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CUBAN SOFT POWER: FROM REVOLUTIONARY CHARISMA TO SOCIAL DIPLOMACY

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Abstract: This article analyzes the international projection of the Cuban Revolution, discussing the contours of its soft power that contributed to international reintegration. After this concept discussing briefly and focusing on the transformation of contemporary international scene, it analyzes the change of use of soft power in the revolutionary process in Cuba. In this sense, it points out that such power was, in the golden years of the Revolution (the 60s and the 70s), based on the revolutionary aura and the charisma of its leaders (Fidel Castro, Che Guevara and others) and that, in the first decade of this century, it acquired new supported contours through the emergence of Social Diplomacy, i.e. cooperation in the field of social services (health, education and sports, among others), thus contributing to the establishment of diplomatic ties and the development of a positive image of the country.

Keywords: Cuban Revolution, Soft Power, Social Diplomacy.

Introduction

Since the 1950s the Cuban issue has become a key element for understanding the inter-American relations and, to a lesser extent, the international relations in the second half of the twentieth century. This is because the attempt to create an alternative system implied supporting or opposing (usually radically) regional politi-

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cal groups and confronting the Western superpower, which brought the small Caribbean island to the center of regional and international politics, as evidenced in Missile Crisis in 1962. Although its significance with the end of the Cold War and with the political changes that have been taking place in the region since the 80s, the role of Cuba remains important in regional policies.

Since the beginning of its revolutionary process, Cuba has developed a foreign policy that sought to ensure and consolidate internal changes implemented by the new regime. In this regard, Cuba forged an intense and global policy that, despite cyclical adjustments, entailed extending the possibilities for internal changes and consolidation, as well as dynamical confrontations with the US, which led it to support and promote revolutions in the third world, notably in Africa and Latin America.

Although due to its small size Cuba had limited capacity in terms of traditional hard power, over the last five decades Cuba was involved in major conflicts in the regions mentioned above. We consider, however, that international perception of this country was associated mainly with the exercise of soft power, which is related to the revolutionary image that Cuba has been projecting internationally at that time. Therefore, this article points to the fact that the international projection of this country has been modified and adapted to new times. If in the early years of the Revolution soft power was founded, although not exclusively, on the “revolutionary aura” of Cuba and the charisma of the revolutionary leaders, notably Fidel Castro and Che Guevara, than in the early years of the 21st century it seems to reemerge in a new way, i.e. based on Social Diplomacy. This transition required adjusting internationalism to new circumstances, as well as shifting towards cooperation based on the use of social services (education, health, sports and culture, among others) in order to project a positive image of Cuba and to establish ties with international community, states or civil society, thus overcoming the relative isolation that the country had faced in the 90s.

The organization of this article is the following: initially and briefly, it discusses the notion of soft power, seeking to highlight its implications as a form of political exercise, in which the force gives way to consensus, cooperation, and to building partnerships through persuasion; then, it narrates the Revolution and the charisma of its leaders, demonstrating how Cuba’s initial projection was associated with its main leaders and their political actions. Finally, it analyzes the emergence of Social Diplomacy, its exercise and impact as a new way for international cooperation and for integration of Cuban Revolution in this century.

Power and International Projection: The Soft Power

Since the end of the Cold War and the bipolar order, the contours of the new international order that has emerged, and which prevails today, constitute a challenge for analysts of international scene. Despite the fact that the new order is not properly configured, being more fluid and transient than some of the hastiest analyzes assess it to be, certain elements can contribute to understanding its basic outlines, as in the analyses of J. Nye (2002).

Trying to understand the paradoxes of American power, manifested in the gap between clear military hegemony and the declining participation in world economy and in the erosion of its political leadership on the international scene, Nye seeks to understand the dynamics of power in the contemporary international scene, presenting two analyses that are relevant for this work.

First of all, based on his studies on complex interdependence, Nye points that the understanding of contemporary international relations has become more complex and dynamic. Thus, he indicates that the distribution of power should be analyzed as a three-dimensional chess board, which implies in a greater challenge for exercising the power. For him, this board is three-dimensional since it involves acting in the military sphere (with clear US hegemony), in economic sphere (increasingly multipolar) and in the sphere of transnational relations, which includes non-state actors and overlapping of control of national governments, thus producing dispersed power. As all these levels are connected, the international action is extremely complex and cannot be based on a single resource or on the form of power. From that the second contribution of his analysis emerges.

Through his studies and analyses of the issue of power, Nye attempts to emphasize that in this new scene two forms are necessary and complementary. Firstly, the traditional hard power, which comprises the capacities associated with population, territory, economic resources and military strength, or as he formulates it, “the ability to get desired results is often associated with possessing certain resources, thus it’s common to simplify the definition of power as a possession of relatively large amounts of such elements as population, territory, natural resources, economic strength, military strength and political stability” (Nye, 2002: 30)¹. In short, hard power is associated with natural and demographic factors. However, as

¹ Authors’ translation.

shown by the author, this concept is no longer sufficient for the definition of power due to technological and economic development, which requires the aggregation of soft power.

Although sometimes overlooked, soft power is defined as:

co-opting people rather than coercing them. Soft power is based on the ability to arrange political agenda so that it shapes the preferences of others (...) it is the ability to entice and attract. And the attraction often leads to acquiescence and imitation (Nye, 2002: 36-37)².

In this sense, such power has an eminently political character, is non-coercive exercise and offers its holder a political capacity to influence others by, among others, enticement and attraction. In this regard, through dialogue and negotiation, it strengthens convictions and paves the way for cooperation. Still in this sense, its ability is related to the values, which it may represent, making it a model allowing to set an agenda around its principles and ideals. Therefore, in the age of global information expansion, this power becomes as important as hard power.

In this sense, we consider that not only has the Cuban Revolution enabled the country to increase its hard power, even if falling short of global superpowers, but also, in different ways, potentiated Cuban soft power in different historical contexts, as we shall present below.

Cuban Revolution and Soft Power: From Charisma to Social Diplomacy

From its beginning in 1959, the Cuban Revolution and its actions provoked intense reactions, both positive and negative. Considering the Latin American context, this revolution was presented as an attractive and feasible alternative for overcoming secular problems (illiteracy, extreme poverty, inequality, etc.) experienced by several countries in the region. Thus, the impact of the transformations experienced by this country and the response to these changes, profoundly affected political projects of both the left and the right, and determined political dynamics in the region in the second half of the 20th century.

The Revolution's power to attract was noted by Hobsbawm. In his summary of the 20th century, he points out that:

² Authors' translation.

No revolution could have been better designed to attract the left in the Western Hemisphere and the developed countries, at the end of a decade of global conservatism; or to provide the guerrilla with better advertising strategy. The Cuban Revolution was everything: romance, heroism in the mountains, former student leaders with the selfless generosity of their youth – the oldest were barely over thirty years of age – exultant people, a tropical tourist paradise pulsating with the rhythms of rumba. And what was more: it could be welcomed by all the revolutionary left (Hobsbawn, 1995: 27)³.

In this regard, the author shows how the Revolution won the sympathy across Latin America and around the world, which was later reinforced by the changes implemented in the country.

The adopted measures, and the actions that followed, allowed gaining support and identification among the Latin American left. As pointed out by Sader (1991), based on the Brazilian experience, several aspects of the Revolution and of Cuba's socialist construction captivated the left-wing: the renewed idea of a revolution, its opposition to the apathy and opportunism of the PCs; the legitimization of political and ideological heterodoxy on how to carry out the Revolution and how to build the socialism; the anti-capitalism and anti-imperialism, both characterized by complete breakup with the US; a power strategy focused on rural areas guerrilla warfare; international solidarity – the proletarian internationalism – as one of the basic components of their ideological training and political action; the ethics of revolutionary dedication, with the militancy confirmed with one's own life, as Che put it: "the duty of every revolutionary is to make the Revolution" and the creation of a new man; and, finally, the emphasis on the vanguard role of subjective aspects on the road to victory (Sader, 1991: 23).

Since the beginning, the Cuban government sought to formulate a foreign policy that could defend its interests (Salazar, 1986; Bandeira, 1998). Proper understanding of this policy relies on the analysis of two fundamental axes: it was the result of the dynamics of "revolution" and "formal policy" on one hand, and "isolation" and "integration" on the other. In the first case, it is necessary to highlight the commitment of Cuban leadership, especially in the 60s and late 70s, to support or promote revolutions that established regimes to favorable to Cuban cause, and to reduce US government's pressure on the Cuban revolution. Through this approach, even if sometimes applied by means of informal politics and non-state organizations (the secret service, solidarity organizations, etc.), for a long time the leaders sought to influence the revolutionary wave that overcame Latin America, and Africa. As

³ Translated by the authors.

for the second aspect of foreign policy, it sought to maintain and strengthen political and diplomatic ties, in an attempt to avoid and overcome the isolation imposed by the US government.

As highlighted above one of the key elements for understanding the Cuban Revolution is linked with the fundamental role of Fidel Castro's leadership, who with his charisma, legitimacy and wit decisively contributed to its survival.

Che Guevara pointed out, while discussing the possibility of carrying out other revolutions in other countries of the region, that the factors which sparked the revolution were common for all the Latin American countries (poverty, inequality, landlordism, etc.), except for certain aspects, e.g. the role of a leadership (Fidel Castro, in the front):

We recognize that the peculiarity of the Cuban revolution comes from exceptional facts. (...) The first, perhaps the most important, the most original, is this force of nature called Fidel Castro Ruz, which in few years reached historical projection. (...) But for us, he will equal to the highest historical figures of Latin America. Given his ability to bring together, to unite and oppose to divisions that weaken, to direct the actions of the people; their deep love for him; because of his deep faith in the future and his ability to predict it, Fidel has done for Cuba more than anyone to build – from the scratch – the formidable apparatus that is now the Cuban Revolution (Guevara, 1970: 403-419).

This leadership has been reaffirmed over the years and, despite the wear and tear, it contributed to the consolidation and sustaining of the process, even in extremely adverse scenarios, such as in the deep economic crisis of the 90s. Even over the years, Fidel Castro still enjoyed a prestige that, as noted by Sznajder and Roniger:

Fidel Castro's role as the leader of the revolution and the Castro regime, as a political movement with its great power to adapt, has been central to the survival of the current regime in Cuba. Castro enjoys the prestige of a true revolutionary, who dedicated his life to his country, without enjoying the characteristic privileges of power as did other Communist leaders in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, which developed personality cults, and whose leaders and political elite were surrounded by nepotism and enjoyed the worldly pleasures (Sznajder, Roniger, 2001: 161).

It's possible to understand the reason why, even after four decades of leadership, the revolutionary impetus and the image of Fidel eroded less than that of the Communist leaders, who were in power in Eastern Europe. Fidel's image, in terms of support within his society, is comparable to Mao in China and Ho Chi Minh in Vietnam, while they were alive. This can be interpreted as a result of his "revolutionary aura" and permanent state of confrontation with the US, presented as

a continuation of national liberation struggles, which give him greater legitimacy, as in the case of primary and conscious projection of José Martí and his ideological and cultural influence, especially emphasized in the preamble of the Cuban Constitution of 1992 (Sznajder, Roniger, 2001).

But what is the source of Fidel's power? Undoubtedly, the charisma is the defining element his leadership, as pointed out by Max Weber:

(...) Secondly there is authority that is based on personal and extraordinary gifts of an individual: charisma, devotion and confidence, strictly personal, deposited in someone who distinguishes themselves with prodigious qualities of heroism or other exemplary qualities that make them leaders. Such is the "charismatic" power of a prophet or – in the political field – by an elected warrior leader, or a sovereign chosen though a plebiscite, or a great demagogue or leader of a political party (Weber, 1989: 57)⁴.

In this regard, we can see that charismatic domination develops as an emotional devotion to the person of a lord and his supernatural gifts (charisma), particularly his magical powers, revelations or heroism, intellectual or oratory faculties – something easily observed in Castro's famous speeches and his omnipresent personality. Thus, the dominant association is based on a community nature, on the community or on the retinue. A genuine form of jurisdiction and conciliation in charismatic disputes is a proclamation of a sentence by a lord or a wise and its acceptance by the community. In the case of Cuba, this is reflected in the fact that, despite the evident process of decades of institutionalization, comprising the construction of social and political organizations, on several occasions Fidel Castro intervened in policies, innovations or changes, i.a. in the process of sugar harvest in the late 1960s, the rectification of errors in the 80s or in the measures adopted throughout the 90s.

In addition, the adaptability and flexibility of this leadership should be noted. In the mid-80s, the process called "rectification of errors and negative tendencies" involved returning to some of Che Guevara's ideas about work and payment, which were abandoned earlier while approaching the Soviet Union. This was also reflected in various modifications and adaptations of the ideals of the 26th of July Movement in the 1950s, whose goals were nationalistic, explicitly demanding social justice, curbing corruption and cleaning the public life. Later, in the '60s and '70s, the flexibility manifested itself in the adoption of Marxist-Leninist model and the support, among other things, of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, and finally in the transformations of the '90s.

⁴ Translated by the authors.

Doubtlessly, apart from Fidel, the other leader who internationally launched the Cuban Revolution was Che Guevara. His impact on Latin America was profound and, with his murder in Bolivia, his work and example, conferred him with an international⁵ dimension. As Sader pointed out:

At this crucial moment of great transformations, Che appeared as a living critique to objectivism that dominated Marxism for decades. It's no coincidence that his image was present at the manifestations of 1968 in Paris, Rome, Frankfurt, Tokyo. And that revolutionary groups constituted in Latin America, Germany, Ceylon, took him for reference. (Sader, 1981: 35)⁶.

As mentioned, Che's assassination boosted his revolutionary aura. The realization that he was able give up positions and honors and sacrifice his life for his ideals, empowered the myth, associated with the pure ideals of the first years of Cuban Revolution (Taibo, 1997; Anderson, 1997)⁷. Much of this myth, managed by the Cuban government itself, was strengthened as Che was not subjected to political abrasion, faced by other Cuban leaders who remained in power, as pointed by Anderson:

In the town of Vallegrande, Bolivia, where the efforts to find and to exhume the body of Che continue, on a mud wall of the telephone exchange a tarred phrase in Spanish reads *Che: Vivo como jamás quisieron que estuvieras*. This phrase, perhaps better than any other, describes the true legacy of Che. Somehow, he maintained his strong position in popular imagination, seemingly transcending time and place. Forever young, brave, relentless and challenging, perpetually fixed looking with those eyes full of purpose and indignation. Che defied death. While even his friends and closest comrades wither with the age and succumb to amenities of a life, in which there is no longer place for Revolution, Che remains unchanged. He is immortal because others want this; as the lone example of the New Man, who once lived and challenged others to follow him (Anderson, 1997: 864).

⁵ For better understanding of the ideas and the role that Ernesto Che Guevara played see, among others, Luis Bernardo Pericás, *Che Guevara e o debate econômico em Cuba*, Ed. Xamã, 2004; Carlos Tablada Perez, *El pensamiento econômico de Ernesto Che Guevara*, Casa de Las Américas, 1987; Fernando Martínez Heredia, *El Che y el Socialismo*, Dialectica, 1992; e Geronimo Alvarez Batista, *Che: uma nueva batalla*, Pablo de la Torre, 1994.

⁶ Translated by the authors.

⁷ As stated by Taibo: "There is a memory. Since thousands of photos, posters, t-shirts, tapes, records, videos, pictures, magazines, books, phrases, testimonials, all the ghosts of industrial society, which doesn't know how to deposit its myths in the sobriety of its memory. Che is watching us. In addition to the whole paraphernalia, he returns. In an era of shipwrecks, he is our secular saint. Almost thirty years after his death, his image crosses generations; his myth goes sliding amid neoliberal delusions of grandeur. Irreverent, ironic, self-willed, morally obstinate. Unforgettable" (Taibo 1997: 704).

Moreover, the treatment given to the heroism and performance of other leaders, like Camilo Cienfuegos and Raul Castro, among others, largely reinforced a mythology of Cuban Revolution, its actions and leaders. Thus, it should be highlighted that the Cuban soft power was not derived exclusively from the actions and example of these leaders, but rather based on various elements.

Additionally, one should consider that the international projection of Cuba was founded on a policy of supporting and encouraging revolutions in the Third World and in the exercise of proletarian internationalism. Such policy determined Cuban civil and military involvement over decades, from the '60s until the '80s in Latin America and Africa.

In the case of Africa, these actions were developed on two different levels. At first, there were the collaborative actions and military aid supporting nationalist or socialist movements. According to López Segrera (1988), Cuban military presence always was preceded by efforts to settle the conflict by negotiations, its military involvement was always a result of formal requests and approved by the governments of the countries in question, and finally, Cuba never posed a threat to the countries neighboring the one where its troops were deployed. In this regard, Bandeira (1998) points out that involvement in Angola, which took place at a request by Agostinho Neto, MPLA leader, and which began with the training of rebels, back in the 1960s⁸; same as in the cases of Ethiopia and Mozambique. In the same way, that author points out that “in any case, Cuba played a constructive role in Africa, including promotion of diplomatic solutions to some issues, e.g. the conflict between Angola and Zaire⁹, and the cases of Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) and Namibia” (Banner, 1998: 599).

Outside the military field, Cuban support also comprised civil work. On one hand, the country welcomed many students from African countries – according to López Segrera, about 15,000 Africans studied in this country in several areas; on the other hand, the country sent numerous experts to work on and encourage the de-

⁸ The connection with the MPLA and Agostinho Neto began in 1965 when Ernesto Guevara took part in a meeting with this Angolan leader and other leaders of the movement. However, it was limited in the early '70s due to the difficulties in shipping material and men, and the development of the struggle for independence. With the onset of Civil War, in 1975, Cuban support was requested again and the country became deeply involved in the Angolan conflict (Glejeses, 2003: 106).

⁹ For an analysis of Cuban participation in the peace process between these two countries, see the book *La paz Cuito Cuanavale – documentos de un proceso*, by Blanca Zabala, La Habana 1989.

velopment of African countries in fields such as health, education, civil construction, agriculture, and transport¹⁰.

Attention should be drawn to two more aspects of Cuban presence in Africa. Firstly, the huge number of participants of these civilian or military missions that, despite uncertainty about the numbers, is estimated at ca. 250,000 Cubans by López Segre (1978) and ca. 110,000 by Bandeira (1998). Regardless of the accuracy of these estimates, both authors point to considerable participation¹¹. The second aspect refers to the benefits generated by such actions. Although they stemmed from the principles adopted by Cuban government, consistent with the ideological basis of the revolution, according to Bandeira (1998), in 1977, at the height of the Cuban involvement, they generated foreign exchange value of \$100 million, which represented about 6% worth of all commodities exported to the Western countries¹².

There are several explanations for Cuban involvement in Africa. As pointed out by Gleijeses, some interpretations indicate that such actions were motivated by personal desire of Fidel Castro for self-aggrandizement, but this certainly has not been the determining factor. The two major factors were, in fact, self-defense and idealism. After searching for a *modus vivendi* with the US, the Cuban leadership came to a very clear conclusion: to protect itself from the US, the best defense would be to attack it, but in the spaces of the Third World. In this sense, we can see that:

(...) Castro considered that the survival of the Revolution depended on “the emergence of other Cubas”; he thought that the US would ultimately be forced to accept Cuba if it had to simultaneously cope with several revolutionary governments. And when Che Guevara went to Africa in December 1964, the US intelligence analysts, considered this element self-defense (Gleijeses, 2003: 109).

The second factor was the idealism that conditioned Cuban foreign policy in this period, in other words, a sense of a revolutionary mission, reflected in proletarian internationalism. In Africa the risks were smaller, not caused directly by the US and the country did not act against legal governments, like in Latin America, as

¹⁰ For more information regarding these actions and activities, apart from the authors mentioned above, see the book *Cubans in Africa* by Neiva Moreira and Beatriz Bissio, Ed. Global 1979.

¹¹ Raul Castro, Fidel Castro’s brother and the second in the Cuban hierarchy, points out that some 400,000 Cubans participated in military or civilian solidarity work in other countries. This number also includes the Cubans who worked in Latin America, in different periods.

¹² According to Bandeira (1998), the value of contract with Libya itself was about \$ 25 million and there was another, similar with Angola in the same period.

Cuba contributed to movements against colonial regimes or pre-established governments. In this regard, it could continue promoting the strategy of revolution without damage. This attitude often clashed with realpolitik, in the sense that it could generate tensions with the Soviet allies, increase the disruption with the US and create new enemies – apart from greatly contributing with resources that the country so badly needed (Glejjeses, 2003: 114-116)¹³.

The explicit recognition of the role played by Cuba, going beyond its constructive character in African conflicts, which we have pointed to, was reflected in the declaration made by Nelson Mandela, when he visited the country as president of South Africa: “We come here with the feeling of a large debt that we owe to the people of Cuba; what other country has a history of more selflessness revealed in its relations with Africa than Cuba?” (cited by: Glejjeses, 2003: 119).

Since the 1980s, with the institutionalization of the Cuban revolutionary process, new dimensions of Cuban soft power, which would receive more definitive contours in the 90s, gained prominence – in response to changes in the Soviet bloc (and socialist ideology as such), in the international context (its nature and fundamental values in the post-cold war) and, finally, in the context of transformations of Cuban policy itself (internal and external), which adjusted to new internal demands (overcoming a severe economic crisis) and the new international scene.

New Cuban Soft Power: The Emergence of Social Diplomacy

As pointed out by Domínguez (2003) and Alzugaray (2003), Cuba continues exerting a seductive power, which fits the concept of soft power proposed by J. Nye (2002). In this sense, although to lesser extent and differently from the previous decades, Cuban Revolution continues attracting and captivating a significant part of population and governments, particularly in Latin America. Although they assume different perspectives, both authors agree that what captivated certain sec-

¹³ As the author points out, citing two different sources. For the Russians, “as a senior soviet official – Anatoly Dobrynin, the former Soviet ambassador – said in his memoirs, Cuban troops were sent by their own initiative and without consulting us”; this assertion was corroborated by Henry Kissinger, who in his memories declares that “we could not imagine that they would act so provocatively, so far from home unless Moscow pressured them to provide military and economic support. The evidence available today shows us that was the opposite” (Glejjeses, 2003: 113-114). In the same way, Szulc points out that: “Contrary to widespread belief, it was the idea of Fidel Castro – and not the Russians – to involve Cuban troops in the civil war in Angola, in a fully open form” (Szulc, 1987: 752).

tors of Latin America in the early years was not only the possibility of carrying out a revolution, as pointed out by Sader (2001), but also the fact that it implied important internal structural changes and, above all, it defied the US with its example of courage, imagination, freedom, opening of new horizons and, especially, with the affirmation of Latin Americanism, based on the works of José Martí and his “Nuestra América”, confronting Pan Americanism and the affirmation of hegemonic US interests. In the 1970s another element was added, i.e. the ability to apply the “proletarian internationalism”, supporting the struggles and revolutions in the Third World, combined with developing military capabilities, which made victories in these fights possible.

In the 1990s, however, it was no longer its military or revolutionary capacity, which still exists though, that enabled Cuba to exercise soft power. The ability stemmed from the fact that the country was able to develop a state safety net, which despite some problems, has solved, though not permanently, most of the difficulties that affected periphery countries, through ensuring access to i.a. health and education for major part of the population and minimizing the effects of social inequality. Moreover, Cuba has performed extraordinarily well in certain areas, such as international events, sports and culture. As the authors point out, Cuban achievements were truly impressive.

Therefore, in the 1990s a strategic international cooperation emerged that reconciled two fundamental ideals of the Cuban Revolution from earlier times, and in particular, positioned it in the new international context, in an attempt to overcome the relative isolation suffered since the downfall of the Soviet bloc. In this sense, through the combination of internationalism and cooperation, based on services, especially in the areas that witnessed significant advances during the revolutionary period (such as education, health, sports and culture), Social Diplomacy came to be, shaping the new contours of Cuban soft power.

The Social Diplomacy contributed to affirmation of a new strategy, which improved the country's relationship with other nations. This concept expands the notion of Medical Diplomacy developed by Julie Feinsilver¹⁴, which is comprised:

In the analysis of Cuban foreign policy, medical diplomacy was overlooked. However, it has been an integral part of almost all agreements of cooperation and assistance that Cuba has historically devoted to strengthening diplomatic ties with other Third World countries. Dozens of countries have received Cuban long-term medical assistance, while

¹⁴ For a further analysis of this concept see the book of the author: (1993). *Healing the masses: Cuban Health Politics at Home and Abroad*, Berkeley: University of California Press.

others received short-term aid in response to emergencies. Each year Cuban medical aid reaches millions of people in the Third World through direct provision of health care, and thousands of recipients annually, in form of education programs and trainings in the field of health, both in Cuba and abroad. Positive impact of this aid on the health of the citizens of the Third World has significantly improved country's relations with other countries and has increased Cuba's symbolic capital among governments, as well as international organizations and intellectuals of the Third World, who often play an important role in shaping public opinion and public policy (Feinsilver, 1993: 193; quoted by Alzugaray, 2003: 27)¹⁵.

It can be stated that such activities have contributed to the development of Cuban "soft power", which strengthened its ties with other countries, on national and societal levels. Moreover, such actions implied introducing adjustments to the concept of proletarian internationalism: less ideological than before, emphasizing social work that a country carries out in favor of the most disadvantaged nations, affected by natural disasters or problems in particular areas¹⁶.

The notion of Social Diplomacy implies, in the first place, that Cuba carries out a strategy of broad cooperation, based on various social areas, which mainly reflect the success of the revolution, such as health, education and sports, among others. This notion also implies that the continued attraction and international support, which this form of cooperation favors, ceased to be generated by the works of great leaders or the military presence, as in the past, but rather has become a result of actions in civilian areas in the context of extreme poverty or natural disasters. The final implication is the renewal of internationalism and "Third-Worldism", present since the 1960s, which now has become a domestic and international challenge placed within the framework of country's new foreign policy, which uses diplomacy and aims to forge new partnerships. According to Erisman and Kirk (2009) various forms of Cuban cooperation could reach some 154 countries, thus contributing to overcoming the isolation of American embargo; according to Huish and Darnell (2011), based on data from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Cuba, since 2011 there have been 42,000 Cuban collaborators working in 101 countries.

Social Diplomacy, thus, allows to project country's positive image in various fields, and also facilitates obtaining funds through exchanging Cuban professionals' services for products or currency, as in the case of Venezuela, or by means of a triangular cooperation, where these services are financed by international or-

¹⁵ Translated by the authors.

¹⁶ Since the beginning of the Revolution, 91 countries received Cuban aid, which involved services of approximately 51,059 professionals.

ganizations – most notably in the field of healthcare. Moreover, those professionals are instructed not to interfere with domestic issues, thus limiting possible tensions. Finally, in the context of the country's foreign policy, such initiatives allow to develop a global-scale South-South cooperation, with counter-hegemonic approach, based on solidarity and critical stance towards the globalized world (Erisman, Kirk, 2006; Kirk, 2009).

Another important aspect is that these actions allow the Cuban government to continue sending significant portion of its population to work in other countries, without the military content of the Cold War initiatives. This enables strengthening of ties between those involved and the government, thus expanding the ability to maintain the internal consensus.

The diplomacy also involves offering education and civil training courses for foreign students from Latin America and Africa (and, to a lesser extent, from other continents), as well as offering medical procedures in Cuba and, in particular, the services of Cuban professionals abroad.

Consequently, Social Diplomacy focuses on the areas, in which Cuba has achieved significant advances. In this sense, cooperation was developed primarily in the areas of education, health¹⁷, sports and culture.

In the educational field, in addition to offering scholarships in various courses and areas of knowledge, the Latin American School of Medicine (ELAM), created in 1999, has proved to be a project with the most significant impact. The purpose of ELAM is to train future medical professionals who originate from impoverished sectors in their home countries, and who would otherwise have limited access to higher education. Thus the Cuban Revolution continues to exercise its seductive power among important segments of society in students' countries of origin. Torres and Cruz (2011), point to the following data regarding educational activities, specifically medicine:

¹⁷ In this case, Cuba has the following structure: "(...) It has the most precious resource: human capital, there are already 566,365 health workers, among them 74,552 doctors and 32,289 specialists in general medicine, resulting in a ratio of one doctor per 151 inhabitants and 95.9 nurses per 10 thousand inhabitants. All this has been made possible through the development of national capacities: 24 medical schools, 499 university polyclinics family, 217 hospitals, 14,007 medical clinics, 160 dental clinics, 13 research institutes with the network of institutions of scientific hubs, all working with just one objective; improve the health of the Cuban population" (Sánchez, Machado, Fernández, 2010: 82).

In the years 2009-2010, some 51,648 students enrolled in Cuba and abroad, and formed Medical Brigades distributed in various countries. There were 8,170 students at the Latin American School of Medicine, 12,017 participating in the New Medicine Training Program, 1,118 in other projects, 29,171 in the Brigades and 1,172 studying technical careers. The Latin American School of Medicine, created on November 15, 1999 by Fidel's idea, also marked a turning point for the concept of Cuban assistance in the training of human resources, initially designed to train students in remote and neglected areas of the continent. It is Cuba's contribution to help countries to pay their own social debt. It is a source of pride, with 7,256 graduated physicians from 30 countries. Currently there are 8,170 active students from 28 countries (Torres, Cruz, 2011: 385)¹⁸.

For a country that still faces the effects of a severe economic crisis this major effort can only be understood as an element of the framework of Social Diplomacy. As Fidel Castro noted, such undertaking (the ELAM) reaffirms Cuban ideals:

(...) what we want is that the students from brother Latin American countries become impregnated with the same doctrine, with which we educate our doctors, that is total dedication to their noble future profession, because a doctor is like a pastor, a priest, a missionary, a crusader for health and physical and mental well-being of the people (...) (cited by Sánchez, Machado, Fernández, 2010: 79)¹⁹.

Apart from the ELAM, in partnership with the local government, Cuba has established and maintains the Nursing School in Dominican Republic, which currently hosts 150 students (Sánchez Machado, Fernández, 2010: 80).

Cuban cooperation in the field of health involves other issues and programs, as mentioned by Sánchez, Machado and Fernández:

Currently the Cuban medical cooperation²⁰, provided in various forms, takes place in 73 countries. It employs 38,544 health workers worldwide, of whom 17,697 are doctors. The PIS itself has treated 117,798,248 patients, including 2,831,870 operations. Conservative numbers indicate that during the 10 years of this program it has saved the lives of nearly 2 million people. Currently in progress is the Operation Miracle, launched in 29 Latin American and the Caribbean countries, including Cuba (Sánchez, Machado, Fernández, 2010: 80)²¹.

¹⁸ Translated by the authors.

¹⁹ Translated by the authors.

²⁰ According to Torres and Cruz (2011: 382): "The Cuban revolution triumphed in 1959 and that same year it saw an intense exodus of doctors, which caused the country to lose, in the first years of revolution, about 50% of its 6,286 professionals" (translated by the authors).

²¹ Translated by the authors.

However, main cooperation has been developed together with Venezuelan support, within the framework of the ALBA (Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America). The organization carries out missions in Venezuela and other Latin American countries, in such fields as literacy and medicine, thus providing space for Cuban Social Diplomacy, and enabling Cuban experts to exchange their services for resources (foreign exchange and oil), which are fundamental for Cuba's economic recovery²².

Sport is another area where Social Diplomacy is present (Huish, Darnell, 2011). The Diplomacy in this field has three main aspects: sending brigades for cooperation to operate in marginalized communities in other countries; developing counter-hegemonic perspective while establishing ties within civil society; and finally, admitting foreign students to study and practice sports in Cuba. Notably, following the example of ELAM, the International School of Physical Education and Sports (EIEFD) was created, and so far has received ca. 1,400 students from 76 countries, and organized numerous events. Thus, we can see, as of Huish and Darnell indicate:

In sum, the most distinguishing feature of Cuban sport internationalism may be that sport is regarded as important element, explicitly situated within broader processes of foreign policy and development, rather than as a vehicle for individualized and specific development goals. As we see it, Cuba has positioned sport as a mechanism in support of, and in conjunction with, comprehensive development projects that aim to address poverty and underdevelopment from multiple angles. For these reasons, it is worthy of ongoing attention within the SDP sector (Huish, Darnell, 2011: 161).

Finally, it should be emphasized that such actions are not limited to medical field, although this is the most significant example. They also cover other areas, where the country has had important achievements in the international arena, including education, sport, culture and certain areas of scientific knowledge. This seems to suggest that the concept of Medical Diplomacy, used by Feinsilver, could

²² In Venezuela's case, the main data are: "The Special Program for Cooperation with Venezuela, which began in April 2003, has 30,685 Cuban health professionals and has achieved the following results: 363, 084,127 consultations, of these 164, 210,014 were field visits; 74,398 operations; 6,306 births; 281,892,894 educational activities and 16,538,746 ophthalmological cases. In the Operation Miracle, the main result is the improvement or return of vision to 1,825,274 people from 33 countries. In Cuba 175,610 patients were operated, as well as 1,649,664 patients in 60 ophthalmological centers established in 18 countries, with 93 surgical points donated by Cuba, which use the newest technologies, in Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Panama, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Uruguay, Angola, Mali, Peru, St. Lucia, St. Vincent, Suriname, Guyana and Argentina" (Torres, Cruz, 2011: 387) (translated by the authors).

be extended to “Social Diplomacy” as an important strategy of expanding and strengthening of political ties and, additionally, of raising funds that are essential for Cuba’s economic recovery.

Thus, we can point out that during the 1990s, Cuba has created a network of support in bilateral and multilateral arena, which allows us to affirm that the country has managed to overcome marginalization the international context. After reorienting its relations and acquiring new sources of financial assistance it was easier for Cuba to recover its prestige, which in turn was largely based on the development of Social Diplomacy.

Conclusion

This study sought to discuss international projection of Cuba and the characteristics of its soft power, since the Revolution, considering that, at the beginning of the revolutionary process it was fundamentally based on the charisma of the revolutionary leaders (Fidel Castro and Che Guevara, notably), while in recent years it shifted towards the Social Diplomacy involving cooperation in services that exemplify Cuban social achievements (education, health, sport...).

Therefore, we consider that, with the changes in the international scene, Cuba faced various challenges and carried out a number of adjustments, both internal and in regards to its international projection, which were driven by a “survival logic” and by the redefinition of national interest. This, in turn, made Cuban foreign policy more pragmatic and less confrontational.

The major change in this process, as we sought to demonstrate, involves the advent or the improvement of the exercise of the Cuban “soft power”, with the emergence of a diplomacy that uses the country’s potential in education, health and sports, to strengthen its ties with civil society and the States, generating political and economic support to the country. We referred to this policy as “Social Diplomacy”.

In this manner, Cuba has managed to overcome, even if partially, the isolation to which it has been subjected since the end of the Cold War and obtained the support and ties that allowed its economic and political survival. Thus, within a decade Cuba was able to enter international markets, find new partners, increase its foreign trade and deepen economic ties with countries and areas of its interest, which resulted in diversification of its trading partners.

This, however, does not mean that the Cuban leadership has definitely overcome the challenges it faces. The sustainability and effectiveness of the actions taken until now largely depend on the performance of its leadership in the conflict with the US, a key element of country's foreign policy; the maintenance and diversification of its economic and political partners; as well as its capacity to overcome the criticism of international community, provoked by country's political model. The final settlement of these issues will determine, to a large extent, the future of the country and the final assessment of efficiency of its foreign policy.

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