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Cuban Embargo: An Insufficient Measure to Encourage US Foreign Policy Interests

By

Esme Prowse

A Major Research Paper
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
through the Department of Political Science
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Master of Arts
at the University of Windsor

Windsor, Ontario, Canada

2023

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Cuban Embargo: An Insufficient Measure to Encourage US Foreign Policy Interests

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April 26, 2023

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ABSTRACT

This major paper examines the Cuban embargo as an ineffective hard power policy and explores the potential of soft, hard, and smart power as alternative approaches to resolve the failures of the 60-year-old blockade. The paper analyzes the historical context and rationale behind the embargo and assesses its impact on Cuban-American relations, regional stability, and U.S. national interests. The study argues that the embargo has failed to achieve its intended goals and has instead perpetuated a cycle of hostility, isolation, and human rights abuses. By drawing on the theoretical frameworks of soft, hard, and smart power, the paper presents policy recommendations for engaging with Cuba and promoting positive change. These alternatives include diplomatic engagement, economic incentives, cultural diplomacy, and people-to-people exchanges. The study concludes that the current embargo policy is outdated, counterproductive, and inconsistent with modern conceptions of international politics. A smarter approach is needed to address the complex issues and opportunities presented by Cuba and the wider region, and to promote U.S. interests and values in a more constructive and effective manner.

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DEDICATION

This masters research paper is dedicated to my partner, Brentan Dortmans who has never wavered in his certainty of my success and patience.

For my parents, Lydia Miljan and Derek Prowse, that only ever allowed me to doubt my doubts and celebrate my failures throughout this written awakening.

For my three younger siblings, Arden, Claire and Wyndham Prowse that inspired me to be everything they see in me and everything I see in them. Finally for my late grandparents (Deda) Jo Miljan and (Nana) Madeline Prowse and surviving (Baka) Nada Miljan for their lifetime of support and guidance for developing my personal self worth. I would be far from whole without their influence and love.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Cuba, a Caribbean island nation, has long been shrouded in mystery and intrigue. The country's tumultuous history and complex relationship with the United States have raised many questions and misconceptions about life in Cuba. For instance, how do Cuban teenagers get their hands on iPhones? Why are there two different Havana Club rums? Moreover, why do state-owned restaurants sometimes lack basic amenities like clean water? The answer to these questions surrounds the ongoing Cuban embargo imposed by the United States for six decades. Despite the prohibition, American culture and products have found their way into Cuba, although their presence remains illegal. The Cuban embargo has had significant international relations effects, and an examination of the efficacy of a particular strategy, whether using hard power or soft power, in policy making will be critical in determining the success of future US-Cuba relations.

Despite some recent relaxations of the embargo, it remains a contentious issue in US-Cuba relations. For over half a century, the United States has maintained its economic policy against Cuba, which restricted trade, technology, and travel between the two nations (Sweig & Robbins, 2015). Among the many commodities impacted by the embargo is rum, a popular spirit that has become synonymous with Cuban culture (Council on Foreign Relations, 2021). The Cuban embargo has had a significant impact on the Cuban rum industry, limiting its ability to trade with the nearby superpower and creating economic challenges for the Cuban people. However, the effectiveness of the embargo as a policy to harm the intended parties is questionable, as it has yet to achieve its goals of undermining the Cuban government or curtailing Russian influence in the region. While some argue that the imposition of the 60-year-old embargo policy is a case study representing both philosophical strategies, this argument is insufficient to determine the sanction's purpose.

Despite this, the embargo has succeeded in damaging the Cuban economy, leading to unintended consequences such as the legal battle between French and Bermudan alcohol conglomerates over state-owned rum. These consequences have

trickled down to affect the economic agency of the Cuban people and global exchange. Overall, while the embargo has had some effects, its efficacy as a policy remains a point of debate. (Badella, 2014).

This paper provides a general assessment of the effectiveness of the Cuban embargo policy, with a focus on the rum industry as an illustration. The paper considers various factors that impact the efficacy of the embargo, including the Cuban government's ability to adapt and develop alternative partnerships, the international community's response to the policy, and the changing political landscape of U.S. foreign strategy. The paper argues that a more nuanced approach international relations (IR) policy holds for Cuba is necessary, one that may be more effective in achieving desired outcomes through alternative policy perspectives.

The Embargo, Post-Crisis

The Cuban Missile Crisis, one of the most significant events in the Cold War, began with the discovery of Soviet missile installations in Cuba that could strike significant cities in the United States. The U.S. government demanded the removal of the missiles while a tense standoff ensued, with both sides preparing for war (Pastor, 2018)The crisis was resolved peacefully, with the Soviet Union agreeing to remove the missiles in exchange for a U.S.-backed promise not to invade Cuba and to remove U.S. missiles from Turkey. In response, the United States began a series of economic and political sanctions against Cuba, which can be traced back to the early years of the Cuban Revolution in the late 1950s. The embargo has had a lasting impact on US-Cuba relations, significantly impacting the Cuban economy and the daily lives of Cuban citizens. Despite some recent relaxation of the embargo, it remains a contentious issue in US-Cuba relations and culture, with the United Nations and other nations and non-governmental bodies repeatedly calling for its repeal.

The embargo consists of several restrictions on economic and trade relations between the United States and Cuba. The measures taken under the embargo include a ban on most U.S. exports to Cuba, restrictions on U.S. citizens travelling to Cuba, and a prohibition on U.S. companies doing business with Cuban companies (CDA; WOLA, 2020). The embargo includes a freeze on Cuban assets in the United States and a ban on

financial transactions between the two countries. Despite the embargo, Cuba has managed to maintain economic ties with other countries, including Russia, Venezuela, France, and China (2020). This imbalance of power procedures has been the subject of debate among scholars, and the U.S. government saw Cuba as a potential threat to its national security, considering the Cuban Missile Crisis and its ties to the Soviet Union during the Cold War (DeYoung, Vitkovskaya, Elliott, Tate, & Sharma, 2014). Under the Kennedy administration, the U.S. government believed that imposing economic blockades on Cuba would weaken the Cuban government and force them to reconsider their relationship with the Soviet Union (Kennedy, 1962; C.F.R., 1963).

The Kennedy administration's decision to impose an economic blockade on Cuba was a major turning point in the history of U.S.-Cuba relations. The U.S. government believed that the embargo would weaken the Cuban government and force them to reconsider their close relationship with the Soviet Union. In 1962, President John F. Kennedy issued Executive Order 11063, which declared a "full and complete embargo" on trade between the United States and Cuba. The order stated that the embargo was necessary to "protect the national security of the United States" and to "prevent the flow of military personnel and supplies to Cuba" (Kennedy, 1962).

The Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), a nonpartisan think tank that provides analysis and recommendations on foreign policy issues, published a report in 1963 that supported the U.S. government's decision to impose the embargo. The report stated that the embargo was an "effective tool" for pressuring the Cuban government to change its policies and end its support for revolutionary movements in Latin America (Code of Federal Relations, 1963). Despite the initial hope that the embargo would force Cuba to change its ways, it has remained in place for over six decades, with little impact on the Cuban government. In fact, the embargo has had a devastating effect on the Cuban people, causing shortages of food, medicine, and other essential goods.

In recent years, there have been calls to lift the embargo and normalize relations between the U.S. and Cuba. The Obama administration took steps towards this goal, but the Trump administration reversed many of those policies. As of 2021, the embargo remains in place, though some restrictions have been eased in recent years.

Modern Concerns and Historical Alterations

The Cuban embargo has undergone several changes in recent years under the administrations of Bill Clinton, Barack Obama, Donald Trump, and Joe Biden in various ways and with varying intensity. Despite the changing political culture and growing criticism of the embargo, the policy remains in place due to several factors, including the influence of Cuban-American politicians and interest groups, concerns about national security and foreign policy, and the difficulty of reversing long-standing policies. The embargo is a codified law through various pieces of legislation that makes it difficult for presidential authority to lift sanctions unilaterally (Libertad, 1996). For example, the Clinton administration tightened the embargo by enacting the Helms-Burton Act, which made it more difficult for foreign companies to do business in Cuba by threatening to punish them with secondary sanctions (1996).

There has been growing criticism of the policy in recent years among Americans; notably, a Pew Research Centre poll found that 62% support lifting the embargo (Tyson, 2016). The United Nations General Assembly has repeatedly passed resolutions calling for an end to the embargo, with the most recent vote in 2021 garnering support from 184 out of 193 member states. Major U.S. companies, including Coca-Cola, General Electric, and Caterpillar, support lifting the embargo, citing the potential economic benefits of increased trade with Cuba (Feinberg R. E., 2016; Congressional Research Service, 2023).

The Obama administration took steps to ease some restrictions by relaxing travel and remittance rules and allowing some U.S. companies to do business in Cuba in 2009. Further reforms were enacted to normalize relations between the two countries (Zezmina, 2014; B.B.C., 2015). A year later, in 2015, the United States removed Cuba from its list of state sponsors of terrorism, which resulted in the encouragement of a review conducted by the State Department (BBC). According to the U.S. Department of Treasury this alteration removed Cuba from international state listing in support of terrorist groups, in exchange for assurances that it would not support such groups in the future (2015). In addition to the change of terrorist agendas, other significant changes made by the Obama administration include the authorization of travelling and the agency for Americans to

visit Cuba and import no more than \$400 worth of goods, including alcohol and tobacco products acquired for personal use (U.S.D.T., 2015).

However, this did not last long once the Trump administration entered office in 2017. Perhaps it was partially due to the historically staunch support from Cuban exiles and their descendants, including U.S. alcohol titan Bacardi and politicians hailing from nearby Florida (Kirk, 2015). Some proponents of the embargo, including Floridian Senator Mark Rubio and Representative Mario Diaz-Balart, in addition to Senator Ted Cruz (Texas) and Former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, have all encouraged strengthening 'hard' power policy reforms to influence the Cuban government towards the respect of human rights, political freedom, and democratic reorganizations (2015).

According to a report by the Brookings Institution, in 2017, President Trump announced the intent to overturn changes the Obama administration achieved including a ban on individual travel to Cuba, restrictions on U.S. companies doing business with Cuban entities, and a reduction in the amount of money Cuban-Americans could send to their families on the island (Brookings, 2009). The Obama administration expelled 15 Cuban diplomats from the United States following the contraction of an unexplained rash by 22 U.S. diplomats (Trinkunas & Feinberg, 2017). The administration accused the Cuban government of not ensuring the safety of the U.S. diplomats and the incident led to a strong warning from the State Department to American citizens, aimed at deterring them from travelling to Cuba or engaging in trade. This warning came just months into the new Cuban-American travel and trade era. Trump and Pompeo's decision to re-list Cuba as a state sponsor of terrorism was a show of power before leaving office, creating difficulties for the newly inaugurated Biden administration in their relations with Cuba (Crowley, Augustin, & Semple, 2021). According to the U.S. Department of State (U.S.D.S.), the resubmission to this list stemmed from allegations of Cuba's support of the Maduro regime in Venezuela and the refusal to extradite members of the ELN guerrilla group to Colombia (U.S.D.S., 2021; Lee & Goodman, 2021).

However, the Biden administration signalled a review of the policy in March 2021, intending to ease the restrictions imposed during Trump's presidency, as stated in a report by the Council on Foreign Relations (C.F.R.) (2021). Additionally, a report by the Congressional Research Service (C.R.S.) projected adverse outcomes for both countries

if Trump's administrative legacy remains unchanged and advocated for policy reform (C.R.S., 2023). It has become evident through these publications that the original goal of the embargo was to benefit both nations, with the potential for future amendments to re-establish diplomatic relations, relieve restrictions on travel, settlements, and admission to conduct business and investments within Cuba (C.F.R., 2021; C.R.S., 2023). The original goal of the U.S. embargo on Cuba was to weaken the Cuban government and force them to reconsider their close relationship with the Soviet Union. However, over time, the goal of the embargo evolved to include the potential for future amendments that could benefit both nations. According to the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), a nonpartisan think tank that provides analysis and recommendations on foreign policy issues, the embargo was originally designed to put pressure on the Cuban government to change its policies and end its support for revolutionary movements in Latin America (Code of Federal Relations, 1963). However, in recent years, the CFR has supported a more flexible approach to U.S.-Cuba relations, arguing that the embargo has failed to achieve its goals and has had a detrimental impact on the Cuban people (Council on Foreign Relations, 2021).

Similarly, the Congressional Research Service (CRS), a nonpartisan research arm of the U.S. Congress, has noted that the embargo has had limited success in achieving its goals, and has instead become a major obstacle to improving U.S.-Cuba relations (Congressional Research Service, 2023). The CRS has also highlighted the potential benefits of lifting the embargo, including increased trade and investment opportunities for U.S. businesses, and improved relations between the two countries.

Overall, while the original goal of the embargo was to weaken the Cuban government, it has become increasingly clear that the embargo has failed to achieve its objectives and has instead become a major obstacle to improving U.S.-Cuba relations. Recent publications from nonpartisan organizations like the CFR and the CRS suggest that there is potential for future amendments to the embargo that could benefit both nations, including the re-establishment of diplomatic relations, the easing of travel restrictions, and the admission of U.S. businesses to conduct business and investments within Cuba.

Richard E. Feinberg is a professor of international political economy at the University of California, San Diego, and a non-resident senior fellow at the Brookings Institution. He is a renowned expert on Latin American political economy and has written extensively on US-Cuba relations. Feinberg's stance on US-Cuba relations is that the two countries should work towards improving their bilateral ties to achieve mutual benefits. He advocates for government-to-government cooperation and the building of agreements and dialogues on various issues such as telecommunications, science and technology, human rights projects, migration, law enforcement, and maritime borders (Feinberg, 2016).

In contrast, the US's current policy towards Cuba, which is the embargo, is an example of hard power, which relies on the use of economic and military coercion to achieve policy goals. The embargo has been in place since the 1960s and has had limited success in achieving its objectives. Analyzing the effectiveness of US policy towards Cuba requires a theoretical framework that can account for the complex dynamics at play. By contrasting hard power and soft power theories, we can explore alternative policy options that prioritize diplomacy and engagement over coercion and isolation.

In the following sections, we will delve further into theoretical frameworks to analyze US-Cuba relations and explore soft power policy alternatives to the hard power embargo.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The U.S. policy towards Cuba framed in this lens of political theory, particularly in hard and soft power, has primarily been characterized by hard power—specifically the economic embargo to exert pressure on the Cuban government. Joseph Nye, a renowned international relations scholar, introduced the concepts of hard power and soft power to describe different ways states can exert their influence over other nations (Nye, 2004). The U.S. policy towards Cuba framed in this lens of political theory, particularly in hard and soft power, has primarily been characterized by hard power—specifically the economic embargo—to exert pressure on the Cuban government. Feinberg's position highlights the importance of diplomatic efforts in achieving policy goals, which aligns with the concept of soft power in international relations.

Soft power refers to a state's ability to achieve its objectives through persuasion, attraction, and the building of positive relationships rather than coercion or force. Hard power is defined as the use of military and economic coercion to achieve desired outcomes, while soft power involves attraction and persuasion to achieve influence (Nye, 2004). In turn, the utility of each power method is indeterminate of the efficacy of policy implementation.

Soft Power

The Cuban embargo exemplifies how the United States could benefit from shifting its approach from economic sanctions and political isolation to one that emphasizes cultural exchange and diplomatic engagement. The U.S. policy towards Cuba, primarily characterized by hard power, has been debated for several years. However, we can better understand the potential for alternative approaches by analyzing this issue through the theoretical framework of political theory, particularly the concepts of hard and soft power. Joseph Nye's introduction of soft power recognizes the potential for influencing the attitudes and preferences of other nations through attraction and persuasion rather than relying solely on coercive tactics. Nye defines soft power as the ability of a country to influence others through cultural appeal.

Other scholars, such as Mattern and Zakaria, have built upon Nye's original concept of soft power and expanded it to include shaping the norms and values of the international system in ways that are favourable to a country's interests. Mattern argues that soft power is not just about using attraction and persuasion but also about a country's ability to shape and promote international norms and values (2005). She critiques Nye's "Bound to Lead" model, which defines a state's attractiveness as a socially produced reality that directs the means for nation-states to accumulate power. Instead, Mattern sees a state's appeal as a determining factor in its ability to shape and promote international norms and values (Mattern, 2005; Nye J. S., 1990, p. 11).

Mattern's theory has important implications for the Cuban embargo. While the U.S. has relied primarily on hard power through economic sanctions, Mattern's theory suggests that the U.S. could benefit from shifting its approach to one that emphasizes cultural exchange and diplomatic engagement to promote international norms and values. Through diplomacy, there is a commitment to promote human rights and democracy in Cuba, which is encouraged by a discourse on more significant issues like economic inequality (Mattern, 2005, p. 610). The U.S. could achieve its foreign policy objectives in Cuba while promoting global stability and cooperation.

Like Nye and Mattern, Zakaria suggests that soft power strategies such as building relationships and promoting cooperation are practical and crucial for achieving global stability and prosperity (2008). He argues that the rise of non-state actors and the increasing interconnectedness of the world economy have made traditional forms of hard power less effective in achieving foreign policy goals (Zakaria, 2008). In his work, he discusses this concept of the inevitability of interconnectivity by using China as a case study to present the present reality of its influence over Africa and Latin America — a reality that Western powers must adapt to by investing in soft power strategies and building alliances with non-state organizations and private businesses. The success of soft power strategies used by China is measurable by the implementation of infrastructure development and cultural exchange (Zakaria, 2008). Therefore, unlike hard power, which relies on inducements and threats, soft power persuades others to follow by appealing to the attraction of an actor's way of life (Mattern, 2005, p. 587).

Hard Power

Proponents of hard power in the United States argue that coercive measures such as economic sanctions, military threats, and diplomatic isolation can effectively achieve U.S. foreign policy goals. The concept of hard power, defined by Nye, refers to a state's ability to achieve its goals through coercion, including using military force, economic sanctions, and other forms of pressure. This approach assumes that power and coercion are necessary to achieve desired outcomes and that using force can effectively achieve foreign policy objectives.

In the case of the Cuban embargo, and according to Robert Art and Kenneth Waltz, hard power is a necessary tool to defend against security threats. They consider it a means for states to ensure their survival in an anarchic international system where states cannot be sure of each other's intentions (Art, 2010; Waltz, 1979). Robert Art and Stephen Walt similarly argued that "military power and the threat of force continue to play a critical role in world affairs" and that "power is the central concept in international relations" (Art & Walt, 2005, p.2). In other words, they argue that because power is the central concept in international relations, hard power becomes critical for maintaining America's national security and humanitarian interests.

In the case of the Cuban embargo, Art and Walt argue that the sanctions were a necessary response to the threat posed by Fidel Castro's communist regime. They note that the embargo isolated Cuba and limited its ability to project power in the region (Art & Walt, 2005). Walt's scholarship in international relations highlights the importance of maintaining a balance of power among states is crucial to avoiding destabilization and power imbalances. He is critical of relying solely on military force and economic coercion, which are components of hard power. Walt argues that building solid relationships and using diplomatic tools should be prioritized to resolve conflicts and achieve policy objectives. He specifically criticizes the US embargo on Cuba as an example of a failed hard power strategy. He contends that the embargo has been counterproductive in achieving US strategic objectives and has not resulted in political change in Cuba. Instead, Walt suggests an engagement-oriented approach, where the

United States builds closer economic and cultural ties with Cuba to promote political change from within.

Walt's scholarship underscores the importance of considering soft power policy alternatives in international relations, which prioritize engagement, diplomacy, and relationship building over coercion and force. By doing so, states may be more successful in achieving their objectives while avoiding unintended consequences that can arise from a solely hard power approach. Through doing so, the United States could achieve its objectives more effectively than relying on hard power tactics such as an economic embargo. Peceny and Morgan are among the scholars who have supported the hard-power approach toward the Cuban embargo. They argue that the embargo was motivated by domestic political considerations rather than strategic concerns. Specifically, the embargo responded to pressure from the Cuban-American community in Florida, which sought to punish the Castro regime for its human rights abuses (Peceny & Morgan, 1990). However, it is essential to note that the embargo has had negative repercussions for the Cuban people, who have suffered from food shortages, and a lack of medicine and other essential goods.

Another scholar who supports the use of hard power in the context of the Cuban embargo is John Mearsheimer. He argues that the United States had a clear strategic interest in containing the spread of communism in the Western Hemisphere. The embargo was necessary for this strategy by limiting Cuba's ability to support communist movements in other countries (2019). However, while he contends that the embargo effectively contains the spread of communism in the region, he also finds that wielding hard power solely through economic sanctions is a misguided and ineffective approach to achieving U.S. strategic objectives. His claim is that the embargo has failed to bring about political change in Cuba and has instead strengthened the position of the Cuban government by providing a convenient scapegoat for the country's economic problems. Mearsheimer asserts that the United States would be better off focusing on military strength and deterrence as a more effective way of achieving its strategic objectives, which are still hard power methods despite the failures of this policy as it stands (Mearsheimer, 2019)

The method of policy formation can determine the effects of a state's soft power methods and outcomes, especially if international cooperation remains central (Mattern, 2005). Therefore, hard power historically has been a key determinant of U.S. policy towards Cuba. The use of military force and economic sanctions were vital tools in the U.S. government's efforts to weaken the Cuban government and reduce the threat it posed to U.S. interests in the region, but soft power policy alternatives may present a better approach that requires policy implementation that utilizes these alternatives. To provide such alternatives, the following analysis of the hard and soft power measures this case's placement within either model.

In international relations, efficacy refers to the ability of a state or actor to achieve its desired objectives or outcomes using power. The concept of power is the ability to influence the behaviour of others to achieve one's goals. For instance, a policy inspired by hard power achieves efficacy when state force or coercion is successfully in achieving its objectives. A case example is the U.S.'s invasion of Iraq in 2003, devised by a desire to eliminate Iraq's weapons of mass destruction and to prevent Saddam Hussein from supporting terrorist organizations. This policy is rooted in the belief that military force is necessary to achieve these goals because diplomatic efforts would be insufficient alone.

The concept of hard power has played a crucial role in U.S. policy toward Cuba. Military force and economic sanctions are critical tools in the government's efforts to weaken the Cuban government and reduce its perceived threat to U.S. interests in the region. However, the effectiveness of this approach has limits, as evidenced by the ongoing tensions between the two nations. A more effective evaluation of the U.S. policy towards Cuba is through a consideration of whether it has reached its intended goals by examining the method of policy formation. Understanding the concepts behind hard and soft power is necessary to assess which power model is best suited to achieve the desired objectives. A soft power approach that promotes democracy, human rights, and economic development in Cuba could be a more effective alternative to the hard power embargo. A policy that utilizes soft power's democratic methods within diplomacy, cultural exchange, and economic engagement encourages positive changes in Cuba.

The modality of these influences has a substantial possibility for the improving the attitudes of the Cuban people toward the U.S., which may lead to changes in Cuba's

political system. However, the current U.S. policy towards Cuba is neither hard or soft because of its longevity and the lack of success in achieving its objectives. The policy has been subject to numerous changes and has been adopted and abandoned by opposing political parties, making it difficult to evaluate its effectiveness. Therefore, it is essential to re-examine the policy's objectives and methods to determine whether a more practical approach can be developed to meet the desired criteria for either power model.

Neither Hard nor Soft Power Embodiment

Joseph S. Nye Jr., Richard E. Feinberg, and Christopher W. S. Ross Piccone are prominent scholars in international relations who have contributed significantly to the study of power in international politics. In comparison, David Pastor (2018) is a scholar in international relations who has focused on the role of institutions and norms in shaping international politics. Pastor's work explores how states use various forms of power, including hard, soft, and smart power, to advance their interests in a changing global landscape. Similarly, Brandon Valeriano and Benjamin Jensen have written extensively on the concept of the modern softer power utilized in a cyber-setting instead of a battlefield. This approach combines both hard and soft power strategies to achieve policy goals (Valeriano & Maness, 2015). Like Nye, Pastor recognizes the importance of soft power in international relations, but also acknowledges the limitations of relying solely on soft power strategies. Similarly, like Feinberg and Piccone, Pastor highlights the importance of diplomatic engagement and building relationships in achieving policy objectives. Finally, like Valeriano and Jensen, Pastor acknowledges the potential benefits of smart power strategies that combine both hard and soft power approaches.

Additional support comes from Feinberg and Piccone, who note that the Cuban embargo has hindered economic engagement and cooperation with Cuba (Feinberg & Piccone, 2014). Feinberg argues that the Cuban embargo has been an ineffective hard power strategy because it has not succeeded in its objectives and has instead had negative consequences that have undermined U.S. interests in the region (Feinberg, 2016). He contends that the embargo has created a trade and investment barrier that has prevented U.S. businesses from accessing the Cuban market, driving Cuba to seek stronger economic ties with other nations such as China and Russia (Feinberg, 2016).

Furthermore, Feinberg supports that the Cuban embargo has been a self-defeating hard power strategy that negatively affects both U.S. interests in the region and the Cuban people (Feinberg, 2016).

Pastor and LeoGrande agree that the Cuban embargo has been counterproductive in achieving its intended objectives and has instead strengthened the grip of the Castro regime on power. The embargo has contributed to economic hardship and deprivation for ordinary Cubans by limiting economic opportunities and trade relationships, fueling resentment and anti-American sentiment. While Pastor focuses on the failure of hard power strategies, LeoGrande's discussion adds to this argument by highlighting the negative impact of the embargo on diplomatic relations between the U.S. and Cuba, making it more difficult to achieve political change through engagement. So, as we discuss the effectiveness of alternative approaches, such as engagement-oriented strategies, it is essential to consider the limitations of hard power policies like the Cuban embargo and the potential for unintended consequences.

In summary, Pastor's work adds nuance to the study of power in international politics by emphasizing the importance of institutions and norms and exploring the potential benefits and limitations of various forms of power, including hard, soft, and smart power. These unique approaches to wielding power within policymaking towards IR, appear obsolete without the Valeriano & Maness' inclusion of "cyber" or 'smart power' – the alternative proposed by Pastor.

CHAPTER 3

MEASURING EFFICACY

Efficacy in power theory refers to the ability of a state or actor to achieve its objectives using power. The efficacy of hard power policies can have limits due to factors; including the costs of military intervention, the potential for unintended consequences, and the impact on international norms and perceptions of legitimacy (Congressional Research Service, 2023; LeoGrande, 2013). Therefore, policymakers must carefully weigh the costs and benefits of hard power strategies and consider alternative approaches to achieving their goals.

According to Pastor (2018), the effectiveness of a state or actor's power directly correlates to its capacity to achieve its goals. However, previously with LeoGrande (2013), Pastor argues that the Cuban embargo is counterproductive, as it has reinforced the Castro regime's hold on power. By blaming the embargo for Cuba's economic struggles, the regime has been able to deflect criticism and maintain its legitimacy in the eyes of the Cuban people. Economic plights have resulted in limited economic growth, widespread poverty, and hardship, particularly for the most vulnerable members of society (Feinberg, 2016). He emphasizes that the embargo has made it difficult for Cubans to access essential goods and services, including food, medicine, and other items. The lack of access to American technology has hindered the country's technological advancement. LeoGrande (2013) agrees with Pastor that the embargo has not led to political change in Cuba. Instead, it has increased hostility between the two countries and provided the Castro regime with an external enemy to justify its repression of political dissent.

Furthermore, the embargo has negatively affected the United States by restricting trade and investment opportunities with Cuba. It has prevented the United States from fully engaging with its Caribbean neighbour and is an example of U.S. imperialism and aggression (Peceny & Morgan, 1990). Considering these challenges, Nye's work on soft power suggests that a shift in approach towards Cuba from the arcane use of "hard power" tactics towards embracing a "softer" or "smarter" approach that values cultural

exchange and diplomatic engagement in the context of a globalized and virtual economy (Nye, 1990; 2004; Valeriano & Maness, 2015).

Notwithstanding the limitations of hard power policies like the Cuban embargo, policymakers must carefully weigh the costs and benefits of such strategies, considering the potential for unintended consequences, impact on international norms, and perceptions of legitimacy. In summary, the Cuban embargo has had significant unintended consequences, and policymakers should consider alternative approaches to achieving their goals.

Unintended Consequences

The Cuban embargo, intended as a punitive measure, resulted in several unintended consequences. Foremost among them was Cuba's isolation from the global community, brought about by the difficulties of engaging in international trade and commerce. This isolation profoundly impacted the country's economy, which struggled to grow and develop within the constraints of the embargo. While the embargo initially aimed to encourage behaviour changes in the Cuban government during the Cold War, it has outlasted the Soviet Union's expiration and led to various unintended effects that have caused harm to the Cuban people and restricted opportunities for American businesses and investors. These effects include the recent protests in Cuba and the ongoing legal dispute over Havana Club rum between Bacardi and Pernod Ricard.

Protests in 2021

In July 2021, Cuba witnessed the most significant and widespread protests in decades, with thousands taking to the streets to express their frustration and anger toward the government (Fletcher, 2021). The economic situation was a significant factor driving the protests. The COVID-19 pandemic hit the country hard, resulting in a sharp decline in tourism and reduced overseas remittances, leading to food and medicine shortages, long store lines, and frequent power outages. These issues are compounded by unemployment and low wages, further exacerbating public frustration (Malo, 2021; Fletcher, 2021). Political issues were also a significant concern, with many Cubans expressing

dissatisfaction with the one-party state, lack of free elections, and government repression of dissent and free speech. Reports of police brutality and repression against protesters fueled the people's anger.

Despite the government's heavy-handed approach, which included deploying police and military forces to the streets and arresting hundreds of protesters, the protests sparked a renewed debate about Cuba's future and the possibility of political and economic reform (Fletcher, 2021; Kirk, 2015). While Foreign Minister Bruno Rodriguez denied any “social uprising,” evidence suggests that a long-brewing frustration among the population generated this momentum, not a U.S. operation (2021). It is important to note that the protests were about much more than just the rum industry, as broader socioeconomic and political issues drove them.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS

Factors in Efficacy Determination

Despite initial support for the Cuban embargo and the use of hard power, it has become increasingly apparent that this policy failed to achieve its objectives. Instead, the embargo strengthened the grip of the Castro regime on power by providing a convenient scapegoat for the country's economic problems and limiting economic opportunities and trade relationships with the United States. Scholars have noted that the Cuban embargo is a prime example of a failed policy that has been counterproductive, ineffective, and self-defeating (Kirk, 2014; Pastor, 2014; LeoGrande, 2013; Feinberg, 2012). An analysis of the factors that have caused the Cuban embargo to be ineffective reveals three vital considerations: the Cuban socialist government structure remains unchanged, yet citizens of Cuba are negatively impacted by the trade blockade despite its shortcoming to control trade relations with Cuba.

1. Failure to Change Political Structure of Cuba

First, the Cuban embargo has not achieved political change in Cuba. The embargo commenced to isolate the Cuban government and limit its ability to engage in international trade. The U.S. had hoped this would force the government to adopt democratic reforms. However, the Cuban government has remained in power despite the embargo for six decades. There has been little progress toward democratic reform, suggesting that the embargo has been ineffective in achieving its primary goal of promoting political change.

The Obama administration attempted to normalize relations with Cuba by lifting some embargo restrictions, such as allowing travel and remittances. Barack Obama himself stated in an interview with CNN that the embargo had not achieved its goal of promoting political change in Cuba and that it was time for an innovative approach (Lipak, 2016). However, an opinion piece from 2019 in the *New York Times* argues that the pursuit of democracy was not a successful approach and did not lead to significant political change in Cuba, in addition to the Trump administration reversing many of these

changes (Sabatini, 2019). A Council on Foreign Relations report notes that the embargo has failed to weaken the Cuban government or increase widespread opposition (Council on Foreign Relations, 2021). *The Washington Post* published an op-ed that the Cuban embargo has been ineffective in achieving political change because it has been unable to isolate Cuba from the rest of the world (DeYoung, Vitkovskaya, Elliott, Tate, & Sharma, 2014). The article notes that Cuba has continued to trade with other countries, including China, Russia, and Venezuela, and has received support from other countries in its opposition to the embargo.

One explanation for this outcome by the C.R.S. is that the Cuban government has remained in power despite the embargo, with little progress toward democratic reforms in the country (Cuban Assets Control Regulations, 2021). The C.R.S. report on the Cuban embargo, updated in 2021, states that 'despite more than six decades of U.S. efforts to isolate Cuba through the embargo, the Cuban government remains in power, and the Cuban economy continues to function.' The report also notes that the embargo has not significantly improved human rights and democracy in Cuba. Further arguments against the Biden administration's approach to Cuba claimed ineffective results in their attempt to achieve political change (2021). In addition, it notes that the administration has maintained many of the restrictions of the embargo and has not taken significant steps to improve relations with Cuba.

2. Negative Effects Against Cuban People

The Cuban embargo has had far-reaching consequences beyond its intended objectives, severely damaging the Cuban economy and leading to shortages of food, medicine, and essential services, resulting in a decline in living standards for many citizens. The sanctions have generated resentment and frustration among ordinary Cubans, making it more challenging to support democratic reforms, leading to protests in recent years (Garcia-Navarro, 2021; Lipak, 2016). While Cuba has survived despite the embargo, this has only been to a negligible benchmark, and the policy has cost the Cuban economy an estimated \$1.2 billion annually in lost exports to the United States alone (CSR, 2021). Tourism, which generates between \$3 billion to \$4 billion annually, is a

vital sector of the Cuban economy and a significant source of foreign currency, which has been growing in recent years (CRS, 2023).

Moreover, the Cuban embargo has had a profound negative impact on the Cuban people, contributing to economic stagnation, shortages of essential goods, and limited access to medical supplies and equipment. The resulting limitations to accessing vital goods such as medicine and food have led to maintaining a supply, and the cost of these goods is often much higher than it would be in a more open market, which has only been amplified by the global pandemic, causing a particularly negative impact on the most vulnerable members of Cuban society, including children and the elderly. The embargo has also created a humanitarian crisis for Cuban-Americans, who find it challenging to visit their families in Cuba due to travel restrictions. These negative consequences highlight that the embargo has failed to achieve its secondary goal of promoting the well-being of the Cuban people.

3. Ineffective Policy to Limit Cuban Foreign Trade

Third, the Cuban embargo has had limited success in limiting Cuba's capacity to act in the international theatre. Despite being intended to limit trade with Cuba, the Cuban embargo has had limited success in achieving this goal. Evidence suggests that Cuba has established economic relationships with others that have filled the void left by the absence of American trade, thereby reducing the embargo's effectiveness, and facilitating the Cuban government's continued functioning. Moreover, there has been growing opposition to the Cuban embargo from the United States and the international community, with many arguing that the policy is outdated and ineffective (B.B.C., 2015). Consequently, there is a growing consensus that the embargo should intensify. At the same time, critiques suggest this will further weaken efficacy and limit the United States' ability to promote political change in Cuba through this policy.

Advocates for lifting the U.S. embargo on Cuba argue that including Cuba in the Americas is necessary to improve its access to capital, technology, and expertise from the United States. Despite the embargo's aim to disrupt the Cuban economy, studies have shown that it failed to achieve its intended goals and harmed Cuban and American citizens (CDA; WOLA, 2020).

Evidence

The U.S. embargo on Cuba has harmed the country's GDP growth and the rum sales industry. Lifting the embargo could increase economic growth and rum sales in Cuba, but it is uncertain how much the impact would be as it is a complex situation with multiple factors at play. Cuba's GDP emanates from various sectors: tourism, agriculture, mining, and manufacturing. The exact breakdown of the GDP by sector and dollar amount is not publicly available and can be challenging to estimate due to the lack of transparency in the Cuban economy. Regardless, the composition of the country's GDP has changed over time. Tourism is one of the most critical sectors of the Cuban economy, and it is estimated to generate around \$3 billion to \$4 billion annually. This sector is considered a significant source of foreign currency for Cuba and has been growing in recent years. In comparison, Puerto Rico has similar economic foundations and illustrates effectiveness of the policy under economic criteria.

Legal battles over Trademarked Rum

The Cuban embargo has historically hindered the Cuban rum industry from economic growth and held the cultural beacon of alcohol trademark lawsuits (Feinberg, 2016). Therefore, addressing the economic impacts of the embargo and lifting restrictions on industries such as the rum industry could help promote economic growth and alleviate some of the socioeconomic issues that drove the protests.

The Cuban embargo has significantly impacted the rum industry in Cuba, leading to a loss of market share in the United States and other countries. Before the embargo, Cuban rum maintained a reputation as some of the best in the world, with brands such as Bacardi and Havana Club enjoying popularity among consumers. However, the ban on imports of Cuban rum to the United States shifted the Cuban government's focus to other markets, primarily Europe and Latin America (Feinberg R. E., 2016). This situation hurt Cuban workers in the rum industry as they lost access to the U.S. market, which was previously a significant market for Cuban rum.

Bacardi Limited was founded by Facundo Bacardi Masso and his brother Jose Bacardi after they were exiled from Cuba following the Cuban Revolution in 1959. The

Bacardi and Havana Club rum brands have been at the center of a long-standing legal dispute over the Havana Club trademark rights. According to Bacardi, the Cuban government unlawfully seized the "Havana Club" trademark and other assets from the Cuban company Jose Arechabala SA in 1960. Bacardi acquired the Havana Club trademark rights from the Arechabala family in 1994 and sold Havana Club rum in the United States in 1995 (Bacardi, 2023)

In contrast, French spirits company Pernod Ricard and Cubaexport, a Cuban state-owned company, have been selling a different version of Havana Club rum outside the United States. This version is made in Cuba and marketed as authentic rum and the other (U.S. Patent and Trademark Office, 2018). The rum industry in Cuba has the potential to generate substantial economic benefits for the Cuban people, with estimates suggesting that the industry could create up to 130,000 jobs and generate more than \$1.3 billion in annual revenue for the Cuban economy (Havana Consulting Group & Tech, 2019). However, the embargo hindered the industry's growth and prevented Cuban workers from fully realizing the industry's potential.

The embargo has hurt not only the Cuban people but also limited opportunities for American businesses and investors to engage with the Cuban market. The ongoing legal battle over the Havana Club trademark highlights the need for a resolution to enable Cuban rum to reach its full potential in the global market.

Rum production has long been an essential part of the economy in both countries, with Cuba known for its Havana Club brand and Puerto Rico for its Bacardi brand. However, rum production has had different impacts on the economies of Cuba and Puerto Rico. In Cuba, the state-run industry has been a significant source of revenue for the government, and the government has invested heavily in the industry to promote its growth; however, the citizens have gone to the streets in lieu of any benefits gained through their labour. Alternatively, in Puerto Rico, the private sector has played a more significant role in the rum industry, and the industry has been able to thrive despite the challenges of the U.S. embargo (LeoGrande, 2013). The embargo's impact on the rum industry has been different in Cuba and Puerto Rico, with the state-run industry in Cuba being a significant source of revenue for the government and the private sector playing a more prominent role in Puerto Rico.

Agriculture and mining are also important sectors of the Cuban economy, but their share of the GDP is small. Agriculture accounts for around 3% of the GDP, and mining accounts for around 1% (World Bank, 2021). Manufacturing is another important sector of the Cuban economy, but its share of the GDP is also relatively small. The production of food, beverages, tobacco, textiles, and construction materials dominates this sector. It is important to note that the Cuban economy has struggled since 2019 due to factors such as the U.S. sanctions, natural disasters, and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Economic Disparity

There are significant disparities in GDP and GDP per capita between Cuba and Puerto Rico, and while the Cuban embargo is undoubtedly a factor, it is not the only one. Also, rum production has had different impacts on the economies of these two countries. In Cuba, the U.S. embargo has heavily impacted the economy, which has limited Cuba's ability to trade with the United States and other countries. According to data from the World Bank, Cuba's GDP was just \$96.2 billion in 2019, making it one of the smallest economies in Latin America (World Bank, 2021). Additionally, Cuba's GDP per capita was only \$8,559 in 2019, which is lower than most other countries in the region (World Bank, 2021). The embargo has significantly impacted the Cuban economy. The Congressional Research Service estimates that it has cost the Cuban economy an estimated \$1.2 billion annually in lost exports to the United States alone.

In contrast, Puerto Rico is a U.S. territory subject to some trade restrictions with Cuba. It is not subject to the same level of restrictions as other countries. As a result, Puerto Rico has developed a more diversified economy that is less dependent on exports (World Bank, 2021). According to the World Bank, Puerto Rico's GDP was \$105.5 billion in 2019, and its GDP per capita was \$30,357 in 2019, higher than most other countries in the region (World Bank, 2021). The imbalance, in my opinion, is a direct result of the nationalist government in Cuba and not the embargo, although the sanctions contribute to this difference.

CHAPTER 5

ALTERNATIVE POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

Advocates for lifting the embargo argue it would increase Cuba's economic activity and political freedom through a soft power approach. According to the Council on Foreign Relations (2021), lifting the embargo could benefit both the U.S. and Cuba, including increased trade opportunities such as the neglected Cuban rum market. A growing body of research suggests that the policy has failed to achieve its intended objectives and that alternative policies should be pursued to address past failures and potential development towards policy objectives towards improved US-Cuba relations.

Research conducted by the Center for Democracy in the Americas (CDA) and the Washington Office on Latin America supports the need to lift the embargo to end the economic assault against Cuba (CDA; WOLA, 2020). Similarly, studies by the U.S. Trade Commission show that lifting the embargo could benefit the U.S. economy by increasing trade and services between the two nations (U.S.T.C., 2016). The U.S.T.C. predicts a small yet positive impact on the Cuban economy and suggests that increased trade and investment would create jobs and stimulate economic growth in both countries.

WOLA's research-based advocacy, alongside the nonpartisan, non-profit CDA, highlights the need for immediate changes to dissolve trade restrictions with the U.S. to avoid Cuban trade opportunities that align with U.S. values. The UN General Assembly has passed a resolution every year since 1992 calling for an end to the U.S. embargo on Cuba. The United Nations (UN) and the World Health Organization (WHO) argue for ending the embargo, citing its violation of international law, harm to the Cuban people, and undermining efforts to promote human rights and democracy in Cuba.

The embargo has also had humanitarian consequences for families separated by the policy. The International Committee of the Red Cross notes that the embargo has made it difficult for Cuban-Americans to visit their families in Cuba, creating a humanitarian crisis. The General Assembly of the United Nations has repeatedly voted in favour of a resolution calling for an end to the embargo, citing its negative impact on the Cuban people. However, a study by the Brookings Institution found that lifting the

embargo would have a limited impact on the Cuban economy, as the policy has not significantly restricted trade or investment with Cuba (Brookings, 2009).

Reform Soft Power

Advocates suggest that a soft power approach benefits both nations, including increased trade and investment opportunities. The UN, WHO, and other organizations support ending the embargo, citing its violation of international law and harm to the Cuban people. While some studies suggest that lifting the embargo may have limited economic impact, immediate changes to trade restrictions are necessary to avoid missing Cuban trade opportunities that align with U.S. values. As the growing body of literature suggests, the Cuban embargo has failed to achieve its intended goals and has negatively impacted both the Cuban and American people. Therefore, alternative policies must be re-investigated to address present and past concerns within US-Cuba relations. This section will discuss three alternative policies that potentially replace the Cuban embargo: engaging and normalizing relations, soft power and cultural exchange, and conditional agreements. These policies aim to improve both nations' economic and political conditions while promoting democratic values and human rights in Cuba.

1. Engagement to normalize Cuba-American Relations

One alternative policy is engaging with Cuba and normalizing relations to a modern conception of international politics. Supporters of this approach argue that engagement can lead to greater economic and political cooperation between the two countries and help promote democracy and human rights in Cuba for a humanitarian goal instead of U.S.-specific interests. In a report by the Brookings Institution, former U.S. diplomat Richard Feinberg argues that normalizing relations would increase trade, investment, and travel between the two countries, benefitting both the U.S. and Cuba (Brookings, 2009; Feinberg & Piccone, 2014). The policy of engaging with Cuba and normalizing relations has gained traction as a viable alternative to the current hardline approach. Proponents of this policy argue that the U.S. should embrace a more modern conception of international politics that prioritizes cooperation and engagement over

isolation and confrontation. By pursuing this policy, the U.S. could establish more constructive relationships with other countries in the region and beyond.

One of the key benefits of engaging with Cuba would be the potential for increased economic and political cooperation between the two nations. Cuba is a market with significant untapped potential for U.S. businesses, particularly in the areas of tourism, energy, and agriculture. Normalizing relations would provide U.S. companies with the opportunity to enter into new partnerships and expand their operations in Cuba, creating jobs and stimulating economic growth in both countries.

Moreover, proponents argue that normalizing relations with Cuba would allow the U.S. to promote democracy and human rights in Cuba, not just in pursuit of U.S. interests but for the betterment of the Cuban people. By engaging with Cuba and working to build positive relationships, the U.S. could help create an environment that is more conducive to political and social change in Cuba. This could include measures such as promoting freedom of expression and assembly, facilitating civil society engagement, and supporting human rights defenders in Cuba. In his report, Feinberg notes that normalizing relations with Cuba would also have a positive impact on regional stability and security. Cuba is an important player in the region, and by normalizing relations with Cuba, the U.S. could help build bridges and foster greater cooperation with other countries in the region. This could include areas such as counter-narcotics cooperation, disaster relief, and environmental protection.

2. Soft Power for Cultural Change

The second alternative policy is to use soft power and cultural exchange to promote change in Cuba by fostering multi-faceted relations between the United States and Cuba, ultimately opening up markets that were previously restricted. This approach has the potential to introduce shared values and promote trade benefits that align with the goals of soft power. As Joseph Nye has argued, soft power involves building positive relationships with other nations through the use of attraction and persuasion rather than coercion. By promoting trade and cultural exchange, the U.S. can build a more positive image and establish closer ties with Cuba, which may ultimately lead to a more peaceful and cooperative relationship.

In her testimony concerning US policy implications affecting Cuba, Sarah Stephens has also advocated for this approach, emphasizing the importance of promoting cultural exchange between the two countries. By facilitating greater understanding between Americans and Cubans, this strategy has the potential to promote democratic values and foster a more positive relationship between the two nations. Cultural exchange programs can help to break down stereotypes and build mutual trust and respect, which may ultimately lead to greater political and economic cooperation between the United States and Cuba (Stephens, 2009). Overall, by opening up previously restricted markets and promoting cultural exchange, the U.S. has the potential to use soft power to promote positive change in Cuba and build a more peaceful and cooperative relationship between the two nations.

By opening previously restricted markets within the U.S. and Cuba, the potential to introduce shared values and trade benefits that align with the goals of soft power, as previously shared by Nye is also advocated by Stephens. This promotes cultural exchange between the United States and Cuba towards a greater understanding of how this blockade affected bilateral relations and the promotion of democratic values in Cuba.

3. Conditional Engagements

A third alternative is through conditional engagement, which requires alleviating economic blockades in Cuba and ensuring political and economic reforms promote U.S. specifications. A proponent of this conditional interaction includes Julia Sweig, who advocated this approach, arguing that engagement can effectively promote change but must also pursue specific conditions. In a report published by the Council on Foreign Relations, Sweig argues that conditional approaches can effectively promote change in Cuba with a cohesive strategy and clear benchmarks for further consideration and growth (Council on Foreign Relations, 2021).

These policies are based on theoretical arguments within various academic and policy circles and are all aimed at promoting positive change and cooperation between the two nations. By considering these options, policymakers can work towards a more constructive and cooperative relationship between the United States and Cuba.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

The Cuban embargo is based on hard power but can incorporate soft power tools to analyze and improve Cuban-American relations. In considering soft power, the U.S. could have employed cultural diplomacy and engagement with the Cuban people to promote American values and institutions. This approach may lead to improved relations between Cuba and the U.S. The use of hard power in forming the embargo has had the opposite effect, alienating the Cuban people from international cultural customs and reinforcing negative attitudes (CDA; WOLA, 2020). With this discussion of how soft power is an enigma, 'hard' power presents a path towards a foundation of force. Policy recommendations for further research include exploring alternative strategies for dealing with Cuba, such as diplomatic engagement and economic incentives. Further research could focus on the benefits and drawbacks of lifting the embargo and the potential impact of alternative policies on regional stability and international relations. It is also essential to consider the views and needs of the Cuban people in any policy decisions, as they are the ones most directly impacted by the embargo.

In conclusion, while the Cuban embargo was founded on hard power, incorporating soft power strategies could potentially enhance Cuban-American relations. Cultural diplomacy and engagement with the Cuban people could have been employed to promote American values and institutions, which may lead to improved relations between the two nations. However, the use of hard power in the form of the embargo has had adverse effects by alienating the Cuban people and reinforcing negative attitudes towards the US. Policy recommendations for further research include exploring alternative strategies such as diplomatic engagement and economic incentives. It is crucial to consider the views and needs of the Cuban people in any policy decisions since they are the ones most affected by the embargo. Future research should focus on the benefits and drawbacks of lifting the embargo and the potential impact of alternative policies on regional stability and international relations. Soft power remains an enigma, and while hard power may provide a path towards a foundation of force, it may not necessarily be the most effective approach in promoting positive relations.

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