Mervyn J. Bain. *From Lenin to Castro, 1917-1959: Early Encounters between Moscow and Havana.* Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2013. 170 pp. $55.34 (cloth). ISBN-13: 978-0-73918-110-2.

Using documents from the Russian State Archive for Social and Political History (RGASPI) and other archives in Moscow, Mervyn Bain, Senior Lecturer of Politics and International Relations at the University of Aberdeen and author of numerous articles regarding Soviet-Cuban relations, successfully argues that the Soviets from the earliest days of their country's formation demonstrated interest in nurturing a relationship with Cuba. Bain counters the premise that the Soviets refrained from attempting to forge ties with Cuba and other Latin American countries due to a "geographical fatalism" recognizing Cuba's proximity to the United States and the latter's Monroe Doctrine policy that cautioned powers from meddling in regional affairs. The author argues that the Soviets, while at times aggressive, largely treaded cautiously toward creating alliances in Cuba and other Latin American countries.

The United States presented an overwhelming presence in the Caribbean, Central and South America, particularly after the Spanish-American War. While Latin American countries gained their independence in the late nineteenth century, U.S. economic prowess loomed as an obstacle to their autonomy. The U.S. extended its dominion over Cuba in the Platt Amendment in 1901 when the Cubans agreed to avoid treaties with (other) foreign powers. The United States increased economic investment in the sugar industry and other businesses in Cuba, which inhibited local enterprise. U.S. troops intervened in disturbances on the island in 1906 and 1917, retaining a military presence in the country until 1922. American economic influence resurfaced in 1934 when the two countries signed a reciprocity act involving 35 U.S. and 400 Cuban commodities. While the Cuban government included a communist element as early as 1940, the United States continued to exert the primary influence in its affairs, orchestrating a coup to restore President Batista to power in April 1952. The Batista government profited from World War II and from American goodwill until March 1958 when a sham presidential election forced the United States to impose an arms embargo. Meanwhile, the Cuban Communist Party (PCC) and its communist affiliates in Latin America developed an allegiance to the Comintern.

According to Bain, Cuba's courtship with Moscow was guided by "realism." This theory as it relates to the field of international relations dates back to Thucydides' analysis of the Peloponnesian War, but the author observes that international relations did not fully develop as a field until after World War I. With the aim of "collective security," Woodrow Wil-

son designed his Fourteen Points to prevent future wars. The failure of Wilsonian policy after World War I brought realism to prominence in foreign relations. In an anarchic international system, modern states maneuvered to ensure their survival. A continuous struggle for power prevailed, a zero sum game in which one state bolstered its strength at the expense of others. Bain argues convincingly that this motivation guided Soviet foreign relations in the years between the Bolshevik (1917) and Cuban (1959) Revolutions.

Bain asserts that realism was the guiding force in Cuban-Soviet foreign relations throughout two distinct periods. During the first period, the Soviets responded to foreign and domestic threats by crafting a "dual track diplomacy." First, in the years immediately following the Bolsheviks' victory in the October Revolution, Moscow militated for a second, more general European revolution through the Comintern (Communist International). Only a more general European revolution, they felt, would permit them to survive on the international stage. The Bolshevik Leon Trotsky, for example, forecasted that the revolution "shall be crushed – that is beyond doubt" without a second rebellion. (p. 6) However, the Soviets soon shifted to a "popular front" approach. The military defeat at the hands of Poland in 1920, the costly victory in the Russian Civil War and other setbacks precipitated this shift. By March 1921, failed revolutions in Bavaria and Hungary caused the Soviets to curb their communist zeal. They ended their isolationist policy and signed treaties of friendship with Turkey, Persia and Afghanistan while making commercial ties with Great Britain. Bain observes that this shift, which occurred in coordination with Lenin's New Economic Policy (NEP, 1921-1928) was aimed at ensuring the survival of the Soviet state.

The second period began around the time of the Seventh Congress in August 1935 and lasted until the victory of the communists in Cuba in January 1959. Bain cites correspondence from 1919 to 1928 that flowed strictly from Havana to Moscow, with the Comintern revealing little interest in the upstarts. As early as December 6, 1919, a Cuban communist named Marselo Salinas, whom later correspondence verified as a prominent Cuban communist, apparently sent a letter to the Comintern requesting membership. Although the Comintern did not respond or grant membership to the Cubans, this correspondence and other letters indicate that they were informed about the Cubans' presence.

In 1925, the *Agrupion Comunista de la Habana* and "self-styled communists" among university student bodies formed the Cuban Communist Party. The Party signified its allegiance to the Comintern from the beginning by sending a letter to Moscow in October 1925 acknowledging acceptance of "the 21 points for membership to the Third International" and

"the organization statutes, directives and tactics." (p. 35) The PCC formed ties with the Mexican and other Latin American Communist parties including the American Communist Party.

Bain cites the year 1928 as pivotal in diplomatic relations between Moscow and Latin America. In April, the Latin American communists held their first Congress in Uruguay and fifteen members of the Cuban Communist Party (PCC) attended. Stalin formed a trading alliance and company in Argentina, which the Soviets may have used for espionage. They may have also provided funds to a Latin American newspaper. By summer the Cuban delegate Lopez gained an appointment to the Central Bureau of the Comintern at its Sixth Congress.

Moreover, by 1928 the Soviets were convinced that international capitalist stabilization was ending and moved towards a more radical foreign policy. The Comintern called for class struggle and was active in El Salvador and other countries. This shift reflected Moscow's control of the Comintern, but other developments obstructed the plan. The failure of communist revolutions and success of fascist governments in Europe, particularly Nazi Germany, prompted a shift toward a "Popular Front" approach. Stalin advocated class cooperation, but such policy was anathema to earlier Comintern policy and broader communist principles. Bain cites the Cuban Communists Juan Marinello and Carlos Rafael Rodriguez taking positions as ministers in the Batista government as examples of Cuban conformance with Moscow's strategy. Once again, realist thinking curbed communist ardor. This type of diplomacy prevailed until the Cuban Revolution in 1959.

While the concept of realism dominates throughout the book, Bain at times uses other theories to interpret historical episodes. For example, he touches on "dependency theory," which was a popular tool for analyzing Latin American international relations in the 1960s. The theory posits that northern countries intentionally kept southern nations as weak as possible in order to pursue their own interests. He also draws on Graham Allison's examination of the Soviet decision-making process during the Cuban Missile Crisis,[1] which involved three models relating to "security and stability, the interests of government organizations in pursuing various agendas, and the role that individuals played in analyzing a situation and arriving at a decision." (p. 3) In regard to individuals he even introduces the Cuban version of Great Man Theory in the form of Fidel Castro as *Fidel personalismo,* that country's incarnation of Adolph Hitler or Joseph Stalin. Bain's use of these theories complements his focus on realism.

1. Graham Allison, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis* (New York, NY: Little Brown, 1971); revised and published in a second edition coauthored by Philip Zelikow (London: Longman, 1999).

The strong point of the book is how the author convincingly and realistically portrays Moscow's foreign policy. While the Soviets seldom aggressively sought out ties with Cuba during the period under study, the Marxist nation operated like "an octopus and its tentacles," covertly probing the West for weak links. (p. 2) Receiving inquiries from Cuba between 1919 and 1925, the Comintern did not react, but surveyed the diplomatic atmosphere waiting for the opportune moment to consolidate the relationship.

Not surprisingly, the weakest part of the book relates to Soviet internal affairs. Bain's citing of 1921, 1928 and 1935 as pivotal years in Soviet foreign policy correlate almost perfectly with shifts in Soviet domestic policy. He of course mentions these developments, but some readers might clamor for more analysis. For example, as the NEP began in 1921 and ended in 1928, pivotal years in the author's account, this epoch was obviously crucial to Soviet foreign relations. The author describes how the rising prominence of fascist countries affected Soviet foreign affairs before World War II, but might have provided more explanation of Soviet trepidation in international affairs in light of Stalin's consolidation of domestic power after 1934. However, Bain is a specialist on foreign relations and his account will undoubtedly provide experts on Soviet internal affairs a number of reference points that will assist in future evaluations of domestic policy.

From Lenin to Castro is a first-class book on foreign policy that sheds light on the relationship between two of the most important socialist countries of the twentieth century. Bain's account will undoubtedly lead to more revelations regarding Soviet diplomacy, not only with Cuba but also with other Latin American countries. Both political scientists and historians will find the book useful in the classroom and for research, as will scholars in international studies programs and programs including study of foreign affairs. Due to Bain's analysis and use of various theories, the book will prove instructive in historical methodology courses. General audiences and readers with an interest in the Cold War, foreign relations, politics and history will also find this book informative.

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