

An Example of Engagement:

Cuba and the United States

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On December 18th, 2014, the adversarial relationship between Cuba and the United States took a sudden turn when President Obama announced a thawing of relations. Cuba and the United States have essentially been in conflict since the Platt Amendment of 1901. The conflict was crystalized during the 1959 Revolution in Cuba, in which Fidel Castro overthrew the American supported leader Fulgencio Batista. Between the 1959 Revolution until the fall of the Soviet Union, the Cuba/US relationship played an integral role in the global balance of power. Like many other proxy nations throughout the Cold War, Cuba was the battle ground for ideological warfare between Communism and Capitalism; and at one point it was the testing ground for deterrence. With this history, many believed repairing relations after so many years between the two neighboring nations was both inevitable but also entirely unimaginable.

This paper will look at the historical event of December 18th, 2014, through the eyes of conflict resolution. First, it will define the state of negative peace that existed prior to the announcement. The paper will then discuss the concept of positive peace and peace building, so that examples of each can be identified. Finally, the paper will look at the context in which negotiations between Obama and Raul took place. The paper will highlight important signals and gestures from each side, as well as highlight the Pope's important role as mediator in peace building.

Defining Peace

Peace is defined in many ways and through many lenses, whether through religion or spirituality, scholarly study or cultural practice. Johan Galtung established a framework in which conflict resolution can operate by making a distinction between two states of peace, a state of negative peace and a state of positive peace. Negative peace can be defined as the "absence of war" (Barash & Webel, 2014, p. 4). The state of negative peace notably does not include any actions between adversaries. Rather it is the negative space that is created between them at the moment the fighting ceases. Thus, it is not a state of growth towards building a relationship

between the sides, rather it is the establishment of a clear demarcation, such as the call for a cease fire or the establishment of a buffer zone. In the realists perspective peace is defined as negative peace. In this perspective they state that peace has been achieved when there is no organized military engagement between nations. With this definition once opposing sides do not necessarily have an amicable relationship, instead the relationship has been suspended in animation. Barash and Webel quote a realist definition of negative peace from the 20th century intellectual Raymond Aron, “peace as a condition of ‘more or less lasting suspension of rivalry between political units’” (2014, p. 6). This in many ways describes the relationship between Cuba and the United States between 1959 until 2014, in which a lasting suspension of rivalry existing for roughly fifty years.

The concept of positive peace refers to “the simultaneous presence of many desirable states of mind and society, such as harmony, justice, equity, and so on” (2014, p. 4). Similar to negative peace, positive peace is a description of a state. In negative peace there is no action whereas in order to reach the complete state of positive peace action is required. These actions must be based on building a new relationship between adversaries. In other words one builds towards positive peace by repairing and redefining the relationship of former adversaries.

Approaches to Conflict Resolution

There are varying ways to address a conflict. Realists see conflict as something to be managed and thus they will often take security oriented actions, such as “wars, espionage, and sanctions, often in tandem with diplomacy” (Barash & Webel, 2014, p. 271). Realists will see conflict as inevitable and thus will be more likely to take offensive actions. Their primary goal is to protect their territory and their interests, in order to do this they will likely see security through the relative strength of their fire power. There is a consistent compulsion to gain advantage over the other, at times this may mean building alliances as a balance of power. Within this perspective lies the concept of peace through strength, in which there is a commitment to

military force (Barash & Webel, 2014, p. 355). According to this perspective, one must use non-peaceful means in order to achieve peace, meaning peace comes at the cost of violence.

The peace oriented perspective addresses conflict in non-violent mean. This view acknowledges that conflict may be a part of the human condition, however the level of harm we are able to inflict on one another is our responsibility to manage. Furthermore, this perspective sees conflict as something that should be prevented if possible, rather than prepared for. As an example of how the peace oriented perspective conceptualize the role of individual peace workers, Barash and Webel quote the researcher Kenneth Boulding, writing that peace workers “make the world safe for conflict” (Barash & Webel, 2014, p. 271). Examples of this can be seen in the work through the 1970 Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). To date 191 states have joined the treaty, making it one of the best examples of addressing conflict through multilateral and peace oriented actions (“Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) – UNODA,” n.d.).

The Cuban Missile Crisis is a good example of security oriented conflict management by way of peace through strength. This crisis was the culmination of adversaries who were compelled to increase their military strength in the form of a nuclear arms race, leading to a situation in which the theory of deterrence was tested on Cuban soil. This crisis is a further example of how the concept of peace through strength, in which the world order is maintained by military might, can create side effects which quickly become unmanageable. Furthermore, as Barash and Webel warn in the case of the Crisis, “since the underlying reasons for the conflict [were] not addressed or resolved, hostilities [could] resume at a later time” (2014, p. 271). By resolving this conflict and by preventing nuclear war, President Kennedy and Premier Khrushchev’s actions worked toward a state of negative peace. The conflict was managed for the time being and thus in the eyes of a realist “peace” was achieved. However, no effort was made

to change the nature of the relationship, either the relationship between the US and the USSR nor the relationship between the US and Cuba, and so further conflict could be seen as inevitable.

US/Cuba Relationship and the Power of Nationalism

For much of the next five decades the Cuban and US relationship was suspended in animation. Efforts to reframe the relationship were essentially non-existent. Instead peace through strength was the modus operandi. The fall of the Soviet Union did not result in an opening of diplomatic relations, instead the two sides stuck to their ideological camps, and so the United States maintained a foreign policy of extreme sanctions, non-engagement and isolation, while the Cuban government maintained a policy of defiance and resistance to imperialism. Both sides views were rooted in nationalism and preservation of the respective national identities. Conflicts that are rooted in nationalism can be extremely damaging due to the entrenched nature of the national identity. Any concession can be seen as treason to the state. Nationalism has no limit to how many lives can be lost on either side of a conflict, there is no point at which it can be said that enough is enough; the nation is holy, untouchable and above human life (Class lecture, 10/23/17).

Therefore, rooted in their nationalist ideologies, all policies between the nations ensured a maintenance of negative peace between the two. And as was noted earlier, from the realists perspective this negative peace is understood as peace. But in the positive peace and peace oriented perspective, since the two sides did not take any steps toward reframing the relationship in order to prevent future conflict, peace had yet to exist in any real form. Instead the US policy towards Cuba would remain “a policy based largely on confrontation and isolation (Mckenna, 2004, p. 283). After the Cold War ended, the United States was itself isolated in this policy approach. While American allies agreed with the United States on their policy objective, to move Cuba toward a system of democracy and increase the standard of human rights for all, they were

largely against the US approach. While allies such as Canada, the European Union and Mexico all maintained policies rooted in “constructive engagement” (Mckenna, 2004, p. 283).

The Shift

Barash and Webel reflect that “one of the pervasive myths of our current culture of militarism is that war and preparation for war are ‘natural,’ unavoidable phenomena, whereas peace and conflict resolution strategies are hopelessly unrealistic” (2014, p. 272). This defines the relationship between Cuba and the United States well, in that it has been a long term assumption that these two proud nations would naturally remain in a state of conflict, and that any break from this norm towards a peaceful relationship was hopelessly unrealistic. It may not be entirely ironic that the US President who eventually accomplished this unrealistic move campaigned on the concept of hope.

In April of 2009, the newly elected President Obama announced at a summit of the Organization of American States that the United States was ready to engage with Cuba (Barrionuevo, 2009). The use of a summit meeting for such an announcement is fitting. Summits can represent the productive nature of engagement and in the case of the OAS, the productive nature of multilateral arrangements. The OAS however plays an especially integral role to the conflict between the United States and Cuba, in that Cuba was excluded from the organization in 1962 – this was part of the American policy of isolation towards Cuba. Calls for Cuba’s invitation back into the organization had become pervasive by the time of the 2009 announcement. And US officials were frustrated with the topic’s ability to derail carefully planned agendas.

Up until this moment in 2009 the two sides were engaged in what could be called “positional bargaining.” This is when “each side stakes out a position and then holds to it” (Barash & Webel, 2014, p. 283). Each leader is thus rewarded for sticking to their side, and penalized publicly for showing flexibility in any way. If either a previous US president or either

of the Castro brothers were seen to concede, it was expected that their respective citizenry would revolt against them. In 2009, both sides showed their willingness to engage, while still maintaining their positions, an attempt perhaps to hold onto their legitimacy. McKenna argued during President George W. Bush's first time that there was no real incentive to change the US policy of isolation given the power of domestic politics (2004). Prior to 2009, any engagement between leaders of either nation was conditioned on certain demands of policy change. In 2009, the presidents were willing for whatever reason to risk appearing weak and choose engagement first.

Obama's announcement signaled his reconciliation of the past, openness for the future, as well as assertiveness of a renewed role for the United States in the region. He acknowledged the long journey the two nations had taken to overcome "decades of mistrust," and that engagement on important issues such as human rights and freedom of speech as well as migration and the economy were necessary. However, he noted that with this redefined relationship between the two nations, the United States could no longer play the role of scapegoat, he declared that "we can't blame the United States for every problem that arises in the hemisphere...that's part of the bargain. That's the old way, and we need a new way" (Barrionuevo, 2009). This bargain is essential to the negotiation and to the process of building positive peace. For Obama, he was declaring the need to make this new relationship benefit the United States, as he saw the role of the country in the region being reduced to scapegoat and villain. This allowed Obama to show his assertiveness, which was important for those at home.

Raul Castro took a very similar strong man approach to this announcement of engagement. He said "we are willing to discuss everything, human rights, freedom of press, political prisoners, everything, everything, everything they want to talk about, but as equals, without the smallest shadow cast on our sovereignty, and without the slightest violation of the

Cuban people's right to self-determination” (Barrionuevo, 2009). Raul asserted his continued sovereign power, making the rules of the engagement clear from the start.

As expected Obama did receive a push back from the domestic political opposition. The Florida delegation saw him as weak, and demanded for a return to a state of positional bargaining. Senator Menendez stated he would “not tolerate significant changes in American policy without significant changes in Cuba” (Thompson, 2009). In May, one month after the announcement lawmakers wrote to the president demanding that “The Obama administration should first insist that the Castro dictatorship [comply] with the accord before renewing talks,” and that “regrettably, this constitutes another unilateral concession by the Obama administration to the dictatorship” (Thompson, 2009). While the President may have been going against the wishes of some members of his government, it is not entirely clear how his actions were unilateral in a global sense. Firstly, considering the repeated demands from members of the OAS to reinstate Cuba. In fact, two weeks after this letter El Salvador restored diplomatic relations with Cuba, leaving the United States as the only country in the Americas without ties to the island nation (Lander, 2009). And secondly, the fact that the US policy towards Cuba was unique among its allies, no other nation took the same approach of isolation. Therefore, in many ways the Obama announcement moved the US away from unilateral policy towards multilateral policy.

Mediation – the role of the Pope and Catholicism

Secret talks were hosted by Canada and mediated by Pope Francis for the 18 months leading up to the official announcement in December 2014. Canada provided a neutral zone for both parties, and the Pope represented the neutral mediator. Furthermore, the Pope instigated the start to the talks, he personally wrote both leaders which “helped to catalyze the reconciliation” (Dwight, 2015, p. 7). These conditions alone however cannot explain why the negotiations were so successful. Emma Dwight writes in the Harvard International Review that “it is only openness

to discussion, negotiation, and cooperation that will bring Cuba the economic benefits, and most importantly, the human rights improvements, that are so desperately needed” (Dwight, 2015, p. 7). In order for these talks to be a success, the participants needed to make those three commitments to: openness to discussion, negotiation and cooperation. Dwight cites moments in history such as Nixon’s opening relations with China, when making a commitment to openness was a brave and bold action, but led to what many believed to be positive outcomes.

Why and how the participants got to a place where they were able to make the commitments listed by Dwight is important to consider. According to Johnathan Powell – the chief negotiator for the Northern Ireland talks in 1998 – there are two conditions that should be met for any successful peace negotiation. The first condition is a state of mutual hurting, or a stalemate. In Cuba’s case, the economy was greatly harmed by the US embargo (or as they call it in Cuba the blockade). For the US, the embargo did not serve the US economy in any way, and the frustration coming from the regional partners was emerging as a serious concern. For this condition, it is important to note that both sides must believe the conflict cannot be won through force alone. In this case, the US had attempted to forcefully alter the Cuban political situation many times over the years, but it had failed so often that this was not an option again.

The second condition “is strong leadership from both parties that hold power to follow through on any concessions made in the course of negotiations” (Dwight, 2015, p. 8). Raul Castro had assumed his brother’s position as leader of Cuba in 2008, with this change in leadership came welcomed changes in national policy in Cuba. Barack Obama was elected with a mandate for change in 2008, and elected to his second term in office in 2012.

In addition to these commitments and these perfect conditions, the role of the mediator should not be under appreciated. Many attribute the success of the negotiations to the peacemaking power of Pope Francis. Popes have long be involved in international political matters, to varying degrees of controversy. According to some, such as Dwight, Pope Francis

represents the long tradition of Popes as peacemakers. However, according to others such as José Azel of the World Affairs, Popes throughout time have interjected themselves into politics as a way of usurping power. Azel rights that “from the beginning of the conflict between individual rights and unlimited authority the Church sided with authority. It is a position that, with notable exceptions, has characterized the Church’s conduct in state affairs to this day” (Azel, 2015, pp. 21–22).

According to Dwight the efficacy of the Vatican in peacemaking is directly attributed to their ability “to play the long game” (Dwight, 2015, p. 9). Popes are not subject to term limits and thus they are able to have patience and allow for situations to evolve, waiting for the appropriate moment to intervene. Dwight awards Pope Francis an esteemed place in peacemaking, perhaps not entirely in the fashion of playing the long game. He has shown a concerted effort at building bridges around the world, and “even more so than his predecessors” Dwight notes that Francis “is audacious in his pursuit of peace” (Dwight, 2015, p. 9).

Furthermore, it is important to highlight the role of Catholicism in Cuba in the peacemaking process. In 2008, Raul Castro began to loosen restrictions on religion throughout the country, signifying a significant shift in policy for the Cuban government. This allowed the Catholic Church to emerge from decades in the shadows. A majority of Cubans are Catholic, and so for many years this was a large repressed portion of population. One may assume that the Catholic population would welcome the Pope’s leadership in guiding the reconciliation between the Cuban government and the US government. However, according to Dwight, Catholic Cuban Americans were especially hurt by the key role the Pope played in the talks. As a former political prisoner is quoted saying “I am still a Catholic till the day I die, but I am a Catholic without a pope” (Dwight, 2015, p. 7). Negotiation with the Cuban government is seen by so many involved in the conflict as an unforgivable offense, even after generations of limited progress in either direction.

There is a disconnect between the public opinion among the Catholic Cuban American community as Dwight has described it, and actions taken by Raul Castro since he has entered office. By allowing for religion to emerge from the shadows, one would assume there would be a reaction of celebration and hope for a continued change. By accepting the Pope as a mediator, Raul Castor was recognizing the Church as legitimate. One would assume that Cuban Americans would welcome this gesture. It would appear this is not the case.

Azel continuously points to Pope Francis' recognition and apparent support of the left as an example of why his actions should not be trusted. This opinion bares a resemblance to those of the Catholic Cuban Americans, who see any collaboration with the Cuban government has an acceptance of the communist regime and thus indefensible. Azel argues that Pope Francis is more swayed by the Cuban government's position than the US by highlighting certain portions of Francis' book that speak of the ills of neoliberal capitalism and importance of shared solidarity. He writes "that shared solidarity appears to be with the nondemocratic, illegitimate authority in Cuba and not with the people" (Azel, 2015, p. 25) He further argues that Francis has a history a supporter of the radical left guerilla movements of the past. His final message uses fear as a tactic, highlighting the threats to security that will be brought on by openness between the two nations, and that security is only truly achieved through close borders:

The president's new policy has legitimized a totalitarian-military regime in the eyes of the world, and particularly in the eyes of Latin America. By opening the door to an oppressive regime that violates human rights with abandon, the president has reversed America's longstanding support for democratic governance in the region. Would-be dictators and their sycophants now know that suppressing civil liberties is not particularly troubling to the United States-and certainly not detrimental to good diplomatic and commercial relations. (Azel, 2015, p. 28)

Azel's final word is an example of many key points in conflict resolution. First, when engagement is seen as weak. Second, a varying definition of human rights. Third, fear of a domino affect when legitimizing certain types of regimes. And finally, advocating for diplomacy only when certain requirements are met – positional bargaining – instead of diplomacy to work towards those requirements.

The split between opinions such as between Dwight and Azel, truly reflect the deep nature of the conflict in Cuba that has raged for generations. This conflict between the revolutionaries and those who oppose the revolution is at the core of every Cuban, and as well as the outsiders who often find themselves strongly supporting one side or the other. It is these types of rooted disagreements that are the hardest to overcome, making Barack Obama and Raul Castro's achievement all the more commendable.

The Announcement

The day President Obama announced the success of the talks, shock waves rang throughout the region. Castro was quoted saying “we must learn the art of coexisting with our differences in a civilize manner” (The Editorial Board, 2014). It was remarkable statements such as these that indicated to many that this was truly a sea change. A change that was beyond welcomed by some and evoked fear, suspicion and uncertainty for others. The New York Times Editorial wrote "Given Cuba's complicated history with the United States, it's all but certain that this new chapter will include suspicion and backsliding. Leaders in both countries must make every effort to deal with those in a rational, constructive way... But this move will inevitably inform the debate about the merits of engagement." (2014).

The effects of the announcement could be seen throughout the region. Latin American countries expressed their overwhelming support for the shift in policy. Prior to the announcement these same countries were unabashed in their referral to the US as a villainous actor. After the announcement these same leaders were praising and celebrating President Obama (Romero &

Neuman, 2014). There were members of Congress who greatly opposed Obama's proposed policy shift in 2009, and their opposition was in part based on the unilateral nature of the Administration's foreign policy towards Cuba. The strong sign of support from the regional partners directly contradicts this opinion.

Conclusion

Three months following the announcement President Obama reaffirmed his commitment to the process by acknowledging Cuba's right to their sovereign power. "I affirm that Cuba's destiny will not be decided by the United States or any other nation,... Cuba is sovereign and rightly has great pride, and the future of Cuba will be decided by Cubans, not by anybody else" (Davis & Cave, 2016). There is no understating the importance of this statement. After generations of sabotage and ardent opposition, the Imperialist – as the Cubans often refer to the United States – was humbly taking responsibility for its history and taking steps to move forward to build a new relationship. Raul Castro has been noted as being a significantly different ruler than his brother, and with the passing of Fidel following this announcement, many assume further changes on the horizon.

However, the passing of the monumental leader coincided with the election in the United States. With Donald Trump in office there is great uncertainty in the air. This reminds us how important leadership is to the process of conflict resolution. Dwight commented that the stars had aligned just right for the talks between Obama and Raul. These are the reminders that these conditions matter greatly to the process, and should be seen as lessons and tools for the future. It should be noted that three years after the announcement of warming relations, the state-run Cuban newspaper, Granma, has several key images lining an article title "The Foundations of our Patriotism." These images includes a photo of Fidel, followed by Obama, followed by the Pope. Much hope can be had when one sees these reminders of engagement and its benefits.

The foundations of our patriotism

"Homeland is humanity, it is that portion of humanity that we see more closely, and in which we were to be born"

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At the end of the 19th century, an authentic social revolution that did not base its dreams of redemption on human beings, a vantage point that sees beyond the limits of race and nation, was unimaginable. Greek democracy excluded slaves and women and – without dwelling on examples from other eras – the ideologues of the bourgeois revolution also disregarded colonized peoples. But neither these, nor the workers and peasants of the "mother country," could emancipate themselves without a humanist concept that embraced all, including the exploiters and the colonizers. When Napoleon Bonaparte accepted, before the belligerence of insurgents, the abolition of slavery in the colony of Saint-Domingue, and in it alone, Toussaint Louverture, an illiterate former slave, with political astuteness and oblivious to any pragmatic and "realistic" position, protested:

"It is not a circumstantial freedom conceded to ourselves alone that we want. It is the absolute



Source: <http://en.granma.cu/cuba/2017-11-30/the-foundations-of-our-patriotism>

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