

"ISOLATION" VS. "ENGAGEMENT": A COMPARATIVE
ANALYSIS OF U.S. AND LATIN AMERICAN
POLICIES TOWARD CASTRO'S CUBA

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POLICIES TOWARD CASTRO'S CUBA

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INTRODUCTION

This paper will analyze and contrast the Cuba policy of the United States with the Cuba policies of Latin American countries. It will examine how these policies and policy goals have changed over the years as relations with Cuba and Cuba's domestic and international situations have changed. The study will also evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the various policies, consider alternatives, and assess how they contribute to or detract from the basic, widely shared objective of bringing about a transition to democracy in Cuba.

Since the early 1960s, the officially stated goal of U.S. policy toward Cuba has been to bring about a peaceful transition to democracy. Essentially, however, the goal has been to encourage the collapse of the Castro regime by isolating it politically and economically. The main instrument of this policy has been a comprehensive trade embargo, which was strengthened in 1992 by congressional enactment of the Cuban Democracy Act (CDA). In addition, Washington has applied bilateral and multilateral diplomatic pressure on the rest of the world to support its hardline stance against Castro. To date, these policies have failed to bring about Castro's removal or significant political opening in Cuba. Whether and to what extent U.S. policy has weakened the Castro regime, potentially contributing to his eventual replacement, remains debatable.

While U.S. policy toward Cuba has remained essentially intransigent for more than 30 years and under nine presidents, the Cuba policies of Latin American countries have changed dramatically and, particularly over the past few years, have differed significantly from those of Washington. For many years, Latin American relations with Castro's Cuba were hostile, primarily

because of Havana's active support for leftist insurgencies in the region that sought to replicate the *fidelista* revolution. However, with the end of the Cold War and Cuba's attempts to export its revolution, relations between Cuba and Latin America have greatly improved. Although there is no unanimity of views, virtually all Latin American countries believe that Castro's Cuba no longer represents a security threat. In general, Latin American countries believe that it is important to encourage a peaceful transition to democracy in Cuba and that the best way to accomplish this is to engage, rather than isolate, the Castro regime.

MUTUAL HOSTILITY: U.S.-CUBAN RELATIONS SINCE THE REVOLUTION

FROM THE EISENHOWER TO THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION

On New Year's Day 1959, Fidel Castro and his supporters marched into Havana, successfully culminating a two year guerrilla revolt against the dictator Fulgencio Batista. Although Castro averred at the time that his revolution was "not socialistic, but a democratic and national revolution"¹, he later claimed to have always been a communist but not to have realized it at the time. In any event, relations between Cuba and the U.S. quickly deteriorated. In 1959, Castro reneged on his promise to hold elections, many former officials of the Batista government were summarily executed, and hard-core *fidelistas* replaced less radical supporters of the Revolution. In February 1960 the first Soviet-Cuban trade agreement was reached and Soviet oil began to arrive in April. At Washington's behest, U.S.-owned refineries refused to process it and were subsequently confiscated. After President Eisenhower reduced Cuba's sugar quota to the U.S. in July, most U.S. businesses in Cuba were nationalized. In January 1961, in response to a Cuban demand that the U.S. reduce its embassy staff in Havana to eleven within forty-eight hours, President Eisenhower broke diplomatic relations. In April 1961, Castro's army crushed a CIA sponsored attempt by Cuban exiles to invade Cuba at the Bay of Pigs.

In January 1962, at U.S. initiative, the Organization of American States excluded Cuba from active participation, and in February the U.S. imposed a trade embargo against the island. In October, Cold War tensions peaked when the U.S. confronted the Soviet Union over its attempt to clandestinely place nuclear-tipped missiles in Cuba. After a harrowing seven days at the brink of nuclear war, the crisis was resolved by a Soviet decision to remove the missiles and a U.S. pledge not to invade Cuba. In 1964 the OAS voted to suspend all diplomatic and commercial relations with Cuba because of its support for subversive activities in Venezuela. For the remainder of

¹ New York Times, January 26, 1959, p.1

the 1960s and the first years of the 1970s, U.S.-Cuban relations remained frozen in hostility.

Relations between Washington and Havana began to thaw in 1975 when the U.S. modified its trade embargo to allow foreign subsidiaries of U.S. companies to trade with Cuba. This step was taken after the OAS voted to allow its members to determine their own political and economic relations with Cuba. Also in 1975, the U.S. and Cuba began discussions to explore the possibility of improved relations but the talks were soon derailed when Cuba intervened militarily in Africa, dispatching some 20,000 troops to support a leftist faction in Angola's civil war.

President Carter took office in January 1977 and shortly thereafter announced that his administration, unlike his predecessor's, would not insist on a withdrawal of Cuban troops from Angola before U.S.-Cuban talks could be resumed. In April several maritime and fishing agreements were signed, and in September the two countries opened "interest sections" in each other's capital, the U.S. section in the Swiss Embassy in Havana and the Cuban section in the Czech Embassy in Washington. However, this positive trend was curtailed by Cuba's increasing military involvement in Africa and its support for revolutionary movements in Central America and the Caribbean. Moreover, relations were further strained by the Mariel boatlift in 1980 in which Castro lifted the barriers and some 120,00 Cuban refugees, including criminals and mental patients that were encouraged to leave by Cuban authorities, fled to Florida.

Relations between Cuba and the U.S. during the 1980s remained generally tense as President Reagan insisted that relations with Cuba could not be improved until Cuban troops were withdrawn from Africa. The U.S. intervention in Grenada in 1983 and continuing Cuban support of the Sandinista regime in Nicaragua and guerrilla movements in several other Central American countries further increased hostility. Nonetheless, in late 1984 Cuba and the U.S. reached an agreement on immigration and refugee issues under which Havana agreed to accept the return of 2,746 "undesirables" from the Mariel exodus, and Washington agreed to grant up to 20,000 visas each year to Cubans seeking to join relatives living in the U.S. However, Cuba suspended this agreement in 1985 after Radio Marti -- a part of Voice of

America (VOA) -- began broadcasting anti-Castro messages to Cuba.

Shortly after President Bush took office in 1989 he toughened the terms for normalized relations. Previously, the U.S. had demanded that Cuba cease its support for subversion abroad, remove its troops from Africa, and reduce its military ties with the Soviet Union. Now, Bush insisted that Cuba also hold free elections, establish a market economy, and reduce the size of its military. A series of incidents, policies, and acrimonious statements over the next several years further inflamed the U.S.-Cuban relationship. These included: the firing of shots by the U.S. Coast Guard on a Cuban-chartered freighter in international waters that refused to stop for a drug inspection; Secretary of State Baker refusing to rule out a military invasion of Cuba under certain circumstances; the establishment of TV Marti; several U.S. military exercises in the Caribbean perceived by Cuba as provocative; a remark by Vice President Quayle that change in Cuba might require a "Contra"-style resistance movement; and several commando attacks against Cuba launched from Florida by anti-Castro Cuban exiles.

During the late 1980s and early 1990s Cuba's policies and situation in the world changed dramatically in ways that might have been expected to lead to reduced tensions between Cuba and the U.S.. These developments included Cuban disengagement from Africa, conflict resolution in Central America marked by the electoral ouster of the Marxist Sandinistas in Nicaragua and a peace accord in El Salvador, and the collapse of Cuba's longtime patron, the Soviet Union. This latter development essentially marked the end of the Cold War and eliminated the U.S. concern that Cuba was a dangerous tool of the Soviet Union and International Communism. The demise of the Soviet Empire was also a serious political and economic blow to Cuba, isolating the Castro regime internationally and removing the estimated four billion dollar annual Soviet subsidy that kept Cuba's centralized and inefficient economy afloat.

Despite the manifest reduction of the Cuban "threat", the U.S. further tightened economic sanctions on Cuba, apparently in the hope that increased pressure would soon bring about the demise of the already weakened Castro regime. In 1992 the U.S. Congress passed the Cuban Democracy Act (CDA) that prohibits foreign subsidiaries

of U.S. owned companies from trading with Cuba (although existing contracts were excepted), bans any ship that docks in Cuba from docking in the U.S. for the next six months, and authorizes the President to prohibit U.S. assistance or arms sales to any country that provides concessionary assistance to Cuba. As one result of the CDA, trade with Cuba by U.S. foreign subsidiaries declined from \$718 million in 1991 to \$336 million in 1992 and a mere \$1.6 million in 1993. Although President Bush initially opposed the CDA, he endorsed it and subsequently signed it into law after Bill Clinton, his opponent in the 1992 presidential election, endorsed the bill in an obvious attempt to curry favor with the politically important anti-Castro voting bloc in Florida. Although the main intent of the CDA was clearly to further squeeze the Cuban economy, it did provide for some measures intended to alleviate the suffering of the Cuban people and improve communication between the two countries. These provisions allow for donations of food and medicine to non-governmental organizations in Cuba (each donation, however, must be approved and licensed) and the expansion of telecommunications systems between the two countries.

The CDA proved extremely unpopular internationally, even among most traditional U.S. allies. For example, Canada and the United Kingdom have issued blocking orders prohibiting U.S. subsidiaries in their countries from complying with the bill. Additionally, in November 1992, a month after the CDA became law, the UN General Assembly supported a Cuban resolution calling for an end to the U.S. embargo by a vote of 59 to 3, with 71 abstentions. Only Israel, Romania, and the U.S. voted against the resolution. Although much of the vote reflected resentment at Washington's perceived attempt to force its political will and law on other countries rather than support for the Castro regime, the vote was hailed in Havana as a major victory.²

² The sections on U.S.-Cuban relations have been derived primarily from the following: Gillian Gunn, Cuba in Transition: Options for U.S. Policy (The Twentieth Century Fund, 1993) pp. 1-26.; Mark P. Sullivan, Cuba: Issues for Congress (Congressional Research Service, October, 1994) pp. 1-8.; Mark P. Sullivan Cuba-U.S. Relations: A Chronology of Key Events (Congressional Research Service, October, 1994) pp. 1-6.; and Facts on File (1960-1994).

POLICY AND RELATIONS UNDER THE CLINTON
ADMINISTRATION

Although the Clinton Administration took office promising "new thinking" on a variety of domestic and international issues, its Cuba policy has changed little from the policies of the last thirty years. In late 1993, Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs Alexander Watson testified to Congress that: "President Clinton's policy toward Cuba is to maintain our economic embargo until there is true, democratic reform and respect for human rights, while reaching out to the Cuban people to eliminate their distress. He does not intend to deviate from this policy."³ Watson went on to review the status of the various sections of the CDA, emphasizing the need to vigorously enforce economic sanctions, but also highlighting measures to "reach out" to the Cuban people with humanitarian assistance.

In their official statements on Cuba, Watson and other Clinton administration officials, like their predecessors in previous administrations, have tended to emphasize that U.S. policy is intended to encourage democratic reforms through peaceful means in Cuba, not explicitly to force the departure of Castro. Nonetheless, there is little doubt that Washington views Castro as the root of all problems in Cuba and his departure from office as essential. For example, in May 1993 Vice President Gore told an audience in Miami that "...our principal policy for hastening the departure of Castro is to convince the people of Cuba that his leadership is an abject failure. And our policy is to stay the course....There are tremendous opportunities in Cuba if they can just get rid of this dictator."⁴

Although the Clinton Administration continued to support the Cuba policy it had inherited from previous administrations, it seemed reluctant to make any new initiatives or even to undertake a high level policy review that many critics said was needed in the post-Cold War world. Beset with foreign policy difficulties in the

³ Statement by Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs Alexander F. Watson to the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Washington, DC, November 18, 1993. Reprinted in "U.S. Department of State Dispatch", December 6, 1993, Vol. 4, No. 49, p. 853.

⁴ Cited in Gunn, Cuba in Transition, p. 23.

former Yugoslavia, Haiti, the Middle East, and elsewhere, the Clinton Administration appeared generally content to ignore Cuba.

In August 1994, however, events once again brought Cuba to the forefront. The crisis began in July when thirty-two would-be refugees drowned after a Cuban government vessel collided with (probably rammed) a tugboat that had been commandeered by Cubans attempting to flee to Florida. This incident provoked several weeks of escalating rhetoric between Havana and Washington, with Castro threatening to unleash a massive exodus of refugees if the U.S. continued to incite Cubans to leave illegally, and the U.S. insisting it would not tolerate a replay of the Mariel boatlift. On August 15, Castro made good on his threat by announcing that security forces would no longer prevent illegal departures, provoking an immediate surge of refugees.

Faced with a tidal wave of thousands -- potentially hundreds of thousands -- of refugees, Clinton reversed a long-standing U.S. policy of granting almost automatic asylum to Cuban refugees and announced that "illegal refugees from Cuba" would no longer be given safehaven in the U.S. Additionally, Clinton imposed four measures designed to punish and further squeeze the Castro regime. The first, and most important, was to block cash remittances to Cuba. Previously, U.S. citizens could send up to \$300 quarterly to their relatives in Cuba. The clear intent of this step was to further constrict the Cuban economy by limiting Cuba's ability to obtain hard currency. The other three measures further restricted charter flights between Miami and Havana, increased Radio and TV Marti broadcasts to Cuba, and promised increased vigilance of human rights abuses in Cuba.

In late August, Cuba indicated it would be willing to hold talks on the refugee crisis if the U.S. was prepared to discuss its "true causes" including the economic embargo. Although the Clinton Administration responded that it had no interest in broadening the agenda beyond the immediate crisis, U.S. and Cuban officials began talks on migration issues in New York on September 1. On the 9th, the U.S. and Cuba signed an accord under which they agreed to facilitate safe, legal, and orderly Cuban migration to the U.S., consistent with the 1984 migration agreement between the two countries. The U.S. agreed to accept a minimum of 20,000 Cuban immigrants each year,

not including immediate relatives of U.S. citizens. Additionally, the U.S. agreed not to grant asylum to migrants who reach the U.S. illegally, and Cuba agreed to take measures to prevent "unsafe" departures from Cuba.⁵

⁵ Information on relations during the Clinton Administration was obtained from: The New York Times; The Washington Post; Sullivan, Cuba: Issues for Congress; and Sullivan, Cuba-U.S.-Relations: A Chronology.

CUBAN-LATIN AMERICAN RELATIONS, 1959-PRESENT

EXPORTING THE REVOLUTION

In late January 1959, a mere three weeks after his triumphant march into Havana, Castro traveled to Caracas to meet with Venezuelan President Romulo Betancourt, who had been democratically elected a year earlier. Castro and Betancourt were widely viewed as representing the hopes of the democratic left in Latin America for a new era of democracy and progress. According to newspaper accounts of the time, Castro suggested that Cuba and Venezuela could take the lead in furthering unity among Latin American democracies. According to the later recollection of Betancourt, however, Castro had something more mischievous in mind. Castro told Betancourt that he was "thinking of having a game with the gringos". What he needed from Betancourt was a loan of three hundred million dollars and access to cheap Venezuelan oil.⁶ Betancourt claims he rejected Castro's proposal out of hand, telling the Cuban leader that Venezuela would pursue an evolutionary rather than revolutionary course. Some analysts have concluded from this episode that Castro was deeply stung by Betancourt's rebuff and from that time on was determined to retaliate by supporting revolutionary movements in Latin America and, specifically, in Venezuela.⁷

In any event, over the next several years Cuba launched, or helped to launch, armed expeditions against Panama, the Dominican Republic, Nicaragua, Guatemala, and Haiti. These small expeditions sought to replicate the *fidelist* experience⁸. It was expected that a small group of committed guerrillas would be able to infiltrate a targeted country, set up a guerrilla *foco* in the hinterland, gain the support of the oppressed populace, and go on to bring down the tyranny. After all, the

⁶ Hugh Thomas, Cuba: The Pursuit of Freedom (Harper & Row, 1971), pp. 1089-1090.

⁷ Tad Szulz, "Exporting the Revolution", in John Plank, ed., Cuba and the United States (Brookings Institution, 1967), pp. 77-78.

⁸ Ibid., pp. 77-81.

fidelistas had required just two years to carry out such a program in Cuba. Unfortunately for Castro and his would-be emulators, though, none of the expeditions managed to gain so much as a foothold. They were crushed by military force.

The lesson drawn by Castro from these failed efforts was not that Latin America was unripe for revolution, or that Cuba could not assist in fomenting it, but that it would not be as easy to spark rebellions as had been hoped. More work and more time would be required. Instead of trying to transplant precisely the Cuban model, Cuba would try to further revolution in countries that had an existing instability and a *lucha armada* that could be nurtured. Venezuela was such a country.

Even though Venezuelan President Betancourt had been fairly and decisively elected in 1958 after helping to oust the longtime caudillo Marcos Perez Jimenez, much of the Venezuelan left refused to accept this less than "revolutionary" outcome, and some elements began to organize and undertake armed resistance. This guerrilla resistance, which was to plague Venezuela for the next decade, provided ample opportunity for Castro's Cuba to meddle. In the early 1960s Cuba brought Venezuelan --and other Latin American -- insurgents to Cuba for training in guerrilla warfare and subversion. In 1963, then director of the CIA John McCone testified to Congress that at least 1,000 to 1,500 subversives had received training in Cuba, which was, he asserted, the driving force behind revolution in Latin America. In effect, McCone charged, Castro was telling Latin American revolutionaries:

Come to Cuba; we will train you in underground organization techniques, in guerrilla warfare, in sabotage, and in terrorism. We will see to it that you get back to your homeland. Once you are there, we will keep in touch with you, give you propaganda support, send you propaganda materials for your movement, training aids to expand your guerrilla forces, secret communication methods, and perhaps funds and specialized demolition equipment.⁹

In addition to training guerrillas, Cuba also provided them arms. In November 1963, the Venezuelan military discovered an arms cache consisting of three tons of rifles, bazookas, machine-guns, ammunition, and explosives that was traced to Cuba through markings on the weapons.¹⁰ Armed with this new and convincing evidence that Cuba was indeed trying to subvert Venezuelan democracy, President Betancourt called for the overthrow of Castro, declaring that: "There will not be peace in this hemisphere as long as Fidel Castro exists in Cuba".¹¹ Betancourt also called on the OAS to act against Cuba, and in July 1964, after its investigation validated the Venezuelan charges, it voted sanctions against Cuba that included the severance of all diplomatic and commercial relations. The OAS resolution also authorized its members "to engage in individual or collective self-defense, including the use of armed force, in the event of a new Cuban aggression through subversion before the OAS has time to invoke collective measures".¹²

The OAS action, disarray of insurgent forces in Venezuela, and concerns by the Soviet Union over the effects of Cuban policies apparently prompted a conference in Havana in November 1964 to reassess the policy of exporting revolution. Out of this conference came the "Havana Compromise" in which it was agreed that certain countries (Venezuela, Colombia, Guatemala, Honduras, Paraguay, and Haiti) were indeed ripe for revolution and that all parties (i.e. Cuba, the Soviet Union, and Latin American communist parties) would support armed rebellion in these countries. As for the rest of Latin America, it was agreed that at the present time more could be accomplished through peaceful means than through armed struggle.¹³

⁹ New York Times, March 2, 1963. p. 1.

¹⁰ Ibid., November 7, 1963. p. 34.

¹¹ Ibid., November 30, 1963, p. 1.

¹² Ibid., July 26, 1964. p.1.

¹³ Carla Anne Robbins, The Cuban Threat (McGraw-Hill, 1983), pp. 32-33.

However, the apparent unity that had been achieved by the Havana Compromise soon began to unravel. The rapidly expanding U.S. involvement in Vietnam and the dispatch of 25,000 U.S. troops to quell a rebellion in the Dominican Republic in April of 1965 were seen by Castro as proof that a new strategy against what he perceived as newly aggressive U.S. imperialism was needed. Castro used the Tricontinental Conference, which was held in Havana in January 1966, to hammer out the new revolutionary strategy. Castro was able to manipulate the various delegations of Third World representatives, communist parties, and would-be revolutionaries into supporting a policy of intensified armed revolution against imperialism, particularly in Latin America. Thus, the consensus achieved by the Havana Compromise was effectively dead. The policy was now, as articulated by Che Guevara, "to create two, three, many, Vietnams." by "turning the Andes into the Sierra Maestra of all America".¹⁴

Guevara tried to implement this policy in Bolivia by setting up a Cuban-led *foco* from where, it was hoped, first a Bolivian and then a continental revolution could be sparked. However, Guevara enjoyed little success. Neither the Bolivian Communist Party nor the Bolivian peasantry rallied to his cause, and in October 1967 he was hunted down and killed by the Bolivian army.

CUBA REASSESESSES

The death of Che Guevara seemed to significantly reduce the zeal of Cuba's campaign to spread armed revolution in Latin America. His death appeared to bring home to Castro the unavoidable fact that all attempts to transplant the revolution had failed. And it must also have been apparent that Cuba's revolutionary exhortations and support of insurgencies had severely complicated its relations with all of its Latin American neighbors, its patron the Soviet Union, and its main adversary the U.S. There is no evidence that Cuba undertook a formal reevaluation of its policies following Guevara's death, but the fact remains that from this point on Cuba became much more selective in its support of Latin American revolutionary groups and more willing to improve its

¹⁴ Ibid. pp. 31-39.

relations with Latin American governments whose overthrows it had previously tried to abet.

Cuba's turning away from its policy of exporting revolution was not clearly defined or explicit; it was gradual and only gradually apprehended by those it affected. The essence of the new Cuban policy was that the road to revolution in the various Latin American countries could be negotiated in different ways. An immediate and armed revolution was now not the only or necessarily the best strategy. In July 1969, Castro stated:

We are not impatient, we are not in a hurry. We will wait while one by one they break with the past, while one by one they develop their own revolutions. How long will we wait? For as long as necessary -- ten, twenty, thirty years if necessary -- though nobody thinks even remotely that it will take that long.¹⁵

Reading only a bit between the lines, Castro seemed to be saying that while the ultimate success of the revolution was still inevitable, it might be best if the *lucha armada* were replaced for a while by a more cautious policy. Castro did not make it easy, however, to ascertain exactly what Cuba's policy was toward Latin American governments and revolutionaries. In April 1970 he declared that "Cuba has not denied, Cuba will never deny support to revolutionary movements. Our position on the revolutionary movement is that while there is imperialism, while there are fighters ready to fight imperialism, our people will give them help". In the same speech, though, Castro noted that "Cuba is prepared to establish relations with countries breaking the economic embargo against her and attempting to lift themselves out of underdevelopment".¹⁶ There was nothing precisely contradictory in these statements, but the former tended to reflect the old revolutionary bravado of the mid-1960s, while the latter seemed to represent a noticeable softening of rhetoric and at least a tentative extending of an olive branch to Latin American neighbors.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* p. 176.

¹⁶ Quoted in Lester A. Sobel, ed., *Castro's Cuba in the 1970s* (Facts on File, Inc., 1978), p. 52.

RELATIONS WARM

Indeed, the early 1970s saw a marked improvement in relations between Cuba and most countries of Latin America. With Cuban support of armed revolution withered to almost nothing and revolutionary rhetoric muted to "acceptable" levels, Latin American governments were eager to undertake (or at least consider) a rapprochement with Castro's Cuba. Venezuela, which had been Cuba's number one priority for revolution in Latin America and which had taken the lead (along with the U.S.) in pursuing OAS sanctions against Cuba, was by 1973 ready to bury the hatchet with its erstwhile enemy. In April 1973, the Venezuelan Foreign Minister Calvani declared that "There is a middle way between hostility and the establishment of diplomatic relations, and our policy with Cuba has reached this level". Calvani indicated that Venezuela believed the OAS should accept a doctrine of "ideological pluralism" and that "there is no reason why, when international organizations such as the United Nations recognize Marxist-Leninism, the American states should not do so".¹⁷

In addition to the warming rhetoric, there were concrete indications of rapprochement between Cuba and Venezuela. There were official exchange visits between government officials, students, sports teams, and professional groups. More importantly, trade and economic relations began to improve. Beginning in 1973, Soviet oil tankers were allowed to pick up Venezuelan crude oil for delivery to Scandinavia after having delivered oil to Cuba. Previously the Soviet tankers had had to make the return trip from Cuba to the Soviet Union empty. This, of course, was expensive and was an indirect cost of Cuba's isolation in the hemisphere. OAS members were not supposed to allow port visits by ships that had delivered goods to Cuba. Venezuela, which had been the foremost proponent of sanctions against Cuba, was now violating those sanctions.¹⁸ In 1975, this arrangement was made more encompassing. A trinational arrangement was worked out whereby Venezuela would export oil to Cuba directly for

¹⁷ New York Times, May 22, 1973, p. 17.

¹⁸ Washington Post, May 22, 1973, p.36.

which it would be compensated by the Soviet Union in goods and cash.¹⁹

In August 1973, Venezuela announced it would resume diplomatic relations with Cuba as soon as the OAS gave its approval. In September, Venezuela, Colombia, and Costa Rica co-sponsored an initiative to end OAS sanctions against Cuba. In December, Venezuela resumed diplomatic relations with Cuba even though the OAS had not yet lifted sanctions. The OAS did act in 1974, voting to rescind the sanctions and to allow its members to normalize relations with Cuba. The U.S. and 15 other members voted for the resolution, Chile, Paraguay, and Uruguay against, and Brazil and Nicaragua abstained. By 1977, at least 11 Latin American and Caribbean countries had full relations with Cuba: Mexico, Argentina, Guyana, Venezuela, Trinidad and Tobago, Jamaica, Peru, Ecuador, Barbados, Panama, and Colombia.²⁰

During the late 1970s and for much of the 1980s, relations between Cuba and Latin America were complicated by Cuba's military interventions in Africa (Angola and Ethiopia), its support of Marxist rebellions in Nicaragua and El Salvador, and its continued contact with some subversive groups in other Latin American countries. In general, however, Latin American countries preferred to avoid the sharp hostility of their earlier relations with Cuba. They seemed to believe that Cuban behavior could best be moderated by continuing dialog and by efforts to reintegrate Cuba, to some extent, into the Inter-American system. In any event, Cuba's withdrawal from Africa, the electoral defeat of the Sandinistas in Nicaragua, and the peace accord in El Salvador, which was followed by Castro's statement that Cuban support for insurgents was a thing of the past, removed the primary obstacles to good relations between Cuba and Latin America. Two other important factors that contributed to better relations were the end of the Cold War, that further minimized the possibility that Cuba could once again become a security threat, and the redemocratization of the remaining non-democratic regimes in Latin America, that facilitated a reexamination of relationships.

¹⁹ New York Times, April 27, 1975, Section III, P. 2.

²⁰ George T. Kurian, ed., Encyclopedia of the Third World, Volume I, Fourth Edition, p. 473.

CUBAN-LATIN AMERICAN RELATIONS IN THE 1990S

Over the past several years both economic and political relations between Cuba and virtually all other Latin American countries have improved significantly. Although the Latin American democracies remain critical - - to varying degrees -- of many aspects of Castro's totalitarian rule in Cuba, they no longer agree with the U.S. policy of isolating his regime politically and economically. They argue that isolating Cuba will make Castro even more resistant to change, and will significantly increase the chance that when political change does occur in Cuba, as it inevitably must, it will be through violent confrontation rather than smooth transition. In the Latin American view, peaceful, democratic change in Cuba can best be encouraged by engaging Havana in constructive dialog and by increasing trade, communication, political, and other links between Cuba and its hemispheric neighbors. Without exception, the Latin American countries believe that the U.S. economic embargo of Cuba is counterproductive, illegal, and should be abolished. These countries also believe that Cuba should be readmitted to various hemispheric organizations, including the OAS, although some countries support the U.S. view that Cuba must first take concrete steps toward political and economic reform.

IMPROVED TRADE RELATIONS

Cuban trade within the hemisphere has been increasing significantly. As of June 1994, Latin America had become Cuba's largest trading partner, accounting for 40% (vice 7% in 1990) of total trade, worth about \$900 million annually. Canada accounts for an additional 10% of the total. Cuban commerce with Colombia, some of the members of the Caribbean Community and Common Market (CARICOM), and the Dominican Republic is growing rapidly. Trade with Mexico, the only Latin American country that never broke diplomatic relations with Cuba, has increased significantly, with Mexican imports of Cuban goods rising from \$8 million in 1988 to more than \$80 million in 1993. Mexico is also Cuba's biggest source of capital, with major investments in the telecommunication and oil sectors of the Cuban economy. Brazil, which is Cuba's second largest

trading partner in Latin America, agreed in 1994 to buy \$30 million worth of meningitis vaccine, giving Cuba's important biotechnology industry a boost.²¹

INCREASED POLITICAL LINKS

Diplomatic links and high-level political contacts between Cuba and Latin America have increased significantly in the 1990s as both have sought to improve relations. Latin American countries have backed several Cuban initiatives in international organizations, and key Latin American leaders have established personal relationships with Castro. In 1990, Latin American countries voted unanimously to grant Cuba a term on the UN security Council. Also in 1990, the Rio Group condemned the US's establishment of TV Marti as a violation of sovereignty and international law. Moreover, Latin American countries have supported almost unanimously annual Cuban resolutions at the UN for the last three years (1992, 1993, 1994) calling for an end to the U.S. embargo.²²

In the 1994 UN vote, Argentina, El Salvador, and Guatemala abstained, while Dominica, Grenada, and Saint Kitts and Nevis were absent. All other Latin American countries voted in favor of the resolution against the embargo, despite intensive U.S. diplomatic lobbying. The debate preceding the vote provides a sampling of Latin American views toward the issue. For example, the Brazilian delegate said "...political, economic, and commercial isolation only contributed to the hardship of the Cuban people at a time when there were positive signs of change in that country." The Mexican delegate stressed that "Dialog and negotiated political solutions were the best way to achieve understanding", and he urged the U.S. and Cuba to resume a dialog that would lead to normal relations. The delegates from Colombia, Venezuela, and Suriname also made statements for the record in support of an end to the embargo. The Argentine delegate explained that his country would abstain in the vote because the resolution involved a bilateral problem

²¹ The Institute for European-Latin American Relations, "Cuba in Crisis: Processes and Prospects" (Dossier No. 50, September 1994), p. 34-35.

²² All Latin American countries voted in favor of the resolution (i.e. against the embargo) with the following exceptions: Paraguay abstained in 1992, voted no in 1993, but voted yes in 1994; Guatemala abstained in 1992 and 1994, and voted yes in 1993; Argentina and El Salvador have consistently abstained.

between two states with which his country enjoyed friendly relations.²³ It should be noted that although Argentina's President Menem has been sharply critical of Castro's regime, and has generally backed the hard-line U.S. policy, he does not support a continued U.S. embargo.

In the last few years Castro has met with key Latin American leaders on a variety of formal and informal occasions. Since 1988, the Cuban leader has attended presidential inaugurations in Brazil, Ecuador, Mexico, Venezuela, Bolivia, and Colombia. His visit to Bolivia in August 1993 was especially symbolic because Che Guevara's ill-fated campaign to spark a continental revolution from that country in 1967 had marked the high-water mark of Castro's attempt to export revolution. On his way home from Bolivia, Castro stopped off in Colombia for a "private" visit with President Gaviria. The meeting apparently went very well; in October, the two countries resumed diplomatic relations after a 12 year hiatus. The following August, Castro returned to Bogota to attend the inauguration of Colombia's new President, Ernesto Samper.

Castro has also attended the last four summit meetings of the Ibero-American presidents. In the communiqué of the June 1994 summit, the leaders of Spain, Portugal, and 19 Latin American countries called for the elimination of "unilateral coercive economic and trade measures".²⁴ Although neither the U.S. nor Cuba were specifically named, the message clearly referred to the U.S. embargo and was directed at Washington. At a meeting of OAS foreign ministers just prior to the Ibero-American summit, a Panamanian delegate described Cuba's continuing exclusion from the OAS as a "relic of the cold war"; OAS President Baena Soares received a standing ovation from delegates when he asked, "Hasn't the time come to admit Cuba to the Latin American family?"²⁵ Brazil, Canada, Colombia, Costa Rica, Mexico, and Venezuela have also supported Cuba's readmission to the OAS in the short term. Other OAS members, however, assert that while Cuba's eventual readmission to the group is desirable, Cuba must first undertake meaningful political and

²³ United Nations General Assembly Press Release, Forty-ninth session, Agenda item 24, October 21, 1994. pp. 5-11.

²⁴ New York Times, June 16, 1994, p.

²⁵ Ibid.

economic reform. Countries holding this view include Argentina, Chile, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Panama.²⁶

At the September 1994 summit meeting of the Rio Group, Latin American leaders explicitly called for an end to the U.S. embargo against Cuba, noted that a "peaceful transition toward a democratic and pluralistic government in Cuba was essential" and advocated Cuba's "full reincorporation into the hemispheric community". They also praised the recent "direct negotiations" between the U.S. and Cuba (the New York talks on migration issues) and urged the two countries to continue the dialog.²⁷ At the Presidential Summit of the Americas in Miami in December 1994 (to which Castro was not invited), the issue of Cuba was not on the formal agenda, although unofficial discussions took place. In March 1995 the OAS Inter-American Commission on Human Rights called on the U.S. to end restrictions on the shipment of food and medicine to Cuba, calling such restrictions a violation of international law. The Commission said the restrictions were causing widespread suffering in Cuba, and urged the U.S. to "faithfully observe" the traditional exemptions from embargoes that international law provides for food and medicine²⁸.

BILATERAL RELATIONS

ARGENTINA: Argentina maintains full diplomatic relations with Cuba at the ambassadorial level. Buenos Aires broke relations in 1964 after the OAS voted to sever ties because of Cuba's support of subversion in Venezuela, but relations were restored in 1973. Somewhat surprisingly, Argentina's military government in the 1980s maintained normal relations with Cuba. Argentine military leaders suspected that Cuba was aiding the Montoneros (a leftist insurgent/terrorist group that was active in Argentina), but clear evidence was lacking and it did not seem to be a major issue. During the 1982 Malvinas War, Cuba offered military aid (specifics unknown) to Argentina. Although

²⁶ "Cuba in Crisis...", p. 38.

²⁷ El Comercio (Lima), September 11, 1994, P. A6.

²⁸ The Washington Times, March 3, 1995, p. A17.

Argentina declined the assistance, it appreciated the offer.

President Carlos Menem has been one of Castro's harshest critics, and he has consistently called for major political and economic change in Cuba. At his direction, Argentina voted in 1991 in favor of a UN resolution sharply critical of Cuba's human rights record. Previously, Argentina had avoided voting for the resolution in order not to "offend" Cuba. Menem has met informally with Castro several times at various presidential inaugurals and summit meetings, and their discussions are said to have been cordial, but the two Presidents are not believed to have had any private meetings.

Despite President Menem's strong criticism of Castro, Argentina is not in favor of isolating his regime and does not support the U.S. embargo against Cuba²⁹. Buenos Aires has abstained in all three of the UN votes on the Cuban resolution calling for an end to the embargo because it views the matter as a bilateral issue between "two friends". Commercial relations are good, but Argentina is concerned that Cuba's current economic crisis could make it very difficult for Cuba to pay back the approximately \$1 billion dollars it owes to Argentina's government and private businesses. Negotiations are on-going on this issue, and Cuba has to pay in hard currency for new purchases.³⁰

EL SALVADOR: El Salvador has no formal diplomatic ties with Cuba, and relations were very strained for many years because of Cuba's support of the leftist insurgency in El Salvador. Nevertheless, El Salvador maintains multilateral contacts with Cuba through international organizations such as the UN and regional groups such as the Latin American Group (GRULAC), as well as through regional summit meetings which the Presidents of both countries have attended the past few years. Additionally,

²⁹ Nonetheless, Menem has at times seemed to support the U.S. economic embargo. In an interview with the Miami Herald in November 1994, in response to a question as to whether the embargo was a "relic of the past", Menem said "Who said it was a relic of the past? Why did Haiti return to democracy? What was done with Cedras? It was precisely because of a blockade, an embargo".

³⁰ Information on bilateral relations between Argentina and Cuba was obtained in the author's 8 February 1995 interview with Maria Julia Rodriguez, Secretary of the Argentine Embassy in Washington, and Alberto D'Alotto, Embassy Counselor.

El Salvador has offered to help promote a dialog among all the political sectors of Cuba, including "the democratic opposition outside that country", to contribute to reaching a political democracy. The Foreign Ministers of both countries held an informal meeting at the UN last year "to establish a direct dialog between both governments, in order to widen the knowledge of our mutual problems."³¹ El Salvador has consistently abstained in the UN votes on the U.S. economic embargo against Cuba.

MEXICO: Mexico is the only Latin American country never to have broken diplomatic ties to Castro's Cuba, and relations remained cordial even during the 1960's when Castro was trying to export revolution throughout the region. There are three basic factors that explain this "special" relationship. First, since its own revolution earlier this century, Mexico has been sympathetic to other leftist revolutionary movements, and has provided safehaven for many revolutionaries exiled from their own countries. Castro himself lived in Mexico and sailed from there with a few supporters in the *Granma* to launch his campaign against Batista. Second, Mexico's dominant political party the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) has used friendly relations with Castro's Cuba to placate and coopt the Mexican left. Third, there has long been a tacit but nonetheless clear understanding between Castro and the PRI that Castro would refrain from supporting or stirring up the radical left in Mexico. A fourth factor, although it is somewhat speculative, is that Mexico has probably enjoyed "pulling the lion's tail" of the Colossus to the North. At some level-- in Mexico and in other Latin American countries as well -- there seems to be a grudging admiration for Castro's skill in standing up to the "gringos", a traditional -- and understandable -- support for the underdog³².

PANAMA: Panama and Cuba maintain diplomatic relations at the chargé level, although Panama is considering sending an ambassador to Havana. Relations were reestablished in 1974 after being broken by Panama in 1964 following OAS

³¹ Information provided by Ana Cristina Sol, El Salvadoran Ambassador to the United States.

³² This explanation of the relations between Cuba and Mexico is that of the author, but they are based on comments made by Mexico scholar Dr. Delal Baer of the Center for Strategic and International Studies in a lecture at the Inter-American Defense College, February 21, 1995.

sanctions against Cuba. Concerning the U.S. embargo of Cuba, Panama has officially stated that it holds no opinion on the issue because it is a bilateral matter. Nonetheless, Panama voted in favor of Cuba's UN resolution against the embargo in 1994 after abstaining in the 1992 and 1993 votes. Panama also believes that "a progressive lifting of sanctions accompanied by a parallel process of democratization in Cuba could bring that nation back into the Inter American System"³³.

PARAGUAY: Paraguay is the only South American country to have no diplomatic relations with Cuba, and, especially during Stroessner's dictatorial rule, was a harsh critic of Castro. Nonetheless, relations have warmed somewhat over the last few years. Paraguay does not believe that the U.S. embargo against Cuba is effective in promoting democracy in that country, and in 1994 voted at the UN in favor of a Cuban resolution calling for an end to the embargo (it abstained in the 1992 vote and voted against the resolution in 1993). Cuban Foreign Minister Robaina visited Asuncion in 1994 -- a trip which would have been unthinkable until recently --, suggesting that relations could continue to gradually improve³⁴.

URUGUAY: Uruguay condemns Castro's repression of political dissent and abysmal human rights record, and believes that Cuba must democratize. However, it does not support the U.S. policy of isolating the Castro regime or the economic embargo against Cuba, and has consistently voted against the embargo at the UN³⁵.

VENEZUELA: Venezuela maintains full diplomatic relations with Cuba at the ambassadorial level, but also believes that Cuba must make political reforms before it can fully rejoin the Inter-American system (i.e. the OAS and Rio Group). Venezuela's relations with Cuba were particularly good during President Carlos Andres Perez's second presidential term (1990-94) as Perez and Castro established a warm personal relationship. Perez believed that democratic change in Cuba could best be encouraged

³³ Information provided by Fernando Eleta C., Minister Counselor, Embassy of Panama, Washington D.C.

³⁴ Paraguayan Ambassador to the OAS Jauregui in discussions at the Inter-American Defense College (IADC), 3 February 1995.

³⁵ Uruguayan Minister to the OAS Caceres Cardozo in discussions at the IADC, 2 February 1995.

by dialog and negotiation, and that the U.S. policy of isolating the Castro regime was counterproductive. However, relations have chilled somewhat as President Rafael Caldera, who took office in February 1994, has been more direct than his predecessors in calling for democratic change in Cuba. At the Rio Group presidential summit meeting in September 1994, Caldera publicly exhorted Castro (through a written communiqué) to allow free elections in Cuba³⁶. Although Caldera also called for a lifting of the U.S. embargo, Castro was apparently irked by what he perceived as undue Venezuelan interference, and Havana complained to Caracas through diplomatic channels. In December 1994, relations between the two countries became more complicated as Castro personally welcomed to Havana ex-Venezuelan Army Lieutenant Colonel Hugo Chavez. Chavez had been cashiered from the army and had served several years in prison for leading an unsuccessful coup attempt against President Perez in 1991. Castro's words of praise for Chavez's "patriotism" were, not surprisingly, poorly received in Caracas. At this time, Venezuelan officials are uncertain whether Castro merely wanted to "tweak" them for Caldera's call for free elections, or whether the incident signals a renewed Cuban interest in encouraging subversion³⁷.

³⁶ "Venezuela exhorta al gobierno Cubano a abrir un proceso de elecciones", Venezuelan government press release, September 1, 1994.

³⁷ Author's interview with Ricardo M. Rodriguez, Venezuelan Minister Counselor to the OAS, February 17, 1995.

POLICY CHALLENGES: "ISOLATION" VS. "ENGAGEMENT"

As should be clear from the preceding discussion and analysis, there are sharp differences between the Cuba policies of the U.S. and Latin American countries. The U.S. policy continues to be a concerted effort to oust Fidel Castro and bring about political and economic reform by politically and economically isolating his regime. While Latin American countries differ amongst themselves in their goals and policies, in general they want to encourage a peaceful and democratic transition in Cuba by engaging the Castro regime in a variety of diplomatic, political, economic, and cultural negotiations. They believe that enveloping Havana in a web of bilateral and multilateral discussions and relationships will inexorably lead to democratic change in Cuba.

The Latin Americans are not alone in their core assessment that it is far more productive to engage rather than isolate the Castro regime. In fact, virtually no other countries support the U.S. policy. In the latest UN General Assembly vote (October, 1994) on an annual Cuban resolution calling for a lifting of the embargo, only Israel voted with the U.S. against the resolution (101 countries voted in favor and 48 abstained). Additionally, the U.S. policy is increasingly being criticized by a variety of individuals and groups in the U.S., both in and outside of government. The Clinton Administration has given no indication that it is prepared to change or even review its Cuba policy. Nonetheless, in a variety of academic and public forums, critics and supporters of Washington's Cuba policy are engaged in a major debate over the wisdom, efficacy, and implications of the current policy as well as potential alternatives.

In the debate over U.S. policy toward Cuba, four general tendencies, or "schools of thought" can be identified. These are: 1) those who support the current policy and believe it should be maintained; 2) those who believe the current policy of isolating the Castro regime should be intensified; 3) those who argue that the U.S.

should negotiate with the Castro regime and moderate some aspects of its policy on a quid pro quo basis; and 4) those who believe the U.S. can best serve its own interest and encourage democratic change in Cuba by unilaterally lifting all or most of its sanctions against Cuba and moving to normalize relations. For analytical purposes, the discussion below will identify these groups as "maintainers", "intensifiers", "moderators", and "normalizers".³⁸

MAINTAINERS

The "maintainers" make a number of arguments why the U.S. should alter neither the goal of forcing Castro's departure nor the policy of isolating his regime. They assert that Castro is the problem, and no meaningful political or economic change is possible while he remains in power. In response to those who point to recent economic liberalization steps by Castro, such as "dollarization" and the authorization of some profit-making ventures, the maintainers say that these are only token measures that will not be significantly expanded and that will not keep the economy from imploding if the pressure is maintained. They also point out that this limited economic liberalization has not been accompanied by any political liberalization; on the contrary, Cuba continues to have no qualms about violating human rights or repressing dissent. To refute the argument that the policy of isolating Cuba has been proven bankrupt by its failure for the past thirty years to oust Castro, the maintainers say that it was only the largesse of the Soviet Union that kept the Cuban economy afloat. With the disappearance of Soviet subsidies, they argue, the Cuban economy has clearly deteriorated and it is only a matter of time before it collapses.

INTENSIFIERS

³⁸ The discussion which follows on various schools of thought on policy toward Cuba is indebted to: Gunn, Cuba in Transition; Sullivan, Issues for Congress; and Mark P. Sullivan, Cuba-U.S. Relations: Should the United States Reexamine Its Policy? (Congressional research Service, September 1994).

The "intensifiers" essentially agree with the views of the maintainers, but they take the argument further. They argue that now is the time to increase the pressure on the Castro regime. According to this view, the long struggle between the U.S. and Castro's Cuba could be compared to a boxing match which has finally reached its last round, and Castro is "on the ropes", all set up for a knockout blow (or at least ready to "throw in the towel"). Why, the intensifiers ask, should the U.S. back off and let Castro survive to fight another day? Why not press the advantage by increasing the pressure? To do this, the intensifiers advocate an expansion of the U.S. economic embargo, a policy for which there is significant support in the U.S. Congress. In April 1994 Congress passed the Foreign Relations Authorization Act which included a non-binding resolution calling on the President "to advocate and seek a mandatory international U.N. Security Council embargo against the dictatorship of Cuba". As noted earlier, however, the UN General Assembly has voted overwhelmingly for the past three years in support of a Cuban resolution calling on the U.S. to *lift* the embargo. Thus, there is virtually no chance that the rest of the world will adopt the U.S. embargo. Nonetheless, the congressional resolution suggests how difficult it would be to abrogate or moderate sanctions against Cuba, absent major changes in that country.

The most recent congressional attempt to step up the pressure on Castro came in February 1995 when Senator Jesse Helms (Republican/North Carolina), introduced a bill designed to tighten the embargo, make the sanctions more international in scope, and insure that Castro "must and will leave Cuba". Specifically, the Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity Act would do the following: 1) Cut U.S. funding to the World Bank, Inter-American Development Bank, and other lending agencies by as much money as those organizations provided Cuba; 2) End U.S. preferential trade arrangements with countries that sell sugar or molasses to the U.S. if they also buy those products from the "Castro dictatorship"; 3) Cut-off aid to former Soviet republics that provide subsidized trade terms to Cuba; and 4) Prohibit entry into the U.S. of foreign businessmen who have purchased U.S. owned property confiscated by Cuba³⁹.

³⁹ The Washington Times, February 8, 1995, p.1.

Prospects for the bill's passage are unclear, but the direct effects on Cuba if the bill is enacted would seem to be minimal. However, as described by Rep. Robert Torricelli, the New Jersey Democrat who was the primary sponsor of the Cuban Democracy Act, the bill would make "failure to comply with the embargo on Cuba an element of future relations with the United States."⁴⁰ As such, the bill is likely to be condemned by virtually all other countries, including key U.S. allies and trading partners, and, if enacted, it would seriously complicate U.S. foreign political and economic relations. As it is, most countries perceive the U.S. as misguidedly trying to bully Cuba; they will view the Helms bill as an intolerable effort to bully the rest of the world.

MODERATORS

"Moderators" generally believe that the policy of isolating Cuba is counterproductive, increases the likelihood of violence or even civil war in that country, is contrary to U.S. interests, and thus needs to be changed. Although the moderators differ among themselves as to just what steps the U.S. should take, they tend to believe that the U.S. should take the initiative, but should not immediately lift the embargo or establish diplomatic relations. Instead, the U.S. should begin with small steps and let Havana know (officially or unofficially) that further steps are possible but depend on reciprocal measures by Cuba. In this way, it is hoped, the icejam of mutual hostility and mistrust between the two countries can be thawed and progress toward improved and, eventually, normalized relations can be made.

Most moderators would begin by unilaterally lifting the sanctions imposed against Cuba last August during the migration crisis. Those measures included a ban on cash remittances to Cuba from Cuban-Americans in the U.S., further restrictions on charter flights between Miami and Havana, and increased Radio and TV Marti broadcasts to Cuba. Other advocates of moderating U.S. policy would also rescind the punitive aspects of the Cuba Democracy Act, especially the prohibition of trade to Cuba by foreign subsidiaries of U.S. companies and the banning of

⁴⁰ Ibid.

foreign ships from U.S. ports (for six months) that dock in Cuba.

NORMALIZERS

"Normalizers" agree with the moderators that the U.S. should improve relations with Cuba but they would move further and faster, not waiting for reciprocal steps by Cuba. In their view, the U.S. embargo works to Castro's advantage by allowing him to claim that Cuba's economic problems are caused by the U.S.. Although this claim is dubious, it resonates with many Cubans, contributes to nationalist feelings against the U.S., and allows Castro to justify (however speciously) the lack of political freedom in Cuba. Removing the embargo, the normalizers argue, would remove Castro's excuse for Cuba's economic woes, diminish popular resentment of the U.S., and probably weaken Castro's leadership. The normalizers would also do away with all travel restrictions on U.S. citizens to Cuba. They believe that the relatively small amount of hard currency Cuba would gain by this would be more than offset by the positive effects of exposing the Cuban people to increased contacts with U.S. tourists and businessmen. Although normalizers point out that U.S. businesses could benefit significantly from the opportunity to invest and trade with Cuba, their more important intent is to "legally subvert" Castro's communist system by exposing it to the seductive benefits of capitalism. They believe that, just as with the former Soviet Union and the former communist regimes of Eastern Europe, economic liberalization in Cuba would bring about political liberalization.

CONCLUSIONS

Supporters of the hardline U.S. policy against Cuba (whether maintainers or intensifiers) insist that this policy best serves U.S. national interest by working to undermine the Castro regime and eventually to bring about democratic change. In reality, however, the hardline policy suffers from two serious flaws. The first is the assumption that putting political and economic pressure on the Castro regime weakens it; in fact, the net effect is to strengthen it. The second flaw is a failure to fully understand the unwelcome consequences for the U.S. in the event the hardline policy did succeed.

WILL THE SQUEEZE PRODUCE A REBELLION OR COUP?

The current U.S. policy essentially amounts to an effort to squeeze the Cuban economy to the point that Cubans will rebel against their government. The intent (usually not articulated) is to make average Cubans so desperately poor and angry that they will rise up en masse against Castro. However, the chance of a successful rebellion is low because the security forces remain loyal to the regime, and to date have been very successful in repressing dissent and maintaining order. Over the past several years there have been isolated anti-regime protests in Havana and other areas that featured rock throwing and shouts of "down with Fidel". The largest protest took place in August 1994, when an estimated 1,000 demonstrators clashed with police in Havana. Almost all of the unrest has apparently been provoked by food and consumer goods shortages and prolonged electrical blackouts. However, there is no indication that these sporadic, isolated incidents are likely to coalesce into regime-threatening unrest. Although an anti-Castro coup attempt by disgruntled military officers or units cannot be entirely ruled out, it seems unlikely. Counterintelligence within the military is pervasive and

it would be difficult for coup plotters to organize, even assuming there are officers so inclined. Most, if not all officers probably see their fate as inextricably linked with Castro's. If he falls, they most likely will also.

Additionally, some evidence indicates that the Cuban economy may have "hit bottom", and that some recent economic reforms may improve the situation and give the Castro regime some breathing room. Food shortages have been alleviated by allowing farmers to sell a portion of their produce directly to consumers, and the government seems to recognize the dangers of continued shortages. Significantly, it was Gen. Raul Castro, the head of the military and Fidel's brother, who pushed for reforms. Just prior to the authorization of "farmers markets" in October 1994, Raul Castro said "today, the political, military, and ideological problem in this country is providing food.... We must be clear about something. If there is food for the people, the risks don't matter"⁴¹. Even Fidel Castro has said that "while [he] is not a great fan of capitalism", he is a realist and recognizes that the world has changed and some market oriented economic reform is necessary.⁴²

IMPLICATIONS OF "SUCCESS"

To supporters of the current U.S. policy, such economic improvement in Cuba (minimal though it may be) has to be unwelcome because it reduces internal pressure on the Castro regime and postpones the "day of reckoning" they are anticipating. Nonetheless, the recent economic improvement could prove ephemeral, the economic slide toward chaos could resume, and a day of reckoning may eventually arrive as Cubans take to the streets against the regime. However, the implications for the U.S. of such a turn of events, even though it would be the logical culmination of present policy, may not be fully appreciated. Although there is a remote possibility that a popular uprising in Cuba could succeed in a relatively short time and with minimal violence, it is far more likely that the Castro regime would use whatever force it deemed necessary to repress the revolt. The result would most likely be a bloodbath and possibly a

⁴¹ The Washington Post, January 23, 1995, p. A15.

⁴² The New York Times, December 13, 1994, p.1.

protracted civil war. Such developments would almost certainly produce two unwelcome consequences for the U.S.: a renewed surge of refugees and demands for military intervention, both of which are highly undesirable.

Even though the U.S. no longer grants asylum to Cuban refugees, large-scale violence in Cuba would almost certainly produce a new wave of "rafters" seeking safehaven in Florida. Since the U.S. is already having major difficulty in deciding what to do with the 30,000 refugees from the August 1994 exodus currently detained in Guantanamo, a new influx of refugees would severely complicate the problem. Additionally, the large, and vocal, Cuba-American population in the U.S. would insist that the U.S. "do something" to resolve the situation. Many Cuban exiles in Florida would probably take boats to Cuba (as they did during the Mariel boatlift) to try to rescue relatives and friends. Some militant exile groups may try to infiltrate the island and join the anti-Castro resistance, possibly resulting in the death of Cuban-American U.S. citizens. Finally, although it is only a remote possibility, a defiant Castro on the verge of defeat could lash out by ordering his Air Force to attack targets in south Florida, possibly including the Turkey Point nuclear power facility⁴³. Thus, the upshot of widespread instability and/or violent unrest in Cuba would likely be intense domestic pressure in the U.S. to use military force to resolve the situation. Although scenarios vary widely, a military intervention in Cuba would probably not resemble Grenada or even Desert Storm. Instead, it would likely result in a major military confrontation with Castro's well-trained troops who be motivated by defending their homeland, and significant U.S. casualties. Moreover, once the fighting ended, the U.S. would be obliged to manage and oversee a democratic transition in Cuba. This would be a difficult and protracted task, almost certainly complicated by the return of tens -- if not hundreds -- of thousands of Cuban-Americans determined to reclaim their former property as well as play a political role in the new Cuba. Thus, at a minimum, U.S. policy makers ought to recognize and plan for the likely consequences if the current policy toward Cuba should "succeed". It would seem more appropriate, however, to undertake a serious,

⁴³ Donald E. Schultz, "The United States and Cuba: From a Strategy of Conflict to Constructive Engagement" (Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 1993), p. 34.

high-level review of the current policy, consider alternatives, and perhaps devise a new approach toward Cuba that does not militate in favor of a violent transition.

IS A NEW POLICY POSSIBLE?

For various reasons, however, the U.S. government is unlikely to undertake a reassessment of its Cuba policy anytime soon, and even less likely to moderate its determination to bring about Castro's downfall by squeezing his regime economically and isolating it politically. On the contrary, the new Republican majority in Congress seems determined to step up the pressure by tightening economic sanctions and punishing other countries and foreign companies that do business with Castro's Cuba. The vehicle for increasing the pressure on Castro is the Democratic Solidarity Act, sponsored by Sen Jesse Helms and supported by a bipartisan group of senators and representatives. At this point, the Clinton Administration appears unlikely to oppose the legislation or to fight the domestic political momentum that is moving toward an increasingly confrontational position toward Cuba. Indeed, U.S. State Department officials say that in the absence of "significant, irreversible movement toward democracy" in Cuba improved relations are "impossible". These officials say that such movement could consist, for example, of ending the hegemony of the Cuban Communist Party, allowing opposition political parties, and ending human rights abuses. If these measures were taken, the U.S. would respond with "carefully calibrated" steps designed to encourage further liberalization in Cuba⁴⁴.

⁴⁴ Statements concerning U.S. Cuba policy were made by Mr. George Lasic of the U.S. State Department to Inter-American Defense College Class XXXIV, February 23, 1995.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Thus, it appears all but certain that in the debate over U.S. Cuba policy the "intensifiers" have prevailed, at least for the short to mid-term. However, the "moderators" and "normalizers" should not accept defeat just because they have lost the current battle. Although the U.S. government is unlikely to formally review its Cuba policy, the debate outside of government -- in newspapers and journals, academic forums and think tanks, congressional hearings, and among the public at large -- will continue. In fact, the debate may well be intensified and stimulated by Senator Helms' effort to ratchet up the pressure on Castro. In the wake of the Helms bill, for example, Time published a cover story on Cuba that included an interview with Castro, an examination of the situation in Cuba, and an analysis of whether increased U.S. pressure will succeed in bringing Castro down⁴⁵. Additional analysis, debate, and opinion will undoubtedly be forthcoming. So, the following specific recommendations are provided in the hope of furthering this debate.

EMPHASIZE TRACK II

Although the main focus of the Cuban Democracy Act (CDA) was to toughen economic sanctions against the Castro regime, it also provided for increased humanitarian support for and enhanced communications with the Cuban people. These latter measures, known as Track II, are intended to "reach out to the Cuban people" (as

⁴⁵ Time, February 20, 1995, pp. 51-59.

opposed to the regime). Since 1982, the U.S. government has licensed various private organizations to provide some \$65 million worth of food, medicine, and medical equipment to Cuban non-governmental organizations such as the Cuban Red Cross and other charitable organizations⁴⁶. According to a senior U.S. official, "We [the U.S. government] continue to look at ways to streamline procedures for sending humanitarian goods directly to the Cuban people"⁴⁷. Additionally, Track II authorized "efficient and adequate" telecommunications between the U.S. and Cuba, and in November 1994 the U.S. government approved applications by five U.S. companies to offer expanded telecommunication services to Cuba.

To date, the effects of the Track II measures have been minimal. Nonetheless, they represent an important beginning and should be expanded. To some extent, increased humanitarian aid could begin to chip away at the perception among many Cubans that the U.S. is primarily to blame for their desperate living conditions. This could detract from Castro's ability to scapegoat the U.S. as the cause of Cuba's difficulties. However, the underlying assumption behind the U.S. embargo is that economic deprivation will eventually encourage (force?) Cubans to somehow bring down the Castro regime. Thus, it will be interesting to see if Sen. Helms and his supporters decide to oppose Track II because it could undermine (in their view) the main goal of squeezing the Cuban economy.

MODIFY THE EMBARGO

Given the current political circumstances in the U.S., it is all but certain that the economic embargo against Cuba is not going to be lifted or fundamentally weakened, absent major political change in Cuba. It is also unlikely that the present Administration and

⁴⁶ See note 43.

⁴⁷ Statement by Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs Alexander F. Watson to the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Washington D.C. November 18, 1993. Reprinted in "U.S. Department of State Dispatch", December 6, 1993, Vol. 4, No. 49, p. 854.

Congress would "roll-back" the increased sanctions imposed by the CDA and by President Clinton during the August refugee crisis. However, it is conceivable that such a roll-back could be "placed on the table". In other words, the U.S. could inform the Cuban government that if it acted to improve its human rights record, liberalize the political system, and reform the economy, the U.S. would respond by modestly adjusting the economic sanctions. For example, if Cuba were to release a certain number of political prisoners or to stop using goon squads to beat up dissidents, the U.S. would rescind, say, the August 1994 ban on cash remittances by Cuban-Americans to relatives in Cuba. Such a step would be attractive to the U.S. because it would improve human rights in Cuba, and would be attractive to Cuba because it would provide hard currency for the economy. More importantly, such a step (and it would not necessarily have to be the one described) could set a precedent that could lead to further negotiation and at least limited political and economic liberalization in Cuba. Over the longer term, this would favor a peaceful transition to democracy in Cuba.

CONTINUE LOW LEVEL TALKS

Although Washington was more or less forced by last August's Cuban refugee crisis into resuming talks with Havana on migration issues, the negotiated agreement clearly benefited both parties. The flood of "rafters" has since slowed to a trickle, and by February 1995 the U.S. had issued some 12,000 immigration visas to Cubans. This result has defused one of the most volatile issues between the two countries. It has also established a measure of trust and laid the ground work for at least low-level discussions on other matters. In addition to continued monitoring and discussions on migration, issues could include cooperation on counternarcotics, which could possibly lead to the sharing of intelligence information and eventually even to joint interdiction operations. Cooperative agreements could also be negotiated on weather forecasting, disaster relief, environmental protection, and a new anti-hijacking agreement.

ESTABLISH CONFIDENCE BUILDING MEASURES

Although the U.S. is already officially committed not to invade or otherwise militarily threaten Cuba, this commitment needs to be emphasized by President Clinton and other senior officials. This would counter the occasional threats (both implied and direct) by anti-Castro zealots in the U.S. that the U.S. might use force to remove Castro, and reassure Havana (and, more importantly, the Cuban people) that the U.S. will not engage in unprovoked military action against the island. Emphasizing this policy would reduce Castro's ability to justify his repression of the Cuban people by claiming that political freedom must be limited to guard against the threat of invasion by the U.S. Additionally, although it is impossible to know what Castro actually believes, it is possible that he would be more amenable to internal reform if he were convinced that the U.S. will not seek to remove him by force. Along the same lines, U.S. law enforcement agencies should increase their efforts to prevent paramilitary attacks against Cuba by anti-Castro organizations based in Florida. Other confidence building measures by the U.S. could include notifying Cuban authorities of planned military exercises in the Caribbean and the avoidance of exercises that could be construed as rehearsals for an invasion.

FINAL THOUGHTS

The above recommendations would certainly be anathema to those who are committed to bringing down Castro by isolating his regime politically and squeezing it economically. The recommendations could also be criticized for requiring the U.S. to take the initiative, without any guaranteed quid pro quo by Havana. In reality, however, the U.S. would have much to gain by moderating its Cuba policy and the risk would be minimal. The hardline U.S. policy against Castro may have been justified during the Cold War when Cuba served as an ally, if not a surrogate, of the Soviet Union, tried to export its revolution throughout the hemisphere, and intervened militarily in Africa. Now, however, Cuba is no longer a military or political threat to the U.S. or to its Latin American neighbors, and its economic system is entirely discredited. Within a few years Castro will almost certainly leave the political scene in Cuba and major political and economic change will take place. The unresolved questions are what these changes will be and how they will take occur. As this analysis has tried to

demonstrate, it is clearly in the self-interest of the U.S. and the rest of the hemisphere to encourage not only a transition to democracy in Cuba but a *peaceful* transition. To do this would require political courage on the part of the Clinton administration, or its successor, but the payoff in avoiding a potential bloodbath in Cuba and very possibly a significant loss of American lives could make the effort enormously worthwhile.

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The New York Times and The Washington Post were also used extensively.