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Reagan and Cuba: An Analysis of U.S. Foreign Policy in the 1980s

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Abstract

Though U.S.-Cuba relations during Reagan years have been studied from various perspectives, scholars have not taken the Reagan's approach to diplomacy and Cuba's foreign policy into consideration, in addition to domestic politics and the global Cold War context. The primary aim of this thesis is to identify the major characteristic of Reagan's Cuba policy and how they emerged. Address this issue improves understanding of U.S.-Cuba relations in the 1980s and the major dynamics in the politics of U.S. Cuba policy. To achieve this, this thesis reviews primary source and secondary source from mid-1950s to 1989 and discusses four main aspects of U.S. policy: an intensified blockade of Cuba, the immigration agreement of 1984, Radio Martí and public diplomacy, and covert actions. The concluding reasons highlighted here are legacies from the past that shaped Reagan's Cold War diplomacy, realignment of domestic political forces and the rise of the Cuban-American community, changing international context, and Cuban foreign policy. The Cuban government's foreign policy, in turn, was driven by its need for survival and also shaped Reagan's Cuba policy. Cuba's connection with USSR and its interventionist activities in Central America also contributed a lot to aggression from Reagan's administration.

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Introduction

Overview and Context

In 1987, U.S.-Cuban relations steadily worsened. Joseph Treaster noted in the *New York Times* that “in the last few months, the United States and Cuba have traded a flurry of diplomatic jabs that have brought relations between the two mutually antagonistic countries to the lowest point in at least a decade.”¹ A year before, the United States had launched a campaign with the UN Human Rights Commission to condemn Cuba for its human rights record. In December 1986, a reconnaissance overflight in Cuban territory generated days of demonstrations outside the U.S. interests section in Havana.² In February 1987, the head of that interests section, Curtis W. Kamman, was reassigned. In July, tensions culminated as Cuba claimed that U.S. diplomats had been involved in spying and supported the charge with hours of videotape.³ It seemed at that time that the interests section, the last remnant of the Carter administration’s efforts to normalize relations with Cuba, might be closed.

It is necessary to contextualize Reagan’s policy toward Cuba historically. In the mid-1970s, President Jimmy Carter made several conciliatory gestures almost immediately after his inauguration, conveying the message that efforts to improve relations with Cuba would be one of the administration’s top priorities. During Carter’s first weeks in office, reconnaissance overflights were quietly cancelled. In March 1977, Carter did not renew the ban on travel to Cuba. More importantly, the ban on expenditures in Cuba was also lifted (the Reagan administration would restore this ban four years later). The Carter administration was intent on easing the tensions between Cuba and the United States. However, the warming trend would be partially reversed before Reagan’s election. U.S.-Cuba relations became increasingly hostile because of Cuban interference in Africa.

The Carter administration’s shift in attitude toward Cuba was bequeathed to Ronald Reagan at the end of 1980.⁴ Carter’s unsuccessful efforts to normalize relations made Reagan firmly believe that the U.S. policy toward Cuba failed because it was not effectively tough. Besides, Carter’s policies in Central

¹ Joseph Treaster, ‘Downward Spiral for U.S.-Cuba Ties’, *The New Yorker Times*, May 2 1987.

² In 1977, the United States and Cuba established interests sections in each other’s capitals to carry out the functions of embassies. This was the first time in 16 years since President Eisenhower broke diplomatic relations with Cuba in 1961.

³ William M. LeoGrande, and Peter Kornbluh, *Back Channel to Cuba: The Hidden History of Negotiations between Washington and Havana* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2015), p.247.

⁴ Philip Brenner, *From Confrontation to Negotiation: U.S. Relations with Cuba* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1988), p.23.

America were widely viewed as failures.⁵ Reagan first demonstrated hostility toward Cuba early in his 1980 presidential campaign, repeatedly suggesting that a blockade be imposed on the island in retaliation for Soviet invasion into Afghanistan.⁶ As a result, although U.S.-Cuban relations were already strained at the end of Carter's presidency, the Reagan administration took an even more hostile stance.⁷

Research Questions

U.S.-Cuban relations since the Cuban Revolution has been the focus of many studies. In terms of the Reagan administration, it is widely acknowledged that after Reagan took office in 1981, he changed the moderate policy toward Cuba by his predecessor, adopting a hardline approach. However, this transition from moderation to aggression was not immediate. The policies of the Reagan administration become more complicated when the internal and external context of the 1980s are taken into consideration. In what areas did Reagan change Cuba policy? Why did the Reagan administration make such changes? Did the Cuban challenge change during Reagan's presidency? How did the domestic politics and international context exert influence on policymaking? These are the primary questions this thesis will address.

Historiography

Literature on this topic covers a wide range of subjects. Scholars and politicians have focused on documenting of U.S.-Cuban relations in this period and the evolvement of the respective policies of each nation. Antonio R. de la Cova has explained the significant shifts and incidents from 1981 to 1988 chronologically and concluded that the Reagan administration adopted economic and political pressure to force Cuba back to the negotiating table.⁸ But other scholars like Jorge I. Dominguez have criticized U.S. policy for being too harsh on Cuba. Reviewing U.S. policy toward Cuba in the 1980s and 1990s, Dominguez asserts that the fatal weakness in U.S. policymaking was insufficient dedication to negotiating and an overvaluation of penalties. He also argues that the adoption of tough stance toward Cuba in this period was a result of the domestic political pressure.⁹

William M. LeoGrande, and Peter Kornbluh take a deeper look into the evolution of relations between

⁵ Howard J. Wiarda, *American Foreign Policy toward Latin America in the 80s and 90s – Issues and Controversies from Reagan to Bush* (London and New York: New York University Press, 1992), p.18.

⁶ Adam Clymer, 'Reagan Suggests Blockade of Cuba on Soviets' Move into Afghanistan', *The New York Times*, January 28, 1980.

⁷ Brenner, *From Confrontation to Negotiation*, p.31.

⁸ Antonio R. de la Cova, 'U.S.-Cuba Relations During the Reagan Administration', in *President Reagan and the World*, ed. Eric J. Schmertz, Natalie Datlof, Alexej Ugrinsky (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1997), pp. 381-391.

⁹ Jorge I. Dominguez, 'U.S. Policy Toward Cuba in the 1980s and 1990s', *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 533, no. 1 (1994), 165-176.

Cuba and the U.S., exploring the hidden history of negotiation between Washington and Havana.¹⁰ LeoGrande and Kornbluh argue that domestic politics played a role in foreign policy on both sides. Reagan was determined to restore America's global dominance by taking the offensive from the start. Cuba was worried and sent overtures first, starting the hidden negotiations. Kenneth Skoug recorded his experience as the coordinator of Cuban Affairs in the State Department from 1982 to 1988, but Skoug's book is mainly the tedious details of how the two parties maneuvered and their negotiation over two concerns, namely the migration problem and Radio Martí.¹¹ Context about the application of the Reagan Doctrine towards Cuba and the Cuban presence in Central America are missing. Wayne S. Smith provides a personal diplomatic account of U.S.-Cuban relations from 1957 to the Reagan administration, lamenting the mistakes and missed opportunities on the part of Reagan's administration.¹² Philip Brenner's book is a mixture of scholarship and policy proposals. He briefly reviews U.S.-Cuban relations during the Reagan administration and argues that the longstanding isolation policy to Cuba was not only harmful to the enemy but also to the national interest of the United States.¹³

Scholars have also studied the role of Cuban ethnic groups in Reagan's Cuba policy agenda. Patrick J. Haney, and Walt Vanderbush explore the case of the Cuban American National Foundation (CANF), confirming the important influence it had in U.S. politics, especially on Cuban issues.¹⁴ Maria de los Angeles Torres reviews the history of Cuban exiles in the U.S. and their struggle for an opportunity in both American society and the political arena.¹⁵ There is also work examining the role of CANF in the Reagan administration and its effectiveness in shaping policies toward Cuba. Maria Garcia discusses the different groups of Cuban exiles in the U.S., mainly the segment that favors dialogue with the Castro government in the hope of political reforms.¹⁶ Many studies review Cuba from multiple angles. Domínguez discusses the economic, political, and historical roots of Cuban foreign policy.¹⁷ Luis E and Rubén G. Rumbaut have

¹⁰ LeoGrande, and Kornbluh, *Back Channel to Cuba*.

¹¹ Kenneth N. Skoug, *The United States and Cuba Under Reagan and Shultz: A Foreign Service Officer Reports*. (London: Praeger, 1996).

¹² Wayne S. Smith, *The Closest of Enemies: A Personal and Diplomatic Account of U.S.-Cuban Relations since 1957* (London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1987).

¹³ Brenner, *From Confrontation to Negotiation*.

¹⁴ Patrick Haney, and Walt Vanderbush. 'The Role of Ethnic Interest Groups in U.S. Foreign Policy: The Case of the Cuban American National Foundation', *International Studies Quarterly* 43, no. 2 (1999): pp. 341-361; *The Cuban Embargo: The Domestic Politics of an American Foreign Policy* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2005).

¹⁵ María de los Angeles Torres, *In the Land of Mirrors: Cuban Exile Politics in the United States*. 1st pbk. ed. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001).

¹⁶ Maria C. Garcia, 'Hardliners v. 'Dialogueros': Cuban Exile Political Groups and United States-Cuba Policy', *Journal of American Ethnic History* 17, no. 4 (1998): pp.3-28.

¹⁷ Jorge I. Domínguez. *To Make a World Safe for Revolution: Cuba's Foreign Policy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989).

examined the Cuban revolution with a focus on its survival in 50 years of confrontation with the U.S.¹⁸

These studies have contributed significantly to our understandings of U.S.-Cuban relations in the 1980s, both in terms of how they evolved as well as factors that influenced them. This topic has been studied predominantly from the perspective of wider Cold War tensions, with undervaluation of Cuba and domestic political change in the United States. This thesis will review Cuba policy during Reagan's presidency and evaluate the related factors contributing to it, ultimately aiming to identify the major changes of Reagan's Cuba policy and what caused them. Unlike previous studies, Reagan's diplomatic worldview and Cuba's foreign policy will also be included in discussion to find out the motives of Reagan's decision in making Cuba policy.

Methodology

For this research paper, my methodological approach was as follows: Firstly, I identified my research topic as U.S.-Cuban relations in the 1980s. I then identified research questions regarding changes to Cuba policy and what caused these shifts. My historiography was compiled to help locate my topic in the literature and reveal the research gaps this thesis will address. Using a wide range of primary and secondary sources, I carried out research with clear objectives to answer the above research questions. The primary sources are documents from Foreign Relations of the United States, Digital National Security Archive, meeting records, diaries, memoirs, written testimonies, archives, etc. The secondary sources include journal articles, encyclopedias, newspapers, biographies, and films.

Argument

The Cold War *détente* ended when the Soviets invaded Afghanistan in 1979 and receded from view after Reagan's electoral victory in 1980, which marked a renewal of hostilities. During the Carter administration, there were debates over foreign policy towards Cuba. Under Reagan, however, there was unremitting opposition to the Castro regime.¹⁹ For its part, Cuba did not articulate an anti-American policy all through Reagan's presidency. Instead, Castro sent signals for negotiation since Reagan's early days in office. I argue that the escalation of U.S. hostility toward Cuba was a product of the combined influence from multiple forces, domestically and internationally. Reagan's Cold Warrior approach laid the foundations for these hardline policies. His personal concepts about the Cold War were deeply shaped by

¹⁸ Luis E. Rumbaut, and Rubén G. Rumbaut. 'Survivor Cuba: The Cuban Revolution at 50', *Latin American Perspectives* 36, no. 1 (2009): pp.84-98.

¹⁹ Tony Platt, 'The United States, Cuba, and the New Cold War', *Social Justice* 15, no. 2 (32) (1988): pp.4-21.

diplomatic legacies from the past. Changing international context also impacted Reagan's choices, making him adopt more aggressive policies in Latin America to maintain U.S. superiority over the Soviet Union. Further, the realignment of domestic political forces facilitated a "new hard line"²⁰ in the Reagan administration, which encouraged coercive measures toward Cuba. The political influence of this right-wing ideology on the Reagan administration was accountable for uncompromising anticommunism and hostility to Cuba. Besides, within the United States, the Cuban-American community was a new but powerful political force that helped Reagan articulate anti-Castro policies. Finally, Cuban foreign policy was a major influencing factor to Reagan's approach. The ideological conflict was rooted in Cuba's desperate need for survival since 1959 and this was at the core of Cuban foreign policy.

What this thesis tries to add to historical understanding primarily is the complexity of policymaking via examining extensively the multiple factors shaping Reagan's aggression against Cuba. Another point I attempt to explore here is why the normalization of U.S.-Cuba relations was still dimmed during Reagan-Gorbachev thaw. I include the changes of Cold War context in the late 1970s and from 1985 to 1989. Surprisingly, Reagan's rapprochement with Gorbachev did not bring immediate reconciliation with Cuba. He still authorized Radio Martí when he was attempting to negotiate with Soviet leader. After studying the policy changes through his both terms, I also contend that Reagan's unremitting antagonism against Cuba is less consistent and aggressive than he claimed. This is partly because he paid more attention to the leftist movement in Nicaragua and El Salvador. And just because of this, communist Cuba was used as a powerful excuse to build up momentum for tough policy in Central America. This explains why Reagan-Gorbachev thaw did not bring about fundamental changes in Reagan's Cuba policy. Another reason for the lasting aggression is the pressure from Cuban Americans, CANF in particular. Radio Martí, which caused U.S.-Cuba tensions again in 1985, was largely a product of CANF pressure on the executive branch.

²⁰ Platt, 'The United States, Cuba, and the New Cold War', pp.4-21.

Chapter 1: U.S.-Cuba Relations, 1959-1980

This chapter examines U.S.-Cuban relations in the period that preceded Ronald Reagan's presidency. This context is important because it shaped the decisions and policies that were available to Reagan. The first section discusses the Cuban Revolution as a starting point. 1959 saw the victory of Castro and also the emergence of antagonism between the U.S. and Cuba, which has now lasted for more than half a century. The second section provides a retrospective of U.S.-Cuban relations through 1960s and 1970s within the wider frame of the global Cold War. The third section discusses the anticommunism in the U.S. after WWII.

1.1 The Cuban Revolution

Every revolutionary movement is unique. While uniqueness can be over-emphasized in the literature, the particular qualities of the Cuban revolution are apparent.²¹ It is surprising that the Castro regime survives until today when taking into consideration its geographical closeness to and ideological opposition against the United States. Antoni Kapcia proposed a persuasive explanation for this uniqueness, linking it to Cuba's prolonged colonialism from the 15th century until 1898.²² Locally born whites in Cuba enjoyed privilege and refused the idea of independence from Spain. In 1898, after succeeding in the Spanish-American War, the United States inherited Cuba, Puerto Rico, the Philippines, and Guam from the decaying Spanish Empire. Only Cuba and the Philippines would acquire independence from the U.S. Cuba's independence came in 1902 after a four-year military occupation, but was limited as the U.S. only permitted it if Cuba agreed to introduce the Platt Amendment²³ into its constitution, which granted the U.S. specific rights to intervene in Cuban affairs. This is the second explanation of its uniqueness by Kapcia: the neocolonialism that lasted for thirty-two years.²⁴ As Cuba transformed from a colony of Spain to a quasi-colony of the U.S., American presence in Cuba, especially in economic affairs, created a universal

²¹ Antoni Kapcia, *Cuba in Revolution: A History since the Fifties* (London: Reaktion Books, 2008), p. 7.

²² *Ibid*, p. 8.

²³ Platt Amendment: introduced by Senator Orville H. Platt in February 25, 1901 and approved by Congress in March 2, 1901, this amendment stipulated seven conditions for the U.S. to withdraw troops from Cuba. It actually limited Cuban sovereignty by allowing the U.S. to intervene Cuban affairs.

²⁴ Kapcia, *Cuba in Revolution*, p. 8.

resentment among the post-independence generation.²⁵

From then until 1959, Cuba went through decades of chaotic presidencies – eleven in total. Among them were two U.S.-supported dictatorships under Gerardo Machado and Fulgencio Batista, with occasional U.S. military intervention, interim and acting presidents. Batista became chief executive of Cuba after Machado in 1933 and manipulated several puppet presidents until 1940 when he made himself elected president of Cuba. Finishing his term in 1944, Batista moved to Florida, came back and took power with a military coup in 1952. Batista's dictatorship got financial and military support from the U.S. that brought stability as well as dependence. Characterized by dictatorship, corruption and brutality, the Batista regime encountered widespread opposition from all classes of Cuban society, with an underground movement in the cities and guerrillas in rural areas. Among the latter arose the most prominent group led by Fidel Castro who headed the failed attack against the army's Moncada Barracks in Santiago on July 26, 1953. Fidel and his brother Raul Castro were captured and imprisoned along with a number of key revolutionaries. Fidel Castro was sentenced to 15 years and Raul Castro to 13 years. Only two years later in 1955, with U.S. support and no domestic opposition, the confident Batista government announced amnesty and released all political prisoners.

The Castro brothers were among those freed. They were exiled to Mexico and started to organize a new rebel movement in earnest with the aid of Argentine radical Ernesto ("Che") Guevara. The group prepared for guerilla combat as well as clandestine resistance in the cities of Cuba. While they were organizing, student demonstrations in Cuba became increasingly common since unemployment for graduates was a major problem. Finally, in December 1956, the Castro brothers and eighty rebels sailed back to Cuba using an American yacht, the *Granma*. The yacht was delayed due to overloading, disrupting their original plan to coordinate with an uprising near Santiago.

The rebel group met with military resistance and then went to the Sierra Maestra where they reorganized and established a guerilla base. With the assistance of local peasants, the group grew in numbers and engaged in urban resistance. Fidel Castro rose as a prominent opposition leader to Batista. It was during this process that Castro's political perspectives went beyond political rebellion to anti-imperialism and social revolution.²⁶

²⁵ Jules R. Benjamin, *The United States and Cuba: Hegemony and Dependent Development, 1880-1934* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1977), p. 6.

²⁶ *Ibid*, p. 23.

Batista responded to the opposition with growing brutality until the U.S. cut arms shipments to Cuba in 1958. Simultaneously, the growing opposition from guerrillas demoralized the Cuban army. As a result, the Batista regime was weakened day by day until Castro launched a final attack, defeating the government's army. Batista fled the island on the last day of 1958. On January 1, 1959, Guevara marched into Havana and Castro arrived on January 8, marking the victory of the Cuban Revolution.

This newly founded Cuba was a substantially different one but still carried many of the same problems. Economic dependence on sugar exports and severe inequality within the country as well as a disordered political system were among the major issues that required prompt responses from the new government. However, something new was added to the revolutionary regime. An increasingly unchallengeable position and growing hatred for the U.S. characterized the Castro regime. Before the U.S. officially cut off relations with Cuba, the small island was in a vacuum under which the revolutionary forces competed for authority. From a Cuban perspective, the period ranging from the success of the revolution to 1961, was marked by matters of social reform, economic problems, and the relations with the United States.

1.2 U.S. Foreign Policy and Cuba in the 1960s-70s

This section provides an overview of U.S. position toward Cuba from the presidencies of Eisenhower to Carter. The focus on presidencies is justified by the major role that presidents and their administrations play in defining U.S. foreign policy. The general point of this section is that U.S.-Cuban relations were consistently tense during the period, with slight easing and prospects for future normalization during the early stages of the Carter administration.

Eisenhower (1959-1961)

As the guerilla groups struggled fiercely and the corruption inside the Batista government grew, United States government suspended arms shipments to Cuba in March 1958. Before the final defeat of Batista, the United States was looking for a “non-Batista and non-Castro solution” to the Cuban problem.²⁷

There have long been debates over whether the hostile stance of the Americans pushed Cuba to embrace

²⁷ Haney, and Vanderbush. *The Cuban Embargo*, p.13.

Soviet Union and Socialist Bloc.²⁸ Initially, the U.S. policymakers were uncertain how deeply Castro's movement was connected to international communism. A telegram from the U.S. embassy in Havana to the Department of State in November 1958 expressed this sense of worry: "Our information on this subject to date is dangerously inconclusive".²⁹ The U.S. Ambassador Earl E.T. Smith in Havana sent a telegram back to Washington stating "I am deeply concerned over the evidence of communism in the Raul Castro group."³⁰ Washington still recognized this new Cuban government on January 7, 1959.

This serenity did not last for long. Castro made his spectacular 1959 trip to the United States. The context was changing as the anti-Castro force grew increasingly overt within the Eisenhower administration. This was due to Castro's plans to carry out agrarian reform and nationalize foreign property, anti-U.S. rhetoric, and connection with other Central and South American leftists. Castro's visit was received with both restrained etiquette and obvious hostility. Eisenhower did not meet the Cuban revolutionary and went golfing instead. Castro met Vice President Richard Nixon for nearly four hours. Nixon concluded in a memorandum that Castro was "either incredibly naïve about Communism or under Communist discipline."³¹ Personally, Nixon hoped his talk to Castro would reorient him to the direction that the U.S. favored. This expectation was most likely an illusion since the vice president wrote later: "I became a leading advocate for efforts to overthrow Castro."³²

Castro's trip to the U.S. was a turning point in U.S.-Cuban relations. Castro's subsequent agrarian reform plan led to strong response from property owners. Meanwhile, more and more Cubans fled to America. So, before the government took action, public opinion towards Cuba in the U.S. had begun to shift and become critical of "cautious" government.³³ Some historians argue that Castro took the socialist road because the U.S. rejected his economic and social reforms in Cuba. It was true that Washington was afraid of any reforms in Latin America at that time, especially ones that might lead to the expropriation of

²⁸ Smith, in *The Closest of Enemies*, contended that the United States forced Castro into the arms of Soviet Union. In *Cuban in Revolution*, Kapcia asserted that the ideology in Cuba after 1961 was not fundamentally different from what had been adopted by many Cubans during 1959-1961 or even in preceding thirty years. Saul Landau did a more comprehensive probe into this question in 'Asking the Right Questions About China', *Race & Class*, (1987) 29(2): pp. 53-68.

²⁹ 'Telegram from the Embassy in Cuba to the Department of State', *Foreign Relations of the United States*, <<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1958-60v06/d152>> [accessed 3 September 2021].

³⁰ 'Telegram from the Embassy in Cuba to the Department of State', *Foreign Relations of The United States*, <<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1958-60v06/d103>> [accessed 3 September 2021].

³¹ Richard M. Nixon, *Six Crises* (New York, Doubleday & Co., 1962), pp. 351-352.

³² Peter Kornbluh, *Bay of Pigs Declassified: The Secret CIA Report on the Invasion of Cuba* (New York: The New Press, 1998), p. 267.

³³ Jules R. Benjamin, *The United States and the Origins of the Cuban Revolution: An Empire of Liberty in an Age of National Liberation* (Oxford; Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990), p. 185.

American properties.³⁴ But the U.S. was not completely unhappy about the coming reforms according to Roy Rubottom, the assistant secretary of State for American Republics Affairs, who claimed that Washington supported the reforms in principle.³⁵ So the crux of the issue would be an impatience with negotiation and the preconditioned antagonism between both parties.

Soon after Castro's visit, the Eisenhower administration began to engage in aggressive activities against Cuba. Plans were approved to support Castro opponents, build a radio station and train a paramilitary force and intelligence organization.³⁶ After several exchanges of retaliatory moves, Eisenhower finally ended diplomatic relations with Cuba in January 3, 1961. Meanwhile, he suspended all trade with Cuba, marking the beginning of the longest economic blockade in global history. From then on, U.S. policy towards the island tended to have two connected goals: to destabilize Cuba and overthrow the Castro regime.

Kennedy (1961-1963)

Kennedy announced at his inauguration that he would continue the tough foreign policy and anticommunist rhetoric of Eisenhower. But the execution of his foreign policy did not live up to the "stirring rhetoric of his inaugural speech."³⁷ Like Eisenhower, Kennedy worked with small group of senior officials to dictate Cuba policy. But there were still dissenting voices. Kornbluh notes that "the State Department took a much cooler view, primarily because of its belief that the political consequences would be very grave in the United Nations and in Latin America."³⁸ Wayne Smith, a prominent Cuba expert, stated that the experts on Cuba were absent in the decision-making process leading to the Bay of Pigs fiasco. Senator William Fulbright, a strong advocate of Cuba's isolation, was among the politicians who clearly opposed the invasion because he was concerned about the political consequences and economic impacts for the U.S. in the region. Kennedy's senior officials described him as "a prisoner of events" enacted by the Eisenhower administration over which he had no control.³⁹

The Kennedy administration did not reconstruct its policy towards Cuba afterwards but stuck to the old

³⁴ See Maurice Zeitlin & Robert Scheer, *Cuba: Tragedy in Our Hemisphere* (New York: Grove Press, 1963), they argued that Washington would not tolerate a reform in Cuba leading to confiscate U.S. property. The U.S. pursued a policy that forced Cuba to the arm of Soviet.

³⁵ Smith, *The Closest of Enemies*, p. 47.

³⁶ Kornbluh, *Bay of Pigs Declassified*, pp. 267-269.

³⁷ *Department of State*, 'Kennedy's Foreign Policy', <<https://history.state.gov/departmenthistory/short-history/jfk-foreignpolicy>> [accessed 3 September 2021].

³⁸ Kornbluh, *Bay of Pigs Declassified*, p. 288.

³⁹ Arthur M. Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House* (London: Deutsch, 1965), p.256.

one: to overthrow the Castro regime. But the main tactics shifted to covert influence and isolationist strategy. In August 1961, Kennedy approved another CIA project of covert operations against Cuba. Senior officials within government suggested enhanced economic embargo and covert actions.⁴⁰ Finally, in December 1961, a new program, Operation Mongoose, was developed to give higher priority to Cuba.⁴¹ A series of operations were launched under the program, to achieve economic, political, psychological effects in Cuba.⁴² As a result of Kennedy's efforts, the Organization of American States (OAS) agreed to suspend membership of Cuba and banned all Cuban imports and re-exports of American goods from a third country in 1962.

In October 1962, the Cuban Missile Crisis broke out and is widely considered as one of the hottest points during the Cold War.⁴³ The two superpowers solved the crisis without consulting Cuba. The crisis was substantially a confrontation between the U.S. and Soviet Union. Castro was unsatisfied with this and the agreement was a "stinging defeat" to him.⁴⁴

In 1963, Kennedy banned financial transactions with Cuba by American citizens as well as travel to Cuba. Kennedy did not seek for relaxation in Cuba policy even after the successful resolution of the missile crisis. On the contrary, he tightened diplomatic strategy and intensified economic blockade against Cuba. Cuba's active military support for Latin American revolutions, its rapprochement with the Soviet Union after 1968, and its rejection of U.S. hegemony in this region were the core of the U.S.-Cuba confrontation.⁴⁵ An audio tape revealed that only seventeen days before the assassination, Kennedy discussed with his security adviser the possibility of secret dialogue with Castro.⁴⁶ But U.S.-Cuba relation remained generally hostile throughout the 1960s.

⁴⁰ Kornbluh, *Bay of Pigs Declassified*, p.325.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, p.326.

⁴² 'Memorandum from the Department of State Operations Officer for Operation Mongoose (Hurwitch) to the Chief of Operations, Operation Mongoose (Lansdale)', *Foreign Relations of the United States*, <<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v10/d355>> [accessed 3 September 2021].

⁴³ See Laurie Collier Hillstrom, *Defining Moments: The Cuban Missile Crisis*. (Detroit: Omnigraphics, 2015); Raymond L. Garthoff, *Reflections on the Cuban Missile Crisis*. Rev. ed. (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1989); Håkan Karlsson and Tomás Díez Acosta, *The Missile Crisis from a Cuban Perspective: Historical, Archaeological and Anthropological Reflections*. (Routledge Studies in the History of the Americas. 2019); Sergo Mikoyan, *The Soviet Cuban Missile Crisis: Castro, Mikoyan, Kennedy, Khrushchev, and the Missiles of November*, ed. by Svetlana Savranskaya (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2012).

⁴⁴ 'Kennedy, Khrushchev and Castro', *The New York Times*, November 3, 1962.

⁴⁵ Juan M. Del Aguila, *Cuba, Dilemmas of a Revolution*. 3rd ed (Oxford: Westview Press, 1994), p. 125.

⁴⁶ 'Kennedy Sought Dialogue with Cuba', *The National Security Archive*, <<https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB103/index.htm>> [accessed 5 March 2022].

Johnson (1963-1969)

The growing involvement of the United States in the Vietnam War after 1964 offered a slight reprieve for Castro and his regime. President Lyndon Johnson mostly inherited Kennedy's key policies toward Cuba. According to an official involved in an early White House meeting, Johnson "indicated his desire to press ahead with the global isolation policy."⁴⁷ The Johnson administration confronted Cuba directly in the "water crisis" in February 1964 when Cuba stopped the water supply to the U.S. naval base at Guantanamo in retaliation for the confiscation of Cuban fishing vessels by the U.S. Coast Guard. The U.S. government responded by threatening to dismiss the Cuban workers at Guantanamo unless they became residents of the base or spent their earnings on the base.

Just prior to the crisis, the Under Secretary of State, George W. Ball, presented a review of free-world economic relations with Cuba, briefly outlining previous blockade efforts and discussing their prospects of success. Ball suggested that the president make it known to all government agencies that "the restriction and reduction of free-world economic ties with Cuba is a basic national policy objective".⁴⁸ The Johnson administration thus extended the global economic and transportation blockade against Cuba.

In January 1964, the Department of State wrote to embassies in European countries whose cooperation was important to restate the basic U.S. policy of isolating Cuba politically, economically, and psychologically.⁴⁹ On September 23, 1967, Secretary of State Dean Rusk called for OAS members to reinforce the "diplomatic, political and economic isolation" of the communist regime in Cuba.⁵⁰ A U.S. proposal to retaliate against ships from outside the western hemisphere entering Cuban ports was adopted by OAS.⁵¹

The number of trips to Cuba by capitalist ships declined from 383 to 195 during his presidency. Cuban trade with the West decreased by almost half.⁵² Cuba paid higher prices on equipment imports from Western Europe and multiple credit-based negotiations between Cuba and the capitalist bloc were prevented by U.S. pressure.⁵³ But no substantial change was achieved in the overturn of Castro regime.

⁴⁷ Morley, *Imperial State and Revolution*, p. 205.

⁴⁸ 'Memorandum from the Under Secretary of State (Ball) to President Johnson', *Foreign Relations of The United States*, <<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v32/d227>> [accessed 3 September 2021].

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, p. 210.

⁵⁰ Benjamin Welles, 'Rusk Urges O.A.S. to Block Castro', *The New York Times*, September 24, 1967.

⁵¹ Benjamin Welles, 'O.A.S. Ministers Adopt New Anti-Cuban Policies', *The New York Times*, September 25, 1967.

⁵² Morley, *Imperial State and Revolution*, p. 237.

⁵³ *Ibid*, p. 238.

Nixon (1969-1974)

The global and regional context changed slightly when Nixon took office. Its engagement in Vietnam and increasing economic losses to Western Europe and Japan had weakened its leading role in the capitalist world.⁵⁴ It became increasingly evident to U.S. policymakers during this decade that economic and military power did not necessarily bring success in foreign affairs.

A détente with Soviet Union began in 1969 through efforts of Nixon and his chief security adviser, Henry Kissinger who sought to avoid nuclear escalation and reduce tensions. Nixon did not ignore Cuba, in part due to his awful trip to South America as vice president in 1958 and Cuba's role in his first unsuccessful presidential election in 1960. Nixon told one of his aides: "There'll be no change toward that bastard while I'm president."⁵⁵ Both Nixon and Kissinger favored a renewal of covert operations and determined to "keep as much of our isolation policy intact as possible".⁵⁶ Castro initiated a very cautious approach to Nixon through Swiss ambassador in February 1969, arousing the first discussions of Cuba policy within the new administration. But this promising start was soon ruled out by Nixon.⁵⁷ In December 1971, Nixon said to Kissinger firmly that "I'm not changing the policy towards Castro as long as I'm alive."⁵⁸

Nevertheless, visible signs of thaw began to emerge. A common interest of fighting against transnational terrorism impelled Nixon to negotiate with Cuba. In February 1973, the U.S. signed the Hijacking Agreement with Cuba to deal with hijacking seriously even though the U.S. stressed to Castro that "this represents no change in our overall policy toward Cuba."⁵⁹ On September 19, 1973, Cuba enacted this law.⁶⁰ During the waning days of Nixon's presidency, Kissinger made some attempts to pursue a possible normalization of relations as he had questioned the outdated Cuba policy. Kissinger sent a message to Castro, suggesting secret talks to discuss possibilities for improving relations. Castro responded and

⁵⁴ Morley, *Imperial State and Revolution*, p. 240.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, p. 247.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, p. 248.

⁵⁷ LeoGrande and Kornbluh, *Back Channel to Cuba*, pp. 121-122.

⁵⁸ 'Conversation Between President Nixon and the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger), Washington, December 9, 1971, 9:13–10:04 a.m.', *Foreign Relations of the United States*, <<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve10/d247>> [accessed 3 September 2021].

⁵⁹ 'Memorandum from Serban Vallimarescu of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs (Scowcroft)', *Foreign Relations of The United States*, <<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve11p1/d271>> [accessed 3 September 2021].

⁶⁰ 'Antihijacking Law Enacted by Havana; U.S. Is Not Affected; Cuba to Return Nonpolitical Hijackers', *The New York Times*, September 20, 1969.

several talks were held.⁶¹ In June 1974, Kissinger approved a trip to Cuba by a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Pat Holt. At almost the same time, Kissinger appointed William D. Rogers, an advocate of normalization, as the Assistant Secretary of State for inter-American affairs.⁶²

From the early 1970s onward, a growing number of Latin American states began to give up the embargo against Cuba and advocate changing the prohibition on trade within the OAS. Latin American states gradually established and reestablished diplomatic relations with Cuba in the 1970s.

Ford (1974-1976)

Gerald Ford was elevated to the office of the presidency at a time favorable for normalization of U.S.-Cuban relations. Though his assumption did not interrupt a hardline policy, the U.S.-Cuba thaw that had started during Nixon's first term continued. Kissinger asserted that the old approach could be changed because "We have to loosen up or we isolate ourselves". But he also did not suggest meeting with Castro because that would be "a drastic policy change".⁶³ Kissinger believed the major issue was the trade embargo, which would be lifted slowly.

Kissinger exchanged messages with Castro and the secret talks between U.S. and Cuba got underway. A series of meetings began in November 1974 and continued throughout 1975. Meanwhile, Cuba released signals for negotiation and the U.S. confirmed that Cuba had restrained its support for armed revolutionaries to overthrow Latin American governments.⁶⁴ In July 1975, the U.S. voted in the OAS with a majority of members to end the eleven-year diplomatic and economic sanctions against Cuba. The U.S. did not resume such relations with Cuba, but U.S. companies were allowed to trade with Cuba under certain conditions. William Rogers, executive assistant to the secretary of state, said that U.S. attitude toward Cuba "depends essentially on Cuba's foreign policy".⁶⁵

This promising normalization process was interrupted by Cuban intervention in the Angola in November 1975. A telegram from the Department of State to Kissinger in December 1975 stated that Cuban

⁶¹ Smith, *The Closest of Enemies*, p. 93.

⁶² Brenner, *From Confrontation to Negotiation*, p. 18.

⁶³ 'Memorandum of Conversation', *Foreign Relations of The United States*, <<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve11p1/d284>> [accessed 3 September 2021].

⁶⁴ 'Interagency Memorandum', *Foreign Relations of The United States*, <<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve11p1/d289>> [accessed 3 September 2021].

⁶⁵ David Binder, 'Cuba Policy in U.S. Slowly Changing', *The New York Times*, March 30, 1975.

involvement in Angola would jeopardize the prospect of improvement for Cuba-U.S. relations as well as Cuba's relations with other countries committed to non-interventionist principles.⁶⁶ Before Christmas of 1976, Ford declared that the possibility for normalizing U.S.-Cuban relations had been eliminated by Cuban intervention in Angola.⁶⁷ In a CIA memorandum, Castro's role as broker between Soviet Union and the Third World was discussed at length and the intelligence community asserted that Cuban success in Angola would further enhance Castro's role as a major powerbroker in Africa.⁶⁸

In October 1976, terrorists exploded a Cuban civilian plane, killing 78 passengers. It was alleged that CIA played a part in this affair. In retaliation, Cuba cancelled the anti-hijacking agreement and accused the U.S of failing to comply with it. Congress and the Ford remained mostly silent on Cuba policy for the rest of Ford's presidency. According to a CIA report, Castro hoped Ford would be reelected and Kissinger would be secretary of state again since they were "reasonable men with whom it is possible to negotiate problems." He sincerely expressed concern about Reagan being president.⁶⁹

Carter (1977-1981)

Early on, Carter demonstrated intent to change the direction of U.S. policy to Latin America and moved quickly to modify policies related to Cuba. Carter was initially cautious as not every major senior official favored a softening of the relations. New Secretary of State Cyrus Vance agreed on normalization while Zbigniew Brzezinski, the national security advisor, disagreed strongly because he worried that soft gestures to Cuba would be taken as a sign of weakness by the Soviet Union.⁷⁰

In his first year in office, Carter made several resolutions to reverse tough policies by his predecessors. Shortly after inauguration, Carter claimed that Cuban troop withdrawal from Angola would not be a precondition for U.S.-Cuba talks. Carter suspended reconnaissance flights over Cuba and did not renew travel restrictions to Cuba for U.S. citizens. After reviewing Cuba policy on March 9, Carter concluded that "we should attempt to achieve normalization of our relations with Cuba."⁷¹ In April, the U.S. Assistant

⁶⁶ 'Telegram 295722/Tosec 240257 From the Department of State to Secretary of State Kissinger in Paris', *Foreign Relations of The United States*, <<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve11p1/d305>> [accessed 3 September 2021].

⁶⁷ Jane Franklin, *Cuba and the United States: A Chronological History* (Brooklyn, NY: Ocean Press, 1997), p. 123.

⁶⁸ 'Memorandum Prepared in the Central Intelligence Agency', *Foreign Relations of the United States*, <<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve11p1/d308>> [accessed 3 September 2021].

⁶⁹ 'Memorandum from Director of Central Intelligence Bush to Secretary of State Kissinger', *Foreign Relations of the United States* <<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve11p1/d316>> [accessed 3 September 2021].

⁷⁰ Smith, *The Closest of Enemies*, p. 100.

⁷¹ 'Presidential Directive/NSC-6', *Foreign Relations of the United States*,

Secretary of State Terence Todman went to Cuba to sign an agreement on fisheries and maritime boundaries. In September, the U.S. interests section was founded in Havana under the protection of the Swiss government and a Cuban interests section was also established in Washington, serving as makeshift embassies.

Congress also showed signs of normalizing relations. Secretary Vance admitted that the U.S. could benefit from normalization of relations and a partial lifting of the embargo would hasten the process.⁷² Cuba responded to Carter's overtures actively, agreeing to release political prisoners and permitting them to emigrate to the United States. Castro also started a dialogue with the Cuban American community-- Committee of 75- leading to an unprecedented family reunion for 100,000 Cuban exiles.

But this momentum toward normalization was again dashed by Cuba's involvement in the Ogaden crisis⁷³ between Somalia and Ethiopia in 1977-1978. Secret negotiations between the U.S. and Cuban government were sabotaged by U.S. public condemnation of Cuban and Soviet interference in Africa. From then on, U.S.-Cuban relations grew worse as Carter slowly lost the political will to proceed with normalization. Domestically, Carter was criticized for weakness in foreign policy. Carter faced an economic recession on the domestic front, too. Internationally, the discovery of a Soviet brigade in Cuba in 1979 complicated the situation for the president further. The Mariel boatlift crisis in 1980 contributed to the escalation of tensions. At the end of Carter's presidency, the array of problems he was dealing with were so complicated that the Cuba issue might was low priority.

Carter was the first Cold War American president who placed normalization of U.S.-Cuban relations as a major object of his foreign policy. However, the interests of the two states were not compatible. Cuba and the Soviet Union increased their movements in Africa and Castro valued his international role as a broker between Soviet Union and Global South countries more than the normalization of relations with the U.S. Though significant improvements were made during the Ford and Carter administrations, no breakthrough was ever achieved. In the final months of Carter's presidency, the politics of Cuba policy had become more complex than ever.⁷⁴

<<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1977-80v23/d9>> [accessed 3 September 2021].

⁷² 'Memorandum from Secretary of State Vance to President Carter', *Foreign Relations of the United States*, <<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1977-80v23/d14>> [accessed 3 September 2021].

⁷³ Ogaden war: or Ethio-Somali war, was a military conflict over the territorial partition of Ogaden. Cuba supported Ethiopia with USSR by sending troops while the U.S. sided with Somalia.

⁷⁴ Haney, and Vanderbush. *The Cuban Embargo*, p.30.

1.3 Anticommunism in the Cold War United States

This section briefly examines anti-Communist ideology within the U.S. after the Second World War and its influence on U.S. foreign relations. This provides a domestic context for better understanding U.S. foreign policy in the 1960s and 1970s and its long-lasting imprint on Reagan's anti-Communist vision.

McCarthyism disfigured American politics for at least a decade from the late 1940s onward.⁷⁵ It arose simultaneously with a widespread fear of communism in America following WWII, which was a derivative of growing Cold War tension - particularly after the Soviet occupation of Eastern Europe and communist triumph in China. Communism is incompatible with what most American people believe. Under these circumstances, anti-Communism prevailed and civil liberties in the U.S. were undermined significantly. FBI director J. Edgar Hoover created a loyalty-security program initiated under President Truman in 1947 and designed to review the loyalty of federal employees. The FBI under Hoover engaged in various operations to gather information on communists and dissident groups.⁷⁶ This program was strengthened by President Eisenhower.⁷⁷

From the mid-1950s, McCarthyism declined. In 1954, Senator Joseph McCarthy started to lose credibility in public and thus his prominent position as an anti-Communist. Although its author died in 1957, McCarthyism took much longer to fade away. A general fear of communism lingered in the public imagination in multiple ways for decades.

Cold War anticommunism shaped U.S. foreign policy towards Latin America in multiple ways. As the Soviet Union exported communism to the world, the Americans adopted a policy of containment that was significantly influenced by their own ideological vision.⁷⁸ U.S. policy elites were traumatized by the success of the Cuban Revolution and Castro's rise to power. This was a significant point in U.S.-Latin American relations. Castro's final shift to socialism embedded anticommunist ideology more deeply in U.S. foreign policymaking. Kennedy expressed this sentiment in his presidential campaign, "I have seen

⁷⁵ Phillip Deery, *Red Apple: Communism and McCarthyism in Cold War New York* (New York: Empire State Editions, 2014), p.1.

⁷⁶ See Athan G. Theoharis, *Chasing Spies: How the FBI Failed in Counterintelligence but Promoted the Politics of McCarthyism in the Cold War Years* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2002).

⁷⁷ This anticommunism sentiment in the U.S. was somewhat logical and grounded as there was evidence showing communism infiltration in U.S. society. See John Earl Haynes, and Harvey Klehr, *Venona: Decoding Soviet Espionage in America* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2000).

⁷⁸ For containment, see Wilson D. Miscamble, *George F. Kennan and the Making of American Foreign Policy, 1947-1950*. (N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992); Fredrik Logevall, 'A Critique of Containment', *Diplomatic History* 28, Issue 4(2004), pp. 473-499.

Communist influence and Castro influence rise in Latin America”. He concluded that Castro was the beginning of difficulties for the U.S. in Latin America and the bigger challenge was how to prevent Castro’s influence from spreading to other countries.⁷⁹ It could be considered rational for the U.S. to contain Castro’s movement in Latin America and Africa. U.S. policies were both overly paranoid and logically cautious, particularly after Salvador Allende was elected president of Chile. This sentiment was deeply rooted in policymaking toward Cuba after 1959 and it stood in the way of the rapprochement between the two nations through the 1960s and 1970s. In the 1960s and 1970s, the intelligence resource was devoted excessively to the communist organizations. The infiltration of FBI against communists during this period even constituted unnecessary harassment.⁸⁰ The U.S. government support pro-democratic movements and anti-Communist organizations covertly through CIA. Though these activities were exposed in the 1970s, the government still felt necessary to subsidize democratic activities and founded the National Endowment of Democracy aid democratic activities around the world.

Conclusion

From 1959 to 1980, U.S. policy towards Cuba primarily depended not on what Cuba did but on what Washington believed Cuba was doing.⁸¹ The inheritance of a policy baseline from Eisenhower to Carter showed major continuities in U.S. approaches to the island. American opposition to Castro took multiple forms. It was characterized by long-lasting economic sanctions and diplomatic isolation. Two aspects made this embargo distinctive. The most striking was its comprehensiveness. The embargo was a systematic set of restrictions on trade and travel both from and to the island, immigration, educational and cultural communication, and shipments to Cuba from its allied countries. The U.S. government usually welcomed Cuban immigrants when they served its geopolitical interests. This was also the easy way for both countries to approach moderate normalization but nothing substantial ever changed during the two decades. The second characteristic is the long duration of the embargo. The U.S. trade embargo against Cuba is the most enduring in modern history. It was strictly implemented throughout the 1960s and 1970s and was never

⁷⁹ John F. Kennedy, *John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum*, ‘Senator John F. Kennedy and Vice President Richard M. Nixon Fourth Joint Radio-Television Broadcast, October 21, 1960’ <<https://www.jfklibrary.org/archives/other-resources/john-f-kennedy-speeches/4th-nixon-kennedy-debate-19601021>> [accessed 3 September 2021].

⁸⁰ John Earl Haynes, *Red Scare or Red Menace? American Communism and Anticommunism in the Cold War Era* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1996) p.192-193

⁸¹ Dominguez, ‘U.S. Policy Toward Cuba in the 1980s and 1990s’, pp.165-176.

truly lifted even though discussions of lifting occurred during the Carter administration.

As for diplomatic isolation, which originated from the Cold War mindset, was carried out all through the 1960s and 1970s. It started when Eisenhower cut diplomatic relations with Cuba. Later, the U.S. proceeded with this isolation strategy by drawing allies to side with it. Under the pressure from Kennedy administration, the OAS suspended Cuba's membership in 1964 and further voted for mandatory economic sanctions. Covert operations under Kennedy and Johnson remained active after the failed invasion attempt at the Bay of Pigs. Since Eisenhower centered anticommunism as a key tenet of U.S. foreign policy, this sentiment was at the heart of the nation's approaches to Cuba.

From 1959 to 1980, successive U.S. presidents held onto this antagonistic Cuba policy with unwavering commitment except for Carter, who was the only one that sought to normalize relations. Even though no breakthrough was achieved under Carter, there were signs of normalization coming from both the White House and Capitol Hill. Carter lifted the travel restrictions, stopped the reconnaissance overflights, and signed agreements on fisheries and maritime boundaries with Cuba. Senators visited Cuba, coming back to discuss a possible end to the embargo. Most importantly, 16 years after Eisenhower cut their diplomatic relations, interests sections were established in Washington and Havana in 1977, functioning as embassies. Carter adopted such an obvious conciliatory posture toward Cuba that Wayne Smith assumed he would soon oversee the end of the embargo in the near future.⁸² However, Carter's unprecedented yet mild moves towards Cuba ultimately failed⁸³ and Carter himself was considered a weak leader.⁸⁴ This foreshadowed the victory of Ronald Reagan in 1980, whose tougher and belligerent stance would leave a strong mark on the Cuban issue.

⁸² Smith, *The Closest of Enemies*, p.118.

⁸³ Wiarda, *American Foreign Policy Toward Latin America in the 80s and 90s*, p.18.

⁸⁴ Colin Dueck, *Hard Line: The Republican Party and U.S. Foreign Policy since World War II* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 2010), p.201.

Chapter 2: The U.S., Cuba, and the New Cold War

This chapter probes into the major changes of U.S. policy to Cuba under the Reagan administration. A “new hard line” was gradually formed during the 1980s and Reagan’s approach to Cuba shifted significantly in four major ways. The first section reviews domestic political change and realignment in the U.S. from the end of Carter’s presidency to Reagan’s presidency. The conservative movement which budded in 1960 and reached its apex in late 1970s and early 1980s was critical in shaping Reagan’s foreign policy. The second section discusses the instruments that the U.S. adopted to pressure Cuba, including hard power and soft power tools. This section highlights four major changes: intensification of the economic blockade, the Immigration Agreement of 1984, Radio Martí and public diplomacy, and covert actions.

2.1 Formation of a “New Hard Line”

This section considers how conservatism influenced Reagan’s political stance and the U.S. political environment from the end of 1970s. Reagan’s revival of the American right influenced his foreign policy in turn, especially towards Cuba. This was not only an outcome resulting from the direct deterioration of U.S.-Cuban relations. The global Cold War context also changed in Carter’s last days in office and Reagan’s second term, contributing to the transformation of U.S. domestic politics in late 1970s and early 1980s as well as the second half of the 1980s that profoundly shaped U.S. foreign policy.

Under Carter, a possible U.S.-Cuban rapprochement was sabotaged by Cuba’s involvement in the Ogaden crisis in 1978 and alleged discovery of a Soviet combat brigade in Cuba in 1979. The final blow came from the Soviet invasion into Afghanistan in December 1979, six months after the signing of SALT II. In light of these tensions, Carter withdrew from the treaty in January 1980 and the longest détente ended. Meanwhile in the U.S., right-wing clout had begun to rise to fore in American political life. Within the Republican party, conservatives made significant moves in 1976 when Ford almost lost to Reagan in the Republican primaries. Embodying the new conservative movement, Reagan originally focused on domestic issues and the results were disastrous. After shifting his focus to national security, Reagan totally changed the situation by making his voters believe that the U.S. was being militarily outmatched by the Soviet

Union.⁸⁵ Even though Ford was the final victor, Reagan played a dominant role in the 1976 campaign and had deeply influenced the agenda of the GOP. Conservatives had already gained dominance of the Republican Party before Reagan announced his run in the 1980 presidential election. The end of détente was a defining moment for conservatives. Carter was suffering from low public support from his handling of the hostage crisis in Iran at the end of 1979. His image as a weak foreign policymaker was reinforced during this crisis especially after a catastrophic attempt to rescue the hostages in 1980. The situation for Carter became even worse when the Soviets invaded Afghanistan. Carter's failure was a catalyst for Reagan's success. This culminated in his electoral victory in 1980. Meanwhile, American political culture became increasingly partisan and polarized, and moderation was more and more difficult to achieve.⁸⁶

Carter received wide criticism on his weak foreign policy. Reagan agreed fully with these criticisms. Viewed as the iconic hero in the rise of New Right, Reagan "took on Goldwater's⁸⁷ coalition of Sun Belt conservatives and expanded it dramatically".⁸⁸ Reagan succeeded in building a comprehensive coalition which included conservative Republicans, evangelical Protestants, Catholics, businessmen, populists, nationalists, neo-conservative intellectuals, nationalists, New Right activists, and some hawkish, conservative Democrats.⁸⁹ Such a coalition was born with multiple internal conflicts. However, Reagan managed to reduce these tensions and held this coalition together successfully, both in Congress and across the country. He gave symbolic rewards to core factions and kept balance inside his base, the Congress, and the wider public. Reagan led this coalition with pragmatism and charisma. As president, he continued this re-definition of conservatism.⁹⁰

Reagan also had his own style of foreign policymaking. He proposed generally consistent compelling plans to his supporters and advisers to rally them together as a strong coalition.⁹¹ He had a tremendous work ethic that was "matched by an ability to master complicated beliefs" on foreign policy.⁹²

⁸⁵ Julian E. Zelizer, 'Détente and Domestic Politics', *Diplomatic History* 33, no. 4 (2009): pp.653-670.

⁸⁶ See Dueck, *Hard Line*; Marjorie J. Spruill. 'Gender Roles, Women's Rights, and the Polarization of American Politics in the Late 20th Century', *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of American History*, January 25, (2019); Zelizer, 'Détente and Domestic Politics'.

⁸⁷ Senate Barry Goldwater: Republican Party nominee for president of the United States in 1964, who is credited for starting the revival of American conservatism. He was considered having laid the foundation for the conservative movement later and helped to proceed the conservative takeover of Republican party which finally helped Reagan to win in 1980.

⁸⁸ Dueck, *Hard Line*, p.189.

⁸⁹ *Ibid*, p.205.

⁹⁰ Craig R. Smith, 'Ronald Reagan's Rhetorical Re-invention of Conservatism', *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, (2017) 103:1-2, pp.33-65.

⁹¹ Dueck, *Hard Line*, p.207.

⁹² John Matlin, *The Reagan Diaries* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), *Journal of American Studies* 41, no.3 (2007): pp.706-07.

Simultaneously, Reagan also transformed conservatism orthodoxy and ethos. Unlike the first half of 1970s when Republican presidents were willing to pursue arms control and trade agreements with the Soviet Union, the first half of 1980s saw Reagan take a tough position on issues related to the communist bloc-and Cuba in particular. He consistently waved the anti-Communist flag in his conservative transformation.⁹³ After assuming office, Reagan adopted a “fundamentally daring, and ideologically charged strategy of aggressive anti-Communist containment and indirect rollback, leavened by considerable tactical pragmatism and flexibility”.⁹⁴ By doing so, Reagan did not intend to further strain the already tense relations between the superpowers. Instead, he was attempting to reduce the tension on American terms by pressuring the Soviet Union with every possible foreign policy instrument. His ultimate goal was neither endless struggle nor long-term accommodation with the Soviets, but rather negotiation from strength through relentless efforts to weaken the Soviet state and its international standing.⁹⁵ However, Reagan did not always benefit from conservatism on foreign policy issue during his first election campaign. Many Americans were seriously concerned that Reagan’s tough posturing would increase the risk of war if he was elected president.⁹⁶ But the American people also believed Reagan would reinforce the U.S. armed forces and make their country the unchallenged leader of the world again, politically and economically. Even though they diverged in areas, Reagan’s supporters shared his conservative Cold War internationalism.⁹⁷

In January 1981, when Reagan assumed office, he and his advisors were determined to reverse the perceived decline of U.S. power since 1950s. Threat of military intervention became paramount under the new administration. Some historians note that Carter had difficulty in establishing any kind of a coherent foreign policy. His advisors diverged deeply in their fundamental ideas and Carter also seemed ambivalent frequently.⁹⁸ In comparison, Reagan formed a relatively unified line of antagonism against Cuba within his government. Carter was the only U.S. president who tried to break away from Cold War perceptions while the Cold War was still active. On the contrary, Reagan led a right-wing, hardline administration that recaptured the Cold War vision and pursued a coercive policy toward Cuba. Secretary of State Alexander M. Haig captured this tough stand when he told Reagan that “You just give me the word, and I’ll turn that

⁹³ Dueck, *Hard Line*, p.207.

⁹⁴ *Ibid*, p.189.

⁹⁵ *Ibid*.

⁹⁶ *Ibid*, p.204.

⁹⁷ *Ibid*, p.207

⁹⁸ Morley, *Imperial State and Revolution*, p.317

fucking island into a parking lot.”⁹⁹

This conservatism drive was demonstrated in Reagan’s “Peace through Strength” policy, especially in his first term. Reagan saw Soviet threat as major priority in making foreign policy. National Security Decision Directive 32 (NSDD-32) signed by Reagan in May 1982 clearly set out his security strategy. NSDD-32 articulated global objectives of the U.S. security policy: to strengthen U.S. influence throughout the world, to deter military attack from USSR and its allies and to contain and reverse the expansion of Soviet control.¹⁰⁰ In June, in his Westminster address, Reagan claimed that “It is the Soviet Union that runs against the tide of history by denying human freedom and human dignity to its citizens.”¹⁰¹ This laid the foundation for his foreign policy.¹⁰² However, even within the administration, pragmatists and hardliners had dispute over foreign affairs relating to Europe and Soviet Union in Reagan’s early years in office.

Reagan was less consistent in hardline policies in his second term. This change came early during Reagan’s reelection campaign. Divergences arose inside the administration when some campaign advisers suggested moderate attitude on Soviet Union. Reagan himself also did not intend to intensify U.S.-Soviet tensions in the first place. Early in June 1983, George Shultz made his presentation explaining U.S. policy toward Soviet Union comprehensively for the first time since Reagan took office: “Strength and realism can deter war, but only direct dialogue and negotiation can open the path toward lasting peace.”¹⁰³ Since then, dialogue was taken as one fundamental elements in Reagan’s Soviet approach. On Reagan’s part, his hardline conservatism could find its way only if practicality and flexibility were involved.

Domestic politics was changing at that moment and the new hard line around Reagan was less belligerent on foreign policy compared to early 1980s. But Reagan-Gorbachev thaw still incurred criticism from some conservatives who insisted that tough stance be held to roll back Soviet Union. What seems paradoxical was that Reagan Doctrine was not implemented consistently on all communist regimes in the Third World such as Cuba, especially when compared to Nicaragua and Afghanistan. The Iran-Contra scandal occurred in November 1986 caused the Congress to change tough attitude toward foreign policy

⁹⁹ Alexander M. Haig, Jr., *Caveat: Realism, Reagan and Foreign Policy* (New York: Macmillan, 1984), pp. 120-122, 125, cited in LeoGrande and Kornbluh, *Back Channel to Cuba*, p.225.

¹⁰⁰ Homeland Security Digital Library, *National Security Decision Directive 32*, United States White House Office, May 20, 1982. <<https://www.hsdl.org/?abstract&did=462986>> [accessed 3 September 2021].

¹⁰¹ The Heritage Foundation, ‘20 Years Later: Reagan’s Westminster Address’, June 4, 2002. <<https://www.heritage.org/europe/report/20-years-later-reagans-westminster-speech>> [accessed 3 March 2022].

¹⁰² Smith, ‘Ronald Reagan’s Rhetorical Re-invention of Conservatism’, pp.33-65.

¹⁰³ *Department of State Bulletin*, July 1983, p. 69, cited in Matlock, J. F. *Reagan and Gorbachev: How the Cold War Ended* (1st ed.) (New York: Random House), 2004.

and to support arms control with USSR. The broad coalition led by Reagan was characterized by neoconservatism and internal conflicts so opposition against his conciliatory moves was inevitable. He successfully found a balance between sticking to anti-Communist doctrine and negotiating for peace. The agreements reached in and after Reagan's presidency were agreeable to regional peace and American interests.

Reagan reversed the policy of détente from the beginning of his presidency and implemented interventionist policy staunchly in Caribbean and Central America, providing assistance to anti-Communist groups throughout his two terms. This policy gained comprehensive support from his administration while the new coalition generally agreed on anti-Communist stance in foreign policy. But Reagan's final goal was not to intensify the Cold War tensions, but to negotiate from America's side through pressure. This hardline stance began to sway slightly from the last days of his first term. Though some conservatives argued against his reaching out to Soviet Union, Reagan paid more attention to his long-term goal to reduce tensions on terms to Washington. He preferred to consolidate the team rather than choose between his advisers in order to achieve his diplomatic goal.¹⁰⁴

2.2 U.S. Instruments of Power toward Cuba

This section introduces four major instruments of soft and hard power the Reagan administration adopted to exert pressure on Cuba: the economic blockade, the Immigration Agreement of 1984, Radio Martí and public diplomacy, and covert actions.

Intensification of the Economic Blockade

The U.S. embargo, or as Cubans called it *el bloqueo* (the blockade), against Cuba was the longest and most comprehensive one in modern history.¹⁰⁵ Before Eisenhower officially cut trade with Cuba, there was a proposal of using Cuban dependence on the U.S. economy to implement economic sanctions. Vice President Nixon suggested that the U.S. should cut the sugar quota of the island. But some officials argued

¹⁰⁴ Alexander Haig, Reagan's first Secretary of State, resigned under this circumstance.

¹⁰⁵ William M. LeoGrande, 'A Policy Long Past its Expiration Date: US Economic Sanctions Against Cuba', *Social Research* 82, no. 4 (2015): pp.939-966.

this would be ineffective in ousting Castro and would probably rally Cuban nationalists around him.¹⁰⁶ In April 1960, the Soviet Union sold crude oil to Cuba in exchange for sugar. Three U.S.-owned refineries refused to refine the oil sent by the Cuban Petroleum Institute under demands from the Treasury Secretary Robert B. Andersen.¹⁰⁷ Castro then confiscated the refineries in retaliation. That was the final blow to arguments against economic sanctions within the U.S. government. Eisenhower cut the sugar quota of Cuba in July 1960.¹⁰⁸ On July 6, 1961, as relations were still deteriorating, Eisenhower officially suspended trade with Cuba and invoked the Trading with the Enemy Act of 1917. Castro made a further move by nationalizing major U.S.-owned businesses in Cuba. Eisenhower escalated the economic war further two months later, stopping all exports to Cuba except for food and medicine, laying the foundation of the economic embargo.¹⁰⁹

In September 1961, following the Bay of Pigs invasion, Congress approved the *Foreign Assistance Act*, prohibiting aid to Cuba and authorizing the president to impose a full embargo. In February 1962, Kennedy extended the embargo with an executive order. After the Missile Crisis, he expanded the embargo with travel restrictions. Johnson tried to multi-lateralize the embargo by pressing U.S. allies in Western Europe and Latin America to cut off ties with Cuba.¹¹⁰

Since it seemed impossible to remove Castro with economic sanctions, the U.S. government began to review the economic blockade from the mid-1970s onwards. When Carter took office in 1977, he did not place Cuban withdrawal from Angola as a precondition of easing embargo. Carter practically lifted the travel ban and the restriction on remittances from Cuban Americans to their families on the island. But Carter did not relinquish the bargaining chip of embargo on food and medicine, since he thought allowing Cuba to sell food to the U.S. practically invalidated the economic blockade.¹¹¹

Reagan took an antagonistic stance to Cuba the moment he took office, predominantly because of Castro's socialist internationalist activities in Africa as well as Latin America and the president's own anti-Communist ideology. The new administration first reinstated the travel ban that had been lifted by Carter. In April 1982, the U.S. government announced new travel restrictions. Under this, only official travels by

¹⁰⁶ LeoGrande, 'A Policy Long Past its Expiration Date', p.939-966.

¹⁰⁷ R. Hart Phillips, 'Castro Orders Seizure - Also Bitterly Attacks US Sugar Bill', *The New York Times*, June 30, 1960.

¹⁰⁸ 'Statement by the President Upon Signing Bill and Proclamation Relating to the Cuban Sugar Quota', *The American Presidency Project*, <<https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/statement-the-president-upon-signing-bill-and-proclamation-relating-the-cuban-sugar-quota>> [accessed 3 September 2021].

¹⁰⁹ LeoGrande, 'A Policy Long Past its Expiration Date', p.939-966.

¹¹⁰ Morley, *Imperial State and Revolution*, pp.178-239.

¹¹¹ LeoGrande, 'A Policy Long Past its Expiration Date', p.939-966.

reporters or researchers would be allowed. John M. Walker claimed this was “designed to reduce Cuba’s hard currency earnings from travel”.¹¹² In August 1986, aiming to prevent the Cuban government easing problems caused by economic embargo, the Reagan administration cut off the last immigration flow from the island to the U.S. The ban also applied to those who claiming to be political refugees. This new measure effectively ended the immigration from Cuba to the United States. Apart from broader immigration restrictions, the Reagan administration also forbade Cuba from using front companies to trade with U.S. corporations.

The travel restrictions to Cuba by U.S. citizens were intensified through reducing the maximum remittance to their relatives in Cuba from \$2000 to \$1200 a year. Under the Trading with the Enemy Act, the Treasury Department announced restrictions on travel and officially put an end to business and tourist travel to the island. State Department spokesman Charles Redman said this was because “the Castro regime controls all convertible currency sent to Cuba and provides Cuban recipients only a small share of the value of the money or goods sent.” The objective of these new measures was to “tighten enforcement of embargo”, preventing the Cuba government benefiting from the U.S. while Castro still held policies that damaged U.S. interests.¹¹³

The U.S. Treasury Department had a list of 118 firms that had been identified as agents of Havana and made it illegal to trade with them, but no one was really prosecuted for doing business with companies or people on the list. According to U.S. officials, the trade restrictions would be in effect indefinitely, but the immigration restrictions would be lifted if Cuba could renew the Immigration Agreement of 1984.¹¹⁴

In 1982, for the first time, Cuba was put on the list of states sponsoring international terrorism.¹¹⁵ This inclusion was just designed to produce further economic sanctions. Reagan also sought to extend the embargo to extraterritorial area by prohibiting imports containing Cuban nickel.¹¹⁶ U.S. allies also complied with these regulations, making sure their exportation products did not contain Cuban nickel. In 1983, the Reagan administration also imposed a ban on nickel products from the Soviet Union. This extended the

¹¹² Barbara Crossette, ‘Linking Cuba to ‘Violence,’ Blocks Tourist and Business Trips’, *The New York Times*, April 20, 1982.

¹¹³ Norman Kempster, ‘U.S. Curbs Cuban Migration, Trade: Tightens Ban on Visas as Way to End Castro ‘Trafficking in Human Beings’’, *Los Angeles Times*, August 23, 1986.

¹¹⁴ From April 15 to October 31 in 1980, there was a mass emigration from Mariel Harbour in Cuba to the United States, triggered by the economic recession in Cuba. This caused severe political problems for U.S. so Carter struggled to reach agreement with Cuba in late October 1980. In 1984, the two governments signed an agreement to resume the interrupted immigration but Castro cancelled it in 1985 in response to Radio Martí. This will be discussed further in next section; Kempster, 1986.

¹¹⁵ Mark P. Sullivan, ‘Cuba and the State Sponsors of Terrorism List’, *CRS Report for Congress*, May 13, 2005.

¹¹⁶ LeoGrande, ‘A Policy Long Past its Expiration Date’, p.939-966.

embargo against Cuba since half of its nickel production was sold to the Soviet Union.¹¹⁷ The Treasury Department also urged Congress to close major air routes between the United States and Cuba.

In July 1986, the Reagan administration tightened the embargo “that was first imposed in the early 1960s”. The National Security Council proposed to reenforce measures to prevent hard currency and U.S. merchandise – as well as technology circumventing existing restrictions – from finding their way to Cuba. A State Department official said efforts to tighten this embargo were made to improve some existing holes and chinks.¹¹⁸ In August, Reagan ordered a series of measures to intensify the supervision of U.S. citizens who organized and promoted travel to Cuba. Meanwhile, Cuban citizens were prohibited to enter the U.S. from a third country. These measures made it more difficult for Cuba to get U.S. hard currency and goods through unlawful means. “The actions reflect the continued strain in United States-Cuban relations.”¹¹⁹ These moves were designed to force Castro to renew talks on the immigration accords he suspended in 1985. The enforcement of the embargo was accompanied by obstructions placed by the U.S. in negotiations between Cuba and its creditors.

Reagan’s post-1981 economic sanctions against Cuba were mainly focused on the capitalist world economy. They functioned in three ways: blocking Cuba’s negotiation with Western creditors; cutting its financial sources from capitalist countries; pressuring U.S. allies to stop trade with Cuba.¹²⁰ All these economic sanctions were aimed at shrinking Cuba’s access to hard currency to cause economic recession. The Reagan administration held the belief that confrontation was the effective way to destabilize Cuba and weaken the Castro regime. Reagan made this blockade more effective than it was during the Ford and Carter presidencies, especially in Cuba’s hard currency earnings, exports to the West and Western investment in Cuba. But the negotiation of debt between Cuba and Western countries failed without significant objectives because of Cuba’s sustained economic growth pattern in the 1980s.¹²¹

Economic blockade had always been the primary measure by the U.S. to coerce Cuba into a subordinate position. Under Reagan, the blockade was intensified as the main tool to force Cuba to change its anti-Americanist stance. This intensification demonstrates that Reagan replaced a once-moderate Cuba policy in the 1970s with more hardline one.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Robert Pear, ‘U.S. Said to Plan Moves to Tighten Embargo on Cuba’, *The New York Times*, August 11, 1986.

¹¹⁹ Gerald M. Boyd, ‘Reagan Acts to Tighten Trade Embargo of Cuba’, *The New York Times*, August 23, 1986.

¹²⁰ Morley, *Imperial State and Revolution*, p.338.

¹²¹ Ibid, p.365.

Immigration Agreement of 1984

Since the Cuban Revolution, the immigration problem had turned into a seesaw battle between the U.S. and Cuba. The Mariel Boatlift of 1980 had greatly shaped the migration policy of both nations. On April 20, 1980, Castro announced that any Cuban who wished to emigrate to the U.S. could leave from the Mariel harbor.¹²² Fearing Castro might change his mind, the plan was carried out in haste. In all, about 125,000 Cuban refugees reached Florida in this boatlift organized by Cuban Americans. Triggered by the economic recession and political persecution in Cuba, this exodus continued in the following years.

This mass immigration overwhelmed the U.S. coastguard, causing significant economic and social problems for Carter administration. Carter struggled to reach an agreement with the Cuban government in October 1980 to end the exodus. This immigration problem left negative implications for the Carter administration and would further influence Reagan's policies.

After Reagan took office, isolating Cuba became a cornerstone of his policy. Negotiations never really took place between the two countries prior to 1984. In 1984, Reagan finally agreed to talk after Cuba showed willingness to negotiate over 2700 exiles who had fled to the U.S. during the Mariel Boatlift. Reagan agreed to do this under the pressure from the Cuban-American community.¹²³ The U.S. government claimed that about 2700 exiles had been released from jails and psychiatric institutions and they were not eligible for entry into the United States. For the past four years, the U.S. had been demanding that Cuba repatriate them. Fearing facilitating Reagan's reelection in 1984, Cuba rejected negotiations and preferred to leave this until the end of election in November.¹²⁴ But at the same time, the Cubans requested the U.S. grant entry to Cubans who already had the visas. Until summer of 1984, Cuba still refused to consider repatriation of those emigrants.

Finally, in July 1984, Cuba made a concession to Washington by agreeing to discuss immigration. Reverend Jesse Jackson visited Cuba and got an agreement from Castro to open talks with Reagan.¹²⁵ Despite Castro's interest in expanding the agenda, senior Reagan officials made it clear that the talks would

¹²² History.com Editors, 'Fidel Castro announces Mariel Boatlift, allowing Cubans to emigrate to U.S.', *History*, (A&E Television Networks), <<https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/castro-announces-mariel-boatlift>> [accessed 3 September 2021].

¹²³ Brenner, *From Confrontation to Negotiation*, p38.

¹²⁴ Morley, *Imperial State and Revolution*, p.333.

¹²⁵ Brenner, *From Confrontation to Negotiation*, p.38.

be limited to immigration only and were unlikely to produce big improvements in relations.¹²⁶ On 14 December 1984, an agreement was signed to repatriate the 2746 “undesirables” from Cuba and allow 20,000 Cubans to emigrate to the U.S. each year, with admission of former Cuban political prisoners. This agreement resumed the normal immigration from Cuba to the U.S. suspended since 1980. The White House spokesman, Larry Speakes, restated that this “does not signal any change in U.S. policy towards Cuba.”¹²⁷

However, Castro described this accord as a “constructive and positive”, which would lead to negotiations in more areas of mutual interests and contribute to the improvement of bilateral relations. Castro told *The Washington Post* editors, that what he said was his willingness to “exchange views with the United States on any topics.” However, the U.S. downplayed the significance of this agreement. The administration had emphasized the limited nature of the pact and insisted that nothing change until Cuba restrained its close ties to the Soviet Union and its support for leftist insurgencies in central America.¹²⁸

Meanwhile, Castro also noted that the Reagan administration had been “one of the most hostile” toward Cuba both on economic sanctions and military threats. He saw “no special signs” for major policies change. He also stated that Cuba had revolutionized its military capacity that any military attack against Cuba would be costly to the U.S.¹²⁹

This immigration agreement was interpreted by both sides in almost opposite ways mainly because their agendas were different in the first place. Reagan’s presidency saw the rise of ethnic interest groups that originally founded to strengthen the pro-embargo forces and consolidate the president’s control over Cuba policy making.¹³⁰ Since the 1980 campaign, Reagan and his group had plans to overhaul foreign policy toward Latin America, especially policy towards Cuba. But Congress was opposed to a more aggressive attitude in the hemisphere. CANF became a strategic partner of Reagan administration.¹³¹ CANF developed a link with the government during Reagan’s presidency through Operation Exodus and proved to be powerful. CANF’s control over the immigration issue marked a remarkable concession from the government to a private organization.¹³² CANF exerted pressure on Reagan to deal with the immigration issue. It was under these circumstances that the Reagan administration made concessions to Castro’s

¹²⁶ Philip Taubman, ‘U.S.-Cuban Parley Said to Be Narrow’, *The New York Times*, July 14, 1984.

¹²⁷ Bernard Weinraub, ‘U.S. and Cuba Gain an Accord on Repatriation’, *The New York Times*, Dec. 15, 1984.

¹²⁸ Leonard Downie Jr. and Karen DeYoung, ‘Cuban Leader Sees Positive Signs for Ties in Second Reagan Term’, *The Washington Post*, February 3, 1985.

¹²⁹ Downie and DeYoung, ‘Cuban Leader Sees Positive Signs for Ties in Second Reagan Term’.

¹³⁰ Haney, and Vanderbush, *The Cuban Embargo*, pp.2-3.

¹³¹ Ibid, p.31.

¹³² Ibid, pp.44-45.

overtures and agreed to negotiate.

But Castro took this as a sign of future negotiations over broader areas. Havana released signals for negotiation since Regan's first year in office. In October 1981, Wayne Smith reported these feelers to the State Department, urging them to explore the possibility of talks, but received no reply. Instead, State Secretary Haig reemphasized his accusation that Castro had expanded his interventionist activities.¹³³ From this time until the signing of immigration agreement in 1984, Washington's suspicion of Cuban intervention in Central America and its closeness with the Soviet Union was in the way of broader negotiations.

Washington's refusal to acknowledge the immigration agreement as a sign for further negotiation partly contributed to the increased tension again later in 1985 when Radio Martí, a broadcasting station supported by the U.S. government, started to broadcast to Cuba. The immigration issue served as both a barrier and an opportunity for U.S.-Cuba negotiations. The Reagan administration agreed to talk with the Cuba under pressure from the CANF and the need to solve the "undesirables" problem urgently. Reagan's non-active response to Castro's request for talks showed his concerns over Cuba's interventionist activities and insistence on an antagonistic policy toward Cuba, explaining why each state interpreted the signing of an immigration agreement in opposite ways.

Radio Martí and Public Diplomacy

Public diplomacy has been a major method for the U.S. to promote its interests globally. It sought to influence other peoples through information and communication activities since WWII. During the Cold War, the United States Information Agency (USIA) conducted public diplomacy efforts with the primary goal of combating the Soviet Union and communism. One of the major methods that USIA performed its public diplomacy was international broadcasting. In March 1960, President Eisenhower approved outlines for covert operations against the Castro regime. Among them was the plan of creating a radio station. Before the invasion of Bay of Pigs, the CIA had been broadcasting to Cuba on Radio Swan, which was part of agency efforts to "create the proper psychological climate" for the ensuing invasion.¹³⁴ Efforts for broadcasting had been undertaken by both public and private groups throughout the 1960s and 1970s.

¹³³ Smith, *The Closest of Enemies*, pp.249-250.

¹³⁴ Lawrence Soley and Nichols, J. L., *Clandestine Radio Broadcasting: A Study of Revolutionary and Counterrevolutionary Electronic Communication* (New York: Praeger, 1987), p. 181, cited from Joseph Progler. 'American Broadcasting to Cuba: The Cold War Origins of Radio and TV Martí', *Ritsumeikan International Affairs*, (2011), volume 10, pp.159-182.

From the beginning of Reagan's presidency, the U.S. government vigorously recommended sponsoring a state-owned broadcasting station.¹³⁵ In September 1981, the Reagan administration announced its launch of "Radio Free Cuba", which was later renamed Radio Martí.¹³⁶ The debate over Radio Martí focused on the possibility of interference.¹³⁷ Radio Martí was modeled after Radio Free Europe and named after the Cuban writer and national hero José Martí. Martí fought for independence for Cuba from Spain and the United States and was respected by Cubans on both sides of the Florida Straits. Wayne Smith argues that the central point of proponents was that they had to establish this radio to break Castro's monopoly on news in Cuba.¹³⁸ But various stations, including Voice of America, had been heard in Cuba for decades. Debate in the Congress focused on different aspects. Proponents of the radio emphasized that the Cuban people deserved the right of free speech. Opponents argued that this might incite military confrontation with Cuba – and besides, the plan would also affect U.S. foreign policy and increase regional tensions.¹³⁹ By contrast, the plan was strongly supported in the executive branch.

The proponents prevailed eventually. Jorge Mas Canosa was the major player urging Reagan to establish the radio station. Mas Canosa was an influential figure in promoting for a surrogate radio to Cuba and he proposed the original idea of a Radio Martí under the Board for International Broadcasting.¹⁴⁰ He claimed that he had attempted to establish Radio Martí in the Carter years.¹⁴¹ In October 1982, Reagan signed Executive Order 12323 to found the Presidential Commission on Broadcasting to Cuba (PCBC). Mas Canosa and another Cuban American served on this commission. The Radio Broadcasting to Cuba Act was passed by both houses and was codified by the President on October 4, 1983. Radio Martí was run by USIA under the auspices of the Department of State. Philip Brenner explains that the Cuban government knew this was probably just a "symbolic reward" to the Cuban Americans who supported Reagan since his campaign.¹⁴² Kenneth Skoug, a foreign affair official, also suggested that this radio "had been fathered intellectually by the Cuban American National Foundation."¹⁴³ At that time, Mas Casona was the chair of

¹³⁵ Joseph Progler, 'American Broadcasting to Cuba', pp.159-182.

¹³⁶ Horward H. Frederick, *Cuban-American Radio Wars: Ideology in International Communication* (New Jersey: Alex Publishing Corporation, 1986), p.24.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Smith, *The Closest of Enemies*, p.268.

¹³⁹ Progler, 'American Broadcasting to Cuba', pp.159-182.

¹⁴⁰ Skoug, *The United States and Cuba Under Reagan and Shultz*, p.201.

¹⁴¹ Jorge Mas Canosa, *Deposition from Mas Casona v. New Republic, Inc, and Ann Louise Bardach*, 253, cited in Haney, and Vanderbush, *The Cuban Embargo*, p.40.

¹⁴² Brenner, *From Confrontation to Negotiation*, p.39.

¹⁴³ Skoug, *The United States and Cuba under Reagan and Shultz*, p.21.

the Advisory Board for Cuba Broadcasting (ABCB) and he held this position until his death in 1997.

On May 19, 1985, Radio Martí began to broadcast to Cuba. Skoug thought Radio Martí was conducted under the mandate of Congress. It met the standards of the VOA and provided reliable information for Cubans.¹⁴⁴ Cubans were outraged and bilateral relations deteriorated immediately. Hours after the first broadcast, Castro suspended the immigration agreement of 1984 and announced that Cuban exiles would never be permitted to visit Cuba. Meanwhile, he threatened to start a radio war against Radio Martí.¹⁴⁵ In response, Reagan released a proclamation to impose restrictions on the entry of “officers or employees of the Government of Cuba or the Communist Party of Cuba.”¹⁴⁶ This proclamation virtually banned all Cubans from entering the U.S. indefinitely. In a statement on Radio Martí broadcast, Reagan said he hoped the new service would “help defuse the war hysteria on which much of current Cuban Government policy is predicated.” However, from Cuba’s perspective, the use of the name of Cuban independence hero was a “gross insult”.¹⁴⁷

In July 1986, Cuba implied it would restore the immigration agreement. The Cuban government proposed to link immigration agreement talks on the radio broadcasts. It was reported that Castro ceased to insist that the shutdown of Radio Martí was a precondition of restoration of this agreement. Negotiations resumed in Mexico City in July but collapsed after only one day. According to the State Department spokesman Bernard Kalb, Cuba did not give up the proposals that major and disruptive changes on organization of radio broadcasting should be made. “In view of Cuban insistence on their own proposals, no agreement was reached.”¹⁴⁸ At this moment, both U.S. and Cuban officials admitted that the relations were worse than at any time since U.S. sent diplomats back to Havana in 1977. The United States diplomat, Curt Kamman, was abruptly recalled in January.¹⁴⁹

In 1987, Cuba had given up its insistence on removing Radio Martí as the prerequisite of immigration negotiation. On November 20, 1987, the immigration agreement was restored in Mexico City, allowing 27,000 Cubans to immigrate to the U.S. each year. Washington claimed that this meant no concessions on

¹⁴⁴ Skoug, *The United States and Cuba under Reagan and Shultz*, p.108.

¹⁴⁵ Norman Kempster, ‘Cuba Retaliates as U.S. Launches Radio Martí: Havana Cancels Immigration Accord, Threatens to Jam Official, Commercial Broadcast Signals’, *Los Angeles Times*, May 21, 1985.

¹⁴⁶ Ronald Reagan, ‘Proclamation 5377- Suspension of entry as nonimmigrants by officers or employees of the Government of Cuba or the Communist Party of Cuba’, *National Archives*, <<https://www.archives.gov/federal-register/codification/proclamations/05377.html>> [accessed 3 September].

¹⁴⁷ Joseph B. Treaster, ‘Radio Martí Goes on Air and Cuba Retaliates by Ending Pact’, *The New York Times*, May 21, 1985.

¹⁴⁸ Don Shannon, ‘U.S.-Cuban Immigration Talks Fail; Radio Access Still the Issue’, *Los Angeles Times*, July 11, 1986.

¹⁴⁹ Flora Lewis, ‘Foreign Affairs; U.S.-Cuba Cold Front’, *The New York Times*, February 27, 1987.

Radio Martí broadcasting. Officials saw the restoration of immigration agreement and the resumption of talks on Radio Martí as significant signs of Castro's willingness to "engage Washington".¹⁵⁰

The establishment of Radio Martí reflected the complicated political climate in the Reagan years. It marked a significant development of the influence of the hardline Cuban American community, especially CANF.¹⁵¹ The broadcasting plan was part of a public diplomacy program that started to form in the second year of Reagan's presidency. In April 1982, the National Security Council (NSC) proposed a top-secret document that suggested the need for a public diplomacy program aimed at Central America and Cuba. It recommended a "concerted public information effort". Reagan then announced that promotion of democratic institutions would be the central strategy for U.S. foreign policy. This was then documented as "Project Democracy: Proposals for Action."¹⁵² The selling of this foreign policy to the public became complicated and the CANF played a significant role in promoting the Reagan agenda.

Reagan signed the National Security Directive No.77 in January 1983, formally founding a new public diplomacy program. This program was supervised by a special group including the national security advisor, directors of USIA, and the secretaries of state and defense.¹⁵³ The Reagan administration made great efforts to use this public diplomacy program to shape media coverage in order to get congressional and public support for more aggressive policies.

The State Department Office of Public Policy for Latin America and the Caribbean was founded during this process. The first head of the office was Otto Rich who was born in Cuba and had experience in the US Agency for International Development (USAID). The office adopted a wide range of overt and covert activities to shape the debate on the Central America policy of the Reagan administration.¹⁵⁴ Even though the office was shut down after the Iran-Contra Affair, its influence on U.S. foreign policy endured.

This contest over radio broadcasting between Cuba and the U.S. was just "another battleground with new weapons at play."¹⁵⁵ Skoug believes that President Reagan sincerely wanted to provide intellectual encouragement to those in Cuba who suspected their Communist authorities but needed the focus of systematic, objective news and analysis of Havana's foreign and domestic policy.¹⁵⁶ The Reagan

¹⁵⁰ Neil A. Lewis, 'U.S. and Havana Agree to Restore Immigration Pact', *The New York Times*, November 21, 1987.

¹⁵¹ Haney, and Vanderbush, *The Cuban Embargo*, p.72.

¹⁵² *Ibid*, p.60.

¹⁵³ Holly Sklar, *Washington's War on Nicaragua* (Cambridge: South End Press, 1988), p.243.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid*, p.62.

¹⁵⁵ Skoug, *The United States and Cuba Under Reagan and Shultz*, p.16.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid*, pp.17-18.

administration used this radio as a major weapon for public diplomacy against Castro and communist propaganda. Evidence of this could be found in Reagan's appointment of Mas Canosa, who had once worked for the CIA in counterrevolutionary activities against Cuba, as the chair of ABCB and a member of PCBC. In 1987, Radio Martí already captured a large audience, including some Cuban government officials. State-owned media in Cuba made major improvements to compete with Radio Martí and the programs were more colorful than before.¹⁵⁷

Cold War dynamics could also be found within the USIA. The agency was founded during the Truman administration and strengthened under the Eisenhower administration. It was primarily focused on the Soviet Union and communism.¹⁵⁸ The director of USIA in the Reagan years, Charles Z. Wick, said that the USIA explained to the world American history, heritage, society, and ideas. He claimed that "we are telling the world about the meaning of freedom". He thought this was a lesson America learned from Cold War: what they were doing was modernizing their communication tools while they were also reviving "the message of hope and freedom".¹⁵⁹ After Radio Martí was launched, Wick said "after 25 years of government censorship, the people of Cuba are hearing news, commentary, and other information about events in Cuba and elsewhere promoting the cause of freedom in Cuba".¹⁶⁰ Though Radio Martí was claimed to be aimed for truth and freedom, the broadcasts existed within the framework of preexisting Cold War dynamics. Besides, the cultural exchange claimed by Wick was overshadowed by the station's political purpose. The ACBC turned down the Cuban government's suggestions of an exchange of programs and reciprocal broadcasts, since it gave Castro the power of "de facto censorship" over broadcasting.¹⁶¹

Though proposed in the Eisenhower years, Radio Martí was finally established under Reagan, even at the cost of the cancellation of the immigration pact of 1984. Reagan's insistence on coercive measures were properly explained by this move. As part of public diplomacy, Radio Martí revealed overt U.S. antagonism against Cuba, accompanied by the covert actions. Though the radio caused cancellation of immigration agreement, Reagan did not do this to irritate Castro nor to increase tensions. He rewarded the Cuban lobby group and restated his attitude to communism in attempt to win practical concession from Castro in

¹⁵⁷ Jose O. Salinas, 'Radio Martí: Meeting the Need for Uncensored Information in Cuba', *New York University Journal of International Law & Politics* 19, no. 2 (1987): pp.433-455.

¹⁵⁸ Progler, 'American Broadcasting to Cuba', pp. 159-182.

¹⁵⁹ Charles Z. Wick, 'The Power of Information in the Quest for Peace; the Tools of Mass Communication', *Vital Speeches of the Day* 51, no. 17 (1985): 519.

¹⁶⁰ Progler, 'American Broadcasting to Cuba', pp.159-182.

¹⁶¹ Advisory Board for Cuba Broadcasting. *Special Report by the Advisory Board for Cuba Broadcasting* (Washington, DC: 1989), cited in Joseph Progler, 'American Broadcasting to Cuba'.

negotiation.

Covert Actions

The U.S. had resorted to covert operations since the early days of the Cold War. The National Security Act of 1947 established the modern American intelligence apparatus.¹⁶² This act created critical organizations including the National Security Council (NSC) and Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). It also provided a pillar for the Truman administration to develop its Cold War strategy of containment. The U.S. government combined covert actions with foreign policy closely through the Office of Policy Coordination. “The Truman administration’s concern over Soviet “psychological warfare” prompted the new National Security Council (NSC) to authorize, in NSC 4–A of December 1947, the launching of peacetime covert action operations.”¹⁶³

Since 1959, the U.S. launched a number of covert actions against Cuba and Castro himself. Early in 1959, President Eisenhower approved a plan devised by the CIA and Department of State to support Castro’s opponents. In March 1960, Eisenhower approved outlines of covert actions against Cuba, including the creation of a radio station, an intelligence organization in Cuba, and the training of Cuban exiles for raids on the island.¹⁶⁴ The plans were inherited by Kennedy and the success of covert actions in the 1950s made them appeal to him. The top target would be Castro mainly due to his increased closeness to Nikita Khrushchev. The Bay of Pigs invasion was launched with CIA backing in 1961.¹⁶⁵ After Kennedy, covert actions against Cuba were less extensive but still actively conducted through a variety of channels, which could be categorized under propaganda, secret political action, economic covert action, paramilitary operations, and secret intelligence support.

The Reagan administration considered Central America the front to draw an ideological and geopolitical line against the Soviet Union. Castro’s support for revolutions in this region made Cuba the major target of U.S. Central America policy. Covert actions in the Reagan years were frequently planned

¹⁶² Loch K. Johnson, ‘Reflections on the Ethics and Effectiveness of America’s ‘Third Option’: Covert Action and U.S. Foreign Policy’, *Intelligence and National Security* 35, no. 5 (2020): pp.669-685.

¹⁶³ ‘Note on U.S. Covert Actions’, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, <<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1981-88v06/Notes>> [accessed 3 September 2021].

¹⁶⁴ ‘Memorandum From the Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs (Rubottom) to the Secretary of State’, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, <<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1958-60v06/d473>> [accessed 3 September 2021].

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

against Cuba and its regional neighbors simultaneously, often outside the island. Reagan strived to enforce a climate receptive to covert action within the executive branch by reestablishing the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board that had been decommissioned by Carter. He also appointed conservatives who favored interventionism.¹⁶⁶ Reagan reorganized the NSC to create a National Security Planning Group, a more restricted subcommittee of the NSC.¹⁶⁷

Paramilitary operations against Cuba in the early Reagan years were mainly caused by the U.S. assertion of Cuban meddling in El Salvador and Nicaragua. As Smith relates, discussions related to Cuba after 1982 would be incomplete without mentioning Nicaragua.¹⁶⁸ In general, overt military intervention was opposed in the government at that moment and Reagan was also very cautious about any direct actions towards Cuba. Yet he was determined to restrain anti-America forces in this region. To a large extent, counterrevolutionary intervention in Nicaragua and El Salvador was planned to contain Cuba, because the U.S. presumed that the best defense for Cuba would be "to confront the U.S. with a Central American 'Vietnam'."¹⁶⁹ State Department counselor Robert McFarlane authorized a memorandum arguing that the U.S. government was not doing enough to contain the Cuban threat in Central America. In November 1981, the Department of State sent a confidential report about alleged Cuban covert actions in Latin America to U.S. diplomatic posts around the world.¹⁷⁰ On November 14, Haig expressed his concerns about Nicaragua and charged Cuba of being "a proxy for the Soviet Union." He claimed that the U.S. had "proof positive" showing that Cuba was "heavily engaged" in supplying weapons for insurgencies in Central America.¹⁷¹

Soon after, in an NSC meeting held on November 16, 1981, Reagan authorized a program for paramilitary and political operations in Central America and the Caribbean, in order to show Cuba and its allies Washington's determination to put down the unrest in the region. In December 1981, Reagan finally approved the covert action program proposed in the NSC meeting.¹⁷² This program greenlighted the largest political and paramilitary operations by the CIA, with a primary target of the Sandinistas in Nicaragua and a secondary target of Cuba and Cuban support in Nicaragua.¹⁷³ The programs included additional economic

¹⁶⁶ John Prados, *Safe for Democracy: The Secret Wars of the CIA* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, Publisher, 2006), p.495.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid*, p.496.

¹⁶⁸ Smith, *The Closest of Enemies*, p.276.

¹⁶⁹ 'Monthly Warning Assessment: Latin America', Freedom of Information Act Electronic Reading Room, 28 January 1981, <<https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/cia-rdp83b01027r000300060037-2>> [accessed 8 March 2022]

¹⁷⁰ Morley, *Imperial State and Revolution*, p.323.

¹⁷¹ John M. Goshko, 'Haig Voices Concern on Nicaragua', *The Washington Post*, November 15, 1981.

¹⁷² Don Oberdorfer and Patrick E. Tyler, 'Reagan Backs Action Plan for Central America', *The Washington Post*, February 14, 1982.

¹⁷³ Leslie H. Gelb, 'Reagan Backing Covert Actions, Officials Assert', *The New York Times*, March 14, 1982.

aid to Caribbean countries, U.S. military training for El Salvador, increased intelligence activities in the region, strengthened economic sanctions against Cuba, and an increased public information program.

In 1982, Reagan approved clandestine actions by the CIA against a Cuban arm supply line in Nicaragua. Covert actions like economic aid to paramilitary groups were already underway. According to officials, the CIA focused on the Cuban presence in Nicaragua.¹⁷⁴ The establishment of an intelligence network of local and U.S. agents was also crucial to this plan. The plan clearly showed that the U.S. would not be directly involved in any of these covert actions. McFarlane wrote memorandums outlining strategy to sabotage Cuban supply lines in Nicaragua. McFarlane required the CIA to study covert actions and Department of Defense to prepare military operations. However, senior officials in the Pentagon opposed this strongly. They argued that direct military intervention might not work or was too risky.¹⁷⁵ Hence, Reagan made the decision not to use military force in Central America. The Reagan administration had been holding briefings to present evidence to Congress and the public to support its assertions of Cuban involvement in the Central America insurgencies. According to the officials interviewed by the *New York Times*, there was generally government consensus on Cuba's meddling in Central America, although some doubt on the Central American policy overall.¹⁷⁶ William E. Colby, a former Director of Central Intelligence, claimed it was not immoral for the U.S. to adopt covert actions in order to prevent "another Cuban-supported government" causing revolutions among its neighbors. Colby thought the situation in Nicaragua was similar to Angola.¹⁷⁷ Reagan also wrote in his diaries that "Nicaragua is another Cuba."¹⁷⁸

In mid-1983, there was debate on covert actions within the executive branch and Congress. House Select Committee on Intelligence and the House Foreign Affairs Committee voted to stop supporting covert actions in Nicaragua. Proponents thought that covert action functioned as a supplement of U.S. foreign policy, along with overt action and military operations. They argued this was the best way to fight against the Soviet and Cuban arm shipments to guerrillas in El Salvador. While the executive branch retained an interest in covert actions, Congress started to react more ambivalently.¹⁷⁹ As Arthur Schlesinger said, Reagan had made covert actions his chosen instrument and thus "secrecy, deceit, mendacity as the

¹⁷⁴ Leslie H. Gelb, 'U.S. Said to Plan Covert Actions in Latin Region', *The New York Times*, March 14, 1982.

¹⁷⁵ Leslie H. Gelb, 'Reagan Backing Covert Actions, Officials Assert'.

¹⁷⁶ Leslie H. Gelb, 'U.S. Said to Plan Covert Actions in Latin Region'.

¹⁷⁷ UPI, 'Colby Backs U.S. Use of Covert Operations', *The New York Times*, March 19, 1982.

¹⁷⁸ Ronald Reagan, *The Reagan Diaries*, edited by Douglas Brinkley, (Harper Collins, 2007), p.67.

¹⁷⁹ Philip Taubman, 'Are U.S. Covert Activities Best Policy on Nicaragua?', *The New York Times*, June 15, 1983.

foundation of American foreign policy.”¹⁸⁰

Senior officials in the executive branch noted that the administration had planned a major expansion of intelligence actions in Latin America in the summer of 1983. The expansion included increased support for anti-government insurgents in Nicaragua and a sabotage plan against Cuban installations there. This expanded program would make CIA activities in Central America the most extensive ones launched by the United States since the Vietnam War.¹⁸¹ With this, CIA support for rebel forces in Nicaragua would increase dramatically. This expansion plan came following a year of intense activities. Foreign diplomats in Nicaragua thought that the insurgents failed to pose a significant threat to the Sandinistas. But Reagan officials insisted that they had forced the Sandinistas towards the negotiation table.¹⁸² Anthony C. Quainton, U.S. ambassador in Nicaragua, argued that the aim of this plan was not to “topple Sandinista Government” but to “modify its behaviors in some substantial ways”. The key point of his assertion was that there were 6,000 Cubans in Nicaragua at that time, engaging in the military training of the Sandinista armed forces.¹⁸³

Reagan repeatedly emphasized that the Soviet Union and Cuba were the sources of unrest in Central America. The White House thought both the Congress and the public had underestimated the threat posed by the two communist countries in this region. However, members of the legislature expressed their dissent over the president’s policies. Thomas P. O’Neill Jr., the house speaker, criticized Reagan’s policy sharply, calling him “inept and ill-informed”. Concern over Soviet Union, Cuba and Nicaragua were the major driving forces for Reagan’s policy in Central America.¹⁸⁴ According to a *New York Times* report in April 1984, Reagan decided to take a break from Central America as Congress halted aid there though he thought it was desperately necessary. There was also criticism of U.S. involvement in this region.¹⁸⁵ But Reagan’s national security advisors still believed that covert actions in Central America were “increasingly necessary” as they allowed the U.S. “an alternative of going to war and doing nothing”. This kind of comments constituted the strongest justification in the administration for CIA activities in Central America. McFarlane said the U.S. intelligence had got information in the previous six weeks indicating that Cubans decided to double the forces carried out by Salvadoran rebels backed up Nicaraguans.¹⁸⁶ Even so, at the same time,

¹⁸⁰ Arthur Schlesinger Jr., ‘A Democrat Looks at Foreign Policy’, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 66, No. 2 (1987), pp.263-283.

¹⁸¹ Philip Taubman, ‘U.S. Seeks Increase in Covert Activity in Latin America’, *The New York Times*, July 25, 1983.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Philip Taubman, ‘Reagan’s Latin Crusade; News Analysis’, *The New York Times*, July 28, 1983.

¹⁸⁵ Hedrick Smith, ‘Reagan Takes a Break from The Furor Over Central America’, *The New York Times*, April 22, 1984.

¹⁸⁶ Bernard Gwertzman, ‘Security Adviser to Reagan Backs Covert Activities’, *The New York Times*, May 14, 1984.

Cuba repeatedly sent signals of a willingness for negotiation over Central America issues. The administration barely changed its basic stance on the role of covert actions played in its Central America policy. Schlesinger asserts that covert actions became a routine part of Reagan's foreign policy.¹⁸⁷ Nevertheless, covert actions under Reagan were less active compared to Eisenhower and Kennedy years. Another difference was that they were mainly directed outside Cuba. Most of these actions aimed to sabotage Cuban support in Nicaragua and El Salvador, to prevent the spread of leftist movements and the Cuban presence more generally. Fundamentally, Reagan's objective was to contain Cuban and Soviet influence in this region.

Conclusion

Compared to the 1970s, the economic embargo was significantly stricter in the Reagan years. In July 1986, the Reagan administration tightened the embargo again to force Cuba back to the negotiation table over radio broadcasts and renewal of immigration accord. Reagan's antagonistic attitude and Castro's reluctance to facilitate Reagan's reelection campaign had delayed the negotiations. For seven years of Reagan's administration, U.S.-Cuban relations were much worse than they were in the prior two presidencies.

In January 1987, the head of U.S. Interests Section in Havana, Curtis Kamman, was called back to Washington with no one to replace him. This was the first time since 1977 when the interests section had been established. There was a consensus among both western diplomats in Havana and Cuban officials that U.S.-Cuban relations reached their lowest point in two decades.¹⁸⁸ In the last months of Reagan's presidency, a slow improvement began to emerge in bilateral relations. The delayed immigration negotiation was revived in November 1987.¹⁸⁹

Reagan was determined to take a tough stance on Cuban issue after he assumed office and had strong executive powers with regards to foreign policy. Congress might make modifications of Reagan's approach but could not "take decisive actions to change it". This "reflected the many difficulties Congress faces as it tries to influence foreign policy in general and Central American strategy in particular."¹⁹⁰ Reagan's key

¹⁸⁷ Schlesinger, 'A Democrat Looks at Foreign Policy', p.263-283.

¹⁸⁸ Morley, *Imperial State and Revolution*, p.334.

¹⁸⁹ Tad Szulc, 'A Thaw in Cuban Relations?', *The New York Times*, December 8, 1987.

¹⁹⁰ Philip Taubman, 'The Reagan Doctrine', *The New York Times*, July 31, 1983.

advisors also took a hardline attitude in foreign policy. Reagan's Cuba policy was characterized by two major factors: a seeming reasonable approach and openness to negotiation accompanied by harsh measures; and retaliations in response to Cuban concessions or failed negotiations.¹⁹¹ This policy was not created solely by Reagan. He had inherited conservative policies and revived them to such a great extent that he changed the terms of American political debate.

¹⁹¹ Morley, *Imperial State and Revolution*, p.336.

Chapter 3: Factors Influencing Reagan's Cuba Policy

This chapter discusses the factors that influenced Reagan's foreign policy toward Cuba. After talking about Reagan's major policy approaches to Cuba in his presidency, I argue that Reagan's policy toward Cuba was primarily shaped by his diplomatic inheritance from the past and domestic politics in the 1980s. International context change and Cuban foreign policy change from late 1970s also asserted significant influence on Reagan. The first section starts with a discussion of the legacies of Reagan's predecessors, which greatly shaped his stance on foreign policy making. The second section provides a probe into American political environment of late 1970s and 1980s, mainly the multiple political forces that affected Reagan's Cuba policy. The third section considers the international context of the 1980s, which also impacted Reagan's foreign policy. The fourth section provides a perspective from Cuba in this discussion, trying to explain that Cuba's foreign policy and its responses to the Reagan administration influenced the U.S. policy greatly in the 1980s.

3.1 Legacies from the Past

The following provides a retrospective of American diplomatic ideologies which influenced Reagan's political vision and his foreign policy. Reagan inherited much from U.S. conservative politics and eventually he "redefined the image of the American right" in the 1980s.¹⁹² This was significantly reflected in his foreign policy, especially towards Cuba.

U.S. foreign policy has much to do with ideology. In the first hundred years of U.S. history, independence and expansion were the two predominant themes that shaped U.S. foreign policy.¹⁹³ The history of U.S. foreign policy started with independence. At the early stage of United States, Americans viewed UK as a corrupting state of the Old World with which they were breaking relations. Territorial expansion was another theme that framed American foreign policy in 19th century. Under Jefferson, the U.S.

¹⁹³ 'Ideology and American Foreign Policy', *Encyclopedia of American Foreign Policy*, <<https://www.americanforeignrelations.com/E-N/Ideology-Ideology-and-american-foreign-policy.html#ixzz6nHkytc00>> [accessed 3 September, 2021].

territory pressed westward steadily and he believed this was “expanding the empire of liberty”.¹⁹⁴ In this process, Americans’ racial attitudes played a role. During the Mexican-American War (1846-1848), President James K. Polk rejected the idea of conquering Mexico because he believed that Latin America was not ready for republican politics of the American style. This belief in Latin American inferiority proved lasting in U.S. politics and influenced its foreign policy significantly later.¹⁹⁵ It is obvious in Reagan’s Latin American policy.

In December 1823, President James Monroe made his State of Union Address to Congress, stating that the New World and the Old World were to remain separated. This separation meant that the New World should avoid being the battlefield of the Old World powers. In this way, the United States could exert its influence uninterrupted.¹⁹⁶ Monroe Doctrine argued that any intervention against Western Hemisphere countries was a threat to the United States. This doctrine emerged at a critical time when almost all Spanish colonies in Latin America gained independence. This doctrine was an outgrowth of U.S. concern that the Old World powers might attempt to restore colonies in the New World, namely Latin America. The fundamental principle of the doctrine was U.S. opposition to any future European intervention in the New World. It would become one of the cornerstones of U.S foreign policy in the Americas.¹⁹⁷ It was inherited by every subsequent presidential administration, including Reagan’s.

Reagan made his State of the Union Address on February 6, 1985, stating the guiding principle of his foreign policy was that American people should not break faith in fighting the Soviet Union and securing their natural rights. This idea became the centerpiece of U.S. foreign policy in the 1980s and, while definitely the product of the Cold War, it clearly drew from Monroe’s legacy. One of the first foreign policy measures by Reagan was to revive the Monroe Doctrine and reassert its predominance in U.S. Latin American policy.¹⁹⁸ The 1980s U.S. had “Reagan’s version of the Monroe Doctrine” though the two doctrines differed. “Monroe had the words but he didn’t have the power to enforce them. President Reagan has the power, but he doesn’t have the support of the American people, the Congress or the allies in the

¹⁹⁴ Merrill D. Peterson, *Thomas Jefferson and the New Nation: A Biography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), p.771.

¹⁹⁵ ‘Ideology and American Foreign Policy’.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ ‘Monroe Doctrine’, *Britannica Academic*, <<https://academic-eb-com.ezproxy.lib.gla.ac.uk/levels/collegiate/article/Monroe-Doctrine/53434>> [accessed 3 September, 2021].

¹⁹⁸ David D. Carto, ‘The Monroe Doctrine in the 1980’s: International Law, Unilateral Policy, Or Atavistic Anachronism?’, *Case Western Reserve Journal of International Law* 13, No. 1 (1981): pp.203-229.

hemisphere".¹⁹⁹ Reagan re-legitimized the Monroe Doctrine and placed it in his own approach. Under this, the Reagan administration perceived that U.S. was responsible for the security of the hemisphere. This was clearly manifested in the way the administration dealt with the unrest in Central America.

Another long-standing theme in American foreign policy is the belief in the exceptional destiny of the United States.²⁰⁰ Since the earliest generation, American people had profound faith in the nation's future greatness. Americans believed that their country was chosen and assigned divine mission. Conceptions of this mission evolved over time but the survival of a republican form of government and the greatness of the nation remained the core.²⁰¹ The resilience of the U.S. government and the fall of empires in the Old World gave the American people stronger belief in their superiority and the legitimacy of their nation.

Reagan's view of American exceptionalism is encapsulated in the idea of the "city upon a hill", which appears many times in his speeches. By the time Reagan won the 1980 election, American exceptionalism was facing huge challenge as both U.S. domestic economy and global geopolitical dominance were wavering. But during Reagan's presidency the U.S. rediscovered faith in itself.²⁰² For Reagan, exceptionalism was more than just a natural process or a product of the nation's history and geographical position.²⁰³ Early in 1952, he delivered a commencement speech in William Woods College, saying that "I, in my own mind, have always thought of America as a place in the divine scheme of things that was set aside as a promised land."²⁰⁴ Reagan repeatedly mentioned this faith in his later speeches to make it clear that the United States is a special nation that was chosen by God. Decades later, this belief was embodied in his foreign policy, especially in Latin America and Iran. Reagan thought that America's predominance in the world was consistent with its destiny and was part of God's plan for humankind.²⁰⁵ Reagan supported *Contras* in Nicaragua out of the belief that U.S. had the duty to help people struggling for freedom and democracy. As for his Cuba policy, the Reagan administration determined to place Cuba in a subordinate situation and wanted to provoke Castro into reconciliation.²⁰⁶

¹⁹⁹ James Reston, 'Washington; Reagan and Monroe', *The New York Times*, March 14, 1982.

²⁰⁰ 'Ideology and American Foreign Policy'.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Tami R. Davis, and Sean M. Lynn-Jones, 'City upon a Hill', *Foreign Policy*, no. 66 (1987): pp.20-38.

²⁰³ 'Ronald Reagan's American Exceptionalism', *States News Service*, 2017.

²⁰⁴ Ronald Reagan, 'America the Beautiful: Commencement Address', 1952, cited in 'Ronald Reagan's American Exceptionalism', *States News Service*, 2017.

²⁰⁵ Chernus I, *Monsters to Destroy: The Neoconservative War on Terror and Sin* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2006), p.47.

²⁰⁶ Platt, 'The United States, Cuba, and the New Cold War', p.4-21.

Despite many shared beliefs, foreign policy has been a partisan issue for the U.S.²⁰⁷ George Washington, in his farewell address, warned against entangling with Europe. Thomas Jefferson and his Republicans were against economic internationalism. In late 1970s, the Republicans and Democrats had become so deeply polarized that they tended to demonize opponents with partisan talking points. Peter Gris argues that this explanation only touched the surface of problem. Partisanship over American foreign policy has deeper roots in disparate ideologies: “widely shared and systematic beliefs about how the world does and should work”. Liberals and conservatives see foreign countries and American foreign policy in profoundly different ways.²⁰⁸ Reagan, as the central conservative leader, held strong conservative views on both domestic and foreign policy. He agreed with the conservative criticism of Carter's conciliatory foreign policy and called for rebuilding of U.S. “strategic superiority” and more aggressive foreign policy against the Soviet Union.²⁰⁹

In the first half of the 20th century, Wilsonianism²¹⁰ impacted U.S. foreign policy significantly and left a profound imprint on the Reagan Doctrine. President Woodrow Wilson is credited with revolutionizing U.S. foreign policy with his doctrine and the policies he pursued. Under the doctrine of democracy promotion, Wilson conducted several interventionist activities in Central America. Wilson believed this was necessary in building a world safe for democracy. Tony Smith calls Reagan the most Wilsonian president since Wilson's time.²¹¹ “No administration since the presidency of Woodrow Wilson has been so committed to the tenets of liberal democratic internationalism as that of Ronald Reagan.”²¹² Before Reagan's assumption, the U.S. foreign policy has been unstable and inconsistent for more than a decade. Reagan administration tried to end this inconsistency by asserting a tough stance. Kennedy once proposed that democracy was the antidote against the appeal of Cuban Revolution in Latin America.²¹³ Reagan held fundamentally similar tenets and unremittingly saw Cuba and Soviet Union as the source of turmoil in Central America. Reagan's Cuba policy was made based on this core ideology and fear about containing Castro's communist internationalism. The Reagan administration conducted its Central America policy

²⁰⁷ Peter Hays Gries, *The Politics of American Foreign Policy: How Ideology Divides Liberals and Conservatives Over Foreign Affairs* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2014), p.1.

²⁰⁸ Ibid, p.5.

²⁰⁹ Dueck, *Hard Line*, p.199.

²¹⁰ Wilsonianism: or Wilsonian idealism, comes from proposals by President Woodrow Wilson. It a form of liberal internationalism. It advocates self-determination of all nations, open negotiations, free trade, especially collective security and international law. It also supports liberal interventionism and emphasizes American exceptionalism.

²¹¹ Tony Smith, ‘Making the World Safe for Democracy’, *The Washington Quarterly* 16, no. 4 (1993): pp.197-214.

²¹² Tony Smith, *America's Mission, The United States and the Worldwide Struggle for Democracy in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994) pp. 291-295.

²¹³ Smith, ‘Making the World Safe for Democracy’, p. 197-214.

under democracy promotion, aiming to overthrow any socialist or leftist government and support democracy in this region. He believed this was the perfect way to contain Castro and make friendly right-wing allies in the neighborhood.

Reagan led a successful revival of conservatism with legacies from his predecessors. Major ideologies in American foreign policy - independence, expansionism, faith in American destiny, exceptionalism - shaped his foreign policy positions. Monroe Doctrine and Wilsonianism provided effective guidelines for his policymaking. All these worked together to direct Reagan's policy toward Cuba into an aggressive way and this aggression was further strengthened by domestic politics in the 1980s.

3.2 Domestic Political Forces

This section discusses domestic political forces that influenced Reagan's Cuba policy. The dynamics that drove U.S. policy towards Cuba changed in the 1980s. Reagan led a wide, comprehensive coalition after his 1980 campaign, which proceeded and anticipated the revival of conservatism and the rise of ethnic interest groups. The politics of U.S. policy toward Cuba was significantly more complicated than during Eisenhower years.²¹⁴ The following mainly discusses factors within the United States from two perspective: the realignment of domestic political groups and the rise of Cuban American organizations in the 1980s.

Realignment

Before domestic political forces effectively influenced Reagan's foreign policy, he benefited a lot from various conservative movements from as early as mid-1970s.²¹⁵ Right-wing organizations in the U.S. were motivated by concerns about domestic issues such as abortion, women in the workplace, gay rights, and welfare reform. New Right lobby groups would play a prominent role in the conservative revival led by Reagan. The New Right started in Barry Goldwater's campaign in mid-1960s and had developed significantly by the mid-1970s. This special set of lobby groups had a distinct populist character and was closely connected to the Religious Right. They focused more on social populism, American nationalism

²¹⁴ Haney, and Vanderbush, *The Cuban Embargo*, p.30.

²¹⁵ Dueck, *Hard Line*, p.200.

rather than traditional fiscal austerity or party loyalty.²¹⁶ Leading figures included Terry Dolan- founder of the National Conservative Political Action Committee, Paul Weyrich-founder of the Free Congress Foundation and the Heritage Foundation, Milton Friedman-neoclassical leader of the Chicago school of economics, and Phyllis Schlafly-anti-feminist activist and founder of the Eagle Forum. These groups put grassroots pressure on government's domestic and foreign policy establishments. Schlafly and her Eagle Forum conducted a successful campaign that defeated a proposed Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) in 1970s. Anti-ERA movement combined forces of the religious right.²¹⁷ The consequential development of religious right was that it provided political mobilization for conservative revival. In the long run, Mormons and evangelical Protestants formed a "Pro-Family Movement" that became a powerful force in American politics.²¹⁸

Reagan's new coalition included not only conservative Republicans but also hawkish, conservative Democrats. A leading group of national security hawks formed an interest group - the second Committee on the Present Danger (CPD) - in November 1976, just days after Carter's election. Being recognized as a neoconservative lobby, its most notable members were hawkish anti-Communist intellectuals such as Jeane Kirkpatrick, who was still affiliated with the Democrats in the late 1970s. This committee also took in Republican Cold War warriors. So, CPD became an organization for a wide range of foreign policy hawks from both parties.²¹⁹ They shared a common goal of returning to anti-Communist policies adopted by presidents before the Vietnam War.²²⁰ During the détente, CPD members worried that the United States might have lost the power to compete with USSR. They called for increase in military defense and opposed the negotiation of SALT II, which they believed could amplify the existing military imbalance between the two superpowers. As a result, after Carter's election, CPD mainly engaged in lobbying against détente and SALT II agreement. Meanwhile, CPD members criticized Carter's foreign policy harshly as the New Right did. CPD provided other more than thirty officials for later Reagan administration besides Kirkpatrick.

In the late 1970s, the rightward trend in congressional Republican party also helped to form a solid coalition around Reagan. Republican senators and congressmen tended to be more conservative on economic and foreign policy than the retiring ones.²²¹ Before Reagan's victory in 1980, hardline

²¹⁶ Ibid, p.195.

²¹⁷ Robyn Muncy, 'The Equal Rights Amendment', *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of American History*, September 30, 2019.

²¹⁸ Spruill, 'Gender Roles, Women's Rights, and the Polarization of American Politics in the Late 20th Century'.

²¹⁹ Dueck, *Hard Line*, p.197.

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ Ibid, p.201.

conservatives had gained predominance in Republican party.

Besides social conservatives, economic conservatives also formed “mobilized strength” and “political potential” to Reagan’s new coalition.²²² Economic issues in the late 1970s provided opportunities for a renewed fiscal conservatism. Under stagflation, taxpayers were dissatisfied with the economic developments and open to conservative measures supported by credible spokesmen like Milton Friedman.²²³ The seeming inability of Keynesian prescriptions to solve economic problems of the 1970s made more fertile ground for conservative policy.²²⁴ This was a favorable environment for conservative think tanks to expand, such as the Heritage Foundation, one of the two mainstay organizations supporting the formation of New Right. Meanwhile, these think tanks provided support for the conservative organizations and ideas.

In general, the New Right held a nationalistic stance on foreign policy and opposed Carter’s dovish approach. New Right approach helped to bring Reagan into the White House in 1981. In turn, the New Right played one of the major roles shaping the Reagan administration’s stance in foreign policy. Neoconservatives were especially influential in foreign policy toward Communism in Reagan administration. On the whole, Reagan’s policy toward Cuba exposed unremitting antagonism for most of his two terms. Under these circumstances, there was “an incessant, united, and closed front of hostility to Cuba” in the Reagan administration.²²⁵ The roots of this policy change could be found in the realignment of domestic political forces since mid-1970s. Reagan’s Cuba policy was based on his Cold War vision that was elaborated well by conservative think tanks and New Right interest groups. Incorporated into the “Reagan Doctrine”, this policy guided U.S-Cuba relations in the 1980s.²²⁶

Another distinctive change during Reagan years regarding Cuba policy politics was the rise of ethnic interest lobbies, namely Cuban American groups.

Cuban-American Organizations

The dynamics that influence U.S. policy toward Cuba had changed greatly since Eisenhower. In late

²²² Dueck, *Hard Line*, p.201.

²²³ *Ibid*, p.200.

²²⁴ Jason T. Stahl, *Right Moves: The Conservative Think Tank in American Political Culture since 1945* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 2016), p.96.

²²⁵ Platt, ‘The United States, Cuba, and the New Cold War’, p.4-21.

²²⁶ *Ibid*.

1950s, the president and executive branch had firm control over policymaking. However, since the 1970s, Cuba policy involved more players, most notably Congress and interest groups.²²⁷ Among the interest groups, ethnic interest groups founded by Cubans were of huge influence in Reagan's Cuba policy.

The Cuban American lobby was formed by Cuban exiles emigrating to the U.S. during the latter half of the twentieth century. Before Castro's seizure of power, about 124,000 Cubans had emigrated to United States.²²⁸ Afterwards, large groups of Cubans also left the island, emigrating to the U.S. in both legal and illegal ways. Early immigrants were mainly supporters of the Batista dictatorship and were fearful of Castro's communist revolution. So, Cuban American lobbies inevitably placed anti-Castroism as the keynote of their principle in the early days. Early immigrants formed organizations following Castro's rise to power and a coalition formed by various military and political forces was founded in Mexico City. This coalition was called Frente Democrático Revolucionario and received aid from the CIA.²²⁹ Cuba's foreign policy also impacted the formation of the Cuban exile community in the United States.²³⁰ The Cuban government permitted Cubans to leave the island to get rid of dissidents. In the 1960s, the relationship between Cuban émigrés and the U.S. government influenced the Cuban community greatly. U.S. military activities were usually accompanied by immigration programs.²³¹ In the 1970s, Cuban exiles became more concerned with their life in the U.S. and class division widened. The need for better life drove the Cuban exiles to enter the political arena. Their homeland was still the center of debate. Cubans as U.S. residents were increasingly involved in U.S.-Cuban relations. During this process, the community became relatively moderate towards the Castro government and even achieved rapprochement with the Cuba during Carter years.

The Mariel Boatlift significantly changed the Cuban government's attitude toward Cuban community. Seeing large numbers of Cubans striving to leave for the U.S, the Cuban government changed its rhetoric to exile groups in the U.S. and renewed the ideological campaign against them. Those who supported U.S.-Cuba rapprochement inside the community were caught off guard by this immigration and Cuban government's response. It became clear that many officials within the Cuban government did not want

²²⁷ Haney, and Vanderbush, *The Cuban Embargo*, p.3.

²²⁸ María de los Angeles Torres, *In the Land of Mirrors: Cuban Exile Politics in the United States*. 1st pbk. ed. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001), p.42.

²²⁹ *Ibid*, p.49.

²³⁰ Torres, *In the Land of Mirrors*, p.59.

²³¹ *Ibid*, p.62.

relations with exile groups. Provoked by this, the pro-normalization section of the community broke up.²³²

From late 1970s to 1980s, the Cuban American community entered mainstream U.S. politics. This group worked together with Reagan in his 1980 election campaign. Among various Cuban American groups, the Cuban American National Foundation (CANF) was the predominant one. CANF activities in the 1980s suggest that interest group activity is far more complicated than is commonly understood.²³³ Ethnic groups had been thought to be relatively less significant in foreign policy making, especially during Cold War when presidents were dominant on the course. In the late 1970s, calls for hardline policies in Central America began to emerge. Reagan's 1980 presidential campaign included discussion about unrest in Central America and its connection with Cuba and Soviet Union.

In 1980, Cuban Americans changed their approach to challenge Castro's regime. Although the Mariel immigrants were more moderate towards the Castro regime, one of the ramifications inside the Cuban community was that they started to "question the stability of Castro's regime".²³⁴ This revived belief injected new energy for the traditional activities of right-wing groups with Cuban émigré circles, who turned more militant.²³⁵ At the same time, they consolidated their relationship with the New Right in the U.S. mainstream political arena. New Right members and right-wing Cuban American groups shared the same ideological and political ideas on foreign policy. The Reagan administration used these groups to counter public apprehension when it planned to make more aggressive policy toward Central America, especially Cuba. Meanwhile, the Cuban community had their own troubles that needed to be solved immediately. Apart from their organizational weakness, they were considered being involved in "questionable covert activities".²³⁶ So, the Cuban community worked with the administration to shift public perception with respective purposes. According to Torres, declassified records showed that State Department planned to weaken more moderate opposition leaders, who were considered not sufficiently pro-American and anti-Castro.²³⁷

Months after Reagan won 1980 election, CANF was founded by a group of Cuban American businessmen and ideologues.²³⁸ Mas Canosa, who was brought on board by the NSC to help organize this

²³² Ibid, p.112.

²³³ Haney, and Vanderbush, *The Cuban Embargo*, p.32.

²³⁴ Torres, *In the Land of Mirrors*, p.113.

²³⁵ Ibid, p.114.

²³⁶ Haney, and Vanderbush, *The Cuban Embargo*, p.34.

²³⁷ Maria de los Angeles Torres, 'Autumn of the Cuban Patriarchs', *The Nation* (1997), pp. 24+. Gale Academic OneFile.

²³⁸ Torres, *In the Land of Mirrors*, p.115.

foundation, became the first president of CANF. Mas Canosa had once fought against Batista and was trained by CIA for the Bay of Pigs invasion. Though it claimed to be nonpartisan, CANF policy was highly consistent with that of the Reagan administration. Its influence continued to increase and it became the most powerful Cuban lobbying group in the 1980s.

Reagan's approach to Latin America coincided with CANF leadership perfectly. Both the Reagan administration and Mas Canosa's leadership opposed Castro government. According to its own literature, CANF was committed to establish an organization that "would challenge the myth propagated by the Cuban government, through the objective analysis and reporting of conditions in Cuba, of Castro's repressive dictatorship and destructive international policies, while promoting the ideals of respect for human rights and self-determination for the Cuban people."²³⁹ CANF contributed enormously to help convince Congress and the public to agree with Reagan's aggressive stance to Cuba, especially because of Castro's support to left-wing movements in Nicaragua and El Salvador. The proposal of building Radio Martí incurred opposition from the administration and Congress, fearing retaliation from Cuban government. CANF assisted the administration to gain nationwide support by lobbying the Congress and condemning opposers.²⁴⁰ CANF also made efforts to convince the Congress and the public that Castro was still posing threat to the U.S. This reversed the pro-normalization trend in the 1970s that softened U.S.-Cuban relations.

For CANF, the support from the administration was of vital importance, too. Republicans not only kept an eye on Cuban exiles, but also promoted them to critical positions in the government. So, "whether CANF was born as an effort by Cuban exiles to influence Washington or vice versa is an open question."²⁴¹

Though it claimed that it aimed at bringing democracy and capitalism to Cuba, in practice, CANF could be quite contrary to its stated principles. The CANF board was consisted of male leaders of the financial and export sectors from Miami. No woman was permitted into the board until 1990. As Mas Canosa became increasingly dictatorial, Jose Antonio Font, subsequent director of CANF, resigned in 1988 to protest against Mas Canosa.²⁴²

CANF's lobby objectives were the same to Reagan's policy priorities. It made great efforts to influence the public opinion. In concert with Reagan, CANF strongly backed contras in Nicaragua to fight against

²³⁹ Cited in Haney, and Vanderbush, *The Cuban Embargo*, p.36.

²⁴⁰ Torres, *In the Land of Mirrors*, p.118.

²⁴¹ Andres Oppenheimer, *Castro's Final Hour: The Secret Story Behind the Coming Downfall of Communist Cuba* (London; New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992), p.329.

²⁴² Torres, *In the Land of Mirrors*, p.116.

Cuba-backed Sandinista government. CANF also supported Angolan rebels fighting that African state's Cuban-backed government. CANF were tireless in efforts to help build Radio Martí and ensured that it remained on the air. The group also supported the U.S. invasion into Grenada and helped Reagan pass the Caribbean Basin Initiative of 1984, which benefited the businessmen on the board.²⁴³

CANF exerted its influence through Mas Canosa and he spared no efforts to make sure the U.S. government put incessant pressure on Castro's regime. Ironically, CANF was originally founded to reinforce the forces supporting embargo and strengthen Reagan's control over Cuba policy. This foundation contributed enormously to the promotion of hardline policies but also caused the executive's loss of control over Cuba policy in the longer term.²⁴⁴

Mas Canosa answered firmly when asked whether CANF was the major force in promoting Radio Martí.²⁴⁵ When Reagan signed the bill to start broadcast in May 1985, the Department of State wanted to postpone it. However, Reagan was influenced by USIA director Charles Wick, who argued that Mas Canosa urged to start as planned.²⁴⁶ After the bill was passed, Reagan named Ernesto Betancourt, a member of CANF, as the first director. Mas Canosa proposed the idea of TV Martí in 1988 to exert more pressure on the Castro regime.

The National Endowment for Democracy (NED), a sister organization of CANF, also distributed money to support the administration's foreign policy. It was created by CANF due to Congressional restrictions on money use. A number of organizations served as NED's conduits for funds except CANF. In a testimony against the *New Republic*, Manosa said CANF never received any money from NED.²⁴⁷ But a source confirmed that CANF received a total of \$390,000 from NED funds by 1988.²⁴⁸ Elliot Abrams, who once served as Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights in Reagan's administration, asserted that CANF could probably be able to claim an "informal veto" over NED program toward Cuba.²⁴⁹ Gradually, CANF's role in Cuba policymaking evolved to a relatively decisive position than it had been in early Reagan years.

²⁴³ Torres, *In the Land of Mirrors*, p.116.

²⁴⁴ Haney, and Vanderbush, *The Cuban Embargo*, p.3.

²⁴⁵ Mas Canosa, *Deposition*, p.177, cited in Haney, and Vanderbush, *The Cuban Embargo*, p.40.

²⁴⁶ Constantine C. Menges, *Inside National Security Council, the True Story of the Making and Unmaking of Reagan's Foreign Policy*, (New York, Simon & Schuster, 1988), p.219, cited in Haney and Vanderbush, *The Cuban Embargo*, p.41.

²⁴⁷ Haney, and Vanderbush, *The Cuban Embargo*, pp.43-44.

²⁴⁸ Torres, *In the Land of Mirrors*, p.117.

²⁴⁹ Haney, and Vanderbush, *The Cuban Embargo*, pp.44.

CANF exerted much bigger influence in immigration issue. CANF was granted the permission to promote Cuban exiles' entrance from a third country. After the Mariel boatlift both governments did not want another one. The U.S. government wanted to avoid third-country entry by Cubans. Cuba also wanted a formal way for Cubans to emigrate. CANF protested strongly against negotiations with Cuba. According to Jane Franklin, the immigration process brought financial and membership benefits for CANF.²⁵⁰ In this case, the administration "withstood the lobbying pressure of CANF".²⁵¹ But still, this privatization of immigration showed a big concession of power from the administration to a private organization.

With tireless efforts by CANF, progressive Cubans that were in favor of better relations with Cuba were left with little possibility to influence the political environment, either within or outside the Cuban community.

CANF formed a symbiotic relationship with the U.S. government on the basis of common interests and objectives in foreign policy. Haney and Vanderbush argued that it was certain that CANF tried to emulate and even perfect the model established by the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC).²⁵² CANF was more than just a lobbying group providing guidance to the president. CANF's role in U.S. foreign policymaking was like "a near coexecutor".²⁵³ It had a unique relationship with Reagan's government and they worked together in a power-sharing pattern. Though the impetus of the birth of CANF came from the executive, the organization seized the initiative to exert influence in the projects like Radio Martí and immigration issue. Because of Radio Martí, the U.S.-Cuba relations did not improve as Reagan-Gorbachev dialogue processed. This unusual case was not totally due to Reagan's anti-Communist creed, but mainly came from the persistent effort by the CANF to pressure the administration to employ assert coercive measures to Castro.

3.3 New Changes in the International Context

This section considers the international context of the 1980s. The global environment was changing before Reagan won the 1980 election and this contributed greatly to his foreign policy. The termination of détente and relations with Soviet Union effectively impacted the Reagan administration's policy toward

²⁵⁰ Franklin, *Cuba and the United States*, p.243.

²⁵¹ Torres, *In the Land of Mirrors*, p.117.

²⁵² Haney, and Vanderbush, *The Cuban Embargo*, pp.48.

²⁵³ Patrick J. Haney, and Walt Vanderbush. 'The Role of Ethnic Interest Groups in U.S. Foreign Policy: The Case of the Cuban American National Foundation', *International Studies Quarterly* 43, no. 2 (1999): pp.341-361.

Cuba during both his terms.

Reagan did not wait until he officially took office to demonstrate his stance on détente and the Soviet threat. He publicly opposed détente in his campaign and won comprehensive support from conservatives and hawkish liberals. International changes in the late 1970s provided major impetus for his hardline foreign policy. As previously discussed, Cuba got involved in the Ogaden crisis in 1978. Next year, the alleged discovery of Soviet combat brigade in Cuba worsened the situation. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 announced the end of détente as well as the SALT II negotiations. Another reason why Reagan was against détente was that détente recognized the Soviet position as another superpower equivalent to the U.S. Reagan, as a conservative who believed in American exceptionalism, denied that.

Be that as it may, the international trend was the same as it had been for the past three decades: the two superpowers still predominated in global geopolitics. The two countries were trapped in a competition from which they seemed unable to escape but operated in significantly different ways.²⁵⁴ Besides the flagrant invasion in Afghanistan, the Soviet Union was also embedded in East Europe and Africa. As to the U.S., intervention in Middle East, Latin America and Africa also consumed much of its attention. It was no longer a conviction that superpowers were unchallenged. Both superpowers started to become less important in international affairs in the 1980s. Fears of Soviet collapse and U.S. economic predominance were common. Soviet Union was facing multiple troubles domestically and abroad since the late 1970s. Compared to the belligerence of Reagan's administration, the Soviet Union under Brezhnev made no major changes on key issues. Even the U.S. admitted that Brezhnev, in one of his speeches, made "overall effort to depict the Soviet Union as a reasonable, accommodating power".²⁵⁵

But as the political scientist Peter Savigear argued, "something in the nature of Soviet-American relations had changed, and that change was already underway by 1980."²⁵⁶ A vital element in this change were shifts in military balance. The Soviet Union increased its military capacity by 1980, especially in nuclear weapons. By the 1980s, some observers revised that judgment, calling it "a one-dimensional superpower," possessing only the military dimension.²⁵⁷ The U.S. government believed that after a decade of modernization and expansion, the Soviet Union had "improved the reliability, payload and accuracy of

²⁵⁴ Peter Savigear, *Cold War or Detente in the 1980s: The International Politics of American-Soviet Relations* (Brighton: Wheatsheaf, 1987), p.2.

²⁵⁵ 'Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Allen) to President Reagan', *Foreign Relations of the United States*, <<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1981-88v03/d23>> [accessed 2 March 2022].

²⁵⁶ *Ibid*, p.25.

²⁵⁷ William E. Odom, 'Soviet Military Doctrine', *Foreign Affairs*, Winter 1988/1989.

their ballistic missiles allowing an improved hard-target kill capacity".²⁵⁸ After U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam, Soviet military presence grew in Southeast Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. Reagan's election intensified the deteriorating relations between the two superpowers. Fears of new tensions or even military confrontation between the Soviet Union and the U.S. grew around the world. The situation was even worse inside the U.S. after Reagan's new conservative coalition spread panic that the U.S. might have lost the nerve to confront the Soviet Union. Reagan won the election with this tough posture and continued this stance staunchly in his first term. Soviet military aid to Central America caused particular vigilance in Washington. In 1981, Haig proposed to Reagan the possibility to renounce 1962 Understanding resulting from Cuban missile crisis as he mentioned that the Soviet used the ambiguities of the understanding to promote military collaboration with Cuba.²⁵⁹ In January 1982, a telegram showed from State of Secretary to Haig showed deep concern over Soviet arms transfers to Cuba because "aircraft of these types can be equipped for nuclear weapons". Haig emphasized to Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko that this kind of military transfer "represents a major obstacle to an improvement in the US-Soviet relationship."²⁶⁰

The international economic system was controlled by international politics, or more specifically, international relations. In turn, economics influenced international relations. Economic interdependence from 1980 to 1985 weakened. On one hand, the U.S. proved to be the most powerful and self-sufficient economy in the world, especially when compared to the 1970s when the domestic economy was hit hard by Vietnam war. But the American people still called for immediate solution for stagflation. The disengagement from war and the relatively stable political situation under the Reagan administration provided a favorable environment for the government to revive its economic superiority in the world. The fact was that the primary resources were priced in dollars and the U.S. economy continued to demonstrate a healthy state. A steady increase in industry in 1981 to 1982 turned into a sharp increase in 1983 and 1984.²⁶¹ So the crucial element for the 1980s was "the still great economic role played by the United States."²⁶² On the contrary, the limitation of the Soviet economic pattern showed more clearly. The member states of USSR could provide "neither the market nor the reliable supply of goods required by many developing economies." So, in the 1980s, even close allied states were counting on Western Europe, North America,

²⁵⁸ Department of Defense, 1981. *Soviet Military Power* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2018), p.95.

²⁵⁹ 'Memorandum From Secretary of State Haig to President Reagan', *Foreign Relations of The United States*, <<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1981-88v03/d5>> [accessed 1 March 2022].

²⁶⁰ 'Telegram From the Department of State to Secretary of State Haig's Aircraft and the Embassy in Moscow', *Foreign Relations of The United States*, <<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1981-88v03/d128>> [accessed 1 March 2022].

²⁶¹ Savigear, *Cold War or Detente in the 1980s*, pp.114-115.

²⁶² *Ibid*, p.115.

and Japan for assistance.²⁶³ So even in late 1970s and 1980s when U.S. global dominance was threatened by domestic recession and its competitive allies, the U.S. still remained the most powerful country in the world.

The international situation in the new Cold War involved Cuba in a slightly different way. Remaining as the USSR's most reliable ally in the developing world and a prominent member of the Nonaligned Movement, Cuba received support from the Soviet Union. The competition between the two superpowers took place around the world in direct and indirect ways. In Latin America, the two states confronted each other through Cuba. Nicaragua provides the best illustration of this. In 1979, the Sandinista National Liberation Front replaced president Anastasio Somoza. This revolution attracted attention from the Soviet Union and Central America turned into an arena for East-West rivalry and regional tensions.²⁶⁴ For Washington, Central America has always been seen as its backyard and now this region became even more important. Furthermore, the Sandinista victory in Nicaragua coincided with conservative shift in Washington. For hardline conservatives, Sandinista's historic relations with Cuba meant that this revolution "could be seen only through the prism of U.S.-Soviet geopolitical competition."²⁶⁵ This was the fundamental impetus for Reagan's persistent support for the campaign against the Cuba-backed Sandinista government. Though Cuba had been sending signals for negotiations on the Nicaragua situation, Reagan almost made no notable alterations in his Central America or Cuba policy. Major changes only were made due to opposition from Congress and from within the State Department. This could be interpreted with respect to Reagan Doctrine and his belief in Soviet-Cuba connection. From early days of Reagan's presidency, Soviet military presence in Cuba provided the major incentive for aggressive stance against Cuba. "There have been 20 deployments of Soviet naval vessels to the Caribbean since 1969, 19 of them stopping in Cuba".²⁶⁶ Though denied by Brezhnev, Americans affirmed that Cuba's actions were threats to vital interests of the U.S. Reagan's administration insisted that Cuban actions would collapse without Soviet support. Hence, "the USSR bears a special responsibility for Cuba's continuing threat to peace."²⁶⁷ For the President, negotiation between superpowers was the effective way to peace.

²⁶³ Savigear, *Cold War or Detente in the 1980s*, p.115.

²⁶⁴ Radoslav Yordanov, 'Outfoxing the Eagle: Soviet, East European and Cuban Involvement in Nicaragua in the 1980s', *Journal of Contemporary History* 55, No. 4 (2020): pp.871-892.

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

²⁶⁶ 'Issues Paper Prepared in the Bureau of Intelligence and Research', *Foreign Relations of the United States*, <<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1981-88v03/d10>> [accessed 25 February 2022].

²⁶⁷ 'Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in the Soviet Union', *Foreign Relations of the United States*, <<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1981-88v03/d127>> [accessed 25 February 2022].

Reagan Doctrine is fundamentally and entirely anti-Communist.²⁶⁸ The Soviet military presence in Latin America, especially in Central America via Cuba, intensified Reagan's aggressive foreign policy significantly. The Reagan administration firmly believed that Soviet and Cuba was the source of unrest in this region. Due to geopolitical and ideological reasons, the Reagan administration promoted exceptionally hardline policy toward Cuba despite Castro's overtures.

Besides the bilateral relations between two superpowers, the relationship between the U.S. and its allies also shaped Reagan's foreign policy in the first half of 1980s. The dependence from U.S. allies changed according to the Cold War tension. In many ways, the Cold War simplified international relations,²⁶⁹ especially in the 1950s and 1960s when antagonism created a confrontation between two blocs. However, the international framework of the 1950s and 1960s when superpowers were spiderlike in the center of a web of alliances, was gone.²⁷⁰ The international framework in the 1980s was more complicated and fluid. Neither agreement nor disengagement was easy to reach then. In Western Europe, the prospect of greater integration was promising as more states joined the European Community in the 1980s. In the first half of the 1980s, trade relations between EU and the U.S. were constantly under stress.²⁷¹

In the western hemisphere, the U.S. had new trouble maintaining its control over OAS. Created in 1948, the OAS was based in Washington and is the leading inter-governmental body in the hemisphere. It facilitated cooperation among the countries from North America, Latin America, and the Caribbean basin on a wide range of issues. The major impetus of the creation of OAS was the fear of communist encroachment in the hemisphere.²⁷² So, scholars have long viewed the OAS as "an instrument of its deep hegemony in the Americas."²⁷³ The OAS unanimously suspended Cuba's membership in 1962. Most members cut diplomatic relations with Cuba in the 1960s under U.S. pressure and promoted embargo against it. But since early 1970s, members of OAS started to reestablish or establish diplomatic relations with Cuba. It became increasingly difficult for the U.S. to win agreements within the OAS on Latin American issues.

The U.S. dominance within its alliances ebbed greatly in the 1980s. This trend challenged New Right

²⁶⁸ Charles Krauthammer, 'Essay: The Reagan Doctrine,' *Time*, 1 April 1985, pp.54-55.

²⁶⁹ Savigear, *Cold War or Detente in the 1980s*, pp.59-60.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid*, p.61.

²⁷¹ Kiran Klaus Patel, and Kenneth Weisbrode. *European Integration and the Atlantic Community in the 1980s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p.106.

²⁷² *Ibid*, p.118.

²⁷³ Rubrick Biegon, and Taylor & Francis Group. *US Power in Latin America: Renewing Hegemony* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2017), p.117.

doctrine and Reagan's deep faith in America. The Cold War vision shared by Reagan and Cold War warriors in the government made efforts to revive the U.S. superiority in first phase of Cold War. This doctrine governed most of the administration's policy making initiatives, Cuba policy in particular. Under this doctrine, Reagan accelerated the military buildup and provide indirect aid for anti-Communist insurgents in Nicaragua and Afghanistan. Besides, Reagan sought for arms control unyieldingly. All these left Soviet Union defensive and tightened the Cold War tensions effectively. By early 1984, the U.S.-Soviet relations were thought to have hit the lowest point in two decades. Until 1985, Reagan took the hardliner's side in major "regional conflicts", especially in Central America. On the other hand, he rejected the congressional proposal for increasing military expense and Haig's proposal for full blockade against Cuba and Nicaragua. Instead, he initiated covert actions against Sandinista. Reagan did not plan to merely incite stronger aggression from the Communist bloc. What he really wanted was to repress communist movement worldwide in general and Central America in particular, in order to pressure the Soviet Union to the negotiation table for peace talk.

Since it was not Reagan's intention to increase the Cold War tensions with Soviet Union, the administration started to seek for negotiation even before his second term. Reagan restrained his anti-Communism rhetoric before re-election. In January 1984, Reagan made a speech on U.S.-Soviet relations, emphasizing "the need for cooperation and the U.S. willingness to compromise".²⁷⁴ According to Jack F. Matlock, this speech was designated to signal invitation for new ideas from Soviet side but the White House did not expect immediate favorable reaction. But impact of this speech on Soviet Union was not as what had been expected since the "Soviet officials failed to use the speech even to make propagandistic proposals".

The fundamental shift occurred after Reagan's reelection and Mikhail Gorbachev's coming to power. Though ideologically committed, Gorbachev was not like his predecessors but was open to new ideas on domestic and foreign policy. Since the 1970s, USSR faced economic and political challenge. Not only its politics seemed dysfunctional, but also flaws in the Soviet economy began to stand out as the capitalist globalization grow.²⁷⁵ Meanwhile, Gorbachev embarked on shifting Moscow's policy in the Third World. Gorbachev was eager on Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, hoping that he could remove American

²⁷⁴ Matlock, *Reagan and Gorbachev*, p.84.

²⁷⁵ Odd Arne Westad, *The Cold War: A World History* (London: Allen Lane, an imprint of Penguin Books), 2017.

hostility by making compromises in the Third World.²⁷⁶ Besides Afghanistan, the core issue of U.S.-Soviet tensions was Central America. Gorbachev increased economic aid to Nicaragua by 40 percent in the first year of his tenure. He also assured Castro that the USSR would provide assistance to Nicaragua via Cuba if the U.S. attacked Sandinistas. In the summit meeting in Washington in 1987, Gorbachev indicated that Moscow would stop selling arms to Nicaragua if the U.S. would cease interference in Central America.²⁷⁷

Reagan also saw the possibility of dialogue in Gorbachev and they finally met for the first time in Geneva summit in November 1985. No official agreement was made but both leaders admitted that no nuclear war would occur. The most critical achievement of this dialogue was that Reagan and Gorbachev revealed their aspiration for negotiation. They met again in Reykjavik in October 1986, talking extensively on arms control. Though the meeting broke up on nuclear abolition-predominantly on SDI (Strategic Defensive Initiative), the Cold War tensions had started to thaw. Cold War competition and peaceful negotiation were proceeding simultaneously. Reagan insisted that military superiority be prerequisite of negotiation rather than a roadblock. Historical facts also showed that Reagan despised the concept of communism but he acted differently in front of individuals when the situation required change. The Iran-Contra scandal of 1986 provided a chance for diplomatic change. This scandal was strong proof of Reagan Doctrine as the administration could make such risk to provide for anti-Communist insurgents while the Cold War thaw was underway. Nevertheless, after the scandal, more U.S. public as well as the Congress were committed to arms control. Then, Reagan was losing his magic. The Congress cut his defense budget and Republicans lost the mid-year elections.

Before the first meeting with Reagan, Gorbachev already cut military support in Nicaragua and also suggested Cuban restraint.²⁷⁸ Gorbachev was skeptical about Soviet investment in the Third World and worried about the consequent damage on Soviet-U.S. relations. After several summits, they found common ground and the antagonism gradually diminished though ups and downs happened all the time during the process. The major obstacle for Gorbachev was Reagan's unwillingness to halt SDI because the Soviet leader insisted that it was the prerequisite for his concessions. Gorbachev went to Washington in December 1987 to sign an Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF) to destroy intermediate missiles and

²⁷⁶ Odd Arne Westad and Cambridge University Press, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of our Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 2007, p.380.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid*, p.377.

²⁷⁸ Warren I. Cohen, *The Cambridge History of American Foreign Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 1993, p.234.

Reagan went to Moscow next year to exchange ratification of the treaty.²⁷⁹ At that time, the U.S. was altering its perception of the Soviet Union as an evil enemy.

The improvement of U.S.-Soviet relations from 1985 dwarfed the geostrategic importance of Cuba to the Soviet Union. Gorbachev's intention to reduce Marxism-Leninism imprint in foreign policy also influenced Soviet-Cuba relations. Gorbachev pressured Cuba to withdraw its troops from Angola. During this time, the focus of Reagan administration's foreign affair agenda was Nicaragua and El Salvador where the leftist movement was putting threat on America's interest in this region. Reagan did not change his Cuban policy fundamentally since his meeting with Gorbachev. The Radio Martí was launched officially in 1985 as planned and Reagan tightened the Cuban embargo in 1986. In 1987, the United States embarked on condemnation of human rights in Cuba at the United Nations Human Rights Commission. The administration held its core tactics consistently toward the Soviet Union and Cuba. Reagan's administration was keen to force Cuba back to cooperation on migration issue. This pressure tactic was also Reagan's attempt to use human right to attack leftist government.²⁸⁰ The U.S. claimed this campaign "A major victory for the U.S." and described Cuba's invitation of UN investigation as "conciliatory".²⁸¹ Besides, the U.S. used this to destroy "the protective cover of its regional and non-aligned groups" which was believed to be one of Cuba's most valuable international assets.²⁸²

A very interesting point about Soviet-Cuba-U.S. entanglement is that the USSR did not always act as the protector in negotiations with America. Early in 1981, at a meeting with Haig, Dobrynin asserted this was a matter between Washington and Havana "and it should be kept that way."²⁸³ When asked by Shultz whether Cuba would stop arms transfer to Nicaragua, the Soviet Minister of Foreign Affairs Shevardnadze replied that "he could not speak for Cuba, they had their own policy and make up their own minds."²⁸⁴ Even before the Reagan-Gorbachev thaw, the situation between superpowers was tense but clear. The Soviet Union saw the strain in investment in the Third World and worried about the consequences it might cause

²⁷⁹ 'The INF Treaty, 1987-2019', *Digital National Security Archive*, <<https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/briefing-book/russia-programs/2019-08-02/inf-treaty-1987-2019>> [accessed 1 March 2022].

²⁸⁰ Jessica Gibbs, *US Policy Towards Cuba: Since the Cold War* (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2011), p.22.

²⁸¹ 'Telegram from the Mission to the United Nations to the Department of State', *Foreign Relations of the United States*, <<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1981-88v41/d105>> [accessed 1 March 2022].

²⁸² 'Draft Telegram from the Department of State to Secretary of State Shultz', *Foreign Relations of the United States*, <<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1981-88v41/d90>> [accessed 1 March 2022].

²⁸³ 'Memorandum From Secretary of State Haig to President Reagan', *Foreign Relations of the United States*, <<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1981-88v03/d38>> [accessed 1 March 2022].

²⁸⁴ 'Memorandum from the Deputy Secretary of State (Whitehead) to Secretary of State Shultz', *Foreign Relations of the United States*, <<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1981-88v06/d130>> [accessed 1 March 2022].

for arms control and peace talks. During a conversation between Haig and Gromyko, the Soviet Foreign Minister denied that Cuba was supplying arms to Central American countries and Cuba was posing threat to the U.S.²⁸⁵

Most importantly, Reagan saw Cuba as the source of unrest in Central America: “The troubles in Nicaragua bear a Cuban label also..... there is no question but that most of the rebels are Cuban-trained, Cuban-armed, and dedicated to creating another Communist country in this hemisphere.”²⁸⁶ Cuban threat was a thorn for Reagan's administration and the final goal of its foreign policy in Nicaragua and El Salvador was to nip another Cuba in the bud. Reagan's persistence of hardline policy toward Cuba was also to set the context for tough tactics in Central America. The Soviet ambassador Gromyko believed that the U.S. used Cuba as an excuse to “maintain the fires in Latin America.”²⁸⁷ So even during the Reagan- Gorbachev thaw, there were no fundamental changes in U.S. foreign policy toward Cuba. Instead, U.S.-Cuba relations deteriorated dramatically again in 1985 because of the broadcast of Radio Martí. In 1987, the U.S.-Cuba relations were at the lowest point in two decades. But the seemingly intransigent antagonism since Reagan's first election campaign was not escalated as predicted. In Reagan's first year of presidency, there were some advocates for hardline policy toward Cuba. During the second term, Cuban threat was mainly used as justification for Reagan's tough policy in Central America, which was predominantly anti-Communism. So as long as the Soviet-Cuba connection existed and it remained a major threat in Central America and Caribbean area, Reagan's administration would not abandon the aggression toward Cuba. There finally appeared a slight mitigation when Reagan won concessions from Gorbachev at the end of his second term.

3.4 Cuba's Responses

This section explores U.S.-Cuban relations in the 1980s from a Cuban perspective. Apart from domestic and international politics, U.S. foreign policy toward Cuba since 1959 was inevitably shaped by Castro's choice in ideology and responsive measures to Washington's sanctions. This interplay was

²⁸⁵ Memorandum of Conversation, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, <<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1981-88v03/d90>> [accessed 2 March 2022].

²⁸⁶ Ronnie Dugger, *On Reagan: The Man and His Presidency* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1983), p.518.

²⁸⁷ ‘Memorandum of Conversation’, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, <<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1981-88v03/d138>> [accessed 2 March 2022].

highlighted in the Cold War context.

Since the Cuban Revolution, the foremost objective of this island was to survive as an independent country in the backyard of the United States. Philip Brenner asserted that two goals of Cuban foreign policy since 1959 were to defend and develop the revolution.²⁸⁸ Jorge Domínguez also argued that Cuban government's primary goal was its own survival.²⁸⁹

A direct threat to Cuban security would still be the military attack by the Americans. Another threat came from inside: economic vulnerability and unstable social status. The two challenges made it difficult to achieve the primary goals of the communist state. Furthermore, the U.S. embargo made it even harder. Under these circumstances, Cuba sought help from the ideologically aligned Soviet Union and formed a relationship with it that "preoccupied the United States."²⁹⁰ This strategy arose not only due to the Marxist-Leninist connection but also for getting support for economic development. This means that Cuba had to operate under what was called "Soviet hegemony".²⁹¹ Cuba's relationship with the Soviet Union tremendously influenced its post-revolutionary course and its relations with its superpower neighbor.

A desire for survival drove the Cuban government to take the risk of breaking up with the U.S. and welcoming Soviet intervention, both military and political, in Cuba. This revolutionary vision remained at the heart of Cuban foreign policy and was opposed to U.S. Cold War strategy and expansionist policies. Cuba's choice of aligning with the Soviet Union and Socialist bloc provided a major impetus for anti-Castro policy in the United States.

Cuba's foreign policy during Cold War since 1959 was significantly characterized by Castro's internationalism due to the internationalist nature of Cuban Revolution.²⁹² Almost immediately after coming to power, Castro started an aggressive relations campaign in the Third World "designed to incite collective rebellion against the bipolar, Cold War system".²⁹³ Under this, the Cuban government made active or even radical moves in international affairs.

Castro's socialist internationalism in the 1970s mainly took forms of encouraging and supporting

²⁸⁸ Brenner, *From Confrontation to Negotiation*, p.55.

²⁸⁹ Domínguez, *To Make a World Safe for Revolution*, p.6.

²⁹⁰ Brenner, *From Confrontation to Negotiation*, p.56

²⁹¹ Jorge I. Domínguez, 'Cuban Foreign Policy', *Foreign Affairs* 57, no. 1 (1978): pp.83-108.

²⁹² Mervyn J. Bain, 'Cuba-Soviet Relations in the Gorbachev Era', *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 37(4) (2005), pp.769-791.

²⁹³ David Grantham, 'Cuba's Cold War Foreign Policy in the Middle East: From Agitator to Mediator: Cuba's Cold War Foreign Policy in the Middle East', *History Compass* 13, no. 9 (2015): pp.445-453.

guerrilla warfare to overthrow governments in Latin America and Africa. Entering the 1980s, Castro shifted his targets to support national movements with indirect military and political support. During the 1970s, Castro pursued a role as a broker between the Third World states and the Soviet Union. But, as a defining feature of its foreign policy, Cuban support for revolutionary movements in the Third World remained consistent. This was due to both strategic and ideological reasons.²⁹⁴ Cuba's consistent support for revolutions in the Third World explained its ideological motive. Since the 1970s, its support was not delivered blindly but with strategic consideration to serve its own interests. Both reasons were deeply antagonistic to U.S. interests and its hegemony in Central America. Cuba's involvement in Africa can also find motive in its historical and cultural links with this continent as well as the connection with guerilla movements.²⁹⁵ By doing so, Castro also intended to get more leverage with the Soviet Union. Consequently, the United States felt that the export of revolution by Cuba to Central America and Africa as well as its arms buildup intensified the tensions and should be terminated at any cost.²⁹⁶

By the 1980s, Cuba had already sent troops to over three dozen countries in Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East.²⁹⁷ Despite Cuba-Soviet tensions in the 1960s, Cuban-Soviet relations became closer after 1975.²⁹⁸ Cuba was still carrying out its socialist internationalism in the Third World with support from the Soviet Union in the 1980s. From Cuba's perspective, supporting revolutionary movements was an effective way to combat the U.S. and its allies throughout the world.²⁹⁹ Cuba's bold moves in Africa and Latin America in the 1970s already destroyed the possibility of normalization with the U.S. and shaped the Reagan administration's attitudes towards Havana. What was worse was its support for Sandinista in Nicaragua in 1977 as well as similar support in El Salvador and Guatemala later. In 1981, the Intelligence Bureau confirmed that no direct Soviet military aid was found in Central America. The Soviets had given military aid to Nicaragua and probably other Central American insurgence through Cuba in past several years.³⁰⁰

Cuba supported rebels in Central America with slightly modified motives. To resist U.S. hostility, Cuba

²⁹⁴ Domínguez, *To Make a World Safe for Revolution*, p.113.

²⁹⁵ Bain, 'Cuba-Soviet Relations in the Gorbachev Era', pp.769-791.

²⁹⁶ 'Memorandum for the Record', *Foreign Relations of the United States*, <<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1981-88v03/d131>> [accessed 2 March 2022].

²⁹⁷ Jorge I. Domínguez, 'Cuba in the 1980s', *Foreign Affairs* 65, no. 1 (1986): pp.118-135.

²⁹⁸ Domínguez, *To Make a World Safe for Revolution*, p.111.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid*, p.114.

³⁰⁰ 'Issues Paper Prepared in the Bureau of Intelligence and Research', *Foreign Relations of the United States*, <<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1981-88v03/d10>> [accessed 2 March 2022].

did more than just seeking help from the Soviet Union. It tried to find its own position in the world by taking the initiative in the Third World. Cuba made major efforts in the 1970s to pursue leadership of the global nonaligned movement. In 1979, the non-aligned movement's annual conference was held in Havana. Castro was the chair and the de facto spokesman of the movement at the time. Cuba's dependence on the Soviet Union not only incited direct hostility from the U.S., but also harmed its own interests. When Cuba refused to condemn Soviet Union for its invasion of Afghanistan, its credibility among nonaligned members was severely damaged. In the 1980s, Castro's goal of being part of global leadership collapsed. It also destroyed Cuba's bid for membership in UN Security Council. Consequently, Havana restrained its active internationalism to a developmental internationalism and a Caribbean Basin orientation.³⁰¹ This shift was even more dangerous for the Reagan administration as it was determined to draw a geopolitical line in this region against communist infiltration.

The Cuban government considered the U.S. a subversive power threatening its security in the hemisphere. They assumed that their support for revolutions matched the U.S. counterrevolutionary activities but U.S. power outmatched Cuba.³⁰² The Soviet Ambassador Dobrynin told U.S. under Secretary of State in 1982 that Cubans had concerns and the "belligerent U.S. statements are a major factor."³⁰³ Cuban interventionist policy in Central America was the direct and latest trigger for Reagan's hardline policy toward Cuba. Not surprisingly, Reagan blamed the Soviet Union for not reining its "proxy" Cuba in Central America.³⁰⁴

But since Reagan took office, Havana had given signals for negotiation in direct and indirect ways. Castro advised the Sandinista government to be flexible in negotiation with Washington. He also suggested that El Salvador accept negotiation to end its civil war. Apart from this indirect way, Cuba approached the U.S. through private channels and leaders of other Latin American states. Wayne Smith sent messages to Washington several times but he was ignored. Alexander Haig, the U.S. Secretary of State, met Carlos Rafael Rodríguez, the vice president of Cuba in November 1981. Nothing was actually achieved and Haig was even more convinced that Cuba's overture was the result of U.S. pressure.³⁰⁵ This implicated the

³⁰¹ H. Michael Erisman, *Cuba's International Relations: The Anatomy of a Nationalistic Foreign Policy*. (Boulder, Colo: Westview Press, 1985), p. 127.

³⁰² Domínguez, *To Make a World Safe for Revolution*, p. 114.

³⁰³ 'Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in the Soviet Union', *Foreign Relations of the United States*, <<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1981-88v03/d135>> [accessed 1 March 2022].

³⁰⁴ William M. LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard: The United States in Central America, 1977-1992*. (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), p.68.

³⁰⁵ *Ibid*, p.229.

staunch hardline attitude of the Reagan's administration toward Cuba, at least in his first term. This was basically because the two countries' conflicting interests and foreign policy ideology. It was further confirmed by Washington's disinterest in expanding dialogue to other areas after the immigration pact was signed in 1984.

Cuba's reputation in combating U.S. imperialism has always been an asset in pursuing for leadership in the Third World.³⁰⁶ The U.S. "big stick" policy in this region incited strong anti-Americanism. Taking advantage of this tradition, Cuba formed alliance with Sandinistas in Nicaragua, leftists in El Salvador and Guatemala.³⁰⁷ This move was designated to revitalize its reputation as an anti-American warrior in the Third World. It was inevitable that their political interests clashed in Central America, especially in the 1980s.

Though influenced by a long, harsh blockade imposed by U.S. and its allies, Cuba did not develop its foreign policy purely in reaction to U.S. hostility. Cuban foreign policy was significantly shaped by its principal objectives of survival and development. From active internationalism in the Third World to the developmental internationalism in Central America was a major change of Cuban foreign policy in the 1980s. In particular, this was in conflict with Reagan's plan to use Central America as front to combat communism. Either Cuba's internationalism before 1980s or its Caribbean Basin orientation policy in the 1980s strongly contradicted U.S. policy in Central America. Correspondingly, inheriting the longstanding hostility against Castro regime since 1959, the Reagan administration renewed an antagonistic Cuba policy.

Conclusion

Reagan did not create a set of new policies toward Cuba by himself. He inherited legacies from U.S. foreign relations thinking. His foreign policy to Cuba was a perfect embodiment of American ideologies: independence, expansionism, a faith in American destiny, and exceptionalism. Besides, Reagan also drew inspiration from Monroe Doctrine and Wilsonianism to support his anti-Communist policies after the détente.

The Republican under Reagan were more coherent than any time since the 1920s. The revival of conservatism and the formation of the New Right changed the political arena in Washington. Another distinct change in political dynamics of Cuba policy was the rise of the Cuban American community. The

³⁰⁶ Erisman, *Cuba's International Relations*, p.133.

³⁰⁷ Ibid.

Cuban-led CANF was the prominent organization that helped shape Reagan's policies towards Havana in the 1980s. Interestingly, in the long run it actually weakened the president's control over Cuba policy.

As to the international context, it changed in multiple ways during the 1980s. Military balance was broken when Soviet Union increased its weapons capacity in 1980. The economic order of the world remained the same with the U.S. still occupying the leading position. Military threats from the Soviet Union, especially in Central America, provided urgency for tough foreign policy by the U.S. government. The USSR was trapped in international and domestic troubles that forced the Soviets to attempt to reduce tensions with the U.S.

However, Reagan-Gorbachev thaw did not bring about direct alleviation on U.S.-Cuba relations. Castro sent signals for conversation but was rejected by the American government. Reagan's fundamental concern was Soviet-Cuba connection and Soviet military intervention in Central America through Cuba. As long as the Cold War was on, sanctions against Cuba would not be lifted. The case was different with Soviet Union since Reagan always wanted to negotiate arms control to avoid nuclear threat through pressure with Soviet leaders. Furthermore, Reagan needed Cuba to set context for his aggressive policy in Central America and did not immediately release signals for accommodation with Cuba before he truly prevailed in negotiations with Gorbachev. Another vital reason for the continuity of hardline policy is the pressure from Cuban American organizations, namely CANF. Radio Martí, which brought U.S.-Cuba relations to the lowest point in two decades, was launched in 1985. The CANF was the major promotion while the Department of State intended to delay it.

Cuban responsive measures were also the major stimulus to Reagan's hostile policy. Desperate to survive during the blockade imposed by the U.S., Cuba sought support from the Soviet Union. The core of Cuban foreign policy -communist internationalism - was slightly shifted to developmental internationalism restricted to Central America and Caribbean Basin in the 1980s. This move was not only in contradiction with Reagan's anti-Communism doctrine, but also threatened U.S. interests in this region.

Conclusion

From 1959 to the late 1980s, the United States' Cuba policy has been characterized by persistent antagonism, with conservative political forces shaping policymaking in unique ways. Under Reagan, a coercive approach aimed at containing Cuba and its Soviet ally dominated, replacing earlier U.S. and Cuban attempts at reconciliation. Reagan believed coercing Castro into a subordinate position would force him to give up his anti-America stance. This project began with a review of U.S. foreign policy towards Cuba from 1959 until 1980, providing historical context to better understand U.S. Cuba policy. Using primary and secondary sources, the preceding research was carried out with the goal of answering research questions. The four major changes of Reagan's Cuban policy and the influencing factors discussed here are not enough to explain U.S.-Cuban relations in the 1980s. To better understand this topic, future studies could explore broader areas with and include more factors. This thesis analyzes the domestic situation in the U.S. along with the global context in the 1980s to explain Reagan's Cuba policy. More importantly, Reagan's diplomatic ideas and Cuban foreign policy were highlighted as two major influencing factors. Most studies on this topic focus on the U.S.-Cuban geopolitical and ideological conflicts, which was essentially U.S.-Soviet competition, framing Cuba as mere subordinate of the Soviet Union. I argue that Cuba's foreign policy from 1959 was shaped by its urgent need for survival and development. The deterioration of U.S.-Cuban relations was largely determined by Reagan's unwavering anti-Communist sentiment and Cuba's urgent need for survival and development. A distinct feature of Cuba policy under Reagan was the noticeable role of CANF. Even though changed its tenets later, it functioned as a major pro-embargo force in the 1980s and contributed greatly to the shaping of Reagan's Cuba policy.

The preceding identified major changes in the Reagan administration's Cuba policy. The thesis discusses four major tools adopted by the U.S. government in the 1980s. The foremost was an economic blockade that was intensified by Reagan to levels not seen since the 1960s. Reagan renewed the restrictions lifted by Carter and extended sanctions on trade and immigration. These sanctions are connected to the immigration issue, a key issue entangling U.S.-Cuba relations. Cuba was the one who took initiative and called for negotiations. In 1984, an agreement on immigration was signed, renewing the normal immigration from Cuba to the U.S. but was abrogated by Castro in 1985 due to Radio Martí, the third factor. The signing of this agreement was somewhat compelled move since Cuban American group were influential on the Cuban immigration issue. Meanwhile, it was also a soft power tool to demonstrate American

superiority to Castro regime. The creation of Radio Martí was not a new idea but was implemented under Reagan. As part of U.S. public diplomacy, Radio Martí was created as a collaboration between the executive branch and Cuban exile groups. The station brought U.S.-Cuban relations to an even lower point. The last factor is covert actions. A major difference was that covert action against Cuba under Reagan was not carried out independently or directly. Reagan's major concern in his first term was Cuban support for leftist movements in Central America – so covert actions were mainly approved to destroy Cuban support in Nicaragua, El Salvador, Grenada, and Guatemala. The overriding aim of this strategy was to contain communism and the Soviet Union in the western hemisphere.

The thesis also explored the reasons why these policy shifts occurred during the Reagan administration. Based on primary and secondary source research, I identified four key developments that shaped Reagan's Cuba policy.

First, Reagan himself was ideologically an “idealist...hawk”.³⁰⁸ His antagonistic Cuba policy was largely shaped by his Cold War vision, which emerged not only from his personal politics but also American diplomatic legacies. Reagan's diplomatic concept shows clear influences from U.S. foreign policy positions dating to the early republic. Reagan's Cuba and Central America policies took on motifs of self-determination and expansionism. A belief that an exceptional American state was destined to dominate in the western hemisphere shaped Reagan's politics, as did a faith in the future greatness and superiority of the United States. All these could elements could be found in his Cuba policy, especially during his first year in office when he ignored conciliatory gestures from Castro. The Reagan Doctrine was built on the ideas of the Monroe Doctrine and he shaped his Central America policy under its guidance. Under Reagan, the Monroe Doctrine was “in vogue in United States foreign policy” again.³⁰⁹ Due to his idealistic internationalism, he was also considered the most Wilsonian president since Wilson.³¹⁰ Reagan implemented his Central America and Cuba policies using the rhetoric of democracy promotion to justify overthrowing leftist governments in the region.

Second, Reagan came to power at a favorable moment when Carter's conciliatory policies were viewed as a failure and domestic stagflation popularized more conservative measures. During the 1980 presidential campaign, Reagan built a successful coalition that included conservative Republicans and

³⁰⁸ Dueck, *Hard Line*, p.189.

³⁰⁹ Carto, ‘The Monroe Doctrine in the 1980's’, pp.203-229.

³¹⁰ Smith, ‘Making the World Safe for Democracy’, pp.197-214.

hawkish liberals. Among them, the New Right played a key role in influencing Cuban policy, calling for increased pressure against Castro. Reagan's hardline policy also benefited from the various other conservative movements that emerged during the 1970s and 1980s, which applied grassroots pressure on the administration's foreign policy. Another unprecedented change in the politics of U.S. policy towards Cuba was the rise of the Cuban American community, the CANF especially. The CANF was created with support from the administration and anti-Castro Cuban exiles. It contributed enormously to helping Reagan to reassert control over foreign policy. But viewed in hindsight, the CANF also caused the president's loss of control over foreign policy agenda.

Third, the international environment changed drastically in multiple ways in the 1980s. First of all, the U.S.-Soviet détente of the 1970s formally ended with the Soviet invasion in Afghanistan and Reagan's victory in the 1980 presidential election. Cold War tensions heightened again. The U.S. was still the most powerful state in the world but its domestic economic growth had slowed. The Soviet Union increased its military expenditures in the 1980s, especially nuclear weapons. Economic interdependency weakened in the 1980s. Washington lost absolute control over the OAS on Cuba issues. All these factors led to calls for more stringent measures to help the U.S. regain superiority over the Soviet Union. Superiority in economic power and military threat from the Soviet Union created a perceived urgent need for tough positions in the new Cold War. But situation changed since the mid-1980s. Gorbachev's efforts for negotiation with Reagan reduced tensions. But Reagan's did not apply this attitude to Cuba. His major concern was the unrest in Central America, which Soviet and its proxy would take much responsibility. Despite Cuba's intention for communication and the opposition from Department of States, Reagan signed the bill to started broadcast of Radio Martí. Lobbying pressure from CANF exerted powerful influence on this.

The last factor highlighted is Cuban foreign policy. Since 1959, Cuban foreign policy was consistently opposed by the United States. Compelled by its foremost goal – survival – Cuba sought dependence on the Soviet Union. Castro's internationalism in foreign policy was the major driver of Cuban activities in the world. In the 1980s, Cuba stayed low profile in Africa and the Middle East, restraining its internationalism to Central America. This threatened Reagan's geopolitical plans in the region and triggered heightened restrictions against Cuba. Havana released signals for negotiation on multiple issues through diplomatic and private channels. Though meetings were arranged and limited achievements were made, Washington's reaction was mainly negative. Fundamentally contradictions in respective foreign policies were a core problem of this seesaw battle.

Apart from anti-Communist doctrine, Reagan's Cuba policy was largely the extension of his concern over Soviet Union and Cuba's interventionist activities in Central America. The actual changes in policy did not live up to his proclaimed hostility against Cuba. The direct blow to U.S.-Cuba relations was Radio Martí. Both the Cuba government and some officials in Reagan's administration considered it a reward to Cuban Americans. The reversed immigration agreement was reestablished in 1987 when Castro made substantial concessions by giving up the request of removing the radio. All these explain why no substantial improvement was achieved in U.S.-Cuba policy while Reagan-Gorbachev thaw was underway.

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