



After the Castro Era, Cuba's Foreign Policy: Revolutionary Continuity or Emerging Realism

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Abstract

An ideological and revolutionary framework, initially established by Fidel Castro after the success of the 1959 revolution and later somewhat upheld by Raúl Castro, has primarily shaped Cuba's foreign policy in recent decades. Historically, this discussion has centered on three key points: resistance to American imperialism, backing for socialist movements in Africa and Latin America, and a focus on political independence and self-sufficiency. But after Raúl Castro stepped down and Miguel Díaz-Canel led a partial handover to a new generation of leaders, Cuba's foreign policy has faced new challenges: Does it continue to adhere to the ideals of the revolution, or is it moving in the direction of a different kind of realism? Cuba has demonstrated an increasing preference for multilateralism in its foreign policy on the international scene. Initiatives to recast Cuba as a peaceful but independent country, participation in climate change talks, and participation in UN forums all point to a shift away from revolutionary isolation and toward international engagement. Cuba's use of medical diplomacy, one of its most potent soft power instruments, continues to be essential to its worldwide sway, with the sending of Cuban medical personnel to other nations supporting the legitimacy of its foreign policy. Concurrently, practical attempts to mend fences with the European Union and a few Latin American nations indicate that Cuba's new leadership is adopting a type of measured realism that significantly differs from its previous revolutionary foreign policy.

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Introduction

The article's main subject is whether post-Castro foreign policy is a continuation of revolutionary theory or a shift toward strategic realism, as Miguel Díaz-Canel's ascendancy signals a new era in Cuban diplomacy. This investigation is essential for comprehending Cuba's changing foreign policy as well as providing a theoretical foundation for evaluating the foreign policies of other ideologically motivated governments.

A combination of local, regional, and international elements must be taken into account in order to comprehend Cuba's present foreign policy approach. The state has been compelled to increase its foreign involvement due to domestic economic difficulty, public discontent, and reform demands. Cuba's traditional sphere of influence has been constrained regionally by the rise of right-wing administrations and the fall of communist governments in nearby nations (Cannon & Brown, 2017). The rise of multipolarity on the international scene, particularly the rivalry between China and the US, has given Havana both new chances and new challenges.

In order to ascertain how Cuba is striking a balance between its revolutionary heritage and strategic adaptation, this study will look at its official rhetoric, diplomatic declarations, and regional and international actions. Eventually, it makes the case that Cuba's post-Castro foreign policy is a complicated process of selective transformation, in which the rhetoric and symbols of the revolution coexist with strategic reactions to new geopolitical realities, rather than a complete break from the past or a static continuity.

The article advances a more comprehensive understanding of how ideological states modify their foreign policies over time by placing Cuba's changing diplomacy within this framework. It also helps readers determine whether Cuba is truly going through a fundamental transition or is just reinterpreting earlier tactics using a different geopolitical perspective.

Methodology

This study uses a qualitative research design grounded in international relations constructivist theory and critical discourse analysis (CDA). Dominant narratives in post-Castro

Cuban foreign policy are identified through an analysis of primary materials, such as comments from the foreign ministry, regional summit communiqués, and formal speeches by Cuban officials. Policy papers and scholarly publications are examples of secondary sources. The approach seeks to understand how Cuba creates its foreign policy identity while striking a balance between revolutionary rhetoric and practical adaptation. A more nuanced understanding of the strategic and symbolic factors influencing Cuba's foreign policy in the post-Castro era is made possible by this interpretive method.

Research Findings

Cuba has experienced significant changes in its foreign policy during the Fidel Castro era, especially under the leadership of Raúl Castro and Miguel Díaz-Canel. Realist sentiment has become increasingly prevalent in Cuba's international interactions, even while revolutionary ideological rhetoric is still evident in official rhetoric and diplomatic symbolism. Economic pressures, geopolitical shifts, and changing regional dynamics in Latin America all influence this process. Five major facets of Cuba's foreign policy are examined in this section: (4) health diplomacy, (3) strategic alliances with world powers, (5) institutional involvement in the global system, (2) regional diplomacy in Latin America and the Caribbean, and (3) ties with the United States.

Regional Diplomacy: Sustaining Revolutionary Symbolism with Pragmatic Engagement

In Latin America, Cuba has long been seen as a symbol of resistance to imperialism. Although Cuba's image still includes this revolutionary character, the level of intellectual activism has decreased in favor of more practical, global strategies.

Cuba was a major player in regional groups like ALBA (Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America) and CELAC (Community of Latin American and Caribbean States) under Raúl Castro's rule. These forums sought to foster South-South collaboration and challenge U.S. hegemony (Serbin, 2012).

However, Cuba reevaluated its regional goals in the 2010s as socialist regimes began to lose electoral support. Under Díaz-Canel, Havana has cautiously re-engaged with Brazil and Colombia while concentrating on fortifying its relations with Mexico, Bolivia, Nicaragua, and Argentina.

Health Diplomacy: Soft Power through Medical Internationalism

Cuba's use of health diplomacy as a soft power instrument is one of its unique foreign policy facets. During health emergencies like COVID-19 and Ebola, Cuba has dispatched hundreds of medical personnel to nations in Africa, Latin America, and even some regions of Europe and Asia (Feinsilver, 2010).

Projects like "Operation Miracle" and the "Henry Reeve Medical Brigade" have given impoverished communities free medical care, establishing a reputation for moral, humanitarian diplomacy. This activity is a significant source of foreign income for Cuba in addition to bolstering its political ties among the Global South (Kirk, 2009).

These missions' influence on Cuba's soft power and international legitimacy is indisputable, even in the face of criticism that casts doubt on their economic justifications.

Results and Discussion

There have been dramatic swings in the relationship with the United States. With covert talks and the reopening of embassies in 2015, the détente era that started in 2014 sparked expectations for political and economic freedom in Cuba. This approach was more of a realism reaction to economic demands and the waning of Venezuelan financial backing than it was a sign of an ideological shift in Havana. This course was changed, sanctions were reinstated, and economic pressure on Cuba increased with the inauguration of the Trump administration. Bilateral relations are strained and unstable because the Biden administration mostly upheld Trump-era limitations, despite early pledges to change policies. Cuba's readiness to contribute to regional harmony and ease tensions, particularly with nations that have recently taken more moderate stances against Havana. While carefully considering reestablishing connections with Brazil and Colombia, Cuba has in this context reestablished relationships with Mexico, Bolivia, Nicaragua, and more recently, Argentina.

One of the most unique aspects of Cuba's soft power is still its use of health diplomacy. Cuba has gained international recognition and vital foreign income by sending thousands of doctors to underdeveloped nations, especially during humanitarian emergencies like earthquakes, the COVID-19 epidemic, or the Ebola outbreak. These medical trips have unquestionably had a favorable diplomatic impact, despite some who view this approach as an economic abuse of human resources. Particularly in Latin American and African nations, they have established a global perception of Cuba as a humanitarian and responsible actor, fostering goodwill and diplomatic capital.

A thorough examination of Cuba's diplomatic practices in the years following Castro demonstrates a hybrid approach that combines adherence to revolutionary principles with practical adjustments to contemporary geopolitical conditions. Cuba wants to reinterpret the rhetoric of resistance in new ways, such regional mediation, South-South collaboration, and interaction with superpowers. Three intersecting logics-the geopolitical logic of strategic opportunity, the economic logic of survival, and the ideological logic of the revolution-appear to have shaped Cuban foreign policy.

Conclusion

Cuba's post-Fidel Castro foreign policy can be viewed as a combination of the necessity for practical reconstruction in the current international order and the legacy of revolutionary tradition. Cuba has made a concerted effort to maintain the essence of the 1959 revolution in contemporary forms that are appropriate for both domestic and international changes, as can be seen by closely examining its diplomatic actions in recent years. This effort is motivated by a realistic understanding of the democratic system's legitimacy and survival needs in the face of globalization, economic pressure, and a rising multipolar world, not by nostalgia or utopian idealism.

The way Cuba handles its complicated relationship with the United States is another important facet of its foreign policy. The Obama administration's détente showed Havana's willingness to cooperate under terms of mutual respect and non-interference, even though Cuba still sees the United States as the source of many pressures, sanctions, and development barriers.

The Trump administration's resurgence of antagonism and Biden's continuation of it taught Cuba not to base its whole foreign strategy on changes in the White House. Consequently, there has been an increasing attempt in recent years to "securitize" the relationship with the United States through public diplomacy, multilateral organizations, and the mobilization of public opinion around the world. This strategy has improved Cuba's international credibility in addition to lowering the expenses of isolation.

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