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U.S. Foreign Policy, 1959-80: Impact on Refugee Flow from Cuba

By JOHN SCANLAN and GILBERT LOESCHER

ABSTRACT: Migration from Cuba to the United States since Castro assumed power, and the characterization of those leaving as refugees, have been strongly affected by U.S. foreign policy concerns. During the 1959-62 migration wave, particularly prior to the failure of the Bay of Pigs invasion, Cubans were welcomed as temporary exiles, likely to topple Castro and return home. The second major migration wave began in 1965, in the midst of a U.S. campaign for systematically isolating and economically depriving Cuba and its citizens. When thousands of those citizens left Cuba, primarily to improve their economic circumstances and rejoin family members, they were welcomed as refugees because of the symbolic value of their rejection of Latin America's only communist state. The third migration wave occurred in 1980, after a decade of detente and gradually improving U.S.-Cuban relations. It served no clear U.S. foreign policy ends and was perceived as helping Cuba rid itself of undesirables. Consequently those arriving received little public support.

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BETWEEN 1 January 1959 and 31 October 1980, over 800,000 Cubans entered the United States. The overwhelming majority entered outside ordinary immigration channels and were afforded special status as de facto or officially recognized refugees. Virginia Dominguez has noted that it is impossible directly to correlate particular outflows of particular refugees leaving Cuba with specific political and economic events occurring after Castro assumed power.¹ In general terms, however, it is possible to relate refugee-creating conditions in Cuba to U.S. policy directed toward the Castro regime, and to relate U.S. willingness to accept so many Cubans as refugees to the objectives of that policy.

Thus after a brief period of strained tolerance during 1959-60, U.S.-Cuban relations have been marked by continuous mutual hostility and distrust, only partially relieved by normalization initiatives undertaken by the Ford and Carter administrations. Resulting from this mutual antagonism have been a polarization of U.S.-Cuban relations along an East-West axis, accelerated radicalization of the Cuban state, and a series of steps undertaken by the United States to isolate diplomatically, deprive economically, discredit ideologically, or—prior to 1965, at least—overthrow violently the Castro regime.² Violent subversion dates back at least to the fall of 1959,

1. Virginia Dominguez, *From Neighbor to Stranger: The Dilemma of the Caribbean Peoples in the United States* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1975), p. 21.

2. "The effort to assassinate Castro began in 1960 and continued until 1965." U.S. Congress, Senate, Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities, *Alleged Assassination Plots Involving Foreign Leaders: An Interim Report* (Washington, DC:

when the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) was first implicated in bringing Cuban counterrevolutionaries to the United States. Economic deprivation was first pursued in July 1960, when President Eisenhower drastically reduced the Cuban sugar quota. Diplomatic isolation began when the United States, after considerable provocation by Castro, closed its embassy in Havana on 3 January 1961. Attempts to discredit the Castro regime ideologically began even before Cuba normalized its relations with the Soviet Union in May 1960, and intensified after the unsuccessful Bay of Pigs invasion in April 1961. Although President Kennedy, in his exchange of letters with Khrushchev ending the 1962 Cuban missile crisis, disavowed any intention of directly intervening militarily in Cuba, covert CIA activities aimed at Cuba continued, as did attempts to pressure all Organization of American States members to break off diplomatic relations with Cuba and to extend the U.S.-initiated boycott of all Cuban commerce to other countries in and outside of the Western Hemisphere.

The politics of hostility have thus been multifaceted, with a number of means employed simultaneously to undermine the Castro regime. Nevertheless those politics, at least to the extent that they relate to Cuban migration, fall into three distinct eras, each comprehending a period of significant flow of Cubans into the United States. During the first two eras, the admission of Cubans into the United States served clear foreign policy ends. Thus the arrival of some 125,000 exiles between January 1959

Government Printing Office, 1978), p. 255. Over 100 pages of the report are devoted to CIA involvement in at least eight assassination attempts initiated during this period.

and April 1961 was positively regarded, since it seemed a temporary phenomenon that presaged, with refugee help, the forcible removal of Castro from office.

Similarly the airlift of some 261,000 Cubans to the United States from 1 December 1965 through 6 April 1973, although accomplishing Castro's goal of easing pressure on a beleaguered economy and explicitly designed to permit exiles to bring family members to the United States, also promoted the goals of the Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon administrations to weaken the Cuban economy further and to broadcast the ideological bankruptcy of the Castro regime. The Carter administration also made some attempts to draw political lessons from the first stages of the Mariel boatlift in 1980, indicating, in the words of Vice-President Mondale, that there "is no better proof of the failure of Castro's revolution than the dramatic exodus which is currently taking place."³ However, the 1980 Mariel exodus was essentially unique in its failure to serve any clearly enunciated and consistently held foreign policy goals of the United States. Instead, to the extent that it served any nation's objectives, that nation was Cuba.

THE POLITICS OF EXILE: 1959-61

From 1 January 1959 through 31 December 1960, approximately 100,000 Cubans arrived in the United States. At least 40,000 of them—perhaps as many as 70,000—settled in southern Florida.⁴

3. White House Press Release, 27 Apr. 1980, *Bulletin of the Department of State*, 80(2039):68 (June 1980).

4. All figures on Cuban migration from 1959 through 1980 are estimates, compiled from a variety of sources, including Immigration and Natu-

ralization Service *Annual Reports*, 1960-78; Max Azicri, "The Politics of Exile: Trends and Dynamics of Political Change among Cuban-Americans," *Cuban Studies/Estudios Cubanos*, 11(2)/12(1) (July 1981-Jan. 1982); U.S., Congress, Senate, *Report on the Refugee Act of 1980*, Senate Report no. 256, 96th Cong., 2d sess., 1980; and various documents of the Cuban Refugee Assistance Program, included in Carlos E. Cortes, ed., *Cuban Refugee Programs* (New York: Arno Press, 1980).

Despite extensive planning and elaborate immigration controls regulating the entry and final settlement of some 39,000 Hungarian refugees in 1956-57,⁵ no similar program was instituted for the larger and more concentrated Cuban flow; although there was significant and rising unemployment in the nation generally and in Florida, many of the Cubans arrived without adequate means of support, and large numbers of Cuban children quickly overwhelmed the Florida schools. Specifically lacking were detailed security checks prior to admission, any requirement that admittees have guaranteed employment in the United States, enlistment of private voluntary organizations (PVOs) in a formalized sponsorship program, and any plan to distribute geographically—resettle—those entering in communities throughout the United States. Instead a passive admissions policy was followed having the following characteristics:

- (1) The consular office in Cuba, which remained open until 1 January 1961,

ralization Service *Annual Reports*, 1960-78; Max Azicri, "The Politics of Exile: Trends and Dynamics of Political Change among Cuban-Americans," *Cuban Studies/Estudios Cubanos*, 11(2)/12(1) (July 1981-Jan. 1982); U.S., Congress, Senate, *Report on the Refugee Act of 1980*, Senate Report no. 256, 96th Cong., 2d sess., 1980; and various documents of the Cuban Refugee Assistance Program, included in Carlos E. Cortes, ed., *Cuban Refugee Programs* (New York: Arno Press, 1980).

5. A good account of the controls in effect in 1956-57, and their partial relaxation in response to the Hungarian crisis, is contained in Martin A. Bursten, *Escape from Fear* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1958), pp. 51-66. For the view that security screening should have been more exacting, see Marion T. Bennett, *American Immigration Policies: A History* (Washington, DC: Public Affairs Press, 1963), pp. 204-6.

issued visas in an expedited and apparently pro forma manner.

(2) The Coast Guard made no attempt to turn away undocumented Cubans who even during this early period were arriving quite regularly in small boats.

(3) The Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) avoided instituting deportation proceedings against those arriving illegally or remaining in the United States after the expiration of their visas, and began the process of granting "extended voluntary departure" as a deportation-avoidance device.⁶

These liberal admissions practices⁷ were partly explicable on humanitarian grounds as well as on grounds of long-

6. According to one source, "U.S. authorities have taken unusual steps to facilitate the entry of disaffected Cubans, even going so far as to allow the majority to enter without visas. No other potential exile group in the hemisphere has been so advantaged. If Castro's policies created the potential for mass exodus, U.S. policies made the exodus possible." R. F. Fagen, R. A. Brody, and T. J. O'Leary, *Cubans in Exile: Disaffection and the Revolution* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1968), p. 102.

7. The ad hoc responses of consular and immigration officials were largely due to the lack of any formal refugee definition and special admissions bureaucracy applicable to arriving Cubans. Indicative of the government's indiscriminating approach to the Cuban migrants was the working definition of "Cuban refugee" employed by the Cuban Refugee Program when it became operational in February 1961. Under that definition, any Cuban registered at the Cuban Refugee Emergency Center in Miami who left Cuba after 1 January 1959, bearing proper identification from the Immigration and Naturalization Service and holding the status of parolee, permanent resident, or student, or granted indefinite voluntary departure, was deemed a refugee. John F. Thomas, "Cuban Refugees in the United States," *International Migration Review*, 1[2](1967); rpt. in Cortes, ed., *Cuban Refugee Programs*.

established political ties and geographical affinity. Executions and public trials of members of the old regime occurred soon after Castro assumed power.⁸ The earliest arrivals were *Batistianos* who had good cause to fear the same fate. They were soon followed by other Cubans not directly implicated in the former government. Self-imposed political exiles, they were clearly pushed out of Cuba, where they held positions of wealth, privilege, and power, rather than pulled to the difficult life that awaited them in Miami.⁹ A final group arriving in the first 28 months of Castro's rule were some of his disaffected followers, veterans of the Sierra Maestra campaign. Like the *Batistianos*, they had reason to fear for their personal safety. During this period there were relatively few restraints against emigration, and commercial flights continued to operate out of Havana.

However, the informality of the early U.S. response to the Cubans cannot be explained without taking into account the special perception of them shared by the Eisenhower and Kennedy adminis-

8. Sources for the historical account that follows include, inter alia, Hugh Thomas, *Cuba: The Pursuit of Freedom* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971); Philip W. Bonsal, *Cuba, Castro, and the United States* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1971); John Barlow Martin, *U.S. Policy in the Caribbean*, A Twentieth Century Fund Essay (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1978); Dominguez, *From Neighbor to Stranger*; Jorge I. Dominguez, *Cuba: Order and Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978); Lynn Darrell Bender, *The Politics of Hostility* (Hato Rey, Puerto Rico: Inter American University Press, 1975); Lester A. Sobel, ed., *Castro's Cuba in the 1970's* (New York: Facts on File, 1978); and *New York Times Index*, 1959-80.

9. Fagen, Brody, and O'Leary, *Cubans in Exile*, p. 4.

tration. That perception regarded the Cuban flow as temporary, a view embodied in the frequent use of the word "exile"¹⁰ to describe those fleeing from Castro's Cuba prior to late 1962 or early 1963. From the very beginning, those settling in Florida were united by a common goal: to return to their homeland as quickly as possible. During 1959, the Eisenhower administration restrained its hostility toward Castro.

Nevertheless tensions between the two countries intensified. The United States reacted negatively to a wide range of events in Cuba, including the public trials and executions of several Americans; land reform and nationalization programs in Cuba that affected or threatened U.S. economic interests; fear of communist subversion in the Caribbean; and a developing political, economic, and military relationship between the Soviet Union and Cuba. Cuba was directly threatened by the U.S. decision to slash its sugar quota and by the repeated incursions of counterrevolutionaries flying into Cuba from sanctuaries in southern Florida. Ever mindful of the overthrow of the leftward-leaning Arbenz regime in Guatemala in 1954 and an extensive program of CIA covert activities throughout the Western Hemisphere, Castro was spurred into anti-American hysteria in March 1960, when *La Courbe*, a French ship docked in Havana harbor, inexplicably exploded with considerable loss of life.

The training of exiles for a possible future invasion of Cuba did not occur

10. "Exile" and "Cuban refugee" have been used interchangeably from 1959 on. During the early 1960s, however, the former term predominated in newspaper accounts and was frequently linked—as it has been consistently since—with attempts to overthrow the Castro regime.

until 17 March 1960.¹¹ However, such a use of the exile community was officially contemplated a full year earlier, when it was urged privately by then Vice-President Richard Nixon.¹² By the autumn of 1959, the CIA was not only in contact with the exile community but had helped ferry Cubans from Cuba to Florida. Such ties may in fact date from March 1959 or earlier. Whatever the date, it is clear that President Kennedy inherited from President Eisenhower not only an invasion plan, but also two correlative beliefs: that Castro could be overthrown with the help of Cubans in the United States¹³ and that once he was overthrown, these Cubans would—as they so often publicly proclaimed—return home. These beliefs did not necessarily entail enlisting large numbers of Cubans in the revolutionary brigade training in Guatemala; but they did tend to discourage federal policy that treated the exile phenomenon as potentially long-standing or permanent, particularly if such policy meant removing the exiles from their staging area for impending return, southern Florida.

Thus on 7 December 1960, the first organized federal response to the Cuban influx emerged with the opening of the Cuban Refugee Emergency Center in Miami.¹⁴ In January 1961, President Kennedy established a successor Cuban

11. Thomas, *Cuba: The Pursuit of Freedom*, p. 1271.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 1243.

13. Kennedy apparently arrived at this view independently of the Eisenhower administration, since prior to learning of its CIA initiatives in Cuba, he had commenced urging the arming of exiles in the United States as part of his presidential campaign.

14. *Report to the President of the United States on the Cuban Refugee Problem* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1961), p. 1; rpt. in Cortes, ed., *Cuban Refugee Programs*.

Refugee Program designed to meet the same two fundamental objectives: provision of welfare benefits to Cubans in need and resettlement of some of the thousands of Cubans already straining the resources of southern Florida to other parts of the United States. At the time that the Eisenhower program was established, it was recognized by the man who designed it, Tracy Voorhees, that resettlement might be the more difficult process. Thus he reported to the president that Cubans in Florida were convinced that it would soon be possible to return to their homeland and would not willingly relocate in significant numbers unless granted "assurance from an authoritative source . . . that they are not losing their chance to return home."¹⁵

Voorhees's concern proved to be justified. As of the end of March 1961, 13,122 Cubans out of an exile population of approximately 125,000 had registered at the Cuban Refugee Center in Miami; only 2011 had been resettled.¹⁶ Kennedy's decision on 11 March "to let the Cubans go where they yearned to go—to Cuba"¹⁷ thus fulfilled a long-standing expectation of the exile community and brought a series of political decisions affecting that community to a logical close. However, when the decision was implemented on 17 April 1961, the Bay of Pigs invasion failed.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 10.

16. Resettlement and registration figures are drawn from Thomas, "Cuban Refugees in the United States," p. 14, Table 2. The flow estimate is a projection based on INS annual figures and estimated rates of flow.

17. Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *A Thousand Days: Kennedy in the White House* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), p. 242.

THE POLITICS OF ISOLATION AND FLIGHT: 1961-73

The Bay of Pigs fiasco was a watershed event in the Kennedy administration and a key moment in the development of U.S. policy toward Cuba and toward the Cubans already in the United States or seeking to enter. Nevertheless the politics of exile, characterized by the expectations and the implicit promise of repatriation, did not die an immediate death. Instead repatriation became suddenly a more distant prospect, and the United States was forced to regard the exile community as a fact that would not disappear overnight. One response might have been to close the border to Cuban entrants, most of whom were arriving on regularly scheduled airline flights at the rate of 1500-1700 per week. No consideration at all appears to have been given to this alternative. Instead Cuban migration continued at approximately the same rate until 22 October 1962, when in the aftermath of President Kennedy's Cuban missile crisis speech, it was unilaterally terminated by Castro. In the aftermath of the Bay of Pigs, it would have been politically suicidal and highly questionable morally to shut the door on potential Cuban entrants.

The United States had planned, equipped, and then, through its half-hearted support, helped to botch an invasion that left over a hundred exiles dead and nearly 1200 in the hands of Castro's army. However critical the U.S. press was of the planning and execution of the Bay of Pigs, it was clear that there was widespread support for driving communism from the Western Hemisphere and general admiration for those abandoned on the beaches of Cuba.¹⁸ U.S.

18. Typical of the press coverage of the time was an editorial in the *Washington Post*, 18 Apr.

perception of the exiles as victims and opponents of an ongoing historical process did not change after the Bay of Pigs; what changed was the perception of the strength of that process as it manifested itself in Cuba and the perception of the role that Cubans who had already fled—or might flee in the future—could realistically have in reversing it.

These new perceptions and the shape of U.S. policy to come were signaled on 20 April 1961 in President Kennedy's first public statement after the Bay of Pigs. Entitled "The Lesson of Cuba,"¹⁹ it made the following points. First, communism was firmly entrenched in Cuba and would not be easily overthrown. Second, the Cuban threat was part of a broader hemispheric and global campaign, which relied not only on military force, but also on the "legitimate discontent of yearning peoples."²⁰ Third, refugee flow reveals the bankruptcy of communism's promise:

Those who shaped automatic "riots" in the streets of free nations over the efforts of a small group of young Cubans to regain their freedom should recall the long rollcall of refugees who cannot go back—to Hungary, to North Korea, to North Vietnam, to East Germany, or to Poland, or any of the other lands from which a steady stream of refugees pours forth, in eloquent testimony to the

cruel oppression now holding sway in their homelands."²¹

Fourth, in order to meet the threat of Castro's communism, the United States, together with other nations in Latin America, would have to assert its own will in "a struggle in many ways more difficult than war":

If the self-discipline of the free cannot match the iron discipline of the mailed fist—in economic, political, scientific, and all the other kinds of struggles as well as the military—then the peril to freedom will continue to rise.²²

Kennedy's speech provided the blueprint for U.S.-Cuban relations for the next 13 years and gave a good indication of the role that Cuban refugees would play in the second stage of the struggle. Significantly, it did not renounce the use of force, although it precluded any "unilateral American intervention in the absence of an attack on ourselves or an ally."²³ CIA intervention in Cuban affairs, either direct or through intermediaries, continued into the Nixon era,²⁴ if not beyond. Included were several attempts to assassinate Castro commencing in late 1961, although not made public until 1975.²⁵ Exiles continued to receive on-the-record financing with CIA funds

21. *Ibid.*

22. *Ibid.*

23. *Ibid.*, p. 659.

24. In addition to the assassination attempts (note 2), it was alleged by former Defense Department consultant Lowell Ponte that in 1969-70, the CIA attempted to damage Cuba's sugar crop by means of a cloud-seeding program. *New York Times*, 27 June 1976, p. 7. In 1977, it was reported by *Newsday* that "anti-Castro terrorists had introduced African swine flu into Cuba in 1971" with at least tacit CIA approval. Sobel, ed., *Castro's Cuba in the 1970's*, p. 131.

25. See U.S. Senate Select Committee, *Alleged Assassination Plots*.

1960, p. 14. Entitled "Invasion of Cuba," it began, "Most Americans will make no secret of their sympathy with the efforts of Cubans to overthrow the Communist-dominated regime of Fidel Castro." Later it asserts, "There is no law or treaty which precludes American help to those who are seeking to regain their freedom."

19. Speech before the American Society of Newspaper Editors, 20 Apr. 1961, *Department of State Bulletin*, 44(1141):660 (8 May 1961).

20. *Ibid.*

until May 1963, when it was announced that the annual stipend to the Cuban Revolutionary Council would be terminated.²⁶ Circumstantial evidence suggests that radical anti-Castro Cubans continued to receive secret U.S. government aid for at least another decade and that there were ties between U.S. intelligence agencies and the exile group that bombed a Cuban airline in 1976, killing 73 people.²⁷

Nevertheless after the Bay of Pigs, the United States refused to support any large-scale military enterprise or recognize any Cuban government-in-exile, and the realization slowly grew that exile was likely to be a long, drawn-out state, perhaps even a permanent one. New legislation recommended by President Kennedy on 21 July 1961 and enacted on 28 June 1962 authorized Cuban refugee aid on a permanent basis.²⁸ In 1966, Congress acted to regularize and make permanent the immigration status of all of the Cubans who had arrived since 1 January 1959.²⁹ The struggle, in other words, was not likely to be a new war of liberation, manned by exile invaders. Instead, as President Kennedy's 20 April 1961 speech intimated, it was going to be a longer campaign, waged simultaneously on diplomatic, economic, and ideological fronts. Refugees would no longer be in the vanguard, yet they would continue to play a role.

26. *New York Times*, 1 May 1963, p. 11. Also see *New York Times*, 17 Apr. 1963, p. 1.

27. *New York Times*, 20 Oct. 1976, p. 3; *New York Times*, 22 Oct. 1976, p. 4; *New York Times*, 24 Oct. 1976, sec. IV, p. 2; *New York Times*, 28 Nov. 1976, p. 35; and *Washington Post*, 25 Oct. 1976, sec. A, p. 26.

28. Migration and Refugee Assistance Act of 1962, 76 Stat. 121.

29. Act of 2 Nov. 1966, 80 Stat. 1161.

The Kennedy administration understood, as perhaps did the Eisenhower administration before it, that political and economic assaults on the Castro regime could not be divorced from attacks on that regime's ideological appeal. Castro's revolution promised a rapid transformation from a free market to a socialist system and an end to the poverty that had always plagued the Latin American peasantry. U.S. policy toward Latin America, as enunciated in the aftermath of the Bay of Pigs and the Cuban missile crisis, had two principal objectives: bringing about "within a democratic framework, the economic development and social reform necessary to provide a better way of life for millions of restless, underprivileged people"³⁰ and defending and protecting "our democratic institutions against the attempts of Castro communism to undermine and destroy them."³¹

The Alliance for Progress, a massive hemispheric aid program launched by President Kennedy during his first days in office, was intended to serve as the primary vehicle for the first objective. A campaign to extend U.S. diplomatic and commercial sanctions against Cuba to every nation in the hemisphere, and to Cuba's traditional trading partners in Europe, was intended to serve as the primary vehicle for the second.

Under Secretary of State George Ball labeled this campaign a "systematic program of economic denial" in a speech

30. Edwin A. Martin, Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs, "Interdependence and the Principles of Self-Determination" (Address before the Pan-American Society of the United States, 16 Apr. 1963), *Department of State Bulletin*, 48(1245):711 (6 May 1963).

31. *Ibid.*

delivered in April 1964.³² In that speech, Ball noted that this program was intended as the substantive complement to an ongoing "propaganda campaign."³³ Summarizing its objectives, Ball indicated that a "program of economic denial [was not] likely *by itself* to bring down the present Cuban regime."³⁴ Instead it could accomplish other, more limited purposes:

First, to reduce the will and ability of the present Cuban regime to export subversion and violence to other American states;

Second, to make plain to the people of Cuba and to elements of the power structure of the regime that the present regime cannot serve their interests;

Third, to demonstrate to the people of the American republics that communism has no future in the Western Hemisphere; and

Fourth, to increase the cost to the Soviet Union of maintaining a Communist outpost in the Western Hemisphere."³⁵

U.S. policy toward Cuba from the beginning of 1962 through 1974 was largely devoted to spreading and defending the gospel of economic denial. Throughout the period, and particularly during the airlift years, 1965-73, Cuban refugees were used both as acolytes of that gospel and as instruments of that policy.

The boycott of Cuba was probably the most intensive campaign of commercial isolation ever waged by one nation, and its allies, against another. Overt U.S. actions included maintain-

ing an embargo on trade with Cuba and placing severe restrictions on travel to and from Cuba by persons using U.S. passports. In January 1962, the foreign ministers of the Organization of American States (OAS) voted to exclude Cuba from participation in the OAS system. In 1963, President Kennedy pledged to build a "wall" around Cuba,³⁶ and measures were taken to pressure the major industrial nations to cut all trade with Cuba.

Finally in July 1964, after years of U.S. pressure and the overthrow of a government sympathetic to the Castro regime in Brazil, and over the objections of Chile, Bolivia, Uruguay, and Mexico, the OAS imposed comprehensive diplomatic and trade sanctions. These sanctions included the breaking of diplomatic and consular relations with Cuba, the suspension of all trade except in foodstuffs and medicine, and the suspension of sea transportation between Cuba and other American states except that employed for humanitarian reasons.

Cuba was thus isolated almost entirely from other countries in this hemisphere, and although not cut off entirely from other Western trade, it had its access to shipping, air transportation, and markets dramatically reduced. The results, when combined with a dramatic decline in the world market price of sugar, were predictable. The Cuban economy, which had remained on a fairly even keel through 1962, plunged in 1963 and 1964 into a trough from which it was not to emerge for nearly a decade. Between 1962 and February 1965, Cuba's trade via free world ships declined nearly 60

32. George Ball, "Principles of Our Policy toward Cuba" (Speech before a Convention of the Omicron Delta Kappa Society, 23 Apr. 1964), *Department of State Bulletin*, 50(1298):741 (11 May 1964).

33. *Ibid.*

34. *Ibid.*

35. *Ibid.*

36. "President Urges Wall of Liberty Encircling Cuba" (Speech before Central American President's Conference, 18 Mar. 1963), *New York Times*, 19 Mar. 1963, p. 1.

percent.³⁷ Not surprisingly, Castro turned increasingly to the Eastern bloc for trade and aid, and Cuba became increasingly dependent on its socialist allies.

While the poorest members of Cuban society benefited from the vast expansion of schooling and medical programs, the material and political position of the remaining Cuban middle class deteriorated rapidly. According to the account of one State Department official in 1964, for "the first time in their history, the 'Cuban people must queue up to receive meager rations of food and clothing.'"³⁸ It was hardly surprising, therefore, that considerable sentiment to leave Cuba, particularly among the middle class, developed in 1964 and 1965—sentiment that led directly to Castro's public statements on 28 and 30 September 1965 that all who desired to leave Cuba were free to do so; to President Johnson's welcoming response at the Statue of Liberty on 3 October;³⁹ and to the negotiations leading to the commencement of more than seven years of freedom flights on 1 December 1965, after a short-lived boatlift from Camarioca harbor engineered by Castro with the cooperation of the exile community in the United States.

Thus there can be no doubt that a systematic and rigorously pursued U.S.

policy contributed greatly to the decline of the Cuban economy in the middle 1960s, and that the first significant migration from Cuba since 1962 was one major result. Virginia Dominguez, in congressional testimony, labeled the post-1965 Cuban arrivals "consumer refugees," explaining that they were

people who left Cuba largely because they were used to a standard of living they could no longer have in Cuba. Many consumer goods were not easily available after the revolution. Many of those who came after 1965 were housewives and children, and were not actively political. They were not necessarily poor, or the victims of political persecution. The people who really do qualify as political refugees . . . are those who left within the first two years after the revolution and not those thereafter.⁴⁰

Undoubtedly this generalization ignores some individual Cubans who left Cuba between 1965 and 1973 for explicitly political reasons. Nonetheless it is noteworthy that the eligible pool for the freedom flights excluded all political prisoners, and all draft-age men, who might have sought refuge as conscientious objectors.⁴¹ Instead the Memorandum of Understanding between Cuba and the United States, in the words of one State Department official, "was

37. Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker, OAS Representative, Address to the Council of the Organization of American States, 27 Feb. 1965, *Department of State Bulletin*, 52(1344):465 (29 Mar. 1965).

38. Thomas C. Mann, Assistant Secretary for Inter-American Affairs, "The Western Hemisphere's Fight for Freedom," *Department of State Bulletin*, 51(1321):550 (19 Oct. 1964).

39. "Remarks at the Signing of the Immigration Bill," 3 Oct. 1965, in *Public Papers of the Presidents: Lyndon Johnson, 1965* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1966-68), Vol. 2, pp. 1039-40.

40. Testimony of Virginia Dominguez, House Judiciary Committee Subcommittee on Immigration, Refugees, and International Law, 24 May 1979, Committee Report, *Hearings on the Refugee Act of 1979*, House Report 2816 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1979).

41. "Memorandum of Understanding Concerning the Movement to the United States of Cubans Wishing to Live in the United States," "Third Separate Note on Political Prisoners," 6 Nov. 1965; rpt. in House Committee on Foreign Affairs, *Hearings: Cuba and the Caribbean* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1970), pp. 5-9.

designed essentially to reunite families in the United States."⁴²

Although U. S. officials often took partial credit for the growing hardship in Cuba, such claims were always tempered by assertions, similar to the one made by Under Secretary of State George Ball in 1964, that

Cuba is providing a spectacle of economic failure for all to see. Far from offering a better life for the Cuban people, Communism is bringing only depression and want.⁴³

The imperatives of this ideological logic required that those fleeing such depression and want be labeled refugees, their departure treated as a ballot for freedom.⁴⁴ Further, it was believed or at least argued as late as 1970 that a generous U.S. refugee immigration policy might encourage continued resistance to communism in Cuba. Thus defending the continuation of the freedom flights that had begun in December 1965, Robert Hurwitch, deputy assistant secretary of state for Inter-American Affairs, testified in July 1970,

In addition to the humanitarian considerations involved and the fact that we have entered into an international agreement, there is additional sound basis for the airlift. Experience has indicated that as long as hope for escape to freedom exists, people living under oppression resist committing themselves to the regime's goals; but when

42. Statement of Robert A. Hurwitch, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs, 8 July 1970; rpt. in *ibid.*, p. 41.

43. Ball, "Principles of Our Policy," p. 743.

44. For an excellent treatment of the symbolic function of political migrations to the United States, see Silvia Pedraza-Bailey, "Cubans and Mexicans in the United States: The Functions of Political and Economic Migration," *Cuban Studies/Estudios Cubanos*, 11(2)/12(1):79-97 (July 1981-Jan. 1982).

escape routes are sealed, accommodation to the inevitable becomes the prevailing attitude. Illustrative of this phenomenon is the case of East Germany where the beginning of economic recovery can be said to date from the erection of the Berlin wall: when the wall barred future escape to the freedom of the West, the East German population had no real alternative but to accommodate to the Communist regime there. The refugee airlift, a route to freedom, forestalls the certainty of accommodation to communism by the Cuban people.⁴⁵

In sum, it was an article of faith that the ultimate repudiation of communism was the spectacle of people "voting with their feet." That type of vote, U.N. Ambassador Arthur Goldberg argued in 1965, is a "criterion of how people really feel".⁴⁶

Many thousands of Cubans have seized every available means of transportation which will take them from Cuba to the United States, but no crowds are pounding on Cuba's gates and seeking admission.⁴⁷

Had Ambassador Goldberg continued, he might have noted that the unidirectional flow from Cuba was perceived by policymakers in the United States as having an instrumental as well as a symbolic effect. As U.S. resistance to a U.N. decision to grant Cuba agricultural development funds illustrated, economic denial was linked to an attempt to deprive Cuba of technical expertise.⁴⁸

45. Hurwitch, Statement, p. 5.

46. Arthur Goldberg, Statement before the General Assembly, 21 Dec. 1965, *Department of State Bulletin*, 50(1387):128 (24 Jan. 1966).

47. *Ibid.*, pp. 128-29.

48. At issue was a \$1 million appropriation by the U.N. Special Fund and the Food and Agriculture Organization for an agricultural research station in Cuba. The United States objected continually to the grant of such technical assistance from 1961 through the spring of 1963. See Secre-

Increasingly in the late 1960s and early 1970s, Castro complained of the negative effect on the Cuban economy wrought by the departure of so many well-educated and skilled people to the United States. Cuban unwillingness to let the freedom flights continue indefinitely was undoubtedly influenced by this brain drain.⁴⁹ However, in ways apparently not foreseen by anyone in the Department of State, some significant benefits accrued to the Castro regime from the outflow. Thus potential dissidents were exported in large numbers, their property redistributed, and the socialization of the Cuban economy hastened. It is thus not clear that the 1965-73 migration was of more lasting benefit to the United States than it was to the Cuban government. But the contemporary view, expressed frequently by politicians and State Department officials, was that the freedom flights furthered U.S. foreign policy objectives.

THE POLITICS OF
THWARTED NORMALIZATION:
1974-80

Between the end of the freedom flights in April 1973 and the beginning of the 1980 Mariel boatlift, a seven-year period intervened during which Cuban migration to the United States was limited to a few thousand Cuban political prisoners, Cuban spouses and children accompanying Americans who had been previously denied exit visas, approximately 17,000

migrants rejoining family members from Spain, and the occasional boat person. Despite its initial characterization as a freedom flotilla by the press⁵⁰ and the initial warm welcome extended to its members by the Carter administration, the 1980 influx aroused unprecedented opposition within weeks of its inception and resulted within months in a total reversal of two decades of unquestioning welcome of anti-Castro Cubans.

One reason for this reversal was the backlash generated by the sudden and disorderly arrival on the beaches of Florida of 125,000 people, a significant percentage of whom proved difficult to resettle. Concerns about the criminal element within the Mariel cohort certainly played a major role, as did the well-publicized rioting at resettlement camps in Arkansas and Wisconsin.

By 1980, moreover, the implicit rationale for regarding every Cuban migrant as a refugee had largely evaporated. Responsible for that evaporation was not only the immediate sense that Mariel was a direct result of Castro's hostility toward the United States, but also a long-germinating realization that the Cubans who arrived here could no longer be used to make any further exemplary points about either the horrors of life under Castro or the more general failures of the communist system. That realization had its roots in a gradual redefinition of U.S.-Cuban relations that began while the freedom flights were still under way. The failure of this redefinition of

tary of State Rusk, "U.S. Position on Special Food Project in Cuba," 13 Feb. 1963, *State Department Bulletin*, 48(1237):357 (11 Mar. 1963).

49. For more than a year before the end of the freedom flights, it had been reported that Cuba might end them because of the economic effect of losing its professional class. See *New York Times*, 6 Dec. 1971, p. 25.

50. Typical of early coverage was a story describing asylum-seeking Cubans in their "voyage to freedom," "Sea Lift from Cuba to Key West," *Newsweek*, 5 May 1980, p. 59. Two weeks later, the press was emphasizing "the rapidly growing backlash." "The Cuban Tide Is a Flood," *Newsweek*, 19 May 1980, p. 29.

relations to achieve long-awaited normalization was probably the chief factor in Castro's unleashing of the Mariel flow.

By the early 1970s, there was concern growing in Congress that Cuban migration had lost its original political character, that it was bringing to the United States larger numbers of people less easily assimilable to the domestic labor market and more dependent on welfare aid, and that the money spent on the airlift and related resettlement programs might better be spent on the indigenous poor.⁵¹ Although the Department of State continued to insist that the freedom flights were a demonstration of the bankruptcy of the Cuban system, the ideological argument for admitting Cubans as refugees had lost some of its force. That argument continued to decline in importance as, in succeeding years, initiatives and attitudinal changes toward Cuba and the communist bloc that first emerged in the late 1960s continued to develop.

Among these developments were the evolution of more pragmatic and less ideological ways of managing the East-West conflict; a new perception of Cuba as a nuisance rather than as an overt threat to hemispheric peace; a growing realization that the policy of economically and politically isolating Cuba was no longer a practical option, given the unwillingness of traditional allies to continue to cooperate; and a concomitant understanding that past policy had in any event failed, creating hardship in

51. In June 1971, the Appropriations Committee of the U.S. Senate voted to cut off funds for the airlift because it believed the continuing influx was adding to U.S. welfare rolls. *New York Times*, 26 June 1971, p. 26. Similar attempts to cut off airlift funds to aid U.S. urban poor occurred in 1970. See *New York Times*, 10 July 1970, p. 4.

Cuba and pushing it ever more deeply into the Eastern bloc, yet producing no significant liberalization in Cuba and no counterrevolutionary movement there.

DETENTE

The retreat from unrelieved hostility in U.S.-Cuban relations took place within the context of the Nixon-Kissinger attempt to reach a more constructive relationship with the Soviet Union and China, America's two principal adversaries. Instead of superpower relations based on total enmity, the Nixon administration sought to involve Russia and China in the establishment of a new power balance that would reduce tension and the risks of war.⁵² Kissinger wanted to avoid the ideological moralism that had characterized American foreign policy during the cold war.⁵³ He avoided criticisms of internal Soviet or Chinese policy, believing that such demands were likely to be counterproductive and would threaten detente, jeopardize the delicate balance of arms control negotiations, and reintroduce the cold war.

This new approach to East-West relations at least indirectly affected Cuban-American relations. For if the United States was prepared to negotiate its differences with the Soviet Union and to

52. Henry Kissinger, "The Process of Detente" (Statement delivered to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, 19 Sept. 1974), in his *American Foreign Policy*, 3rd ed. (New York: Norton, 1977), pp. 144-45.

53. See Interview with Pierre Salinger, *L'Express*, News Release, 12 Apr. 1975, Bureau of Public Affairs, Office of Media Services, Department of State; and Henry Kissinger, "Moral Purposes and Policy Choices," *Department of State Bulletin*, 69: 525 (1973).

pursue the possibility of trade and diplomatic relations with China, which it had traditionally labeled as perhaps the most totalitarian regime in the world and as a direct military threat to its allies and strategic interests, the rationale for continuing to isolate Cuba largely evaporated. As Secretary of State William Rogers noted in an address before the General Assembly of the OAS three months after the China visit, "the very boldness of President Nixon's initiatives toward China has raised questions whether we might not be on the verge of a shift, with similar surprise, in our attitude toward Cuba."⁵⁴

REDUCED CUBAN THREAT

Further contributing to the dissipation of that rationale was a subtle recharacterization of the Castro regime which began in 1967, when Ernesto Che Guevara was killed in Bolivia and his guerrilla movement there wiped out. As early as 1968, Sol Linowitz, President Johnson's adviser on Latin American affairs, had reported that there was no massive guerrilla threat to hemispheric security.⁵⁵ At that time, the Soviet Union was also applying considerable pressure on the Castro regime to abandon its attempts to export revolution. As a result, there occurred a fundamental shift in Cuban foreign policy.⁵⁶ Although Castro did not renounce his ideas on revolution, he began to stress the need for internal development and peaceful relations with progressive governments.

54. William Rogers, Statement of 12 Apr. 1972, *Department of State Bulletin*, 66 (1714): 621 (1 May, 1972).

55. *New York Times*, 28 Feb. 1968, p. 10.

56. Jorge Dominguez, "Cuban Foreign Policy," *Foreign Affairs*, 57(1):83-108 (Fall 1978), esp. pp. 59-91.

Cuban relations with other nations in Latin America became more conciliatory. By 1970, the only condition being stressed by the Cuban government for relations with Cuba—that countries behave independently of the U.S. hemispheric security—grew increasingly unconvincing as a reason for isolating Cuba.

THE FAILURE OF ISOLATION

Cuba's new foreign policy contributed to the failure of a U.S.-dominated strategy of isolation by reopening diplomatic and trade channels to other countries in the hemisphere and by providing additional encouragement to Western European nations to resume or augment their commerce with Cuba. By the early 1970s, Cuba had greatly expanded its international contacts. Favorable governments had come to power in Chile, Argentina, Peru, and Panama and were willing to join Mexico in renouncing sanctions. Other Latin American nations, such as Venezuela and Ecuador, were anxious to increase trade with Cuba. Newly independent English-speaking countries in the Caribbean that were admitted to the OAS had had no part in the blockade of Cuba and maintained friendly relations. A new trade accord was also reached with Mexico, and commerce with Japan, Canada, and the Western European countries rose dramatically.

PRESSURE FOR A NEW CUBAN POLICY

Responding to these developments, Congress and various interest groups within and without the United States began urging a new U.S. policy toward Cuba well in advance of the termination of the freedom flights in 1973. As early as the 1968 presidential campaign,

Hubert Humphrey had suggested that the OAS reexamine its sanctions.⁵⁷ In 1969, Senator Mansfield, an early advocate of the U.S. boycott, spoke in favor of entering into a hijacking treaty with Cuba, and of improving U.S.-Cuban relations.⁵⁸ Similar positions were adopted by other members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Similarly the *New York Times* in 1971 adopted a new editorial policy urging normalization,⁵⁹ and a number of mainline church groups, including the Roman Catholic Bishops of Cuba, the United Presbyterian Church, and the World Council of Churches, advocated the end of Cuba's "continental excommunication."⁶⁰ There were also indications from various members of the U.S. business community that they would welcome steps toward resumption of commercial relations.

Thus a full-fledged debate on U.S. policy toward Cuba was already under way in the early 1970s when Senate hearings were held reviewing that policy. That debate continued through the 1972 presidential campaign, with the Nixon administration remaining quite adamant about Cuba, although permitting such small accommodations as the journey of

a U.S. volleyball team to Cuba in 1971 and the initiation—immediately after the 1972 election—of skyjacking talks with Cuba. The Cuban plank of the 1972 Democratic platform was considerably more moderate, stating that the "time has come to reexamine our relations with Cuba and to seek a way to resolve this cold war confrontation on mutually acceptable terms."⁶¹ The quest for such "mutually acceptable terms" began soon after President Ford entered office in 1974 and continued under President Carter until early 1978, although new U.S.-Cuban tensions erupted in late 1977.

NORMALIZATION, MIGRATION, AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Implicit in U.S. responses to Cuban migration prior to the era of attempted normalization of relations was a view of human rights similar to that espoused later and more explicitly by Ernest Lefever and Jeane Kirkpatrick.⁶² Thus

61. Sobel, ed. *Castro's Cuba in the 1970's*, p. 46.

62. In an op-ed piece commenting on the emerging Carter position, "The Rights Standard," LeFever argued that human rights policy should be subordinate to the national interest more broadly defined. He asserted it was in the national interest to continue supporting an "authoritarian ally," Chile, but not to improve relations with a "totalitarian adversary," Cuba, which maintained a military presence in Africa and held "thousands of political prisoners and denied many basic rights." *New York Times*, 24 Jan. 1977, p. 23. Jeane Kirkpatrick has elaborated on the authoritarian/totalitarian distinction. See "Human Rights and American Foreign Policy: A Symposium," *Commentary*, Nov. 1981, pp. 42-45. In June 1982, Elliott Abrams, assistant secretary of state for Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs, in a speech delivered in Miami, relied implicitly on the authoritarian/totalitarian distinction to explain why Cubans are refugees and should continue to

57. Hubert Humphrey, Interview with editors of the *New York Times*, *New York Times* 23 June 1968, p. 58. However, by October 1968, Vice-President Humphrey was taking a considerably harder line. See *New York Times*, 20 Oct. 1968, p. 74.

58. See *New York Times*, 2 Feb. 1969, p. 48; and *New York Times*, 9 Dec. 1969, p. 4.

59. In October 1971, the *New York Times* advocated for the first time that the United States normalize its relations with Cuba. *New York Times*, 29 Oct. 1971, p. 40.

60. Archbishop Camara, speaking on behalf of the Roman Catholic Bishops of Cuba, *New York Times*, 27 Jan. 1969, p. 2. Pronormalization statements issued by the other named groups were reported by the *New York Times*, 25 May 1969, p. 40, and 21 Aug. 1969, p. 7.

life in Cuba was regarded automatically as the equivalent of persecution, and those fleeing as refugees.⁶³ During the era of attempted normalization, considerably less attention was given to the hardships of life in Cuba. Particularly during President Ford's administration, when migration from Cuba was almost nonexistent, little attempt was made to relate current conditions there to the generation of refugee flow.

This is not to suggest that either President Ford or his State Department said many positive things about the Castro regime. Rather the policy, at least through late 1975, was to say very little publicly while conducting secretive but not entirely unnoticed normalization negotiations. This was consistent with Secretary of State Kissinger's view that relations with foreign governments, and not the internal affairs of foreign countries, were the legitimate concern of the U.S. government. The changes that were taking place in Cuba's relations with other governments and the generally changing pattern of world politics led to an Amer-

be welcome in the United States—at least to the extent they are not “shot” at the United States “in the way a cannonball is shot out of a cannon,” while Haitians should be turned away at the border or interdicted at sea. “Human Rights and the Refugee Crisis,” 2 June 1982, *Department of State Bulletin*, 82(2066):43-45, 44 (Sept. 1982).

63. The 1965 amendments to the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) of 1965 essentially defined a refugee as a person fleeing persecution in a communist-dominated or Middle Eastern country. INA, sec. 203(a) (7), 8 USC 1153(a) (7) (1965) (repealed). Most Cubans were not admitted under the direct authority of these amendments, although they did receive favorable immigration treatment. To the best of the authors' knowledge, almost without exception, Cubans prior to the summer of 1980 were not required by the Immigration Service to show any personal opposition to the Castro regime or any personal hardship exacted as a price for particular associations or political beliefs.

ican reappraisal of relations with Cuba and a search for possible areas of accommodation.

During this period, minor steps were taken to lessen hostilities. In February 1973, the governments of the United States and Cuba signed an antihijacking agreement. An important provision of the agreement stipulated that each country would try to punish, according to its law, persons who conspired to promote, prepare, direct, or participate in any expedition aimed at damaging aircraft or vessels traveling to or from the territory of the other country or other similar unlawful acts.⁶⁴ In a major policy shift, the United States voted with the new majority which, in July 1975, ended the OAS policy of hemispheric sanctions. President Ford, Secretary of State Kissinger, and a number of other State Department officials all made public statements favoring dialogue with Cuba with the object of eventually normalizing relations.

However, two aspects of Cuban foreign policy were consistently criticized: its growing military involvement in Angola and its support in the U.N. Decolonization Committee for Puerto Rican independence. Moreover Secretary Kissinger, in a comment in connection with the lifting of the OAS embargo on Cuba, had specified that the U.S. decision on whether to resume relations with Cuba would be “heavily influenced by the external policies of the Cuban government,” especially in connection

64. *Agreement on the Hijacking of Aircraft and Vessels and Other Offenses* (15 Feb. 1973), *TIAS 7575, UNTS, 24:737*. This was the first agreement to limit the use of the United States as a base for terrorist exile groups against Cuba and received virtually no publicity in the United States.

with its "military relationship with countries outside the hemisphere."⁶⁵

Increasing concern over Cuba's African role, as well as the exigencies of the primary campaign for the 1976 presidential race, resulted in an abrupt U.S. policy shift in late 1975 and early 1976. In November 1975, shortly after Castro sent 4000 Cuban troops to aid the forces of the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola, negotiations between Cuban and U.S. diplomats broke off; in December, President Ford announced that the "action of the Cuban government in sending combat forces into Angola destroys any opportunity for improvement of relations with Cuba."⁶⁶

In February of the following year—five days before the Florida primary—the president assumed his most forceful anti-Castro stance. In that speech, delivered at a ceremony in Miami in which some 1200 immigrants, including a large number of Cubans, became naturalized American citizens, he not only labeled the Castro regime "a regime of aggression"⁶⁷ and pledged total U.S. noncooperation with it, but also resorted for perhaps the only time in his administration to the traditional cold war refugee rhetoric with respect to Cubans. Thus he told his audience,

You can tell those who take America for granted that millions of people in other lands as far away as 9,000 miles and as close as 90

miles would dearly love to have just a fraction of freedom we have in America.

Many of you come from places where people are denied the right of free choice; from places where churches and synagogues are open, but only for tourists; from places where free elections are promised, but never held; from places where free speech exists only as a memory.⁶⁸

In the same speech, President Ford also pledged to support legislation speeding the naturalization of Cuban refugees.

The more overt normalization drive that occurred when Jimmy Carter became president in January 1977 followed much the same pattern, with numerous public statements supporting eventual resumption of diplomatic relations, criticism of the Castro regime focused generally on its foreign rather than its domestic policy, and no recourse, even indirectly, to the metaphor of people voting with their feet until late in the president's term, when the campaign for renomination and reelection was already under way. Nonetheless the Carter administration, because of its more specific emphasis on human rights and because of some of the advances it did make in improving relations with Cuba, developed a more comprehensive immigration policy toward Cuba than did its predecessors, although that policy was hardly free from contradiction.

The step-by-step advances in Cuban-American relations in 1977 and the subsequent retreat in 1978 and 1979 have been sufficiently well documented elsewhere.⁶⁹ However, several lines of devel-

65. Quoted in Jan Knippers Black et al., *Area Handbook for Cuba* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1976), p. 345.

66. "President's News Conference of December 20, 1975," in *Public Papers of the Presidents: Gerald Ford, 1975* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office), vol. 2, p. 1987.

67. *Public Papers of the Presidents: Gerald Ford, 1976* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office), vol. 1, p. 464.

68. *Ibid.*

69. Among the better accounts of Cuban-American relations 1977-80 are Alfred Stepan, "The United States and Latin America: Vital Interests and the Instruments of Power," *Foreign Affairs, America and the World—1979*, 58(3):659-

opment that directly affected the flow of Cubans to the United States from the autumn of 1978 on and that helped color the official and unofficial perception of the Mariel boatlift deserve some attention. These developments involved the partial but short-lived opening of ordinary migration channels, the reversal of the political prisoner issue, the instrumental role that contacts between Cuban exiles and the Castro regime played in renewing Cuban migration, the political use that Castro was able to make of the boatlift, and the Carter administration's own indecisiveness about how to characterize or treat the Cubans seeking admission.

All of these factors were closely related. The culmination of the 1977 Cuban thaw was the opening, on 1 September of that year, of interest sections by the United States and Cuba in Havana and Washington, respectively. Staffed by mid-level diplomats, they provided a channel for continuing direct bilateral

contact. As important, they had a limited capacity to issue travel documents and visas. Movement in both directions was thus facilitated. The opening of the interest section in Washington, the lapse of a regulation prohibiting the travel of U.S. citizens to Cuba, and the U.S. Treasury's legalization of expenditures in Cuba by visitors from the United States set the stage for short-term visits to Cuba by Cuban exiles and others. These were made initially by members of the Cuban community in Miami who favored dialogue with Castro. However, in November 1978—at a time when U.S.-Cuban relations had soured again, due to widespread Cuban military involvement in Africa—Castro announced that beginning in January 1979, he would accept visits from all Cuban exiles.⁷⁰ During 1979, some 100,000 Cuban Americans accepted this invitation.

It is important to note that these trips to Cuba began well before there was any significant flow in the opposite direction. When renewed Cuban migration to the United States began, first as the result of a Castro-initiated political prisoner release program and later as a consequence of the Peruvian embassy occupation and the subsequent Mariel boatlift, much of its impetus could be traced back to the visits to Cuba by exiles. Similarly much of the Carter administration's ambivalence toward that flow when it began can be traced to its uncertainty about the exile role, both at the time of these visits and afterward.

The political prisoner release program and the Carter administration's response to it in large measure set the tone for the administration's later response to Mariel. At the 1976 nomi-

92, 685-91; William M. LeoGrande, "Cuba Policy Recycled," *Foreign Policy*, 46:105-19 (Spring 1982); and Wayne S. Smith, "Dateline Havana: Myopic Policy," *Foreign Policy*, 48:157-74 (Fall 1982). Also informative are Barry Sklar, *Cuban Exodus-1980, the Context*, mimeo (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, Congressional Research Service, 1980); and the report of the Special Congressional Study Mission to Cuba, *Toward Improved U.S.-Cuba Relations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1977), which contains an especially helpful chronology as an appendix. For treatment of events leading up to the Mariel boatlift, see Mario A. Rivera, "The Cuban and Haitian Influxes of 1980 and the American Response: Retrospect and Prospect," U.S. House of Representatives Committee on the Judiciary, *Oversight Hearings: Caribbean Migration* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1980), appendix 4; and Ronald Copeland, "The Cuban Boatlift of 1980: Strategies in Federal Crisis Management," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 467 (May 1983).

70. *New York Times*, 22 Nov. 1978, p. 2.

nating convention, the Democrats tied betterment of U.S.-Cuban relations to two issues: lessening of Cuban involvement in Africa and release of political prisoners in Cuba.⁷¹ In response to frequent questions after his election about his human rights policy vis-à-vis Cuba, President Carter's stock response was that the United States was seeking, as a condition or prerequisite for normalization, "a demonstration of [the Cuban leaders'] commitment to the human rights concept, particularly by releasing some of the thousands of political prisoners they have had incarcerated for a number of years, 15 or 20 years."⁷² Although the political prisoner question was the only specific human rights issue President Carter was to raise publicly about Cuba until the last year of his term, he received no positive response from Castro during the 1977 thaw.

However, on 1 September 1978, three months after Carter had lashed out at Cuba for its alleged involvement in the Angolan invasion of Zaire, Castro announced a change of heart: he would release 500-1000 political prisoners into the custody of the United States. In October, Castro met with a visiting delegation of exiles, the Committee of 75. Following that meeting, Castro announced that he agreed with the committee in principle that more political prisoners should be released, that there should be more family reunification and more travel to Cuba.⁷³ Finally in Novem-

ber, in the same speech that initiated the large-scale visitation program, Castro announced his intention of releasing some 3000 political prisoners and 600 other Cubans imprisoned for minor crimes at the rate of 400 prisoners per month.⁷⁴

Instead of responding to the prisoner release program with enthusiasm, as might have been expected, the Carter administration responded with suspicion, largely because progress on the human rights front was not matched by any change in Cuba's foreign policy. Processing of political prisoner immigration applications lagged far behind the number of applicants. Despite Castro's demand that the United States accept all those released who indicated a desire to resettle there, Attorney General Griffin Bell continued personally to review each file, with the stated purpose of excluding "spies, terrorists, and common criminals."⁷⁵ Castro, in turn, announced his willingness to meet with exile representatives again to discuss how releases to the United States could be effectuated should the Carter administration refuse to accept them.⁷⁶

Although President Carter shortly thereafter pledged to do his "utmost to ease the plight . . . of released political prisoners" and expressed his "hope that we will always stand ready to welcome more than our fair share of those who flee their homelands because of racial, economic, or religious oppression,"⁷⁷ and

71. Sobel, ed., *Castro's Cuba in the 1970's*, p. 159.

72. Interview with the President, and Question and Answer Session with a group of Publishers, Editors, and Broadcasters, 20 May 1977, in *Public Papers of the Presidents: Jimmy Carter, 1977* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office), vol. 1, p. 946.

73. *New York Times*, 24 Oct. 1978, p. 13.

74. *New York Times*, 22 Nov. 1978, p. 2.

75. *New York Times*, 25 Nov. 1978, p. 25, correcting account of 19 Nov. 1975 remarks.

76. "Castro Would Free 3000," *New York Times*, 23 Nov. 1978, p. 7.

77. "Universal Declaration of Human Rights," Remarks by President Carter, 6 Dec. 1978, *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents*, 14(49):2163 (11 Dec. 1978).

although the pace of admissions did increase, the political prisoner release program, as a unilateral Castro initiative, was never enthusiastically embraced by the United States. Indeed hundreds of former political prisoners were still seeking entry when the 1980 influx began, and the issue had become a source of acute Cuban grievance against the United States.

From the U.S. perspective, Cuba's external policies, its alignment with the Soviet Union, and its activities in Africa were of central concern and overrode in importance Castro's concessions on the political prisoner issue. Moreover during 1979, new U.S. concerns subsequently arose, such as Cuba's increasingly close military relationship with the Soviet Union and Cuba's growing willingness to become involved in the Caribbean and Central America. In response, the Carter administration in 1979 decided to switch from a policy toward Cuba based on efforts to normalize relations to a concerted effort to discourage Cuba's involvement in the region. Presidential Directive 52 called for increased economic aid and sales of military equipment to allied governments in the region, and the U.S. took a series of additional steps, including renewal of spy-plane flights, the establishment by the United States of a Joint Caribbean Task Force, and military maneuvers at the Guantánamo naval base.⁷⁸

The 1980 influx not only took place in the context of a rapidly deteriorating bilateral relationship but was, at the very least, also hastened by the extensive visitation of large numbers of Cuban Americans to Cuba in 1979. If Castro intended those visits to generate more

sympathy for his regime from the group most vocally and violently opposed to it, he apparently failed. Instead the group most influenced were Cubans who had never left and were impressed by the wealth and the well-being of their mainland visitors, as well as by renewal of contact with long-departed friends and relatives.

The visitation program highlighted not only the attractiveness of the United States, but also "the sea of difficulties,"⁷⁹ economic and political, in which Cuba continued to swim. Cuba in 1979 and 1980, plagued by its overdependence on an unsatisfactory and underpriced sugar crop, had entered into a new era of hardships. Accompanying this deprivation were new political campaigns launched against the nation's nonproductive and undesirable citizens, including its homosexuals and petty criminals. The visits by Cuban Americans did not create the dissatisfaction with conditions in Cuba that was then endemic, but they did serve as a catalyst by emphasizing the attractiveness of the migration alternative.

When Castro, on 4 April 1980, opened the gates of the Peruvian embassy to more than 10,000 Cubans seeking to leave their country, the United States was confronted with that alternative and the necessity of responding to it. A further response was required on 19 April when Castro opened Mariel Harbor and in the months thereafter when the Marielitos continued to arrive in Florida. Under those policies that had prevailed in 1959-62 and 1965-73, the U.S. response in each instance would

79. The phrase is from a speech made by Fidel Castro in December 1979. It is quoted and analyzed in Rivera, "Cuban and Haitian Influxes," p. 291.

78. Sklar, *Cuban Exodus*, p. 28.

have been unreservedly positive, although attempts to secure an orderly departure program might have ensued. By 1980, however, a decade of pronormalization arguments and initiatives had robbed a new and massive Cuban immigration program of its ideological appeal.

Caught in a new and more complex calculus of response, the Carter administration found itself weighing a variety of reasons for welcoming Cubans warmly or discouraging their entry. Favoring generosity were a well-publicized human rights policy, a campaign to win the electoral support of the large Cuban-American community in Florida, and the attacks of candidate Ronald Reagan, "who blasted Carter's efforts to bar refugees."⁸⁰ Favoring restriction were a new refugee act—which permitted the admission of large numbers of refugees but required that they demonstrate fear of persecution as their motive for departure—growing national concern over uncontrolled immigration, and a sense that Castro was exploiting the migration fever to export Cubans deemed, not only by Cuba but also by the United States, undesirable. By forcing boat skippers to carry several thousand institutionalized persons to the United States and by actively involving the Cuban government in the direction of traffic into and out of Mariel, Castro magnified this concern. Deteriorating relations with Congress over Cuba, occasioned largely by the Carter administration's indecisive response to the Soviet combat brigade originally believed stationed there, required that Carter take a hard line with Castro, yet President Carter's own rhetoric required that genuine refugees be received warmly.

80. LeoGrande, "Cuba Policy Recycled," p. 111.

Had Carter been able to exploit the 1980 flow and to argue forcefully, consistently, and often that the Marielitos were in fact voting with their feet, that their motivations were primarily political rather than economic, that the "dregs of Cuban society" made up only a small and manageable part of the 1980 refugee cohort, then the gap between these conflicting objectives might have been bridged, and some of the negative effect of the flotilla's ungoverned arrival mitigated. However, despite a January 1980 State Department Human Rights report highly critical of the "totalitarian Marxist-Leninist system" in Cuba and its effect on the Cuban people,⁸¹ despite remarks by President Carter just days before the boatlift began comparing Cuba to East Berlin as a place desperate to keep its dissenters in,⁸² and despite Vice-President Mondale's early effort to make political capital out of the influx, no consistent effort to turn the 1980 exodus into an asset rather than a liability occurred.

Instead, the first decision reached for those occupying the Peruvian embassy was that they would be admitted to the United States only if they met U.S. immigration requirements or entered the political prisoner program.⁸³ On 15 April President Carter invoked his powers under the new refugee act to designate 3500 of the Cubans in the Peruvian

81. U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1979* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Offices, 1980), pp. 291-97.

82. Speech before the American Society of Newspaper Editors, 10 Apr. 1980, in *Public Papers of the Presidents: Jimmy Carter, 1980-81* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1981), vol. 1, p. 642.

83. *New York Times*, 6 Apr. 1980, p. 4.

embassy as refugees admissible to the United States.⁸⁴

Yet no similar action was taken later with the throng waiting to leave Mariel⁸⁵ or with those who had landed in Florida. Instead during the first weeks of the boatlift, the Carter administration welcomed with one hand while it waved the boats away with the other. Carter's "open heart and open arms"⁸⁶ speech followed by three days a White House statement that the INS was concerned about criminals in the flotilla and would carefully screen each arrival.⁸⁷ Until 15 May, when the Coast Guard began actively interfering with boat traffic heading to pick up passengers from Cuba, threats of reprisals against boat owners alternated with Coast Guard sailing instructions on how best to make the round trip from Mariel.⁸⁸ Only the State

Department maintained a consistent perspective. Its opposition to the boatlift marked a new recognition that in mass-asylum situations in this hemisphere, particularly those involving Cuba, it is no longer possible to rely on cold war ideology and label all who leave as refugees without first examining their economic situation and their true motives for departure.

CONCLUSION

To date, the lessons of Mariel have been almost exclusively negative. Cubans, who for foreign policy reasons were automatically classified as refugees in the past, are unlikely to be granted especially favorable immigration treatment so long as they are regarded, in the words of former White House Assistant Jack Watson, "as bullets aimed at this country."⁸⁹ As Elliot Abrams's June 1982 speech confirms,⁹⁰ the Reagan administration is likely to regard any new Cuban influx in terms of this metaphor. But as that speech also confirms, the traditional view of Cubans voting with their feet appeals to the administration's strong anticommunist, anti-Castro sentiments. The policy dilemma posed by any renewal of significant Cuban flow appears insoluble, unless refugee admissions—and particularly the asylum procedures that will govern the admission of future Cuban boat people—are substantially depoliticized.

84. "Cuban Refugees in the Peruvian Embassy in Havana," White House Statement, 14 Apr. 1980, in *Public Papers of the Presidents, Jimmy Carter, 1980-81*, vol. 1, p. 682.

85. Senator Kennedy urged such a use of the Refugee Act in a public letter to the president on 20 May 1980. See *Congressional Record*, 6 June 1980, S.6436-37.

86. "League of Women Voters," Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session, 5 May 1980, in *Public Papers of the Presidents: Jimmy Carter, 1980-81*, vol. 1, pp. 833-34.

87. "Cuban Refugees, White House Announcement of Federal Actions in Response to the Emergency," 2 May 1980, *ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 819.

88. In the weeks before President Carter announced his intention of using the Coast Guard to stop the boat traffic from Mariel Harbor, it had been used for precisely the opposite purpose. According to one newspaper account, "As thousands of Cubans continue to express abhorrence of Fidel Castro's rule of their homeland by streaming away from it in anything that can float, the U.S. Coast Guard is laboring mightily to ensure their safe arrival on these shores in one of the

biggest peacetime operations it has ever mounted." "Coast Guard Shepherding Cubans from Danger to Succor: Small Boat Armada Depends on 'Mothering' by Cutters," *Christian Science Monitor*, 8 May 1980.

89. Rivera, "Cuban and Haitian Influxes," p. 292.

90. Abrams, "Human Rights and the Refugee Crisis."