

Title VIII Combined Research and Language Training Program

Final Report – Research Findings

During my time in Moscow, I conducted research at the State Archive of the Russian Federation (GARF), the Russian State Archive of Contemporary History (RGANI), and the Foreign Policy Archive of the Russian Federation (AVPRF). I found a wealth of interesting material that has helped me to refine the scope of my Ph.D. dissertation. In addition, the language training component of the program was extraordinarily helpful. My Russian language skills improved tremendously over the course of the nine months I spent in Moscow. The most noticeable improvement was in the pace and ease with which I was able to read documents while working in the archives. Now that I am familiar with the types of documents that are available to researchers in Moscow, I have clarified the focus of my dissertation.

Unlikely Allies: The Soviet Union and Latin America in the Cold War

In 1954, Soviet representatives at the United Nations delivered a stinging rebuke to the “American imperialists” for their blatant meddling in the domestic affairs of a sovereign nation. The Agitprop Department of the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party (CPSU) launched a campaign to maximize the propaganda potential of the CIA-engineered coup that overthrew the democratically elected government of Jacobo Arbenz in Guatemala. Using trade unions, international societies, and most importantly, the U.N., the Soviets disseminated a vision of U.S. economic imperialism against which was contrasted their own unstinting respect for the principle of non-

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intervention in the internal affairs of sovereign states. It was the first time that the Soviets used the United Nations as a forum for developing an extended critique of U.S. policy toward Latin America, but it would hardly be the last. In fact, the Soviets consistently used international organizations to foment anti-American sentiment in Latin America and to portray themselves as the true friends to nations suffering under the burden of U.S. imperialism. To a surprising extent, the Soviet narrative of the causes and consequences of U.S. Cold War interventionism in Latin America has survived in contemporary scholarship.

My dissertation will accomplish three main objectives. The first is to shed light on a previously under-examined arena of competition between the United States and the Soviet Union – international organizations, and in particular, the United Nations. The second major goal of my work is to examine the international policy agendas of Latin American states that sought to exercise regional influence. The third objective of my dissertation is to explore the impact of a series of watershed moments on regional alliances and solidarity. I will illuminate shifts in the balance of power within international organizations as a result of the following developments: the CIA-sponsored coup that overthrew Arbenz in 1954, the rise to power of Fidel Castro and his regime's concomitant alliance with the Soviet Union, the rise and fall of Salvador Allende in Chile, and the Sandinista victory in Nicaragua's civil war. For their part, the Soviets clearly understood the gravity with which the United States approached the cultivation of hemispheric solidarity and consciously sought to undermine it by providing moral and material support for Latin American regimes that pursued an independent foreign policy. As early as 1953, the Soviets were actively working to improve the content and

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effectiveness of propaganda intended for the countries of Latin America – to portray the United States as a militarist and exploitative imperial hegemon against which was contrasted their own policy of peaceful coexistence and adherence to the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of sovereign nations.

Latin American regimes, on the other hand, seem to have been motivated by a complex combination of considerations in pursuing closer relations with the Soviets. In a political and symbolic sense, the establishment of formal diplomatic relations with the USSR was a clear indication of an intention to pursue a foreign policy course independent from that of the United States. Especially as the non-aligned movement and the concept of the Third World as a political bloc gained traction, some Latin American leaders seized the initiative in identifying their countries with the political aspirations of newly decolonizing nations. In more concrete terms, the economic difficulties facing Latin American countries led to a desire to widen trade relations with the countries of the socialist camp and to seek financial aid from the Soviets in a bid to mitigate their economic dependence on the United States.

Arbenz's regime in Guatemala was one of the earliest examples of this striving to achieve independence in the realm of foreign policy and to break away from subservience to U.S. international policy goals. Arbenz was more influenced by communist ideology than has typically been acknowledged. Although Arbenz himself was not a communist, some of his most influential advisers were, and he made repeated overtures to the Soviets. During the years of Arbenz's tenure as president of Guatemala, the Guatemalan Communist Party (PGT) was fiercely anti-American. Although Guatemala had not established formal diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union, the Soviets used their

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embassy in Mexico to stay abreast of developments in neighboring countries. The embassy composed a detailed report of the PGT's second congress. In preparation for the congress, General Secretary Manuel Fortuny penned a report in which he described the United States as a fascist police state and accused the "American imperialists" of carrying out "terrorist acts" against the workers and "democratic movements" of several countries of the world. Fortuny also detailed the history and future prospects for U.S. interference in the internal affairs of Latin American nations. The fundamental goal of aggressive U.S. policies, according to Fortuny, was to halt economic development in these countries and to thwart the struggle for national liberation. "Pan-Americanism," "anti-communism," and "continental security" were merely empty slogans used as a pretext for overthrowing progressive leaders and replacing them with obedient and repressive dictators.¹

In the early 1950s, the Agitation and Propaganda Department of the CPSU Central Committee capitalized on the Red Scare in the United States and the effects of McCarthyism to portray the country as a fascist state. Against this depiction was contrasted the Soviet striving for peace and international security, and the supreme respect for democracy exhibited by the entire socialist camp. The Soviet Information Bureau tendentiously relayed events in the United States back to Moscow, frequently emphasizing the "aggressive foreign policy" of the U.S. and its attempts to prevent the dissolution of international tensions.² Sovinformburo officials characterized the U.S. domestic atmosphere as increasingly fascistic, with the "ruling circles" conspiring to weaken civil liberties and destroy progressive organizations and Soviet sympathizers.³

¹ RGANI, Fond 5, opis' 28, delo 48, pp. 15-17

² RGANI, fond 5, opis' 28, delo 192, p. 198.

³ Ibid.

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Committees and subcommittees of the U.S. Congress, along with executive branch agencies, under the pretext of investigating subversive and anti-American activity, were in fact attempting to further inflame the “anti-Soviet and anticommunist hysteria in the country.”⁴

This propaganda line may have been encouraged by the communist parties of the countries of Latin America. The rhetoric of these communist parties was in line with the rhetoric issuing from Moscow; where it originated and which direction the influence flowed from can be only speculated upon. I would suggest that Soviet propagandists developed the general leitmotif of American fascism and imperialism, while the Latin American communists supplied the details about the shape that U.S. imperialism assumed in the western hemisphere. In any case, the Soviets were certainly influenced to some degree by the denunciations of U.S. economic imperialism that rang out from communist party platforms in Latin America. On the other hand, one of the most consistent themes in the Latin American communists’ messages likely originated in Moscow – the linkage of the Latin American struggle for independence with the struggles of other nations straining under the burden of western imperialism. Germany was a case in point. The Brazilian communist party accused the United States of “aggressive imperialism” and claimed that the United States was attempting to enslave the peoples of West Germany.⁵ The fate of Germany was so far removed from the practical concerns of Latin Americans that its inclusion in the agendas of Latin American communists was almost certainly a gesture of deference to Moscow.

⁴ Ibid., 205.

⁵ RGANI, fond 5, opis’ 28, delo 193, 162.

The Soviets carefully monitored the proceedings of associations assumed to be either directed by or affiliated with the U.S. government, including journalists' associations, labor organizations, and even Latin American political parties. In what is perhaps a revealing assumption, the CPSU Central Committee assumed that even supposedly "non-governmental" organizations were created and funded by the U.S. Department of State. Many front organizations existed for the purpose of furthering progressive goals in Latin America. These included women's associations, trade unions, youth groups, and peace committees. The World Federation of Trade Unions came under communist control and served the foreign policy interests of the Soviet Union, as was clear in its 1953 exhortation to the workers of the world to unite in solidarity with the Vietnamese people and call for the immediate cessation of the colonial war in Vietnam, led by "French colonizers with the support of American monopolists."⁶ The union branch in Guatemala called on its members to tie the issue of colonial war in Vietnam with the struggle for Guatemalan independence.⁷

Other radical leftist trade unions, particularly the Confederation of Workers of Latin America, were an excellent source of information for Soviet propagandists. It is likely that the Agitprop Department of the CPSU Central Committee availed itself of this information to develop and refine its anti-U.S. propaganda platform directed toward the countries of Latin America. The Confederation of Workers sharply criticized the United States and the "Yankee monopolies" that dominated the economies of the western hemisphere, designating the "North American imperialists" as the common enemy. They exhorted members to struggle for economic justice and touted the "international

⁶ RGANI, fond 5, opis' 28, delo 192, 2.

⁷ Ibid., 21.

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solidarity” that had strengthened in favor of the labor movement as a result of the “bloody terror” in Guatemala.⁸

In the early 1950s, the Agitprop Department of the CPSU Central Committee, perhaps in part responding to the initiative of Latin American communists, stressed the importance of improving Soviet propaganda capabilities and effectiveness in the western hemisphere. The Telegraph Agency of the Soviet Union (TASS), which collected and distributed all official news, embarked on a concerted effort of reform and refinement of its information-gathering facilities in Latin America. Orlando Millas, editor of *El Siglo*, the official newspaper of the Chilean communist party, helped spur this initiative with his direct request for TASS to expedite and expand translations into Spanish of newsworthy developments in the Soviet bloc. Millas complained that because U.S. information distribution outlets were so much more effective, the majority of Latin Americans learned about the Soviet Union and its allies from news media that reflected the anti-communist and anti-Soviet biases of the United States. Although Millas’s letter was directed to the Central Committee, it was quickly passed onto the head of TASS, who developed a series of measures to improve the agency’s work in Latin America.⁹

The Soviet Information Bureau, tasked with developing and disseminating propaganda in foreign countries, also emphasized the necessity of enhancing its capabilities in Latin America. Sovinformburo representatives in Argentina, who began work there in the beginning of September 1954, relayed to the Agitprop Department the wide scope of the “North American propaganda apparatus” and proposed a convention of Sovinformburo leaders in Latin America to develop methods for increasing the quantity

⁸ RGANI, fond 5, opis’ 28, delo 253, pp. 223 & 226.

⁹ RGANI, fond 5, opis’ 28, delo 193, 202-203.

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and veracity of information about the USSR in the “bourgeois press” in Mexico, Uruguay, and Argentina.¹⁰

The early 1950s thus witnessed a transformation in the Soviet approach to Latin America. Working through Soviet embassies, Latin American communist parties, non-governmental organizations, trade unions, and front groups, the Soviets carefully monitored developments on the continent and diligently built up its propaganda apparatus. Perhaps most significantly, in the wake of the coup that overthrew Arbenz, the Soviets mastered the use of the United Nations as an international forum for ideological competition with the United States. This involved not only the dispensation of propaganda but also attempts to cultivate solidarity with Latin American countries suffering under the burden of “U.S. imperialism” as well as with the newly independent countries of Africa and Asia. This approach gained momentum after 1955, when the Bandung conference exhibited the developing trend toward Third World solidarity.

With the rise to power of Castro and the concomitant development of an alliance with the Soviet Union, the balance of power in the western hemisphere shifted dramatically. The Soviets now had a reliably anti-American friend in the region and a base from which to expand their influence. Cuban overtures to the USSR occurred earlier than is generally acknowledged in the historical literature. The orthodox interpretation of Castro’s turn toward communism argues that it was driven by U.S. hostility. However, I found evidence at AVPRF that the Cuban embassy in Mexico had turned to the Soviets in the first days of the revolution, with fulsome praise for the results of the socialist

¹⁰ RGANI, fond 5, opis’ 28, delo 193, 212-213 & 219-221.

experiment in the USSR and with requests for unofficial negotiations on establishing economic and even diplomatic relations.¹¹ U.S. hostility did, however, spur the Soviets to provide certain military guarantees to Castro, which resulted in one of the most well-documented Cold War episodes – the Cuban Missile Crisis. In the aftermath of the crisis, Soviet-Cuban relations were damaged, but not irreparably. Despite Castro’s sense of being “sold out” by Khrushchev, Cuba remained well-entrenched in the Soviet bloc and was one of Moscow’s most loyal and consistent allies.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, however, the Soviets and the Cubans did not always see eye to eye and Castro attempted to mediate between the sometimes conflicting imperatives of adhering to the Soviet Communist Party line and establishing his own role as a leader of the Third World. Cuba, despite being clearly aligned with the Soviet bloc, was influential in the non-aligned movement and the Soviets capitalized on this influence to promote their own objectives. On the other hand, Moscow’s ideological adherence to the viability of a “peaceful path” to socialism led to an attempt to distance itself from the negative consequences of Cuba’s support for armed insurgencies. Castro’s attempts to export the revolution unsettled other Latin American regimes and created conflict within inter-regional organizations like the Organization of American States. Shifts in the hemispheric balance of power during this period were thus largely driven by Castro’s regional and international ambitions.

With the coming to power of a leftist military junta in Peru headed by General Juan Velasco, and the election of Salvador Allende in Chile, the Soviets were not only enthralled with the opportunities this progressive regional bloc afforded but also

¹¹ AVPRF, fond 110, opis’ 19, papka 43, delo 5.

vindicated in their fidelity to the concept of socialist revolution through democratic methods. The tide in Latin America seemed to be turning. As early as 1954, Salvador Allende, then vice president of the Chilean Senate, during a visit to the USSR, told the assistant director of the Latin American department of the All-Union Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries (VOKS) that he hoped to be received by a high-ranking government official, because as president of the Chilean Popular Front, he considered the establishment of diplomatic and economic relations with the USSR to be one of his chief tasks.¹² He also openly stated that he hoped to achieve major political successes as a result of his visit to the USSR and the People's Republic of China.¹³ Soviet officials noted that Allende had recently taken a hard left turn and that his positions had evolved from moderate socialism to an identification with communism. The communist members of the Chilean delegation felt that Allende's travels around the USSR contributed heavily to the evolution of his "personal political views" as well as those prevailing within the Popular Front.¹⁴ This evidence flies in the face of the contention – a common one among historians – that Allende was more of a social democrat than a Marxist, and that communist ideology did not play a significant role in his political development.

A constellation of leftist regimes in the western hemisphere – Allende's Chile, Castro's Cuba, Velasco's Peru, and even to some extent Peronist Argentina and Echeverria's Mexico – reliably supported the USSR's international policy agenda in the United Nations and actively opposed U.S. initiatives. Peruvian and Chilean delegations at the U.N. and the Organization of American States lobbied for the inclusion of Cuba in

¹² RGANI, fond 5, opis' 28, delo 193, p. 146.

¹³ Ibid., 147.

¹⁴ RGANI, fond 5, opis' 28, delo 251, 180-181.

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inter-regional organizations and encouraged the re-establishment of diplomatic relations between Cuba and the Latin American countries that had previously severed their relations with Havana. Mexico had maintained diplomatic relations with Cuba despite intense U.S. pressure to isolate Castro. As Soviet relations with the United States improved and the much-touted policy of détente began to yield results, the progressive regimes of the western hemisphere amplified efforts to forge continental solidarity and to exert influence within the non-aligned movement. This translated into a rhetorical identification with the Third World and a proliferation of inter-regional organizations designed to develop and defend common positions on foreign and economic policy.

Unfortunately for the Soviets, this progressive moment proved to be short-lived. In the wake of General Pinochet's coup, the creation of the National Security Doctrine, which aimed to eliminate communist influence on the continent, and the increasing cooperation of the intelligence agencies of the countries of the southern cone, led to the consolidation of a new and fiercely anti-communist regional alliance. The Soviets spearheaded a campaign to promote a narrative of U.S. imperial dominance, creating organizations dedicated to international propaganda work and spreading an interpretation of events that continues to hold sway in the public imagination. Accusing the CIA of directing the junta, the committee consistently cited Allende's independent foreign policy as one of the main reasons for U.S. opposition to his regime. Under the aegis of non-governmental organizations that were ultimately beholden to the dictates of the party, the Soviets worked through the U.N. not only to encourage anti-American sentiment, but to publicize the human rights violations perpetrated by the military junta and to pressure the international community into taking concrete steps to isolate Pinochet's regime.

The Soviet Committee for Solidarity with the Chilean Democrats was one such organization. At GARF, I examined the collection of documentation that the committee produced. In speeches, protocols, press releases, and reports prepared for both domestic and international audiences, the committee emphasized a few key themes. One of the primary themes was Allende's independent foreign policy and the increasing stature of Chile's leadership in the international arena. There were three aspects of Allende's foreign policy orientation that alienated the United States: his vocal opposition to "U.S. imperialism," his active pursuit of relations with the Soviet Union and the other countries of the socialist camp, and his regime's support for national liberation movements in other countries of the western hemisphere. The committee prevailed upon the United Nations to pressure Pinochet to release political prisoners and restore civil liberties. Moreover, the committee used the U.N. as a forum to exhort the international community to isolate the junta by severing diplomatic relations and imposing an economic embargo.¹⁵

In sum, an examination of this period leads to several important conclusions. Despite Castro's fidelity to the Soviet party line in the Sino-Soviet ideological dispute over revolutionary socialism, his own regional and even international ambitions forced him to contend with the conflicting imperatives of establishing himself as a leader of the Third World and proving his loyalty to his Soviet patrons. Moscow was shrewd in its approach to Castro's aspirations – confident of unwavering Cuban support for the USSR's international policy agenda, Soviet officials saw much to gain in the increase of Castro's prestige and cache among other influential leaders of the non-aligned movement. Moreover, by the time of Allende's overthrow in September 1973, the Soviets had

¹⁵ GARF, fond 9644.

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become adept in their use of the United Nations as an ideological platform that could be used to shape the narrative of current events. Through the skillful manipulation of international opinion, Soviet diplomats and propagandists crafted and circulated a chronicle of events in which a progressive, democratic, and independent leader had become the victim of the depredations of the CIA, plotting on behalf of predatory U.S. corporate interests. A measure of the success of Soviet propaganda is the degree to which this narrative continues to enjoy favor today, not only in the public imagination but in the assumptions and arguments of academic historians.

With the Sandinista victory in Nicaragua's civil war, and the Reagan administration's determination to roll back the tide of communist influence in Central America, the Soviets dramatically escalated their efforts to cultivate support among the countries of the western hemisphere. This involved a propaganda campaign to convince the world that the Reagan administration was intentionally aggravating the situation in Central America in order to justify the ever-increasing U.S. military presence there. Moreover, despite the fact that there had been a KGB presence in Nicaragua since the birth of the Sandinista revolutionary movement in the early 1960s, the Soviet propaganda line strenuously denied that Moscow was even peripherally involved in the region beyond the routine affairs of its ambassadors. The Soviet delegation to the United Nations bruted the same themes: the USSR firmly supported the principles of self-determination and non-interference in the domestic affairs of sovereign nations, while the United States aggressively intervened in the Caribbean, under the pretext of "anti-communism" and

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“hemispheric security” but with the ulterior motive of using inflamed regional tensions as a Trojan horse for the installation of even more U.S. military bases.¹⁶

The success of the Sandinistas had much the same effect as the Cuban revolution in reviving the optimism of Soviet leaders regarding the revolutionary potential of Latin America. Moscow was thus keen on ensuring that its new allies in the region remained in power. Soviet diplomats used all of the resources at their disposal to cultivate the goodwill of Latin American regimes and to convince them of Moscow’s benevolent intentions in the region. This took the form of parliamentary contacts, enhanced communication between Soviet delegates to the U.N. and their counterparts from the countries of the western hemisphere, and a sustained international propaganda blitz painting the United States as a brutal imperial aggressor. In the initial period of the Sandinista revolution, Moscow took a backseat to Havana and was content with providing the bulk of economic assistance and military hardware. However, as the Sandinista leadership became more frustrated with Castro’s excessive demands, they sought a more balanced position and Moscow gained influence at Havana’s expense. An examination of this period can thus shed light not only on regional dynamics during a period of revolutionary tumult, but also on the rivalries within the socialist camp.

I am currently writing an article for submission to either *Diplomatic History* or the *Journal of Cold War Studies*, both of which are peer-reviewed and leaders in the field of international history. The article focuses on Soviet-Latin American relations during the early 1950s and on the Soviet use of the United Nations as a propaganda conduit to

¹⁶ AVPRF, fond 114, opis’ 23, papka 3, delo 3.

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castigate the United States for the CIA's role in engineering the overthrow of Guatemala's Jacobo Arbenz. This article will eventually be the first chapter of my dissertation. I plan to conduct research at the Organization of American States in Washington, D.C. and the United Nations in New York City in order to better understand the Soviet approach to international organizations.

Additionally, I hope to travel to Mexico City, Santiago de Chile, and Buenos Aires to conduct archival research. Mexico, Chile, and Argentina were regional powerhouses with strong leaders who sought to exercise influence throughout the hemisphere as well as within the framework of the non-aligned movement. If my Fulbright-Hays application is successful, I can pursue this research, which will be so critical to my dissertation, and will allow me to answer important questions that have not been adequately addressed in the extant historical scholarship on Cold War Latin America. In its final form, my dissertation will be a useful source of information for policymakers interested in the interplay of local, regional, and international dynamics and the ways in which the United Nations and other international organizations became a Cold War battlefield.