

Мервин Дж. Бейн¹
Mervyn J. Bain

ФУЛЬХЕНСИО БАТИСТА И СОВЕТ- СКИЙ СОЮЗ

FULGENCIO BATISTA AND THE SOVIET UNION

Аннотация: Традиционное восприятие отношений между Москвой и Гаваной сводится к тому, что Кубинская революция, победившая в январе 1959 г., явилась катализатором их установления, и что до 1959 г. Советский Союз испытывал последствия «географического фатализма» не только в отношении Кубы, но и Латинской Америки в целом, поскольку континент воспринимался как находящийся в «сфере влияния Вашингтона». В целом это было так, но в статье доказывается, что многогранные отношения между Москвой и Гаваной существовали и до Кубинской революции, в частности во время президентства Фульхенсио Батисты (1940-1944, 1952-1959). Эти отношения носили как экономический, так и политический характер. Внутренние факторы в Советском Союзе, так и на Кубе (принципиально Куба воспринималась как «рассадник» рабочего радикализма в эпоху до 1959 г., это было связано в значительной степени с негативными последствиями экономического господства США на острове), так и международные факторы, (не в послед-

¹ **Мервин Джон Бейн** – доктор исторических наук, профессор департамента политики и международных отношений Университета Абердина (Великобритания), глава Школы социальных наук; **Mervyn John Bain** – M.A, MPhil and PhD, University of Glasgow. Professor in the Department of Politics and International Relations at the University of Aberdeen (United Kingdom) and Head of School of Social Science. Mail: mervyn.bain@abdn.ac.uk

ною очередь личные взаимоотношения лидеров Москвы и Гаваны с Вашингтоном, а также влияние итогов Великой Отечественной войны и начавшейся Холодной войны), лежали в основе двусторонних отношений. Некоторые из этих причин вновь проявились во взаимодействии между Москвой и Гаваной после Кубинской революции, но это не преуменьшает исторического значения отношений, которые существовали в период, когда президентом Кубы был Фульхенсио Батиста.

Ключевые слова: Батиста, Советско-кубинские отношения, влияние США

Abstract: The traditional perception of relations between Moscow and Havana was that the Cuban Revolution of January 1959 was the catalyst for their creation and that prior to January 1959 the Soviet Union had suffered from “geographical fatalism” with regards not just Cuba specifically, but Latin America as a whole, because the continent was perceived as being in Washington’s “sphere of influence.” Although this was the case, this article will argue that a multifaceted relationship between Moscow and Havana existed prior to the Cuban Revolution and also during both Fulgencio Batista’s Presidencies of Cuba (1940-1944, 1952-1959). This multifaceted relationship had been both economic and political. Reasons internal to both the Soviet Union and Cuba (crucially Cuba was perceived as ‘hot bed’ of labor radicalism in the pre-1959 era with this originating in large part due to the U.S. economic domination of the island) and international factors, not least Moscow and Havana’s individual relationships with Washington and the impact of both the great Fatherland War and Cold War had underpinned the multifaceted bilateral relationship. A number of these reasons would resurface in the post-Cuban Revolution relationship, but this is not to downplay the historical significance of the relationship that had existed between Moscow and Havana while Fulgencio Batista was President of Cuba.

Keywords: Batista, Soviet-Cuban relations, U.S. influence

DOI: 10.32608/2305-8773-2019-24-1-96-104

The traditional perception of relations between Moscow and Havana was that the Cuban Revolution of January 1959 was the catalyst for their creation. Prior to January 1959 Soviet media reports on Cuba were predominantly negative in their content. For example,

the article “A Soviet View of Cuba” written by Yu. Yartsev, published in *Literaturnaya Gazeta* on 8 April 1952, in the aftermath of Fulgencio Batista becoming the President of Cuba for the second time in early 1952, stated,

And so, one President has taken over the place of another. What, it may be asked, has changed? Cuba remains as before a colony of the American monopolists, and both Presidents, the old one and the new, are only obedient puppets in their hands. The boss pulls the string – there is a coup in Havana; he pulls again – there is another coup and the next President turns up. There is almost no difference between the Presidents – it is a question of a struggle inside the Cuban ruling elite².

Furthermore, in November 1956 Cuba proposed a draft resolution at the United Nations (UN) which criticized the Warsaw Pact action in Hungary in October 1956. Regarding this draft resolution, D.T. Shepikov, the Soviet representative at the 11th Session of the UN General Assembly, stated in a speech on 19 November 1956 to a plenary session of the General Assembly,

In attempting to give some credibility to their slanderous allegations, the authors of the Cuban draft resolution glibly refer to mythical ‘information of official Radio Budapest.’ However, verification of this charge has shown that Radio Budapest has not broadcast any such information. For this reason, the Cuban representative no longer refers to this source today. On what, then, are the provocative fabrications of the Cuban delegate based? On nothing.³

Underpinning this perception were the sentiments of Yartsev’s article quoted above, the United States dominated Cuba economically and politically with this negating cordial Moscow-Havana relations due to tension which existed in Soviet-U.S. relations.

However, the reality was somewhat different as a multifaceted relationship between Moscow and Havana had existed prior to January 1959, and even during the presidencies of Batista despite his portrayal in the above cited article. On 5 October 1942, while Batista was President of Cuba for the first time, the Cuban Foreign

² Yartsev, 1952.

³ Pravda, 20.11.1956. P. 4.

Minister José Agustín Martínez, requested the creation of diplomatic relations between the Soviet Union and Cuba.⁴ On 10 October 1942 the Cuban newspaper *The Havana Post* reported,

The Cuban Government has decided to recognize Russia and establish diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union, Prime Minister Ramon Zaydin revealed yesterday in a speech delivered at the National Theatre during ceremonies feting the anniversary of the Grito de Yara.⁵

Cuban-U.S. relations and World War 2 were crucial for the creation of bilateral diplomatic relations between Moscow and Havana as they were part of a process of the Kremlin creating diplomatic relations with a number of Latin American countries in the early to mid-1940s. The wartime alliance between Moscow and Washington, previous tension had been sidelined in the fight against Nazism, and the U.S.'s relationship with both Cuba individually and Latin America as whole facilitated the conception of Moscow's diplomatic relations with Latin American countries.

On the establishment of Moscow-Havana diplomatic relations, Maxim Litvinov, the former Soviet Commissar of Foreign Affairs and in 1942 the Soviet ambassador in Washington, became the first Soviet charge affairs to Cuba. Litvinov may not have lived in Havana, but in April 1943 he travelled to Cuba and met Batista.⁶ In August 1943 Andrei Gromyko succeeded Litvinov as Soviet charge affairs to Cuba. Gromyko too did not live on the island, but in December 1943 Gromyko visited Cuba during which he also met Batista and Cuban Foreign Minister Emeterio Santovenia.⁷

Aurelio Concheso was the first Cuban ambassador to the Soviet Union, arriving in the Soviet capital in mid-May 1943. In his first report to Santovenia, Concheso somewhat dramatically stated, "...the Cuban flag is flying over the capital of the socialist world."⁸ He also reported that on 21 May 1943 he had met Mikhail Kalinin, Soviet Head of State. Three days after his meeting with Kalinin,

⁴ Martínez, 2004. P.37.

⁵ Cuban, 1942. P. 1.

⁶ Concheso, 2004. P. 37-39.

⁷ Havana Post, 18.12.1943. P. 1.

⁸ Concheso, 2004. P. 46.

Concheso presented his credentials as Cuban ambassador to the Soviet Union to Joseph Stalin, with Vyacheslav Molotov, Soviet Commissar for a Foreign Affairs, also being present at the meeting on 24 May 1943.⁹

In the archive for the Commissar for Foreign Affairs in the Russian State Archive for Social and Political History in Moscow a transcript of the meeting between Stalin and Concheso exists. The meeting commenced with a Cuban government statement read by Concheso which paid homage to the efforts of the Red Army in its battle with Nazi Germany.¹⁰ The remainder of the meeting comprised Stalin asking Concheso a series of seven questions on the nature of Cuban society, the island's economy, the Cuban military and the Soviet leader's final two questions were, "Tell me, Cuba appears an independent country, is it not dependent on the United States?" and "...are there Cubans in the American army?"¹¹ It would appear that Stalin was cognizant of the nature of Cuban-U.S. relations. Moreover, on 24 June 1945 Concheso, along with the Chilean, Mexican and Uruguayan ambassadors, attended the celebrations in Red Square to mark victory in World War 2.¹² The result was that Cuba was represented at one of the most historic and important celebrations in Soviet history.

Moreover, bilateral Soviet-Cuban trade also existed at this time. The creation of diplomatic relations, detailed above, and again the effects of World War 2 were important. Reports of food packages being sent from Cuba to the Soviet Union during World War 2 exist, and Hugh Thomas has written that in 1941, "Russia by this time also required Cuban sugar, since the Ukrainian beet fields had fallen to Germany: 70,000 tons a month were sent via the Allies."¹³ Soviet-Cuban trade helped to mitigate the negative impact of World War 2 on Soviet agricultural production.

Additionally, the Cuban Communist Party (PCC), which had been loyal to Moscow since its creation in the 1920s, became more

⁹ Pravda, 29.05.1943. P. 3.

¹⁰ Russian State Archive for Social and Political History (RSA) 4558/111/349.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Sizonenko, 2010. P. 20.

¹³ Thomas, 1971. P. 728.

prominent in the Cuban political arena during Batista's first Presidency. In 1942 Juan Marinello and Carlos Rafael Rodríguez, key members of the PCC, were appointed to Batista's cabinet. On these appointments Julia Sweig has written that they were "...the height of Communist political participation in Cuban political policy."¹⁴ Subsequently K.S. Karol has described the PCC as "...the most important Communist Party in Latin America."¹⁵ The wartime alliance between the United States and Soviet Union had resulted in the 'fear' of socialism receding in Cuban society, with this, and Batista's need for political allies, creating the opening for the PCC to have representation within Batista's government.

The existence of bilateral diplomatic and trade relations with Moscow and prominence of the PCC in Cuban society while Batista was Cuban President for the first time is somewhat different from the Soviet media reports detailed above. As noted, the Soviet press have been highly critical of Batista from soon after he assumed the Presidency for a second time in early 1952. Batista denying Soviet couriers' entry to Cuba, and therefore 'engineering' the break in bilateral diplomatic relations, only exacerbated these negative sentiments. On 3 April 1952 G.E. Formin, Soviet charge d'affaires to Cuba, sent a letter to the Cuban Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs terminating diplomatic relations and it stated

The USSR Legation in Cuba, on instructions of the Soviet government, considers it necessary to state the following.

In view of the fact that on March 21, 1952, the Cuban government refused to allow diplomatic couriers of the Soviet Union to enter Cuba and thereby deprived the USSR Legation in Cuba of normal diplomatic contact with the government of the USSR, violating generally accepted diplomatic standards, the Soviet government is withdrawing the USSR charge d'affaires in Cuba and terminating relations with the government of Cuba.¹⁶

Underpinning Batista's decision to prohibit the Soviet courier's entry to Cuba was the necessity of U.S. support, crucial as he at-

¹⁴ Sweig, 2002. P. 126. The Cuban Communist Party (PCC) changed its name to the Cuban Socialist Party (PSP) in the summer of 1944.

¹⁵ Karol, 1971. P. 87.

¹⁶ Mamedov, 2004. P. 84-85.

tempted to build his power base in the aftermath of becoming Cuban President. At the height of the Cold War the denial of entry to Cuba of Soviet couriers perfectly evidenced Batista's pro-U.S. credentials to Washington.

Although this was the case, sporadic bilateral trade occurred in the period from 1952 until the Cuban Revolution with the Caribbean island being one of the world's largest sugar producers being key for this trade. In 1955 the Soviet Union bought 32.2 million roubles of Cuban sugar. Cuban-U.S. relations were crucial to this Soviet purchase of Cuban sugar which was despite the intensification of the Cold War. Washington believed that an issue of overproduction in Cuban sugar in the early 1950s could be resolved by selling Cuban sugar to third-party countries, which included the Soviet Union despite superpower tension.¹⁷ Moscow required Cuban sugar as Soviet agricultural production was suboptimal with this eventually heralding the Virgin Lands Campaign. In short, this Soviet purchase of Cuban sugar benefitted both countries.

The aforementioned Cuban reaction to the Warsaw Pact action in Hungary in the autumn of 1956 prevented the sale of further Cuban sugar to Moscow, but it did not completely quell Soviet attention in the commodity. Reports exist of a meeting in late 1957 in Mexico City between the Soviet and Cuban ambassadors to Mexico at which the Soviet purchase of Cuban sugar was discussed.¹⁸ No actual purchase materialized, but this demonstrates Soviet interest in Cuban sugar while Batista was President of Cuba.

Soviet attention in Cuba in the 1950s was not confined to sugar, but also extended to the PCC, which was despite both the Cuban party no longer being represented in the island's government as it had in the 1940s and also its association with "Browderism" in the Communist Party of the United States (CPUSA) in July 1945.¹⁹ Blas Roca of the PCC being invited, and attending, the 19th and 20th Congresses of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) held in Moscow in October 1952 and February 1956,

¹⁷ Vneshniaia trgovlia SSSR statisticheskii sbornik 1918-1966, 1967. P. 68-69; Garcia, Mironchuk, 1976. P. 141-142.

¹⁸ Montes, 1970. P. 518-519.

¹⁹ Duclos, 1945. P. 656-672.

demonstrated this continuing interest.²⁰

The relationship between Moscow and Havana may have expanded exponentially after the Cuban Revolution, but a bilateral relationship had existed prior to January 1959 and during both of Batista's Presidencies of Cuba. This pre-1959 relationship may have received little attention, but it had been both economic and political. Reasons internal to both countries and international factors, not least Moscow and Havana's individual relationships with Washington had underpinned the multifaceted bilateral relationship. A number of these reasons would resurface in the post-Cuban Revolution relationship, but this is not to downplay the historical significance of the relationship that had existed between Moscow and Havana while Fulgencio Batista was President of Cuba.

БИБЛИОГРАФИЯ / REFERENCES

- Cuban Government to Recognize Russia, Zaydin Announces // Havana Post, 11.10.1942.
- Duclos J.* On the Dissolution of the Communist Party of the United States // Political Affairs, Vol XXIV, Number 7, July 1945.
- García A., Mironchuk P.* Esbozo Histórico de las Relaciones entre Cuba-Rusia y Cuba-URSS. Havana: Academia de Ciencias de Cuba, 1976. P. 141-142.
- Karol K.S.* Guerrillas in Power, The Course of the Cuban Revolution. L.: Hill & Wang, 1971.
- Mamedov G.E., Dalmau A.* Rossiia-Kuba, 1902-2002, dokumenty i materially. Moscow, 2004.
- Montes J.G., Ávila A.A.* Historia del Partido Comunista de Cuba. Miami: Ediciones Universal, 1970.
- Poppino R.E.* International Communism in Latin America. A History of the Movement 1917-1963. N.Y.: Free Press, 1964.
- Russian State Archive for Social and Political History (RSA) 4558/111/349.
- Sizonenko A.* USSR-Latin America: Diplomatic-Technical Aspects

²⁰ Pravda, 15.10.1952. P. 1-7; Pravda, 15.02.1956. P. 1-11; Poppino, 1964. P. 168-169; Montes, 1970. P. 444-445.

of the War Years Relationship // *America Latina*, No5, May, 2010.

Sweig J.E. Inside the Cuban Revolution. Fidel Castro and the Urban Underground. Cambridge (Mass.), 2002.

Thomas H. Cuba or the Pursuit of Freedom. London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1971.

Vneshniaia torgovlia SSSR statisticheskii sbornik 1918-1966 // *Mezdunarodnye otnosheniia*, Moscow, 1967. P. 68-69.

Yartsev Yu. A Soviet View of Cuba // *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, 8.04.1952.