

Cuba–Soviet Relations in the Gorbachev Era

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Abstract. Cuba–Soviet relations are examined in the period that Mikhail Gorbachev was leader of the Soviet Union, focusing on the Cuban perception of the effects of the Soviet reforms on the relationship, in the light of the campaign of rectification of errors. It is concluded that the Cuban leadership kept a surprisingly united front in this period; the year 1989 and repercussions of the August 1991 coup were vital; but the Cuban reaction was not more critical due to diplomatic constraints and the hope that a semblance of the relationship could continue, despite the situation within the Soviet Union.

International relations were vastly different in December 1991, when Mikhail Gorbachev resigned as General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), to what they had been when he came to power in March 1985. The same is true of relations between Moscow and Havana, as in this seven-year period some of the most dramatic events in the 30-year relationship occurred. This was in no small part due to the fact that different processes were introduced in both countries that would impact massively on the relationship. The Soviet Union that Gorbachev inherited from Konstantin Chernenko faced many problems, and in an attempt to solve these he introduced perestroika, glasnost and ‘new thinking’ in foreign policy. In Cuba President Fidel Castro began the campaign of rectification of errors to try to solve problems that had become apparent on the island by the mid 1980s. His solution was very different from Gorbachev’s reformism, as he believed a return to a more idealistic model similar to that followed in the 1960s was required.¹ These contrasting perspectives would result in increasing tension in Cuban–Soviet relations.

However, knock-on effects of the Soviet reforms also affected the relationship. Economic relations were affected as perestroika struggled to

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¹ *Pravda*, 24 April 1985, p. 1, *Pravda*, 26 Feb 1986, p. 5, M. S. Gorbachev, *Zhizn i Reformy Kniga 2* (Moscow, 1985), p. 287, Supplement to *Granma*, 21 April 1986.

reinvigorate the Soviet economy but also vital was the effect of Gorbachev's 'new thinking' in foreign policy. This not only resulted in Moscow wishing to remove ideology from its relationship with Havana, but as it also reduced tension in the Cold War as superpower relations improved, with the result that Cuba's geostrategic importance to Moscow declined.

As this period progressed, Gorbachev also sought to reform the relationship between Moscow and Havana itself. He wanted the relationship to evolve, with ideology playing a less significant part, and eventually to resemble Moscow's relations with other countries. The trade agreement signed at the end of 1990 illustrated this perfectly: not only was it to last for only one year and not the next five, as had previously been the case, but trade was also to be conducted at world market prices – a first for the relationship.²

The Gorbachev period was also significant in other ways. In April 1989 Gorbachev became only the second Soviet leader to visit Latin America when he travelled to Cuba, and during this visit he signed a Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation with his Cuban counterpart and host – the only one he signed while he was General Secretary of the CPSU. Even while the relationship underwent fundamental change, Cuba appeared to still be 'first among equals' when it came to the Soviet elite.

After a brief overview of the history of Soviet–Cuban relations and the reasons why Gorbachev introduced reform in the Soviet Union, this article will concentrate on the effects that this had for the relationship, followed by a detailed examination of the Cuban perception of both these changes and the effects they had on the relationship. The Cuban perception will be ascertained through the analysis of government statements, speeches by the ruling elite, work produced by Cuban academia and a number of interviews conducted by the author.

Historical Background

Relations between Cuba and the Soviet Union quickly developed after the victory of the Cuban Revolution in January 1959. This occurred for a variety of different reasons in both countries. On the Soviet side: after Stalin's death, Soviet foreign policy had become more adventurous, resulting in Moscow taking a greater interest in the Third World; the Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev had a more risk-taking personality than his predecessor; the Cold War was at its height and Cuba's geographical proximity and shared history with the United States made Cuba a prestigious propaganda tool

² *Pravda*, 11 Jan. 1990, p. 6.

for Moscow. With regard to Cuban reasons, a debate has long existed on whether Fidel Castro was a communist in January 1959 and whether United States' actions drove Cuba towards the Soviet Union. What is certain is that, due to the Cold War setting and the long shadow that events in Guatemala in 1954 cast over Revolutionary Cuba, if Havana did not side with the United States, the Caribbean island would have had to move closer to the Soviet Union.³

However, a number of different problems and pressures soon became apparent between Moscow and Havana. Chief amongst these was the Cuban Missile Crisis. The Cuban government was extremely unhappy with the outcome of the crisis and after 28 October 1962 (the day when agreement was reached between Moscow and Washington to resolve the crisis), the 'honeymoon' period came to an abrupt end.⁴

However, a public falling-out or schism never took place, although relations were strained for the remainder of the 1960s. Due to increasing pressure, the Soviet Union found itself in a position where it could not witness the failure of Cuban Revolution. This was certainly the case after the considerable risks that Moscow had taken in sending nuclear missiles to Cuba in October 1962. Moreover, Moscow would lose considerable world prestige and be further challenged by China as the leader of the world socialist movement if the new government in Havana were overthrown. Moreover, very quickly the relationship developed a financial side that meant that, if the Castro regime was ousted from power, Moscow would have nothing to show for its massive investment. In the first few months after the revolution, Moscow granted Cuba a \$100m trade credit, and its financial investment continued to grow: in January 1964 the first 5-year plan between the two countries was signed, with advantageous terms of trade for the Caribbean island.⁵ For these reasons, Moscow quite simply could not afford a permanent schism to appear despite relations having become extremely strained in the aftermath of the Cuban Missile Crisis.

The Cuban government turned this situation to its advantage and after having gained economic support from the Soviet Union Havana embarked upon radical policies both at home and abroad, much to the displeasure

³ M. H. Morley, *Imperial State and Revolution. The United States and Cuba 1952–1986* (Cambridge, 1987). For this debate see A. Fursenko and T. Naftali, 'One Hell of a Gamble,' *The Secret History of the Cuban Missile Crisis* (London, 1997), pp. 34–100, H. M. Erisman, *Cuba's Foreign Relations in a Post-Soviet World* (Gainesville, 2000), pp. 49–62.

⁴ Among the many books written on the Cuban Missile Crisis, see Fursenko and Naftali, 'One Hell of a Gamble' and J. D. Blight and P. Brenner, *Sad and Luminous Days. Cuba's Struggle with the Superpowers after the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Lanham, 2002), pp. 35–85.

⁵ *Sevodayna*, 13 Jan. 1995, p. 3. The 1964 agreement meant that Cuban sugar sales increased from 2.1m tons in 1965 to 5m tons in 1969. *Pravda*, 23 Jan. 1964, p. 1. Blight and Brenner, *Sad and Luminous Days*, p. 39.

of Moscow. Internally, the Soviet Union felt that Cuba was wasting its aid as it endeavoured to engineer the 'new man' and, interlinked with this, attempted to produce a record 10m-ton zafra or sugar harvest in 1970. Cuba's radical foreign policy manifested itself in a number of different ways: Cuba's backing of revolutionary movements in Latin America, the radical nature of interventions such as Ernesto 'Che' Guevara's speech in Algiers in February 1965 and the proceedings at the Tricontinental Conference in January 1966. The radicalism of both also illustrated Havana's belief that the revolution in the Soviet Union had been eroded and become staid. Guevara's adventures in the Belgian Congo and ultimately in Bolivia also illustrate Cuba's radicalism. This was not just the most public difference with the Soviet Union, but also, perhaps, illustrated the Soviet leadership's lack of understanding of both the heritage and nature of the Cuban Revolution.⁶

The year 1968 is often perceived to have been pivotal in Soviet/Cuban relations as in August 1968 Castro publicly backed the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia that ended the 'Prague Spring'. However, the picture is more complicated, as illustrated by the trial of Aníbal Escalante and his associates and the 'secret speech' that Castro delivered to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Cuba (PCC) on the Cuban Missile Crisis in January 1968. Although Cuba would move back into the Soviet fold later in the year, pragmatic economic reasons rather than ideological ones drove this decision. Castro used these two events to illustrate to both the Cuban population and Moscow the independent, nationalistic and unique nature of the Cuban Revolution. The micro-faction headed by Escalante had after all been accused of adhering to criticism of Cuba by Moscow-orientated communist parties in Latin America, supplying false information about Cuba to officials of the Soviet embassy in Havana and encouraging Moscow to implement economic sanctions against the island.⁷

The Cuban government may not have forgotten its differences with Moscow but it did appear to move more into the Soviet fold as the 1970s progressed. This was prompted by the failure of Cuba's radicalism in both its foreign and internal policies. An institutionalisation process took place in the 1970s that resulted in Cuba becoming a much more integrated member of the socialist community and also, in many ways, more closely resembling its socialist allies. In 1971 GOSPLAN, the Cuban version of the Soviet JUCEPLAN, was created, and in June 1972 Cuba gained membership to the Council of Mutual Economic Aid (CMEA). This turn of events was

⁶ Blight and Brenner, *Sad and Luminous Days*, pp. 99–104. *Granma*, 16 Oct. 1967, pp. 1–4, *Granma*, 5 Sept. 1970, p. 1, *Granma*, 8 Dec 1970, pp. 1–7.

⁷ *Granma*, 24 Aug. 1968, pp. 2–4; Blight and Brenner, *Sad and Luminous Days*, pp. 33–76.

advantageous to both Moscow and Havana. It gave Moscow more control over the Cuban economy, while helping the Caribbean island to recover from its poor condition in the immediate aftermath of the 1970 harvest. This institutionalisation process continued in December 1975 when the First Congress of the Cuban Communist Party (PCC) was held in Havana, and during the following year a new constitution ratified at this congress and closely resembling the Soviet one became law. Moreover, Leonid Brezhnev became the first Soviet leader to visit Latin America when he travelled to Cuba in January 1974.

Simultaneously, however, Havana still attempted to show its independence from Moscow, with Cuba's foreign policy again the major issue. This was most apparent with events in Africa from 1975 onwards. Cuba took advantage of the world situation to become involved first in Angola and then in Ethiopia. Cuba not only had historical and cultural links with the African continent, but also connections with various guerrilla movements from the early 1960s. It was for these reasons, as well as the internationalist nature of the Cuban Revolution, that the government in Havana took the decision to send its troops to Africa. Moreover, and crucially, it was also an attempt to gain more leverage with Moscow. Cuba may have acted first, but Moscow also quickly became involved in Africa and soon the two countries had shared interests in a successful outcome to their African adventure.⁸

Cuba's desire for an independent foreign policy and a key role in the Third World appeared to come to fruition with the holding of the Non-aligned Movement Conference in Havana in June/July 1979. However, Cuba's close ties with Moscow would have repercussions for Cuba's involvement in this organisation when in December 1979 the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan to uphold the Brezhnev Doctrine. As a result, many questioned Cuba's leadership and even membership of the movement. This was perfectly illustrated in January 1980 when a United Nations resolution condemned the Soviet action in Afghanistan. All the members of the Nonaligned Movement backed the resolution except one: Cuba.⁹

In 1985, when Gorbachev became the General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), the relationship continued to exist despite all this. It continued because the pressures of the 1960s that had originally pushed the two countries together were still present; significantly, however, new ones had also come to the fore. Cuba was still

⁸ A vast amount of material has been written on Cuba's involvement in Africa including C. Mesa-Lago and J. S. Belkin, *Cuba in Africa* (Pittsburgh, 1982), P. Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington and Africa, 1959–1976* (Chapel Hill, 2001), and Fidel Castro, 'Angola: Africa Giron,' in F. Castro, *Fidel Castro Speeches. Cuba's International Foreign Policy* (New York, 1981), pp. 91–2. ⁹ *Granma*, 31 Aug. 1979, pp. 1–2, *Pravda*, 26 Dec. 1979, p. 1.

an important propaganda tool in the Cold War that had taken a turn for the worse in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Levels of investment had continued to multiply to such an extent that some estimates put the figure as high as US\$100 billion over the 30-year period.¹⁰ The result was that Moscow was not able to admit that its investment had been incorrect. The two countries still had a shared ideology, but by the 1980s they also shared a twenty-year history. The relationship had become so all-encompassing that it affected aspects of life in both countries. A vast number of joint collaboration projects had been created in areas such as science and technology, and sport and education. By this time, some 8,000 Cubans studied in the Soviet Union each year and 140 educational centres had been completed on the island with Soviet help.¹¹

Moreover, by 1985 trade had become a vital component in the relationship, as trade between the two countries accounted for over 70 per cent of Cuba's entire trade and this rose to over 80 per cent when the other CMEA countries were also considered. The year 1985 marked the highpoint in trade between the two countries as it reached almost 10 billion roubles. If this year is compared to the first 5-year plan in 1965, trade twenty years later had increased thirteen-fold. By the mid-1980s, over 50 different items were involved in trade between the two countries.¹² Again, this added to the reasons for the relationship to continue.

Gorbachev and Reform in the Soviet Union

In March 1985, when Gorbachev became General Secretary of the CPSU, the Soviet Union faced a great number of problems. The domestic situation was particularly worrying as Soviet science and technology had fallen increasingly behind the West, but even more significant was the poor state of the national economy. Not only were growth rates falling, but also the gap between it and the West was increasing. Gorbachev very quickly addressed this situation and implemented the process of perestroika in an attempt to solve these problems.¹³

Gorbachev quickly realised that in order to maintain perestroika's progress, other policies must also be introduced at the same time. Crucially for relations with Cuba, this included the field of foreign policy. Due to the Soviet Union's perilous position in the mid-1980s Gorbachev took dramatic action, leading to 'new thinking' in Soviet foreign policy. He believed that

¹⁰ *Sevodnya*, 13 Jan. 1995, p. 3.

¹¹ V. Lavrentyev, 'USSR–Cuban Brotherhood and Cooperation' (FBIS LD182341 Moscow Domestic Service in Russian 0615 18 April 1985).

¹² Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (CEPAL) (Santiago, 1987), p. 252.

¹³ *Pravda*, 24 April 1985, p. 1.

the Warsaw Pact countries required ‘revitalising’, and that the CMEA also needed to be reformed as it had become too bureaucratic and inefficient, and was also falling behind the West technically. This would affect Moscow’s relations with both the socialist and non-socialist world.¹⁴

Gorbachev began to question traditional views in many areas of Soviet foreign policy, and began to view the world in much more multi-polar terms than had been the norm. The Soviet position towards the Brezhnev Doctrine also began to change as the Soviet premier wanted to withdraw the Soviet army from a war in Afghanistan that had become increasingly expensive in both monetary terms and in human lives. New appointments to the foreign-policy making apparatus aided these changes, the most prominent coming when the little-heralded Georgian Eduard Shevardnadze replaced Andrei Gromyko as Minister of Foreign Affairs.¹⁵ Gorbachev also believed that the secrecy that had traditionally dominated Soviet society should be brought to an end, and very quickly openness or glasnost became an integral part of the general reforms introduced in the mid 1980s.¹⁶

Gorbachev and Cuba

It could be assumed that Moscow’s desire to oversee change within the CMEA and its hope of improving Soviet relations with the United States would both affect Cuba due to its membership of the socialist trading bloc and the strained nature of relations between Washington and Havana. In addition, Soviet–Cuban relations would be affected by Gorbachev’s wish to reduce the role of Marxism-Leninism in foreign policy. This situation was further complicated by the introduction of the ‘campaign of rectification of errors’ in Cuba.

This campaign began at the time of the Third Congress of the PCC held in February 1986. In his address to the Congress, Castro demanded more efficiency in the workplace, since, although the economy had grown, he believed even better results could be obtained. In April 1989, he returned to this topic in his speech to mark the 25th anniversary of the Bay of Pigs invasion. Not only was there concern about the economy, but it was also felt that the revolution itself was suffering from moral erosion. The reason given for this was that from the early 1980s, inequalities on the island had increased as a result of some private enterprises being allowed to exist,

¹⁴ *Pravda*, 26 Feb. 1986, p. 5. A. Lynch, ‘Does Gorbachev Matter Anymore?’, in *Foreign Affairs*, 69, Summer, 1990, p. 25.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 24. A. Lynch, *Gorbachev’s International Outlook: Intellectual Origins and Political Consequences*, Occasional Paper Series 9 (New York), pp. 32–41; A. Rahr, ‘Winds of Change Hit Foreign Ministry,’ *Radio Liberty Research*, 16 July 1986, RL 274/86, pp. 2–10.

¹⁶ S. White, *Gorbachev and After* (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 70–3.

allowing some people to earn up to 150,000 pesos a year. The solution, he believed, was a reduction in bureaucracy and inefficiency, the outlawing of private enterprises and an increase in voluntary work. As the campaign of rectification of errors and perestroika both appeared to have the same goal, the improvement of socialism, many felt that they were in accordance with each other.¹⁷ However, the methods to achieve these were very different, as in Cuba Castro wished the solution to be a return to the more idealistic methods of the 1960s.

However, another reason also drove the decision to introduce this process. Since the early 1980s, Soviet-trained ‘technocrats’, career bureaucrats and personnel within the Central Planning Board, and especially its president, Humberto Pérez, had been in prominent positions of power in Cuba. Significantly, the rectification campaign reduced their power in favour of the more traditional elite with close ties to President Castro dating from the victory of the Cuban Revolution. The rectification campaign had the dual purpose of solving economic problems in Cuba and altering the control of power on the island.¹⁸

The complications that this process introduced into Soviet–Cuban relations were not immediately apparent. The relationship traditionally had never been an area of the utmost significance for Moscow, and when Gorbachev came to power, other issues were certainly pressing, such as the internal situation within the Soviet Union, and Moscow’s relationship with Washington. Soviet government statements in the months immediately after March 1985 reflect this. Cuba was rarely mentioned, and such statements as were made were very similar to those issued before Gorbachev’s ascent to power. The relative lack of comment is surprising since Shevardnadze made his first visit to Cuba in October 1985, the 3rd Conference of the PCC was held in February 1986 and the 27th CPSU Congress in March 1986. Some comment on the relationship might have been expected – but none was forthcoming.

From 1987 onwards, however, Soviet statements on Cuba did start to change. In part this reflected the improvement of superpower relations, which resulted in a decline in the geostrategic importance of the Caribbean island to the Soviet Union. The events that unfolded in Eastern Europe in late 1989 subsequently resulted in the socialist world undergoing fundamental change and this, again, had enormous repercussions for Soviet–Cuban relations. In the meantime, the Cuban economy had become much

¹⁷ *Granma Weekly Review*, 16 Feb 1986, pp. 6–9; Supplement to *Granma*, 21 April 1986; Gorbachev, *Zhizn i Reformy Kniga*, p. 422.

¹⁸ Supplement to *Granma*, 21 April 1986; Jorge Domínguez, ‘The Political Impact on Cuba of the Reform and Collapse of Communist Regimes,’ in C. Mesa-Lago (ed.), *Cuba After the Cold War* (Pittsburgh, 1993), pp. 104–17.

more of a concern for Moscow. The main driving force of Gorbachev's reforms had been the poor state of the Soviet economy, but Moscow continued to support the Cuban economy. It seemed contrary to the nature of perestroika to continue to prop up an inefficient Cuban economy while struggling to reform the Soviet economy.

By the time of Gorbachev's visit to Cuba in April 1989 many in the West believed that Gorbachev would impose reform on his Cuban counterpart, and that it would be the start of a reform process on the island. Cuba's position in relation to the Soviet elite appeared to have been strengthened with the signing of a Treaty of Friendship and Co-operation between the two countries during Gorbachev's visit.¹⁹

However, the vastly altered new one-year trade agreement signed in late 1990, to come into force in 1991, made it clear that Moscow could no longer afford to be as generous towards Cuba as it had been in the past.²⁰ As a result of the agreement, trade between the two countries, which had fallen from a peak of 10m pesos in 1985 to just over 7m by 1990, fell to just 3.3b pesos in 1991.²¹ This was not solely due to the 1990 trade agreement, but also to the internal situation within the Soviet Union in that year as Moscow found it increasingly difficult to meet all its delivery responsibilities to Cuba. Even prior to this, moreover, the terms of trade had turned against Cuba. In 1985 Moscow paid over 11 times the world price for Cuban sugar, but this price had 'fallen' to a 'mere' three times the world price by 1989. Even before the landmark trade agreement of late 1990 and the problems within the Soviet Union in 1991, trade between the two countries had already started to undergo significant change. In addition, Cuba had also had to deal with dramatic changes in the CMEA from the time of the 45th meeting of this organisation in Sofia in January 1990, when it was decided that all future transactions would be conducted in convertible currency. The situation deteriorated even further for Cuba when this organisation was disbanded in June 1991.²²

On 11 September 1991 the continuing evolution of Soviet/Cuban relations was illustrated by Gorbachev's announcement that the last remaining Soviet troops would be removed from the Caribbean island. This was in no small part due to the improvement of the relationship between

¹⁹ For Gorbachev and Fidel's speeches see *Pravda*, 6 April 1989, p. 1 and *Granma*, 5 April 1989, p. 4. For the treaty see *Granma*, 5 April 1989, p. 3; Y. Pavlov, *Soviet–Cuban Alliance 1959–1991* (New Brunswick, 1994), p. 138.

²⁰ *Pravda*, 11 Jan 1990, p. 6, Gorbachev, *Zhizn i Reformy*, p. 422.

²¹ The trade figures are taken from CEPAL 1988, p. 254; CEPAL 1988, p. 254; CEPAL 1992, p. 134; CEPAL 1992, p. 135.

²² *Izvestia*, 12 Sep 1991, p. 1, CEPAL 1989, p. 321. For the situation with the CMEA see: *Pravda*, 11 Jan 1990, p. 6, *Izvestia*, 28 June 1991, p. 6.

Moscow and Washington. President Bush had made it clear to Gorbachev that further improved superpower relations were not possible until these troops had been removed from Cuba. It appeared that this played a part in Gorbachev's decision, as his announcement was made during a joint press conference with the United States Secretary of State James Baker.²³ Moreover, the Soviet troops appeared an expensive anachronism for Moscow as the Cold War thawed.

Significantly, however, Gorbachev's announcement came less than a month after the attempted coup in Moscow in August 1991. Soviet–Cuban relations had been a side issue in the failed coup. Internal problems within the Soviet Union had been the primary concern of the plotters but many in the Emergency Committee had also been members of the 'Cuban lobby'. The coup's failure also signified a massive reduction in this lobby's power and, therefore, in the Caribbean island's privileged position in Moscow. Even in the turbulent 1960s, Cuba had always had people championing its position within the Soviet elite but this was no longer the case. The junta behind the coup had consisted, among others, of Oleg Baklanov (Secretary of the Central Committee of the CPSU, who had been in Cuba in 1990), Vladimir Kryuchkov (Chairman of the KGB, who had made an unofficial visit in 1991), Konstantin Katushev (a former Soviet ambassador to Cuba, in 1991 Head of Foreign Economic Relations in Moscow), and General Mikhail Moiseyev (First Deputy Defence Minister of the USSR) and Marshal Dmitrii Yazov (Defence Minister of the USSR), both of whom had links with Cuba dating back to the time of the Cuban Missile Crisis.

By the end of 1991, then, Soviet/Cuban relations were greatly altered – but they did continue to exist. While he was General Secretary of the CPSU, Gorbachev never once called for an end to the relationship. It was only in December 1991, when the Soviet Union imploded, that the Soviet–Cuban relations came to an abrupt end.

Glasnost and Cuba

As has already been discussed, Gorbachev implemented glasnost as a part of the package of reforms that was introduced in the aftermath of his accession to power in the Soviet Union. This new openness started slowly but quickly accelerated until it affected many parts of society, including Soviet–Cuban relations.

Articles written in the months immediately after March 1985, as with official Soviet policy, closely mirrored those printed before March

²³ *Izvestia*, 12 Sept. 1991, p. 1, Gorbachev, *Zhizn i Reformy*, p. 431.

1985.²⁴ This, however, slowly began to change as the 1980s progressed, and more critical articles began to appear. Aspects of the history of the relationship were the first area to be questioned within the Soviet Union and, in particular, with regard to Che Guevara, the icon of the Cuban Revolution, and his legacy. This is not as surprising as may at first appear. As a historical topic, it was a less sensitive area to question than more current ones, and even during his lifetime the mutual antipathy between Guevara and the Soviet elite was public knowledge.²⁵

The year 1987 was pivotal, as it was from this point that the number of critical articles about Cuba within the Soviet Union greatly increased. They appeared in a large variety of different publications including *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, *New Times*, *América Latina* and even the party paper *Pravda*, with the lack of efficiency in the Cuban economy receiving the most amount of attention.²⁶ Indeed, from 1987 some articles published were so critical of Cuba that they drew responses from the Cuban government. The first was in 1987 when Carlos Rafael Rodríguez, a member of the politburo of the PCC and one of the island's leading economists, countered the criticisms of the Cuban economy printed in *New Times* in August 1987. Shortly after this, even the Castro brothers' personal lives came in for public scorn when their lifestyles, marital status and even the number of children they had fathered were all questioned. José-Ramón Balaguer, the Cuban ambassador to the Soviet Union, curtly responded that both the Cuban population and the Soviet readers of the article had been 'insulted'.²⁷ By June 1989 even the Soviet Union's continuing ties with Cuba were being discussed and questioned in the Congress of People's Deputies. N. P. Shmelyev, the radical economist, for example, questioned the logic of the Soviet Union continuing to buy Cuban sugar at above world market prices. In February 1990, Shmelyev returned to this topic when the budget was being discussed in the Soviet parliament.²⁸

Soviet academics and writers were not, however, completely anti-Cuban. Some continued to defend the relationship, and attacked those who had become critical of it. Sergo Mikoyan, editor of *América Latina* and son

²⁴ For example see: M. Zubatkin, 'The Cuban Revolution and Fidel Castro,' *Kommunist* (12), Aug 1986, pp. 103–10 and Y. Khurnov, 'Cuba: 27 Years of Struggle and Labour,' *International Affairs*, (2), Feb. 1987, pp. 145–50.

²⁵ 'En torno a un artículo sobre Che—Discusiones, Criterios,' in *América Latina*, 11 año 1987, p. 38.

²⁶ Critical articles appeared more and more regularly in these publications. For example see: *Pravda*, 25 July 1987, p. 4, and *Izvestia* 31 July 1989, p. 2.

²⁷ Viktor Chirkov, 'An Uphill Task,' *New Times*, 33, 17 Aug. 1987, pp. 16–17, and Carlos Rafael Rodríguez, 'A Difficult But Steady Ascent,' *New Times*, 41, 19 Oct. 1987, pp. 16–21, *Moscow Komsomolskaya Pravda* 18 Oct. 1990, p. 3 and *Pravda* 26 Oct. 1990, p. 5.

²⁸ *Izvestia*, 9 June 1989, p. 10, *Izvestia*, 1 March 1990, p. 1.

of Anastas the former CPSU politburo member, was, perhaps unsurprisingly, one of Cuba's most vocal defenders.²⁹ Many would have felt an affiliation to Cuba as a result of contact with the island due either to visiting the island personally, or through family connections, and these people could be seen as members of the 'Cuban lobby'. Others would not wish the Soviet role in Cuba to be reduced due to a sense of loyalty through historical ties, while others would not wish to see Moscow's massive investment wasted. Moreover, others would not want to see the Soviet Union's superpower status, that was already being questioned, further diminished if its role in Cuba fell. Lastly, some had allegiance to Cuba simply due to ideology.

Nevertheless, by the end of the 1980s glasnost was further increasing the pressure on Gorbachev to make changes to Moscow's relationship with Havana as public opinion was beginning to demand it, and could not be ignored in the changing and more democratic atmosphere of the early 1990s. Conversely, glasnost may have hindered reform in that those in the Soviet elite who favoured the continuation of the status quo with Cuba were all more determined to safeguard it in the face of the increased criticism of the Caribbean island within the Soviet Union.

The Cuban Perception

The year 1989 is crucial in the Cuban perception of events unfolding in the Soviet Union in this period. This year marks a watershed, as from this point onwards the Cuban government was much more vocal in its dislike of the Soviet reform processes – and it became even more radical after the attempted coup in Moscow in August 1991.

When Mikhail Gorbachev became General Secretary of the CPSU, *Granma*, the Cuban national newspaper, stated: 'Mikhail Gorbachev is associated with the strategy elaborated at the 26th CPSU Congress and the plans of the Central Committee which he participated in with Yuri Andropov and Konstantin Chernenko, have been invariably continued.'³⁰ This would suggest that the Cuban government was not expecting any great change in Soviet policy with his appointment.

This can be partly explained by the fact that no great changes had occurred previously in Soviet policy towards Cuba with the appointment of a new CPSU General Secretary. Moreover, the Cuban government may not have known much about Gorbachev in 1985, due to his lack of previous contact with the island. He had never visited Cuba before becoming General

²⁹ Anastas Mikoyan had had close ties to Cuba from the inception of Soviet–Cuban relations, (FBIS-SOV 11 Sep 1990, pp. 26–7, PY1109034090). ³⁰ *Granma*, 12 March 1985, p. 6.

Secretary, and if his early speeches and writings are examined, he appears to have written very little about it before March 1985.³¹ Indeed, no one, even amongst the Soviet elite, foresaw the reform process that Gorbachev was going to embark upon. In addition, the Cuban leadership would have been more concerned with the internal problems that faced the island at this time, as the campaign of rectification of errors was soon to be introduced, than with the events in the Soviet Union.

Even once the rectification campaign and perestroika and glasnost had been introduced, the differences were played down, as had traditionally been the case. As stated previously, the issue of Cuban economic dependency on the Soviet Union was crucial. As analysed before, over 70 per cent of Cuba's trade was conducted solely with the Soviet Union, involved a large number of goods and all Cuba's imports of oil. Moreover, the terms of trade with Cuba, although significantly reduced in the late 1980s, continued to be advantageous. Quite simply, Havana could not afford to upset Moscow, as it could have dire consequences for the island.

In relation to the Soviet reforms, the government in Havana concentrated on the similarities between the different campaigns and affirmed that they all hoped to improve socialism. Members of the Cuban elite at various points over the next two years repeated this sentiment, and as a result were sometimes portrayed as showing tentative support for the reforms. Chief amongst these were Carlos Aldana, Party Ideology Secretary, and to a much lesser degree Carlos Rafael Rodríguez.³²

Cuba also appeared to support 'new thinking' in Soviet foreign policy. At the 3rd Congress of the PCC held in Havana in February 1986, Castro commented on Gorbachev's statement of January 1986: 'This was the first time since the appearance of these awesome weapons of mass destruction – which have become a nightmare for all humanity – that such a categorical, resolute and concrete proposal had been made.'³³ He took a similarly positive tone on a number of other occasions, which is perhaps surprising as Moscow was attempting to find a negotiated peace for areas of the world that Cuba was heavily involved in and to which it attached great importance, such as Angola and Central America. It could be thought that Havana would have been against this as it would reduce their global presence, but Cuban academics also wrote much on the new Soviet foreign policy and praised it in relation to Angola and Central America, as they believed it would reduce tension in the world. They also appeared unworried by the

³¹ Before March 1985 he mentioned Cuba only three times and each one was as an example of US Foreign Policy. Gorbachev, *Izbrannye rechi i stat'i* (Moscow, 1985), p. 350 and pp. 445–50.

³² See for example; *Granma*, 21 Oct 1986, p. 6, *Granma*, 4 Nov 1987, p. 1, *An Interview for NBC–Fidel Castro* (Havana, 1988), p. 50 and Domínguez, 'The Political Impact,' pp. 104–17.

³³ *Pravda*, 4 Feb. 1986, p. 4.

improvement in relations between the Soviet Union and the United States, as they again believed that this had been done to make the world safer.³⁴

As had always been the case, Soviet–Cuban relations were more complicated than a simple reading of the state press would suggest. This was certainly the case in this first period, as Havana did appear to have concerns over the events in the Soviet Union. These, however, were kept to a minimum and were discreet in nature. In March 1986, while in the Soviet capital for the 27th Congress of the CPSU, Castro met Gorbachev for the first time. *Granma* was very positive about this meeting, but the positive nature of his trip was called into question by Castro's speech to this Congress, in which he pointedly mentioned national liberation movements when Gorbachev had chosen to omit these from his own speech.³⁵ Although very discreet, this was significant as it suggested that the Cuban leader was wary of certain events unfolding within the Soviet Union, or at least about Gorbachev's silence on liberation movements.

When Gorbachev travelled to Cuba in April 1989 relations on the whole appeared good, and any unhappiness between the two sides had been kept to a minimum. For instance, trade between the two countries was 9,047 million pesos in 1988.³⁶ As noted above, many in the West believed this visit would be a watershed in Cuba that would lead to a reform process being introduced on the island. Cuban reporting on the visit was very positive. The Cuban periodical *Bobemia* stated that it 'showed evidence of the great friendship which is frank, open, solid, and very close between the first socialist country in the world and the first socialist country in the Americas.' *Trabajadores*, a Cuban national newspaper stated, 'The visit of Gorbachev to Cuba was a great defeat for those who thought problems existed in the relations between Cuba and the Soviet Union'.³⁷

Conversely, however, Gorbachev's visit also signalled the beginning of a much more open and critical Cuban perception of events in the Soviet Union. During the visit, Cuba was informed that the Soviet Union eventually wished for trade between the two countries to be conducted at world

³⁴ For Cuban involvement abroad see Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions*; H. M. Erisman, *Cuba's Internationalist Relations. The Anatomy of a Nationalistic Foreign Policy* (Boulder, 1985); Domínguez, *To Make a World Safe for Revolution*; Sofía Hernández, 'La política de la URSS hacia Europa Occidental (1985–1987),' *Revista de Estudios Europeos*, Año 1987, no. 4, octubre-diciembre 1987, pp. 48, 50; Eloy Ortega González, 'El conflicto kampucheano en la política asiática de la URSS,' *Revista de Estudios Europeos*, Año 1988, nos. 7–8, Julio-Diciembre 1988, p. 97. Vivian del Rosario Hernández, 'El tratado soviético-norteamericano: un nuevo proceso distensivo,' *Cuadernos de Nuestra América*, vol. V, no. 11, July–December 1988, pp. 118 and 120–121; and Rafael Hernández, 'El ruido y las nuecas: ¿hacia un ciclo de baja intensidad en la política cubana de Estados Unidos?' *Cuadernos de Nuestra América*, vol. V, no. 11, 1988, pp. 80–1.

³⁵ *Pravda*, 4 Feb. 1986, p. 4.

³⁶ CEPAL, 1988, p. 272.

³⁷ *Trabajadores*, 6 April 1989, p. 1 and *Bobemia*, 7 April 1989, p. 21.

prices. On 5 April 1989 both Gorbachev and Castro addressed the National Congress of People's Power. While introducing Gorbachev, the Cuban president praised Soviet foreign policy and thanked the Soviet Union for its help, but he then stated that Cuba was not facing the same problems as the Soviet Union and outlined these for his audience. The idea that each country had its own problems and had to find its own methods of solving them was not new, but Castro's speech was a public reminder to Gorbachev of this. Pointedly Castro also stated that 'if any of the socialist countries wishes to construct capitalism we respect this right but we will not follow the same path'.³⁸ The audience was left in no doubt that Cuba would not be turning its back on Marxism-Leninism.

This new and more openly critical stage continued when, in a speech at Camagüey on 26 July 1989, Castro again returned to the problems facing the socialist world and the Soviet Union. He stated that the whole Third World, and Cuba in particular due to its economic links, would face problems if the socialist community disappeared. He was highly critical of the events unfolding in Eastern Europe, and in regard to the Soviet Union he spoke of the problems between nationalities there and the possibility of receiving one day 'news of a great civil war in the Soviet Union, or even that the Soviet Union has fallen apart, things we hope will never happen'.³⁹ Defiantly, he again stated that regardless of the situation in the rest of the socialist world, Cuba would continue on its own road and resist the capitalist world. This sentiment would be repeated during various speeches over the next two years and significantly by Carlos Rafael Rodríguez at the 45th meeting of the CMEA in Sofia when it was decided, in the aftermath of events in Eastern Europe in late 1989, that all future transactions would be carried out in convertible currency.⁴⁰ The more open criticism illustrated by these two speeches was certainly something new for Soviet–Cuban relations. Castro had never before been so vocal or stinging in his criticism, even in the late 1960s when relations between the two countries had been extremely strained.

The events surrounding the trial and subsequent execution of General Arnaldo Ochoa in June/July 1989 are also highly significant. In what very much appeared a show trial, the former head of the Cuban army in Angola was found guilty of drug smuggling, but other reasons also lay behind this trial. One of Gorbachev's goals had been to reduce tension in regional conflicts in various parts of the world and this began to come to fruition in the late 1980s as peace agreements were reached in both Central America and Africa. Due to their heavy involvement in both areas, this provided a number of problems for the Cuban regime. Not only did it

³⁸ *Granma*, 5 April 1989, p. 2. ³⁹ *Granma*, 28 July 1989, p. 4. ⁴⁰ *Granma*, 10 Jan. 1990, p. 4.

reduce the leverage that Cuba may have had in Moscow, but it also caused problems within the island with returning troops and other personnel. Disillusionment amongst these people grew, as there were often insufficient jobs for them when they returned to Cuba. This was certainly the case with soldiers returning from Africa, and Ochoa became a figurehead for them. Due to this, Ochoa is perceived by many as having been a possible challenger to the Cuban regime, with some even thinking him willing to introduce Gorbachev-style changes within the island. The fact that both Castro brothers spoke for the prosecution at his trial suggests that they were eliminating this possible challenge to their authority and using the charges of drug smuggling to achieve this.⁴¹ Ochoa's trial sent a number of signals to the Cuban population. Not only was a possible challenger to the regime removed, but Gorbachev-style reforms were not going to be implemented on the island.

In addition, in November 1989 certain Soviet publications were banned from sale on the island. Castro commented on this: 'We could not hesitate to prevent the circulation of certain Soviet publications which have been against the policies of the USSR and socialism. They are for the ideas of imperialism, change and the counter-revolution.'⁴² This made the Cuban government's dislike of glasnost very public, although it had never previously been criticised. The timing of the statement is also crucial, as it came a matter of days after the 'velvet revolution' in Eastern Europe. The Cuban regime sent a very blunt message to the Cuban population that a similar process was not going to be tolerated on the island. Moreover, glasnost was resulting in aspects of Soviet history being questioned within the Soviet Union. By not allowing an equivalent process in Cuba, the Cuban government was aiming to avoid similar difficult questions. As many of the original revolutionary elite were still in power, such a process could have resulted in a critique of their earlier actions – a situation they would wish to avoid.

This change in the Cuban perception was not confined exclusively to speeches. In 1989 Havana also took steps to earn more hard currency in an attempt to safeguard itself against the deteriorating situation in Eastern Europe. It was hoped that an increase in the sale of pharmaceutical goods on the world market, and in tourism to the island would do this. Cuba was not only beginning to open itself up to the outside world, but, significantly, making efforts to reduce its dependency on the Soviet Union. Improvements

⁴¹ *Granma International Review*, 16 July 1989, p. 1. The idea that the Castro brothers were extinguishing a possible leadership challenge was all the more plausible as Ochoa had fallen out with Raúl Castro over the need for reform in the government in May 1989. A. Oppenheimer, *Castro's Final Hour* (New York, 1992), p. 91.

⁴² *Granma*, 8 Dec. 1989, p. 4.

in Cuba's relations with other Latin American countries and with Western Europe were indicative of this. The Cuban government also introduced a food programme in an attempt to make the island more self-sufficient. The gravity of the situation was shown a few months later when in March 1990 Castro introduced the 'special period in peacetime' in an attempt to cope with the dire economic situation on the island.⁴³

Also in 1989, Cuban academia started to become critical of the Soviet Union, Gorbachev and his reforms. Bárbara Sarabia Martínez, a researcher at the Centro de Estudios Europeos in Havana, wrote: 'The final result that has characterised perestroika is that it has caused structural changes, a presidential multiparty system, and the market economy, that have all caused socio-economic problems to appear that have in effect created a new Soviet Union.'⁴⁴ The effects that perestroika was having on the Third World and Latin America were criticised and Juan Valdés Paz, the head of the Cuban government-funded Centro de Estudios Sobre América (CEA) in Havana, wrote that it was also having grave results for the Soviet Union's status as a superpower. In addition, Santiago Pérez, a researcher at the CEA in Havana, argued that it reduced Cuba's importance in Moscow.⁴⁵

The Cuban government's reaction to the August 1991 coup in Moscow marked a new and even more critical stage, for which the Cuban reaction will be analysed in some detail. In the immediate aftermath of the coup, the Cuban government took a very measured and careful stance. On the day the coup took place, 19 August, *Granma* carried a very short factual article stating that Gennadii Yanaev, Vice President of the Soviet Union, had assumed the position of Acting President of the Soviet Union. Two days later, *Granma* published a Cuban Government Declaration that was on the whole noncommittal in nature. Even when the coup quickly failed, still no analysis for the reasons for the coup's failure was given in Cuba.⁴⁶

It was only ten days later that the Cuban government's reaction to the recent events in the Soviet Union became clear, with a *Granma* editorial. This statement was very different in content from previous ones, as it stated that the policies implemented in the Soviet Union at the 27th Congress

⁴³ Interview with Dr H. Marquetti in Havana, 28 Nov. 2000; Ersiman, *Cuba's Foreign Relations* pp. 126–41 and A. Hennessy and G. Lambie, *The Fractured Blockade: West European–Cuban Relations during the Revolution* (London, 1993), pp. 64–80.

⁴⁴ See: Juan Valdés Paz, 'Notas sobre la perestroika y el Tercer Mundo,' *Cuadernos de Nuestra América* vol. VII, no. 14, Enero-Junio 1990, pp. 76–93, Bárbara Sarabia Martínez, 'Los problemas nacionales en la URSS. El Báltico y el Cáucaso,' *Revista de Estudios Europeos*, no. 16, octubre-diciembre 1990, pp. 49–65.

⁴⁵ Juan Valdés Paz, *Cuadernos de Nuestra América* No. 14, 1990, pp. 92–3. Santiago Pérez, 'El fin de la URSS y Cuba,' *Revista Interamericana Otoño/Invierno*, 1992, vol. XXII, nos. 3–4, p. 30.

⁴⁶ *Granma*, 19 Aug. 1991, p. 1, *Granma*, 21 Aug. 1991, p. 1.

of the CPSU in February 1986 had started the process of change that resulted in the problems that faced the country. It then repeated the sentiments of the Cuban President's speech at Camagüey on 26 July 1989 and stated: 'In the Soviet Union, politicians favour the process of privatisation and the acceleration to the market economy. These positions have resulted in the development of these events. A call for good sense, an appeal for pathos for the preservation of the Union and the battle against the 'witch-hunt' being promoted, against the most reactionary and primitive sectors, against the enemies of socialism. These voices are missing.'⁴⁷ Cuban academia was also highly critical of these events.⁴⁸

Gorbachev's statement of 11 September, made during a press conference with the US Secretary of State and analysed earlier, seemed to signal both an improvement in relations between Moscow and Washington and the pressure that President Bush may have exerted on the Soviet Union. However, as the Cold War thawed, and especially after this announcement, Cuba may have been seen as less of a threat to the United States and an improvement in relations between Washington and Havana might have resulted. If this situation had come to fruition, it would have achieved yet another goal of Gorbachev's reforms, as tension in another 'hot spot' would have been reduced.

However, it did not, as mistrust still ruled in both Washington and Havana. History, and the power and influence of the exile community in the United States, meant that Washington would only allow a significant improvement in relations with a post-Castro Cuba. Cuba, enraged by the announcement made at a press conference with the US Secretary of State, did not alter its position with regard to Washington, and Castro commented, 'I disagree with the pullout of friendly troops at a time when a Yankee armed force remains at Guantánamo Naval Base against the will of the Cuban people.'⁴⁹ Moreover, during the previous month the leader of the Cuban American National Foundation, Jorge Mas Canosa, had visited the Soviet capital with a US congressman, and even met the Soviet Foreign Minister. It appeared that not only did the exiles have influence within Washington, but they were also trying to gain influence in Moscow. This was a very worrying scenario for the Cuban leadership and would only have increased

⁴⁷ *Granma*, 29 Aug. 1991, p. 1.

⁴⁸ Eloy Ortega González, 'La política exterior de Gorbachev: de las intenciones a las realidades,' *Revista de Estudios Europeos*, no. 19, Julio-Diciembre 1991, p. 59; Bárbara Sarabia Martínez, 'De la Federación Soviética a la Comunidad de Estados Independientes: el factor político y nacional,' unpubl. *Investigaciones*, 1997, p. 26; Pérez, 'El fin de la URSS y Cuba', *Revista Interamericana*, Autumn-Winter 1992, p. 26.

⁴⁹ TASS in English 1459 gmT 25 Sept 1991 (FBIS-SOV 26 Sept 1991, p. 17, LD2509181591).

Havana's concerns.⁵⁰ The Cold War may have been coming to an end, but in regards to the United States and Cuba it was not.

Cuban academics were particularly caustic in their remarks on Gorbachev's 11 September announcement. Some believed that as a result of it, Moscow now perceived Cuba merely as a trading partner. Criticism of the Soviet Union continued and in December 1991, Eloy Ortega González, a researcher at the Centro de Estudios Europeos, wrote: 'The idea that exists that Gorbachev is a visionary, a man with a political strategy ... is debatable ... In his strategy of perestroika, Gorbachev attempted the impossible: to combine the vanguard of the Communist Party with multi-partyism, the planned economy with the mechanisms of the market'.⁵¹

Interestingly, as 1991 progressed, statements by the Cuban elite started to move closer to those of the country's academics. In July Carlos Aldana gave an interview to *Pravda* while he was in the Soviet Union during which he said: 'We are attentively watching the developing events in the USSR, and frankly we do not always understand their underlying causes, trends, or the motives for the decisions adopted.' This was very different from his earlier 'support' for Soviet reforms.⁵² As the situation in the Soviet Union ran out of control, Castro described the situation in the Soviet Union as undergoing 'chaos and disorganisation' while Cuba still enjoyed 'order and discipline'.⁵³

The 4th Congress of the PCC held in October 1991 provides an excellent illustration of the Cuban perception to the Soviet Union in its final days. A large section of the Cuban President's speech was devoted to the problems that had occurred in trade with the Soviet Union. On these, Castro said, 'It isn't that the economic ties between the Soviet Union and Cuba have been destroyed, it is simply that, right now, nobody can guarantee that the Soviet Union will continue to exist as a great multinational country, for its components may fall apart.'⁵⁴ However, the Resolution on Foreign Policy at this Congress stated: 'To the peoples of the Soviet Union, with whom we have maintained fraternal relations during three decades, we restate our disposition to continue – in the present circumstances and on the basis of the mutual respect that has always prevailed – relations in all areas and by all possible means.'⁵⁵ Interestingly and surprisingly, this was very similar to the Resolution passed at the 3rd Congress of the PCC. As the relationship had undergone, and was continuing to undergo,

⁵⁰ Interestingly, the Cuban press printed no coverage of this visit but Cuban academia did. Pérez, *Cuadernos de Nuestra América*, January–June 1991, p. 33.

⁵¹ González, *Cuadernos de Nuestra América*, Julio–Diciembre 1991, pp. 57–9.

⁵² *Pravda*, 15 July 1991, p. 7.

⁵³ Moscow TASS in English 1206 GMT 3 Dec. 1991 (FBIS-SOV 4 Dec 1991, p. 12 LD0412051391). ⁵⁴ *Granma*, 18 Oct 1991, p. 8. ⁵⁵ *Granma*, 23 Oct 1991, p. 6.

fundamental change, it might be expected that the 1991 resolution would have illustrated this. However, it did not, and even at this very late stage of the Soviet era, the Cuban government still appeared to hope that the Soviet Union would be able to solve its problems and continue to exist.

This gives rise to a number of questions. Why did the Cuban reaction take the form it did, why did it begin to change in 1989, and why did it become increasingly radical towards the end of 1991? Crucial to all these is that during the Gorbachev era, Soviet–Cuban relations were still in existence although undergoing great reform. Havana could not afford to be more radical in its approach for fear of offending Moscow and jeopardising relations between the two countries. Despite a thawing in the Cold War with the United States in the late 1980s, the United States embargo was still in place and the increase in hostility from Washington from the early 1980s towards the Cuban regime meant that Havana could not allow this scenario with Moscow to develop. Besides, it must also be taken into account that they hoped perestroika would be successful. Vital to this was the fact that Gorbachev did not want to terminate Soviet–Cuban relations or destroy the Soviet Union itself – he merely wanted to reform both. If perestroika succeeded in improving the Soviet economy, it could only benefit Cuba due to the close economic ties between the two countries. For this reason, Havana did not want to be too critical of it and risk adversely affecting relations in case it was ultimately successful.

The Cuban perception changed in 1989, by which time Soviet government statements had been much more critical of the Caribbean island for two years. Once actual change within the socialist world commenced, the Cuban elite had to make some comment on the changes while simultaneously trying not to offend the Soviet Union. And once the situation within the Soviet Union started to change drastically the Cuban government could make more forthright opinions public as the relationship was going to be fundamentally altered even if the Soviet Union had continued to exist. In addition, these events illustrated that the misgivings that had existed within the Cuban elite from as early as 1987, and certainly from the time of publication of Gorbachev's *Perestroika i novoe myslenie dlia nashei strany i dlia vsego mira* in Cuba in 1988, had been correct.⁵⁶ These concerns had been kept private at the time.

Also of extreme importance, and highly significant, was that by the end of 1988 perestroika had not been able to improve the Soviet economy and this had consequences for Cuba. However, this situation could be turned to the advantage of the Cuban government because Gorbachev and perestroika

⁵⁶ Interview with Dr R. Fonte, a retired ideologue to the Central Committee of the PCC, in Havana between 14 and 30 Nov. 2000.

provided Castro with an excuse for the poor performance of the Cuban economy. The real problem was not just the situation in the Soviet Union, but also the failure of the rectification of errors campaign to alleviate the problems in the Cuban economy.⁵⁷ This was certainly never made public at the time. However, the issue of the Soviet problems could be used in a similar way to the United States embargo in that it shifted the blame away from the Cuban regime and its shortcomings. It was thought that Cuban attempts to earn more hard currency on the world market were intended to offset the changes in the socialist world, but would also help alleviate the poor performance of the campaign of rectification of errors.

Unwillingness to offend the regime in Moscow was the reason that criticism within Cuba of the Soviet Union commenced amongst academics. Slightly freer in what they could write, they could be more critical. Moreover, since their work was on the whole for internal consumption, it would not offend Moscow. However, due to the nature of Cuba, their work would still reflect what the government in Havana thought of the changes within the Soviet Union. Criticism only increased once the situation became so grave in the Soviet Union that major changes in relations between the two countries were inevitable. This explains why members of the Cuban elite during 1991 also started to be more critical of the Soviet Union. Although trade continued, it was at a much-reduced level and as a result of the coup in Moscow in August 1991, Cuba had clearly lost its privileged position within the ruling circles of the Soviet capital. The Cuban government quite simply had less to lose due to fundamental changes taking place in the relationship.

Interestingly, the Cuban elite kept a united approach in the face of the changes taking place within the Soviet Union when it might have been expected that some may have been more in favour of the Soviet reforms than the Castro brothers. Some of those with links to the Soviet Union and some of the 300,000 Cubans a year who studied Russian, members of the military and, in particular, Carlos Rafael Rodríguez, who had been a member of the Cuban Socialist Party (PSP) before the Revolution, along with Carlos Aldana, all might have been expected to show sympathy towards the Soviet reforms. Rodríguez and a small group around him may have shown some very tentative support for the Soviet reforms, but this was extremely rare and worded in very careful language. On the whole, he kept very close to the standard Cuban line. One person who did not was General Rafael del Pino, who strongly supported Gorbachev's reforms in his memoirs. But

⁵⁷ Dr J. Vázquez, professor at CIEI, made this statement during an interview in London 27 Jan. 2001. Interview with Dr H. Marquetti, consultant professor at CIEI in Havana, on 28 Nov. 2000.

this is hardly surprising, as these were written after he defected to the United States in 1989.⁵⁸ The Ochoa trial in mid-1989 had the effect of silencing anyone on the island, and in particular military personnel, who supported the Soviet reforms.

Once constraints had been removed with the disintegration of the Soviet Union in December 1991, it became clear that some in Cuba felt that Gorbachev had tried to implement reforms too quickly. Castro commented, 'Often, I felt that he was doing things too quickly and wanted to solve many problems all at once.'⁵⁹ These sentiments had certainly never been made public during the Soviet era for fear of offending the government in Moscow.

Conclusions

This article, using a detailed analysis of both the Cuban and Soviet media and information that has become available in the last decade, has been able to throw light on arguments relating to relations between the two countries that existed at the time the events took place. The year 1989 was pivotal in the Cuban perception of the Soviet Union, the changes implemented there, and their effects on Soviet–Cuban relations. Until 1989, Havana was very careful in its response, partly due to diplomatic constraints, but it changed and became increasingly vocal, especially in late 1991.

The 1985–1991 period is characterised by the fact that Soviet–Cuban relations continued to exist throughout it, as Moscow wanted the relationship reformed but not terminated. The Cuban government most certainly did not want the relationship to end, but neither did it wish to jeopardise its relationship with Moscow by being overly critical of the Soviet reform process. Change, or worse still a termination, in Soviet–Cuban relations would have grave consequences for the island due to its economic dependence and the continuing US embargo. The Cuban elite has acknowledged this in interviews and statements made since 1992, and this explains Havana's very careful response to changes within the Soviet Union up to 1989.⁶⁰ However, even during this period Havana showed some concern over the reforms, as was evident in the form of 'veiled criticisms'.

⁵⁸ R. del Pino, *Proa a la libertad* (Mexico City, 1990), pp. 291, 367; Lavrentyev, 'USSR–Cuban Brotherhood and Cooperation' (FBIS LD18234); Domínguez, 'The Political Impact,' pp. 104–17.

⁵⁹ *Face to face with Fidel Castro. A Conversation with T. Borge* (Melbourne, 1993), p. 25.

⁶⁰ Beatriz Pages Rebollar, *Fidel Castro. Presente y futuro de Cuba* (Mexico City, 1991), p. 12; and D. Deutschmann, *Cuba, Socialism and the 'New World Order'. An Interview with Cuban Vice-President Carlos Rafael Rodríguez* (Melbourne, 1992), p. 12.

After 1987 Soviet statements on Cuba had been becoming increasingly critical, and a new situation arose in 1989 due to fundamental change in the socialist world. Havana's dislike of the Soviet reform process became public after Castro delivered two key-note speeches, the first on 5 April and the second on 26 July. Moreover, the prospect of Soviet-style reforms appeared to be extinguished as a result of Ochoa's trial and execution, and of the fact that the sale of certain liberal Soviet journals was prohibited. Such public criticism of the Soviet Union had not taken place before, even in the traumatic days of the late 1960s.

Importantly, as only became known in 1992, by 1989 some believed that the Cuban government could turn the situation with Gorbachev, perestroika and Soviet problems to their political advantage. They would obviously have wished for relations to continue as they had, but as it became apparent that perestroika was not producing the desired results for the Soviet economy, with negative effects for the Caribbean island, an opportunity arose to deflect criticism from Cuban policies. The campaign of rectification of errors was not having the hoped-for results, but by concentrating on the Soviet problems, the Cuban government was able to shift the blame for its own shortcomings to Gorbachev and the Soviet elite. The economic problems could now be blamed on both the Soviet reforms and the US embargo. This situation, not appreciated at the time, is vital in explaining the change in the Cuban perception from 1989 onwards. Clearly, too, ideological opposition to the reforms also drove Havana's response.

The August 1991 coup in Moscow is also crucial, as a side effect was to end the power of the 'Cuban lobby.' This resulted in Cuba losing its privileged place in relation to the Soviet elite. This, and fact that the situation in the Soviet Union continued to deteriorate, meant that Havana had less to lose if its criticism increased, and from this point onwards, it became more outspoken in its comments. Although this was the case, even in the final days of the Soviet Union the Cuban government did not want the relationship terminated. This was evident at the Fourth Congress of the PCC in October.

What is also evident is that the Cuban elite maintained a very united front in its comments on Soviet reforms in the Gorbachev era. Some tentative support for the Soviet reforms may have existed but it disappeared from view from the time of Ochoa's trial in June/July 1989, suggesting that it was read as a signal that Soviet-style reforms were not going to take place in Cuba. Even in late 1991, though, Havana was not willing to be overly critical in case the situation within the Soviet Union improved and some semblance of Soviet–Cuban relations could continue. However, this prospect was brought to an abrupt end with the disintegration of the Soviet Union in December 1991.