



**HAL**  
open science

# “Un orgullo de Cuba en los cielos del mundo”. Cubana de aviación from Miami to Bagdad (1946–79)

Etienne Morales

► **To cite this version:**

Etienne Morales. “Un orgullo de Cuba en los cielos del mundo”. Cubana de aviación from Miami to Bagdad (1946–79). *Journal of Transport History*, 2018, 40 (1), pp.62-81. 10.1177/0022526619832592 . halshs-02290036

**HAL Id: halshs-02290036**

**<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-02290036v1>**

Submitted on 24 Mar 2023

**HAL** is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.



Distributed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License

# “Un orgullo de Cuba en los cielos del mundo”. *Cubana de aviación* from Miami to Bagdad (1946–79)

*The Journal of Transport History*

2019, Vol. 40(1) 62–81

© The Author(s) 2019

Article reuse guidelines:

sagepub.com/journals-permissions

DOI: 10.1177/0022526619832592

journals.sagepub.com/home/jth



Etienne Morales 

Centre de Recherche et de Documentation sur les Ameriques, France

## Abstract

This article focuses on the transformation of the carrier *Cubana de aviación* before and after the 1959 Cuban revolution. By observing *Cubana's* management, labour force, equipment, international passenger and freight traffic, this article aims to outline an international history of this Latin American flag carrier. The touristic air relationships between the American continent and Spain that could be observed in the 1950s were substituted – in the 1960s and 1970s – by a web of political “líneas de la amistad” [Friendship Flights] with Prague, Santiago de Chile, East Berlin, Lima, Luanda, Managua, Tripoli and Bagdad. This three-decade period allows us to interrogate breaks and continuities in the Cuban airline travel sector and to challenge the traditional interpretations of Cuban history. This work is based on diplomatic and corporative archives from Cuba, United States, Canada, Mexico, Spain and France and the aeronautical international press.

## Keywords

Cuba, aviation, revolution, blockade

Compared to its Caribbean and Latin American neighbours, *Cubana de aviación* had the most original international network between the 1960s and the 1980s. Without regional connections before the early 1970s (with the exception of Mexico), the Cuban national airline flew to Prague, East Berlin, Luanda,

---

## Corresponding author:

Etienne Morales, Centre de Recherche et de Documentation sur les Ameriques, 28 rue Saint Guillaume, Paris 75007, France.

Email: [etienne.morales69@gmail.com](mailto:etienne.morales69@gmail.com)

Maputo, Tripoli and Bagdad. It was clear that the aircrafts followed the lines of the revolutionary government headed by Fidel Castro since 1959, in the context of the global Cold War. As the sole socialist state on the continent, it diverged from other American countries which had built integrated regional networks. Moreover, State-owned *Cubana* from 1959 is less known than the one founded in 1929 as the *Compañía Nacional Cubana de Aviación Curtiss* which was managed by private hands until the takeover of 1959.

Historical analyses of the *Cubana de aviación* tend to emphasise a radical break between the republican period (1902–58) and the revolutionary one (after 1959), replicating hegemonic public discourses. The two major (but non-academic) studies about the *Cubana* both end their analysis in 1961 and present important political biases. For Diana Rodríguez and Juan Rodríguez, Cuban exiles in Florida, the nationalisation of the *Empresa Consolidada Cubana de aviación* meant the end of free enterprise in aviation and of the golden period of the 1950s when *Cubana* was among the ten biggest air carriers in Latin America.<sup>1</sup> On the other end of the spectrum, for Marrón Duque de Estrada, a Havana-based old *Cubana* worker, the same event marked the triumph of the policy of the “chosen instrument” which led to the unification and nationalisation of all the Cuban airlines to serve the nation and the revolution.<sup>2</sup> Implicitly, both views agree on the idea that the history of the main Cuban airline does not deserve to be written after 1961.

This paper challenges this and addresses the internationalisation of *Cubana de aviación* from its first flights to Miami in 1946 to the latest developments of the late 1970s. Focusing on the evolution of *Cubana*'s international network (as much as on management, labour, technology and passengers), I want to investigate how *Cubana* flew the Cuban flag as a national airline before and after the revolution. What was *Cubana* exporting “en los cielos del mundo” [in the skies of the world] as an advertisement of the 1950 stated and how did the context of the Cold War and blockade shaped its role? I argue that after the revolution of 1959, the development of *Cubana* was conditioned by the policies of United States and the blockade that had major consequences on its operations. The militarisation and then the sovietisation of the airline from the late 1960s and in the 1970s were the responses by the Cuban state to develop the airline. Soviet aid to Cuban aviation allowed *Cubana* to serve the new purposes of the Cuban foreign policy.

### **1946–58: A Cuban *Cubana*?**

In the context of rapid growth of the international air transport after Second World War, Cuba found itself in a very good position to serve as a crossroad between South and North America. Sydney Clark noted in her 1946 travel guide for American tourists to Cuba that “Nowhere has the pace of expansion been faster

---

<sup>1</sup> Diana Rodríguez and Juan Rodríguez, *En alas Cubanás* (Miami: Cuba Aero, 2002).

<sup>2</sup> Rolando Marrón Duque de Estrada, *Cubana de Aviación: El Instrumento Elegido (1929–1961)* (Havana: Cubana de Aviación, 2009).

than in services to and through Cuba”.<sup>3</sup> This boom did not only affect passengers but also air cargo. For instance, in 1947, Cuba represented 23 per cent of all USA air freights exports and 32 per cent of the imports.<sup>4</sup> The main question for the Cuban leadership was how to take advantage of its geographical situation: as Cuban historian Herminio Portell stated, Cuba needed to avoid becoming “a small Polynesian island without [its] own aviation to which foreign aviators did a favour [by] bringing their planes full of merchandise”.<sup>5</sup> At the end of Second World War, Cuba had an old airline, *Cubana de aviación* and an international airport near Havana, at Rancho Boyeros, both under Pan American World Airways control. *Cubana de aviación* was founded in 1929 as “Compañía Cubana de Aviación Curtiss” and bought by Pan Am in 1932, the latter taking also control over the airport. In the nationalistic context of the presidencies of the *Partido Revolucionario Cubano Auténtico*, those of Ramón Grau San Martín (1944–48) and Carlos Prío Socarrás (1948–52), the Cuban state pushed for a stronger involvement of local investors in *Cubana* and in the airport management, but the negotiations failed several times. The policy of Pan Am in the Cuban market was to intensify the offer of flights between Miami and Havana, as well as to progressively withdraw from *Cubana* (a policy followed with its other Latin American subsidiaries at that time<sup>6</sup>) and to sell the Havana airport in order to focus on air transport activities.

Whereas Pan Am shares in *Cubana* were reduced to 52 per cent in 1945, 48 per cent in 1948 and 20 per cent in 1953, in this period the Cuban governments supported new smallest airlines such as *Aerovías Q*, *Aeropostal* and *Expreso Aéreo Interamericano* rather than *Cubana*. *Aerovías Q* was founded by colonel Quevedo, former manager of *Cubana*, in late 1945 in order to “cubanise”<sup>7</sup> air transport in Cuba against the influence of USA airlines (especially Pan Am). Among a lot of privileges, the military-controlled *Aerovías Q* and *Cuba Aeropostal* obtained from president Grau San Martín and his acting first lady Paulina Alsina de Grau to operate from the military airfield of Columbia in Havana rather than at Rancho Boyeros. This situation raised the opposition of the union of air transport workers (*Federación Aérea Nacional* hereafter FAN), of the government of United States and other airlines for the unfair competition, as well as of the large part of Cuban society because of the smuggling in the Columbia airfield. However, it was only in February 1960, under the revolutionary government, that Rancho Boyeros regained its status as the unique civil airport of Havana.

The internationalisation of *Cubana's* routes implies that *Cubana* appeared as a Cuban company for the foreign countries, as indicated in the negotiations for the

<sup>3</sup> Sydney Clark, *All the Best in Cuba* (New York: Mead, 1946), 7.

<sup>4</sup> Camille Allaz, *La Grande Aventure de la Poste et du Fret Aérien, du 18 e Siècle à Nos Jours* (Paris: Presse de l'Institut du transport aérien, 1998), 340.

<sup>5</sup> H. Portell Vilá, “Aviación y Aeropuertos”, *Bohemia*, 21 July 1946, p. 20.

<sup>6</sup> On Pan Am subsidiaries in Latin America, see Ronald Edward George Davies, *A History of the World's Airlines* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), 329–55 and Id., *Airlines of Latin America Since 1919* (London: Putnam, 1984).

<sup>7</sup> “Aviación comercial cubana”, *Hoy*, 20 January 1946, p. 1.

inauguration of *Cubana's* route to Madrid (April 1948) and New York (May 1956). For instance, the Spanish Foreign Ministry wanted to be certain that *Cubana* was effectively Cuban and was not Pan Am's instrument to set foot in Spain.<sup>8</sup> Also the New York service was the key objective of *Cubana* (as for all the other Latin American carriers in the 1950s) but *Cubana* faced the competition of *National Airlines* and *Línea Aeropostal Venezolana* which, respectively, inaugurated New York–Havana and Caracas–New York (via Havana) routes. In 1949, some economic circles in Havana and the FAN aimed for a service to New York, but the USA Civil Aeronautics Board permit to *Cubana* was delivered only August 1951 and was conditioned to *Cubana's* task to differentiate his logo and public relations from those of Pan Am.<sup>9</sup> This decision forced Cuban government to consider as best solution to develop *Cubana de aviación*. Cuban President Carlos Prío Socarrás (1948–52) created the *Banco de Fomento Agrícola e Industrial de Cuba* (BANFAIC) and in January 1952, the latter asked a feasibly study from Booz Allen & Hamilton management consultants in New York, so to “study *Cubana's* operation, financial condition and management, and its relations with Pan American World Airways”. The report concluded that “*Cubana* should dissolve all agreement with PAA and should take any other steps necessary to achieve full independence”.<sup>10</sup>

In this context, Pan Am envisioned to recover the planes leased to *Cubana* and end its international routes in February 1952. But it abandoned this plan since “as soon as decisions are known, labour will undoubtedly announce a general strike demanding government intervention”: “labour will refuse service to PAA aircraft, reservations etc.”, and “there will be a general attack against PAA by means of press, radio and other forms of propaganda”.<sup>11</sup> For the head of the *Pan Am* Latin American Division, Wilbur Morrison:

However, the situation has gradually become worse over the past several years and the only thing that saved this company from bankruptcy four years ago was its monopoly on the Cuba-Spain route. But for the impossible labor situation the company could still be saved and operate at a profit. However, I do not consider it worthwhile to continue fighting a losing battle with a bunch of Communists. You will recall that this has been my opinions since 1945 when I insisted that we sell out to Expreso. It is most unfortunate that Expreso was unable to comply with the sale agreement which we entered into at that time.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Archivo Nacional de Cuba, Havana (hereafter ANC), Ministerio de Estado (hereafter ME), Box 1131, File, 17526, Spanish Foreign Ministry to Spanish Embassy, 24 July 1948.

<sup>9</sup> University of Miami, Pan American World Airways Records (hereafter UM, PAWAR), Series I, Sub-Series 6, Sub-Series 6, Box 4, CAB, “The Havana-New York Foreign Air Carrier Permit Case”, docket no. 3213, 25 July 1951 and “New York-Havana Permit to *Cubana*”, *Aviation Week & Space Technology*, 27 August 1951, p. 67.

<sup>10</sup> BANFAIC, *Survey of Cubana de Aviación SA* (New York: Booz, Allen&Hamilton, 1952), i–iii. The exemplary of the National Library of Cuba is stamped “Biblioteca F. Batista”.

<sup>11</sup> UM, PAWAR, Series 4, Sub-series 12, Box 2, W. Pine to E. Balluder, 6 February 1952.

<sup>12</sup> UM, PAWAR, Series 4, Sub-series 12, Box 2, W. Morrison to E. Balluder, 2 July 1951.

Under Pan Am rule, the nationalistic FAN took a stand against Pan Am arguing that *Cubana* was not a Cuban company because it was ruled by a USA citizen, Warren Pine<sup>13</sup> and considered Pan Am as alien “lords”.<sup>14</sup> Pan Am was already considered as a symbol of USA imperialism in the 1950s in Cuba but it was after the Revolution that this image was reinforced.

Pan Am directives were negotiating with three interested groups for the sale of *Cubana* and Rancho Boyeros Airport. Their first line of negotiation targeted directly the Cuban government for a takeover by the State. The second option was driven by Amadeo Barletta, a businessman, owner of the newspapers *El Mundo*, and the third one was José Lopez Vilaboy, owner and director of newspaper *Mañana*. We can infer that Fulgencio Batista, who took power on 10 March 1952 demitting Prio Socarrás, agreed with José López Vilaboy for his purchase of both Rancho Boyeros and *Cubana* from *Pan Am*. So, in 1954, Pan Am liquidated its remaining 20 per cent of *Cubana* shares. With the aid of BANFAIC and after Banco de Desarrollo Económico y Social, *Cubana* became an important instrument of the development of tourism in the island. With credit lines offered by the banks, *Cubana* ordered new aircrafts, as Vicker Viscount for the Miami line, Superconstellation for the line of New York, Madrid and Mexico, and, in 1957 four Bristol Britannia and two Boeing 707. With 337,416 passengers flown at home and abroad in 1958, *Cubana* was an important Latin American private airline in a country with around 6.8 million inhabitants when in Argentina Aerolíneas Argentinas flew 482,000 passengers in a country of 20 million inhabitants.

In other words, between 1946 and 1958, the international network of *Cubana* was consolidated between the Caribbean, America and Europe, largely with the support of the Cuban state. The Miami line was the most important in terms of passengers though *Cubana* suffered the competition from USA airlines.<sup>15</sup> Other lines aimed to integrate Cuba in a regional market for USA tourism in the Caribbean like Port-au-Prince (1953), Kingston (1954), Nassau (1957), attracting some passengers and served with less prestigious and smaller aircraft such as DC-3 and DC-4. The New York route inaugurated in 1956 became rapidly the most profitable one. Mexico and, above all, Madrid were destinations that embodied the historic ties between Hispanic nations.

The CEO of *Cubana*, José López Vilaboy, used the airline to promote tourism in Cuba abroad and promoting linking with other businesses. “The new patron of Cuba”<sup>16</sup> with Spanish origins organised a touring exhibit of Cuban landscape painting with a prize of US\$ 1000 that was inaugurated in Madrid’s *Círculo de Bellas Artes* in October 1957. Another of those initiatives was the inauguration of the Tropicana Special flight between Miami and Havana that included a

<sup>13</sup> A. Miolán, “La Aviación Comercial Cubana en Grave Peligro”, *Bohemia* 41/48, 27 November 1949, pp. 28–30, 135.

<sup>14</sup> C. Sánchez, “Sobre la Realidad de una Crisis”, *Aerovoz*, April 1953, p. 16.

<sup>15</sup> ANC, MINREX, Box 19, File 349, M. Quevedo to Ministry of State, 9 February 1953.

<sup>16</sup> A de Foxá to J.P de Lojendio, 18 September 1953 in Agustín de Foxá, *Obras Completas*, tomo 3, (Madrid: Editorial Prensa Española, 1976), 508.

dance show.<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, 1958 proved to be a problematic year for *Cubana*. Its intimate relations with the government of Batista discredited the company and led some rebels to hijack *Cubana*'s planes; some pilots deserted, and exiled *fidelistas* [that is anti-Batista] harassed *Cubana*'s pilots in the airports of Miami, Madrid and Mexico.<sup>18</sup> On 25 September 1958 the Havana airport was targeted by an action of sabotage and partially burnt: the fate of *Cubana* and its master, López Vilaboy, was deeply interlocked with the Batista regime that fell on the eve of the 1959 New Year.

### 1959–62: *Cubana* in the revolution, revolution in *Cubana*?

What to do with the national airline *Cubana* in time of revolution? The first action was to renew the image of the flag carrier with the mission to bring back the Cuban exiles. The new “revolutionary” government granted more than one million Cuban pesos to pay for tickets for the refugees that were transported back by *Cubana* from Miami, New York, Mexico, Madrid, Santiago de Chile, Buenos Aires. *Cubana* was under the control of the newly created *Ministerio de Recuperación de los Bienes Malversados* [Ministry of Ill-Gotten Goods]. López Vilaboy maintained a struggle against the *interventores* [the administrators designed by the government], asking a public trial to show he was not a puppet of the Batista (*testaferro*),<sup>19</sup> but eventually he left Cuba in September 1959.<sup>20</sup> The first *interventor* Genaro Hermida was presented in the *Diario de la Marina* as “a young hard-working man with new ideas”<sup>21</sup> but in private a *Pan Am* manager wrote that Hermida and most of the new directives appointed by the State “nobody knows a damn thing about aviation”.<sup>22</sup> As Alfred Padula underlined, “in this moment of crisis, Fidel gave preference to men of known loyalty to the revolution. Technical or administrative competence was a secondary consideration”.<sup>23</sup> In the early 1960, the presidents of *Cubana* changed quickly and two figures remained in the shadow. First was the experienced Mario Torres Menier, involved in the 1933 Revolution against Machado, Cuban

<sup>17</sup> “Propaganda de Cubana de aviación”, *Cuba Económica y Financiera*, January 1956, p. 33. A. Vandyck, “How Cubana Is Pulling Out of the Red. Flying Night Club, Addition of Modern Equipment, Opening of NY-Havana Route All Helped”, *American Aviation*, 25 March 1957.

<sup>18</sup> Earl Smith, *The Fourth Floor: An Account of the Castro Communist Revolution* (New York: Random House, 1962), 123; Archivo del Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores de España, Madrid (hereafter, AMAEE), Box R-5037, File 32, Note from Cuban Embassy, 21 April 1958; Archivo de la Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores de México (hereafter ASRE), III-2259-31, Note from Cuban Embassy, 21 April 1958.

<sup>19</sup> On the press polemics, see for instance: *Diario de la Marina*, 9 June 1959, p. A-8, 10 June 1959, p. 8-A; 12 June 1959, p. 3-A and 5-B; 13 June 1959 p. A-3; 16 June 1959 p. A-1 et 9-B; *Combate*, 23 June 1959, p. 1.

<sup>20</sup> José López Vilaboy, *Motivos y Culpables de la Destrucción de Cuba* (San Juan de Puerto Rico: Editora de libros Puerto Rico, 1973), 430.

<sup>21</sup> “Nueva directiva de la Cía Cubana de la Aviación”, *Diario de la Marina*, 3 March 1959, p. A-12.

<sup>22</sup> UM, PAWAR, Series 4, Sub-series 12, Box 2, Memorandum Latin American Division to Balluder “Cubana Gets New Officers”, c. March 1959.

<sup>23</sup> A Padula, “The Fall of the Bourgeoisie: Cuba, 1959–1961”, PhD dissertation, University of New Mexico (USA), 1974, p. 600.

representative during the 1944 Chicago Convention and at the International Civil Aviation Organization: he remained the international specialist for Cuban international aviation policy until his death in 1977.<sup>24</sup> The communist militant and aviation specialist Víctor Pina Cardoso was the other man of *Cubana* in the 1960s: he played a big part in developing relations with Czechoslovakia and USSR and using *Cubana* as medium for Cuban Regime.<sup>25</sup>

In his first declaration about air transport as Prime minister, Fidel Castro told *Cubana* workers in March 1959 that “his men” were aiming at merging Cuban airlines and developing new routes such as Chicago or Los Angeles.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, it looks like the new government had two strategic goals: the unification of domestic airlines and the implementation of new routes. *Cubana* could indeed inaugurate a flight to Kingston on December 1959 and to Caracas in March 1960, but the growing confrontation between the governments of Cuba and United States challenged the future of *Cubana*, especially in oil supply. Esso monopolised the oil supply for *Cubana*,<sup>27</sup> and when Cuban government nationalised the Esso, Shell and Texaco refineries in July 1960, *Cubana* had to face the retaliation. Esso cut its credit line to *Cubana* in all the airports where it refuelled out of Cuba and the only solution left for *Cubana* was to pay cash to other oil companies. For some months, Luís Martínez (managing director of *Cubana*) gave between 50,000 and 100,000 USD (equivalent to circa today’s 410,000 and 820,000 USD) each week in cash to the pilots for refuel,<sup>28</sup> but later *Cubana* looked for friendly suppliers in the airports of the East Europe. At the same time, from July 1960, any Cuban plane that landed in United States was subject to embargo in the name of the *Harris & Company advertising* writ against the Cuban state and against *Cubana* for debts. Although the Cuban government contracted the left-wing attorneys Victor Rabinowitz and Leonard Boudin in New York to defend *Cubana*,<sup>29</sup> *Harris & Company* obtained the seizure of six planes up to 1961 when the last *Cubana* flight landed in the United States. The rupture of diplomatic ties between Washington and Havana in January 1961 and the seizures of planes marked the final of *Cubana*’s flight, though *Pan Am* continued its flights to Havana until 22 October 1962.

<sup>24</sup> “Falleció el ingeniero Mario Torres Menier, pionero de la aviación cubana”, *Granma*, 15 January 1977, p. 3.

<sup>25</sup> On Víctor Pina engagement in aviation and world revolution before 1958, see the book written by his son: Víctor Pina Tabío Víctor, *Víctor Manuel Pina Cardoso: Alas y Sombras (1910–1958)* (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 2011). On his action about aviation and communist countries, see Albert Manke, “Cuba y Checoslovaquia: Una Nueva Alianza Estratégica en la Guerra Fría”, in Josef Opatrný (ed.), *Las Relaciones Entre Europa Oriental y América Latina 1945–1989* (Prague: Ibero-Americana Pragensia Supplementum, 2015), 94 and César Reynel Aguilera, *El soviét Caribeño: La Historia de la Revolución Cubana* (Barcelona: Ediciones B, 2018).

<sup>26</sup> “Serán Fusionadas las Líneas Aéreas Cubanas”, *Revolución*, 13 March 1959, p. 12.

<sup>27</sup> Dieter Baudis, Gloria García, Jürgen Kuczynski and José A. Piñera, “Los Pronósticos Económicos de la Esso Standard Oil de Cuba. Estudio de la Planificación de un Monopolio Basado en Documentos de Sus Archivos”, in Horacio García Brito (ed.), *Monopolios Norteamericanos en Cuba: Contribución al Estudio de la Penetración Imperialista* (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias sociales, 1973), 59–60.

<sup>28</sup> Luís Martínez Menocal, *Historias de la Aviación Cubana* (Havana: Editora Política, 2009), 84.

<sup>29</sup> Víctor Rabinowitz, *Unrepentant Leftist: A Lawyer’s Memoir* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996), 198–218.



The purchase of spare parts for United States-built planes as the DC-3, the DC-4, the C-46 or the Super Constellations became more and more difficult until the proclamation of the embargo in October 1960 that definitively prohibited it. Cuban authorities decided to sell some of the planes that could not be used in these conditions. Mortimer “Morty” Rabson, a United States citizen, veteran of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade in the Civil Spanish War (1936–39) and friend of Víctor Pina Cardoso, was charged with the complicated task of selling Cuban Super Constellations, and to find buyers in Europe, Africa and Asia and could sell one before dying. Two more were sold later by a Spanish associate.<sup>30</sup> Some DC-3 and DC-4 were cannibalised for the use of their spare parts in order to keep the other working as one of the four Bristol Britannia. The Cuban press began to exalt the heroism of *Cubana*’s workers who repaired and manufactured spare parts.<sup>31</sup> Among the innovation introduced, *Cubana* workers installed bus seats in DC-3s for the interior traffic<sup>32</sup> or create a press to repair Britannias’ windows instead of sending them to United Kingdom for reparations.<sup>33</sup> In November 1960, a Cuban commercial mission to Ottawa, headed by minister Regino Boti and largely publicised in Cuban press, obtained licenses for the importation of instruments and engines for the Britannia.<sup>34</sup> As Harold Boyer argued, the first “great debate” about Canadian economic relations with revolutionary Cuba took place in Parliament Hill in Ottawa about aircraft materials for *Cubana*.<sup>35</sup> Liberal MP Paul Martin asserted that the exports “could easily be transferred to [a] military aircraft and that it was even possible that some of the Cuban planes could be reconstructed for military purposes”, suggesting that “any flights of a ‘commercial’ nature could easily be conceived of having strategic functions in that they provided Cuba with an important means of carrying on her vital foreign trade”.<sup>36</sup> Nevertheless, the Diefenbaker government maintained the licenses and Canada became the key spot for the maintenance of the Britannia in the next years.

The first contract for Soviet-built aircraft was signed at the Leipzig’s world fair in March 1961 by the Deputy Minister of Foreign Trade, Jacinto Torras, and the minister of Transports, Julio Camacho.<sup>37</sup> This first deal overlapped with the internationalisation of Soviet aircraft technology with the creation of Aviaexport in 1961. At the same time, *Cubana* acquired its twelve Soviet Ilyushin IL-14 for domestic lines, along with Air Mali, Ghana Airways and Air Guinée.<sup>38</sup> In November 1962, Cuba signed a very favourable agreement to buy three IL-18s

<sup>30</sup> Martínez Menocal, *Historias de la Aviación Cubana*, 84.

<sup>31</sup> E. Yaelis, “Instrumentos y Piezas Cubanos Surcan los Espacios del Mundo”, *Verde Olivo*, 15 January 1961, pp. 68–73.

<sup>32</sup> J.C. Santos, “Emulación Socialista en el Sector Aéreo”, *El Mundo*, 22 September 1963, pp. 6–7.

<sup>33</sup> G. Hernández, “Cubana de Aviación. Mantenimiento Técnico”, *Bohemia*, 4 May 1979, pp. 88–9.

<sup>34</sup> H. Boyer, “Canada and Cuba: A Study in International Relations”, PhD dissertation, Simon Fraser University (Canada), 1972, p. 186.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 187.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 186.

<sup>37</sup> Martínez Menocal, *Historias de la Aviación Cubana*, 34–5.

<sup>38</sup> Betsy Gidwitz, “The Political and Economic Implications of the International Routes of Aeroflot”, PhD dissertation, University of Washington (USA), 1976, p. 481.

from the USSR as well as spare parts. In the aftermath of the Missile crisis, the contract was a sort of gift to the Cuban government: three Soviet crews were sent to Cuba for training, while five Cuban crews were sent to USSR for technical training.<sup>39</sup> The supply question was very tense: the first IL-18 full of their own spare parts reached Cuba after landing in Moscow, Belgrade, Rabat, Conakry, Recife, Port of Spain in the last days of December 1962,<sup>40</sup> whereas the USA Department of State obtained the prohibition of overflight and technical stops from NATO countries.

The summer of 1960 proved to be a defining moment for the transformation of *Cubana* in all the ground in many respects. As Aerolíneas Argentinas and Líneas Aéreas Venezolanas left Havana as destination in October 1960, Cuba faced the dire consequences of isolation. *Cubana* sought to open new routes to other countries with independent lines with United States as Diefenbakers' Canada,<sup>41</sup> De Gaulle's France<sup>42</sup> and the Brazil under João Goulart, the promoter of the Brazilian *Política Externa Independente*,<sup>43</sup> but it failed for different reasons. Neither Ottawa nor Brasilia was going to challenge Washington, whereas Paris eventually refused due to Cuba's support to Algeria independency groups. The new connection with Prague was the only one to materialise. The first experimental flight to Prague was run in November 1960 and the weekly line was inaugurated on 28 February 1961. The president of the *Banco Nacional de Cuba*, Ernesto Che Guevara and Víctor Pina Cardoso took a great deal of interest in the development of the new connection. In the first year of exploitation, the *Cubana* line to Prague facilitated the exchange of official and touristic delegations between East Europe and Cuba, transported Cuban coinage produced in Czechoslovakia in times of shortage,<sup>44</sup> spare parts for the Britannia, Cuban soldiers injured during the Bay of Pigs Invasion,<sup>45</sup> Czechoslovak dogs for the new Cuban border guards,<sup>46</sup> fellow travellers from the West and world progressive intelligentsia looking for political references in the Cuban revolution.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>39</sup> "Convenio Sobre la Entrega de los Aviones IL-18 y la Ayuda Técnica en su Mantenimiento por parte de la Unión de las Repúblicas Socialistas Soviéticas a la República de Cuba", 9 November 1962 in República de Cuba, *Tratados Bilaterales de Cuba 1902–1962*, Havana, MINREX, December 1963, f. 305r.

<sup>40</sup> Archives du Ministère des Affaires Etrangères de France, La Courneuve (hereafter AMAEF), File 87QO/44, Bayens (ambassador in Brasilia) to minister, 28 December 1962.

<sup>41</sup> Library and Archives Canada (hereafter LAC), Ottawa, RG25, Vol. 6171, file 72-AGS, Green to Diefenbaker, 10 November 1960.

<sup>42</sup> AMAEF, 87QO/42, Du Gardier (Ambassador in Havana) to minister, 17 September 1960.

<sup>43</sup> "Brasil Vai Incrementar Comércio com Cuba: Missão", *Última Hora*, 14 August, 1961, p. 2.

<sup>44</sup> Arquivo Nacional Torre do Tombo, Lisbon, Arquivo Oliveira Salazar, Polícia internacional e de defesa do estado, Serviços de Segurança, Secção Central GU, PC-63A, cx. 637, pt. 3, 28 February 1961.

<sup>45</sup> "Asistencia Médica a Cubanos en Praga", *Hoy*, 21 June 1962, p. 9.

<sup>46</sup> Martínez Menocal, *Historias de la Aviación Cubana*, 97.

<sup>47</sup> On this question, see Paul Hollander, *Political Pilgrims: Travels of Western Intellectuals to the Soviet Union, China and Cuba (1928–1978)* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981); Jeannine Verdès-Leroux, *La Lune et le Caudillo. Le Rêve des Intellectuels et le Régime Cubain* (Paris: Gallimard, 1989); François. Hourmant, *Au Pays de L'avenir Radieux. Voyage des Intellectuels en URSS, à Cuba et en Chine Populaire* (Paris: Aubier, 2000); Kepa Artaraz, *Cuba and Western Intellectuals Since 1959*

The establishment of refuel stops for *Cubana* was a major issue. The airports of London, Hamilton (Bermudes) and Santa María (Azores) were eventually closed for Cuban aircrafts by USA pressures and at the end of 1961 the route by Gander (or Halifax) and Shannon was established. *Cubana* trained Czechoslovak pilots in transatlantic flights<sup>48</sup> and lent one of its four Bristol Britannia to the Czechoslovak State's airlines.<sup>49</sup> In the official Cuban production (as cartoons, advertisement and in the *Instituto Cubano del Arte e Industria Cinematográficos*' reels)<sup>50</sup> the new line of Prague was presented as a victory against USA imperialism, a rapprochement with European socialist countries and a window on the world. Six months after the inauguration, the minister of Transport Omar Fernández qualified the Prague route as "one of the vital nerves of our socialist revolution".<sup>51</sup>

Some of the personnel of *Cubana* disagreed with the new orientations of the Cuban government and the management of *Cubana*. In the early days of January 1961, Cuban pilots Eduardo Tomeu and Miguel González decided to stay in Spain after sending their relatives to Miami. The two senior pilots, who flew over the Atlantic since 1948 cited his refusal to fly the Prague line beyond the Iron curtain.<sup>52</sup> Indeed, from the 1960s onwards, *Cubana* was confronted with massive defections, initially at destination such as Miami, New York and Madrid and afterwards in the refuelling points of Shannon (Ireland) and Gander (Canada). In February 1961, the British *chargé d'affaires* in Havana, Ian Sutherland, estimated that three-quarter *Cubana* flying personnel had defected.<sup>53</sup> In 1962, the *New York Times* evaluated that 70 out 150 pilots who flew to Florida had remained there, while the president of *Cubana* confirmed later that only 3 out of 23 pilots engaged in transatlantic flights were still in Cuba in 1961.<sup>54</sup> In April 1962, *Flight International* mentioned 16 pilots of *Cubana* that had deserted in the previous eight months.<sup>55</sup>

## 1962–70: "Volando sobre el cerco"

In 1962, the journal *Panorama Económico Latinoamericano* dedicated a report to *Cubana* called "Volando sobre el cerco" (flying over the siege). As all the articles published in Cuba in the 1960s, it was marked by optimism: the air blockade would be overtaken by the heroism of Cuban workers and the aid of socialist countries.

(*fnote continued*)

(New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Thomas Neuner, *Paris, Havanna und die Intellektuelle Linke: Kooperationen und Konflikte in den 1960er Jahren* (Constance: Verlagsgesellschaft, 2012).

<sup>48</sup> M. López, "Realizados 110 vuelos Praga-La Habana", *El Mundo*, 30 October 1963, pp. 1–2.

<sup>49</sup> "Zahájení Pravidelného Leteckého Spojení s Kubou", *Rudé Pravó*, 4 February 1962, p. 1; "Se Inicia Hoy Vuelos de la Compañía CSA", *Hoy*, 7 February 1962, p. 3.

<sup>50</sup> "Habana-Praga", Noticiero ICAIC no. 27, 5 December 1960, 0min40.

<sup>51</sup> "Omar Fernández en la Universidad Popular. El papel del Transporte en la Edificación del Socialismo", *Hoy*, 17 October 1961, pp. 6–7.

<sup>52</sup> "Hacia la Libertad", *ABC*, 7 January 1961, pp. 35–6.

<sup>53</sup> LAC, RG 25, Vol. 4986, file 72-AGS-40, Embassy Ottawa to under-secretary, 15 February 1961.

<sup>54</sup> "Cuban Air Service Sharply Cut Since Start of the Castro Regime", *New York Times*, 18 March 1962, p. 88.

<sup>55</sup> "Cubana Adrift", *Flight International*, 26 April 1962, p. 643.

But the period between 1962 and 1970 was the moment of maximal isolation for Cuba with *Cubana* serving only Mexico, Madrid and Prague. The 1962 Missile crisis put a temporary end to all international flights. *Pan Am*, *KLM*, *Mexicana de aviación* and *Iberia* ceased their activities at the height of the crisis: only the Spanish airline returned to Cuba once the crisis was resolved. The United States government intended to establish an air blockade around Cuba, and in this strategy, one goal was to limit the flights of *Cubana* abroad. The Department of State tried to impede the resumption of flights to Madrid in late 1963.<sup>56</sup> It pressured France and United Kingdom to impede refuelling stops in the Cayman Island<sup>57</sup> or Guadeloupe, for charter flights.<sup>58</sup> Moreover, 1964 military coup that overthrew president Goulart, put to end the hope of links towards Brazil. Further investigations led by *Cubana* to establish new links (with Canada, to Paris, to Alger and to the Bahamas) all failed.<sup>59</sup>

No need to remark how the number of passengers transported out of the island by *Cubana* fell drastically after 1960. In 1962, *Cubana* had flown 16,200 passengers abroad. In 1970, they were 31,100, that is, more or less the level of 1949 (see Table 1).

The profile of the passengers also deeply evolved: Cuban citizens were not free to exit the island and tourism became a privilege for people selected by the communist party (*Partido Comunista de Cuba* from 1965) and the Unions (*Central de los Trabajadores de Cuba*). *Cubana*'s lines also served to transport Latin American militant and *guerrilleros* between their countries and Cuba via Prague, with the aid of Czechoslovak intelligence.<sup>60</sup> *Cubana* occasionally served to transport Cuban soldiers, as it happened in October 1963 to support the Algerian army in the "Sand war" against Morocco.<sup>61</sup> Finally, in a context when the main escape to leave Cuba was Madrid and Mexico (1962–65) and after the "freedom flights" Varadero-Miami (1965–73), *Cubana* organised some charter flights to transport Cuban emigrants to Lisbon, Paris or Prague, waiting for a further lift to go to the United States.<sup>62</sup>

With the drain of pilots and qualified workers to the United States, *Cubana* had to form new specialist and implement tactics to keep them in Cuba. Already in

<sup>56</sup> Real Academia de la Historia, Madrid, Fondo Castiella, 13-1-2285-1, E.Garrigues to Castiella, 19 December 1963.

<sup>57</sup> H. Raymond, "US Asks Britain to Bar Flights from Cuba to Isle in Caribbean", *New York Times*, 11 July 1963, p. 1, 11.

<sup>58</sup> AMAEF, 87QO/76, Du Gardier (ambassador in Havana) to minister, 1 April 1964.

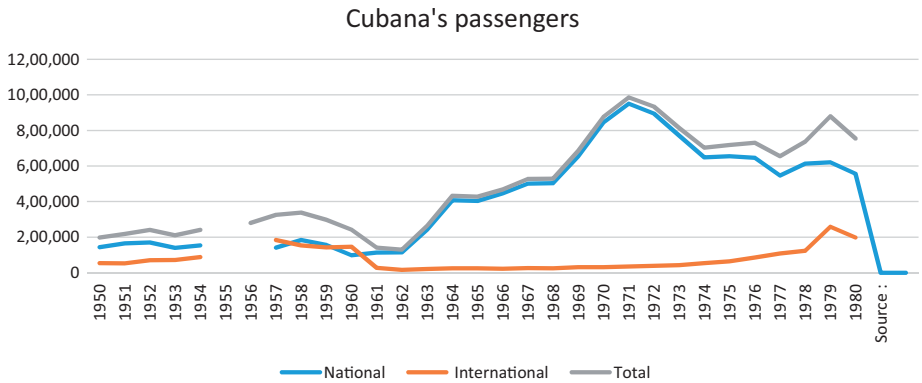
<sup>59</sup> LAC, RG 25, Vol 13518. file 42-8-3-1, Memorandum "Civil Air Relations with Cuba", Latin American Division to Economic Division, 2 April 1964; AMAEF, Box R-7377, File 24, Acta de la reunión no. 182 de la CIPAI, 29 September 1964; AMAEF, 87QO/76, Compte-rendu de la visite du Directeur de l'Aviation Civile cubaine auprès du Directeur des Transports Aériens, 5 August 1964; "Cuba Suspends Nassau Flights, Bahamas Governor Announces", *Miami Herald*, 26 September 1964.

<sup>60</sup> Michal Zourek, "Operation Manuel. When Prague Was a Key Transit Hub for International Terrorism", *Central European Journal of International and Security Studies* 9:5 (2015) 78–98.

<sup>61</sup> Piero Gleijeses, "Cuba's First Venture in Africa: Algeria 1961–1965", *Journal of Latin American Studies* 28:1 (1996) 159–95.

<sup>62</sup> Arquivo Histórico Diplomático, Lisboa, Negócios económicos EEA Proc 42/Cuba/324, Maço 261. Escalas técnicas em território português de aviones cubanos e checoslovacos, transportando emigrantes cubanos, autorizadas durante o decurso do ano 1965.

**Table 1.** Cubana's passenger, 1950–80.



Year	National	International	Total
1950	143,207	54,293	197,500
1951	165,261	53,122	218,383
1952	170,308	70,747	241,055
1953	139,204	71,109	210,313
1954	153,175	87,733	240,908
1955			
1956			279,865
1957	141,427	183,816	325,243
1958	183,395	153,231	337,416
1959	155,804	142,259	298,063
1960	97,629	145,621	242,250
1961	113,865	27,554	141,419
1962	114,100	16,200	130,300
1963	243,900	21,000	264,900
1964	407,300	24,800	432,100
1965	403,300	24,600	427,900
1966	446,300	22,000	468,300
1967	500,700	26,100	526,800
1968	503,500	25,100	528,600
1969	654,200	31,600	685,800
1970	845,700	31,100	876,800
1971	950,800	35,300	986,100
1972	895,400	38,500	933,900
1973	771,100	43,100	814,200
1974	649,200	53,700	702,900
1975	654,400	63,800	718,200
1976	645,700	85,100	730,800

(continued)

Table 1. Continued

Year	National	International	Total
1977	546,400	108,500	654,900
1978	612,700	124,000	736,700
1979	621,400	258,100	879,500
1980	556,200	198,100	754,300

Source: Cubana de aviación, Memoria anual, 1946–51, Anuario estadístico de Cuba 1972, 167; Anuario estadístico de Cuba 1975, 127; Anuario estadístico de Cuba 1980, 116; IATA, World Air Transport Statistics, 1957–78.

1959, the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias* sent some young people to be formed as pilot at the regional International Civil Aviation Organization School in Mexico. In the next years, military pilots were sent to train in Czechoslovakia, the Popular Republic of China and the USSR, while in the early 1960s, *Cubana* was highly militarised in terms of personnel of staff. A special revolutionary mind-set was imposed on all the staff: for instance, flight attendants had to first swear political loyalty. Daisy Dueñas was a model of Cuban fly attendant: member of *Milicias Nacionales Revolucionarias*, of the *Federación de las Mujeres Cubana* and of the *Unión de Jóvenes Comunistas*, she participated in the *zafra* (sugarcane crop) and she won an award in shotgun shooting.<sup>63</sup> As the pilots of the 1950s were described in the 1960s as *bourgeois*, flight attendants were criticised as “characters” from “high society” or a “beauty contest” which wanted to “travel” without the “concern to be useful to society”. “Age” or “colour” was abandoned as criteria for their recruitment and “political conditions” and “revolutionary spirit” were substituted to them. Nevertheless, the three main qualities remained to be “young, good-looking and attentive”, leaving room for very ambiguous outcome about the real selection of personnel.<sup>64</sup> The few pilots and attendants who had not escaped were privileged. The Canadian ambassador at Havana interviewed an anonym pilot of *Cubana* in 1964. He said a pilot was paid 1200 pesos a month, more than a mechanic who received 200 pesos a month, in addition to other material and symbolic advantages. Generally, in the 1960s, aviation workers had the highest wages in Cuba,<sup>65</sup> and Cuban authorities alternated between reward and threat to control *Cubana*’s personnel. The stick was the army guard in the domestic flight to prevent hijackings and control of the correspondence with relatives. Nevertheless, there was some opposition of Cuban and *Cubana* rules as the hijacking by a flight engineer of *Cubana* in 1966 demonstrated it. The hijacking failed, the pilot and the guard were

<sup>63</sup> “La Mujer Cubana en el Transporte”, *Mi-Trans*, August 1962, p. 23.

<sup>64</sup> W. Hierro, “Nuestras Aeromozas”, *Transportes*, March/April 1978, pp. 6–9; N. Garcia, “La mujer Revolucionaria en la Aviación Cubana”, *Transportes*, July–August 1979, pp. 24–5.

<sup>65</sup> Roberto E Hernández and Carmelo Mesa-Lago, “Labor Organization and Wages”, in Carmelo Mesa-Lago (ed.), *Revolutionary Change in Cuba* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1974 [1971]), 233.

killed, and the engineer was condemned to the death penalty. Afterwards, Rafael del Pino, from the military forces, was designated as the new president of *Cubana* (1966–68) and imposed a militarisation of the company and a new organisation of labour and party: the militarisation of *Cubana* in the 1960s was a state management response to fully control the company and it arrived before the sovietisation of the 1970s. Five hundred employees were fired and substituted by personnel from the army.<sup>66</sup>

### **1971–79: Sovietisation and desbloqueo (end of the blockade)**

A few days after Salvador Allende was appointed president of Chile in November 1970, he announced the resumption of diplomatic ties with Cuba. Immediately, LAN Chile and *Cubana* began to study a new route between Havana and Santiago. LAN route never materialised due to the opposition from the United States, as well as from the Chilean army (and conservative press). But *Cubana* was prompt to take this opportunity: Agustín Venero went to Chile in February to sign an air agreement, and, in route to Chile, he said to the press that Cuba was disposed to “start a commercial offensive” in international aviation with “all the countries”.<sup>67</sup> Indeed *Cubana* inaugurated the route to Santiago in June 1971,<sup>68</sup> a date which marked the beginning of the “desbloqueo” (i.e. the beginning of the end of the blockade), despite having more a symbolic effect than economic.<sup>69</sup> Some delegations, some tourists, some press and books, some weapons flew between Havana and Santiago until the overthrow of Allende on 11 September 1973. It was an important step for the reintegration of Cuba in the Americas.

If the Chilean route did not survive the end of Allende’s presidency, signalled retrospectively the beginning of *Cubana*’s expansion phase in the 1970s. The list of Cuba’s air agreements (see Table 2) shows the increase of signed conventions in the 1970s described as an “aeronautic potential” by the director of *Instituto de Aviación Civil de Cuba*.<sup>70</sup> However, every new agreement did not lead to the establishing of a new route, and inversely, not every *Cubana*’s line was based on an agreement. The countries which signed air agreements with *Cubana* can be divided into three groups: Western countries interested in the new Cuban tourism wave such as Canada, Belgium, Switzerland; Non-Aligned Movement’s countries more or less supporting diplomatically Cuba such as Chile, Guyana, Barbados, Guinea, Equatorial Guinea, Trinidad and Tobago, Algeria, Jamaica, Sierra Leone, Guinea Bissau, Angola, Nicaragua; and finally COMECON countries that formalised the integration of Cuba in the Eastern bloc as Poland and Hungary. After the founding of new connexion with Santiago, *Cubana* flew in October 1973 to

<sup>66</sup> Rafael Del Pino, *En Proa a la Libertad* (Mexico: Planeta, 1991), 141.

<sup>67</sup> AMAEE, Box R-13465, File 63, Dispatch EFE, 14 February 1971.

<sup>68</sup> Arturo Acevedo, “Abierta la Línea Aérea Entre La Habana y Santiago de Chile”, *Juventud Rebelde*, 27 June 1971, p. 1.

<sup>69</sup> “Chile. Fidel y Salvador, un Solo Corazón”, *Panorama*, 16 November 1971, p. 59.

<sup>70</sup> Gregorio Hernández, “El Desarrollo de la Aviación Civil en Cuba”, *Bohemia*, 17 October 1975, pp. 48–9.

**Table 2.** Cuba's air transport agreement until 1980.

Year	Country
1948	United Kingdom
1951	Spain
1951	Portugal
1953	United States
1955	Mexico
1961	Czechoslovakia
1962	USSR
1965	Bulgaria
1967	GDR
1971	Chile
1973	Guyana
1973	Barbados
1974	Switzerland
1974	Hungary
1974	Poland
1974	Guinea
1974	Equatorial Guinea
1974	Trinidad and Tobago
1974	Jamaica
1975	Algeria
1975	Panama
1975	Canada
1975	Belgium
1976	Sierra Leone
1976	Guinea Bissau
1976	Angola
1976	Cape Verde
1980	Nicaragua

Source: ICAO.

Kingston (Jamaica) and Georgetown (Guyana), with stops in Bridgetown (Barbados) and Port of Spain (Trinidad and Tobago) the possibility to reach Conakry. In the context of "Operation Carlota" (i.e. the Cuban intervention in Angola), *Cubana* supported The People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola, while 1976 agreements with Sierra Leone, Guinea Bissau Angola and Cape Verde secured a safe itinerary to reach Luanda, all the more so crucial considering the issue of refuelling points in the Atlantic.<sup>71</sup> The last agreement signed during this period was with Libya, which led to the opening of the line to Tripoli and Bagdad

<sup>71</sup> Piero Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington and Africa 1959–1976* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007 [2002]), 367–9.



in 1979.<sup>72</sup> It materialised, without an air agreement, a political rapprochement with Gaddafi and Hussein (in Iraq). After the Sandinista victory against Somoza in Nicaragua, *Cubana* managed daily flights between Havana and Managua.<sup>73</sup>

*Cubana's* expansion was backed by USSR aid, using one jet aircraft, the IL-62. As Table 3 shows, the 1970s was the decade of the sovietisation of the *Cubana* fleet, although the old Britannia was still operational in Angola (as Gabriel García Márquez wrote in his account of “operación Carlota”). After the integration of Cuba in the COMECON in 1972, *Cubana* began to use IL-62 with Cuban-Soviet crews and in the summer 1977, *Cubana* purchased its own IL-62 to be used in the lines to Berlin, Luanda, Tripoli and Bagdad.<sup>74</sup> Moreover, in July 1975, the Organization of American States lifted its economic and diplomatic sanctions against Cuba, which led to the opening of a line to Panama. With Jimmy Carter's new policy to Cuba, travelling was allowed between the United States and Cuba and charter flights of USA airlines between those two countries began in 1977. In 1979, *Cubana* was occasionally authorised to land in the United States.<sup>75</sup> Nevertheless, *Cubana* did not play a major role in the renaissance of tourism in Cuba: 3034 tourists in Cuba in 1970; 39,727 in 1975; and 96,156 in 1979 were mainly carried via charter flights of foreign airlines.<sup>76</sup>

1979 is the apogee of Cuba's diplomatic reintegration before Reagan's years and the fall of USSR in 1991. In 1979, *Cubana*, celebrating its 50th anniversary, took a great part in the organisation of the sixth Non-Aligned Movement Summit in Havana, and flew again to the United States 18 years after its last flight. It also inaugurated its first and unique line to Asia, with Saddam Hussein's Iraq. In the 1970's decade, the number of *Cubana* passenger grew from 31,100 in 1970 to 258,100 in 1979 (see Table 1). Cuban soldiers to Angola, Cuban instructors and construction experts to Iraq, Cuban fishermen to East Germany, Cuban teachers and physicians to Nicaragua, Cuban athletes to world competition, Cuban “exiles” in United States to Cuba, African students to Cuba, etc. the *Cubana's* passenger of the 1970s were radically different from those of the 1960s, although travel abroad remained a rare privilege in Cuban society.

*Cubana's* expansion was also met by a wave of terrorism in Europe and America led by the anti-regime *Coordinación de Organizaciones Revolucionarias Unidas*.

<sup>72</sup> “Llega a Bagdad Avión de Cubana Con Parte de los Constructores Cubanos Que Laborarán en Obras en Iraq”, *Granma*, 5 May 1979, p. 8; “Inaugurada ruta de Cubana de Aviación que enlaza a La Habana con Trípoli y Bagdad”, *Granma*, 20 December 1979, p. 3.

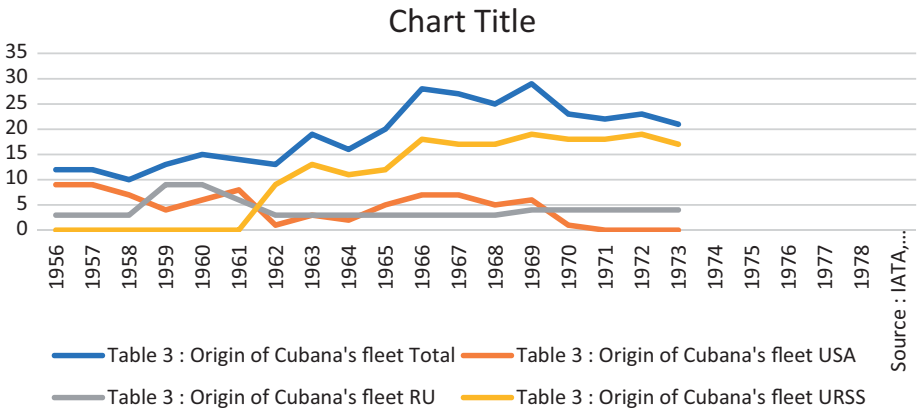
<sup>73</sup> AMAEF, 87QO/136, Favitski to Poncet, 13 November 1979.

<sup>74</sup> A. Shelton, “Llegó a La Habana el Segundo Avión IL-62-M de una Flotilla de Cuatro Adquiridos en la Unión Soviética”, *Granma*, 19 January 1978, p. 2.

<sup>75</sup> On the United States-Cuba negotiations on this question, see Archivo General del MINREX, Havana Fondo Estados Unidos, Piratería aérea (década del 70), Box 16, Conversaciones sobre el permiso para vuelos chárter de Cubana de aviación a los Estados Unidos, efectuadas en el hotel «Sierra Maestra», el día 31 de mayo de 1979, año 20 de la victoria.

<sup>76</sup> *Atlas de Cuba*, Havana, Instituto cubano de geodesia y cartografía, 1978, p. 98 and John Andrew Gustavsen, “Tension Under the Sun: Tourism and Identity in Cuba, 1945–2007”, PhD dissertation, University of Miami (USA), 2009, p. 170.

**Table 3.** Origin of *Cubana's* aircraft.



Year	Total	USA	UK	URSS
1956	12	9	3	0
1957	12	9	3	0
1958	10	7	3	0
1959	13	4	9	0
1960	15	6	9	0
1961	14	8	6	0
1962	13	1	3	9
1963	19	3	3	13
1964	16	2	3	11
1965	20	5	3	12
1966	28	7	3	18
1967	27	7	3	17
1968	25	5	3	17
1969	29	6	4	19
1970	23	1	4	18
1971	22	0	4	18
1972	23	0	4	19
1973	21	0	4	17
1974				
1975				
1976				
1977	24	1	3	20
1978				

Source: IATA, World Air Statistics, 1957–78.

On 24 March 1974, *Cubana* offices in Mexico were bombed,<sup>77</sup> and on 18 August 1976 were those in downtown Panama City as well as *Cubana* desk in Panama International airport,<sup>78</sup> as those in Madrid the same year.<sup>79</sup> This campaign culminated on 6 October 1976 with the attack against a flight of *Cubana* after its take off from the Seawell airport of Bridgetown (Barbados) which resulted in the death of all 73 persons on board (memorised as “crimen de Barbados”).

## Conclusions

*Cubana de aviación* became wholly controlled by Cubans in 1954 and developed an important network of destinations in the Americas, mainly in the United States and centred around Miami. The Castroist revolution of 1959 nationalised the airline and made of it the single one to operate in the country. Facing a global blockade in 1960s, *Cubana* could not develop its networks and was reduced to Madrid, Mexico and the new Prague connection. The flights to Santiago from June 1971 authorised by Salvador Allende marked the beginning of the *desbloqueo* which symbolically culminated in 1979 with *Cubana* coming back to Miami and opening the first Latin American line to Asia, to Bagdad.

Although a large part of the issues analysed here are focusing on the Cold War period, in many aspects, this history can be useful to enlighten the current Cuban context. For instance, if the resumption of charter flights between the United States and Cuba in 2016 under Obama’s presidency was publicised as a symbol of the new relationships between the “intimate enemies”, few commentators underlined that this applied only to USA airlines. *Cubana*’s absence in the United States’ airspace can be explained, in part, to the predictable reaction of part of the Cuban community in United States and a political lecture of the history of *Cubana*.

## Declaration of conflicting interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

## Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

## ORCID iD

Etienne Morales  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-1253-6756>

<sup>77</sup> “Atentado Contra el Local de la Empresa Cubana de Aviación en México”, *Granma*, 25 March 1974, p. 6.

<sup>78</sup> “Atentados Dinamiteros Contra Oficinas de Cubana de Aviación en Panamá”, *Granma*, 19 August 1976, p. 7.

<sup>79</sup> “Estalla Potente Bomba en Oficinas de Cubana de Aviación en Madrid”, *Granma*, 8 November 1976, p. 6.

## Bibliography

### Archival and oral sources

- Archives du Ministère des Affaires Etrangères de France, La Courneuve.  
 Archivo de la Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, Mexico.  
 Archivo del Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores de España, Madrid.  
 Archivo General del MINRE, Havana.  
 Arquivo Histórico Diplomático, Lisbon.  
 Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa.  
 University of Miami, Pan American World Airways Records, Coral Gables.

### Published sources

- Camille Allaz, *La Grande Aventure de la Poste et du Fret Aérien, du 18 e Siècle à nos Jours* (Paris: Presse de l'Institut du transport aérien, 1998).  
 Kepa Artaraz, *Cuba and Western Intellectuals since 1959* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).  
 Dieter Baudis, Gloria García, Jürgen Kuczynski and José A. Piñera, "Los Pronósticos Económicos de la Esso Standard Oil de Cuba. Estudio de la Planificación de un Monopolio Basado en Documentos de sus Archivos", in Horacio García Brito (ed.), *Monopolios Norteamericanos en Cuba: Contribución al Estudio de la Penetración Imperialista* (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias sociales, 1973), 59–60.  
 Harold Boyer, "Canada and Cuba: A Study in International Relations", PhD dissertation, Simon Fraser University (Canada), 1972.  
 Sydney Clark, *All the Best in Cuba* (New York: Mead, 1946).  
 Rafael Del Pino, *En Proa a la Libertad*, (Mexico: Planeta, 1991).  
 Ronald Edward George Davies, *A History of the World's Airlines* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964).  
 Ronald Edward George Davies, *Airlines of Latin America since 1919* (London: Putnam, 1984).  
 Agustín de Foxá, *Obras Completas*, tomo 3 (Madrid: Editorial Prensa Española, 1976).  
 Betsy Gidwitz, "The Political and Economic Implications of the International Routes of Aeroflot", PhD Dissertation, University of Washington (USA), 1976.  
 Piero Gleijeses, "Cuba's First Venture in Africa: Algeria 1961–1965", *Journal of Latin American Studies* 28:1 (1996) 159–95.  
 Piero Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington and Africa 1959–1976* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007 [2002]).  
 John Andrew Gustavsen, "Tension Under the Sun: Tourism and Identity in Cuba, 1945–2007", PhD dissertation, University of Miami (USA), 2009.  
 Roberto E Hernández and Carmelo Mesa-Lago, "Labor Organization and Wages", in Carmelo Mesa-Lago (ed.), *Revolutionary Change in Cuba* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1974 [1971]), 209–50.  
 Paul Hollander, *Political Pilgrims: Travels of Western Intellectuals to the Soviet Union, China and Cuba (1928–1978)* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981).  
 François Hourmant, *Au Pays de L'avenir Radieux. Voyage des Intellectuels en URSS, à Cuba et en Chine Populaire* (Paris: Aubier, 2000).

- José López Vilaboy, *Motivos y Culpables de la Destrucción de Cuba* (San Juan de Puerto Rico: Editora de libros Puerto Rico, 1973).
- Albert Manke, “Cuba y Checoslovaquia: Una Nueva Alianza Estratégica en la Guerra Fría”, in Josef Opatrný (ed.), *Las Relaciones Entre Europa Oriental y América Latina 1945–1989* (Prague: Ibero-Americana Pragensia Supplementum, 2015), 87–99.
- Rolando Marrón Duque de Estrada, *Cubana de Aviación: El Instrumento Elegido (1929–1961)* (Havana: Cubana de Aviación, 2009).
- Thomas Neuner, *Paris, Havanna und die intellektuelle Linke: Kooperationen und Konflikte in den 1960er Jahren* (Constance: Verlagsgesellschaft, 2012).
- Alfred Padula, “The Fall of the Bourgeoisie: Cuba, 1959–1961”, PhD dissertation, University of New Mexico (USA), 1974.
- Víctor Pina Tabío, *Víctor Manuel Pina Cardoso: Alas y Sombras (1910–1958)* (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 2011).
- Víctor Rabinowitz, *Unrepentant Leftist: A Lawyer’s Memoir* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996).
- César Reynel Aguilera, *El Soviet Caribeño: La Historia de la Revolución Cubana* (Barcelona: Ediciones B, 2018).
- Diana Rodríguez and Juan Rodríguez, *En alas Cubanas* (Miami: Cuba Aero, 2002).
- Earl Smith, *The Fourth Floor: An Account of the Castro Communist Revolution* (New York: Random House, 1962).
- Jeannine Verdès-Leroux, *La Lune et le Caudillo. Le Rêve des Intellectuels et le Régime Cubain* (Paris: Gallimard, 1989).
- Michal Zourek, “Operation Manuel. When Prague Was a Key Transit Hub for international Terrorism”, *Central European Journal of International and Security Studies* 9:5 (2015) 78–98.