



Brazil's President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, left, shakes hands with Fidel Rivero Prieto, president of Cuba's state oil company CUJET, as Cuba's acting President Raul Castro looks on, after signing a cooperation agreement at the Revolution Palace in Havana, Tuesday, Jan. 15, 2008.

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# Opting for Engagement

Cuba specialists around the world have spent much of the past decade, and an even greater part of the period since July 2006, speculating on what the future holds for Cuba after the departure of Fidel Castro from power. Will there be a stable succession or a dramatic change? Will a post-Fidel government strengthen respect for the rule of law and human rights, extend freedom of speech, and permit multi-party elections? Will it try to preserve Cuba's achievements in education and health care, and if so, how? Will it change the role of the state in the economy? How will a new government handle the process of political and economic reforms? These questions and others have consumed the attention of analysts and policy makers.

Comparatively little attention has been paid, especially in the United States, to how other countries have chosen to relate to and engage with Cuba during this decisive period on the island and how those relations might evolve in the future. This publication hopes to fill that gap, looking at how countries in Europe and the Western Hemisphere relate to Cuba and suggesting some useful lessons for the international community. The Washington Office on Latin America has undertaken this publication because it believes that the international community can engage with Cuba in constructive and respectful ways that will over time contribute to greater respect for human rights and democratization on the island.

The United States is one of the very few countries that does not have formal diplomatic and commercial relations with Cuba. But among the countries that do, the level of engagement and interaction has varied widely. The articles herein trace the shifting levels of engagement that Mexico, the United Kingdom, Canada, Spain, and the European Union have all had with Cuban government and society, where relations stand today, and where they might be headed. One article also looks at the U.S. approach and the implications of the U.S. strategy of isolation.

Many governments have also recognized that engagement allows greater cooperation on issues of common concern, such as security, terrorism, trade and migration.

In 2007, many countries opted for a relatively cautious approach to Cuba, maintaining relations but taking few initiatives and adopting a passive stance based on the assumption that events on the island would dictate changes in the direction of their Cuba policy. Exploring this theme, Joaquín Roy's article traces the internal debate over the European Union's "wait and see" tactics, while John Kirk and Peter McKenna describe the recent cooling in Canadian relations with the island. As events have unfolded in Cuba, other governments have opted for increased levels of engagement as the island moves toward a post-Fidel Castro era. In this context, María Cristina Rosas explores the Mexican government's changing approach, while Margaret Blunden reviews British relations with Cuba and appeals for a more constructive approach toward its government.

The British, Canadian, and Mexican perspectives have all concluded that engagement offers important benefits. As Geoff Thale notes in the piece on U.S. policy, disengagement and isolation have failed to undermine the Cuban government and have done little to improve the prospects for greater respect for human rights on the part of Cuban authorities. A better alternative, he argues, would be to interact with Cuba, as a deeper understanding of its government, institutions and civil society will necessarily lead to a more positive outcome. Many governments have also

recognized that engagement allows greater cooperation on issues of common concern, such as security, terrorism, trade and migration.

One striking element that emerges is the extent to which the United States' relations with Cuba continue to cast a long shadow over other countries' approaches. The ebbs and flows in third countries' relationships with Cuba are often influenced by the closeness of their relationship with the United States. Still, it is remarkable how unsuccessful U.S. pressure to isolate Cuba has been among even some of Washington's closest allies, as demonstrated by these cases.

As these articles make clear, nations have their own particular set of concerns and interests in relation to the island. Most countries have economic and political interests that dispose them toward engaging with Cuba. Clearly, most governments also have concerns about human rights and political freedoms in Cuba. Most choose to pursue these concerns in the context of engagement with Cuba; none have adopted the sanctions regime that the United States has pursued nor sought regime change.

The articles follow the history of Canadian, U.S., European Union (with a focus on Spain and the United Kingdom), and Mexican relations with Cuba and the factors that have influenced those relationships. They end with a set of recommendations based on lessons drawn from that history.

# The United States and Post-Castro Cuba

**Geoff Thale**, Washington Office on Latin America

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The United States has had a trade and travel embargo on Cuba since 1961. Originally conceived as one element of a larger strategy to overthrow the Castro regime, in the context of the Cold War, the embargo has remained in place for almost fifty years. The historic foreign policy rationale for the embargo has disappeared. Today, its defenders are principally in the hardline sectors of the Cuban exile community.

For more than forty years, Fidel Castro's opponents in the Cuban exile community have hoped, prayed, and worked for the day when Castro would leave power. They have pursued a variety of strategies to achieve their goal. Assuming that his departure would trigger major changes in Cuba, they have hoped that illness or assassination would remove him from office. They danced in the streets of Miami when Castro suddenly announced that he would cede power to his brother Raul while he recovered from surgery in the summer of 2006, and again in September of 2007, when rumors spread in Miami that he had passed away. Their optimism proved unfounded on various levels, as the subsequent transfer of power proceeded smoothly and without major changes in the Cuban political regime.

(As this publication goes to press, Raul Castro was recently elected Cuba's Head of State following the resignation of Fidel Castro as Cuba's leader on February 17, 2008.)

Over the years, much of the hardliners' effort has been focused on the U.S. embargo on Cuba, and the hope that

the embargo would squeeze the country's economy, thereby hastening Castro's downfall. In the early years, exile groups hoped that the economic disruption caused by the embargo would weaken the Castro government's ability to defend itself, making an exile invasion more likely to succeed. After the failure of the Bay of Pigs invasion and the Cuban government's eventual defeat of counter-revolutionary forces on the island, exiles contented themselves keeping the embargo in place, harassing Cuba with occasional raids and waiting for the day when a hardline U.S. Administration might once again consider the invasion option. They had a brief moment of hope when Ronald Reagan was elected, and again after the collapse of the Soviet Union when George Bush, Sr. refused to rule out invasion as an option. But both Administrations had other foreign policy priorities, and the invasion option was not long on the table.

The Cuban economic crisis of the 1990s spurred hardliners once again into thinking that the Cuban economy might collapse, and might bring the government down with it. In response, they sought to further tighten the U.S. embargo on Cuba, lobbying the Congress and Presidential candidates for new restrictions that they hoped would intensify the pressures on the struggling Cuban economy. The Cuban Democracy Act, passed in 1992, forbade the foreign subsidiaries of U.S. companies to trade with Cuba. Then, the Helms-Burton bill in 1996 sought to discourage foreign investment that might help revive the Cuban economy. It threatened foreign firms that did business in the United States with lawsuits if they invested in Cuba.

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These measures succeeded in hurting the Cuban economy. They reduced the Cuban government's room to maneuver, and imposed additional hardships on the already hard-pressed Cuban people. But they did not lead to collapse. Despite an economic crisis more severe than the Great Depression of the 1930s in the United States, the Cuban government maintained enough domestic legitimacy to prevent serious internal challenges, and began a slow process of economic restructuring and recovery.

Although they continued to pressure the Bush Administration to tighten the embargo even further – particularly to restrict hard currency flows from the United States by limiting Cuban-American family visits – by 2006, most hardliners had stopped believing that U.S. economic measures against Cuba would lead to the government's collapse. The Cuban economy appeared to be recovering (in fact, Cuban macro-economic growth rates have picked up substantially in the last several years), and while many Cubans continued to be unhappy about their personal economic situation, there was little evidence of a significant or growing internal opposition that could challenge the Cuban government and provoke a political crisis.

Strategists in the hardline exile community came to believe that the next real opportunity for change in Cuba would come when Castro died. Having abandoned the notion that economic problems and internal unrest might lead to Castro's overthrow, they supposed that Castro's death would create a political opportunity for change. They assumed that whatever post-Fidel government emerged in Cuba, it would be interested in improving relations with the United States, and would be willing to negotiate political and economic changes in Cuba in return. This view presumes that a post-Fidel government will be substantially different than the current government, for whom national sovereignty and independence are extremely important,

and who are very unlikely to ever negotiate internal political and economic change for the sake of better relations with the United States.

Given this view, hardline exile groups sought to maintain the embargo not to weaken or attack the current Castro government but so that it could be used as leverage for negotiations in the post-Fidel period.

A Presidential Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba was established by the Bush Administration and charged with developing plans for assistance to a post-Fidel Cuba, based on this assumption. The reports released by the Commission in 2004 and 2006 are based on the premise that, after Fidel, the Cuban people would reject their entire social and political framework, and welcome U.S. assistance and advice.

The Presidential Commission reports, based on these assumptions, provide no useful framework for thinking about U.S. engagement with Cuba after Fidel. The events of the last year, in which a smooth transfer of power took place in Cuba when Fidel Castro voluntarily ceded power to his brother Raul while he coped with emergency surgery and illness, illustrate how incorrect these assumptions are. As a result, the United States government remains an irrelevant actor during this critical time in the history of Cuba.

## What Will a Post-Fidel Government be Like?

Many discussions about Cuba begin with the assumption that Fidel Castro's departure will begin a process of rapid political change in the country. The examples of the Soviet Union and of the countries of Eastern Europe are often cited, where transitions occurred when governments collapsed, or when sharp divisions among the political elite provoked ruptures and led to regime change. Less traumatic transitions, such as

those in Spain after Franco, or Chile after the referendum on Pinochet, are sometimes cited as well. But Cuba is unlikely to follow any of these models.

Most serious observers, whether sympathetic or hostile to the Castro government, argue that, in the immediate period after Fidel's retirement, a relatively stable succession will take place. Popular discontent will not boil over; internal differences among elites will not explode. Continuity, not change, will be the hallmark of the new government. For example, Mark Falcoff, a conservative political analyst and scholar at the American Enterprise Institute has written, "What follows Castro is not likely to be a free-market democracy, but rather a blander and more bureaucratic version of the system they have now."

Recent events seem to vindicate this point of view. President Fidel Castro had long ago named his brother, Raul Castro, as his successor. When he announced in the summer of 2006 that he was temporarily ceding power while he recovered from surgery, he followed this plan, and appointed Raul to stand in for him. Raul, an army general and the longtime Minister of the Armed Forces, does not have the charisma or the popularity that Fidel does. But he has become head of state. With Fidel's resignation on February 17th 2008 and the subsequent election of Raul Castro as Cuba's new president, the transition is complete. Key centers of power in Cuban society – the military, the Communist Party leadership, and senior state officials – have accepted him as the country's new leader.

As Raul Castro leads the country, he does so in new circumstances. Raul Castro will not rule as unilaterally as did his brother, Fidel. Fidel Castro was First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Cuban Communist Party, President of the Council of State elected by the National Assembly, and, by virtue of his position as President of the Council of State, head of the Council of Ministers that runs the government bureaucracy. He was the

dominant figure in each of these governing institutions. While the election of Raul as Cuba's new President election occurred without challenge, his hold on power will be significantly less concentrated than that of his older brother. He will depend on the support and the counsel of a number of key figures and institutions, and will probably not be able to act without them. These include the Minister of the Economy, the Minister of Foreign Relations, the head of the National Assembly, and senior members of the Central Committee of the Cuban Communist Party. Significantly, when Fidel Castro announced the temporary transfer of power, he named the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Minister of the Economy, and the Ministers of Education and of Health, as individuals who would have key responsibilities, along with Raul Castro.

In addition, given the fact that Raul Castro is only a few years younger than his brother Fidel, his tenure in office will be significantly shorter. Other political leaders will perceive this, and Raul is unlikely to accumulate the kind of decision-making power that Fidel had. He will be more dependent for support on other political actors. In a post-Fidel government, Raul Castro will lead, but in a political environment where other actors have become more powerful.

The successor government led by Raul Castro will seek to both consolidate and demonstrate its popular support and legitimacy. There will certainly be differences among the leadership. But whatever those differences are, they will likely be managed privately; the public façade will be one of unity.

## Legitimacy and the Succession in Cuba

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popular support will be critical in the early days, but other issues will surface.

The Cuban economy has improved since the very difficult years of the 1990s, when the economy struggled to adjust to the end of Soviet subsidies, and had to suddenly seek new markets for its exports. But Cubans still continue to suffer through relatively difficult economic times. The *libreta*, the coupon book for state subsidized food stuffs, only provides enough to cover basic needs for two to three weeks out of the month. For the other one to two weeks, most Cubans have to purchase food at non-subsidized prices, or in hard currency. On a state salary, this is very difficult; Cubans who do not have remittances from relatives abroad, or some form of earnings in hard currency, have a hard time making ends meet. And while transportation and electricity supplies have improved from the most difficult times, many Cubans continue to suffer through badly overcrowded public transportation, and occasional electrical outages.

The result of these continuing economic difficulties is dissatisfaction. That dissatisfaction has not boiled over, and is not likely to with Fidel's departure. Most Cubans continue to accept and support their government. But dissatisfaction is a factor in the background, and Raul's government will have to take that into account. While it will have legitimacy in the eyes of the population, a government led by Raul Castro will not be able to count on the level of support that the charismatic Fidel enjoyed. The next government will have to recognize the discontent, and will have to take some measures to respond to it and maintain popular acceptance and support.

The government will seek to re-enforce its popular legitimacy in several ways. It may take short term steps that seek to spread the benefits of the macro-economic growth of the last few years to the "micro" level more aggressively, taking measures to increase salaries, or improve public services, perhaps even expanding

once again some of the options for self-employment, while maintaining a vigorous campaign against corruption.

Such efforts by the Cuban government are currently underway. A broad plan to reform the agriculture industry has begun with a series of dialogues with individuals ranging from government officials, to academic researchers, unions and the farmers themselves in order to best determine how to raise productivity, output, and living standards. This process represents an important change in the internal decision making process on economic issues facing Cuba. The government may also consider political measures that would boost its legitimacy, including modest and carefully controlled measures that would open space for some dissidents, and efforts to reach out to and seek support from the churches in Cuba.

In addition to pursuing measures that will bolster its domestic legitimacy, a post-Fidel government may seek to quickly demonstrate its international acceptance, urging visits by government leaders ranging from Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez to Spanish President Jose Luis Zapatero, and from leaders in developing nations not perceived as closely aligned to the United States.

Independence and national sovereignty have been consistent themes in Cuba's foreign relations since Fidel Castro came to power, and this is unlikely to change under Raul Castro. Foreign governments who signal their acceptance of the political succession in Cuba will not be able to demand political or economic change in Cuba as a condition for recognition. Nonetheless, at a time when the Cuban government is re-examining aspects of its internal policies, other countries with relations with Cuba – from the centrist and center-left governments of Europe, to Chavez and the government of Iran – will be in a position to urge the new Cuban leadership to move in one direction or another. Countries like the United States, with no contact with the Cuban leadership

and few contacts with Cuban society, will have no influence.

As long as the United States continues to isolate the island, the new government will certainly continue to capitalize on pro-embargo rhetoric in the exile community or any other bold actions by the U.S. that threaten Cuban sovereignty, in order to unite Cubans in a nationalist rejection of interference in Cuban affairs.

## Problems for U.S. Policy Makers

Current U.S. policy sidelines the United States as Cuba goes through a political succession and considers policy reforms. Beyond irrelevance, current policy also poses several possible risks for U.S. policy makers.

Some Cuban-American hardliners have always believed that the Cuban population is waiting to throw off the yoke of communist tyranny, and has always imagined they would return to Cuba at the time of Fidel's departure to help establish a new government, or to support dissident groups. The power transfer has taken place without any signs of internal unrest, or the emergence of a significant political opposition, and this has made the thought of returning to Cuba seem less realistic. But it is still possible that groups in the hardline exile community will try to return to Cuba by boat or by air when Fidel Castro is finally gone.

Others moved more by humanitarian concern than by politics, could try to return to Cuba to pick up relatives eager to leave the island, at a time when they are less likely to be stopped by the Cuban military, which will be pre-occupied with the succession.

It is thus easy to imagine a relatively chaotic scenario in which Cuban-Americans in boats or small planes, attempt to return to Cuba at the time of a definitive succession. This is a recipe for disaster. Most Cuban citizens, whatever

they may think of the Castro government, are not eager to see exiles who left over forty years ago return to take over the country. The Cuban government and the Cuban military would see any large scale attempt to return as a political challenge and a national security threat. Conflict, in which U.S. citizens were arrested, or hurt, or killed, would be likely, and that would be very dangerous, as it would threaten to bring both governments into confrontation.

In part because of this scenario, the U.S. Coast Guard has, for many years, had standing orders to prevent small boats from leaving South Florida and heading toward Cuba in the period immediately after Castro's death or departure. This is a simple and common sense measure, designed to prevent uncontrolled movement that could generate a crisis at an already tense moment. Whether the Bush Administration and subsequent U.S. governments maintain this order, and assure that the Coast Guard fully and effectively implements it, is a major issue. It is an encouraging sign that the both federal and Florida state authorities made a serious and effective effort to dissuade Cuban exiles and Cuban-Americans from trying to return to Cuba in the days after the temporary transfer of power in 2006.

If one risk has to do with Cuban-Americans heading toward Cuba after Fidel Castro's death, another risk has to do with rafters leaving Cuba. If the succession in Cuba were to be less stable than expected, an exodus of Cubans could take place with significant numbers of rafters heading toward Florida. The hardline community in Miami would likely contribute to this exodus through its radio stations and other contacts in Cuba, encouraging people to take advantage of a relatively weak government and border patrol. This would present difficult political choices for the U.S. government. A significant exodus would overwhelm U.S. resources and produce a huge political backlash in the United States (which is already in the midst of a polarized immigration debate),

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While the Cuban government may feel the need to take economic measures designed to boost popular support, economic conditions will not be so dire that it will be desperate for U.S. aid, or tourism, or trade to keep it afloat.

while measures to prevent Cubans from reaching U.S. soil would probably require military force and be politically costly in the hardline Cuban-American community.

Even if the United States prevents boats from heading for Cuba, and can prevent a rafters crisis, under current policy it will still face a number of other issues in how it responds to Fidel's departure from the scene.

The Helms-Burton Law, passed in 1996, requires a set of changes in Cuba before the United States can normalize relations or extend economic assistance to Cuba. This severely limits the scope of potential action for the current and future administrations. The Bush Administration has made it clear that it wants to see significant political and economic change in Cuba as a precondition for improved relations. And, as noted earlier, hardline sectors envision offering to ease the embargo in return for these changes in Cuba.

This hardline position is unlikely to achieve results. Assuming that the successor government has come into office, and that a rafters and emigration crisis has been avoided, no post-Castro government is likely to abandon the nationalism and independence that have been the hallmark of Cuban policy for nearly five decades in return for negotiations on U.S. terms. While the Cuban government may feel the need to take economic measures designed to boost popular support, it will not be in such difficult economic circumstances that it will be desperate for U.S. aid, or tourism, or trade to keep it afloat. In fact, U.S. demands for political and economic change are likely to provide the government an opportunity to rally public support in nationalist opposition to U. S. interference. Thus the United States will be doomed to continued irrelevance.

### What should the U.S. do?

Any discussion about how the U.S. should act toward Cuba ought to begin by recognizing historic Cuban sensitivity about sovereignty. The U.S. should make it clear

that it does not seek to dictate the details of Cuba's economic and political life. It should also recognize the real and significant advances that Cuba has made in education, health care, and social equality over the last forty years, advances that the Cuban people are likely to want to preserve.

U.S. discourse about Cuba has long emphasized Cuba's serious problems with democracy, respect for the rule of law, and human rights. The U.S. should not drop these concerns as it looks toward the post-Fidel future, in particular continuing to call for a release of those dissidents arrested in 2003 who remain in jail. But they can only meaningfully be raised in the context of an extensive and ongoing dialogue with Cuba, rather than being cast in stone as pre-conditions for a more constructive relationship. U.S. policy ought to broadly engage with Cuba, and in that context, focus on encouraging a post-Fidel Cuba to move toward greater political opening, while respecting its sovereignty and recognizing its achievements.

Of course, any discussion about the U.S. role in promoting democracy and human rights around the world today has to recognize that the history of U.S. intervention in Latin America (much less the recent role in the Middle East) leaves many people, both in the U.S. and in Latin America, deeply suspicious about U.S. motives when talking about democracy and human rights in other countries.

Given those two caveats, how should the United States act toward a post-Fidel Cuba, if what it hopes to do is encourage movement toward greater political opening?

The most important point is that a policy of keeping the embargo in place, and waiting until Fidel dies or both Castro brothers step down from power is short-sighted and ineffective. Cubans, from Fidel Castro on down, are already thinking about and preparing for the future. Sitting on the sidelines and waiting for the future to happen means having no meaningful role.



Efforts by the Bush Administration, through the Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba, to lay out how the U.S. would relate to a post-Fidel Cuba were all based on the assumption that a dramatic change in Cuba's governing structures would take place after Fidel leaves the scene. But events have shown that assumption to be unrealistic, and so the work of the Commission has almost no value.

A more sensible policy would start with the recognition that a post-Fidel Cuba is likely, at least initially, to look much like the Cuba of today. Relations with a post-Fidel Cuba will be shaped therefore by the relations we have today, and will develop in the near future. Groundwork laid today through increased contacts between academics, cultural sectors, and others, will open channels of contact and communication that will be useful in the future.

The United States should recognize that the Cuban-American community is going to be a major force in shaping U.S. relations with Cuba now and in the future, and a major force in relation to Cuba itself. In the long run, the grievances that many Cuban-Americans feel will have to be addressed, as part of some process of reconciliation. (Such a process will also have to recognize the grievances that many Cubans harbor against the exile community.) The U.S. ought to begin now to take measures that encourage contact between the Cuban American community and Cubans on the island, both because it will make future relations easier, and because contact encourages and strengthens the moderate sectors of the community and tends to isolate the hardliners. Family, business, cultural, and religious contact between Cuban Americans and Cubans can only reduce tension during a time of change.

Similarly, a sensible policy would recognize that the post-Fidel leadership is likely to draw on the advice and expertise of

academics, technicians, government officials and others in Cuba who are young and more open-minded. Any strategy that wants to encourage political opening in Cuba ought to be interested in developing relations and maintaining contact with that younger set of Cubans. Such a strategy need not be based on the idea that younger Cubans should be cultivated because the United States can "infect" them with ideological beliefs, or can influence them to fundamentally alter their government. It should simply recognize that contact and communication between those individuals and sectors in Cuba and people in the United States cannot but be constructive in the long term.

The U.S. embargo against Cuba should be ended. It was originally driven by Cold War fervor, and was never justified in terms of any realistic appraisal of the human rights situation in Cuba itself. A policy of engagement with Cuba, in which the United States raises its human rights and democracy concerns in the context of an ongoing diplomatic relationship, is the right thing to do from both a moral and political standpoint.

But in the context of discussions about the post-Fidel future, it is clear that the United States should be taking measures now to increase contact between Cubans on the island and the Cuban American community, and increase contact between academic, religious and other sectors likely to be in touch with those who will actually shape Cuba's future. The Coast Guard should remain prepared to prevent a crisis in the event that Fidel's death triggers instability in the Florida Straits either in Miami or in Cuba.

If we take these steps, we have a chance to encourage a succession in Cuba that would avoid a crisis and might over time lead toward greater political opening on the island.

Relations with a post-Fidel Cuba will be shaped therefore by the relations we have today, and will develop in the near future.

# Mexico-Cuba Relations: A Two-Sided Triangle

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Of course Mexico's foreign policy toward Cuba reflects its own national interest, and vice versa, but it is indisputable that the larger context that affects their relationship with each other are the links that each country has with the United States.

Diplomatic relations between Mexico and Cuba have long been characterized by “triangulation.” Mexican authorities and the Mexican people have long felt close to the Caribbean isle, and vice versa, based on mutual interests, yet relations have always been conditioned by the interests of the global powers of the day. During colonial times, contact between the two territories was intense yet their relationship developed within the framework of Spain's rule over the region. Once Mexico gained its independence, Cuba became even more important, given its position as a Spanish colony, and therefore a possible launching point for attempts by the Spanish crown to retake Mexican territory. As Spain declined in importance in the New World and the United States took its place as a global power, the triangular relationship morphed. During this transition, revered Mexican political leaders such as Antonio López de Santa Ana and Benito Juárez went into exile, at different times, in Havana. José Martí, the father of Cuban independence, spent part of his career as a politician, writer, and journalist in Mexico. After the Spanish-American War, Cuba, with its strategic location, saw itself converted into a virtual protectorate of the United States, a position that limited any Mexican designs on its “third border.” The triangular relationship came to be characterized by the dynamics that prevail today.

Mexico-Cuba relations have thus been defined within a “strategic triangle.” During the colonial period and through the 19th Century, the triangle was

composed of Mexico, Cuba, and Spain. Subsequently, the triangle took a different shape: Mexico, Cuba, and the United States. In this way, in spite of the empathy that naturally exists between the two peoples, the interference of more powerful nations has inevitably determined the course of the relationship.

Of course Mexico's foreign policy toward Cuba reflects its own national interest, and vice versa, but it is indisputable that the larger context that affects their relationship with each other are the links that each country has with the United States. In terms of Mexico, the United States is its principal trading partner and largest investor. Three quarters of Mexican exports are bound for the United States, a relationship institutionalized with the enactment of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994, which has intensified the already heavy flow of goods, services, and investment among the NAFTA countries. There is also a decidedly complex bilateral agenda that includes prickly areas such as illegal immigration of Mexicans into the United States, the drug war, the fight against organized crime, arms trafficking, border security, and, after the attacks of September 11, 2001, the war on terror. In addition, Mexico's geographical position, with its 3,000-kilometer border with the United States, puts the country in the path of illegal immigration from South America, Central America and Cuba as well as drug or contraband smuggling networks that use Mexican territory by land, air, or sea to reach the United States.

The complexity of the relationship described above in itself explains the high level of priority that the United States has in Mexico's foreign policy. Mexico strives to exercise its leadership and autonomy in its actions throughout the world, always within the context of satisfying its national interests. The relationships that it develops with other countries and international organisms are therefore designed to give the country the greatest possible strategic benefit, including creating conditions that permit Mexico to counterbalance the enormous influence of the United States.

One must also keep in mind the relationship between foreign and domestic policy. In many cases, actions taken in the international arena by Mexico are aimed at furthering national unity, and more concretely, have allowed the political class in power to win legitimacy in the eyes of social groups at home that may oppose its domestic political, economic, or social programs.

## **Mexico-Cuba Relations During the Cold War**

During the Cold War, relations between Mexico and Cuba could be termed "politically correct." Trade maintained a low profile throughout. Academic, recreational, scientific, and cultural exchanges carried on normally. When, after the triumph of the Cuban Revolution, the Organization of American States resolved in 1962 that the Inter-American system was incompatible with a Marxist-Leninist government such as that which existed in Cuba. Mexico was one of six countries that abstained from the vote to suspend the island from participating in the OAS. (The resolution won 14 to 1 to 6.) By abstaining from this vote, Mexico demonstrated, on the one hand, its disagreement with the OAS' strongly U.S.-influenced position, and on the other, assured continued friendly relations with Havana, though without necessitating deeper links with the island.

Above all, Mexico sought to ensure its own internal stability during a time of political turmoil and insurgency around the globe. It also sought to avoid Cuban support for guerrillas and activists inside Mexico who could threaten the country's status quo. By invoking nationalism and independence from the United States in its foreign policy toward Cuba, the Mexican government, under the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) until 2000, also legitimized itself from within by taking advantage of the long-standing empathy between the Mexican and Cuban people.

In this way Mexico achieved several goals through its relationship with Cuba during the Cold War. It projected an image of political independence and leadership in spite of its economic reliance on the United States; it used its relations with Cuba as a counterweight to mitigate pressure from Washington; and it occupied a role of privileged interlocutor with Cuba on important topics such as guerrilla movements.

## **Mexico-Cuba Relations Post-Cold War**

The international changes that brought the Cold War to a close, combined with a series of internal reforms in Mexico and Cuba, led to the substantial modification of the bilateral links and the "strategic triangle." For Cuba, the end of the Cold War meant the end of Soviet- and Eastern European-sponsored assistance, which meant that the island had to reform its international relationships, shifting its dependence to nations in Western Europe, Latin America, and Canada, though none of these could counterbalance the United States as the Soviet Union had. Mexico, for its part, after facing external debt and the worst economic crisis of its history in the 1980s, found itself forced to implement sweeping economic reforms that brought a reduction in the role of the Mexican state in almost all of its functions. From that moment forth, and as never before in its history, internal decisions in Mexico would be

...actions taken in the international arena by Mexico are aimed at furthering national unity, and more concretely, have allowed the political class in power to win legitimacy in the eyes of social groups at home that may oppose its domestic political, economic, or social programs.

Fox had no need to seek legitimacy internally and so the value of political dialogue with Cuba fell with respect to previous PRI administrations.

strongly influenced by the course of global events. In economic terms, its prosperity would depend upon gaining better access to the markets of its principal trading partners. At the same time, attracting foreign investment became a decisive issue. The United States would be crucial in achieving both those goals.

All these changes in Mexico contributed to a modification of the PRI power base. In the 1980s, the PRI government demonstrated that it was incapable of maintaining the wellbeing of the population, and in the 1990s, with the signing of NAFTA, it entered into an alliance with the United States in a move that many sectors of Mexican society considered a betrayal and a dizzying change in foreign policy. NAFTA went into effect on January 1, 1994, accompanied by the outbreak of the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) insurrection in Chiapas and, later, the assassination of PRI presidential candidate Luis Donaldo Colosio and that of PRI General Secretary José Francisco Ruíz Massieu. All those events demonstrated the attrition of the PRI-dominated political system and the impossibility of generating internal consensus within it, which in turn acted as the impetus for a transition that ended with Ernesto Zedillo taking power. The advent of the financial crisis in December 1995, which caused the gross domestic product to fall almost 7%, led to questions regarding Mexico's economic model, even as the financial rescue by the United States demonstrated once again the enormous dependence of Mexico on its neighbor. In this politically and economically vulnerable position, Mexico changed its foreign policy, becoming more pragmatic and less anti-establishment (in terms of discourse) concerning the United States. This shift inevitably affected relations with Cuba, since the strategic triangle tended to become "bilateralized." Mexico discussed the bilateral agenda directly with Washington, without using its relationships with third parties to obtain concessions from Washington. This was particularly visible with the arrival of

Vicente Fox, the first non-PRI head-of-state, in 2000.

The Fox administration (2000-2006) sought to distinguish itself from previous administrations. Fox's victory gave him tremendous political capital in the first years of his government, during which he developed a pragmatic policy of closer ties with Washington. Given the way in which he came to power, by defeating the PRI, Fox had no need to seek legitimacy internally and so the value of political dialogue with Cuba fell with respect to previous PRI administrations.

There was an additional factor that provoked a shift in Mexican-Cuban relations in the Fox administration. Because the political transition that brought Fox to power was the result of a contested electoral process, the Fox government trumpeted democratic values, in which context criticism of the Cuban regime became inevitable.

During the UN-sponsored International Conference on Financing and Development in Monterrey in March 2002, it became evident that the Mexican government had chosen to "bilateralize" its relations with Cuba, reducing their significance. Speaking by telephone to Fidel Castro before the summit, Fox told the Cuban leader that his presence would prove uncomfortable for U.S. President George W. Bush, given that both were scheduled to participate in the meeting. Fox told Castro to "eat and leave," meaning that he should participate only in the official dinner and then leave immediately in order to avoid encountering President Bush. A month later, Mexico voted in favor of a resolution presented by Uruguay at the U.N. Human Rights Commission in Geneva to condemn the human rights situation in Cuba. In October that year, Mexico's ambassador in Havana, Ricardo Pascoe, resigned, expressing surprise at the drastic change of direction in the Fox Administration's relations with Cuba. From that point until the end of the Fox administration, relations with Cuba

maintained a low profile. Not until the arrival of Felipe Calderón to the presidency in 2006 did bilateral ties begin to rebuild.

## Prospects for Mexico-Cuba Relations

As a post-Fidel transition begins to gestate on the island, Mexico finds itself without the ongoing political dialogue with Cuba necessary to be part of the discussion and therefore minimize any negative impacts on its own interests. The rupture of the “strategic triangle” has not served Mexico’s interests and, for that reason, policy planning has begun to focus on rebuilding it. The Mexican Ministry of Foreign Affairs recognizes the urgency of normalizing relations with Cuba and has identified a series of priorities that should be dealt with in the short term.

Part of this strategy could involve the creation of a high-level bilateral consultation mechanism, which would permit political dialogue between officials in both countries as well as offer solutions for any challenges. This mechanism is of particular interest, because of the back-door channels of communication it might facilitate. Though the Hugo Chávez Administration has sought to become Cuba’s main political ally, Venezuela’s government lacks a constructive dialogue with the Bush Administration. In contrast, Calderón can guarantee more than just dialogue with Washington; in fact, there are reports that former president George H. W. Bush and U.S. ambassador to Mexico, Antonio Garza, have suggested that Mexico might serve as mediator for Cuba’s transition. In this sense, Washington would seem to be in favor of recreating the *strategic triangle*.

But this is not an easy task, above all internally, given that the political forces that are likely to play leading roles in normalizing relations with Cuba are members of the PRI, creating the possibility of a political power play vis-à-vis the National Action Party (PAN), Calderón’s

party. That being said, members of both the PRI and PAN appear to recognize that unless they take decisive steps in favor of political dialogue with Cuba, Mexico’s interests could be harmed.

The Calderón Administration recently named Gabriel Jiménez Remus as Mexican Ambassador to Cuba. Known as a conservative figure, Jiménez Remus was Mexico’s ambassador to Spain during the Fox Administration and, in that position, he developed close ties with the Spanish royal family and top officials within the Popular Party. Overall, in spite of his conservatism, he is recognized as a capable negotiator, skilled in compromise and diplomacy, with high-level links to PAN leadership, and, of course, to President Calderón. With this appointment, the Mexican government demonstrates its wish to normalize relations with Cuba, though under different conditions than those during the PRI years.

On a different note, given that one of the points of conflict in relations between Mexico and Cuba is the vote in the new United Nations Human Rights Council, separating that topic from other elements of the bilateral agenda has been proposed in an effort to avoid “contaminating” the dialogue and cooperation on the remaining topics of common interest. In the same way, as a means of compensation for Mexico’s voting position in the council, the Calderón government has been considering lobbying in favor of Cuba before the UN General Assembly regarding the U.S. embargo.

Mexico, in attempting to reassert itself as a regional power, may have interests in exploring cooperation on energy issues and regional development with Cuba. Mexico might also be willing to lobby within the OAS for a dialogue that could lead to Cuba rejoining the inter-American system, an idea supported by OAS Secretary General José Miguel Insulza.

One of the most prickly subjects within the bilateral relationship between Mexico and Cuba is the debt Havana has accumulated

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with the Mexican Foreign Trade Bank (BANCOMEXT), which amounts to \$500 million. While trade ties are modest (Cuba receives less than one percent of Mexican exports), this debt inhibits many trade and investment possibilities that Mexico would otherwise develop in Cuba. Moreover, the debt impedes Mexico's ability to take advantage of the U.S. embargo against Cuba, given that when those economic sanctions end, Mexico will face U.S. competition in Cuba. If Mexico dedicated itself to promoting its economic interests adequately before that transition, it would find itself in a better position to compete.

Yet the most important subject for Mexico in its bilateral relations with Cuba has to do with the security issues created by Cuban migration to, and through, Mexico, and with the possibility of increases in this migration in a post-Fidel period in Cuba. Security and migration issues are closely linked in Mexico. Since the 2001 terrorist attacks, the U.S. has sought to reinforce its border controls, including the construction of a wall, and has exhorted the Mexican government to fortify its own border controls in regards to South American, Central American, and Cuban migrants who enter the country in transit to the United States. The addition of an explosion of Cuban migrants would put Mexico in an impossible situation: a wall to the north plus migrant flows from Central and South America, and the Cubans.

Cuban migration to Mexico is not a new phenomenon. Beginning in the early 1990s, coinciding with the Special Period (period of economic crisis in Cuba) following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, and the end of Moscow's assistance, Mexico experienced a surge in Cuban immigration. This stems from the traditional empathy that exists between the people of the two

countries, the geographic proximity, and Mexico's position as the closest neighbor to the U.S. Many Cubans in Mexico maintain contact with Cuban family members who are residents in the United States.

In the face of this situation, it is imperative that Mexico and Cuba develop an immigration agreement that takes into account, among other concerns, the exchange of information about migratory policies in the two countries, the definition of policies for the reinsertion of nationals from each country, the criteria for combating undocumented immigration, consular protections, and the rights of airline and maritime crews that travel to Mexico.

Conditions are in place for Mexico and Cuba to normalize bilateral relations and steer their relationship into less treacherous waters. Cuba is Mexico's third border, a fact which bestows upon it special relevancy for the bilateral agenda of that country. Mexico must take the initiative in this reconciliatory process, both to gain the benefits that its foreign policy would receive by taking a leadership role in the region and to secure the support of Cuba in those multilateral institutions where Cuban diplomacy carries substantial weight that the Mexican government can use in its favor. Other considerations justify closer ties with Havana, including the transition that is occurring on the island and the impacts in terms of security that any transition could have on Mexico. If the Calderón government does not develop an appropriate political dialogue, the consequences will be very unfavorable for the country. In contrast, a respectful and cooperative relationship with the Cubans will allow Mexico to be a proactive protagonist in Cuba's transition. It is therefore in Mexico's best interest to work to reestablish the "strategic triangle."

# The Attitude of the European Union and Spain Toward Cuba<sup>1</sup>

Joaquín Roy, Miami University

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The European Union's approach toward Cuba, and that of its individual member states, has differed markedly from that of the United States. Brussels has not restricted trade relations with Cuba for many years. When Cuba opened itself to limited foreign investment in an effort to cushion the impact of the collapse of the Soviet Union and its subsidies, European interests (especially Spanish companies) looked to the island for opportunities. European tourism to Cuba has increased significantly. Still, while the EU has consistently opposed coercive sanctions on Cuba, it has criticized its government on human rights and democracy issues and has declined to reach a full government-to-government agreement on development assistance and cooperation until Cuba makes progress on political and economic reforms. Since the mid-1990s, Cuban-EU relations have gone through cycles of tension over these conditions.

Beginning in 2003, EU relations with Cuba entered a cycle in which European actors would attempt to influence or persuade Havana to move toward political and economic reforms. Cuban authorities would respond to the pressure by freezing the level of diplomatic contacts. In 2005, after a prolonged period in which

the EU waited to see if any progress was forthcoming, the EU took a series of initiatives aimed at finding a middle ground with Cuba while not abandoning its human rights concerns. These initiatives were controversial among EU member governments: certain governments viewed them as positive; others saw them as insufficient. The new initiatives received an ambivalent response from the Cuban government.

Today, tensions remain in the relation between the EU and Cuba. Debate within the EU culminated with a June 2007 statement representing a compromise between member governments which re-affirmed the status quo. Cuba responded negatively. In sum, a year and a half after the July 31, 2006 announcement regarding Castro's health, not much has changed in the essence, details and spirit of the peculiar relationship between Europe and Cuba.

While the EU overall has taken a cautious position vis-à-vis Cuba, the Spanish have moved on their own track. The politically risky trip taken by Spanish Foreign Minister Miguel Angel Moratinos to Havana during Easter week of 2007 surprised European and U.S. observers as

While the EU overall has taken a cautious position vis-à-vis Cuba, the Spanish have moved on their own track.

<sup>1</sup> Summarized version of a paper presented at the Latin American Studies Association (LASA) Congress in Montreal, Canada, September 5-9, 2007. This document is a follow-up to a report made in the aftermath of Fidel Castro's illness and temporary withdrawal from power on August 1, 2006, "From stubbornness and mutual irrelevancy to stillness and vigil on Castro's crisis: The current state of European Union-Spain-Cuba relations," Occasional Paper, Jean Monnet Chair/European Union Center. Special August/September 2006. Reproduced by Real Instituto Elcano, <http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/documentos/253.asp>. Available at website of Fundación Alternativas (Madrid): [http://www.falternativas.org/base/download/bc80\\_28-08-06\\_vigil-EN-paper.pdf](http://www.falternativas.org/base/download/bc80_28-08-06_vigil-EN-paper.pdf).

The European governments, historically a counterweight to U.S. hostility, have concluded that in the short term, Cuba does not need them as a balance to the U.S. relationship. Raúl Castro is well supported by the strategic alliance with Venezuela and sees no need to reach an accommodation with the EU.

a major turn in Spain's policy several years after the Spanish Socialist Party (PSOE)'s electoral victory in March of 2004. When most observers expected the impasse caused by Castro's illness to last longer and invite an extended period of inaction and caution from an array of foreign actors, Spain decided to act. The bold move taken by the Spanish government has to be seen within a wider context regarding the European perception of the Cuban scene.

## Cuba-EU Relations

In 1996, after the planes of the exile organization Brothers to the Rescue were shot down and Cuban authorities cracked down on civil society, the EU, which had been moving toward a full development cooperation agreement with the island, decided not to move forward. Instead, EU governments adopted a united stand, known as the Common Position, which stated that Brussels would not negotiate a regular cooperation agreement until Cuba adopted political and economic reforms. Since then, the Cuban government has refused to meet the EU conditions which it perceives as an attempt to impose political changes on Cuba. Cuban-EU relations remained cool for the rest of the decade, then warmed briefly as both sides displayed some flexibility. In 2003, in response to the arrests of 75 dissidents and the execution of three Cubans who had commandeered a passenger ferry, taking hostages in an attempt to reach the United States, the EU adopted "temporary measures" which limited EU-Cuban diplomatic contacts. The EU, in imposing these restrictions, agreed to review them every year. In 2005, following Spanish leadership, the measures were suspended (though not formally ended).

Of course, within the overarching EU approach, individual countries each differ in their relations with Cuba. Some states have pursued a policy of "constructive engagement." A ranking of EU states exercising this policy shows Spain in first place, followed by Belgium and Italy. On

the other hand, some states pursue a more oppositional approach, with the Czech Republic leading the ranking of EU member states perceived as hard-liners on Cuba.

The Cuban government reaffirmed its cool approach, even after the suspension of the EU temporary measures in 2005. Havana continued to selectively place obstacles on the access granted to certain foreign representations to the high echelons of the regime. Meanwhile, the government-run media sporadically would attack, sometimes in a veiled manner, sometimes in an explicit way, certain European governments and the EU as whole, accusing it of taking part in the U.S. "conspiracy." The EU Common Position in effect since 1996 has been systematically equated with the long-standing U.S. embargo.

Havana has noted the willingness of certain countries to continue with the overall approach of "constructive engagement." But it has noted, too, a deepening of the opposition approach taken by the Czech Republic. This has generated a verbally aggressive response from the Cuban government and its media, blaming the EU for allegedly caving in to pressure and mirroring the strategy of the United States.

The European governments, historically a counterweight to U.S. hostility, have concluded that in the short term, Cuba does not need them as a balance to the U.S. relationship. Raúl Castro is well supported by the strategic alliance with Venezuela and sees no need to reach an accommodation with the EU. Although few expect a hardening in the public confrontations between the EU and Cuba, which were the norm before the suspension of the temporary measures in early 2005, the EU institutions have been predicting that the stalemated relationship that is best described as "mutual irrelevance" will continue. Both parties have come to the conclusion that they cannot influence each other; so the logic has been not to bother with more than the status quo.

Moreover, the calm in Cuba that followed the announcement of both Fidel's illness in 2006, and his eventual retirement in 2008, has led EU observers to re-examine the reality of European involvement and interests in Cuba.

Europe's influence over Cuba is thus limited because Europe, like the United States, is not needed by the Cuban government. This perception was confirmed empirically when Cuba bluntly declined the invitation to send a Cuban delegation to visit Brussels to discuss a wide range of issues in June 2007. While some years ago this rejection might have been dictated by ideology and by the Cuban government's need to construct an "enemy" against whom to rally the population, today there is a concrete economic factor added to the equation. Venezuela and its leader Hugo Chávez, for the moment, have filled the economic vacuum, offering Cuba an alternative to dependency on European investment and financing.

## EU Attitudes After Fidel Castro's Illness

This situation, which existed before Castro fell ill, has continued. Eight months after the health crisis erupted, the EU (including Spain) was still pursuing a cautious approach. The institutional machinery of the European Union and leading member states (leading because of their historical legacy and because of their influence in EU decision-making) reaffirmed a cautious approach in their policy towards Cuba. European discussions of innovative political and economic frameworks have been frozen since Raúl Castro took over, with Europe concluding that circumstances were not propitious for a considerable shift in the general policy.

Several factors contributed to this approach. One factor had to do with the lack of substantial changes in the overall political shape of the Cuban regime. Signals, both subtle and explicit, emanated from the Cuban government implying that

major changes should not be expected. Meanwhile, Fidel Castro continued to make indirect media appearances, reinforcing the ambiguity about who was truly in charge on the island. This ambiguity would be clarified only with his death or full return to power. Another factor had to do with the pacts arranged by Cuba with other actors (Venezuela, among others), which indicate that Havana felt less need to win additional support or favors.

This European perception that it was not the moment for policy change toward Cuba coincides with that of international policy analysts elsewhere, including in the United States. In general, the international community has demonstrated a lack of fresh ideas in dealing with unforeseeable events in Cuba. As long as Washington does not explore more innovative avenues toward Cuba, there is consequently little pressure on Europe to do so either, and so Europe has maintained its cautious attitude during this long period of "constructive engagement."

European foreign ministries have thus opted to take into account the signals emanating from Havana and to respond to the apparent "normalcy" presented by the temporary transfer of power with a nod and an intention of waiting. At the same time, because the EU's precarious consensus position on Cuba had been developed in the middle of 2006, shortly before the illness of Fidel Castro, the EU did not wish to change its approach. This impasse lasted into 2007.

In 2006, the EU in its annual review of its Cuba position, agreed to draft a new strategy by 2007. But the promised drafting never took place. Concerned that a new strategy might re-affirm the 1996 Common Position that they sought to change, and seeking a more opportune moment, Spain and other actors were energetically opposed to the development of a new strategy document. They feared that a re-affirmation of the Common Position's limits on full economic and

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diplomatic relations would make it more difficult for the EU to maintain the flexibility needed to respond to unforeseeable circumstances. Also, Spain and other governments felt that a new EU strategy document might give the Cuban regime new ammunition to argue that it was being harassed in the U.S. style.

## The EU Adopts a Formal Position

The pending business of the temporary measures taken against Cuba in 2003, (provisionally lifted in 2005) and the continuing validity of the Common Position approved in 1996, became the centerpieces of EU decisions made in the middle of 2007. To the dissatisfaction of all parties involved, a new compromise was reached which resulted only in stalemate and continuing ambiguity.

There had been hopes for a permanent lifting of the 2003 measures. Spain and other member states were pressuring for their permanent suspension on the grounds that they were never really implemented and had become an irritant to the Cuban regime, while opposing members and sectors of the dissident movement were advocating for the re-imposition of the measures.

The EU Council reached a compromise. It decided to continue the suspension of the measures, without making any move toward their permanent dissolution. The compromise reached was, essentially, a way to avoid the topic of the measures altogether. The thorny topic of the Common Position suffered the same treatment. The document that was drafted included the customary demands for Cuban political and economic reform, and the liberation of political prisoners. In closing, the EU invited the Cuban government to send a special delegation to Brussels to discuss all matters of mutual concern, including the conflict-ridden topic of human rights.

Despite intensive discussions, the 2007 agreement failed to resolve important disagreements among the EU member states over policy toward Cuba. It was not possible to reach an agreement on a re-evaluation of the Common Position, or on formally ending the 2003 measures. The final consensus then implied that the Common Position was still valid. In the event that Cuban authorities do not accept the invitation to meet, the Common Position will again be reviewed in June 2008.

All said, the consensus was a successful initial agreement. The EU felt it would strengthen its future position by showing unity and lose leverage if it showed signs of in-fighting. A reopening of the complex text meant the risk of destroying the agreement. The EU also managed to place the ball back in Cuba's court by extending the invitation to send Cuban representatives to Brussels.

The Cuban government's reaction was first a cool silence. It was then followed by a declaration laced with animosity and irritation. Castro published a furious article in *Granma*. He described what he called "sanctions" as "unenforceable and unsustainable." He labeled the Common Position a draft written by the U.S. State Department and called the Czech government "U.S. peons." The conclusions made by the EU Council were labeled as "calumnious" interference in the "internal affairs of Cuba." In sum, he said, the EU was acting with a "persistent and humiliating subordination" to the United States. It is then "up to the EU to make corrections in its policy towards Cuba."

## The Common Position

It is worth noting that the meaning of the Common Position of 1996 has been subtly changed and manipulated by a variety of actors. On one side, what originally was simply a set of conditions presented to Cuba for enjoying a cooperation agreement similar to the deals made with the rest of the Latin American countries, has been



“sold” by the Cuban exile community and the U.S. government as “sanctions,” a word that has been expanded to cover the measures taken in 2003. On the other side, the Cuban government has gladly accepted the term and its spirit. In the background of the discussions over the decision to lift the measures in 2005, the Cuban government sent an unequivocal message indicating that there was no chance of an agreement unless the Common Position was lifted.

As frequent declarations by Cuban officials including Fidel Castro have illustrated, the Common Position has been equated to U.S. policy. The Cuban government then skillfully applies the same treatment to both, interpreting them as examples of economic and political imperialism, blaming them for the economic shortcomings of the Cuban system.

It should be stressed, when dealing with this comparative dimension, that the EU Common Position does not aim to bring change to Cuba by coercive means. But it continues to be portrayed that way in Cuba, based on nationalist feelings. That has been the main reason why the current Spanish government and other EU partners have been opposed to a strategy that is interpreted as the imposition of “sanctions.” They believe the Common Position has been ineffective in offering incentives for change in Cuba and has only stiffened nationalist resistance.

## From Prudence to Bold Action

If the European Union, took a cautious wait-and-see approach over the last year, Spain, acting on its own, did take a dramatic step. Foreign Minister Miguel Angel Moratinos visited Cuba, and the government made the decision to reestablish full communication with the Cuban government through the public signing of agreements in the fields of economics, investment, and political dialogue including human rights.

There were a range of reactions to and attempts to explain the Spanish action. As an immediate response, commentaries ranged from silence and prudence to overt criticism and finger pointing at the motivations involved. Dissidents, humiliated by Moratinos’ refusal to meet with them, expressed disappointment at his decision and his offer, as an alternative, to arrange a meeting with lower-level Spanish officials. Significantly, the frustration over the visit of Moratinos and the lack of a scheduled meeting with the dissident community prompted some dissident groups to issue a “declaration of unity” (although they denied the link between the visit and their decision).

Commentators close to the views of the opposition Popular Party expressed critical evaluations. Media analysts questioned the future effectiveness of the move. Voices in the exile sectors argued that Spain’s motives were predominantly economic – Spain was tending to its investments, seeking protection for current operations and expecting devolution or compensation for partnerships terminated in the past.

When the Popular Party presented a motion in Congress asking the Spanish government to demand the release of 134 political prisoners, Moratinos responded that a strategy of dialogue would be the most effective. Elena Valenciano, the ruling Socialist Party’s (PSOE) secretary for international relations, said the Spanish government had specifically communicated to Cuban authorities what Spain expected of them regarding the prisoners, reminding critics that in the past, Spain carried little leverage and hence had not obtained results.

## Spain’s Motives

In response to the torrent of criticism, keener analysts noted that simplistic explanations based solely on trade and investment arguments were inaccurate. Cuban business operations are in fact of relatively minor importance to the

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Spanish economy. The PSOE would have little domestic political incentive to stress business ties with Cuba, since the Spanish business sectors that would benefit from closer trade and investment links with Cuba are strongly allied with the more conservative Popular Party. In spite of the public acrimony over the Cuban issue, its actual impact in the last election was insignificant. Voters were motivated by unemployment, the cost of living and housing, education, immigration and ETA terrorism, not by Spain's policy on Cuba.

A more credible motivation for Spain's accommodation with Cuba might be the feeling that Spain was losing ground in Cuba, where its presence had been felt for half a millennium. Spain was left with the unnerving prospect of subjecting its policy to a never-ending annual review by the EU, where the Czech Republic and other governments could influence policy while being cheered on by U.S.-supported groups in Europe. It was no wonder that Madrid decided to set its own course.

Spain decided to lead those who considered that the best strategy was to take advantage of the Cuban system's windows of opportunity. The "bilateral" approach prevailed over the precarious "multilateralism of the EU." Spain concluded that cultural cooperation, development cooperation and political dialogue with the Cuban government would serve as the columns that maintain communication with Cuban civil society.

This attitude is not free from risks. Some European analysts say Spain's strategy amounts to a willingness to pay any price for maintaining an open communication line with the Cuban government. Although the decision may not be that important in terms of Spain's standing in the EU, considering the low priority enjoyed by Cuban issues in EU institutions, some loss of confidence in Spain might be the result of its accommodation with Havana. The final evaluation given by the rest of

the member states (especially those most critical and skeptical toward Cuba) will depend on how many imprisoned dissidents will be liberated, which is out of Spain's control. In other words, Spain's standing may have been placed in a dependent position. It will be up to the Cuban regime to respond and evaluate how important its relationship is with Spain before offering any concessions. The Spanish government took a direct dive into a Cuban swimming pool which was half empty. The Cuban government may or may not provide the necessary water.

But if there were risks to acting, the Spanish authorities concluded that there were risks to inaction as well. The Spanish may have concluded that a quick transition was unlikely and that inaction would prolong the stalemate.

## Conclusion

The Brussels establishment has become increasingly irritated by the erratic language used by Cuban authorities, including that used by Castro himself in his writings. The offer to meet in Brussels received a "provocative and unfriendly reply," in the words of one EU official, without the "respectful" tone so often demanded by the Cubans. EU representatives are not happy with what they perceive as a deliberate misreading by Cuba of EU positions, with the Cubans basing their opinions on statements by a non-representative minority of EU member states. Brussels would hope that Cuban declarations would take notice that the Common Position explicitly excludes coercive means, so as to be differentiated from the U.S. attitude to which Cuba frequently equates it. Still, no further drastic policy changes are expected.

As the transition in Cuba further develops, the moment of truth will come, and observers will see what kind of influence the new Spanish approaches toward Cuba may have. Meanwhile, the rest of the EU (with the possible exception of the

hardliners) will probably continue the “wait and see” approach that has been the trend until now. Neither Spain nor its EU opponents on the Cuban issue have the capacity to drastically change the current official position or to re-impose the temporary measures, unless Cuba creates a

political opening or makes a reckless move by making further arrests.

For the time being, the EU continues to stand on the sidelines, and Spain will pursue a more forward looking policy of engagement.



# UK Relations with Cuba in the Post-Fidel Era

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The International Institute for the Study of Cuba is an initiative by a team of UK-based academics, specialists and consultants, with the object of providing an in-depth and focused appraisal of the Cuban social experience as it approaches and undergoes another period of major change. The Institute was incorporated into London Metropolitan University on May 1, 2007.

British and European policies towards Cuba have signally failed to meet their stated objectives, and a radically new approach, not based on heavy-handed criticism and coercive political conditionality, is needed.

Two days after the revolution, on January 3, 1959, *The Times* of London published a letter from Graham Green, the distinguished novelist and author of *Our Man in Havana*. It began, “the welcome success of Dr. Fidel Castro in overthrowing the dictatorship of Batista reminds us again of the extraordinary ignorance of Cuban affairs shown by the British government.” The UK Government had, with American agreement, delivered 25 fighter aircraft to General Batista in September 1958, convinced that Fidel Castro’s rebel army was facing defeat. Shortly after Castro had taken power, his request for further aircraft was refused, principally to avoid offending the United States.

A number of themes recur in British policies since the Cuban revolution: 1) partial and incomplete understanding of Cuban politics and society; and 2) a calculated strategic approach, in which the view that Cuba is not worth a conflict with the United States overrides commercial interests and ideological considerations, or indeed matters of principle. Paradoxically, the Labour government of former Prime Minister Tony Blair attached less importance to good relations with Cuba than did its immediate Conservative predecessors. In contrast, in Spain, where Cuba is a more prominent issue in foreign policy debates, the right/left affiliation of the party in power has been much more

determinative of the government’s Cuba policy. Since 1996, the Blair government’s support for the European Union’s so called “Common Position”, linking policies towards Cuba to human rights demands, coinciding with the Blair government’s exceptionally close relations with the United States, has brought Britain’s relations with Cuba to a low ebb. British and European policies towards Cuba have signally failed to meet their stated objectives, and a radically new approach, not based on heavy-handed criticism and coercive political conditionality, is needed.

## UK Policy Through the Mid-90s

The UK government, like that of other European nations, refused from the start to join the U.S. trade embargo and maintained normal diplomatic relations with the island. A compensation settlement was agreed with the Shell Oil Company for its property nationalized at the revolution. The British Government’s continuing dissociation from the U.S. embargo helped to offset the close relationship between the UK and the U.S., particularly marked during the Thatcher government of 1979 to 1991. During the 1980s, trade and investment were not made conditional on progress in human rights, as they were later to become, and in 1986 Cuba constituted

the UK's fifth largest market in Latin America. If British policy toward Cuba through the 1980s was different than that of the United States, Cuba was not a priority issue for British leaders: As David Brighty, British Ambassador from 1989 to 1991 has remarked, "it was clear to me that my masters in London saw Cuba as peripheral and were really only interested in knowing when Fidel would step down."

In the early 1990s, with the Cold War over and Cuba embarking on a number of market-oriented reforms, the Conservative Government of John Major supported British commercial interests and functional collaboration with Cuba, in areas such as counter-narcotics operations. The UK Government, in common with others, made it a crime to comply with the extraterritorial provisions of the 1992 American Cuban Democracy Act (the Torricelli Law), which prohibited foreign subsidiaries of U.S. companies from trading with or investing in Cuba, provisions which were widely seen as a violation of international laws and customary norms. In 1995, the Major Government, recognizing the commercial advantages of a closer dialogue, endorsed the foundation of the Cuba Initiative, a bilateral, non-government and non-partisan political body which aims to enhance the UK/Cuba relationship, particularly in the business field.

## UK Policy Since 1996

### The Common Position

Good bilateral relations between the UK and Cuba were, however, to be complicated from 1996 on, both by European Union ambitions to develop a coordinated policy towards Cuba, and by American efforts at more vigorous enforcement of the embargo. The Major Government seemed less willing to resist American pressure when operating in a multilateral, rather than a bilateral framework. The government supported the adoption of the EU Common

Position in 1996, which declared further improvements in political and economic relations between the EU and Cuba to be dependent on progress in human rights and political reforms.

In 1996, the U.S. hardened its policy toward Cuba, reacting to the downing of two U.S.-registered private planes flown by Miami-based Cuban exiles over the Straits of Florida in February. In that same period, Cuba halted the process of economic and political liberalization that had been underway in the early and mid-1990s. In Europe, the Common Position was an initiative proposed as a response to these events by the then-conservative Spanish government, after American lobbying. The British and Spanish governments were the only ones happy with the initial wording of the proposed Common Position, which many member states considered "too close to the U.S. thesis and demands."

The agenda and priorities of the Labour Government of Tony Blair, which came to power in 1997, worked against good relations with Cuba despite the presence of a strong pro-Cuban lobby on the left wing of the Labour Party. Maintaining a certain distance from one of the few remaining communist countries helped to underline the image of the Government as "New" rather than "Old" Labour. The Government's vaunted new ethical foreign policy included giving greater prominence to human rights issues. Upholding the European Union's Common Position towards Cuba had the advantage of demonstrating New Labour's credentials both as defenders of human rights and as good Europeans on an issue that never had the salience in Britain that it has in Spain.

Initially, overt support for the EU Common Position was not incompatible with bilateral contacts – though these took place at lower ministerial levels – and with some support for British commercial interests. Philip McLean, UK Ambassador from 1994 to 1998, has remarked that the Common Position proved no lasting impediment to the business of individual

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countries quietly building up practical cooperation in chosen area. His successor, David Ridgway, has described the Common Position as “a useful framework within which member states were able to develop their own bilateral policies.” Official contacts with Cuba were confined to the junior ministerial level, as much because of issues related to UK-U.S. relations as because of the Common Position itself. The close relations between the Blair Government and the Clinton and Bush Administrations meant that there was a red line on Cuba which could not be crossed. Below this line, junior ministers were free to take low-level functional initiatives. A number of junior ministerial visits took place: in 1998 Baroness Symons, the then parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, made the first visit to Cuba by a minister in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office since the revolution. Brian Wilson, Minister of State between 1997 and 2003, was able to normalize relations with Cuba in areas such as trade and energy, and collaboration developed between Cuba’s oil and gas industries and their counterparts in Scotland.

### **The UK and Helms-Burton**

Good relations with Cuba, were, however, always vulnerable when broader British interests were involved. (This was particularly the case since the Blair government, like the American, was confidently expecting that the demise of Fidel Castro would be followed by popular demonstrations provoking a collapse of the government and the installation of a new one, more favorable to American and British interests) The 1996 Helms-Burton legislation included provisions affecting European investors in Cuba. In 1998, coordinated European resistance to these extra-territorial provisions of the Helms-Burton legislation, including the prospect of a formal appeal to the World Trade Organization, set off alarm bells in London. Common EU resistance to Helms-Burton could threaten the Blair government’s special relationship with the Clinton Administration, and a tough

EU position raised the possibility of a transatlantic trade war.

Whereas the Major government had immediately protested to the Americans about the 1996 Helms-Burton (Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity Act), claiming that its extraterritorial provisions would create a dangerous precedent in international law, the Blair government seems to have played a leading role in securing a trade-off compromise. London was the venue for the crucial meetings at which it was agreed that the European Union would not pursue its complaints through the World Trade Organization, but would negotiate a settlement of the dispute directly with the U.S. government. In the subsequent settlement, the Clinton Administration agreed to suspend implementation of the most egregious aspects of Helms-Burton, while the EU agreed not pursue a WTO hearing that would find the United States in violation of its trade obligations. This has been described by Michael Erisman as “a clear victory for the Clinton Administration” because it saved the Administration from making hard choices between domestic political constituencies that wanted Helms-Burton and its support for the WTO and WTO processes. This caused great offence in Havana.

### **The UK and the Cotonou Agreement**

After the UK became the single biggest contributor to the American-led coalition in Iraq in 2003, Blair was less willing than ever to allow anything to do with Cuba to complicate relations with the United States. The Blair government played a prominent role in the events of 2003 leading to President Castro’s decision to withdraw Cuba’s second application to join the Cotonou Agreement, by which the European Union provides its former colonies in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific (ACP), with trade preferences and aid. In 2002, the EU and Cuba had begun negotiations that might lead to Cuba becoming part of the Cotonou agreement.

Had Cuba's application, which was made with the unanimous backing of the ACP countries, been successful, EU aid to the island would probably have tripled. But in the spring of 2003, Cuba arrested and gave long jail sentences to some 75 dissidents and executed three would-be refugees who had commandeered a passenger ferry at gunpoint in Havana harbor. In response, the Aznar Government in Spain, supported by the Blair Government in the UK, persuaded their EU partners to postpone Cuba's application indefinitely.

When, the following year, the new Socialist government in Spain called on the European Union to help Cuba negotiate entry into the Cotonou Agreement, the Blair Government was among those countries opposing any change. The Government supported the Bush Administration's policy of keeping Cuba isolated; representations from the Cuba Initiative, the foundation that the Major government had helped create eight years earlier, that increased cooperation through business activity was more likely to bring about economic and political reform, and pro-Cuba lobbying by Labour's left wing back-bench MPs at Westminster, were ignored.

The Cuban government, which has subsequently cut off political dialogue with the EU and refused virtually all bilateral aid, has some justification in denouncing EU policy as unfair in singling out Cuba and conditioning relations on human rights criteria that it does not employ elsewhere. Cuba is the only Latin American country not to enjoy a bilateral agreement with the EU. Cuba is indeed a one-party state, with restricted civil and political liberties, which prioritizes unity and punishes its opponents severely. However, the 79 existing members of the ACP group include some countries with dubious human rights records. In no other case was progress in this area demanded as a prerequisite for membership.

The Blair Government repeated the mantra that Cuba is the only non-democracy in the

Western Hemisphere. While not incorrect, this is too simplistic a characterization. The Government did not trouble to make a distinction, as some French ministers have done, between political and social rights, or to acknowledge Cuba's achievements in education and health. The unease of a number of British ministers – and indeed of prominent Conservatives – about the logical justification for British policies towards Cuba, rarely surfaces in public.

## New Governments in London and Havana

The new government of Gordon Brown in London, and that of Raul Castro, more pragmatic than his brother, in Havana, presents the opportunity for changing policies, at both British and European levels, which have manifestly failed. The UK and the European Union have made themselves largely irrelevant while Cuba, increasingly integrated into its own region, has looked for partners elsewhere. A substantial body of parliamentary backbenchers and of business interests support a more positive approach. It should be possible, as former minister Brian Wilson points out, to develop a constructive foreign policy towards Cuba without calling into question the relationship with the United States, even if there were to be no change in policy from Washington.

At the bilateral level, political dialogue between the UK and Cuba should be re-opened. A necessary prerequisite, at British as at European levels, is the adoption of more appropriate diplomatic language respectful of Cuba's national sovereignty and balancing legitimate concerns about democracy and civil rights with acknowledgement of Cuba's many domestic achievements and its remarkable international contribution in health and education. Beneficial opportunities, for both countries should be actively sought for bilateral cooperation, including business partnerships, scientific cooperation in such areas as medicine, biotechnology or alternative energy

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Changes at the European level are overdue. The EU policy of “constructive engagement” pursued since the adoption of the EU Common Position in 1996, has been neither constructive nor an engagement and EU/Cuba relations are now at a stalemate.

sources, and government-to-government collaboration in combating international crime and terrorism. UK/Cuba cooperation in international development would be particularly timely, at a moment when achievement of the Millennium Development Goals appears to be receding.

Changes at the European level are overdue. The EU policy of “constructive engagement” pursued since the adoption of the EU Common Position in 1996, has been neither constructive nor an engagement and EU/Cuba relations are now at a stalemate. The UK, together with France and Germany as leading decision makers on the European Council, should be supporting Spain, the spearhead of a European movement for improving relations with Latin America, including Cuba. The Council needs to instigate a fundamental re-thinking of the Common Position, without waiting for the change of policy from Washington that may follow the next presidential elections.

Real engagement with Cuba means dropping the heavy-handed political conditionality of the Common Position and the critical and one-sided subsequent annual reviews; it means forming a cooperation agreement with Cuba and re-opening negotiations for the country to join the Cotonou Agreement, implicitly acknowledging that there is no consistent and principled justification for its exclusion. Real engagement of this kind would be more likely than the present standoff to achieve the balanced

objectives of the EU Amsterdam Treaty, to foster sustainable economic and social development, to facilitate a smooth and gradual transition into the world economy, and to fight against poverty, as well as developing and consolidating democracy and the rule of law, fundamental human rights and freedoms.

The false analogy, much repeated by some Eastern European governments, and frequently heard in the European Parliament, between the political system of Cuba and that of former Soviet satellites in Eastern Europe, needs to be rebutted. The Cuban government, with all its shortcomings, enjoys a degree of nationalist legitimacy that the Eastern bloc governments never had; as the research of Elizabeth Dore among others suggests, its political system incorporates substantial elements of consent, rather than coercion. The UK government should be urging that genuine engagement and partnership is more likely to encourage greater political and economic openness which the EU rightly hopes to see in Cuba.

The British government, with its European partners, should make united representations to the United States government to comply with annual United Nations resolution calling for an end to the economic embargo of Cuba, adding its voice to the increasing weight of criticism of the embargo from within the United States itself. The circumstances, in Europe, in the United States, and in Cuba itself, could be propitious for change.

# Canada-Cuba Relations: Under the Shadow of the Elephant

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There is an old oriental fable about several blind men who were asked to describe an elephant. One grasped the leg, and described the elephant as being round and sturdy, while another felt the trunk and said that it was long, thin and jerked a lot, and the third felt an ear and provided a wholly different interpretation. Analyzing Canadian-Cuban relations is somewhat similar, since providing a description of the nature of bilateral ties in large part depends on what aspects are being talked about, and who is doing the talking.

This brief paper looks at the various "elephant parts" and then offers an overall conjunctural analysis of bilateral ties, seeking to present an overview of their current direction. It concludes with some predictions on the future of the distinctive Canada-Cuba relationship.

## The Historical Overview

The key point to remember when grappling with Canada-Cuba ties is that despite moments of significant pressure, they have stood the test of time. The Cold War put enormous strains on the bilateral relationship, particularly in the wake of the Missile Crisis of October 1962. Indeed, for over a quarter of a century afterwards,

Canadian security officials looked askance at Cuba, following the orders of suspicious Liberal and Conservative governments. Prime Ministers such as Lester Pearson (Liberal) and Brian Mulroney (Conservative) sought to downplay the relationship in deference to U.S. geopolitical interests, whereas others such as John Diefenbaker (Conservative) and especially Pierre Trudeau (Liberal) sought to foster closer ties, pursue commercial opportunities, and chart an independent course in foreign policy. In more recent years, the Liberal government of Jean Chrétien initially sought to distance itself from the Mulroney approach, but ended up being critical of Havana, swinging back and forth between periods of engagement and estrangement.

The nature of relations between Canada and Cuba, then, is that they are "normal." Yes, each side occasionally takes issue with something that the other has done. But the essential point to bear in mind is that they engage with one another, respecting each other's sovereignty and distinctive circumstances, to discuss and express concerns as would happen in any normal diplomatic relationship. That said, the relationship could, and should, be a lot better. In the last years of the Chrétien government, and in the

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Common to all of the Canadian governments that have dealt with revolutionary Cuba, is the fact that there has never been the slightest attempt to terminate the relationship. While there have been several disagreements (usually over the human rights question), with the occasional diplomatic letter of protest handed over, nothing has ever been serious enough to threaten the overall relationship. “Constructive engagement,” and its occasional bureaucratic variant, “principled pragmatism,” have been the order of the day. In essence, Ottawa decided long ago that sitting down at the table to discuss differences was far more sensible than breaking the relationship and isolating Cuba.

This has at times been a challenge, in no small part because of pressure emanating from Washington. There are of course enormous similarities between Canada and the United States, in terms of cultural, security and linguistic ties, as well as commercial and political connections. Understandably, this longstanding friendship between close neighbors – particularly in light of the size of the United States and its geopolitical influence – has had a major influence on Canadian foreign policy. The two economies are intricately intertwined, face similar border challenges, and historically have been on the same side in a number of international wars and military missions.

This ideological, cultural, historical, economic, political and geographic proximity has clearly influenced Ottawa in many ways. In particular, the economic dependency of Canada upon the United States (some 83% of Canadian trade is with U.S. companies) is enormous, and has influenced Canadian foreign policy disproportionately. Speaking to the National Press Club in Washington, D.C., in March 1969, Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau explained the significant impact

of the United States on Canada: “Living next to you is in some ways like sleeping with an elephant. No matter how friendly and even-tempered is the beast, if I can call it that, one is affected by every twitch and grunt.” In the case of Canada’s connections with Cuba, it is important to bear in mind that the total annual bilateral trade is about the same amount as 12 hours of 1 day of goods crossing the U.S.-Canada border.

## Recent Currents in Canada-Cuba Relations

In October 1993, the government of Jean Chrétien (Liberal) was elected, in no small part because his predecessor, Brian Mulroney, had been reviled for his increasingly close ties with Washington. Herein lies the paradox of Canadian-Cuba relations, for while Ottawa officialdom is often influenced by pressure from the south, the body politic of Canada looks askance at excessively cozy ties with the United States. Mulroney found this out the hard way. Chrétien was elected on a nationalist program, and lost few opportunities to condemn Mulroney’s close friendship with Presidents Reagan and George H.W. Bush, claiming that he did not care to “schmooze at Camp David.”

The potential of trade with Cuba was seen as being extremely promising during the early years of the Special Period, or economic crisis in Cuba, that followed the implosion of the Soviet Union, and Canadian investment was soon flowing to Cuba. Foreign Minister Lloyd Axworthy made two official trips to Cuba, and in 1998 the prime minister visited Cuba to meet with Fidel Castro. Sadly, the relationship started to deteriorate, in no small part because of unrealistic expectations that Chrétien had about Canadian influence on Cuba, a process typified by Chrétien’s blunt demand that five prominent government opponents be released. Largely as a result of Ottawa’s approach to the Cuba file, the last decade has resulted in a bilateral relationship that has been muddling through with little



understanding of the bilateral dynamic or any clear direction. At times the policy appears almost frozen in time.

Since taking power in February 2006, Prime Minister Stephen Harper (Conservative) has pursued a foreign policy strongly harmonized with that of Washington, most clearly seen in the Middle East and the so-called “war on terror.” This has led to a downturn in the official relationship with Havana (which was already frosty under his two Liberal predecessors). In May 2007, for example, Canada and Panama supported a watered-down statement issued by the U.S. delegation at the OAS on the admitted terrorist Luis Posada Carriles. This came after Venezuela sought to condemn Washington for failing to extradite Posada Carriles. The following month then-Foreign Minister Peter MacKay expressed disappointment at the U.N. Human Rights Council which had voted overwhelmingly to downgrade concerns about the human rights record of Cuba. In this vote, Canada was a minority of one, with all other voting members (46) voting against Ottawa. Clearly this government’s approach to Cuba, while showing deference to the Bush administration, is doing itself few favors internationally – particularly in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Finally, in July 2007 Prime Minister Harper, on a state visit to Barbados, expressed “concerns about certain aspects of governance and human rights in Cuba.” Significantly his Barbadian counterpart Owen Arthur took him to task, explaining that “civilized relationships” were based on “respect for people’s sovereignty and non-interference and the right for people to pursue alternative paths for their development.” To many Canadians this was an ironic role reversal, with Harper being lectured about the essence of the traditionally independent Canadian foreign policy, principles that he appears to have forgotten.

The current Canadian government has also been taken to task for sins of omission. For example, several Canadian banks

(including the Royal Bank of Canada and the Bank of Nova Scotia) have closed accounts of Cuban companies and reduced ties with Canadian businesses that have connections with Cuba. This was done in response to U.S. pressure. So far Ottawa has not protested officially or spoken up publicly to criticize this decision.

In late 2007, in blatant disregard of Canadian blocking legislation, the government ignored the impact of the purchase of the Canadian MasterCard franchise on Canadian credit unions by American banking restrictions. The purchase by a U.S. firm imposes U.S. legal restrictions on what is now a Canadian subsidiary of a U.S. corporation, and this means that millions of Canadians with MasterCard drawn on a Credit Union account will not be able to use that credit card in Cuba.

## The Future of Cuba

Since Fidel Castro ceded power to his brother Raúl, not much of a dramatic nature has happened in Cuba. In fact there has been a seamless transfer of power, and continuity and stability have been the order of the day. The government has continued to function as before. There have been some new initiatives: some measures have been taken to make it easier to obtain consumer items; stern warnings have been issued by the revolutionary leadership about the need for the Cuban economy to be more competitive and efficient and the workforce more disciplined; and economic planners and academics have met to see how changes can be introduced to offer greater incentives to produce and acquire goods while maintaining the socialist system. In three speeches Raúl Castro has reached out to Washington, offering direct bilateral discussion, but sadly these have been rebuffed, and the same tired rhetoric employed.

The minority of Cuban-Americans who danced with joy in Calle Ocho in Miami at the news of Fidel Castro’s transfer of power

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and ill health were announced have been proven guilty of wishful thinking. Likewise those doomsayers who predicted rivers of blood in Havana also misread the reality of Cuba today. The fact of the matter is that normalcy never disappeared from Cuba. “Business as usual” has been the dominant note, and there is no sign of concern or angst in the Cuban populace. Nor are there likely to be any major changes in the near or mid-term future, with or without Fidel. Stability will be the central watchword.

Too often media commentators rush to grasp in sound-bite fashion complex realities, and Cuba is an excellent example of this phenomenon. It is important to understand that most Cubans do not wish to make significant changes to their political system. While many understandably want better living conditions (and housing, the cost of food and transportation continue as major problems on the island), the ideas of Cuban-Americans returning to reclaim their property, run the economy, or take control of the political system are definitely not acceptable. Raúl Castro appears to understand this with great clarity, and whether he is a “caretaker” president before the Communist Party of Cuba chooses another leader, or stays in power for a number of years, it appears that a path of controlled reform will result. It also appears that the vast majority of Cubans are happy to go along with this prescription. This means that there will not be significant change in Cuba, a fact which Ottawa hopefully grasps.

## The Future of the Canadian-Cuban Relationship

Unfortunately, at present, official Canadian policy towards Cuba appears to be drifting on autopilot. (Others would say that the government has contradictory and confused aims, seeking on the one hand to appease Washington, while at the same preparing for changes in a post-Castro Cuba). There are many examples of this lack of direction.

The successful visit to Havana of Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Leonard Edwards in May 2007, while the prime minister pursued a clearly different tack two months later, would appear to illustrate this confusion. Likewise, while Cuban minister of tourism Manuel Marrero inaugurated the Canadian pavilion in November 2007 at the 25th International Havana Trade Fair – at which Canada made sales totaling \$140 million – Canada voted against Cuba at the U.N. General Assembly, in a vote on whether or not to eliminate a special human rights rapporteur on Cuba. The vote was 168 to eliminate the rapporteur and 7 to maintain the position with Canada joining the U.S. and traditional allies including Israel, Palau, the Marshall Islands, Australia and Micronesia).

There is some concern that, in exchange for refusing to send Canadian troops to Iraq, and deciding not to join the ballistic missile defense system sponsored by the Bush administration, Ottawa might be prepared to support Washington’s attempts to isolate Cuba.

Should this ill-advised policy be pursued, the government would be countered by two other significant parts of the “elephant” – namely the business sector and, more importantly, the Canadian population at large. The business sector is doing well in Cuba. Cuba is Canada’s largest export market in the Caribbean and Central America, and the third largest in Latin America, with annual bilateral trade of over a billion dollars. The largest single investor in Cuba is Canadian company Sherritt International, with principal investments in oil and nickel mining and refining, power generation and perhaps most promising of all, oil exploration beneath the Straits of Florida. Earnings roughly doubled in 2006 for Sherritt, with May 2007 quarterly profits up 150%, and plans to invest a further \$1.25 billion in the coming years.

A third facet of the “elephant” (and often the most under-appreciated in government circles) is the impact of people-to-people

contact between Canadians and Cubans. There are a handful of Canadian NGOs that have been working in Cuba the past decade and have been doing excellent work. There are also about 20 Canadian universities and colleges with study abroad and exchange programs with Cuban counterparts. At Dalhousie University, for example, some 20 students each semester spend 3-4 months there.

Far more important, though, is the impact of tourism—with over 600,000 Canadians (roughly one-quarter of all tourists on the island) descending on Cuban beaches annually. During the tourist season there are direct flights from some two dozen Canadian cities. This is more than a strict commercial exchange, since Canadians have been flocking to Cuba since the emphasis on tourism was revived about a dozen years ago. This is the equivalent in the U.S. context of some 6 million American tourists visiting the island every year.

So, while the Canadian prime minister might prefer to place government policy towards Cuba more in line with that of the United States, this is unlikely to happen, largely because of a negative public reaction to such a move. In general, Canadians view the Bush administration with great trepidation. (In November 2006 a poll conducted by leading Canadian, British, Mexican and Israeli newspapers revealed the extent of that concern: 62% of Canadians polled viewed the world as more dangerous because of current U.S. policy, while George W. Bush was seen as a greater danger to world peace than Kim Jong-il of North Korea or Mahmoud Ahmadinejad of Iran.) As a result, pursuing closer ties with Washington would be political folly for Prime Minister Harper, especially given his minority status in the Canadian Parliament. The growing displeasure in Canada (particularly in Québec) with government policy in Afghanistan will also be a factor in reining in the Harper foreign policy agenda.

## Lessons to be Learned from “Constructive Engagement”

It is clear that, for Cuba, the relationship with Canada has been successful and productive. After Washington broke diplomatic ties with Havana in January of 1961, it badly needed allies or at least trading partners in the West. The aging machinery (mainly U.S.-manufactured) needed spare parts and upgrading. An avenue for banking transactions (preferably in U.S. dollars) was also required. And of course the strategic value in international circles of having good relations with Washington’s neighbor (and largest trading partner) enhanced Cuba’s legitimacy. This was particularly the case as the Cold War heated up. Cuba needed a market for its sugar following the reduction and then suspension of trade by the U.S. government, and Canada was interested in purchasing cut-price sugar.

For Canada there were also several advantages in developing a working relationship with revolutionary Cuba. For governments of varying stripes it offered the opportunity to distinguish their foreign policy from its U.S. counterpart. In particular, the Trudeau government gained significant symbolic capital for its political independence, genuinely felt by the prime minister, who became the first NATO leader to travel to Cuba in 1976.

The present Canadian government would do well to realize that the symbolic importance of Cuba far exceeds its small size of 11.2 million. In fact it is in Canada’s interests in Latin America to maintain a good relationship with Cuba. From the 1970s, Cuba’s credibility began to rise in the hemisphere, and its current leadership of the 118-nation Non-Aligned Movement, the widespread international support (seen in the recent vote at the U.N. General Assembly condemning the U.S. embargo by 184 to 4), and the presence of 30,000 Cuban medical staff in 72 countries all speak volumes of Cuba’s international

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credibility. Clearly, in Latin America and the Caribbean, Cuba is highly regarded, as Ottawa needs to appreciate more fully.

Trade and investment opportunities have been good for Canada. In all, some 85 Canadian companies operate in Cuba, from large brewery companies such as Labatt to small companies selling various goods and services. Most prefer to “fly under the radar” because of U.S. legislation. For its part Cuba benefits greatly from Canadian tourism, since the mid-1990s the mainstay of the Cuban economy, as well as access to high-tech products and training in management practices.

The leadership shown on the Cuban file in the early years of the Chrétien government has proven beneficial to Cuba in terms of financial infrastructure. Senior advisers from the Bank of Canada and Revenue Canada (the IRS of Canada) spent a great deal of time in Cuba, setting up a tax system, and explaining the underpinnings of a modern, Western-styled banking system there. Also useful was the substantial development assistance from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) in providing financial support designed to help Cuba prepare for a “soft landing” to capitalism. Carleton University in Ottawa teamed up with the Faculty of Economics at the University of Havana on a multi-year CIDA-funded project to facilitate this process. The end result of these various initiatives was a far greater understanding for Havana of the international capital market, and what it would need to do – including the concessions to be made – to survive in a post-Soviet world and globalized economy.

## Recommendations

First, discussions about human rights and democratization in Cuba should be handled with some humility. It is important for a Canadian government, whatever the political stripe, to recognize that Cuba will follow its own development path, and that Canada has remarkably little influence

over that direction. Too often we rush to condemn the lack of “democracy” and “human rights” in Cuba without realizing that we are hardly paragons of virtue. (In Canada, for example, the upper chamber or Senate is made up of appointed regional representatives, none of whom is elected. The cost of winning an election in many industrialized countries is also scandalously high, a process which of course questions the basic concepts of democracy being based upon any talented citizen standing for election. Media concentration also flies in the face of an unbiased fifth estate). Similarly, while we criticize the lack of civil and political human rights in Cuba, we fail to act diligently to resolve the horrible socio-economic conditions of the First Nations here, many of whom have unemployment and suicide rates that are many times the national average, and whose health profile bears little resemblance to that of mainstream Canadians.

This is not to say that one should accept the clear limitations on human rights in Cuba. Any victims of human rights, wherever they are, should be defended and abuses not tolerated. That said, it is important to bear in mind the context of Cuba. Most First World governments often fail to understand the priorities of underdeveloped and developing societies, where the importance of access to food, water, health care, employment, housing, and education trumps the concept of elections every four or five years or the possibility to write a letter to the editor of a newspaper. In these social, cultural and economic human rights, Cuba does well, as a glance at WHO or UNICEF websites attests.

Understanding the “big picture” is thus called for, something which is difficult to grasp for many industrialized countries. This is particularly important if we are to understand the Cuban case, where 90 miles away is the world’s only superpower, and which for almost 50 years has engaged in a variety of tactics (including government-supported terrorism) to bring about “regime change” and which today both forbids its citizens from traveling to the island and

maintains in place a Trading with the Enemy Act. In those circumstances the decision of Cuba to limit political rights, while not defensible, is understandable. Again, it is important to walk in the other's shoes and not to presume that there is only one model – our model – that is correct.

Second, while it is important to appreciate the idiosyncrasies of revolutionary Cuba, this does not mean acceptance of them. What is important is confidence-building in the relationship if we are to reduce the tensions felt in Havana around any external recommendation about reform. There are many ways that this process can develop, and the Canadian approach of 1993-96 was instructive, since many useful initiatives were taken. (As a sign of good faith, Cuba also offered to release to Canada 21 political prisoners.)

Third, it is important to maintain greater interaction between representatives from both countries – among government leaders and ministers, business representatives, intellectual, cultural and academic delegates, and especially among people from various branches of civil society writ large. This process (largely symbolic) could lead to further, and more profound exchanges – ranging from bilateral trade commissions that met regularly to the visit of Navy vessels, from trade missions to film series, from baseball games between the Blue Jays and a Cuban national team, to cultural and religious exchanges. Some of this is now happening, but it is done sporadically and generally without government initiative or focus.

Fourth, the Canadian government also needs to accept that Latin America and the Caribbean are becoming increasingly important for Canada, for reasons of trade, immigration, security, diplomacy, tourism and culture. To a certain extent the recent visit by the prime minister to Colombia, Chile, Barbados and Haiti, and that of then foreign minister Mackay to Mexico, reveal that they are beginning to understand the region's potential. What they also need to understand, however, is the importance of

Cuba's role within the region, particularly in view of the "Pink Tide" that has resulted from the election of eight socialist or social democratic governments in the last two years. Cuba is the conscience of Latin America, and it behooves Ottawa's aspirations in the region (at the very least to show that it has indeed a foreign policy that is different from the unstinting neglect exhibited by the Bush White House) to have developed a solid working relationship with Havana.

Cuba clearly "punches above its weight," regionally and internationally. Its medical missions throughout the Americas have proven enormously successful. In the last three years alone, to take one example, Cuba has carried out eye surgery (at no charge to the patient) on over 750,000 patients from the region. To put this in context, in April 2007 the United States sent a 350-member task force to Panama and provided free consultations for 30,000 people during a two-week period. President Bush also talked about winning the "hearts and minds" in the region by sending a hospital ship to visit key ports. This is tokenism when compared to the significant support throughout the region given by several thousand doctors and nurses from Cuba, as well as the training of 20,000 medical students in Cuba at no charge. Cuba's literacy program is also being used widely in the region, and with great success.

Finally, where Canada can be beneficial to Cuba, to itself, and indeed to the overall region, is in reducing tensions between Washington and Havana. Canadian armed forces have never invaded any country in the region, the country is becoming an important player in Latin America (particularly in the mining industry), immigration to Canada is increasing, it has a decent reputation in the OAS, and occasionally it has dared to speak out and express disagreement with Washington. In sum, the potential for establishing solid *bona fides* in Latin America and the Caribbean is there. It is now up to Ottawa to take advantage of that fact and, more importantly, to use that political clout

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wisely. The appointment of a new foreign minister (Maxime Bernier), and the promotion of Canadian Ambassador to Cuba Alexandra Bugailiskis to Assistant Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs and Executive Coordinator of the Americas Strategy, indicate the potential for a more pragmatic policy towards Cuba – but only if the political will exists in Ottawa. So far, it appears that the Harper administration is lacking a clear direction in its policy towards Latin America, and in addition, wants to cool down relations with Havana. Both developments are unfortunate.

One of the greatest challenges facing the region is the normalization of relations

between Washington and Havana. This is a process which has appeared feasible on a half-dozen occasions, but has been derailed by a variety of factors. With the passing of power to Raúl Castro more than a year ago, it is time to revisit this needless bilateral disconnect. Should it desire (and of course should it have the support to do so of the two other players), Canada could play a useful role in setting the scene for this process, although clearly it will be in post-Bush times. The whole world would applaud such a move, since the end of the first decade of the 21st millennium is a long, long way from the dark days of the Cold War of the 1960s.



# Lessons for U.S. Policy

The articles in this publication demonstrate that while the U.S. has succeeded in significantly affecting other countries' relations with Cuba, those countries have never adopted the outright isolationist policy pushed by the United States. Despite U.S. pressure, Canada, Mexico, and the European Union (particularly the UK and Spain) have opted to engage with Cuba for a variety of economic, political, and social reasons. The level of engagement varies from country to country, and as leadership within each of these countries has shifted over time. While there are a range of views on the level of engagement chosen by a country, the authors of this publication believe that:

- The national political, social and economic interests of their country are best served by engaging with Cuba
- While engagement will not have an impact overnight, it is much more likely than isolation to contribute to the process of political and social change already underway in Cuba.

These varying policies and relationships with Cuba have positioned countries other than the United States to play a far more significant role in Cuba's future as it continues the process of gradual change that began with Fidel Castro's illness in July of 2006. Cuba has formed strong commercial, cultural, and political ties with countries as far away as China, while its most natural partner just 90 miles away has maintained a state of virtual irrelevance for nearly half a century.

Years of engagement have provided countries other than the United States with close ties to Cuban civil society, academics, government and military officials, cultural contacts, religious organizations, and the commercial and industrial sector, which will all play key roles in shaping Cuba's future. The connections the United States has to these sectors of Cuban society are weak and have been further debilitated by the policies implemented by the Bush Administration since 2003.

The United States will never make up for 50 years of lost time. Still, there are a few key lessons which can be learned from the choices made by the countries profiled in this report. The first is that the United States ought to do away with its failed policy of isolation. By normalizing our relations with Cuba, the United States can regain some of the credibility it has lost in the international arena, including in Cuba. The second is that reengaging with Cuba would demonstrate U.S. interest in forming a new relationship with Latin America as a whole. And thirdly, reestablishing connections with Cuban government and society would allow the United States to reconnect with those people who are actively shaping Cuba's future and influencing human rights on the island.

In opting for a new relationship with Cuba, the United States would benefit domestically in a variety of ways. It would gain the possibility of cooperating with Cuba on drug trafficking, immigration concerns, and environmental problems in the Florida Straits, increased sales of agricultural products to Cuba, tourism to and from Cuba, and access to Cuban advances in the medical and scientific fields.

The vast amount of time and political capital used by the United States to try to isolate Cuba have been squandered, resulting only in offending and frustrating our international partners and doing nothing to improve the human rights situation in Cuba. By ending pressure on other nations and normalizing relations with Cuba, the United States will serve its own national interests and position itself to at least engage in a dialogue about human rights and democracy in Cuba.

While major changes in U.S. policy are unlikely during the Presidential campaigns of 2008, the U.S. government ought to, at a minimum, end its pressure on other governments to minimize their engagement with Cuba. They also ought to revise U.S. policy, and move toward engagement with Cuba and its people, in the hope of playing a constructive role in the country's future.

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