding results, Castro modified his approach. But he has not discontinued completely his support of violent revolution. Rather, he will probably continue to give limited support to viable guerrilla groups in certain countries.

#### Outlook

Castro's long-range design apparently envisions political and economic unification of Latin American countries. The Cuban leader has frequently stated that such unification is necessary to give Latin America the strength to "confront" the US. Typical of this belief are his repeated calls—echoed by Cuban representatives at regional conferences—for a "union of Latin American nations" that would replace the OAS and would exclude the US.

He has also set at least three shorter range and perhaps more attainable goals: 1) reduce US influence in Latin America; 2) discredit the OAS; and, 3) create a leadership role for Cuba in

hemispheric affairs. Castro will probably attempt to achieve these goals by continuing Cuba's expansion of its Latin relations on a selective, bilateral basis. This does not mean that Cuba is interested in developing ties with every nation in the hemisphere. As Castro stated during his visit to Chile, Cuba is "not desperate to normalize relations with other Latin American countries." He does take the position that there is no reason for diplomatic recognition of countries "that obey orders from the United States." Castro probably also realizes that there still are Latin American nations that are adamantly opposed to the re-establishment of any sort of relations.

Castro's moderate stance is likely to continue for the foreseeable future. Neither economic realities nor Soviet pressures are likely to change over the next several years. In addition, Castro can see that an all-out promotion of violent revolution throughout the hemisphere would succeed only in returning Cuba to its former isolation. Only if Castro thought that Havana's new policy were leading to a string of sharp reversals would he be tempted to abandon his moderate approach.

Cuba will continue to strengthen its ties with Chile although the relationship will not be without problems. By coming to power through legitimate electoral means, the Allende government has

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demonstrated the unsoundness of Castro's theory that armed struggle is the only path to power for a true "revolutionary" government. Although Allende is a close personal friend of Castro, he represents a legitimate challenge to Castro's position as the leading spokesman for Marxist ideology in Latin America. At present, however, there is no evidence to indicate this will seriously impair their relationship.

Castro will probably continue strengthening ties with Peru. Regardless of the outcome of Lima's initiative in the OAS, Peru will in all likelihood establish diplomatic relations with Cuba. In the meantime, routine exchanges can easily be conducted through the Prensa Latina office in Lima or the liaison staff of the Cuban hospital-construction team.

Cuba's future relationship with Ecuador is less clear. Castro has been impressed with Ecuador's strong defense of its 200-mile territorial waters claim and has frequently voiced his support of that claim. His brief stopover in Guayaquil was strongly criticized by opponents of the Velasco regime, however. As a result, Quito may be more inclined to follow quietly in the footsteps of Peru on the Cuba issue. For its part, Havana will probably attempt to expand its contacts with the Ecuadorean Government and gently encourage Ecuador to follow the Peruvian example, nationalize foreign businesses, and implement agrarian reform.

Castro will probably continue his increased public support for the Panamanian position in the canal talks. He is extremely interested in the outcome because a settlement favorable to Panama will have a strong impact on US influence in that area. Such an agreement could, for example, provide a tool in pressuring the US to get out of Guantanamo. Every indication is, however, that the Cuban leader will exercise caution about doing anything more than pay lip service to Panama's canal aspirations.

The new moderation in Cuba's foreign policy does not extend to the OAS, for which Fidel still reserves his most vituperative language. In the unlikely event that the sanctions are lifted, there is little chance that Cuba would consider rejoining what Castro has often called "that indecent garbage heap called the OAS."

As for other Latin American countries, Cuba will probably continue its efforts to develop closer ties with those nations it deems "acceptable," a term that has already proved flexible. These efforts will probably take the form of exchanges of athletic teams, cultural groups, and scientific and technical delegations. These contacts will probably be followed by attractive Cuban trade offers, which can be expanded until only formal diplomatic relations are lacking.

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