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## U.S.-Cuba Relations in the 21st Century

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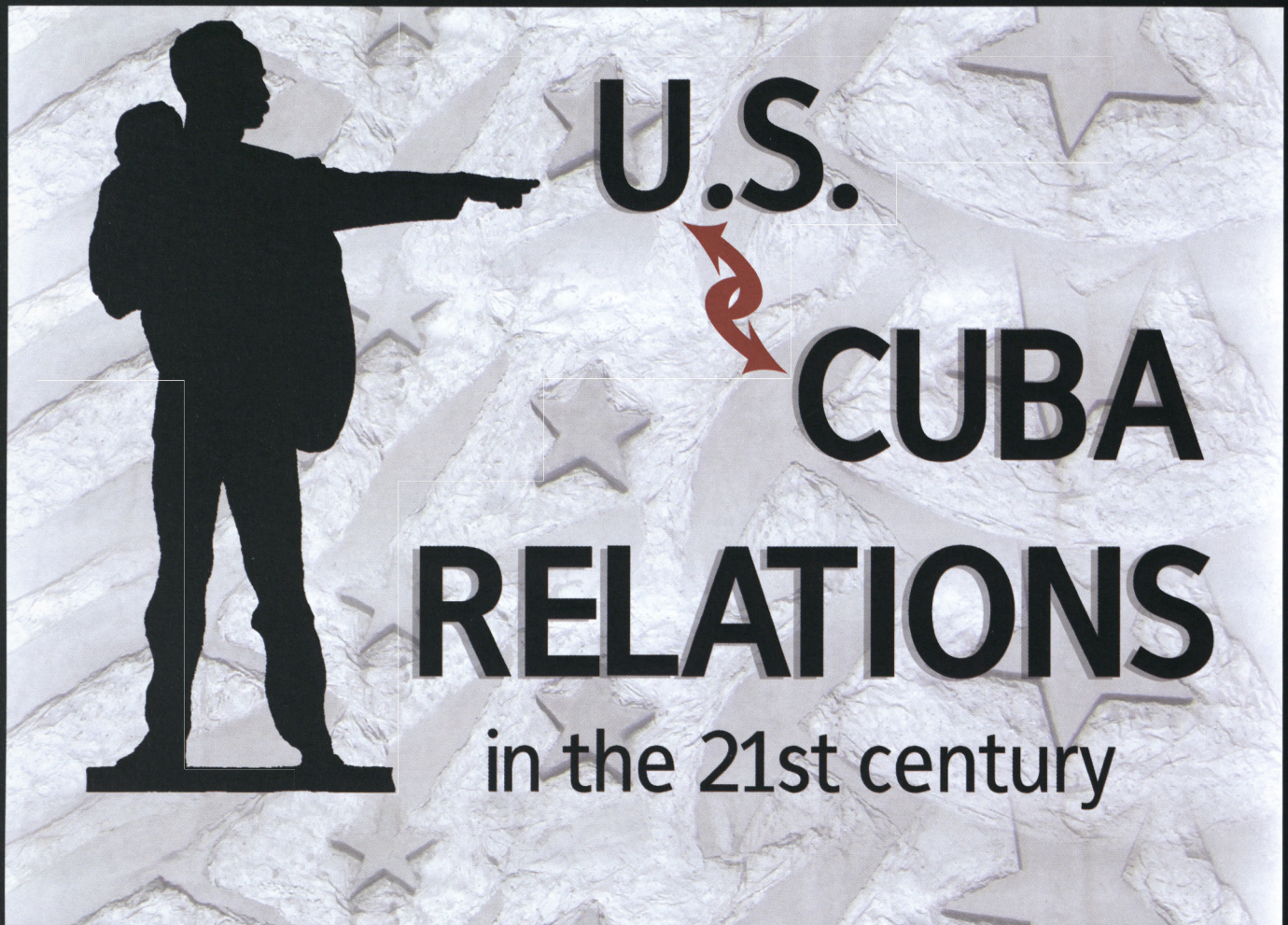
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The logic of the U.S. War on Terror permeates the current debate in both Cuba and the United States over the relationship between the two countries. Key questions in an analysis of the relationship hover around which of the post-September 11 variables are the most important in identifying future bilateral possibilities between Cuba and the United States. Of course, a full analytical model attempting to explain Cuban–U.S. relations must take into account external and domestic factors, and the relevant actors in both nations who have contributed to making the relationship into a confrontational one. The aim here is more limited. This paper will focus on the context in which the two States relate to each other today.

A relevant factor to this reflection concerns the formation of the Cuban State under U.S. intervention and occupation, and the reinforcement of Cuban nationhood with a Constitution that provided for a Damocles' sword: the Platt Amendment. Under the assumption that Cubans were not capable of running their own government, the United States required that the Platt Amendment be included in the Constitution of the young Republic in return for granting Cuba its nominal freedom. The Platt Amendment granted to the United States the unlimited right to intervene in Cuban internal affairs. This left an imprint on Cuba's national consciousness and a vision of the United States: no matter the circumstances, the potent neighbor always would be a cardinal power which Cubans had to take into consideration in creating any national design.

In structural terms, the above reflection unveils the roots and nature of the Cuban–U.S. conflict, sovereignty vs. domination, which existed even before the 1898 U.S. intervention into Cuba's war of independence. While Cuban visionaries spoke of independence around the time of the 1823 Monroe Doctrine, the idea of annexing Cuba enjoyed political support in the United States. Indeed John Quincy Adams compared Cuba to an apple, saying the island would gravitate naturally to the United States just as "ripe fruit" has no choice but to fall to the ground. U.S. leaders already thought of Cuba as an extension of U.S. territory.<sup>1</sup>

Present Cuba–U.S. relations embody a similar conflict of national goals. Cuba has asserted that its sovereignty is a goal of the highest priority, and it has labored vigilantly to safeguard its independence from external domination. Meanwhile, the United States has defined its national interests in accord with the claim that it has the undisputed right to dominate the affairs of all Latin America countries. This dichotomy—sovereignty vs. domination—explains the continuity of a policy of punishment and hostility against Cuba which the U.S. government has pursued despite the end of the so-called Cold War.

While the East–West conflict might seem like an appropriate framework for reviewing these hostile relations, it actually obscures the essential Cuban–U.S. conflict since 1959: Cuba's pursuit of sovereignty vs. the U.S. pursuit of domination. Still Cold War ideology did provide the language and rationale for U.S. policy. Thus when the Cold War ended, and the Soviet Union collapsed, it seemed as if a thaw in Cuban–U.S. relations



could be possible, because a substantially new international context existed.

## CUBA POLICY IN THE CONTEXT OF THE WAR AGAINST TERRORISM

The world system went through a transitional stage of about ten years, as U.S. political and military leadership acted in a unipolar manner and attempted to play a hegemonic international role, which reached a pinnacle following the September 11th terrorist attacks. The slogan of a “global war on terrorism” and its conceptualization filled the vacuum created when the prior “enemy” disappeared with the disintegration of the Soviet Union.

The terrorist events and the consequent tragedy in human, material, and political terms of September 11, 2001 constituted unprecedented events in U.S. history. Without doubt, the attacks were a wake-up call that resulted in a re-evaluation of the concepts and priorities of U.S. foreign and security policy. Despite the end of the Cold War, the new policies flowing from the events of September 11 maintained laws and practices from the Cold War period. The attacks have had a direct impact on all U.S. domestic, foreign, and security policies, and ultimately they will have contributed to a total restructuring of the entire international relations system.

With its new “crusade against terrorism,” the Bush Administration revived a 1982 classification of states in terms of whether they are alleged “sponsors of international terrorism.” Notably, in 2001 Afghanistan was not listed as such a state. But Cuba is a target of this campaign now in part because it is on the list. Counter-evidence about Cuba’s behavior falls on deaf ears in the Bush Administration.

To link Cuba with international terrorism on the basis of easily discredited information, weakens the U.S. effort when confronting real terrorist threats.<sup>2</sup> These claims also trivialize the credibility of the U.S. war on terrorism, and obscure legitimate concerns which the United States and Cuba ought to investigate bilaterally.

The events of September 11 engendered a new evaluation of U.S. diplomatic ties to all countries. However, the four-decades-old tumultuous relations between Washington and Havana remained stubbornly unchanged in part because of the terrorist attacks. For example, U.S. unilateral economic sanctions against Cuba, such as the restrictions on the sale of medicine and food to the island, have been justified on the basis of Cuba’s inclusion on the list of states sponsoring terrorism. U.S. officials such as James Cason, former chief of mission at the U.S. Interests Section in Havana, must believe that repetition of a lie will lead the public ultimately to accept its validity. He has argued erroneously that Cuba “missed the opportunity to join the international coalition against terrorism,” which, he says, “will further isolate Cuba and solidify its status as a rogue state.”<sup>3</sup>

In reality, the Cuban government officially condemned the terrorist attacks on the afternoon of September 11, 2001.<sup>4</sup> It then offered to provide the United States with all the medical and humanitarian aid it could muster, and the use of Cuban airspace for U.S. aircraft.<sup>5</sup> (The U.S. Federal Aviation Administration, for reasons of national security, closed U.S. airspace shortly after the attacks.) On September 15, the Cuban government organized a rally of thousands of persons to condemn the attacks and show support for the U.S. people.<sup>6</sup> This was followed on September 22 by President Fidel Castro’s categorical condemnation of terrorism as an “ethically indefensible phenomenon that should be eliminated.” He also declared that Cuba was ready to “cooperate

with all the other countries in its total elimination” and added “Cuba would never permit its territory to be used for this type of action against the U.S. people.”<sup>7</sup> He underscored emphatically that Cuba would declare itself “never to be an enemy of the U.S. people.” Five weeks later, following an anthrax attack on the U.S. Congress, Cuba offered to deliver to the U.S. government 100 million tablets of Cipro, an effective antibiotic against anthrax. On November 12, it offered low cost, Cuban-made devices to detect and eliminate anthrax. These measures of support elicited little or no acknowledgment from U.S. officials. Most newspapers and news broadcasts also overlooked Cuba’s offers of aid and concern for U.S. citizens in their time of distress.

When the U.S. government called for an international coalition in the struggle against terrorism, the Cuban government argued that the struggle should be waged through the United Nations (UN). In a letter to UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, President Castro promised Cuba’s complete cooperation with initiatives to eliminate terrorism undertaken through multilateral institutions. By October 2001, Cuba had ratified twelve UN resolutions against terrorism which had stemmed from the September 11 attacks.<sup>8</sup>

Shortly afterward, on November 29, 2001, the chief Cuban diplomat in Washington delivered a memorandum to the State Department’s Director of the Office of Cuban Affairs, which summarized the various Cuban offers of assistance to the United States. This gesture was intended to stimulate negotiations on three bilateral agreements under which Cuba and the United States would have worked collaboratively to deal with issues of concern to both: illegal immigration and the smuggling of persons, narcotics trafficking, and terrorism. The proposals used existing accords with European and Caribbean countries as their guideline.

On December 3, 2001, while Cuban and U.S. delegates celebrated the signing of a new migration agreement, Ricardo Alarcón, president of the Cuba’s National Assembly of People’s Power, presented the same three proposals to the U.S. delegation. But the U.S. representatives asserted that they had authority only to discuss the migration agreement, and that the proposals had to be presented through other diplomatic channels. In turn, on March 12, 2002, Cuba formally presented three proposals to the United States dealing with immigration, the interdiction of drug trans-shipments, and the fight against terrorism. The Bush administration’s lack of a response indicates that it had no interest in discussing the proposed bilateral settlements suggested by the Cuban government.

As the war in Afghanistan began, the United States started to ship alleged “enemy combatants” to the U.S. Naval Base at Guantánamo Bay, which is located on Cuban territory. Though it has been under U.S. jurisdiction since the 1898 war for Cuban independence, the naval base was effectively isolated after the 1959 Cuban Revolution. While U.S. possession of the base has been a longstanding point of disagreement between the two countries, Cuba avoided a confrontation in regard to the use of this prison camp. Cuban officials continued to criticize the inhumane and illegal detentions, but Cuba’s measured response to the unilateral U.S. decision to use Guantánamo Naval Base was viewed internationally as a welcome moment of quiet collaboration and positive diplomacy between the two countries.

General Raúl Castro Ruz, minister of the Cuban Armed Forces, stated on January 19, 2002 that, over the last few years, a climate of mutual respect and cooperation surrounding the Guantánamo Naval Base has been developed.<sup>9</sup> He underscored that this minimal contribution was “an example of what could be



attained in other such areas,” and commented that the new environment could aid the fight against drugs and terrorism, issues on which Cuba “differed from the U.S. over methods.”<sup>10</sup> The Bush Administration, though, had little interest in acknowledging the possibility of an accommodation with Cuba. It even ignored the irony of sending prisoners accused of terrorism to Cuba’s disputed base at Guantánamo while the Department of State considered Cuba to be a state-sponsor of terrorism.<sup>11</sup>



Gate is closed to the maximum security prison at Camp Delta 2 & 3, at the Guantanamo Bay U.S. Naval Base, Cuba, April 5, 2006. Photo by Reuters. Courtesy of www.chinadaily.com.cn

Indeed, Undersecretary of State John Bolton intensified U.S. accusations against Cuba on the eve of former U.S. president Jimmy Carter’s May 2002 visit to Cuba. Bolton claimed that Cuba had “provided dual-use biotechnology to other rogue states” and expressed his concern that this technology would be used to “support BW [biological weapons] programs in those states.”<sup>12</sup> His charges were unsubstantiated, and the State Department’s own 2002 report on terrorism makes no mention of any Cuban biological weapons capability.<sup>13</sup> Carter, himself, stated publicly that Bush administration officials had repeatedly assured him that there was no evidence Cuba had supplied other countries with technology for manufacturing weapons of mass destruction.<sup>14</sup> It appeared that the only reason the Bush administration raised the alleged threat of Cuban terrorism at that moment was to deflate any possibility that Carter’s trip might help to relax tension between the two countries.

The entire affair had become so uncontrolled and inflammatory that the Senate Western Hemisphere Affairs Subcommittee asked Bolton to explain his lie in testimony. But Secretary of State Colin Powell sent Carl Ford, who was head of the State Department’s Bureau of Intelligence and Research and had a reputation for judiciousness, in Bolton’s place. During the June 2002 hearing, Ford repeated what he had said at an earlier Senate meeting, that Cuba only has “a limited developmental offensive biological warfare research and developmental effort” and not a “program”. He added that “it’s not at the top of my priority list in terms of the greatest threats posed to the United States.”<sup>15</sup>

Later in 2002, a new unsubstantiated allegation of Cuban perfidy arose when Daniel Fisk, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for the Western Hemisphere, charged that Cuban agents

systematically had approached U.S. officials with false warnings “about pending terrorist attacks against the United States and other Western interests.”<sup>16</sup> His claim emerged again in the State Department’s Global Terrorism Report: “On repeated occasions, for example, Cuba sent agents to US missions around the world who provided false leads designed to subvert the post-September 11 investigation.”<sup>17</sup>

But foreign policy matters concerned President Bush less than politics at home as the 2002 election loomed on the horizon. In May he returned Cuba policy to the realm of a domestic electoral game by announcing a proposed *Initiative for a New Cuba*. The initiative was transparently a sop to the hard line Cuban-American community in an attempt to gain its support for the 2002 reelection campaign of his brother, Florida Governor Jeb Bush, and for Bush’s own 2004 campaign.<sup>18</sup> Promising to veto any new proposal which would expand trade relations or would lift restrictions on travel to Cuba by U.S. citizens to Cuba, the president bellowed that “Fidel Castro ought to open Cuba’s political and economic systems by allowing non-Communist candidates to participate in next year’s legislative elections and the development of independent trade unions.”<sup>19</sup>

President Bush’s veto threat also was intended to restrain members of Congress who saw their own electoral fortunes tied to opening the Cuban market for their districts. Beginning in 2000, there was increasing pressure from Congress to change U.S. policy, and several conservative legislators in the president’s party had sponsored measures to relax economic sanctions against Cuba. They were the key actors in securing passage of *The Trade Sanctions Reform and Export Enhancement Act (TRSA)* of 2000, which was the most far-reaching attenuation of the blockade in more than forty years. The TRSA legalized the direct commercial export of food and agricultural products from the United States to Cuba.

Though the sales required special licensing procedures, and the products could be purchased on a cash-only basis or with financing obtained through a third country entity, an enormous barrier had been breached. From December 2001 to December 2002, U.S. agricultural sales to the island rose to more than \$255 million.<sup>20</sup> This placed Cuba in thirtieth place of the 228 countries which import food and agricultural products from the United States, compared with 180th place in 2000 and 138th place in 2001.<sup>21</sup> By the end of the first quarter of 2004, the accumulated U.S. sales to Cuba since late 2001 was \$718 million.<sup>22</sup>

A majority of both parties, in both chambers of Congress, also had voted to allow increased travel to Cuba, even if that meant barring the Treasury Department from enforcing the law. But unresolved differences in House and Senate versions, and a legislative sleight of hand by Majority Leader Tom DeLay (Texas) in one instance, kept these proposals from final passage. President Bush evidently was not disposed to listen to the increasingly bipartisan clamor on Capitol Hill which favored the lifting of sanctions against Cuba. Instead, the White House hardened its animosity toward Cuba by resorting to rationales which were increasingly implausible.

## RELATIONS BETWEEN CUBA AND THE UNITED STATES AFTER THE U.S. INVASION OF IRAQ

The U.S. invasion of Afghanistan, its quick defeat of Iraq’s armed forces, and the subsequent occupation of Iraq, displayed the brute force and technological wizardry of the U.S. military which



undergirded U.S. power. In the process of these interventions, force was reborn as the instrument of power which the United States was willing to use against those states it unilaterally characterized as “rogue”. U.S. officials claim that threats from non-state actors—supported by rogue states—legitimate U.S. aggression, in order to stop emerging threats before they materialize. Asserting that such preventive attacks by the United States are in fact “pre-emptive” strikes, the Bush Administration has sought to legalize its crude seizure of territory for geo-economic and geo-political gains in terms of a hegemonic power’s moral need to bring about “regime change” when the international system is threatened.

This overbearing philosophy, increases the potential for a rapid and lethal show of power. With its origins in neo-conservative precepts about the necessity of demonstrating rapid and lethal power, the unscrupulous use of pretexts such as the alleged threat which the Iraqi regime posed for U.S. security under the presumption that it held an arsenal of WMDs, illustrates how the Bush Administration camouflaged the core doctrine of “regime change” within the global war on terrorism. Such a posture allows little space for positive dialogue between Cuba and the United States.

The designated “rogue states,” just like those considered part of the “Axis of Evil” (Iraq, Iran, North Korea) and “Beyond the Axis of Evil” (Cuba, Syria, Libya), were together with Sudan states which the State Department deemed as state sponsors of terrorism. (Libya was recently removed from the list.) They are all part of the South, which is a different variable in U.S. strategic thought, above all if we compare it to the Cold War period when an East-West axis was the main reference point.

Following the war in Iraq, the gravest consequence for Cuba would result from the U.S. government’s projection of a new aggressive and expansionist discourse, if it were willing to put it into practice. The invasion of Iraq establishes a clear warning to Cuba that the United States has moved to the ultimate extreme in its range of options against any government it unilaterally defines as an “enemy”. The United States now operates at the fringes of international law, defying the UN and its Security Council, and there is no force capable of stopping it. Using the war on terrorism unilaterally to achieve hidden foreign policy objectives, the United States feels it can use or threaten the use of force with impunity, even when the country it attacks has no links to terrorism.

Deemed a rogue state, Cuba finds itself on five black lists which the United States created unilaterally to reinforce its rhetoric and propaganda, and to provide an apparent justification for an aggressive policy of regime change. Cuba is on the following official lists:

- Countries which possess “at least a limited, developmental biological weapons research and development effort.”<sup>23</sup>
- State sponsors of international terrorism.<sup>24</sup>

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- Flagrant human rights violators.<sup>25</sup>
- Countries with aggressive intelligence operations on U.S. territory.<sup>26</sup>
- States trafficking in persons for sexual exploitation and forced labor (Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act).<sup>27</sup> Cuba was included in this group for the first time in June 2003.

Moreover, the National Intelligence Council and the CIA have identified 25 allegedly unstable countries—one of which is Cuba—where U.S. intervention might be required.<sup>28</sup> Cuba also is characterized as an “outpost of tyranny,”<sup>29</sup> which makes it an opportune target under the terms of the Bush doctrine. The U.S. president declared in his second inaugural address that “it is the policy of the United States to seek and support the growth of democratic movements and institutions in every nation and culture, with the ultimate goal of ending tyranny in our world” and set the idea that “The future of America and the security of America depends on the spread of liberty.”<sup>30</sup>

Cuba’s fabricated return to the U.S. security circle, and the attempts to erode any succession plans on the island and to hasten the end of the Cuban regime, are the cornerstones of U.S. policy towards Cuba. The Bush

Administration defines “regime change” as the basis for expanding its global hegemony, unilaterally employing a series of public instruments and resources that leave little space for positive dialogue with Cuba, even with respect to vital issues.

## THE FIRST REPORT OF THE SO CALLED “COMMISSION FOR ASSISTANCE TO A FREE CUBA”

October 10 is the anniversary of the beginning of the Cuban War of Independence against Spain. President Bush pointedly used that day in 2003 to announce the formation of a “Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba” (CAFC). Headed jointly by Secretary of State Colin Powell and Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Mel Martínez, who subsequently became a U.S. Senator from Florida and chair of the Republican National Committee, CAFC was given the charge to present proposals designed to hasten and plan for the “transition to democracy” in Cuba. President Bush accepted the Commission’s report (CAFC I) on May 6, 2004, in the midst of the presidential electoral campaign.<sup>31</sup>

At first the proposed sanctions were construed as a mere attempt to secure the Cuban American vote in southern Florida in 2004 presidential elections. In fact the commission’s key recommendations were quickly transformed into federal regulations, suggesting that the report was not merely an offering to right wing Cuban-Americans. It clearly indicates both U.S. imperialist aims and the U.S. intention to change the political and socioeconomic regime in Cuba in such a way that the clash over Cuban sovereignty vs. U.S. domination would be settled in favor



of domination.<sup>32</sup> It envisions not only the kind of government the United States would be willing to tolerate—as already indicated by the 1996 Helms-Burton Law—but also the detailed workings of the “future Cuba”.

Reminiscent of halcyon days in the early twentieth century when U.S. proconsul governors John R. Brooke, Leonard Wood, and Charles A. Magoon ruled Cuba, the report recommends that implementation of its proposed transformations would be directed by a State Department representative who would oversee an interim government. It also calls for a “Transition Coordinator at the State Department to facilitate expanded implementation of pro-democracy, civil-society building, and public diplomacy projects for Cuba,”<sup>33</sup> as well as the creation of a U.S.-Cuba Joint Committee on Trade and Investment (JCTI),<sup>34</sup> through which the Departments of State, Treasury, Commerce, USAID, Justice, Agriculture, Housing and Urban Development would make basic decisions about the Cuban economy, including implementation of a required Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between Washington and Havana.<sup>35</sup>

Such arrangements constitute an attempt to project not only the type of government which the United States would tolerate as referenced by the Helms-Burton Act of 1996, but also the detailed functioning of Cuba’s future. This is even more arrogant than the Platt Amendment, and represents an irrational revival of the Monroe Doctrine and Roosevelt Corollary.

In order to hasten regime change, the report advocates reducing contact between Cubans and their U.S. relatives—as well as between Cubans and U.S. citizens in general—by re-defining “close relatives” narrowly, and by dramatically restricting the frequency, length and allowable cost of Cuban American family visits to the island.<sup>36</sup> Other recommendations include sharply reducing allowable remittances and gift parcels of household items and medicines; scaling back educational travel; and eliminating the category of fully hosted travel.<sup>37</sup> The Treasury Department’s Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) published the regulations which emerged from the Commission’s proposals on June 16, 2004, and they became effective on June 30, 2004.<sup>38</sup>

Though Larry Wilkerson, chief of staff to Colin Powell, called the Commission’s plans “the dumbest policy on the face of the earth,”<sup>39</sup> Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice followed them in 2005 by appointing an obscure former employee of the House International Relations Committee, Caleb McCarry, as Cuba transition coordinator. The appointment indicated that the cornerstones of the Administration’s strategy include redefining Cuba as a security threat to the United States, preventing Cuba from developing its own transition plans, and accelerating the end of the current Cuban regime. Consequently, any kind of Cuban-U.S. interaction—whether educational, religious, humanitarian, or commercial—which could lead to mutual understanding, would challenge the Bush Administration’s goals for Cuba.

The Cuba transition coordinator and the Department of State’s Office of Reconstruction and Stabilization have warned that a Cuban transition might be attended by violence, in which case the United States would have to undertake a project of nation building.<sup>41</sup> At the same time, a U.S. invasion of Cuba, once the “transition genie is out of the bottle,” has not been rejected.<sup>42</sup> This hostile posture was reinforced in December 2005 when Secretary of State Rice stated that it “was time” for a regime change in Cuba after 46 years of Fidel

Castro’s “cruel dictatorship” and announced that Washington would take new measures to hasten the end of the “oppression”. The Bush administration’s use of “transformational diplomacy” and forcible democratization in dealing with Cuba was under way.

## CAFC II AND CUBAN LEADER FIDEL CASTRO’S JULY 31 SURPRISE

Rice and Cuban-American Commerce Secretary Carlos Gutierrez replaced Colin Powell and Mel Martinez, respectively, as co-chairs of CAFC. On July 10, 2006 they ceremoniously released the Commission’s second report (CAFC II). Joined by the Cuba transition coordinator, Caleb McCarry, they claimed success for the 2004 measures, and they offered additional recommendations to insure that “the Castro regime’s succession strategy does not succeed.” The hollowness of their claims was revealed in a November 15, 2006 audit released by the General Accountability Office (GAO), the investigative arm of U.S. Congress. released on its audit on how well USAID’s Cuba program is working. The GAO study found lax oversight of USAID’s programs and “questionable expenditures” which had resulted in most of the \$65 million and the \$8 million earmarked for Cuba democracy assistance programs by USAID and the State Department, respectively, remained in Miami or Washington.<sup>45</sup> The programs, the GAO concluded, had done little more than create an anti-Castro economy which financed activities in the United States – including what some analysts saw as electoral support from the Cuban American community.<sup>46</sup>

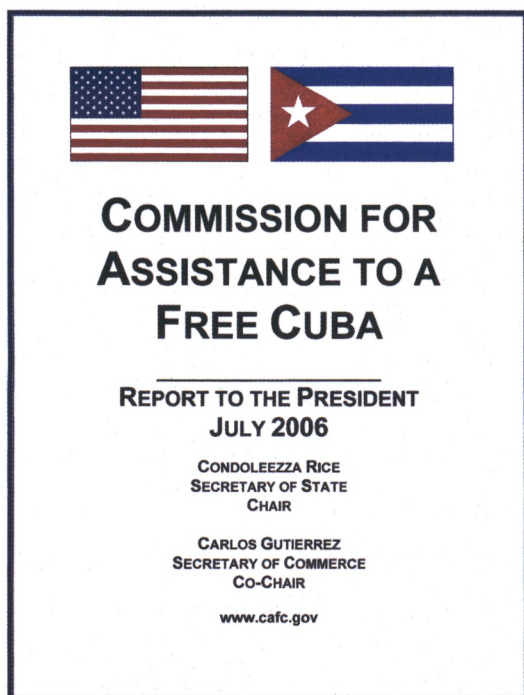
CAFC II offers detailed plans for a U.S. occupation, from reorganizing the economy and the educational system to the holding of multiparty elections. Though the report’s recommendations seemed to be the stuff of fantasy, Cuban officials could not dismiss them easily, because their publication coincided with organizational changes that effectively institutionalized U.S. policy towards Cuba. During the summer and fall of 2006, the Bush administration created six interagency working groups to monitor Cuba and to use increased funding to implement U.S. policies more vigorously in order to bring about “Cuban regime change”. Three of the newly created groups—for diplomatic actions, strategic communications, and democracy promotion—are located in the State Department.<sup>47</sup> A fourth, which coordinates humanitarian aid to Cuba, is run by the Commerce Department. The National Security Council and the Department of Homeland Security are in charge of an interagency working group which focuses on migration issues.<sup>48</sup> The sixth group, is chaired by the U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of Florida, and is comprised of members from OFAC, ICE, FBI, IRS, the Department of Commerce’s Office of Export Enforcement, the U.S. Coast Guard, and the Field and Air divisions of Customs and Border Protection.<sup>49</sup> Named the “Cuban Sanctions Enforcement Task Force,” it was formed to investigate violations and enforce energetically existing U.S. economic sanctions against Cuba.

At about the same time, the intelligence community restructured the way it monitored Cuba. In August 2006 Director of National Intelligence John Negroponte appointed CIA veteran Patrick Maher to be acting mission manager for a new unit which combined and coordinated two separate departments devoted to Cuba and Venezuela.<sup>50</sup> The significance of these administrative changes is that



organizational units can take on a life of their own, especially as professionals gain a vested interest in their new responsibilities. These actions thus contribute to the maintenance of a hostile policy.

The most concrete recommendation in CAFC II was the creation of an \$80 million fund—to be known as the Cuba Fund for a Democratic Future—to “promote democracy” in Cuba. The report called for at least \$20 million be added to the program every year after the initial two-year period, in addition to the \$10 million a year which the State Department and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) spend for other democracy-assistance programs.<sup>51</sup> Moreover, CAFC II proposes a broad array of measures to tighten the enforcement of U.S. sanctions against the island, from creating another task force to target Cuba’s growing nickel exports, to stopping humanitarian aid from reaching organizations with alleged links to the



government, such as the Cuban Council of Churches.<sup>52</sup> The report also advocated amending Presidential Proclamation 5377 “to permit the denial of immigrant, as well as non-immigrant visas, to officers and employees of the Government of Cuba or the Communist Party of Cuba.”<sup>53</sup> A portion of the report— included in a secret annex—remains hidden from public scrutiny for “reasons of national security”.<sup>54</sup>

Supporters of the Bush Administration’s strategy for dealing with Cuba – i.e., “transformational diplomacy” and forcible democratization – saw the timing of CAFC II as remarkably prescient. Only 21 days after it was published, on July 31, 2006, the Cuban government announced that its ailing leader, Fidel Castro, had provisionally ceded power to a collective leadership headed by Raul Castro. The possibility of a transition in Cuba instantly became palpable. But U.S prognosticators had not anticipated the scenario which unfolded, in which the Cuban leader stayed in the background while a group of seasoned policymakers coordinated the continuity of the Cuban Project.

Though the Cuban system showed no instability in the wake of President Castro’s illness, the turn of events did force Washington to consider the real consequences of its policy. The question arose as to whether continuation of punishment of Cuba served U.S. interests. The Department of Defense, for

example, had balked at acting too aggressively for fear of igniting a crisis in the U.S. backyard at a time when U.S. forces already were stretched thin by the Afghan and Iraq wars. And if rumblings of instability did begin to emerge from Cuba, it was hardly clear that Bush’s mindless chants, urging Cubans on the island to adopt so-called democratic reforms, offered the United States a meaningful guideline to deal with such a circumstance. Would the United States try to push the regime over the edge, or would it help the regime to survive in order to avert chaos 90 miles from south Florida?

What was clearer to Cubans, though, was the way in which four decades plus of inhumane economic sanctions, and a policy of increasing hostility, had undermined U.S. claims for a role in shaping whatever might unfold within Cuban domestic politics on the island. At the same time, the negative U.S. position in its historic conflict with Cuba has engendered a spirit of Cuban nationalism, while the Helms-Burton law, which codified the sanctions, reduced Washington’s options. Helms-Burton established the criteria for a post-Fidel Castro government which would be acceptable to the United States, and it defined conditions Cuba had to meet in order for the United States to lift sanctions. For example, if the Cuban people elected Raul Castro as their next President, even in a U.S.-style “open” election, the law requires the sanctions to remain in place. Such limitations on U.S. policy options constitute an enormous problem. Credible scenarios leading to chaos and violence can be envisioned if there were an upsurge in interest from radical right wing segments in the Cuban–American community. These extremists could well engage in provocations in order to draw the United States and Cuba into a direct conflict.

## NOTES FOR REFLECTION

While policy making in Cuba has always taken U.S. politics into serious consideration, Cuba has not been, in the short or medium term, a political priority for the United States. This fact has constrained the debate on U.S. Cuba policy for more than 45 years. As a consequence, those with narrowly-focused interests traditionally monopolized the discussion about Cuba in the United States. A reassessment of the Cuban issue, placing it in a world context, is imperative for the establishment of constructive relations between the two nations.

Globalization, with its contradictory processes of economic integration and the marginalization of states, nations, and social groups, has made it essential to face genuine and universal problems of terrorism, underdevelopment, pollution, migration, drug-trafficking, weapons proliferation, and human smuggling, as well as new challenges to national, regional, and international security. The geographic, economic, political, and cultural space that Cuba and the United States share cannot be ignored. Therefore, agreement on subjects of common concern is in the short-term interest of both countries. For example, the United States and Cuba could readily engage in positive-sum negotiations over issues related to the environment, terrorism, immigration, and drug trafficking.

Negotiations concerning matters covered by international laws also could be feasible in the medium term. They might address issues such as the property claims and counterclaims of the two governments, the status of Guantánamo naval base, and the lifting of trade sanctions and restoration of normal trade relations. This would open the way for consular and diplomatic relations.

But the *sine qua non* of negotiations for most people on the



island is that the United States must respect Cuba's sovereignty and quest for independence. Any U.S. intent to restore domination over Cuba would violate a fundamental Cuban national interest. U.S. willingness to abandon such a goal would be an indication of how seriously Washington sought meaningful negotiations and a peaceful outcome to any Cuban transition. To be sure, Cuba also must take into account U.S. national interests and concerns about regional security. Thus the process by which the two neighbors could achieve constructive coexistence needs to begin with mutual respect.

## NOTES

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