The US-Cuba relations in the early sixties, the nineties and the recent reconciliation process. 
And the reciprocal effects on Russia, Canada and the Vatican.

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Abstract

The US-Cuba relations have been problematic for half a century; however, in December 2014, both countries announced the restoration of their bilateral ties. Over the decades, these relations have also had reciprocal effects on other countries like Russia, Canada and the Vatican. First of all, the thesis provides a brief historical background of the US-Cuba relations from 1898 to 1959 to understand their context before the Cuban Revolution. It then examines the main happenings of the US-Cuba relationship and its reciprocal effects on Moscow, Ottawa and the Holy See during three distinct time periods: the early sixties, the nineties and from 2008 to the present. In order to do this, the study is divided in three case studies, one for each interval, and analyses through the help of the realist, defensive realist and liberal theories the actions taken by these five countries to face the developments of the US-Cuba relations. It finds that Havana’s foreign policy has always been driven by the same wish for the survival of its revolution, the US still aims at changing the Cuban government although it is gradually reducing the sanctions against it, while Russia, Canada and the Vatican have basically kept unchanged their approach toward Cuba throughout the decades. Finally, the recent US-Cuba thaw is not completed yet because these two countries still have to tackle some crucial issues.
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CANF: Cuban American National Foundation
CARICOM: Caribbean Community
CDA: Cuban Democracy Act
CIA: Central Intelligence Agency
CLDSA: Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity Act
COMECON: Council for Mutual Economic Assistance
CPSU: Communist Party of the Soviet Union
EU: European Union
EXCOMM: Executive Committee of the National Security Council
GDP: Gross Domestic Product
ICBMs: Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles
INAV: National Savings and Housing Institute
INRA: Agrarian Reform Institute
MRBM: MRBM: Medium-Range Ballistic Missiles
NAFTA: North American Free Trade Agreement
NATO: North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NORAD: North American Aerospace Defense Command
NYT: New York Times
OAS: Organization of American States
ODA: Official Development Assistance
PSP: Partido Socialista Popular
TPP: Trans-Pacific Partnership
UN: United Nations
UNSC: United Nations Security Council
USAID: United States Agency for International Development
US: United States
USSR: Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Initialising the task and the puzzle

The Short Century: the twentieth century was defined in this way by the historian Eric Hobsbawm (1994, 5). It was characterised by a long series of radical events, among which was the Cold War, that had a huge impact on the international system. In 1959, in the middle of the Cold War, Fidel Castro and his revolutionary troops entered Havana and took power in Cuba. He officially resigned in 2008 because of the deterioration of his health and he was successively replaced by his brother Raúl. During the Short Twentieth Century, nobody else ruled a country as much as Fidel Castro. His long leadership was delineated by his resolute relations with the Soviet Union (USSR) as well as by the strong ideological contrast with the United States (US). The Cuban-Soviet cooperation culminated in the installation of nuclear weapons on the island in 1962. In that year, the world was close to the nuclear holocaust as Cuba was the scene of the global struggle for power between the American superpower and the Soviet. If on the one hand, Cuba was wrongly expected to collapse just after the dissolution of the USSR in 1991, on the other hand, it is equally puzzling that the US-Cuba relations did not improve in the nineties despite the Cold War and its ideological battle between capitalism and communism were over. Nevertheless, these two countries waited until December 2014 to announce the restoration of their bilateral relations through a reconciliation process that it is still taking place.

Admiring or criticising Cuba unconditionally is not helpful to understand the peculiarities of its system. The Cuban revolution was established with the ultimate goal of ending the political and economic hegemony of the US on the island. The revolutionary model was inspired by nationalism first, and successively by communism. This is the distinctive trait of the Cuban system. Over the years, this model has faced with difficulty the external happenings of the international arena. Furthermore, Havana has recently started updating its system to ensure its survival as well as opening to the rest of the world thanks also the diplomatic help of Canada and the Vatican.

In general, the US-Cuba relations have especially concerned both states, but they have also caught the attention of other countries such as the USSR/Russia, Canada and the Vatican. This thesis primarily focuses on the relationship between Washington and Havana as well as the responses given by the three aforementioned countries to this issue in three different historic periods: The Cuban Missile Crisis, the fall of the USSR and the US-Cuba reconciliation. The case studies of the thesis are based on such intervals.
1.2 Aim of the thesis and research questions

The purpose of the research is to explain, analyse and describe the US-Cuba relations from 1962 until their recent normalisation by also focusing on the roles played by Russia, Canada and the Vatican to face their changes. It will explain the relations between the US and Cuba and those of Russia, Canada and the Vatican with the Caribbean island. It will analyse, through the realist, defensive realist and liberal theories, the actions taken by the aforementioned five countries in Chapters Four, Five and Six. It will also describe the historical context of the US-Cuba relations from 1895 to 1959 as well as the most relevant event and information in Chapters Four, Five and Six. Moreover, the thesis is supported by the following research questions:

1) How did Russia act toward Cuba in the three case studies?
2) Why was the US-Cuba thaw impossible in the nineties after the end of the Cold War, but it has just taken place recently?
3) What are the internal and external actors that contributed to the US-Cuba thaw?

These questions permit me to grasp crucial aspects of this topic. The first question pays attention to Russia’s relations with Cuba over different time periods to understand whether changes have taken place after the fall of the USSR. The second question focuses on the timing of the US-Cuba reconciliation. The last question is important to discover the involved actors’ reasons and the intentions behind the reconciliation.

1.3 Units of analysis, data and relevance of the study

The US, Cuba, the USSR/Russia, Canada and the Vatican are the actors and the units of analysis of the study. The attention focuses on them for the following reasons: the US and Cuba are the natural protagonists of the issue; the USSR was the primary economic and military ally of the Caribbean island in the Cold War, while nowadays, Russia still has good relations with Cuba; despite its close bonds with Washington, Canada has mostly preferred a constructive approach toward Castro rather than the hard-line; while the Vatican has also favoured this kind of engagement. The outcomes of the US-Cuba ties have induced the Kremlin, Ottawa and the Holy See to take actions on their foreign policy to preserve their interests in Cuba and Latin America. This is what links all the five actors in the case studies.

The thesis relies on qualitative methods and its data are based on relevant books, academic
articles, (online) newspapers, official reports and, partially, on interviews and speeches by the political leaders of the countries involved in this study. Such data and the main happenings are linked to the theories used to analyse the actions of the five actors. In other words, they support the theories.

It should be underlined that reams have already been written about the US-Cuba relations and that the academic attention on it has been very high. Currently, it is even increasing due to the last notable developments. After saying this, why should it be relevant to study such a subject? Because this thesis would like to contribute to the existing academic literature by presenting the US-Cuba relations not merely like a bilateral issue as one might believe, but rather like an issue that has also impacted on countries from different part of the globe since 1959. To do so, the thesis focuses on the five aforementioned states that have played a role in all the three periods.

1.4 Theories’ choice
The choice of the realist theory is justified by the concept that “international politics, like all politics, is a struggle for power” (Morghentau 1978, 29). This aspect of realism was predominant in the foreign policy of the US and the USSR during the Cold War and especially during the Cuban Missile Crisis since the nuclear weapons were installed, as will be argued below, to change the global balance of power. The notion of defensive realism is useful in comprehending the decisions of the revolutionary Cuba because it is in conformity with the elements of defensive realism delineated by Waltz (1979). The first objective of the Cuban political leadership has always been the protection of the revolution (Bain and Mollinedo Fernández 2016, 262). Surviving and keeping its authority in Cuba has also been part of the Vatican policy on the island. In addition, defensive realism is suitable to explain reassurance and cooperation between two former enemies such as Washington and Havana, while the tenets of liberalism became predominant in the nineties because the fall of the USSR caused the victory of capitalism over communism.

1.5 Methodology

1.5.1 Qualitative research
Qualitative research is commonly used in political science, sociology and social sciences. Unlike quantitative research, it tends to focus on quality rather than numbers. Its goal is
understanding events and the significance that individuals give to the roles of their behaviour and the social world (della Porta and Keating 2008, 26). In other words, it is interested in examining how human beings interpret their experiences and what the latter means to them. Qualitative research consists of six main steps: pertinent research question(s) tending to respond to questions based on “how”, “why” instead of “how many”; the selection of relevant subjects; the collection of data; interpretation of data; use of the theoretical framework that may involve the gathering of new data or a stricter focus on the research question(s) and finally, the exposition of the most important findings of the study and the final conclusions (Bryman 2012, 384).

Qualitative research is suitable to analyse the US-Cuba relations since, as already argued, instead of resting on statistics and other numeric elements, this thesis sharpens the focus on the actions of five countries in order to understand the global relevance of the phenomenon. This type of research is also supported by theories; however, researchers do not agree on the common role and importance of these theories. In general, as concerns their role, theories are linked with methodology and epistemology of the research and they can also be compared with methodology (Tavallaei and Abu Talib 2010, 571). In addition, it has to be highlighted that the broad nature of social sciences allows researchers to choose a large variety of theories to study a given phenomenon; hence, they are likely to provide different aspects of the phenomenon and the combination of such perspectives can explain a specific event more clearly.

In qualitative research, data are commonly collected through observations, interviews and documents. The researcher has to determine the origins, the accuracy and the authenticity of the documents in order to conduct a reliable study. A good way to fulfil such requirements is checking the author(s), the publisher of the source, understanding its structure and the relevance of information. For example, the data of this thesis relies on documents written by experts in US-Cuba relations such as, for example, Bain, LeoGrande, Pérez, McKercher. Documents are valid sources of data because, depending on the topic of the study, they may have more relevant information than interviews or observations; moreover, they are easily accessible especially if online and they can also contain a large amount of information that could be collected by the researcher with difficulty (Merriam 2009, 155).

According to Merriam, “data analysis is the process used to answer…. [the] research question(s)” (2009, 176). To reach this purpose, the researcher needs to read, interpret and select the most important parts of the chosen documents. This process starts by recognising those segments contributing to response of the questions. A segment can be defined as a unit having an inherent response or just a part of it to the research questions (Merriam 2009, 176).
Moreover, the units have to be combined together coherently in order to have all the full answers to the questions. Finally, if the combination of several different units does not permit the researchers to reach plausible and concrete findings, they should opt for more pertinent information to the study.

1.5.2 Case study
Case study is one of the most common methods in both qualitative research and social sciences. It “investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (Yin 2009, 18). In other words, the researcher decides to study a particular issue, e.g. an event, an individual, that is relevant to his/her field of study within a specific period of time. It is necessary to determine the theoretical framework at the beginning of the study because, according to Yin, this influences important elements such as the interpretation of the results, research questions and the analysis of data (Yin 2009, 28). The different delimitations of the phenomenon depend on the theoretical framework selected by the researcher. Furthermore, the variety of existing theories helps the researcher to highlight the external world’s complexity, while further ideas and perspective might be developed thanks to the abundance of data (Hodkinson and Hodkinson 2001, 7). Three more points need to be stressed: first, case study can partially describe the event to provide a general background; second, data collection can be either qualitative or quantitative depending on the researcher’s choice; third, the time period of the case does not have to be necessarily current, but it can even be based on a past phenomenon.

This study rests on the case study method because the aforementioned aspects are suitable for the structure of this thesis. In fact, the theoretical framework will analyse the complexity of the phenomena and the actions of the units of analysis in three different delimited periods of time. Two of these periods are from the past. Each case study of this thesis sharpens the US-Cuba relations and the reciprocal effects on Russia, Canada and the Vatican over three distinct time periods. The first case is about the early sixties, the second about the nineties and the third goes from 2008 to the present. Overall, case studies have different objectives. For example, investigators can base their research on this method to explain a certain event or generate new hypotheses through the use of causal mechanisms/theories and finally, to assess and work on theories (Vennesson 2008, 227).

As pointed out by Vennesson, there are four main kinds of case studies, all of which have different goals: the descriptive case study does not contribute to the existing scientific literature because it just describes a given event without adding new knowledge; the interpretative case study (utilised in this thesis) aims at explicating a phenomenon by using a set of theories and
such theories can be even assessed; the hypothesis-generating case study can either sharpen current hypotheses or create new ones; finally, the theory-evaluating case study evaluates whether the present theoretical framework explains the process and the results of the case under examination (2008, 227-28).

1.6 Limitations of the research

The previous subsections underlined the main characteristics and strengths of both methods; nevertheless, it is also necessary that the reader is aware of their weaknesses. Case study researchers know that a large amount of data to summarise can be an obstacle during the analysis. In line with this point, Flyvbjerg argues that: “The problems in summarizing case studies, however, are due more often to the properties of the reality studied than to the case study as a research method” (2006, 241). In this thesis, it has actually been difficult to collect, summarise and analyse data and information because the realities studied are very complex since they involve five countries over three periods. Therefore, it should be mentioned that only the most relevant data have been chosen to highlight the reasons that have brought the countries to adopt different strategies to face the outcomes of the US-Cuba relations.

Furthermore, the direct involvement of the researcher in data collection can affect the subjects’ responses. The critics, among which are the quantitative investigators, point out that qualitative research relies on subjectivity rather than objectivity because it is influenced by the researcher’s view about what is relevant and what is not and by the eventual personal connection of the author with the topic or group of individuals studied (Bryman 2012, 405). Even if I do not have any personal links with the thesis’ topic, the data collection might have been affected by my subjective view on the importance of the units of analysis’ actions in the three case studies. Thus, I might not have considered more relevant aspects.

As mentioned above, theories are an important tool because they guide the empirical process and the analysis of the researcher. Nevertheless, existing theories might be incomplete or inappropriate to investigate a given phenomenon: theories may not be exactly tailored to the case under study and this weakness might ignore some aspects of the research (Vennesson 2008, 236). Indeed, the theoretical toolkit of this study fails to explain and analyse all the features considered. Therefore, depending on the context, the analysis is sustained by some extra concepts, e.g. the role of morality and ideology in politics, and soft power because they consider aspects which are ignored by the thesis’ theoretical framework. By doing so, one can have clearer views on the choices of the countries involved.
1.7 Chapter outline

This qualitative study consists of seven chapters: the introduction, the theoretical framework, the historical background of the US-Cuba relations, three case studies of the US-Cuba relations also focusing on their repercussions on the USSR/Russia, Canada and the Vatican, and the final conclusions. This first chapter includes the structure, the methodology, the research questions, the aim and the limitations of the thesis.

The second chapter provides a theoretical framework of three international relations theories: realism, defensive realism and liberalism. In each case study, such theories are used to analyse the actions taken by the main actors (the US, Cuba, the USSR/Russia, Canada and the Vatican) to face the outcomes of the US-Cuba relations.

The third chapter describes the historical context of the US-Cuba relations from the Cuban Independence in 1898 to the takeover of the revolution in 1959. Knowledge of this period is important in order to have a broader view on the issue because the countries’ bilateral relations were very different before 1959. As will be seen, the US helped Cuba during the War of Independence by fighting against Spain and then it played a hegemonic role on the island by imposing its rules on the local executives until 1959. The revolution took place because it wanted to stop the excessive political and economic power of the US: this is why Americans have always been furious with Castro.

Chapters Four, Five and Six represent the main part of the thesis and they are based on three case studies, each focusing on a different period. The fourth chapter identifies what moved Cuba and the USSR to initiate the Missile Crisis in 1962, the countermeasures discussed by the US and the reactions of Canada and the Vatican. The fifth chapter explores the US domestic and ideological factors that prevented the thaw with Havana in the nineties, the actions taken by Cuba and Russia to face the disintegration of the Soviet empire and the responses of Canada and the Vatican to the US foreign policy. The sixth chapter investigates the American and Cuban motives behind their rapprochement, current Russian ties with the Caribbean island and the role of Canada and the Vatican in this thaw. The choice of these periods is justified by the fact that they were marked by crucial events such as the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962, the collapse of the USSR in 1991 and finally, the recent reconciliation in 2014. The final conclusions highlight the main findings of the case studies and respond to the research questions.
2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Realism
Throughout the decades, the theory of realism has evolved, providing different approaches by focusing on given aspects of the international system. Although the theory of realism became predominant in the aftermath of the Second World War due to the defeat of idealism, it is possible to find its early origins in the writings of Thucydides, Machiavelli and Hobbes. The realist bases are the following ones:

- States are the main actors in the international arena, not institutions and individuals
- The international system is characterised by international anarchy, in other words there is a lack of a global government that is able to impose binding decisions on all the states
- The actors are rational and egoistic as they want to pursue their self-interests
- States aim for their survival and/or power in the international system (Donnelly 2005, 30-31).

The concept of international anarchy is fundamental as states struggle for power and can rely only on themselves to ensure their own security from external threats. Thus, states seek to strengthen their military capability and this has repercussions on the global perception of the level of security. For example, if a state increases its military capability, other states are very likely to feel unsafe. This point is strictly related to the security dilemma, as no one can be sure about the others’ intentions. Given this fear, states struggle to prevent attacks against themselves and therefore, they make efforts to increase their power to limits the actions of the others’ power. According to John Herz: “this, in turn, renders the others more insecure and compels them to prepare for the worst. Because no state can ever feel entirely secure in such a world of competing units, power competition ensues, and the vicious circle of security and power accumulation is on” (Tang 2009, 509).

The international system without doubt presents some elements concerning the state of nature described by Hobbes in his book *Leviathan*. Indeed, in such a state, all the men are equal, interact in anarchy and are finally moved by competition, diffidence and glory (Donnelly 2005, 32). Each man aims for his own preservation and thus seeks to acquire without limitations all that is necessary to his survival. Hobbes clarifies that each individual tries to dominate all the other individuals. This fact in addition to the above-mentioned features of the state of nature leads to “a war of all against all” (*bellum omnium contra omnes*) where “each man is a wolf to another man” (*homo homini lupus*). Obviously, the description is very radical and this condition
has never existed in history, as acknowledged by Hobbes himself; nevertheless, for realists, the three assumptions are very interesting and need to be taken into account (Donnelly 2005, 34).

The concept of hierarchy is also significant because it underlines the relationships between the dominant part and its subordinates. As claimed by Waltz, a structural realist, in a hierarchic condition, the actors, especially small states, tend to jump on the bandwagon since, by joining the strongest player, their main purposes are diminishing the losses and increasing their gains (Donnelly 2005, 36). For instance, during the Cold War, Cuba ensured Soviet military and financial aid to deter the US from attacking its territory and face the losses of the US embargo, respectively.

Another relevant concept is polarity. To be considered as poles, states must have the following characteristics: size of population, territory, natural resources, economic power, military and force (Waltz 1979). For approximately half a century, the world was divided into two main political blocs (capitalist and communist) controlled by the US and the Soviet Union; therefore, the international system was bipolar. Nevertheless, the end of the Cold War in 1991 left a unipolar world: the US is the only military superpower that is much more powerful than all the other states.

Structural logic claims that unipolarity brings instability since powerful states want to form a coalition to balance the strongest state. As will be argued below, Russia has been attempting since 1995 to erode the US global power by strengthening ties with the former Soviet allies such as Cuba. This goal is the core of the Putin Doctrine as Moscow is interested in augmenting its sphere of influence and thus creating a multipolar world to balance the US (Bain 2014, 454). According to others, unipolarity brings more stability as no one else is able to challenge the strongest part (Donnelly 2005, 38). Schweller has noticed that multipolar systems (with four/five great powers) are, after all, similar to competitive markets, while systems with up to three powers are rather monopolistic or oligopolistic (Donnelly 2005, 39). Moreover, disputes on the periphery of a bipolar international arena are unlikely to endanger it, whereas, in a multipolar system, they can have serious repercussions on the general level of stability. As regards the stability of bipolar and multipolar systems, Waltz has argued that there cannot be a clear response to this issue, as the results are not automatically established by the structure because the states are strongly influenced by the structure itself as well as diverse external variables: sometimes the latter can play a crucial role in deciding the outcomes (Donnelly 2005, 40).

As already mentioned, states are the only actors in the world system, which is why the role
of international institutions is minimised by classic realists. Although institutions exist at a domestic level and can bind different parts, this does not happen internationally because of, as stressed by Snyder, the anarchical structure of the system and the consequent struggle for power (Donnelly 2005, 43). In addition, the role of cooperation is very scarce because the goal of the states is to obtain their own national interests rather than common gains: they prefer to maximise their power and have weak counterparts in order to prevail on the latter.

In general, classic realists have affirmed that morality must be excluded in foreign policy as the anarchic system is an arena in which states struggle for power. This concept emerges clearly from Morgenthau's words: “the concept of interest defined in terms of power... saves us from that moral excess and that political folly” (Fukuyama 1992, 249-50). It is necessary to highlight that this statement is both extreme and false: indeed, states often consider issues related to the moral sphere because, for example, international law contains moral obligations or the national and foreign public opinion may put pressure on them (Donnelly 2005, 49). Furthermore, states can afford morality even for reasons which are not necessarily linked to the threat of use of force: for example, they can join humanitarian operations to provide assistance to suffering people, but also for achieving political objectives such as building and improving their reputation in the international community (Donnelly 2005, 49). By doing this, their future (political) actions can be more credible in front of it.

2.2 Defensive Realism

Defensive realism is a branch of realism asserting that the anarchic structure of the international system does not necessarily raise the probability of war. This theory stresses the need for the increase of security through the use of instruments such as deterrence, negotiations and controls on weapons (Nguyen 2014, 22). The best way to avoid and reduce conflicts is by applying defensive measures. According to Waltz, “the first concern of states is not to maximize power but to maintain their position in the system” (1979, 126). As will be argued below, Cuba has always striven to maintain its position, in other words, to keep its communist regime intact due to the US counterrevolutionary attacks, while the Vatican pursued the involvement of Havana internationally to keep its authority on the island as it has mostly been weak there.

Structural variables can cause specific outcomes in the system as well as in the foreign policy of states. Firstly, the concepts of anarchy and security dilemma remain essential. Secondly, the security dilemma can be exacerbated in given contexts by structural modifiers such as the access to raw materials, geographic vicinity and offence-defence balance. The
impact of structural modifiers on the destiny of war and cooperation is larger than that of the gross distribution of power\(^1\) which is related to the material capabilities owned by every state in the international system (Taliaferro 2001, 131). Thirdly, the political leaders’ perceptions and calculations have a material influence on the foreign policy of states, and in particular when the distribution of power is unstable and so rulers obtain unclear information about it. Fourthly, the limits of domestic policy can have repercussions on the actions of a state internationally (Taliaferro 2001, 142).

Unlike classic realism, defensive realism has a different attitude toward cooperation. If, on the one hand, it is complex to assess the other state’s intentions because they are mutable, on the other hand, states are not malign by nature. Cooperation between states is actually possible if uncertainty about their goals diminishes and some trust is created between them through reassurance (Tang 2010, 129). Reassurance is a way of increasing cooperation and thus trust between the parties. Furthermore, it makes it possible both to signal one’s benevolent purposes to the other party and to understand how this other party responds to this openness and its intentions (Tang 2010, 130). In order to establish more trust, the start of a bilateral relation needs to be gradual and have some attempts at reassurance (part of a reassurance programme), because simple reassurance could be considered a suspicious action. A state should initiate a reassurance attempt under the following conditions: its intentions must be benevolent, it is not unsure of its actions and it needs to have some doubts about the other state’s intentions (Tang 2010, 132).

For two former enemies, e.g. the US and Cuba, a reassurance programme is usually part of a larger objective such as reconciliation which generally occurs after a conflict or a very tense period. The task of cooperation is putting aside the conflict of interest to reach common gains, so it can be described as a total-sum game (Keohane 1984). However, reassurance is not always a sign of good intentions, as the strategy might be used by one part to give the other a false sense of security to make the other believe to be safe; hence, it is necessary to comprehend the signals of the parts. Reassurance is both costly and risky. The cost occurs when someone sends the signal, while the risk occurs when the other part ignores such a signal, but in order to benefit from others’ cooperation, it is necessary to risk being swindled by the other unwilling part (Tang 2010, 135). Generally speaking, in politics, no purpose can be reached without cost. If the reassurance attempt is reciprocated by another state, it is successful and will probably lead

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\(^{1}\) It is assessed through polarity and the number of great powers within the international system (Taliaferro 2001).
to an improvement of the bilateral relations, whereas, if the attempt fails, it might leave the relations unchanged or worsened.

In general, how do the reassurance attempts take place? According to Tang, there are three main ways:

- With words: they must be pronounced by one single voice so that words become more credible to the receiver of the attempt. In order for words to be effective, they have to, for example, break a taboo, emphasise the role and importance of cooperation, dialogue and diplomacy to solve issues and attenuate previous tensions.

- With non-military deeds: the initiator should give some small concessions to the other part as well as change the preceding policies against it. Moreover, both sides should begin, or strengthen, mutual exchanges and cooperation.

- With military deeds: one side can stop the placement of arms and troops and reduce its (offensive) military capability without endangering its strength in case of defence and deterrence; both sides can even decide to establish new institutions aiming at enhancing security cooperation and restricting eventual security competitions (2010, 148-154).

The tenets of the second bullet-point are evident in the US-Cuba reconciliation because both countries are enhancing mutual cooperation to tackle common issues such as criminality, drug trafficking and cataclysms. Furthermore, Washington is gradually modifying its old Cuba policy: for example, Cuba was removed from the US list of state sponsors of terrorism in 2015 (The White House 2016).

2.3 Liberalism

The main cornerstones of this theory are based on democracy, cooperation, free trade and respect for human rights. Philosophers such as Locke, Kant and Voltaire are considered the progenitors of liberalism. In “The Perpetual Peace”, Kant claims that states with a republican form of government, characterised by the accountability of the governments and the protection of individual rights should create a pacific federation (foedus pacificum) in order to pursue peace internationally (Kant 1991).

If realism considers states as the only actors in the international arena and underestimates the role of institutions and cooperation, liberalism has a wholly different approach: in fact, the anarchical structure is significantly reduced by the presence of institutions because they are important and useful actors that facilitate cooperation among states to reach common gains.
Furthermore, not even the lack of a hegemonic actor affects the role of international cooperation. Nonetheless, liberal institutionalists recognise that it can be endangered in cases where the enforcement is fragile (Burchill 2005, 57).

Peace is the normal state of the subject and it can be achieved through economic, financial and cultural means. Since the bases of human nature are cooperation and harmony, war is irrational because it is the consequence of undemocratic elites trying to enhance their power and private interests. War can be prevented by democracy and free trade because the elimination of barriers improves interactions among states. Furthermore, it has to be noted that democracies do not tend to fight each other: the long period of peace among industrialised countries shows that war is gradually becoming an outdated tool in international relations, but, as stressed by Doyle, democracies are likely to engage in conflicts with authoritarian countries (Burchill 2005, 59).

During the Cold War, capitalism opposed communism as an economic model and found its breeding ground in North America and Western Europe. One century ago, Weber argued that the origins of modern capitalism found its very breeding ground in the Puritan and Protestant work ethics in the US and Europe (2005). However, the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 also established the defeat of communism. This event gave liberal democracy no competitors. According to Fukuyama, it is still an unchallenged model which is the “end point of mankind’s ideological evolution” and the “final form of human government” (1992, xi). Nevertheless, if such a form of government is particularly suitable with Western countries, it has to be stressed that other countries reject this model: for instance, the attempts by the West to promote democracy to the Middle East has been considered as an attack against Islamic values (Burchill 2005, 62).

As mentioned above, commerce is an effective means of encouraging peace among states: liberals point out that, firstly, national economies benefit from free trade and the removal of tariffs as the exchange of goods is higher than in a self-sufficient regime. Secondly, the increase in contacts favours better agreements and understanding among different peoples (Burchill 2005, 64). Throughout the decades, Canada has always believed that the promotion of trade with Cuba is the best way to establish a common peaceful existence within the region in order to face the massive differences between their systems. Cuba is actually benefiting from Canadian investments especially in the tourist sector as Canadians represent 40 per cent of all foreign tourists visiting the island (Nolen 2015).

On the contrary, for Realist scholars the function of trade is basically another means to
achieve the national interest. Carr argued that power can be obtained through economic instruments by exporting the capital, typical of powerful actors, and fighting to take control of foreign markets; power is the only objective of political action and can be achieved through both economic and political means (2001, 121). In other words, it is not absolutely true that the “economic weapon is less moral than the use of the military weapon” (Carr 2001, 119). In fact, as will be seen below, an embargo like that the US on Cuba can cause much suffering in the civil population.

Another liberal foundation is the respect for human rights. The idea of human rights mostly emerged during the eighteenth century due to the Enlightenment, the American Declaration of Independence in 1776 and France’s Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizens in 1789. These rights represent the basis of emancipation, freedom and equality among people. Liberals affirm that states that acknowledge fundamental rights as well as actively include their citizens in the political life are less likely to act offensively in the international arena (Burchill 2005, 67). It has to be underlined that liberals have a very Western-centric concept of human rights and democracy; this makes it clear that this kind of model cannot be applied successfully to societies that have values (extremely) different from those of the West. As far as it concerns the protection of human rights internationally, liberals address this issue in two different ways: on the one hand, interventionists claim that intervention in the questions of sovereign states is justifiable when it comes to protecting these rights; on the other hand, non-interventionists believe that sovereignty should not be put in jeopardy (Burchill 2005, 70). It should be noted that the attempts by Canada and the Vatican to talk about the human rights condition in Cuba with the local government were considered by the latter a means to destabilise the regime by adding extraneous elements in the Cuban system. This is why Havana has always been sceptical about introducing human rights.
3. THE HISTORIC BACKGROUND OF THE US-CUBA RELATIONS FROM 1895 TO 1959

3.1 Cuban Independence

In 1895 when the War of Independence began, discontent among the Cuban people was rising, due to poor living conditions and lack of agricultural reforms from Spain, which caused suffering for planters. In the Eastern part of the island, uprisings in the name of Cuba Libre (Free Cuba) were led by Cuban Autonomist movements to protest against the Spanish misgovernment. However, their attempts were unsuccessful. Furthermore, Spain was unwilling to support political and agricultural reforms which led the Cubans to violently oppose the colonial authorities. The idea of Cuba Libre was very vague: the movements supporting independence just listed all the problems of Cuba caused by the Spanish occupation, but the resolution to these problems, they suggested, was the duty of the future independent Cuba (Pérez 2006, 102). Even if the concept and the separatist programme were unclear, they facilitated the spread of discontent across the island, especially in the West, and as a consequence many peasants, civilians and soldiers joined the separatist cause.

Given the worsening situation and the unexpected speed of the rebellion, the Spanish authorities faced serious problems in maintaining control over the Caribbean island. Hence, General Valeriano Weyler was sent to Cuba to firstly stop, the conflict militarily and, secondly, re-establish the political consensus for colonialism: his policies aimed at exiling and incarcerating both autonomists and independentists as well as forbidding the export of tobacco to the US since many separatists were in Florida (Pérez 2006, 108).

For Spain, the military situation worsened, while the economy was near to collapse: for example, commerce between cities and the periphery no longer functioned. It was clear that Weyler was unable to put an end to war in Cuba and this dramatically diminished the possibility for Spain to restore political and economic order in Cuba. Its domination was in peril. As a matter of fact, conservatives, elites and local (Cuban) planters were perfectly conscious that the victory of Cuban rebels could threaten their interests on the island; thus, they believed that only the US intervention (and eventually the annexation) could re-establish the old socioeconomic order. They officially asked President McKinley to intervene. Moreover, it is necessary to emphasise that such groups had been interested in a union with the US due to their economy and, in these circumstances for political reasons.

However, the imminent victory of Cuban arms in 1898 was a threat to the US foreign policy
in Latin America. In fact, during the nineteenth century, the US claimed the “right” to be the next imperial successor in the Caribbean region and wanted Cuba to join the North American union, but this attempt was unsuccessful (Pérez 2006, 120). Given the situation in favour of Cuban arms, the US needed to act before the Cuban people declared Cuba's independence. In 1898, the US President requested Congress to intervene militarily as a “neutral party” in Cuba to stop the war between the Cubans and Spain: if, officially, the intervention was against Spain, in practice, it was against the eventual sovereignty of Cuba (Pérez 2006, 126). Congress authorised the intervention, but the Teller Amendment established that the US denies “… any…. Intention to exercise sovereignty, jurisdiction, or control over said island except for pacification thereof, and asserts its determination, when that is accomplished, to leave the government and control of the island to its people” (Pérez 2006, 137).

One year later, the US started the intervention, but the municipal Cuban elections in 1900 complicated the US hegemonic plans since the candidates supported directly by the Americans did not win. The demand for independence was increasing in Cuba. If, one the one hand, the Teller Amendment could not be violated, on the other hand, the US could not leave the island without having reached its hegemonic interests. In 1901, the US administration was able to find a loophole to pursue its interests and took advantage of the weak government that took office in Cuba. The Secretary of War, Elihu Root, proposed the Platt Amendment to the Administration. It established some measures such as US supervision on the new Cuban government and the possibility for the Americans to intervene in case of threats to political stability, individual freedom and property (U.S Department of State 2015). Due to this amendment, the discontent among civilians rose notably and some anti-US protests were held in Cuba. The US reaction was determined: Washington affirmed that the acceptance and ratification of the Platt Amendment by Cuba was the only means for terminating the US military occupation. Because of this pressure, it was included into the Permanent Treaty in 1903 (Pérez 2006, 141).

3.2 The beginning of the twentieth century
Cuba obtained its independence, but paid an extremely high cost: the war brought a huge level of destruction to the whole country and it was mainly dependent on US interests. The Platt Amendment was also an instrument to protect the colonial stakes as well as the properties of the local elites. Hence, it is clear that the Caribbean island reached self-government, but not the real and full sovereignty that the independentist movements had aimed for. As concerns the
national economy, it has to be stressed that it was firmly under the control of US and foreign companies. Between the period of the intervention and the very first years of the Twentieth Century, the US enhanced its power over several different sectors of the Cuban economy such as tobacco and sugar production, mining, estate market, railways etc. (Pérez 2006, 144). For instance, Spain, England, France and partially the US dominated banking, while Canada and Germany had investments in the estate companies and factories respectively.

1903 was a crucial year because Cuba signed two other deals with the White House in addition to the above-mentioned Permanent Treaty: the Reciprocity Treaty and an agreement to lease naval stations and lands for coaling. The Reciprocity Treaty established a 20 per cent concession to Cuban agricultural goods entering the US market in return for reductions of 20 and 40 per cent on US imports. In the third treaty, Havana leased the areas of Bahía Honda and Guantánamo Bay to the US and such provisions were included into the Platt Amendment (Yale Law School 2008). Later, a naval military base was built in Guantánamo.

The following years were characterised once again by the US presence on the island. In 1906, it occupied Cuba to stop an insurrection and successively, a provisional executive led by the US governed the country. Six years later, the US stifled an armed rebellion organised by the Afro-Cuban population in order to safeguard its properties. In 1912, Washington decided to quit Bahía Honda in exchange for more facilities at Guantánamo Bay. In 1930, Cuba was led by Gerardo Machado, and its economic situation worsened considerably because the US Hawley-Smoot Act diminished the Cuban share of the U.S. sugar market (Pérez 2006, 149). In the meantime, the political crisis was exacerbated due to the tensions between the Machado government and the opposition. Machado was overthrown by a military coup in August 1933 that installed Carlos Manuel de Céspedes. His government and that following were both overthrown in September 1933 and January 1934, by coups promoted by Fulgencio Batista. In the same year, the US abrogated the Platt Amendment.

3.3 Batista, Fidel Castro and the Revolution

In 1940, the new constitution was promulgated and Batista became president after winning the elections. During his presidency in 1940-44, Cuba went to war in December 1941 to support the US. Because of that, the Caribbean island benefited from more advantageous trade agreements as well as loan/credit programmes with the US (Pérez 2006, 215). In spite of this economic benefit, affluence was not equally distributed within the population; thus, discontent
rose. Consequently, Batista lost the election in 1944 and Ramón Grau San Martin became the new president.

After the Second World War, the export of sugar was among the main sources of income for the Cuban economy as the global demand went up considerably. Moreover, industrial activity spread on the island (Pérez 2006, 217). However, Cuba did not take advantage of the favourable economic situation. On the contrary, it wasted all these opportunities. In fact, Cuba was unable to generate reforms to tackle structural problems such as a high unemployment rate and a weak agrarian system; in addition, corruption was very common. It is clear that all these negative issues enlarged protests and discontent within the country, and in 1952, Batista took power through a military coup d'état. Just after his assignment, he promised the national business community to bring more stability, and the US to protect foreign investments.

However, the socio-economic situation worsened seriously under the Batista administration in the fifties. First of all, there were inequalities within the population: indeed, most peasants lived without having access to accommodation, education and healthcare, while the middle-class was in decline despite appearing to prosper. The cost of living was much more expensive in Havana than in any other North-American city, but the per capita income and wage levels were much lower than in North America (Pérez 2006, 225). Furthermore, the chronic problems of unemployment and underemployment affected further the economy: indeed, productivity in the most important sectors of the national economy (e.g. sugar and tobacco) dropped dramatically. At that time, it was clear that the economy was near total collapse.

Uprisings and protests against Batista began already in 1953. Fidel Castro, a member of the opposition faction, the Party of the Cuban People – Orthodox, failed in the attack against the military base in Santiago de Cuba, but despite such a failure, he gained more popularity among the anti-Batista forces (Pérez 2006, 229). In the following years, peaceful demonstrations rose, while guerrilla operations continued, and in 1957 a rebel attack organised, by Castro won for the first time against Batista’s troops. As the rebels led by Fidel Castro, his brother Raúl and Ernesto Che Guevara increased their successful operations and consensus among the people, the Batista regime was considered as the main obstacle to reforms and socio economic stability. For his government, the situation went from bad to worse since it acquired a very powerful enemy: the US.

Even though the US supported Batista’s administration, upon realising that his regime was near collapse and thus incapable of protecting the US interests in Cuba, Washington decided that Batista had to be replaced. In March 1958, the US applied an arms embargo on Cuba which weakened the actions of the regime. As predicted, the government candidate, Andrés Rivero
Agüero, won the fraudulent elections in 1958. This outcome dissatisfied the armed and civilian oppositions as well as the US government that also opposed the future leadership of the revolutionary Fidel Castro on the island (Martínez-Fernández 2014, 36). In December, the US, through the ambassador William D. Pawley, tried to convince Batista to resign and accept its military-civilian government in exchange for political asylum. Since he nevertheless refused this proposal, the US decided to deprive him of its support (Martínez-Fernández 2014, 41).

On January 1, 1959, Fidel Castro called for a general strike and Batista was forced to flee. The regular armed forces capitulated due to lack of leadership and instructions. The revolutionaries won and Fidel Castro became Prime Minister in February. The new government started an important process of reforms to provide better living conditions to its people. The creation of the National Savings and Housing Institute (INAV) provided cheap accommodation, while the role of the Agrarian Reform Institute (INRA) was to, firstly, establish a new method to distribute lands and, secondly, build roads and improve both the education and healthcare systems (Schoultz 2012, 21).
4. THE EARLY SIXTIES: THE CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS

4.1 Toward the diplomatic breach between the US and Cuba

The revolution led by Castro and the unexpected agrarian reform were causes for concern for the US since it saw its hegemony and interests in peril. The concern further augmented when in 1959 the participation of the Cuban communist party’ members, the Partido Socialista Popular (PSP), spread to the key positions of the executive as well as the armed forces. Moreover, in 1960, Cuba and the USSR re-established their diplomatic relations after the interruption in 1952. The Soviets immediately took advantage of the presence of an American unfriendly country in the US “backyard” since it was a unique occasion to undermine the Washington’s global and regional spheres of influence (Bain 2015, 160). The USSR and Cuba also signed an oil agreement that permitted Cuba to buy cheaper oil from the Soviets.

Such a deal immediately had serious repercussions on the relations between the island and the US. Havana required the foreign oil companies to refine the Soviet crude petroleum, but they rejected the order: as retaliation, Cuba decided to nationalise all the foreign oil refinery companies on its territory (Pérez 2006, 245). President Eisenhower announced a cut of the Cuban sugar quota by 700,000 tons and no loans for Cuba, while $500 million in form of loans and funds were distributed to all the other Latin American countries (López Civeira 2012, 180). Nevertheless, the Cuban authorities continued to expropriate and nationalise the US enterprises and properties such as banks, hotels, lands, tobacco export firms, chemical industries etc. Moreover, Castro proclaimed officially Cuba a socialist country on May 1, 1961 (Diaz-Verson 1997). This made Cuba the only communist state in the Western hemisphere besides being a US neighbour.

Washington was furious because its multi-decennial hegemony on the island was suddenly stopped by a young revolutionary and communism. According to the US, Cuba represented a threat to its interests and this was unacceptable. Realism became predominant in this period since the US tried to impose its will on Cuba in different ways. The first US countermeasure was economic: in 1960, the Eisenhower Administration decided to put an embargo on exports to Cuba, while in 1961 it stopped the diplomatic relations with Havana. According to the White House, the embargo was a means to destabilise the new government as Cuba was still highly dependent on trade with the US. The statement on economic sanctions by the realist scholar Carr, seen in the theoretical chapter, is pertinent to this case because a powerful country, the US, implemented an economic weapon to pursue its national interest: the overthrow of the
Castro regime. Cuba was able to face the embargo thanks to the strong economic partnership with the USSR.

The second realist US countermeasure was based on the use of force. The Bay of Pigs Invasion was planned under the Eisenhower Administration, but it took place in April 1962. The goal of this operation was to oust Castro to then establish a US-friendly government. The plan was supported by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) that trained, in Guatemala, a small army of 1500 Cuban exiles who opposed Castro (Voss 2011). Just after he took office in January 1962, Kennedy had the opportunity to reinforce the American interests in the hemisphere by defeating the communist Cuba as well as giving a strong signal to the USSR to demonstrate that he was a capable and resolute leader.

However, the assault was “[p]oorly planned and executed, driven by self-deception and political spin” (Jones 2008, 3). Indeed, the US predicted that it would conquer the bay easily and counted on subsequent revolts against the local government. On the contrary, the Cuban militia was ready to launch an immediate counterattack against the invaders because it by far outnumbered and outgunned the exiles. Furthermore, the US President John Kennedy denied the American air support to the exiles because he did not want proofs of an explicit American involvement in the operation (Welch 2012, 187). Although these two plans were underpinned by realism, the US neither eliminated the communist threat on its doorstep nor re-established its interests in Cuba.

Indeed, the plans had a boomerang effect because Washington did not maximise its power in the region, but on the contrary, Castro strengthened his authority within the country and the relations with the USSR. The US officials erroneously underestimated the huge prestige and consensus regarding Castro on the part of the Cuban people, so it was impossible to rely on the establishment of an alternative government (Voss 2011). For the Americans, Cuba became even more perilous for their national and global interests. During an Organization of American States (OAS) meeting in early 1962, the US tried to persuade all the member countries to break their economic and political relations with Cuba. Despite the aversion of some countries to this hard line, in August the majority of the members voted for the suspension of Cuba from the organisation. The Cuban threat peaked in October 1962 when the US discovered the deployment of Soviet Medium-Range Ballistic Missiles (MRBMs) on the island.
4.2 Cuba’s view on the installation of the Soviet missiles

The 1959 revolution rested on a firm anti-American sentiment that allowed Cuba to free itself from the US domination. Like the Melians, Cuba has always refused the realist assumption according to which the strongest Athens, in this case the US, can impose its decisions on the weak as well as act in the international system by different tools than all the other states (LeoGrande and Kornbluh 2015, 415). In 1978, Fidel affirmed: “I never accepted the universal prerogatives of the United States. I never accepted and will never accept the existence of a different law and different laws” (Gleijeses 2013, 125). In general, for the Cuban policymakers, the safeguard of the revolution has been the most important goal and this has been displayed in the island’s foreign policy. Such an aspect highlights the importance of defensive realism in the Cuban political strategy.

As stressed by defensive realism, geographic proximity is likely to exacerbate the security dilemma and Castro had concrete reasons to fear American actions against his country. Indeed, after the fiasco of the Bay of Pigs Invasions, the US armed forces simulated an attack against the fake Republic of Vieques in the Caribbean Sea to overthrow its fictitious dictator Ortsac;
in other words, the backward spelling of Castro (Welch 2012, 191). Furthermore, in 1961-62, CIA initiated a secret plan called “Operation Mongoose” to assassinate Castro and destabilise the communist regime; but, it was unsuccessful. Nevertheless, such operations did not prevent Castro from cooperating with Moscow and they further increased the Cuban fears.

The security of the Cuban revolution was clearly in jeopardy: hence, Cuban officials feared an imminent American invasion. Given the overwhelming superiority of the US, Cuba could not obviously rely on its own strength to protect itself, but it needed the help of the Soviet superpower because it was able to provide a huge military capability to Cuba. In the summer of 1962, Castro allowed the USSR to deploy MRBMs on the island to deter the US by nuclear means. The importance of defensive realism is noticeable in Castro’s words: “Cuba saw a danger to its security, and with an absolute right…. adopted the measures that would fortify its defence” (Brenner 1990, 124).

It has to be underlined that both Cuban revolution and the presence of the USSR in Cuba challenged the Monroe Doctrine which considers the US the only supreme power in the Americas (Pérez 2012, 143). The installation of the nuclear weapons showed how Castro took advantage of geographic vicinity to make the US a vulnerable target by aggravating the security dilemma of the Americans. The situation was reversed because Cuba’s status shifted from “threatened” to “threatening”.

Nevertheless, the two communist allies miscalculated the reactions of the US to the exacerbation of the security dilemma. The Cuban officials supposed that the public announcement of a defence agreement with the USSR, prior the deployment of the MRBMs, would have deterred the US. They also assumed that the Americans would have accepted the presence of MRBMs like the USSR did in 1961: indeed, the Soviets accepted, although reluctantly, the construction of the Jupiter nuclear missiles in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) bases in Turkey and Italy (Brenner 1990, 123). Furthermore, both Havana and Moscow underestimated the public reaction to Kennedy’s admonishment in September 1962 against eventual Cuban threats to the security of the Latin American region and the creation of an offensive Soviet military base on the island (Kennedy 1962). The presence of the MRBMs convinced Washington that it was necessary more than ever to overthrow the Castro regime in order to safeguard its national security.

On the dramatic days of the October crisis, Cuba was overshadowed by the struggle for survival between Washington and Moscow even though its national security was at stake. As will be seen in this chapter, the Soviets preferred to safeguard their own security interests rather than those of Cuba. The USSR decided unilaterally to withdraw the missiles from the island
without informing Castro (Allison and Zelikow 1999, 136). In exchange, the US promised the USSR not to invade Cuba. Castro was furious with Khrushchev because this pledge seemed to him totally insufficient to ensure the survival of the revolution. In fact, due to the security dilemma, he could not be sure of the real US intentions. The Soviet decision shows the aspect of the realist theory according to which states’ actions are driven by egoism to pursue their national interests without paying attention to others’ condition.

It has to be stressed that Cuba was willing to do whatever it took to defend its security: even starting a nuclear war. In a letter, Castro exhorted Khrushchev to launch the MRBMs in case of an American invasion to ensure the definitive elimination of any threats coming from the US (Castro 1962). According to the Cuban viewpoint, this request was not inconsiderate because the developments of the crisis seemed to lead to an inevitable catastrophe (Belkin and Blight 1991, 737). However, one might also claim that the Castro’s request was in contrast with the Cuban defensive realist strategy because if the Soviets had launched the MRBMs, the US would have responded in the same way against Cuba. If so, the island would have then been disappeared off the face of the Earth and the survival of the revolution would have been clearly nullified.

4.3 What brought the USSR to deploy the missiles in Cuba?

For Khrushchev, defending the Cuban ally was significant for the global status of communism, but especially to keep and maximise the Soviet sphere of influence near the American doorstep. Referring to the Bay of Pigs Invasion, he claimed that the potential loss of Cuba for the Soviets “would gravely diminish our stature throughout the world, but especially in Latin America” (Allison and Zelikow 1999, 84). Furthermore, the USSR decided to counter the deployment of the Jupiter missiles in the NATO bases near its borders by using nuclear deterrence. Concerning this point, Khrushchev stated in his memoir that: “it was…. Time [that] America learned what it feels like to have her own land and people threatened” (Allison and Zelikow 1999, 98). Defensive realism is relevant in the Kremlin’s choice to install the MRBMs to assure its security and that of the Cuban ally. Khrushchev, like Castro, realised how geography was strategically important for the deployment of weapons. Thus, following defensive realism, it was necessary to take advantage of the geographic location of Cuba to exacerbate the security dilemma of the US, that it would make the latter less secure in the region, and balance the overwhelming nuclear superiority of the Americans.

In those years, both the US and the USSR competed with each other for the world leadership.
One way to reach it was owning a more efficient nuclear arsenal than the adversary. Hence, a significant nuclear progress of one side represented a weakness for the other side. The US could rely on a great nuclear capability as it had 180 InterContinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBMs) (Udall 1998, 144). As already seen, before 1961, Washington had installed the Jupiter ballistic missiles in Italy and Turkey. Such weapons were evidently a huge threat to the USSR security. As regards the Soviet nuclear arsenal, Moscow owned ICBMs which could be directly launched from the Soviet territory; but, their accuracy was scarce. Thus, it was unlikely that they could hit successfully the US (Allison and Zelikow 1999). However, the Kremlin had hundreds of MRBMs that were not a serious threat to the US unless they were placed near its territory.

The deployment of the nuclear weapons on the Caribbean island was also driven by the wish of Moscow for increasing its power in Europe. Indeed, the USSR and the US were competing for the control of Berlin which also represented the real scenario of the Cold War. The city was split into two main parts: one controlled by the Western allies and the other by the Soviets. The location of West Berlin in East Germany (a Soviet satellite state) was a clear advantage for the Kremlin since it could use it to pressure NATO, as shown by the blockade on Berlin in 1948-49. Later, the struggle between the two superpowers for the dominion of the city culminated in the Berlin Crisis in 1961 and the unforeseen construction of the Berlin Wall. West Berlin and its capitalist model were extraneous elements to the communist world. In Khrushchev’s words “the NATO military base and the occupation regime in West Berlin represented a rotten tooth which must be pulled out, and no one would be harmed by that” (Allison and Zelikow 1999, 103). For the USSR, the Berlin issue was a real obsession, as demonstrated by the confidential Khrushchev-Kennedy correspondence between September 1961 and October 1962: in fact, 12 letters of 16 were about Berlin (Allison and Zelikow 1999, 109). The Soviet leader expected that the imminent nuclear threat in Cuba would have induced the US to leave Berlin. He also thought that if the Americans had tried to use any countermeasures on Berlin to counter the Soviet missiles’ presence, he could have done the same things in Cuba. The eventual loss of this city would have been unacceptable for the NATO members and it would have had devastating repercussions on the alliance. In other words, the installation of the MRBMs was also an attempt to cause the definitive collapse of NATO (Cyr 2013, 15).

The wish to win Berlin and the dissolution of NATO are attributable to realist tenets because the USSR wanted to maximise its power in Europe by eroding the influence of its enemy in this key-region. For Moscow, the geopolitical value of Berlin was much more important than Cuba because it would have permitted the Soviets to control the core of Europe (Allison and
Zelikow 1999, 106). This objective was also confirmed by the Director of the CIA, John McCone, in 1962, according to whom the missiles were placed in Cuba because Khrushchev aimed at obtaining a primary role in another part of the globe which was at stake for the USSR (McAuliffe 1992, 116). To sum up, the deployment of the MRBMs was part of the Soviet strategy to dominate over the US in the world; nevertheless, it should be stressed that in his memoir, Khrushchev affirmed that Castro misunderstood the ultimate aim of the MRBMs since they were installed to prevent the US from invading Cuba and not to launch a nuclear attack against the Americans (Khrushchev 1990, 4).

4.4 The countermeasures debated by the US after the discovery of the missiles

4.4.1 Doing nothing, invading or bombing Cuba?
In October 1962, Kennedy was shocked when he was informed about the construction of nuclear weapons in Cuba. As mentioned above, before the crisis, he had explicitly admonished both Cuba and the USSR against taking offensive actions. He stressed that in case of lack of respect for this warning, “this country [the US] will do whatever must be done to protect its own security and that of its allies” (Kennedy 1963, 674). The presence of the MRBMs in Cuba was a hard test for the US because a wrong move would have affected negatively its national security as well as the stability of NATO. Given the presence of the Soviet missiles, the main US aim was ensuring its national security and keeping its global power rather than maximising it. It is clear that defensive realism was the pillar of the US decision-making process in this phase.

If the White House did not do anything, NATO and Moscow would have seen it as a signal of total inability and the Soviets could have taken advantage of that to erode the US influence in Europe. Other alternatives were considered. The military officers proposed a plan to destroy the weapons and overthrow the Castro regime. Kennedy initially supported it, but then he believed that it was better to search for less risky alternatives to avoid harsh Soviet countermeasures (Freedman 2001, 175). If the US had invaded Cuba, the USSR could have done the same in Berlin. The invasion of Berlin implied a NATO-Warsaw Pact war and the endurance of the Alliance would have been seriously compromised.

The Executive Committee of the National Security Council (EXCOMM) members suggested to launch air strikes to eliminate the missiles before they became operational. According to the EXCOMM, the bombings were supposed to be large and sudden to hit some
strategic targets such as the Cuban air force bases and the MRBMs (Allison and Zelikow 1999, 117; Freedman 2001, 179). Nevertheless, as noticed by some officials, the eventual Soviet countermeasures could have been drastic. They pointed out that the USSR could have bombed the major US cities located in the Southeast or the naval base in Guantánamo and probably Berlin (Allison and Zelikow 1999, 118). This option was also in contrast with the US defensive realist purpose because it would have jeopardised the security of the country and NATO.

4.4.2 The Diplomatic Channel
During the EXCOMM meetings, the diplomatic way emerged as an option to prevent war and facilitate the US-USSR dialogue. The EXCOMM suggested giving Khrushchev a secret ultimatum to withdraw the nuclear weapons in exchange for neither US intervention in Cuba nor public confrontation (Allison and Zelikow 1999, 115). The US ambassador to the United Nations (UN) Stevenson proposed to urge either the UN or the OAS to call for inspections in Cuba to remove the offensive weapons. Nevertheless, some argued that diplomatic bargaining could have implied the American withdrawal from Guantánamo Bay and of the Jupiter missiles. Others also added that the USSR, as a United Nations Security Council (UNSC) permanent member, had the right to veto any UNSC resolutions related to the issue; in this way, the Soviets could buy time to complete the MRBMs installation (Allison and Zelikow 1999, 114). Kennedy rejected the diplomatic channel because, for the aforementioned reasons, the US would have diminished its influence in strategic areas such as the Caribbean and the Mediterranean and this was against the conservation of the US world power.

4.4.3 The Quarantine
The quarantine was established, positioning US Navy ships around Cuba to impede Soviet ships from providing further military equipment. However, in its first stages, serious doubts about its legality were implied. Firstly, a blockade was hostile and could be considered by Cuba as an act of war. To overcome this issue, the State and Justice Department suggested the President that, according to the Rio Treaty for the defence of the Western Hemisphere, it was necessary a resolution approved by, at least, two-thirds of the OAS members (Freedman 2001, 183). On October 23, the OAS approved unanimously the quarantine.

Some supporters of the quarantine such as McNamara, Sorensen and Stevenson pointed out

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2 They were the Secretary of Defence and the Special Counsel to the President, respectively.
that the quarantine was an efficacious means to “freeze the status quo” without requiring the dismantlement of the missiles, while others suggested to initiate negotiations with the USSR during the quarantine period to find a shared agreement (Allison and Zelikow 1999, 119). This proposal was accepted by the EXCOMM for the following reasons: firstly, it was a firm decision to demonstrate the US intentions as well as a good compromise between aggressive and “soft” actions; secondly, the pressure shifted from the US to the USSR as the Kremlin had to make the next move; thirdly, in the Caribbean, the US could rely on an overwhelming military capability and tactical superiority (e.g. air support and naval bases) over the Soviets. Moreover, the quarantine shifted the tension to a nonnuclear step (Allison and Zelikow 1999, 120). As shown by the above-mentioned motivations, the quarantine was underpinned by defensive realism as the US could maintain its sphere of influence in the American region; however, its internal security was still at stake even though a nuclear overkill seemed less likely.

Image 2: One of the Soviet missile sites under construction in Cuba. Source: John Fitzgerald Kennedy Library

4.5 Canada’s view on the crisis

Canada was and still is one of the most significant economic and military partners of the US and like the latter, it agrees on the importance of liberal democratic principles. After 1959, Canada did not cut its commercial and diplomatic relations with the revolutionary Cuba. Ottawa believed that it was more fruitful to maintain the bilateral relationship regardless the
deep economic and political differences between their governments. The choice of a new governmental system was an internal Cuban affair: thus, according to the Canadian viewpoint, the revolution led by Castro was totally legitimate (McKercher 2014, 110). Unlike the US, Ottawa had a different perception of Cuba: it was just a small country (even if communist) with a negligible economic relevance and as such, it did not represent a serious threat to the geopolitical interests of the hemisphere (McKercher 2011, 337). For the same reason, Canada opposed the US pressures to internationalise the embargo on Cuba.

During the Missile Crisis, the US tried to change the Canadian approach toward Cuba to gain the support of the North-American ally. Kennedy had decided to inform, without prior consultation, the Canadian Prime Minister John Diefenbaker about the quarantine just a few hours before its implementation (McKercher 2012, 71). Diefenbaker was disappointed with this late notification because it was against the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) regulations which established a prior consultation in case of a crisis. The White House did not consult Canada because it took for granted that Canada, as a member of NORAD and NATO, would have also seen its national security in jeopardy like the US and thus, it would have consequently endorsed the American countermeasures (Ghent 1979, 182). In line with defensive realism, Ottawa was interested in ensuring its survival because the MRBMs could reach its territory3, but Canada believed that the enforcement of its state of alert, as Washington required, would have caused a Soviet resolute response and then it would have further endangered its national security.

The Canadian reaction was hesitant for some reasons. Firstly, unlike the White House, Ottawa had a different perception of the crisis: for Kennedy, it was a threat to the US and the entire Western bloc, while for Diefenbaker, just a political intimidation to the US (Urban 2015, 267). It has to be emphasised that the Kennedy-Diefenbaker relationship was never idyllic and during the Missile Crisis, it was deeply affected by mistrust. According to the Prime Minister, after the Bay of Pigs failure, Kennedy “had something to prove in his personal dealings with Khrushchev” and that he “was perfectly capable of taking the world to the brink of thermonuclear destruction to prove himself the man for our times, a courageous champion of Western democracy” (Ghent 1979, 173). Diefenbaker believed that Washington was incapable to ensure the security and interests of Canada since its Cuban policy was highly affected by the aversion against socialist countries. He realised that demanding for a UN inspection in Cuba represented a better way to defend Canada’s survival in the region in addition to verify the

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3 See image 1, p. 27.
Kennedy’s claims over the Soviet weapons. Even if Ottawa and Washington founded NORAD, a common liberal defensive cooperation, Urban points out that the countries adhering to liberalism and institutions are supposed to work together by using non-violent means to overcome issues (like Canada tried to do); but, such countries may not pay attention to the others’ interests (2015, 264). For the latter reason Canada was reluctant to follow the US strategy to face the crisis.

Secondly, Canada did not want to change its approach toward Cuba for foreign policy reasons. Canada was willing to keep its prestige in Latin America (McKercher 2012, 83). If Ottawa had used harsh measures against Havana, the other Latin American countries would have seen Canada as a hostile player highly dependent on the US stances. In those years, the Canadian government aimed at establishing an independent foreign policy from that of the Americans. In this sense, the missed prior consultation and the request to rise the alert were considered by Ottawa as an outrage to its sovereignty since Washington assumed to obtain an unconditional support from Canada (Ghent 1979, 175). Diefenbaker initially refused to rise the alert status because he was unwilling to show the Canadian vulnerability to the US, but the Canadian armed forces believed that this issue was unimportant since the US was the only actor able to ensure the Canadian security (Urban 2015, 268). In other words, Diefenbaker was trying to make Canada a country “that would become powerful enough to withstand the absorption attempts by the United States” (Newman 1973, 184). Nevertheless, due to the worsening of the crisis, the Prime Minister realised that the nuclear conflict was probable and that the US interests were closer to those of Canada and therefore, he decided to accept the US requests and provide intelligence and military support to the American ally.

4.6 Why did the world avoid the nuclear catastrophe?

4.6.1 The letters between Kennedy and Khrushchev

The Soviet ambassador to the US Anatoly Dobrynin informed Moscow that the Americans wanted to demonstrate all their determination through the quarantine. Hence, Khrushchev thought that the US could suddenly invade Cuba. The imposition of a blockade made the Soviet leader realise that his next move was crucial for the destiny of the crisis. On October 25, in the letter to the Soviet Premier, Kennedy urged him to change the situation. On October 26, in his reply to Kennedy, Khrushchev showed peaceful intentions by appealing to reason to avoid the mutual nuclear destruction because he was horrified by this scenario and he also added that the
USSR was willing to dismantle the missiles in return for the US pledge to not attack Cuba (Freedman 2001, 220). Khrushchev felt more reassured because during the quarantine, there were no accidents between the US Navy and Soviet ships. Therefore, he believed that he could aim for something more in exchange for the withdrawal of the MRBMs in Cuba: on October 27, in his second letter to the White House, he asked the US to dismantle the Jupiter missiles in Turkey⁴.

Despite the opposition of some US officers, the second Khrushchev’s proposal seemed reasonable to Kennedy since the dismantlement of those obsolete weapons was already scheduled. Initially, the EXCOMM decided to accept officially and publically only the first message and ignore the second letter for some main reasons: first, the content of the second message was broadcast by Radio Moscow and thus made it public; second, it undermined NATO authority; third, Turkey had previously refused to agree on the dismantlement of the Jupiter missiles (Freedman 2001, 222).

Nevertheless, the EXCOMM assumed that it was too dangerous to disregard completely the second message. Attorney General Robert Kennedy delivered privately the US secret response to Dobrynin, affirming that the US planned to dismantle the Jupiter missiles in Turkey several months after the withdrawal of the MRBMs in Cuba so that it did not seem connected to the missiles crisis (Cyr 2013, 15). Even if there are still some doubts about whether the dismantlement of the Jupiter missiles in Italy was part of the secret deal, in his memoirs, Khrushchev claimed that after the end of the crisis, McNamara gave orders to withdraw the missiles in both Turkey and Italy (Johnson and Tierney 2006, 105). On October 28, the USSR publicly accepted the American promise not to invade Cuba in return for the dismantlement of the missiles.

As mentioned above, defensive realism was significant for both superpowers since they aimed firstly at their own survival. The shared defensive realist purpose as well as the prospect of a nuclear war made them realise that it was better to pursue common gains instead of individual gains to ensure their own survival. The latter was reached to the detriment of Cuba’s security since the Missile Crisis represented a struggle between the US and USSR. The role of Castro was irrelevant during the solution of the crisis because, as seen above, he was not consulted by Moscow in the most crucial moment. In addition, morality played an important

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⁴ On October 25, the influential journalist Walter Lippmann suggested the same exchange to overcome the crisis, however, it was seen suspiciously by the Soviets because they supposed that he proposed publicly on behalf on the White House (Cyr 2013). In other words, the USSR thought that Lippmann was working for the Kennedy Administration.
role in preventing the nuclear catastrophe. Using nuclear weapons becomes a moral hazard because there is an enormous disproportion between the eventual political achievements and the devastation caused by these weapons (Nye 2011, 29). Morality is confirmed by the aforementioned Khrushchev’s appeal to reason and by the Kennedy’s speech to the nation on October 22 when he claimed that: “We will not prematurely or unnecessarily risk the costs of worldwide nuclear war in which even the fruits of victory would be ashes in our mouth” (Kennedy 1962).

4.6.2 The role of the Vatican
During his pontificate in 1958-1963, John XXIII emphasised the need for a new approach toward the countries under the Soviet sphere of influence. He also constantly searched for the dialogue with those states. The Second Vatican Council started in October, 1962 (which seen the participation of members of the Russian Orthodox Church authorised by Khrushchev) was characterised by the Cuban Missile Crisis. On the days of the Crisis, the Dartmouth Conference⁵ was held and its participants felt the need to do something for their countries. One of the members was a visiting priest Felix Morlion, from the Vatican asked both Americans and Soviets if a message of the Pope could be useful to prevent the catastrophe (Widmer 2015). An American member, Norman Cousins, called Sorensen who affirmed that the President was very likely to appreciate the papal role⁶.

Given the possibility of a nuclear war, on October 25, the Pontiff launched a message in favour of world peace. It was delivered to the American and Soviet embassies in Rome and it was then broadcast by the Vatican Radio. He urged both leaders “to do all in their power to save the peace, saving the world from the horrors of a war” (The Telegraph 1971, 10). Furthermore, between October 23-24, the Holy See, the Kremlin and the White House were constantly in contact to solve the crisis. Despite Khrushchev being highly sceptical of the role of religions, he claimed that the Pontiff’s words were “the only gleam of hope” in that dramatic period (Widmer 2015). On October 28, the US and the USSR announced the end of the crisis.

The intervention from John XXIII was very important because it contributed to avoid a nuclear catastrophe. The Vatican used its power “to influence the behavior of others to get the outcomes one wants” (Nye 2004, 2). Papal diplomacy succeeded thanks to the Vatican soft power. According to Nye, the soft power of a state is a means to attract other and it is based on

⁵ It is a bilateral dialogue between American and Soviet (now Russian) representatives. Its purpose is the improvement of the relations between the US and Russia. The Conference was held in 1961 for the first time.
⁶ Kennedy was the first and only Catholic President in the US history.
three main elements: its culture, its political values and its foreign policy (2011, 84). The resonation of the pope’s message and provision of much-needed diplomatic support (elements two and three) made the Vatican an appealing and credible mediator to both Kennedy and especially Khrushchev. To sum up, Pope John XXIII played a relevant role by acting publicly and behind the scenes to prevent the nuclear holocaust in the world.

4.7 Conclusion

After Castro took power in 1959, the US-Cuba relations worsened rapidly and this caught the attention of the USSR. Thus, the latter established a close cooperation with Cuba which peaked with the construction of the MRBM on the island. This decision was moved by two main reasons: first, in line with defensive realism, the USSR felt the need to protect itself and counter the deployment of the Jupiter missiles in the NATO bases; second, by following realism, it tried to enlarge its global power by pressuring the US and cause the American withdrawal from Berlin. Even if Khrushchev obtained the dismantlement of the Jupiter missiles, he was unable to maximise the Soviet power in Europe as the eventuality of a nuclear conflict prevented him and Kennedy from taking offensive actions against each other’s countries.
5. THE NINETIES: AFTER THE COLLAPSE OF THE USSR

5.1 The fall of the Soviet Union

When Mikhail Gorbachev became the General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) in 1985, he decided to reform the Soviet communism because the economy was stagnating and the living conditions of the population were worsening. The principles of the reform were based on the concepts of perestroika (reconstructing) and glasnost (publicity). According to Gorbachev, the USSR had to restructure its political and economic systems by favouring transparency in the public life. Other movements appealing to democracy and independence spread to other states of the communist bloc as well as Soviet republics.

In East Germany, due to the growing protests of the people and the internal pressures within the communist party, the Politburo members decided to remove the President Erich Honecker in late October 1989. In early November, the Berlin Wall fell. Similar conditions and a coup d'état attempt caused the dissolution of the USSR in 1991. This put an end to the Cold War. The fall of the Soviet giant left the US as the only word superpower and it also implied the victory of its capitalist model over communism. Because of this collapse, the international system shifted from bipolarity to unipolarity.

5.2 The Special Period in Cuba

In Cuba, the perestroika initiated by Gorbachev was highly disapproved. His efforts aiming at the reestablishment of private property, the introduction of market mechanisms and the abandonment of central planning were seen by Castro as misrepresenting elements of communism. During the leadership of Gorbachev, the Cuban-Soviet relations were complex because of the above-mentioned reasons and the Soviet rapprochement to the US. These tensions had repercussions on the economic and military cooperation between Havana and Moscow. Firstly, the duration of the 1991 new trade agreement was just one year and it established that commerce was based on world market prices (Bain 2012, 77). Secondly, in September 1991, due to domestic political tensions, the USSR withdrew unilaterally its troops from the island without consulting the Cuban authorities. Similarly, to 1962, the Kremlin acted

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7 In this context, publicity is referred to the state of being open to the public knowledge (Oxford Dictionary).
8 Before this agreement, Cuba and the USSR had always signed five year plans and the Soviet had provided goods (e.g. oil) at lower prices.
unilaterally, following realism, to preserve its national interest as its political system was in jeopardy. However, the USSR collapsed in December 1991.

Cuba lost its main economic and military ally that had supported its revolution for about 31 years. The economic relations with the USSR and the Eastern European socialist bloc ended almost entirely. Cuban commerce was highly dependent on communist countries; in fact, it is estimated that 85% of Cuban trade was with the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON); however, it was dismissed in 1991 (Pérez 2006, 292). Due to such losses, Cuba was able neither to export nor import goods. Since Cuba could not rely on the Soviet assistance anymore, it was essential more than ever to preserve the survival of its revolution. It decided to pursue this defensive realist goal by putting into effect the Special Period in 1991. This plan established strict austerity measures and rationings to limit the scarce availability of goods which had a huge impact on the living conditions: supplies of petroleum products were dramatically diminished; shortage of oil contributed to the reduction of industrial and agricultural productions and many workers were dismissed; the sugar production almost halved in two years as it went from 8.1 million tons in 1991 to 4.2 million tons in 1993 (Pérez 2006, 294).

Moreover, poverty, crimes, malnutrition, unemployment and homeless people increased in the whole of Cuba. All those young individuals, who did not see a flourishing future on the island, migrated to other countries to find a job and better living conditions. Due to poverty and desperation, people took comfort in religion during this period. For example, Christian churches and the Havana Synagogue were crowded with believers. The role of religion was rediscovered after decades of state atheism. In 1992, the government abandoned state atheism and announced that it was permitted to be both believers and members of the communist party (Pérez 2006, 298). The opening to religion brought to the thaw in the relations between Havana and the Vatican, as will be argued below in this chapter. In conclusion, because of the collapse of the USSR and the special period, Cuba was isolated and very vulnerable to the US.

5.3 The US intransigent approach toward Cuba

5.3.1 Political and economic changes in the American continent
Cuba was the only Marxist-Leninist country on the US doorstep, but the Castro regime did not represent a serious threat to the US security anymore because of the lack of support from the USSR. Nevertheless, in the nineties, the relations between Washington and Havana shifted
from the Cold War to a Colder War (Domínguez 2012, 285). As already seen, capitalism won over communism and despite the ideological battle between these two system was over, the Fukuyama’s (1992) concept related to “the end of history” became a cornerstone in the US foreign policy to encourage the rise of new liberal democratic countries especially in the neighbouring countries (Badella 2014, 160).

The Cold War tensions were still continuing in Central America since this region was the scene of civil wars in Nicaragua and El Salvador between the late eighties and early nineties. The US supported the local dictators because they opposed communism, while Cuba sent its troops to help the communist rebels and the guerrilla movements involved, such as the Sandinista Front. Preoccupied about the escalation, Washington asked Gorbachev to pressure Castro to withdraw his soldiers from the region in exchange for American financial assistance to the USSR: however, the Soviet attempts were useless because Castro was unwilling to change his policy in the region (Morley and McGillion 2002, 23).

To overcome the impasse, the US Administration, through Congress, authorised non-military deeds to favour a peaceful transition and elections in Nicaragua. The policymakers supposed that the Sandinistas would agree on having elections in case of the end of military operations (Morley and McGillion 2002, 27). The candidate opposing the Sandinistas won the elections and a pro-communist government did not take office in Nicaragua. Moreover, the majority of Latin American countries adopted free market and democracy. This broad shift to liberal democracy makes clear that the region was in step with the US interests. The importance of realism emerges from the foreign policy of Washington and Cuba since they insisted to maximise their influence in the region.

In order to expand the US regional influence, George H. W. Bush wanted Cuba to become a liberal democratic country like the other Latin America states did. Indeed, he established three conditions to normalise the relations with Havana: free elections, the creation of a market economy and the decrease of the Cuban armed forces (Morley and McGillion 2002, 25). Such requirements were unacceptable for Castro: thus, it was impossible to find a compromise between the two countries. The support for liberal democracy by the US in the region is attributable to realism because it could strengthen its security and influence in an area favourable to its geopolitical interests, while it is also ascribable to liberalism because the US companies benefited from trading with the new Latin American partners. However, the severe approach of the US toward Cuba was mainly affected by ideology and domestic political reasons that cannot be entirely explained through the analytical use of the theories.
5.3.2 Ideology

When Bush took office in 1989, the Cuban issue was still relevant both in the US foreign policy and internal politics as well as the desire to overthrow the communist government on the island. Given the favourable international scenario for the US and the West, Bush could have accomplished a task that was always failed by the previous presidents. In 1992, he stressed this point in a rally by declaring that he was “looking forward to being the first president of the United States to set foot on the free soil of post-Castro Cuba” (Bush 1993, 376). As the Administration thought that Cuba could never withstand the radical changes aroused by the end of the Cold War, the victory of the American crusade against Castro was apparently probable.

Between the late eighties and early nineties, Cuba had to downsize its foreign policy to face the transformation of the international system. For example, Cuba announced it would repatriate its troops that were sustaining the communist revolutionary movements in Africa during the Angolan Civil War. Despite the efforts made by Cuba, the White House under Bush and Clinton presidencies decided to ignore and underestimate them, because according to the policymakers those changes were still insufficient to modify the US attitude and seek the thaw (Morley and McGillion 2002, 17). The Cuban reforms were considered as the decline of the regime, so both Bush and Clinton thought it was the right moment to deliver the coup de grace to Castro (Petras and Morley 1996, 275). Bush’s policy could rely on the endorsement of the conservative lobby Cuban American National Foundation (CANF) that was one of the major advocates of the Cuban isolation. As Castro resisted the destabilisation attempts by the US, the White House started an obsessive ideological campaign against Cuba on different fronts to isolate Cuba (Morley and McGillion 2002, 26).

At a regional level, Bush was worried that the strengthening of ties between Cuba and other Latin American countries could then imply the readmission of Havana in the OAS and the US strove to prevent this situation. Argentina and Mexico suggested the US to consider the OAS membership of Cuba because it would have favoured diplomacy and democratic reforms; but the US affirmed that it was unwilling to change its attitude toward Cuba (Domínguez 2012, 284). President Clinton used the same approach within the American community. Firstly, he opposed the Cuban memberships in OAS. Secondly, he admonished respectively Chile and Honduras for restoring political and economic relations with Havana; he even threatened Chile with economic sanctions when Santiago completely re-established its ties with Havana (Petras and Morley 1996, 272). Nevertheless, sustaining this strict regional policy isolated the US and not Cuba. Indeed, Latin American countries were unwilling to follow the US policy based on
an outdated “Cold War” ideology which was still demonising Cuba although it was not a threat anymore. In addition, they wanted to engage Cuba regionally to pursue their political and economic interests: in other words, they wanted to enlarge their power.

At an international level, Bush pressured the UN to monitor even more strictly the human rights conditions in Cuba, even if the American policymakers knew that the UN had previously assessed an improvement in the respect for human rights and political opponents. Nevertheless, the UN declined such a request. By stressing this point internationally, the US wanted to discredit Castro and label him as a brutal dictator; indeed, Bush hoped that this warning would prevented the US partners to develop further relations with Havana (Morley and McGillion 2002, 30).

In 1990, the Bush Administration enhanced its media propaganda against Castro, hoping to destabilise him, through the broadcaster TV Martí that transmitted TV and radio programmes in Spanish to Cuba. The project was directly financed by the federal government and endorsed by the CANF; however, Cuba blocked successfully most of the TV Martí transmissions (Torres 2001, 131). Although the project did not reach its aim, it was not stopped because it continued to receive funds from the Cuban-American community and because the CANF lobbied Congress. Clinton believed that it was necessary to exploit the TV and radio programmes and he even signalled to employ the US air force to expand the quantity of TV Martí transmissions to Cuba (Petras and Morley 1996, 271).

5.3.3 The influence of domestic politics
The US also opted for stricter economic sanctions to destabilise the Castro regime. In 1992, the Cuban Democracy Act (CDA) bill was drafted by Jorge Mas Canosa, the CANF’s leader, and presented in the House by the democratic Congressman Robert Torricelli (Morley and McGillion 2002, 41). Furthermore, the democratic presidential candidate, Bill Clinton, endorsed it. The legislation established the extension of the embargo on those US subsidiaries located abroad exporting goods to Cuba, it asked the President to encourage foreign countries to limit their commerce with Havana and it also prohibited US citizens from travelling to Cuba and sending family remittances there (Pérez 2012, 155). The CDA’s objective was accelerating the collapse of the Cuban economy and the consequent fall of the government. The CDA was strongly criticised by the US companies that feared a decline of their export, by the closest American allies such as Canada and the European Union (EU) claiming that it was against

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9 It was founded in Florida in 1985 under the Reagan Administration
international law and free trade. Even if the Bush Administration was doubtful about the effectiveness of the act and believed that it endangered the US economic interests and ties with its partners, it decided to pass the bill in late October 1992 because of the imminent presidential elections in November (Pérez 2012, 158). It hoped to increase its popularity within the conservative electorate.

During his presidency, Clinton decided to take actions against Cuba because he saw some political opportunities: indeed, he wanted to increase his support among the right-wing electors as well as within the large Cuban community in Florida since this state was seen as a key-constituency to win the presidential and the mid-term elections (Petras and Morley 1996, 275). This hypothesis was confirmed by a statement by one of the Clinton’s foreign policy advisers who claimed that the President during his first mandate refused to diminish the tensions with Cuba because “There are no votes riding on how we deal with Indonesia, and not many on how we deal with China. Castro is still political dynamite.” (Sanger 1995, 3). The approach chosen by Clinton confirms the defensive realist tenet according to which leaders’ perceptions can have repercussions on foreign policy.

The Republican Party won overwhelmingly both Chambers of Congress in the 1994 mid-Term elections. On the one hand, this victory further strengthened the positions of those politicians who had never accepted that Castro put an end to the American hegemony on the Caribbean island; on the other hand, it weakened the attitude of those Clinton Administration’s officials ready to alleviate the strict measures against Cuba (Vanderbush and Haney 1999, 401). Indeed, during his second mandate, Clinton opened slightly to Cuba by encouraging educational, artistic exchanges between the two countries and reduced restrictions on Cuban American travel and remittances. Between 1994-95, he had bilateral secret talks with Castro to manage the Cuban refugee issue: the US accepted to take in 20000 refugees a year, while Castro committed to avoid huge refugee flows leaving the country (Vanderbush and Haney 1999, 399).

Since the Republicans benefited from a solid majority, Senator Helms and Representative Burton, both belonging to this party, sponsored the Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity Act (CLDSA) bill in 1995. The law includes measures to enhance the embargo on Cuba and sanctions by the US against the foreign companies and governments trading with the island. Clinton decided to oppose the bill for several reasons. Firstly, it would cause, as in the case of the CDA, problems with the allies and the erosion of US influence in the hemisphere: against the realist view on the enlargement of power; secondly, it was considered as an interference
with the foreign policy role of the President and thirdly, the CDA was already sufficient (Vanderbush and Haney 1999, 402).

However, an event overturned the situation: an airplane of the Brothers to the Rescue\(^\text{10}\) dropping propaganda fliers against Castro was shot down by the Cuban air force. After that, the pressures by CANF significantly increased and Clinton was ready to adopt countermeasures against this outrage by endorsing the CLDSA. The act was approved in 1996 and as predicted, the foreign allies complained about the US meddling in their foreign policy. The approval of both CDA and CLDSA demonstrates that the US undermined, although for domestic politics and ideological reasons, some liberal pillars of its policy such as its free-market and the export of the US company to overthrow Castro. They also confirm that domestic politics affects foreign policy as stated by defensive realists. According to Taliaferro, it is more complicated to mobilise sources in a lack of an external menace; however, this subsection denies this claim as the US made considerable efforts to fight the former Cuban threat (2001, 142).

5.4 Cuba struggling for its own survival

The combination of the domestic economic crisis with the US sanctions strained the stability of the communist government to the limit. Thus, Cuba had to reform and sacrifice some aspects of the revolution to prevent its total collapse as well as ensure its survival. Unlike Gorbachev, Castro realised that unifying a broad and rapid opening to market economy with austerity measures would have meant the end of the regime (Morley and McGillion 2002, 19). However, he decided to partially open to liberalism, as seen below, only to guarantee the defensive realist perspective of a country’s survival in the international system.

Some Cuban officials acknowledged that Cuba had to adapt permanently to the global economic integration (Domínguez 2012, 289). Thus, Havana sought new economic partners all around the world to face the lack of Soviet support. It strengthened its commercial relations with communist countries such as North Korea, China, Venezuela and Vietnam. It even started and increased commerce with European, Islamic and American countries. Cuba was also active in the Caribbean region and in fact, in 1994, it announced its membership in the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) that aims at promoting economic cooperation and integration among its member states (Pérez 2006, 304).

As Cuba lacked hard currency, the US dollar was legalised in the early nineties. This

\(^{10}\) It is a non-profit organisation founded in 1991 by Cuban exiles opposing the Cuban government
measure had some pros and cons. On the one hand, for Cubans, it was easier to receive remittances from abroad and the state-controlled businesses such restaurants and kiosks rose in number. On the other hand, it contributed to the growth of the black market which was already relevant and its consequent completion with the economy under the control of the state (Pérez 2006, 305). In fact, the exchange of the local currency for dollars was often very variable. Furthermore, the government authorised the creation of some private companies: for example, restaurateurs, artisans, gardeners were allowed to provide services at competitive and cheaper prices.

The authorisation of foreign direct investments brought companies from several different sectors to Cuba: foreign firms invested their capital in agriculture, construction, transport and especially tourism that increased notably throughout the nineties. Defensive realism is noticeable in the choice of attracting companies from diverse countries and sectors; by doing so, Cuba tried to broaden its access to markets in order to avoid economic dependency on a single economic partner and it assured the endurance of the revolution (Bain 2015, 166). However, the introduction of all these liberal elements implied the erosion of the Marxist-Leninist ideology that strongly characterised all the history of the revolution.

It should be underlined that Cuba was able to nullify the realist claims according to which its regime would have never survived the shocks caused by the end of the Cold War: this small country was predicted to succumb to the strongest player’s will (Domínguez 2012, 299). The endurance of the revolution was possible, as argued above, to the limitations imposed on its foreign policy as well as the austerity measures in its internal economy. Even if its safeguard was achieved, Cuba paid a high price for it.

5.5 Russia returns to Cuba

The USSR-Cuba relations came to an end in 1991 due to the disintegration of the Soviet empire and this, as earlier argued, had serious repercussions on the Caribbean island. In the first half of the decade, the ties between Cuba and the Russian Federation eroded notably. In fact, in 1992, Russia voted in favour of a UN motion reporting the human rights violation in Cuba and abstained in a vote concerning the CDA at the UN (Bain 2011, 113; Domínguez 2012, 284). The Russian choice to diminish the relations with Cuba was mainly determined by the US pressures: indeed, Washington asked President Boris Yeltsin to interrupt ties with Cuba in order to improve the relations between the two countries so that Russia could benefit from the US financial assistance to recover its devastated economy (Bain 2012, 75). This pressure
represents clearly the disparity between a strong and a weak player underlined by realist scholars: in Thucydides’ words, the “strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must” (Thucydides 1951, 331).

However, the Kremlin maintained minimum relations with Havana to follow a realist strategy: keeping its position in Latin America. For instance, Russia decided not to close the Lourdes Signals Intelligence station in Cuba. Moscow officially claimed that this measure was “necessary to maintain stable communication with our embassies in Latin America” (Bain 2006b, 148). Furthermore, Russia decided to not sever its relations with Cuba because the island had to repay its debt from the Soviet era.

In mid 1990s, Cuba and Russia increased their relations. The first reason was economic. Both countries were suffering from a terrible economic crisis and therefore, it was necessary to trade with each other in order to ensure their own survival in the post-Cold War international system. Like in the previous decades, Cuba provided sugar to Moscow in exchange for Russian oil. In 1996, Russia became again the largest trading partner of Cuba: in fact, their bilateral trade went from 251,302 million pesos in 1995 to 616,084 million pesos in 1996 (Bain 2011, 114). The Cuban tourist sector also spread to the Russian market although partially: it has to be noticed that Cuba was visited by one million European tourists a year; nevertheless, just 12000 Russians spent their holiday on the Caribbean island in 1999 (Bain 2006b, 149). Furthermore, Russian companies tried to invest in Cuba, but they did not succeed as they were replaced by foreign companies in the first half of the nineties. In other words, Cuba and Russia used a liberal instrument such as commerce to reach a defensive realist goal: the national survival in the global arena.

The second reason was political and underpinned by realist tenets. The new unipolar nature of the international system dissatisfied the Russian geopolitical view. Moscow was willing to regain its international power that was lost after the dissolution of the USSR. In fact, it was not gratified by a secondary role in the world (Bain 2014, 454). The main step was to restore the relations with its former allies such as Cuba. In addition, Russia thought to expand its sphere of influence in Latin America to respond to the NATO enlargement attempts in Eastern Europe and the Alliance’s intervention against its fellow Serbians (Bain 2006b, 148). Vladimir Putin travelled to Cuba a few months after he took office at the Kremlin in 2000 in order to strengthen the ties between the two countries. In fact, he signed a five-year trade agreement with Havana. His foreign policy was driven, like that in middle nineties, by a realist reason: the counterbalance of the US global hegemony.
5.6 Two constructive approaches toward Cuba

5.6.1 Canada
In the new post-Cold War geopolitical scenario, Canada pushed for promoting dialogue and diplomacy with Cuba. Unlike the US, Canada believed that it was more convenient to use the “carrot” (negotiations) rather than the “stick” (sanctions) with Havana to facilitate changes on the island. Between the eighties and the early nineties, the Canada-Cuba relations declined because the Prime Minister Mulroney was a firm supporter of the US-Canada relations and the US global stances, included Cuba. Nevertheless, when the Liberal government, led by Jean Chrétien, took power in 1993, it proposed to use a constructive approach to Cuba and reduce its dependency on the US without undermining their relations (Klepak 2009, 271). Since Canada appreciated the insertion of liberal elements in the Cuban economy and the reestablishment of the freedom of worship it considered that it was worth engaging Cuba regionally (Warren 2003, 4).

Canada became an active regional player by joining the OAS in 1990 and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994. In 1995, it pushed for the Cuban reintegration in the OAS as well as in the hemisphere hoping that this integration could facilitate the dialogue with Castro about the Cuban political and economic changes. In 1996, Canada and Cuba agreed on a five-year bilateral aid plan that was not related with liberal reforms on the island: Ottawa allocated most of its Official Development Assistance (ODA) to trade and foreign investment sectors and a just a very small part to humanitarian issues such as poverty alleviation (McKenna and Kirk 1999, 60). The Canadian companies which were already working in Cuba benefited from the ODA, while others were encouraged by Ottawa to trade with Cuba. After becoming Foreign Minister in 1996, Lloyd Axworthy further emphasised the need for more dialogue with Castro and more independence of Canada foreign policy from Washington since the Cold War was over. In fact, he claimed that the US approach toward Cuba was anachronistic and discordant with its engagement policy with China (McKenna and Kirk 2012, 93). Furthermore, he strongly criticised both the CDA and the CLDSA because of their incompatibility with the NAFTA regulations and their extraterritorial effects (Warren 2003, 6).

The principles of realism are evident in the Canada’s attempts, as described above, to expand its sphere of influence in Latin America as well as diminishing its reliance on the US. As the Cold War ended and political tensions shrank, Ottawa looked more favourably on this region because the majority of the countries shifted to democracy and market economy. Its purpose
was to increase its regional power to counterbalance the incontrovertible leadership of the US in the hemisphere (Warren 2003, 3). To achieve this aim, unlike the US, it decided to use soft power instruments such as dialogue and diplomacy to attract Cuba and establish ties with other countries in the region: the Canadian policymakers supposed that, in this way, Ottawa would be perceived more reliable and an independent actor from Washington by most of the Latin American countries.

In the nineties, commerce between Ottawa and Havana grew as well as Canadian tourists to Cuba. In 1995, Canada was the largest export partner of Cuba and their bilateral trade between Ottawa and Havana rose from 229,440 million pesos in 1994 to 568,827 million pesos in 1999 (Bain 2006a, 178; Oficina Nacional de Estadísticas 2001, chap. VI–5). Ottawa believed that its constructive approach would have encouraged the US to do the same also considering that Washington changed its attitude toward the other Latin American countries (Warren 2003, 5). Canadian interests would have benefited from confidence-building between the US and Cuba. As regards the human rights status on the island, in 1997, Ottawa and Havana signed the Canada-Cuba Joint Committee on Human Rights and established to hold joint seminars on human rights, but there was no tangible progress made by Cuba (McKenna and Kirk 2012, 97). The two countries faced some tensions after the bilateral talks between Chrétien and Castro in 1998, since the former explicitly addressed the human rights issue by demanding for the release of four political prisoners, but the immediate response of the Cuban leader was cold and vague. In 1999, those dissidents were accused of sedition and sentenced in the trial and the Cuban authorities exacerbated the limitations on freedom of expression. Because of the Canadian pressures on human rights, in 1999, Castro attacked verbally Canada by accusing it of being dependent on the US imperialist policies and aiming at destabilisation of the revolution (Cawthorne 2001, 9).

The importance of liberalism is noticeable in the Canadian emphases on free-trade and human rights. Since the liberal democratic model became dominant in Latin America and Cuba undertook an opening to liberalism, Canada believed that the use of institutions and cooperation was likely to facilitate the shift of Cuba from communism to democracy. If successful, this change, would have consolidated liberalism in the hemisphere and hence bolstered Canadian interests. Ottawa was also interested in negotiating with Cuba to expand its trading partners and the sale of goods. It even tried to address the human rights issue, but the Canadian attempts were useless due to the inflexibility of Castro.
5.6.2 The Vatican

As argued earlier, there was a revival of religion in Cuba in early nineties. Due to this opening, the Cuban Catholic Church was able to reorganise and expand its structure. As a matter of fact, the number of dioceses increased in Cuba and most significantly, the hierarchical figure of the cardinal was re-established. It meant that this high authority could again represent the mediator between the State and the Church. The key interlocutor was Cardinal Jaime Lucas Ortega due to his close relationship with the Holy Father. Furthermore, some Catholic movements spread to different groups such as students, journalists and young people (Alonso 2005, 247). It has to be stressed that Castro had not undertaken repressive measures against the Catholic Church before the nineties. Unlike other communist regimes, Castro did not choose to follow this path because the Cuban Church did not support the counterrevolutionary attempts to destabilise his government and also he knew that the role of this religious institution was well regarded by the local population (Evans 1998, 112).

The Vatican monitored and appreciated all these developments undertaken by Castro. Hence, John Paul II thought it was the right time to initiate a constructive engagement with Havana, although the Cuba-Vatican relations have always been complex. Thus, he travelled to Cuba in 1998. It was a historic event because it was the first trip ever of a pope there. It is worth mentioning that Castro collaborated with the Cuban Church to organise in the best way possible the pontiff’s visit: In fact, before the pope’s arrival, he required the population to take part in the liturgical celebrations and show respect for papal spiritual role (Alonso 2005, 248). In addition, the Cuban leader released 106 prisoners out of 260 whose names were written on a list given to him by the Vatican Secretary of State Angelo Sodano, while the dissident and human rights issues were tackled in the private talks between Castro and the pope (Bohlen 1998).

The trip was motivated by the defence of the Catholic Church national interest. Historically, speaking, it had always been very weak on the island and decades of state atheism further undermined its position: therefore, it seriously risked to disappear (Gayte 2013, 48). The need for survival highlights the importance of defensive realism in the Vatican foreign policy. During the official visit, the pontiff condemned the US unethical and oppressive economic sanctions against Cuba underlining that an “imposed isolation strikes the population indiscriminately, making it ever more difficult for the weakest to enjoy the bare essentials of decent living, things such as food, health and education” (John Paul II 1998). This resolute statement allowed the Vatican to keep its distance from the US counterrevolutionary approach to strengthen its position and appeal in Cuba (Gayte 2013, 49). After the papal visit and the
bilateral negotiations between the two countries, the number of the clergy members and churches rose notably on the island. In these ways, the Vatican was able to safeguard its survival in Cuba.

Furthermore, the Church knew that Castro was well considered by the Third World Countries due to his firm opposition to the US and it was highly conscious that its historic opening to Cuba and the stigmatisation of the embargo would have been noticed by them. For the Vatican, this part of the world was at a stake because of the increasing number of Catholics: it is estimated that more than 800 million believers lived there (Evans 1998, 113). The will to attract such countries makes the realist theory evident because the Holy See aimed at expanding its sphere of influence and authority among the millions of believers in the Third World.

5.7 Conclusion

The end of the Cold War had a radical impact on the international arena. Indeed, the US was the only superpower left, while Cuba ceased to represent a threat to the American interests as it could not rely on Soviet assistance anymore. Despite these circumstances, Washington did not seek to reset the tensions with Havana, but it even exacerbated the sanctions against the Caribbean island. This intransigent approach was moved by ideological reasons and the broad influence of the US internal politics on foreign policy. Nevertheless, the combined efforts of Canada and the Vatican to engage Cuba were insufficient to persuade the US to change its Cuban policy. In 1995, Russia re-established relations with Cuba to face the shocking effects of the fall of the USSR. Indeed, they traded with each other to sustain their weak national economies and thus to ensure their survival. Furthermore, Moscow wanted to regain and increase its influence on the former Soviet allies that was lost due to the end of the Cold War.
6. FROM 2008 TO THE PRESENT: THE US-CUBA THAW

6.1 Background

2008 represented the turning point in both the US and Cuba. Barack Obama took office in the White House as the first Afro-American President ever. During the 2007 electoral campaign, Obama acknowledged that the US policy toward Cuba had been a failure since 1959 and that it was time to initiate a new chapter in the US-Cuba relations. In 2009, Obama announced the restoration of those cultural and academic programmes that were cut under the George W. Bush Administration and he loosened the restrictions on travels and remittances to Cuba. There, Raúl Castro became President temporarily in 2006 due to Fidel’s illness. In 2008, Fidel was forced to resign because of this reason and Raúl was officially elected as the new President by the Council of State. In 2006, he claimed that he was ready to participate in a dialogue with the US based on respect, reciprocity and he is less ideological and intransigent than his brother (LeoGrande and Kornbluh 2015, 415).

The US and Cuba opted for a defensive realist approach in order to initiate a reciprocal productive dialogue through the use of words and non-military deeds. In fact, in 2009, the US State Department launched a signal to Cuba by asking the recovery of the bilateral talks, interrupted by Bush in 2004, on the migration issue: Havana not only responded positively, but it even suggested to enlarge the cooperation to tackle common problems such as drug trafficking and the prevention of both terrorism and natural disasters (LeoGrande and Kornbluh 2015, 371). It should be highlighted that working with Cuba on counterterrorism was a contradiction as it was still included in the US black-list. Obama believed that it was necessary to base the negotiations on mutual interest issues to show the benignity of the US intentions to Cuba and build trust between the two parts. In 2010, the US and Cuba had a double chance to cooperate together: in January, they provided humanitarian assistance to the Haitian population in the aftermath of the earthquake, while in April, they worked to limit the spread of the oil spill caused by the explosion of the Deepwater Horizon oil rig in the Gulf of Mexico.

As argued in the section on defensive realism, the establishment of trust can take (a long) time especially if the parts were bitter enemies. Despite these promising steps undertaken, the continuous presence of mutual mistrust complicated the reassurance programme. In fact, on

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11 Cuba was included in the list in 1982, but in 2009, it was still considered as a state sponsor of terrorism despite the lack of concrete proofs (LeoGrande and Kornbluh 2015, 371). As already seen, Cuba was excluded from the list in May 2015 as a signal of further relaxation of the relations.
the one hand, Washington was unwilling to give more concessions to Cuba as it did not see tangible progress in the fields of human rights and democracy. On the other hand, in late 2009, the arrest of the American contractor Alan Gross by the Cuban authorities increased the diffidence of Castro on the US intentions. He was arrested because he provided technological equipment\(^{12}\) to the Jewish community. He was accused of being a spy aiming at undermining the revolution; thus, he was sentenced to fifteen years in jail (The New York Times 2014). In Cuba, Gross was working as a contractor for consulting company whose tasks were financed by the democracy promotion programmes of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) (LeoGrande and Kornbluh 2015, 376).

Indeed, like his predecessor Bush, Obama continued to fund this type of USAID programme and this induced Castro to believe that the US was still aiming at destabilising the regime and that its reassurance attempts were just propaganda for the public opinion (LeoGrande and Kornbluh 2015, 377). In 2009-10, to avoid the impasse, Washington asked Spain to build more confidence between the US and Cuba and overcome diplomatic incidents. Moreover, Spain supported the dialogue between Castro and the Cuban Catholic Church represented by Cardinal Ortega. In 2013, the reconciliation process accelerated as will be seen below, for some reasons:

- Obama undertook new measures after the start of his second mandate. Castro made travelling abroad easier, included the US.
- The Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez (very close ally of Cuba) died in March 2013 and his successor Nicolás Maduro has not been able to face Venezuela’s devastating economic crisis.
- The secret talks between the US and Cuba were favoured by Canada and especially by Pope Francis.

The world had the impression that something was changing when Castro and Obama shook hands publicly in South-Africa in December 2013. One year later, on December 17, 2014 they officially declared the common will to restore the diplomatic relations and a prisoner swap in which Cuba released Gross, while the US released three members of the group so-called Cuban Five, five Cuban intelligence officers arrested in the US in 1998 and condemned for espionage in 2001 (Labott 2014).

\(^{12}\) Providing satellite communications technology (e.g. laptops, mobile phones and disks) is prohibited by the Cuban law.
6.2 The timing and the reasons behind the reconciliation

6.2.1 US Motives
On 17 December, 2014, President Obama affirmed that: “[the US] outdated approach…. for decades, has failed to advance our interests” while the “longstanding U.S. policy towards Cuba has isolated the United States from regional and international partners, constrained our ability to influence outcomes throughout the Western Hemisphere” and he added that “We cannot keep doing the same thing and expect a different result” (Obama 2014, 2015, 53). He pointed out the main outcomes and weaknesses of the US policy on Cuba in his speeches. The US isolationism caused by its intransigent approach collides with the realist rationale of the Monroe Doctrine establishing that Washington has to spread its authority over the Americas and thus be the regional leader. Beside this point, it is possible to detect further reasons behind the rapprochement.

Firstly, there has been a change in security interests. As argued above, Cuba ceased to be a security threat to the US after the end of the Cold War. This point was confirmed by Obama in an New York Times (NYT) interview: “There aren’t that many risks for us. It’s a tiny little country. It’s not one that threatens our core security interests” (Friedman 2015). Nevertheless, the current increase of ties between Cuba and extra hemispheric actors such as Russia, will be shown in this chapter, and China might represent a future geopolitical threat to the US security. Currently, Russia-Cuba relations are mainly based on commerce, but the lesson of the Cuban-Soviet alliance demonstrates that a very close economic cooperation can even result in a
military threat to Americans. Hence, the US is actually monitoring Havana and Moscow very carefully (Murati 2015). Washington, following a realist rationale, has to counterbalance the expansion of the Russian sphere of influence on its doorstep by enhancing its ties with the island. Moreover, Obama, during his historic trip to Cuba in March 2016, signed with Castro a deal on maritime safety. The signing of this agreement confirms the defensive realist approach undertaken by the two countries in 2009 to build mutual trust by working on common issues and to ensure their national security.

Secondly, new commercial opportunities have emerged. In the nineties, Cuba became of interest to American investors as it opened to new markets, but the US firms’ actions were overcome by the investments of Canadian and European companies and challenged by the embargo. The latter is estimated to cost the US about $1.2 billion each year (Scheid Rothkopf 2009, 3). Since the end of the Cold War, agro-industrial lobbies have been pressuring Washington to lift the embargo and take advantage of the Cuban opening to capitalism. In March 2016, both presidents signed commercial agreements facilitating US firms’ investments in Cuba. For instance, Google is likely to support the expansion of the Internet on the island, while other companies will operate in the tourism sector (LeoGrande 2016). The effort to develop the broadband is a way to facilitate the ideological contamination of the regime because Cubans will be able to obtain divergent information than that provided by their government. The US hopes that this contamination will rise the demand for democracy and bring the tenets of liberal democracy to Cuba through economic cooperation. (LeoGrande 2016). Moreover, according to liberalism, commerce and cooperation are a way to favour peace among countries. In other words, one might argue that Obama’s purpose is re-establishing the US hegemony on the island ended by the revolution by promoting the economic change in Cuba.

Thirdly, US relations with Latin America were at stake. After Obama took office in 2009, Latin American governments further pushed for the readmission of Havana in the hemisphere’s affairs. This pressure continued in 2012 since they did not see tangible progress in the US-Cuba relations: as signal of protest, Nicaragua and Ecuador did not attend the Sixth Summit of the Americas as Cuba was not invited while Brazil was firmly against the exclusion of Cuba (LeoGrande 2015b, 481). At the Seventh Summit of the America in 2015, a very large support for the inclusion of Cuba by most of participant countries was expected. Presumably, if Washington did not endorse it, its relations with most of such countries would have seriously deteriorated (LeoGrande 2015b, 482). As emphasised by Obama, the US had already
diminished its influence and could not risk to lose more. Cuba participated in the Summit as the secret negotiations were in progress.

Lastly, as reminded by defensive realist scholars, leaders’ calculations and perceptions can affect foreign policy: indeed, according to the polls, in 2007 and 2011, a larger part of the Cuban-American community in Florida endorsed the end of the embargo (Peralta 2014)\textsuperscript{13}. Florida has always been a key-state in the presidential elections and to get votes, Obama needed to enlarge his consensus within this community by supporting a constructive approach toward Cuba. This strategy was successful as he obtained about 50 percent of Cuban-American votes in 2012 (Caputo 2012). Obama, like Clinton, took advantage of the Cuban-American community’s sentiment to address the US foreign policy toward Havana, but, as seen, to pursue opposite purposes.


6.2.2. Cuba’s Motives
Cuba and Venezuela became close political and economic allies in the previous decade. Their bilateral agreements establish that Cuba send qualified workers such as doctors, teachers and military advisors to Venezuela in exchange for oil supplies (Piccone and Trinkunas 2014, 1). This alliance was favoured by the historic friendship between Fidel Castro and Chávez, but especially by the Cuba’s need for new markets in the Special Period. Economically speaking, Cuba is highly dependent on Venezuela since its economic support accounted for almost 21

\textsuperscript{13}This stance was determined by a demographic change: on the one hand, the Cubans, migrated to the US between the sixties and the seventies and more hostile to Castro, passed away; on the other hand, the younger generations, who are more in favour of the reconciliation, have obtained the right of vote in last years (LeoGrande and Kornbluh 2015, 397).
percent of Cuban Gross Domestic Product (GDP); while, oil is fundamental for Venezuela as 95 percent of its foreign incomes are subject to the sales of petroleum (Piccone and Trinkunas 2014, 6). Caracas could afford to help Cuba as long as oil prices were high. However, due to their drop and its national economic and political crises, Venezuela was forced to halve its oil export to Cuba in 2014-15 (Delgado 2015). Cuba has been obviously affected by such a situation and still needs to adopt measures to overcome the impasse. The Cuban strategy of basing most of its economic interdependence on one country, like in the case of the USSR, has revealed again all its limits.

One way to understand the Cuban viewpoint on the thaw is to focus on its economy. Raúl Castro has mainly tended to blame Cuba’s internal problems for its weak economy rather than the US sanctions and in 2006 he realised that the country has to update its economic system to ensure the survival of the revolution, a defensive realist aim, by introducing further market economy elements (LeoGrande and Kornbluh 2015, 407). In fact, Cuban officials are interested in developing a mixed model similar to those of Vietnam and China characterised by the strong presence of the state and significant aspects of market capitalism (Smith and Walter 2016, 531), but this model is complicated to pursue because the Vietnamese structural reform process began in 1989. Nevertheless, the economic reforms promoted by Castro’s government have facilitated the expansion of small-business entrepreneurs, foreign investments and the private sector in the last years (Piccone and Trinkunas 2014, 7; Smith and Walter 2016, 536).

In economic terms, the reconciliation has two meanings: firstly, in the short-run, Cuba hopes to substitute Venezuelan oil with tourist and investment flows from the American neighbour as showed by the recent commercial agreements; secondly, in the long-run, it aims at lifting the embargo which has caused, over the decades more than $1 trillion in losses for Cuba (United Nations 2014a). Furthermore, flights and cruises between the US and Cuba have been made simpler. It is clear that Cuba desperately needs a new benefactor to recover its weak economy. The search for new capitals confirms how defensive realism still underpins Cuba’s foreign policy to safeguard the revolution. As claimed by defensive realist scholars, geography can exacerbate the security dilemma. This was true, without doubt, during the Cold War like in 1962; but the geography vicinity is currently representing an advantage to pursue a reassurance programme as well as strengthen liberal economy and cooperation between the two countries.

The thaw also has political relevance. Indeed, it allows Cuba to maintain its power as the US acknowledged the deep differences between them and its respect for the island. The rapprochement shows the failure of the US hostility, while Cuba can claim that it has never
been defeated by the embargo. It is clear that the world political perception of Cuba might reinforce. One the one hand, Third World and communist states can see it as the tiny country that has resisted the American superpower for half a century. On the other hand, developed countries can consider Cuba as an actor ready to open to the rest of the world and undertake significant reforms. Hence, they can think it is worth engaging it to institute common diplomatic and economic ties. One might affirm that Cuba has nullified the realist assumption according to which the hegemonic player imposes its decisions on the weak part since all the US attempts did not put an end to communism on the island (LeoGrande and Kornbluh 2015, 415). On the contrary, the strong and the weak are working together to improve their relations. This aspect is ascribable to liberalism since both countries aim at common gains from their cooperation.

6.3 Russia’s eyes on Cuba

Russia and Cuba strengthened their relations when Putin came to power in 2000. This path was also continued under Raúl Castro’s presidency as evidenced by the trips of the Russian President Dimitri Medvedev to Havana and Castro to Moscow in 2008 and 2009, respectively. Moreover, Putin travelled to Cuba in July 2014: in the middle of the handshake between Obama and Castro and the announcement of the historic thaw. The Russian strategy of enhancing ties with the Caribbean island is part of the Putin doctrine whose goals are Russia’s return to a superpower and the wish for a multipolar international system (Bain 2015, 161). The doctrine has realist objectives because Putin aims at maximising Russian global power. In fact, the increase of Cuban-Russian relations is a way for Moscow to respond to the NATO expansion attempts in the Balkans and in the Caucasus; areas which are considered to belong de facto to the Russian sphere of influence. Accession talks between NATO and Montenegro are advanced, while Georgia has been making efforts to join the Alliance since 2002 when it announced its official intention to become a member (Kogan 2015, 8). In other words, if the US tries to erode Russia’s influence in Europe, Moscow reacts by enlarging its presence on the American doorstep as well as in Latin America. In fact, in the last years, Russia has also established economic cooperation with Brazil, Argentina, Mexico, Venezuela etc…. (Bain 2015, 162)

It has to be stressed that, despite its realist aims, the doctrine is supported by defensive realism as Russia and Cuba need to support their weak national economies. In fact, in 2013-14, they signed agreements to increase mutual commerce, investments in the energy sector and
Russian tourist flows to Cuba. In addition, Putin made an importance concession to Havana by writing off $32 billion of Cuba’s debt to Russia and leaving the payment of the remaining $3 billion in the next ten years (Westcott and Powell 2014, 53). It should be noted that the choice of trading with each other and cutting the debt reflects the realist Waltz’s conviction that “self-help is necessarily the principle of action” (Bain 2014, 457; Waltz 1979, 111). In fact, Havana and Moscow need economic cooperation as their national economies are suffering and for the same reason the island cannot sustain the entire debt repayment. Besides such economic measures, Russia announced in 2013 the continuation of military and military-technical cooperation with Cuba. Using military deeds is considered by defensive realism an instrument to enhance cooperation and signalling benign intentions (Tang 2010, 153).

The Putin Doctrine also meets Cuba’s foreign policy strategy which is underpinned by defensive realism since the Cuban main objective has always been the survival of the revolution. As highlighted by Bain, the principles of the defensive realism can be observed in the Cuban tactics to reduce its dependency on one country or a few countries (Bain 2015, 166). This is confirmed by the Cuban attempts to search for new markets in Russia to face the Venezuelan crisis as well as by the Cuban effort to attract more Russian tourists since the island is highly dependent on Canadian tourists (Bain 2014, 458).

Furthermore, Cuba’s foreign policy strategy has focused on Cuba’s security in an unfavourable geopolitical context by creating ties with progressive governments and the establishment of a Third World constituency to benefit from diplomatic support in international institutions and economic cooperation (Feinsilver 1993, 13). This underlines the bases of defensive realism. Russia is unlikely to be a part of such as constituency; but, their mutual help in international organisations is significant because Moscow and Havana have supported each other at the UN in the last years. For instance, Cuba voted against UN resolutions condemning the annexation of Crimea in 2014, while Russia voted in favour of UN resolutions opposing the US embargo (Bain 2014, 457; United Nations 2014b).

Cuba needs an active Russia in Latin America to have more reliable partners and therefore, avoid reliance on a few countries. The former Cuban diplomat Carlos Alzugaray, as reported by the Washington Post, affirmed that: “A strong, muscular Russia also fits Cuba's broader geopolitical vision…. Cuba is interested in a multipolar world, not a unipolar world, so it's in Cuba's interest for Russia to continue doing what it's doing” (Miroff 2015a). In other words, Havana benefits from a powerful Kremlin because the latter can provide enough support to the Cuban revolution. In conclusion, it is possible to notice that Russian-Cuban relations are still
based on the same framework of the nineties such as common economic support and Russia’s desire for multi-polarity.

6.4 The actors that favoured the thaw

6.4.1 Canada
In 2013, Washington asked the Canadian government to facilitate its secret talks with Cuba. In 2013-14, Canada hosted seven meetings between Ottawa and Toronto. However, Canada did not participate in the negotiations as stated by the Prime Minister Stephen Harper: “We were not trying in any way to direct or mediate the talks” (Harper 2014). It should be emphasised that Canada was an authoritative actor for both parts as it is one of the most significant US allies and it kept diplomatic relations with Cuba after the revolution. Although Cuba represents just 1% of Canadian export, the Royal Bank of Canada chief executive David McKay claimed that: “We see a very attractive, long-term marketplace in Cuba” (Spadoni and Sagebien 2015, 2). As argued in the previous chapter, Canada was already interested in the US-Cuba thaw to rise its economic interests on the island. Since Ottawa saw a good aptitude by US and Cuba for the reconciliation, it agreed to host the talks to continue its strategy underpinned by liberalism whose objective is enhancing its trade with Havana.

One the one hand, Canada is taking advantage of the liberalisations introduced by Castro. On the other hand, after the reconciliation, the end of the embargo is likely to finish. This might have some disadvantages because American companies’ investments should reduce the Canadian market share; nevertheless, the advantages are higher in the long-term: first, the legal issues of the CDLSA should disappear due to the lift of the sanctions; second, Canadian firms have a much deeper knowledge of the Cuban market than the competitors; third, the increase of American tourists should pressure Cuba to modernise its infrastructures as well as rise its import of food (Spadoni and Sagebien 2013, 87). Canada is likely to benefit because its firms are already active in the tourist sector: approximately one million Canadians goes on holiday to Cuba per year and it could build new hotels and facilities; moreover, Cuba could increase its current import of food from Canada to feed the tourists (Spadoni and Sagebien 2013, 86).

Ottawa also wishes that the rise of democracy in Cuba will follow the new opening to liberalism introduced by Castro. Harper stated that “one would hope we’ll see that [democracy] although we have some tainted democracies in the hemisphere…. [Cuba] is really the only place where there are elections that are completely non-competitive” and he added the shift to
democracy will “eventually” occur (Harper 2014). This confirms the liberal pillars of the Canadian strategy since it is interested in promoting both commerce and democracy. However, it has to be stressed that Harper during his mandates admonished occasionally Cuba for human rights violations (Spadoni and Sagebien 2013, 82); thus, the current Prime Minister Justin Trudeau should emphasise more this issue to complete the liberal mission of Canada.

Canada’s involvement in the US-Cuba reconciliation is also part of a strategy to bolster ties with the US and Latin America. First, as stressed by Obama in March 2016, Washington and Ottawa are further cooperating together to consolidate security of the hemisphere as shown by the common actions to favour peace and demining efforts in Colombia; policy to cut gas emissions and by their scientific cooperation to tackle the spread of the Zika virus (Obama 2016). The White House also thanked Trudeau for the partnership “as we renew America’s leadership across the hemisphere” and the constant support in the US-Cuba relations (Obama 2016). Second, even if Ottawa is overshadowed by the US in the hemisphere, it has a long history of relations with Latin American countries (Ferreira Alvarez 2016). Canada is currently expanding its presence and economic relations with such states and its policy toward the region is clearly based on liberal tenets such as free-trade and elimination of barriers/tariffs. This is demonstrated by the ongoing negotiations to establish free-trade areas with the CARICOM, Dominican Republic, Nicaragua, El Salvador and the recent creation of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) in late 2015 (Government of Canada 2016). In addition, through its engagement in the Cuba issue, Canada launched a “soft power” signal to Latin American countries: indeed, it is likely to be perceived as a reliable and Latin American friendly actor by such states and to further enlarge its interests in the region. It is possible to discern similarities with the previous case study since Canadian foreign policy’s pillars embrace the tenets of liberalism. Finally, one might claim that Ottawa is still continuing consolidating the capitalist hegemonic order in the hemisphere since the nineties.

6.4.2 The Vatican
The Holy See was an active broker in the talks between Cuba and the US and it even hosted a meeting at the Vatican in 2014. The support for the US-Cuba rapprochement has been part of the Vatican policy toward Latin America for many years: in fact, Pope Francis pushed for the US-Cuba reconciliation that was initiated by John Paul II in 1998, continued by Cardinal Ortega in Havana and Benedict XVI during his official visit to Cuba in 2012. All of them called for the end of the embargo and the isolation of Havana. However, the John Paul II trip to Cuba
was overshadowed by the Monica Lewinsky sex scandal in the US; hence, his efforts were not successful (Vallely 2015, 14).

In the last years, the Holy See has appreciated the laws introduced by Castro that further strengthened religious freedom and allowed the construction of churches for the first time since the beginning of the revolution. It pushed for the reconciliation to enhance its sphere of influence over Cuba. This goal shows a realist aspect in the Vatican foreign policy. After his election in 2013, Pope Francis was expected to revitalise the church in the Southern Hemisphere (Yardley and Pianigiani 2014). During the Francis papacy, there has been much attention to the large number of Catholic believers in Latin America as shown by his travels across the region and those scheduled in the near future (Vatican State 2016). Moreover, even before the thaw, the Roman Catholic Church had acted as a peacemaker in the region by mediating between governments and guerrilla movements in Colombia and El Salvador (Freedland 2014).

However, Pope Francis succeeded as a peacemaker where other diplomats failed. This success cannot be explained through the theoretical framework of this study because it ignores the appeal of his personality. This element is the key of his triumph. Firstly, he benefits from a high authority since most of the Cuban people are Catholic; unlike his successors he is considered culturally closer to Cuba due to the common Latin American origins and native language. Secondly, for a successful peace-making, both parts needed a common leadership having the strength “to follow through on any concessions made in the course of negotiation” (Dwight 2015, 8). The US Catholic Church was represented by Cardinals Brian O’Connor and Bernard Law who have been supporting the end of the embargo since the eighties and Cuba by Cardinal Ortega who worked with the Pope. Francis supervised their actions. Thirdly, he is very well considered by both countries for his moral authority. The US appreciates the papal emphasis on diplomacy, dialogue and the typical constructive approach toward Cuba. He is well seen by Cuba because of the common Latin American identity, his deep knowledge of the Latin American and Cuban context since he accompanied John Paul II on his state-visit to the island in 1998. Furthermore, his opposition to the US sanctions is historic since he already called for the lift of the embargo in his book Dialogues Between John Paul II and Fidel Castro written in 1998.

Moreover, what makes him very appealing to Castro is his typical critiques of capitalism and the inequalities that it causes between developed and poor countries. In his book, the pontiff argues that: “capitalism is a model that subordinates human beings and conditions development to pure market forces . . . thus humanity attends a cruel spectacle that crystalizes the enrichment
of the few at the expense of the impoverishment of the many” (Azel 2015, 24). His critiques derive from the historic complex relations of Latin America with capitalism as well as the “Third Way”\(^\text{14}\) which emerged under the Perón regime in Argentina. However, he is also critical of the Cuban government because it needs to change its structure in order to guarantee human rights and a free participation of all the citizens in public life (Miroff 2015b).

During the negotiations, he used all his moral persuasion on both presidents to “resolve humanitarian questions of common interest, including the situation of certain prisoners, in order to initiate a new phase in relations” (LeoGrande and Kornbluh 2015, 444-45). Considering this, one might claim that the Holy Father contributed to the choice of the defensive realist approach by the US and Cuba.

This reconciliation has a broader objective for the Vatican. In fact, the latter needed better relations between the US and Cuba to reduce the Venezuelan pressures (especially under Chavez presidency) on both local and Cuban clergy (Gayte 2013, 57). Furthermore, Catholicism is eroding in Latin America. The Holy See hopes that its role in the US-Cuba rapprochement can have a large resonance in Venezuela: because, as already seen, Cuba and Venezuela are strict allies, while 90% of Venezuelans are Catholic (Paulson 2014). These elements in addition to the cultural background of Pope Francis might convince Maduro to accept the Holy See as peacemaker to overcome the isolation of the country and the national economic crisis. In this way, the Vatican might continue its strategy, whose objectives are ascribable to defensive realism and realism respectively, to firstly keep its presence and second increase its presence in Southern America.

6.5 The future challenges of the US-Cuba relations

Despite the notable progress in the US-Cuba reconciliation, much still has to be done to reach the full normalisation of the bilateral relations. In fact, crucial issues such as the lift of the embargo and the destiny of Guantánamo Bay have not been solved yet and it will probably take a long time to change the situation.

Havana officially stated that the US has to return the Guantánamo Bay in order to completely normalise their ties (Welna 2016). As described in the historical framework, the lease of the bay was imposed by the US through the Platt Amendment. Since 1959, the Cuban government has consistently protested against this provision because it violates the sovereignty.

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\(^{14}\) It is a political position opposing both communism and capitalism.
of the country and has always refused the annual rent payment from the US (Lamrani 2015, 5). Even if Obama declared that the detention camp has to be closed, the return of this territory seems highly unlikely because the naval base is useful to the US geostrategic interests in the region.

Obama eliminated part of the economic sanctions as the US president benefits from executive privileges. In fact, during his administration, he has cut restrictions on travels, remittances, air and naval transport, Cuban-origin merchandise etc. (U.S. Department of the Treasury 2016, 3). However, the whole embargo can only be abolished through Congress approval since it is a federal law. Obama has been calling for its removal since December 17, 2014, but the lift of the embargo seems to be unlikely in the short-term for two reasons: first, the second mandate of Obama will finish in January 2017; second, the Republicans have the majority in both branches of the Congress and they are historically hostile toward Cuba. According to the Republican Reid Ribble, as reported by the Washington Post, the sanctions might end when Obama and the Castro brothers will be out of the scene because new leaders represent a new possibility (Demirjian 2016). The future of the US-Cuba thaw will also depend on the willingness of the next US president to fully normalise the bilateral ties, but according to Obama, the embargo will finish under the following presidency regardless the party of his successor (Mason 2016).

As regards Cuba, Raúl Castro announced in 2013, that he and other key senior officials will retire at the end of his second mandate in 2018. In general, the succession of the leadership has been a common problem in communist countries and the issue has not been tackled sufficiently by Cuba. In fact, the political establishment tended to promote its favourite cadres rather than choosing skilled cadres with more experience and it was reluctant to actively engage Afro-Cubans, youth and women into the leadership (LeoGrande 2015a, 400). The future Cuban establishment that will take power in 2018 is likely to be less ideological than its predecessors because its members were not part of the revolution. This factor, in addition to the “ideological contamination”, caused by the spread of the Internet and the present opening of Cuba to the world, might accelerate the economic reform process already undertaken. Other important issues that can contribute to the full normalisation of the US-Cuba ties are the stop of Radio and TV Martí transmissions and trials for those individuals living in Florida who have organised terrorist attacks against Cuba and its people (Lamrani 2015, 6).

Migration is another relevant issue. The Cuban Adjustment Act, approved by the US Congress in 1966, establishes that all the Cuban emigrants reaching the American soil obtain a permanent residence permit after one year and one day regardless the use of legal or illegal
means *(Cuban Adjustment Act 1966)*. There are no illegal Cubans in the US due to this law. The encouragement of illegal migration allows the US to appropriate valuable human capital composed of teachers and doctors to the detriment of Cuba (Lamrani 2015, 5). Throughout the decades, Cuba has repeatedly called for the end of this legislation; nevertheless, the US Senate refused to repeal it in April 2016 (Miami Herald Editorial Board 2016). It is clear that the migration issue will not be tackled in the short-run, at least, as long as Castro is in power.

6.6 Conclusion

The US and Cuba has recently sought to reappraise their relations because there has been a shift in their national interests. On the one hand, the US sees Cuba a means to reinforce its influence over Latin America and counter the increasing presence of Russia in this region and especially on the island. In fact, Moscow has signed new commercial and economic agreements with Cuba for two main reasons: firstly, expanding its power on the US doorstep is a way to respond to the NATO enlarging attempts in Eastern Europe; secondly, like in nineties, Russia and Cuba need to trade with each other to support their suffering economies. On the other hand, Cuba is searching for new commercial partners in addition to the existing ones in order to diversify its access to new markets and thus face the problems affecting its main key-partners like Venezuela. As seen above, some actors made the US-Cuba thaw possible. As concerns the internal ones, the good disposition of both Obama and Raúl Castro was essential to begin this new chapter, while the external actors, Canada and the Vatican, provided valuable mediation to favour the reconciliation between Washington and Havana.
7. FINAL CONCLUSIONS

The thesis set out to address the US-Cuba relations and the reciprocal effects on Russia, Canada and the Vatican in three distinct time periods. After having completed the entire discussion, it is now possible to draw the final conclusions. This section aims at answering the initial research questions, highlighting the main findings emerged from the use of the theories as well as the description and understanding of the main considered events.

The US, after having defeated Spain in the Cuban War of Independence in 1898 could, from this year until 1959, rely on an indisputable economic and political hegemony on Cuba. In those years, Washington imposed its decisions, like the Platt Amendment, on the small Caribbean island thanks also the collusion of the local US-friendly governments. That US-Cuba relationship could be defined as: “The strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must” (Thucydides 1951, 331). The firm refusal of this realist assumption by Fidel Castro actually drove him and his revolutionary forces in 1959 to rise up against the dictatorship of Batista supported by the Americans and their domination over Cuba. Castro put an end to this hegemony by nationalising all the US-owned companies on this island. This escalated the tensions between Washington and Havana.

The rapid decline of their relations and the strong anti-American sentiment of the revolution caught the attention of the USSR because it saw Castro as an ally to limit the US power. Cuba and Moscow restored their bilateral relations in 1960 and created a solid economic and military cooperation. Their ties diminished drastically in 1991-94 and were re-established in 1995-96. Nowadays they still are good. Hence, how did Russia act toward Cuba in the three cases? From the analysis, it has emerged that its actions were always based on the same types of defensive realist and realist frameworks. In 1962, Khrushchev ordered to deploy the MRBMs in Cuba to deter the US from attacking both the island and the USSR as its security was threatened by the Jupiter missiles in Turkey. Defensive is realism is thus evident in this decision to assure the safeguard of both countries. Realism also impacted on the installation of the MRBMs because Moscow saw them as a means to expand its global power to the detriment of the US and it hoped that the missiles would have induced the Americans to withdraw their bases from Berlin. In the middle nineties, Cuba and Russia were reunited by the shared need to survive in the international arena since their domestic economies were devastated by the fall of the USSR; therefore, they restarted trading with each other. Despite this defensive realist connotation, realism remained essential for the intentions and actions of these actors. Indeed, the Kremlin was interested in creating a multipolar world by reinforcing its ties with the island and regaining
its global influence lost after the implosion of the USSR in order to challenge the US superpower status. This wish for a multipolar world has increased in the last years and it is at the core of the Putin Doctrine which wants Russia to enlarge its influence on the former Soviet allies and recover its old role of world superpower. The doctrine is sustained by defensive realism “due to the role this plays in garnering support for the Russian regime” (Bain 2015, 167). In fact, Moscow is trying to obtain it through economic, military and institutional cooperation with Cuba. Furthermore, like in the nineties and in accordance with defensive realism, these two countries are trading with each other to aid their weak economies.

The suspension of the US-Cuba relations continued for all the Cold War era. Due to the dissolution of the USSR and the lack of assistance from the latter, Cuba ceased to represent a threat to the US in the nineties. Despite such favourable conditions for the White House, the rapprochement with Cuba was not possible and their relations even worsened. It is incredible that a positive change did not take place. Thus, why was the US-Cuba thaw impossible in the nineties after the end of the Cold War, but it has just taken place recently? In that period, it was not achievable in large part due to the weight of the American domestic politics and the ideological hostility against Cuba. As regards the first factor, CANF was very influential in the decision-making process and called for the exacerbation of the embargo on the island. In fact, it lobbied Congress to approve the CDA bill. This legislation was also endorsed by the presidential candidate Clinton who stressed the need for a more intransigent Cuban policy. Why that? Because he saw many potential electors within the Cuba-American community in Florida: according to the polls, a large part of it was in favour of stricter sanctions against the Castro government. Additionally, the anti-Cuban sentiment further rose after the Republican victory of the 1994 mid-term elections and the CLDSA bill was passed by Congress in 1996. This example confirms the veracity of the defensive realist assumption according to which the domestic politics of a state can affect its foreign policy. As concerns ideology, the American policy-makers were still obsessed with the overthrow of Castro because they have never accepted a communist leader on the US doorstep. Even if Cuba made some liberal progress in its internal economy, it modified its foreign policy and it did not represent a menace to the US anymore, they were unwilling to recognise such characteristics and pushed for more sanctions.

In the Americas, some Washington’s key commercial partners like Canada complained about the extraterritorial repercussions of the CDA and CLDSA on their firms trading with Cuba. Ottawa opposed these legislations since it considered Cuba a place to run its businesses and spread liberalism over the hemisphere. It supposed that pursuing a constructive approach toward Castro would have helped to improve its reputation among the other Latin American
governments and therefore, to enhance its regional influence. Moreover, the Holy See was against the US isolationist policy of Cuba and it considered that an international involvement of the latter would have favoured, in line with defensive realist principles, the conservation of its authority on the island. Despite the pressures by Canada and the Vatican the status quo of the US-Cuba did not mutate.

However, the historic reconciliation between Washington and Havana was only possible in 2014. The investigation demonstrated that the main causes are attributable to a change of the US interests in the Americas and the Cuban need for new commercial partners. The White House realised that it is necessary to maximise its presence in the region to counter the increasing attention on it of China and especially Russia and reinforce its present ties with the Latin American countries as they were weakened by the divergent views on the Cuban policy in the nineties. Realism is still important in the US foreign policy because it aims at expanding its regional power and pursue the Monroe Doctrine. The Cuban domestic economy is currently suffering because of the inefficiencies of its socialist system as well as the crisis of its largest ally, Venezuela. Economically speaking, Cuba has mostly relied on foreign countries during its history: Spain in the colonial years, the US from 1898 to 1959, the USSR in the Cold War and recently Venezuela (Erisman 2000, 45). This high dependency on a single country has always jeopardised the revolution when the foreign state ceased its economic support. Therefore, seeking more access to markets in the US is a means to guarantee the revolution’s survival in accordance with defensive realism. It should be noted that this objective is present in all the three cases and that since the sixties, Havana has always endeavoured to optimise its survival in the international arena (Bain and Mollinedo Fernández 2016, 262). In other words, Cuba kept this foreign policy foundation unchanged throughout the decades.

In addition to the US and Cuban motives, some key-figures made this thaw possible. Who are the actors behind it? Without doubt, the common will of the US and Cuba’s presidents provided the essential input to the new era. They also represent the internal actors of the thaw. Most significantly, Obama undertook it because normal relations with Havana will facilitate the achievement of the US regional purpose mentioned above and they will also help both countries to tackle shared problems such as terrorism. Raúl Castro sought the rapprochement because he was driven by a less hostile approach to the US than that of his brother and the Cuban need for economic partnerships with foreign countries. Furthermore, two other external actors facilitated the US-Cuba rapprochement: Canada and the Vatican. The Canadian government hosted the secret talks between them. Firstly, Ottawa pushed for this improvement because, as demonstrated in the analysis, its economy and companies are likely to benefit from
it. Secondly, this constructive approach toward Cuba confirms the same will, also observed in Chapters Four and Five, to prove the full independency of the Canadian foreign policy from the Washington’s guidelines in order to enhance its prestige and influence within the Americas. The Holy See acted as the silent mediator between the American and Cuban governments and it provided valuable diplomatic support. Over the years, its efforts to engage Cuba internationally were mostly motivated, as shown in Chapters Five and Six, by its necessity to maintain and increase the Catholic presence on the island, in accordance with defensive realism, but also by its increasing interest in the large number of believers living in Latin America. The Vatican is aware that its contribution to the thaw is very appealing to them and therefore, it is likely to strengthen its authority in this key-region. This last objective, thus, shows a realist aspect of the Vatican foreign policy.

In conclusion, one can assert that the US and Cuba made notable progress after fifty years marked by tensions and mutual opposition. In spite of the positive steps, it should be emphasised that these two countries are still far from a complete normalisation of their bilateral relations. In fact, their future is uncertain because both Washington and Havana are going to have new presidential leaderships in 2017-18, while the destiny of the embargo and Guantánamo Bay have not been decided yet. The views on the reconciliation of the next American and Cuban presidents could represent a stimulating topic for further academic research.

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