

Kirk Sharma

### **Castro to Canossa or El Dorado? The Causes, Events, and Impact of Fidel Castro's Journey to the Soviet Union, Spring 1963**

On April 27, 1963, Fidel Castro landed in Murmansk and was greeted by high-ranking Soviet officials, and thousands of enthusiastic onlookers. Castro promptly called Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev, thanking him for the kind invitation. Khrushchev responded, "Moscow awaits you, comrade Fidel Castro, all of the Soviet nation warmly welcomes you!"<sup>1</sup> During Castro's two-month stay in the Soviet Union, he would travel throughout the country, attracting crowds of unprecedented size, reminiscent of the Beatles' United States tour in 1964. However, Castro's trip was far more than a vacation; it served essential functions in repairing Soviet-Cuban relations and was very important in the context of the Cold War. While the 1963 trip is widely known, historians have consistently underrated its importance.

Fidel Castro's trip to the Soviet Union from April 27 through June 3, 1963, lies in the remarkable period just after Cuban Missile Crisis that marks the climax of the Cold War. While Castro and Khrushchev hugged and smiled for the cameras, both leaders sought to use the trip to further their own political agendas. The many contradictions that underlie the trip make it particularly interesting and revealing to a close study. Castro and Khrushchev spoke of Soviet-Cuban camaraderie in the highest terms, during a time when relations were so poor that a few months earlier the countries nearly severed diplomatic ties. Castro went to the Soviet Union because of its leadership and economic strength, and yet the Soviet Union was experiencing a substantial challenge to its

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<sup>1</sup> *Krasnaya Zvezda*, Apr. 28, 1963

leadership of international socialism, and was suffering from economic stagnation and agricultural disaster. The trip itself was meticulously and secretly planned, and yet came to be characterized by a media circus and unanticipated public infatuation with Castro.

A close study of Castro's trip, and deciphering what the Soviets hoped to get out of it, has the potential to expose the political priorities of Soviet policy-makers, and the issues that most concerned them. The places that the Soviets had Castro go, and the duration of his stay, speaks to what they thought to be important domestically, and how they wished to be viewed abroad. The outpouring of enthusiasm for Castro among Soviet citizens, and the specific qualities they admired about him, reflected their feelings about the shortcomings of Soviet leadership. The Soviet media closely covered Castro's trip, and an analysis of the coverage is instructive as to what Soviet leadership hoped that citizens would take away from their experience with Castro. Finally, the true meaning of the trip, and its significance, cannot be fully understood without placing it within the context of the greater Cold War, and U.S.-Soviet diplomacy.

It seems that the primary objectives of the Cuban delegation were to secure future Soviet economic and military aid, and to increase the international stature of Cuba and Fidel Castro, without giving up their political independence. Things were much more complicated for the Soviet Union. Domestically, the Soviets desperately needed to restore the morale of the nation, ease the growing unrest in factories, and make the government seem competent and energetic. Internationally, the Soviet government hoped to appear committed to a path of peaceful coexistence with the West, and yet supportive of national-liberation movements in the developing world. Above all, Castro's trip was important for solidifying Soviet standing as leaders of the international communist

movement, thereby weakening China and giving them the political capital with which to pursue a policy of détente with the United States. It is not too much to say that the 1963 trip played an indispensable role in the stabilization of the Cold War.

### Fidel Castro in the Soviet Union



Map of Castro's trip around the Soviet Union<sup>2</sup>

On April 27<sup>th</sup>, the First Secretary of the National Government of the Unified Socialist Revolutionary Party of the Republic of Cuba, Fidel Castro Ruz, stepped out of his turboprop TU-114, setting foot on Soviet soil for the first time. He and his entourage

<sup>2</sup> Trip Itinerary: Apr. 27 Murmansk, Apr. 28-May 5 Moscow, May 6-7 Volgograd, May 8-9 Tashkent, May 10 Samarkand and Yangiyer, May 11-12 Irkutsk and Lake Baikal, May 13 Bratsk and Krasnoyarsk, May 14 Sverdlovsk, May 15-16 Leningrad, May 17-20 Moscow, May 20 Kiev, May 21-24 Moscow, May 24-31 Pitsunda, June 1-2 Tbilisi, June 2 Moscow, June 3 Murmansk. Map created by Kirk Sharma.

had arrived in the northern Russian city of Murmansk and were greeted by several high ranking Soviet officials.<sup>3</sup> His arrival had not been highly publicized, and so was a surprise to many.<sup>4</sup> Over the next several weeks, Castro would embark on a whirlwind tour of the Soviet Union. Soviet authorities carefully orchestrated his schedule, but Castro's enthusiasm and activity, and the tremendous excitement among Soviet citizens, went far beyond Moscow's plans.<sup>5</sup>

On April 28<sup>th</sup>, Castro travelled to Moscow and was met by Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev. The two warmly embraced, and then proceeded to Red Square where they gave speeches emphasizing the great fraternal camaraderie between Cuba and the Soviet Union. Castro's youthful enthusiasm and charisma thrilled the enamored crowds. Around the Soviet Union, mountains, trees, flowers, and children were named after the great leader of the "Island of Freedom." Poems were composed in his honor, and ordinary citizens invited him to visit their workplaces and homes.<sup>6</sup> This praise was not totally contrived by the state; the excitement among Soviet citizens was sincere. Young men grew "Castro" beards, in defiance of the clean-shaven or well-groomed goatees

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<sup>3</sup> *Krasnaya Zvezda*, Apr. 28, 1963; Castro was joined by Emilio Navarro, Sergio del Valle Jiménez, Guillermo Garcia Frias, Raul Curbelo Morales, Regino Boti Leon, Raul Leon Torras, Jose Abrantes Fernandez, D'emidio Escalona Alonso, Rene Vallejo Ortiz, and others. Anastas Mikoyan headed the Soviet delegation sent to meet him.

<sup>4</sup> Nayda Sanzo y Anatoli Rusanov, *Fidel en un Pueblo de Gigantes* (La Habana: Editora Politica, 1983), 5; Fursenko and Naftali, *Gamble*, 330; Robert E. Quirk, *Fidel Castro* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1993), 459. Soviet officials feared for Castro's personal safety. His itinerary was a state secret. The length of Castro's stay may have even been a surprise to Castro himself. Castro's biographer Robert Quirk reports that Castro had intended to depart from the Soviet Union after May Day celebrations on May 1, but that Soviet officials, perhaps fearing that Castro would subsequently visit China, modified the schedule.

<sup>5</sup> Quirk, 460

<sup>6</sup> Sanzo y Rusanov, 5-6; *Krasnaya Zvezda*, Apr. 28, 1963; Quirk, 459. Additionally, three new stamps were issued, and a satellite was put into orbit in his honor.

conventionally accepted in the Soviet Union.<sup>7</sup> Enthusiastic teachers trained their young students to answer the question of “Who is your father?” with “Fidel!” and “Who is your grandfather?” with “Nikita!”<sup>8</sup>

The energetic Castro always reciprocated the passion of Soviet citizens, lavishing praise upon them in his speeches and personally meeting with them whenever he could. The night after the rally in Red Square, Castro went off-script and walked unguarded around the streets of Moscow, much to the horror of Soviet officials.<sup>9</sup> For Castro, who only four years earlier had been living among peasants and fighters in the Sierra Madres, meeting with common people was both natural and important, and he did so often in the Soviet Union. While in Irkutsk, he spontaneously spoke with a group of fishermen warming themselves at a bonfire, and on another occasion in Ukraine, Castro stopped his caravan of automobiles to offer advice to farmers weeding their fields.<sup>10</sup> He also indulged himself in the prettiest of the women he met; while at a factory in Kiev he pointed to a young blond and told Jose Abrahantes to “Get her for tonight.” The young woman had no objections, apparently “ready for an adventure.” She was not alone; many Soviet women were enraptured by the “handsome and well-spoken” Castro, whom they viewed as a “god.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Harrison Salisbury, *A New Russia?* (1962; repr., New York, 1975), 21-22, 57; Anne Gorsuch, “Cuba, My Love” in *American Historical Review* (April 2015), 512-513

<sup>8</sup> Anita Casavantes Bradford, “‘La Niña Adorada del Mundo Socialista:’ Cuba, the US, and the USSR, 1959-1962,” *Diplomatic History* (February 2015); Gorsuch, 514

<sup>9</sup> Quirk, 461-462

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 464-465

<sup>11</sup> Quirk, 465; Gorsuch, 512. This infatuation went beyond the figure of Castro, extending to the thousands of Cuban men who moved to the Soviet Union to study and work. Hundreds of Russian women took Cuban husbands and moved to Cuba in the ensuing decades. Dimitri Prieto Samsonov and Polina Martinez Shvietsova, trans. Kristina Cordero, “...so, Borscht Doesn’t Mix into the Ajiaco?: An Essay of Self-Ethnography on the Young Post-Soviet Diaspora in Cuba” in *Caviar with Rum: Cuba-USSR and the Post-Soviet Experience*, ed. Jacqueline Loss and Jose

Castro and his entourage spent their first week in Moscow attending performances at the Bolshoi Theater, meeting with high ranking Soviet officials, and hunting at the Zavidovo Reserve, north of Moscow. On May 6 they began their tour of the Soviet Union, with the first stop in Volgograd (formerly Stalingrad). From May 8-10, Castro was in Uzbekistan, visiting the diverse city of Tashkent, the ancient wonders of Samarkand, and the modern wonder of the Virgin Lands and mechanized agriculture near Yangiyer. After suggesting that they rename a local area long called the “Steppe of Hunger” the “Steppe of Abundance,” and proclaiming in Uzbek, “Long live the Kzyl Kolkhoz of Uzbekistan!” Castro set off for Siberia. In only two days, Castro visited Irkutsk, Lake Baikal, Bratsk, and Krasnoyarsk, stopping at various factories, institutes, and hydroelectric dams along the way. On May 11, a student from the Irkutsk Institute of Agriculture gave him a bear cub, which Castro named “Baikal.”<sup>12</sup>

The Cuban delegation then turned back west, arriving at Sverdlovsk (today Yekaterinburg) on May 14, and then Leningrad on the 15<sup>th</sup>. There, Castro spent two tireless days seeing as much as possible in the city before returning to Moscow on the 17<sup>th</sup>. In Moscow he took a brief rest, before visiting the *Pravda* offices on the 19<sup>th</sup>, and then leaving for Ukraine, an area of personal significance to Khrushchev. Castro visited Kiev and a nearby Kolkhoz, and returned to Moscow on the 21<sup>st</sup>. On May 23, Castro and Khrushchev appeared to a massive crowd in Lenin Stadium, and delivered speeches which emphasized the “solidarity and friendship” between the Soviet Union and Cuba. Later that day, a joint Soviet-Cuban statement was released, again proclaiming the

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Manuel Prieto (New York: Palgrae MacMillan, 2012), 135; Reina Maria Rodriguez, “Todas ibamos a Ser Reinas” (2008)

<sup>12</sup> Sanzo y Rusanov, 52, 57, 79-84, 100-116

complete agreement of Khrushchev and Castro on all of the important issues. It was a clear rebuke of the Chinese.<sup>13</sup>

With major events now finished, on May 24 Castro and Khrushchev flew to Khrushchev's personal dacha in Pitsunda, near Sochi. There they relaxed and talked until June 1, when they flew to Tbilisi, Georgia. Castro visited a strategic missile base and talked with locals, and then flew back to Moscow, and then to Murmansk. He arrived back in Cuba on June 3, and over the next few days gave interviews that lauded the Soviet Union and Khrushchev.<sup>14</sup> His trip had lasted a total of 38 days, and he had travelled over 12,000 miles in the Soviet Union.<sup>15</sup>

The Soviet government chose the content of Fidel Castro's itinerary carefully, and for definitive reasons. 1963 was a very important year for the Soviet Union, and Nikita Khrushchev found himself in a precarious position. Khrushchev and the Soviet leadership appeared old and tired, and no longer captured the imagination of the Soviet population. Belief in the socialist dream was not dead, but for the first time Soviet economic growth was beginning to taper off. Only the Soviet space program seemed to be holding its own, but that in itself was not enough to counter the effect of increased food prices and declining working conditions. The party was even losing the support of the working class, and this had become all too clear during the Novocherkassk riots in June 1962, which were crushed by the army and police, with twenty-six workers killed

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<sup>13</sup> Sanzo y Rusanov, 127-129, 134-139, 150-157; Quirk, 467-469

<sup>14</sup> Quirk, 469-473

<sup>15</sup> If the miles from Havana to Murmansk and back again are included, Castro travelled about 23,000 miles, nearly the circumference of the Earth.

and almost a hundred injured.<sup>16</sup> Still worse, Khrushchev's "Virgin Lands" project, which sought to cultivate the vast expanses of Central Asia, was quickly turning into a debacle. Shortages in water, manpower, and machinery, coupled with devastating topsoil erosion, caused major declines in yields, until bottoming out in the 1960s. Khrushchev's boast that Soviet grain production would surpass the grain production of the United States ended in humiliation in 1963, when the grain harvest was so bad that Khrushchev was forced to buy grain from the capitalist nations.<sup>17</sup> Judging from the itinerary of Castro's trip, Khrushchev hoped that the enthusiasm and optimism of Castro might be used to shore up the flagging Soviet economy and the national morale.<sup>18</sup>

Fidel Castro's scheduled activities can be classified in to six categories: industrial/infrastructural, agricultural, educational institution, commemorative, cultural, and mass rallies.<sup>19</sup> When visiting these various locations, Castro was always extremely

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<sup>16</sup> Svetlana Savranskaya and William Taubman, "Soviet Foreign Policy, 1962-1975" Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad, eds., *The Cambridge History of the Cold War, Vol. 2* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 139

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 138

<sup>18</sup> For an analysis of the political and diplomatic implications of the trip, see below: "Castro's Trip and the Cold War."

<sup>19</sup> **Industrial/infrastructural:** 4/30 Likhachev automobile factory, Moscow; 5/6 tractor factory, Volgograd; 5/7 hydroelectric dam, Volgograd; 5/12 hydroelectric dam, Irkutsk; 5/12 Castro met with workers from Shelehov aluminum factory, Irkutsk; 5/13 hydroelectric dam, Bratsk; 5/14 Uralmash heavy machinery factory, Sverdlovsk; 5/15 Electrosila turbine factory, Leningrad. **Agricultural:** 5/8 Kirov and Kzyl Kolkhozes, near Tashkent; 5/9 Zhdanov Kolkhoz, near Yangiyer; 5/20 Kolkhoz near Kiev. **Educational:** 5/8 Visited rural schoolhouse near Tashkent; 5/11 Met with students from Irkutsk Institute of Agriculture; 5/11 Irkutsk Limnological Institute; 5/15 Smolny Institute, Leningrad (this could also qualify as commemorative); 5/15 Visited a kindergarten in Leningrad; 5/21 Moscow State University. **Commemorative:** 4/28 Lenin's tomb, Moscow; 5/6 Stalingrad memorial, Volgograd; 5/15 Lenin's hideout at Razliv, near Leningrad; 5/15 Visited the *Aurora* and met with veterans. **Cultural:** 4/28 Watched performance of *Swan Lake* at Bolshoi Theater; 5/2 Entertained by Bolshoi Orchestra and the Academic Choir at the Palace of Congresses, Moscow; 5/10 Historical sites in Samarkand. **Mass Rallies:** 4/28 Welcoming celebration, Red Square; 5/1 May Day celebration, Red Square; 5/23 Joint Announcement, Lenin Stadium, Moscow. Other significant events that do not fit the above categories include: 4/28 Visits Murmansk fisheries, a naval base, and the nuclear icebreaker



personable and encouraging. When visiting factories he frequently asked technical questions of the workers, who were eager to explain and felt appreciated. While on collective farms, Castro visited private homes of peasants, and asked to operate a tractor. At universities, Castro played up his legal credentials and lectured on socialist philosophy. In his speeches he inspired audiences by reminding them of what they had built, and that they were indeed on the right side of history.<sup>20</sup> He ended many of his speeches with a confident shout of, “Venceremos!” He frequently linked the heroism of the Soviet victory in the Second World War to the workers’ current contributions to glorious struggle against capitalism, thus giving renewed meaning to their labor.<sup>21</sup> He

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“Lenin”; 4/29 Visit to Moskva Department Store with Khrushchev; 5/2 Lenin Stadium for opening of summer sports season; 5/19 *Pravda* offices; 6/1 Strategic Missile Base, Tbilisi.

<sup>20</sup> Castro spoke of Soviet achievements in the highest terms: “[This hydroelectric dam] reminds us of the great works achieved by other peoples at various historic moments. Many countries are famous for the works they built, great engineering works. Thus, we hear of the pyramids of Egypt, and of other great construction works. When this morning we visited the power station, we said: This work by itself will make the Soviet people famous, apart from many other reasons that they have to be famous.” Fidel Castro, speech at Bratsk Hydroelectric Station, May 13, 1963.

“The courage, patriotism, and healthy spirit of the citizens of the country where socialism has been fully victorious leave not the smallest doubt that the CPSU Program will be fully carried out...” Fidel Castro, speech to crowd at Red Square, April 28, 1963. “Lenin would feel proud of what the CPSU has accomplished... The Soviet economy will in a very short period of time irrevocably overtake that of the United States.” Fidel Castro, speech at Soviet-Cuban Friendship Rally, Lenin Stadium, May 23, 1963.

<sup>21</sup> “Among those fallen, the heroic defenders of Volgograd will always occupy an honored and glorious place. It is not only that they withstood the onslaught of the fascist hordes; it is not only that they influenced in the most decisive manner the outcome of World War II and made the decisive contribution to the victory over fascism; they also bequeathed to humanity an immortal example... And if our admiration is great for what you have done for the sake of the defense of your socialist motherland, if our admiration is also great for what you have done for the sake of peace, then it is impossible to express our admiration at what you have done in order to raise your city from ruins and ashes. Soviet workers, led by the glorious Communist Party, have not only found energy and strength to rout aggressors but also found strength to restore everything that was made by their hands and to multiply this many times.” Fidel Castro, speech in Volgograd, May 7, 1963. He echoed the “war” motif in subsequent speeches.

also personalized the fruits of their labors by telling the enamored crowds that the Cuban Revolution, and he personally, would not have survived had it not been for their efforts.<sup>22</sup>

While Castro certainly wasn't being insincere, his comments did serve the dual purpose of restoring faith in revolution and the Soviet leadership, as well as increasing his personal popularity (to nearly hysterical levels) within the Soviet Union. Even Nikita Khrushchev was swept up in the enthusiastic atmosphere, acting in the friendly and bombastic manner that he had been known for in younger years, prompting people to comment that, "The Old Man is himself again."<sup>23</sup> At the May 23 Soviet-Cuban joint rally, Khrushchev, seeing Castro's informal attire, allowed himself in the hot weather to take off his coat, which then prompted the other Soviet officials to take off theirs as well.<sup>24</sup> Castro's persona and charisma truly infected all levels of Soviet society.

One other interesting dimension of Castro's trip was his interaction with the various nationalities of the Soviet Union. His rhetoric, of course, emphasized the unity of the country, the ingenuity of its system of constituent republics, and the common sense of purpose among all Soviet citizens.<sup>25</sup> He went far beyond this however, truly embracing the nationalities he met with: eating plov in Uzbekistan, drinking wine out of a traditional

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<sup>22</sup> "However, we ourselves shall never forget one circumstance--the Cuban revolution became possible only because the Russian Revolution of 1917 had been accomplished long before. Without the existence of the Soviet Union, Cuba's socialist revolution would have been impossible." Fidel Castro, speech to crowd at Red Square, April 28, 1963. "We have many reasons for being grateful to you—the help we have received from you, the techniques, the experience in the organization of agriculture." Fidel Castro, bidding farewell to Kiev, May 21, 1963.

<sup>23</sup> Quirk, 467

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 466

<sup>25</sup> "I see perfectly in all my travels through the USSR the distinct regions and the distinct nationalities, which have satisfactorily conserved their national character. But, without exception, there is absolutely no contradiction between that sentiment and the sentiment of the unity of all towns that are integrated in the Soviet Union. It is a perfect synthesis of national character and internationalist sentiment." Sanzo y Rusanov, 79

cow horn in Georgia, and eating broiled grayling from Lake Baikal in Irkutsk.<sup>26</sup> Castro's Cuban heritage also didn't fit any of the established ethnic categories in the Soviet Union and lacked the stigma that a white equivalent to Castro would have had.<sup>27</sup> Soviet citizens could see in Castro whatever nationality they wished; in the Soviet context, where in practice "transcending nationality" was more Marxist propaganda memorized by rote than reality (this would be violently proven after the break up of the Soviet Union in 1991), Castro actually did. In speeches he strived to speak some phrases in local vernacular, and he often jokingly compared the local weather with that of Cuba. Castro also occasionally wore the attire of the local population in speeches and gatherings. He wore an Ushanka throughout Russia, an Uzbek dressing gown while at the Kyzyl kolkhoz, and a Georgian burka in Tbilisi.<sup>28</sup> In many of the places Castro went, he was more popular than Khrushchev could ever hope to be.

Fidel Castro's trip was viewed as a big success in the Soviet Union and Cuba. Castro said many generous words about Khrushchev in his speeches, and he spent a lot of time personally with him. However, if Khrushchev hoped that it would increase his popularity in the Soviet Union and shore up his political base, he would be sorely disappointed.<sup>29</sup> Also, despite the long duration of the trip, Castro and his entourage spent

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<sup>26</sup> Sanzo y Rusanov, 79; Quirk, 464, 469

<sup>27</sup> It's hard to conceive of a Castro equivalent from the Middle East, Africa, Europe, or Asia producing the same fanfare, due to the complicated histories or racist sentiments between Russia (and its nationalities) and those regions. Of course, the Soviet Union praised socialist leaders around the world, but none came close to capturing the hearts and minds of all Soviet citizens to such a powerful degree. Russians sometimes had an eroticized and sexualized image of Cubans, although Soviet authorities discouraged this. Gorsuch, 516-520

<sup>28</sup> Sanzo y Rusanov, 82; Quirk, 469

<sup>29</sup> Khrushchev was removed from power in October 1964. Castro's response to the news was reserved. In speeches he only answered non-controversial questions. In an interview with the *New York Times*, he said that while he liked Khrushchev personally, he was impressed by Brezhnev and that the change could produce "positive results." Quirk, 510

very little time in formal negotiations. Castro made a return trip to Moscow in January 1964. This time, he spent the majority of his time in negotiations for a new trade agreement. Many of the loose ends of the 1963 trip were tied during this second trip. Castro left the meeting a happy man; Khrushchev agreed to yet another generous agreement.<sup>30</sup>



Castro and Khrushchev in Tbilisi, June 1963

### **Historical Perspectives on the Soviet-Cuban Relationship and Castro's Trip**

The Cuban Revolution has been a popular topic among historians and political scientists since 1959. In the United States, the majority of research has been focused on the political, diplomatic, economic, and military history of the revolution. Particular attention was cast upon the Soviet-Cuban relationship, and the politics of the Cold War was always looming over the works. The most extreme examples of politically polemic

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<sup>30</sup> Halperin *The Taming of Fidel Castro* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1981), 11-25; Quirk, 488-489. In a joint communiqué on January 21, Castro agreed to establish good relations with the United States in exchange for increased Soviet purchases of Cuban sugar, at above market prices.

publications view Castro's revolution as completely illegitimate and without popular support, maintaining power only through brutality and coercion.<sup>31</sup>

Historians who studied Soviet-Cuban relations concerned themselves with the dynamics of the alliance. Most works in the 1960s and into the 1970s took the common sense view that the Cuba's economic dependence on the Soviet Union removed their independence of action, thus rendering Cuba a Soviet puppet.<sup>32</sup> This assumption was powerfully challenged in the late 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, as historians began to show the many points of tension between the Soviet Union and Cuba.<sup>33</sup> Recognition of Cuba's agency was a vital piece in interpreting Castro's trip as more than the honeymoon that it appeared to be on the surface.

The Cold War era political and diplomatic historians of Soviet-Cuban relations had precious few sources to draw upon. They relied heavily on Soviet and Cuban newspapers, radio broadcasts, speeches, U.S. government reports, and the accounts of defectors. The historical consensus viewed Castro's conversion to Marxist-Leninism as the result of hostile U.S. policy, and the hope for increased Soviet military and economic support.<sup>34</sup> The claims by the Cuban and Soviet press that Castro's revolution enjoyed

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<sup>31</sup> An obvious example is Fulgencio Batista's, *Cuba Betrayed* (New York: Vantage Press, 1962), and common among the Cuban exile community. A recent book of this type is Humberto Fontova's, *The Longest Romance: The Mainstream Media and Fidel Castro* (New York: Encounter Books, 2013).

<sup>32</sup> Leon Goure and Morris Rothenberg, *Soviet Penetration of Latin America* (Miami: University of Miami, Center for Advanced International Studies, 1975); James D. Theberge, *The Soviet Presence in Latin America* (New York: Crane, Russac 1974)

<sup>33</sup> Jacques Lévesque, trans. Deanna Drendel Leboeuf, *The USSR and the Cuban Revolution: Soviet Ideological and Strategic Perspectives, 1959-77* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1978); Maurice Halperin, *The Taming of Fidel Castro* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1981); W. Raymond Duncan, *The Soviet Union and Cuba* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1985); Peter Shearman, *The Soviet Union and Cuba* (London: Routledge, 1987); Yuri I. Pavlov, *Soviet-Cuban Alliance, 1959-1991* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers (and the University of Miami), 1994)

<sup>34</sup> Shearman, 6-10; Duncan, 37; Halperin 5-8.

mass support, or that there was a revolutionary situation in Cuba prior to Castro's victory, were treated with skepticism.<sup>35</sup> Some, like Yuri Pavlov, maintained that Castro was at the head of a totalitarian government; a notion that many Soviet historians had discarded in the 1980s.<sup>36</sup> Without any information on debates within the Kremlin, or between Moscow and Havana, historians used circumstantial evidence to construct the causes of the Cuban Missile Crisis, and usually determined that it was some combination of a desire to protect Cuba from U.S. invasion, and an attempt to improve the nuclear balance of power.<sup>37</sup> Castro's 1963 trip to the Soviet Union was interpreted as an attempt by the Soviets to patch up relations with Cuba.<sup>38</sup>

Scholarship within the last fifteen years has benefitted from much better access to archives, and lessened travel restrictions to the former Soviet Union and Cuba. Historians have begun to study the cultural effects of the Soviet-Cuban partnership, and have taken the global approach of studying connections and movement of peoples between the Soviet Union and Cuba.<sup>39</sup> There have also been fascinating new studies of the Cold War, with the benefit of newly revealed documents from the Soviet Union.<sup>40</sup> However, there has yet to be a focused study of Soviet-Cuban political and diplomatic relations since the opening of the archives.

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<sup>35</sup> Halperin, 4

<sup>36</sup> Pavlov, 61, 71-72

<sup>37</sup> Shearman, 12-13; Halperin, 8

<sup>38</sup> Duncan, 44; Lévesque, 92-95

<sup>39</sup> Anne Gorsuch, "Cuba, My Love" in *American Historical Review* (April 2015); Jacqueline Loss and Jose Manuel Prieto, eds., *Caviar with Rum: Cuba-USSR and the Post-Soviet Experience*, (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012); Jacqueline Loss, *Dreaming in Russian: The Cuban Soviet Imaginary* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2013)

<sup>40</sup> Aleksander Fursenko and Timothy Naftali, *Khrushchev's Cold War: The Inside Story of an American Adversary* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006); Jonathan Haslam, *Russia's Cold War: From the October Revolution to the Fall of the Wall* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011)

Soviet and Cuban historians tended to focus on Soviet-Cuban political goodwill and unity of purpose, economic development, and emerging social connections that were being forged as a result of the alliance. For Soviet historian M. Torshin, Castro's trip was motivated by the desire to "further consolidate the brotherly camaraderie between Soviet and Cuban peoples."<sup>41</sup> Cooperation in the advancement of the sciences and the development of industry and agriculture were viewed as the qualities that made communism superior to capitalism. *The USSR and Cuba: 15 Years of Fraternal Cooperation*, exulted Soviet-Cuban scientific, economic, and academic achievements, and was printed in both Russian and Spanish.<sup>42</sup> Nadya Sanzo and Anatoli Rusanov's *Fidel en el Pueblo de Gigantes* (Havana, 1983) focused entirely on Castro's trip.<sup>43</sup> Technology and industry were strongly fetishized in the book, with long interludes taken to describe what and how much each factory and kolkhoz that Castro visited could produce. The ability to divert rivers and alter the earth was also viewed as evidence of the invincibility of the proletariat.<sup>44</sup> Youth education and athleticism were viewed as critical, as was the "moral impulse" of liquidating illiteracy. Castro himself was portrayed a technical wizard, constantly asking questions about how tractors and

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<sup>41</sup> М. Торшин, «Советско-кубинские отношения после победы революции на Кубе», in *Советско-Кубинские Отношения, 1917-1977* (Москва: Издательство Наука, 1980)

<sup>42</sup> П. Н. Федосеев, ed., *Советский Союз и Куба: 15 Лет Братского Сотрудничества* (Москва: Издательства Наука, 1973)

<sup>43</sup> Nadya Sanzo y Anatoli Rusanov, *Fidel en un Pueblo de Gigantes* (La Habana: Editora Politica, 1983)

<sup>44</sup> Sanzo y Rusanov, 32, 59-60. In describing the Volgograd Hydroelectric dam, they boasted that the river could be diverted to supply irrigation to 1,000,000 hectares of farmland, and that it even included a "fish elevator." Castro put it best himself: the workers have "dominated nature." Fidel Castro, speech at Elektrosila plant, Leningrad, May 15.

industrial machinery worked; he apparently even asked if he could take a turn at flying the airplane while on his way back to Cuba.<sup>45</sup>

A discussion of the broad strokes of the historiography of Soviet-Cuban relations, and a comparison of scholarship in the capitalist and communist worlds, makes the biases of authors easily perceptible. They also make an interesting point of comparison with contemporary accounts of the trip. The daily Soviet newspaper *Krasnaya Zvezda* extensively covered Castro's trip, and reveals interesting insights into how Soviet officials wished to convey the Cuban Revolution, the Cuban Missile Crisis, and Castro's trip, to the population at large.<sup>46</sup>

### **Castro's Trip in *Krasnaya Zvezda***

Fidel Castro's trip was extensively covered by Soviet and Cuban news organizations, including *Krasnaya Zvezda*. The paper covered all the major events in Castro's journey, and provided a nearly cover-to-cover profile on him and the Cuban Revolution in the first few days of his stay. Castro's arrival was hailed as a great event, and fellow Soviet heroes like Cosmonaut Pavel Popovich chimed in with rousing editorials. As one might imagine, *Krasnaya Zvezda* was especially adept at coverage of military events, especially Castro's visit to a naval base in Murmansk, his trip to

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<sup>45</sup> Sanzo y Rusanov, 11, 17, 48. While Castro still figures prominently in Soviet and Cuban histories, Khrushchev is seldom mentioned. In *Fidel en el Pueblo de Gigantes*, Khrushchev's name only appears once in the entire text, in a timeline at the back of the book. Castro's trip to Pitsunda is excluded in the book. For that matter, Stalin and his 5-year plans are also cut out of history. The rapid industrialization of the Soviet Union in the 1930s is portrayed as the product of Lenin's GOELRO plan, which was concerned with the spread of electricity throughout the USSR. There is no mention of the NEP.

<sup>46</sup> *Krasnaya Zvezda*, meaning "Red Star" was the official newspaper of the Soviet Ministry of Defense. The Minister of Defense at the time was Rodion Malinovsky. Note that after the Cuban Missile Crisis, Malinovsky became increasingly critical of Khrushchev, eventually participating in the 1964 coup against him.



Volgograd, and his meeting with army officers in Tbilisi.<sup>47</sup> However, after May 1<sup>st</sup>, the paper did not cover his trip on a daily basis, only covering his arrival at major cities.<sup>48</sup>

The coverage was in many ways an educational tool for the readers to familiarize themselves with Cuba and with Castro. Citizens could get a taste of Cuban music through the radio channels, which played “Literary music composed about heroic Cuba,” “Cuban melodies,” and “Boys from Havana.” *Krasnaya Zvezda* also allowed readers to get to know the mighty Fidel Castro, “National Hero of the Cuban Nation.” He had “unusual love of knowledge, inquisitiveness, and aspirations to know about his surroundings.” His “outstanding abilities, deep honesty and righteousness” won him the respect of all of his friends. Unlike later scholarship, *Krasnaya Zvezda* claims that after Castro was first introduced to far-left ideology while at law school at Havana University, he was “at once carried away by the communist manifesto of Marx, Engels, and Lenin.” By the time he graduated in 1949, he was already “under the strong influence of Marxism-Leninism.” While in court after his failed raid on the Moncada Barracks, Castro was questioned about a book about Lenin he had. Castro responded, “That is our book, and whoever hasn’t read it is an ignoramus.” From the very first day of taking power, he had created the “Island of Freedom.” He, in the Soviet style, fought against factionalism, sectarianism, and opportunism. While the overall Cuban Revolution is not directly compared to the Russian Revolution, there are clear attempts to make Castro’s personality and life similar to that of Vladimir Lenin. The lessons to the readers of

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<sup>47</sup> *Krasnaya Zvezda*, April 28, May 7, June 1

<sup>48</sup> In fact, the reports on Castro’s arrival to Irkutsk and Kiev were rather formulaic.

*Krasnaya Zvezda* are wrapped up by explaining the Bay of Pigs and the “Caribbean Crisis” as the result of “American mercenaries” and “American imperialism.”<sup>49</sup>

Interestingly, the newspaper did not go out of its way to glorify Khrushchev, or exaggerate his role in the coverage of Castro. Khrushchev is certainly not neglected, and his major speeches were published verbatim, but Castro often overshadowed him in the daily coverage. Leonid Brezhnev and other top Soviet leaders, who would be among those who depose Khrushchev, were given fair treatment.<sup>50</sup> While Khrushchev himself had been emphasizing the collective nature of the leadership at that time, it may also be that the military publishers of *Krasnaya Zvezda* had no desire to do Khrushchev any favors.<sup>51</sup>

Above all, *Krasnaya Zvezda* emphasized the unity and camaraderie of the Soviet Union and Cuba, and that the unity was a source of great strength.<sup>52</sup> A political cartoon from May 1 titled “friendship” depicted a powerful Soviet and Cuban handshake. An American officer, a cowboy, and two Chinese (depicted in a very racist way) are crushed by the handshake, along with a document that reads “threatening blockade, intervention against Cuba.” Placing the Chinese alongside the Americans showed readers that the Sino-Soviet split was no mere disagreement; implying that the Chinese were in league

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<sup>49</sup> *Krasnaya Zvezda*, April 28, 29, 30

<sup>50</sup> *Krasnaya Zvezda*, April 30

<sup>51</sup> The western press began to notice this trend towards collective leadership in Soviet journalism. *New York Times*, May 5, 1963

<sup>52</sup> Unity and camaraderie does not, however, necessitate complete equality. One political cartoon depicts the Soviets pointing a hand at a capitalist with a torch, warning, “don’t mess with fire gentlemen!” The newspaper portrayed the Soviets as leaders and guardians of the brave, but overmatched, Cuba. *Krasnaya Zvezda*, May 24

with the capitalists meant that Khrushchev had largely reconciled himself to a long-term or permanent split with China.<sup>53</sup>

The coverage of Castro's trip in *Krasnaya Zvezda* demonstrates the depth of the Soviet commitment to Cuba, and points to the possibility that a basic agreement between the Khrushchev and Castro had been reached prior to his arrival. Before any negotiations could even begin, the press was committing the Soviet Union to a long-term alliance with Cuba with its high praise of Castro and by proclaiming the indestructibility of the fraternal camaraderie between the USSR and Cuba. There was no hint of the poor relations that had plagued the Soviet-Cuba alliance since the Cuban Missile Crisis; on the contrary, speeches by Castro were published that commended Khrushchev's handling of the situation, and expressed his deep gratitude.<sup>54</sup> Soviet readers seemed to believe the stories the newspapers told, and this is partly responsible for the great sense of disappointment and betrayal felt by many Soviet citizens after the tensions began to come increasingly more clear in the mid-1960s.

### **Castro's Trip and the Cold War**

The significance of Castro's trip to the Cold War relates to its importance in setting the stage for finding a solution to the "German question," which plagued U.S.-Soviet relations for two decades. To properly situate Castro's trip requires looking at earlier events, some even predating the Cuban Revolution, which had an important effect on the future development of Soviet-Cuban relations. The road to the 1963 joint Soviet-Cuban communiqué is long and complex, involving the Berlin Crisis, the Sino-Soviet

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<sup>53</sup> *Krasnaya Zvezda*, May 1

<sup>54</sup> *Krasnaya Zvezda*, May 25, May 25

split, the Cuban Missile Crisis, and various other events which all exerted influence on the 1963 agreements in one way or another.

The German question regarded the potential arming and nuclearization of the FRG, and was of primary concern to Soviet policymakers in the 1950s and 60s. The Soviets were very uncomfortable with a hostile German state on their border armed with nuclear weapons; the belligerent rhetoric and rejection of the status quo split of the German nation by FRG leaders, including Chancellor Konrad Adenauer, made the notion of a nuclearized FRG intolerable.<sup>55</sup> It was, however, the policy of the United States government in the 1950s to give the FRG a nuclear arsenal.<sup>56</sup>

President Dwight Eisenhower sought to extricate the United States from Europe, but recognized that to sufficiently balance Soviet power, German rearmament would be required. The Eisenhower policy, while well intentioned, played a large role in the Soviet ratcheting up of pressure. The easiest way for the Soviet Union to apply pressure on the United States was by threatening Berlin, an indefensible island of the West in the middle of the GDR. It is notable that, while Khrushchev made bombastic threats over the status of West Berlin, he never threatened the supply of food or water to the city, and did not even seal the border until 1961. For Khrushchev, Berlin itself was not so much a

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<sup>55</sup> Marc Trachtenburg, *A Constructed Peace: The Making of a European Settlement, 1945-1963* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 253, 255, 274-275. West German leaders in the 1950s and early 1960s claimed that if an uprising in East Germany took place, they could not and would not stand by and let it be crushed. Adenauer opposed any de facto recognition of the status quo by the Americans and was even suspicious of U.S.-Soviet détente, believing it represented the Americans' abandonment of any future unification of Germany. The FRG also violently opposed any political or economic dealings with GDR officials, as this would be tantamount to accepting the legitimacy of the GDR government. Given the defiance of West Germany when it was weak and entirely dependent upon the United States for security, Soviet concerns about the West German acquisition of nuclear weapons seem reasonable. One Soviet official told John Foster Dulles that if West Germany acquired nuclear weapons, they would be able to "speak in a different tone," a hypothetical that they were committed to preventing.

<sup>56</sup> Trachtenburg, 146; Francis J. Gavin, "Nuclear Proliferation and Non-Proliferation, in *The Cambridge History of the Cold War, Vol. 2*, 398-399

goal, but rather a lever by which to apply pressure upon the West and gain concessions elsewhere.<sup>57</sup>



Khrushchev and Kennedy at Vienna Summit, 1961

Shortly after the inauguration of John F. Kennedy to the presidency in early 1961, Khrushchev again ratcheted up pressure, insisting on the withdrawal of U.S. forces from West Berlin. The Cuban Missile Crisis is best seen as an extension of the Berlin Crisis, and another means by which to exert pressure on the United States, and American policy makers recognized that at the time.<sup>58</sup> The Cuban Missile Crisis took the world to the

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<sup>57</sup> Trachtenburg, 252

<sup>58</sup> French and British officials viewed the Soviet aggression in the same way. Khrushchev himself wrote that, “The Americans knew that if Russian blood were shed in Cuba, American blood would surely be shed in Germany.” Nikita Khrushchev, trans. Edward Crankshaw, *Khrushchev Remembers* (New York: Bantam Books, 1970), 555; Haslam, 191, 195, 210; Trachtenburg, 251, 254-255. Khrushchev’s decision to put missiles in Cuba is a little odd given that the Kennedy Administration had already signaled that it would be willing to make concessions regarding the nuclearization of West Germany, at negotiations in Geneva. Both Mikoyan and Gromyko opposed the idea of putting nuclear weapons in Cuba, favoring instead the continuation of negotiations. Even Khrushchev admits that it took “two or three lengthy discussions” for him to persuade the government to install the missiles. He did find support from military circles and Minister of Defense Rodion Malinovsky. No doubt, Khrushchev’s concern for the defense of the island played a role in his decision to deploy missiles, as he claims, although then it’s not clear why he waited well over a year after the Bay of Pigs invasion to act. One possible explanation is that he needed to substantiate his claim of nuclear parity with the United States. His cuts of the military budget in 1960 had been very unpopular in the Soviet Union, and so for Khrushchev, his

brink of nuclear war, and was resolved when Khrushchev agreed to pull the missiles out in exchange for the a guarantee that the U.S. would not invade Cuba, and the removal of U.S. missiles from Turkey.<sup>59</sup> Khrushchev claimed that the Cuban affair was a huge “triumph of Soviet foreign policy and a personal triumph in my own career as a statesman.”<sup>60</sup> Fidel Castro and Mao Zedong did not agree.

The capitulation of the Soviet Union in the Cuban Missile Crisis proved that Khrushchev’s policy of threats was both reckless and hollow. If the United States had not submitted to Soviet pressure when there were nuclear missiles in Cuba, they certainly would not submit to the continued threats against Berlin. Khrushchev therefore decided in late 1962 to shift to a strategy of détente with the West. One feature of this policy change was Khrushchev’s overtures to West Germany signaling his intention to broker a second Treaty of Rapallo.<sup>61</sup> He apparently even harbored dreams of a unified, socialist Germany, coupled with the withdrawal of Soviet troops from East Germany.<sup>62</sup>

At the same time, Khrushchev contemplated reaching an agreement with the United States that would keep the GDR dispossessed of nuclear weapons. The United

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hollow boasts of military strength were as important domestically as they were abroad. It seems that the true balance of power, very much in favor of the United States, was exposed in early 1961 through the defection of a GRU officer, and Khrushchev became aware of the leak shortly thereafter. Worse, the Soviet missile gap was becoming more widely known within the Soviet Union. Therefore, Khrushchev may have felt that he needed to take radical steps to equalize the balance of power, before the exposure of his lies led to severe consequences. Finally, he may have felt that while a potential diplomatic solution would be good, an American defeat in Berlin after almost a decade of tension could potentially destroy NATO, an even more desirable outcome. Given that Kennedy was young and seemingly very willing to compromise, perhaps a strong show of force in Cuba could lead to an American capitulation. Khrushchev, 547, 549; Shearman, 12; Trachtenburg, 283-285; Haslam, 195-197, 200-202.

<sup>59</sup> Pavlov, 48

<sup>60</sup> Khrushchev, 555-556

<sup>61</sup> Fursenko and Naftali, *Khrushchev*, 525-526, Khrushchev told Kremlin colleagues on June 13, “We [Russia and Germany] are really partners. The Americans, the British, the French, they are the rivals. Rapallo is advantageous for both the Federal Republic and the Soviet Union.”

<sup>62</sup> Haslam, 211

States was unwilling, however, to sign any treaty that was specifically aimed at the GDR. Such a treaty would demonstrate that the United States did not completely trust the Germans, and didn't see them as political equals; something that could sour U.S.-German relations and destabilize the NATO system.<sup>63</sup> What appealed to both sides was a nuclear non-proliferation treaty, which would be implicitly targeted at preventing the nuclearization of the GDR and the PRC.<sup>64</sup>

The Soviet leadership was aware that the Chinese would respond very negatively to the signing of a treaty. China had long been lambasting Soviet weakness, and their insufficient support of Lao and Vietnamese Communists.<sup>65</sup> The Soviet withdrawal from Cuba added fire to the flames.<sup>66</sup> Khrushchev, however, was not terribly concerned with further angering the Chinese.<sup>67</sup> In October 1962 he had taken a pro-Indian position in their conflict with the Chinese, and he would later tell Castro that the Chinese were jealous of the Soviet Union's leadership and that they "wanted to be first violin."<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Gavin, 400-402. Under Secretary of State George Ball remarked that it was not "safe to isolate Germany or leave it in with a permanent sense of grievance...[by] her forced exclusion from the nuclear club."

<sup>64</sup> Michael R. Beschloss, *The Crisis Years: Kennedy and Khrushchev, 1960-1963* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1991), 593. It is clear that Khrushchev had this in mind. Edward Harriman, U.S. Under Secretary for Political Affairs, met with Khrushchev in early spring, 1963. According to Harriman, Khrushchev was obsessed with the German question, leading Harriman to say, "Germany? Can't you think of anything else to talk about?" Khrushchev suggested in reply, "I will propose a deal with you. Why not combine a test ban with a German settlement?"

<sup>65</sup> Fursenko and Naftali, *Khrushchev*, 505; Aleksander Fursenko and Timothy Naftali, *"One Hell of a Gamble": Khrushchev, Castro, and Kennedy, 1958-1964* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1997), 323. Khrushchev cut off all aid to Laos in November 1962. He told his colleagues at the Presidium that "What is most important now is peace...We will conclude a peace."

<sup>66</sup> Khrushchev, 553

<sup>67</sup> Fursenko and Naftali, *Khrushchev*, 526-527

<sup>68</sup> Haslam, 193; Fursenko and Naftali, *Khrushchev*, 526, Sergey Radchenko, "The Sino Soviet Split", in *The Cambridge History of the Cold War, Vol. 2*, 355. Khrushchev even went so far as to tell Castro that Mao and the Chinese leadership were not as smart as the Soviets, if not racially inferior: "There will be different colors and different characteristics, and different mental capabilities among people, there will be inequality as in all species of nature."

Perhaps Khrushchev even saw a total brake with China as desirable, so that he could prevent the spread of Chinese influence through open condemnation of their policies.<sup>69</sup> Khrushchev's complete willingness to write off China made reconciliation with the aggrieved Cubans of utmost importance. Cuba was strategically important and ideologically vital; if Cuba joined Albania in aligning themselves with the PRC, it would seriously jeopardize Soviet claims to leadership in socialist movements around the world, and especially in the third world.<sup>70</sup> If the Soviet Union was going to go through with their policy of détente with the United States, it was vital that Castro was brought back onboard first, and in no uncertain terms.

Historians have consistently underestimated the importance of Fidel Castro's trip to the Soviet Union in the coming of the Soviet-U.S. détente. It's true that Castro personally never liked the idea of détente with the United States, but in exchange for enormous economic and military support, along with an increase in the personal status of Castro within the socialist movement and a flattering red carpet treatment in the Soviet Union, Castro knowingly supplied Khrushchev with the political capital necessary to come to a deal with the United States.

Prior to Castro's trip, Khrushchev's position on the signing of a nuclear test ban treaty had been utterly perplexing to the United States. On October 27, 28, and 30, in the wake of the Cuban Missile Crisis, Khrushchev sent letters to Kennedy proposing talks on

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<sup>69</sup> Lévesque, 88-89; Radchenko, 350, 356. Radchenko argues that Khrushchev held much of the responsibility for the Sino-Soviet split, and as early as 1960 was attempting to stall the Chinese nuclear weapons program. The Soviets suspended talks with the Chinese on July 20, while the Soviets were negotiating with the Americans over the terms of the test ban treaty.

<sup>70</sup> Even within the Warsaw Pact there was dissension. Khrushchev had not consulted or informed the Eastern Europeans of his plans to put missiles into Cuba, or his decision to withdraw them. Vladislav Zubok and Constantine Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War, From Stalin to Khrushchev* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 269



a nuclear test ban treaty.<sup>71</sup> Yet, when Kennedy sent a letter to Khrushchev on May 8 1963 with a similar proposal, Khrushchev responded very negatively. On April 3 in a harsh letter to Robert Kennedy, Khrushchev appeared as intransigent as ever.<sup>72</sup> He gave similar impressions to independent peace activist Norman Cousins in a meeting on April 12, and then again to the U.S. and British ambassadors on April 20.<sup>73</sup> However, in his April 26 meeting with Edward Harriman seemed very amicable to the idea of opening negotiations.<sup>74</sup> Then, on July 2, in a speech given in a hall in East Berlin, Khrushchev announced that he was prepared to accept a partial test ban treaty.<sup>75</sup> Why the sudden change of heart? This question has been either ignored by historians, or attributed to the temperamental and unpredictable nature of Khrushchev.<sup>76</sup> It seems more likely that

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<sup>71</sup> Svetlana Savranskaya and William Taubman, 138

<sup>72</sup> Beschloss, 596; Fursenko and Naftali, *Khrushchev*, 517

<sup>73</sup> Fursenko and Naftali, *Khrushchev*, 518-520

<sup>74</sup> Trachtenburg, 388

<sup>75</sup> Fursenko and Naftali, *Khrushchev*, 526; Haslam, 211; Beschloss, 618. Khrushchev didn't have the strength to sign a full non-proliferation treaty because of opposition from the army and his former ally Malinovsky. Malinovsky grumbled even at the signing of the partial test ban treaty. He did have the support of Mikoyan, however, who was in good spirits on July 4, attending an Independence Day reception and telling U.S. ambassador Kohler that his government was ready to "end the cold war."

<sup>76</sup> Beschloss, 598-600, 618 attributes it to Khrushchev hearing Kennedy's "American University" speech on June 9, which apparently persuaded Khrushchev that Kennedy was sincere in his dedication to compromise and peace. Fursenko and Naftali, *Gamble*, 337 agree with this, arguing that the speech drew an "immediate and dramatic response from Khrushchev." While the speech was no doubt encouraging, Kennedy didn't say anything new, and it doesn't explain Khrushchev's amenable comments two weeks prior to the speech, on April 26. Fursenko and Naftali, *Khrushchev*, 519-520 address this inconsistency in the timeline by claiming that on his way back from his Pitsunda meeting with Cousins on April 12, he "brought back...two new convictions: first, that the Berlin issue should no longer be a roadblock to serious U.S.-Soviet agreements, and second, that if a comprehensive test ban would be impossible to achieve with the West, Moscow should accept a partial ban..." And yet, *on the next page*, Fursenko admits that in his meeting three days later with U.S. Ambassador Kohler, Khrushchev took the same line he had taken with Cousins, but that "it was the last time that this lecture represented Soviet foreign policy." I argue that after the Cuban Missile Crisis, Khrushchev decided to shift to a policy of détente, beginning with his late October letters to Kennedy, and the cutting off of aid to Laos in November (in compliance with a promise to Kennedy from the Vienna summit in 1961 that he had been violating), but first felt the need restore the Soviet leadership position in the international socialist movement. The linchpin was Castro's trip.

Khrushchev's change of policy on April 26 is related to the fact that Fidel Castro's plane was in the air as he spoke, and would arrive in Murmansk on the morning of the 27<sup>th</sup>.

Castro would certainly take some convincing if he were to voice support for the Soviet Union. He felt personally insulted and humiliated when Khrushchev "exchanged" Cuba for Turkey with the United States.<sup>77</sup> Castro's "five conditions" for the removal of the missiles had seemingly been completely ignored in the U.S.-Soviet deal; all he got was a verbal promise by John Kennedy to not invade Cuba.<sup>78</sup> Perhaps worst of all, Khrushchev had unilaterally agreed to allow U.N. inspectors onto Cuban territory, a violation of Cuban sovereignty.<sup>79</sup>

Almost immediately, Castro denounced the Soviet "capitulation", and accused Khrushchev of lacking manhood.<sup>80</sup> He made comments that reasserted Cuban freedom of action, and agreed with China that the Soviet Union was wrong to capitulate to imperialism and peaceful coexistence between classes was impossible. Cuba increasingly took a neutral stance in the Sino-Soviet split, as Cuban delegates refused to criticize China or Albania at the Bulgarian, Italian, Czechoslovak, and Chinese party congresses in late 1962 and early 1963. Still worse, Castro criticized the lack of USSR aid to Vietnam and Laos, and questioned Soviet leadership in Eastern Europe and Latin

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<sup>77</sup> Pavlov 48; Quirk, 442-443, 449. Castro took it very personally, indeed. When first heard that Khrushchev and Kennedy had reached a deal he "flew into a rage, kicking the wall and breaking a mirror." He brooded after receiving the news, and refused to meet with Mikoyan for some time. He underwent a physical decline, becoming "gaunt and thin", left the capital for his hideaway in the Sierra Maestra, and even considered resigning. His mood was "somber and apocalyptic."

<sup>78</sup> Pavlov, 50 Castro's five conditions for peace were: 1.) An end to economic sanctions of Cuba, 2.) Cessation of all subversive activities in Cuba, 3.) Cessation of pirate attacks (how Castro described the Bay of Pigs invasion), 4.) Cessation of violations of Cuban airspace and territorial waters, 5.) U.S. withdrawal from Guantanamo Bay.

<sup>79</sup> Fursenko and Naftali, *Khrushchev*, 490-491; Lévesque 92. Unsurprisingly, Castro denied the U.N. inspectors the right to enter Cuba. To add further insult, the Soviets also removed IL-28 bombers, which, unlike the missiles, had already been formally given to Cuba.

<sup>80</sup> Pavlov, 48-49

America, condemning the blind servility of the European “satellites” and the lack of militancy displayed by several Latin American Communist parties.<sup>81</sup> Yet, despite the rhetoric, Cuba still very much needed the Soviet Union, and China did not have the power or the reach to be a viable substitute. As it became increasingly clear that the sugar harvest of 1963 would be poor, Castro became more open to Soviet overtures for reconciliation.<sup>82</sup>

In March, Castro publically began to change his attitude. In a confusing sequence of events, on March 21-22, Parisian newspaper *Le Monde* published exclusive interview with Castro in which he strongly criticized Khrushchev’s actions in the Cuban Missile Crisis, and supported China. But the next day, Castro distanced himself from the article, and denied giving an interview (although he admitted having “informal talks” with a *Le Monde* editor).<sup>83</sup> A few days later Castro told the director of *Revolución* of his “profound respect and friendship” for Nikita Khrushchev, and the “indestructible friendship” between Cuba and the Soviet Union. It is no coincidence just a few days prior the Soviet Union granted a large loan to Cuba.<sup>84</sup>

It seems likely that Castro had an understanding of the general compromise that would be reached with the Soviet Union well in advance of his actual arrival. Castro was to reaffirm Soviet leadership in the international socialist movement, publicly denounce Chinese policies, and exult the development of socialism in the Soviet Union (which would consist of expressing admiration for the happiness and industriousness of the

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<sup>81</sup> Lévesque, 91-92; Quirk, 451-452; Duncan, 42

<sup>82</sup> Shearman, 12-13; Quirk, 446. Mikoyan was in Cuba for three weeks trying to patch up relations in November 1962, while his wife lay dying in Moscow.

<sup>83</sup> Lester A. Sobel, ed., *Cuba, The U.S. & Russia, 1960-63: A journalistic narrative of events in Cuba and of Cuban Relations with the U.S. and the Soviet Union* (New York: Facts of File, Inc., 1964), 125-126

<sup>84</sup> Quirk, 455

Soviet worker, applauding Soviet industry, infrastructure, technology, and agriculture, and emphasizing the cohesiveness of the many nationalities of the Soviet Union, especially in Central Asia). He would even agree to focus the resources of Cuba on sugar production at the expense of diversification and industrialization. In exchange, Cuba received substantial military and economic aid, and a Soviet “nuclear guarantee” against potential U.S. invaders.<sup>85</sup>

Soviet-Cuban negotiations during the trip were mostly informal, and largely took place within Khrushchev’s dachas at Zavidovo and Pitsunda. Castro asked Khrushchev about the Sino-Soviet split, and Khrushchev lectured Castro about paying closer attention to domestic enemies within Cuba. Khrushchev was always committed to unequivocal protection of Cuba, but hoped to reduce the Soviet footprint in Cuba to assuage U.S. fears. He tried to convince Castro that it was in Cuba’s interest to not be brought into the Warsaw Pact and that some Soviet soldiers should be removed from Cuba. Castro tried to get the USSR to increase their support for national-liberation movements, with some success.<sup>86</sup> Throughout, the talks were cordial, and all parties left satisfied. The agreements were made public through speeches made by Castro and Khrushchev, and the joint Soviet-Cuban communiqué of May 23.<sup>87</sup> While Castro’s ideological concessions

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<sup>85</sup> Duncan, 44; Fursenko and Naftali, *Gamble*, 334

<sup>86</sup> Fursenko and Naftali, *Gamble*, 329-334 Khrushchev agreed to send weapons to Ahmed Ben Bella in Algeria.

<sup>87</sup>G. E. Mamedov, Angel Dalmau, et. al., *Rossiia-Kuba, 1902-2002: Dokumenti e Materiali* (Moskva: Mezhdunarodnii Otnoshenia, 2004), 186-202. On Soviet leadership in the international socialist movement: “We are sure that our people will not be defeated, for there are two conditions absolutely indispensable for a victory—there is the revolutionary and patriotic spirit of our people, and the solidarity of the socialist camp with the Soviet Union at its head.” Fidel Castro, speech at Red Square, April 28, 1963. On peaceful coexistence with non-socialist states: “Cuba has declared its wish to live in peace and maintain normal relations with all countries of the continent, including the United States... The power of the socialist camp bridles bellicose adventures...” Fidel Castro, speech at Soviet-Cuban Friendship Rally, Lenin Stadium, May 23, 1963. On Khrushchev’s handling of the Cuban Missile Crisis: They [the imperialists] abandoned

seem significant, the agreement was essentially non-binding; by autumn 1963 the Cubans were again returning to a more neutral position between the Soviet Union and China and emphasizing the need for armed struggle as opposed to peaceful coexistence. They did not sign the nuclear test ban treaty.<sup>88</sup>

Both sides benefitted from the 1963 trip and agreements. Castro, in the final analysis, gave up very little, and received a great deal of aid. His prestige in the international socialist movement was certainly raised after the trip. For Castro, rhetoric was much cheaper than military and economic aid, and he had few qualms with modifying his rhetoric as he saw fit in later months. Frustrating as Castro's lack of loyalty was for Khrushchev, he got what he needed at that time. The Soviet-Cuban alliance was reaffirmed in as strong and public a manner as possible, and he could now proceed with his policy of peaceful coexistence with the United States.<sup>89</sup>

## Conclusion

The journey of the Cuban delegation through the Soviet Union in 1963 was remarkable for its duration and its fanfare. It is hard to find other trips by political figures

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their plans to invade our country only after the October crisis... The Soviet country, which during the Great Patriotic War against fascism lost more people than the entire Cuban population defending its right to live and create the enormous riches that it now has, did not hesitate to risk the danger of a terrible war in defense of our small country. History does not know of any other such example of solidarity. This is internationalism! This is communism!" Fidel Castro, speech at Soviet-Cuban Friendship Rally, Lenin Stadium, May 23, 1963.

<sup>88</sup> Lévesque, 95-97

<sup>89</sup> The signing of the partial test ban treaty did not end Soviet fears of West German nuclearization; indeed concerns far outweighed Khrushchev's tenure as First Secretary. Even in 1967, Kosygin felt it necessary to tell British Foreign Secretary George Brown in regard to Bonn's acquisition of nuclear weapons that they "would use force to prevent it. This was a categorical position." Still, the treaty was an important step in the direction of détente, and would be built upon by Brezhnev in 1960s and 70s. The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty was signed in 1968. Khrushchev's hope for a new Rapallo was partially realized with the coming of Willy Brandt's *Ostpolitik* in the early 1970s. Haslam, 242; Jussi M. Hanhimäki, "Détente in Europe, 1962-1975" in *The Cambridge History of the Cold War, Vol. 2*, 209-212; Gavin, 409-412

that match it, and it was certainly unprecedented in the history of the Soviet Union.<sup>90</sup>

Castro himself would journey to the Soviet Union several more times, but none matched the spectacle of his first trip. Even today, the scene of Khrushchev hugging Castro is one of the most famous images of the Cold War. In the Soviet Union, Castro found neither the capitulation of Canossa nor the gold mine of El Dorado. He found an ally, to be sure, but a shrew one, with divergent interests.

Many notable achievements came out of Fidel Castro's stay in the Soviet Union. As argued above, it gave Khrushchev the political capital to pursue a policy of détente with the United States. It also increased knowledge and awareness of Cuba to the general Soviet population, and the image of the exotic and youthful Cuban had a definite affect on Soviet popular culture. The Soviet-Cuban Friendship Society, founded in 1964 with Yuri Gagarin as president, shows that positive feelings for Cuba persisted for well over a year.<sup>91</sup> Finally, it guaranteed that the Soviet-Cuban alliance would persist for the foreseeable future, and left the door open for thousands more Cuban students and workers to come to the Soviet Union for an education.

Equally notable, however, are the failures. Soviet-Cuban relations remained fairly good until the fall of Khrushchev in late 1964. A period of sustained poor relations subsequently ensued, and there was little improvement until the end of the decade. The general Soviet population also began to sour towards Cuba in the mid-1960s. As the initial enthusiasm subsided, many Soviets came to view Cuba as a parasite, which

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<sup>90</sup> Peter the Great's "Grand Embassy," comes to mind, and more recently, Winston Churchill's trips to the United States and Canada, John F. Kennedy's trip to Berlin, various Papal tours, and Barack Obama's trip to Europe in 2008. All seem, however, imperfect comparisons with Castro's trip.

<sup>91</sup> Gorsuch, 522-523, although Gorsuch interprets the "friendship society" as "suggestive, perhaps, of the increasing formality of the relationship."

syphoned off much needed resources, with very little gratitude.<sup>92</sup> Castro's trip may have created more awareness of Cuba among the Soviet population, but before long they had seen enough; the heroic image faded away in sight of Cuba as it really was.

Spring 1963 was a time of high tension in the world, both on the scale of international relations, and in terms of the domestic situation within the Soviet Union. It was the right place and the right time for a charismatic figure like Fidel Castro to have maximum impact. There was no repeat performance for Castro in subsequent years, and later leaders from socialist movements, like Daniel Ortega, experienced nothing similar to the events of 1963. Regardless of the course of Soviet-Cuban relations in ensuing years, Castro's trip the Soviet Union is an indelible example of transnational goodwill, and a scene from the Cold War that will never be forgotten.

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<sup>92</sup> Gorsuch, 522-524; Leonid Parfenov, "Kuba—liubov' moia!", in Parfenov, *Namedni: Nasha era, 1961-1970* (Moscow, 2009). One Soviet satirist put it this way: "Cuba, give back our bread / Cuba, take back your sugar / We're fed up with bearded Fidel / Cuba, go fuck yourself."

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