

USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

**CUBA AND ECONOMIC SANCTIONS:  
A COLD WAR STRATEGY IN THE 21ST CENTURY**

by

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This SRP is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Master of Strategic Studies Degree. The views expressed in this student academic research paper are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of the Army, Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government.

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## ABSTRACT

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Fidel Castro came to power in Cuba in January 1959 culminating a three-year revolution against President Fulgencio Batista's government. In October 1960, President Eisenhower initiated the opening phase of economic sanctions against Cuba and in 1961 the United States and Cuba severed diplomatic ties. Every President from Dwight D. Eisenhower to George W. Bush has reviewed and kept in place sanctions against Cuba. The sanctions were originally established in response to Cuba's seizure of U.S. property, establishment of a single party Marxist-Leninist government, alliance with the former Soviet Union, and Castro's defiance on any American intervention into Cuba. These sanctions, and U.S. attitudes and perceptions, were based on objectives driven by the Cold War and as such are outdated and overtaken by events. The sanctions should be lifted and diplomatic ties once again established both to support United States' goals in the region, and for quality of life improvements for Cuba.



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## CUBA AND ECONOMIC SANCTIONS: A COLD WAR STRATEGY IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Fidel Castro came to power in Cuba in January 1959 culminating a three-year revolution against President Fulgencio Batista's government. In October 1960, President Dwight D. Eisenhower initiated the opening phase of economic sanctions against Cuba and in 1961 the United States and Cuba severed diplomatic ties. Every President from Eisenhower to George W. Bush has reviewed and kept in place sanctions against Cuba. The sanctions were originally established in response to Cuba's seizure of U.S. property, (approximately \$1.8 billion at the time), its alliance with the former Soviet Union, and Castro's defiance of any American intervention into Cuba.<sup>1</sup> The island nation of Cuba is located just 90 miles south of the United States, but the long-standing confrontation and sanctions have kept the two nations isolated from one another for over 40 years.<sup>2</sup>

During the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the United States treated Cuba with little respect, perceiving the island as little more than a territory under its own control. Peter Schwab, noted authority on human rights issues, has argued that in seizing control of the Cuban economy, the U.S. turned Cuba "into a brothel for U.S. tourists."<sup>3</sup> The Monroe Doctrine was the justification used for intervention into Cuba and subsequent occupation and control. Philip Bonsal, former Ambassador to Cuba, has explained that, "Pre-Castro Cuba was a depressed, exploited 'colony' dominated and managed by American 'imperialists' and their Cuban 'lackeys' for selfish profit."<sup>4</sup>

The Castro revolution was driven by deep-rooted disdain for the Batista government, poor economic conditions of the lower classes, and the unwanted intervention and control by the United States. Once Castro came to power, there were valid reasons for the U.S. to impose sanctions against Cuba and for keeping pressure on Castro's regime. Shortly after Castro came to power he expropriated U.S. properties and quickly adopted a one-party Marxist-Leninist political system. As Castro established close ties with the Soviet Union, the U.S. feared Cuba would serve as another Soviet satellite country supporting the spread of communism in Africa and several Latin American countries, fueling cold war tensions and keeping bilateral relationships tense during the 1960s. Tensions between the two governments peaked during the April 1961 'Bay of Pigs' invasion and the October 1962 missile crisis.

These sanctions, and U.S. attitudes and perceptions, were based on objectives driven by the Cold War and as such are outdated and have been overtaken by events. The sanctions should be lifted and diplomatic ties once again established both to support United States' goals in the region and for quality of life improvements for the Cuban people.

## **BACKGROUND:**

### PRE-REVOLUTION HISTORY (1898-1956)

The United States intervened in Cuba in April 1898 after the sinking of the USS Maine in Havana Harbor sparked the Spanish-American War. Although Spain denied any involvement in the explosion that sank the ship, the two countries declared war and the U.S. defeated Cuba's Spanish occupation force in just a few months. The terms of the December 1898 Treaty forced Spain to relinquish sovereignty over the island. Cuban freedom fighters had fought three wars over the previous 30 years, and the objectives of their struggles were to free themselves from Spanish economic and political control, abolish slavery, and live in peace without any intervention from foreign powers.<sup>5</sup> Jose Marti (1853-1895), a Cuban intellectual who became an avid spokesman for Cuban independence, warned that Spain was not the only threat to foreign control; the United States was as well. His political acumen in seeing future developments was borne out by subsequent events.<sup>6</sup> The U.S. established direct control over Cuba by establishing a military government that ruled until 1902. And even though Cuba "won" its independence in 1902, the U.S. kept the doors to intervention open by passing the Platt Amendment, which gave the U.S. the right to intervene into Cuba anytime U.S. interests were threatened. Additionally, the U.S. leased a base in Cuba on the eastern part of the island known today as Guantanamo Naval Base. It still belongs to the U.S. and is being used today as a detention center for those individuals being held in connection with the current war on terrorism.

The Platt Amendment was repealed in 1934. However, the United States retained control over Guantanamo Naval Base. From 1902-1959, the Cuban government was plagued by corruption and ineptness leading to social inequality, racism, and dramatic economic injustice. Fulgencio Batista served as Cuba's President from 1940-44. After his term as President, he withdrew from public office. Considered an able and respected leader, he remained a key influence behind the scenes and backed his own candidate during the 1952 elections.<sup>7</sup> After it became obvious that Batista's candidate was going to lose, he planned a masterful coup and successfully assumed the office of president again. The ease with which Batista took over power highlighted dramatically the weaknesses of Cuban political institutions, and underscored the violence that pervaded Cuban politics.<sup>8</sup> For the first few months nothing changed, but later, Batista's regime became much more repressive and he began killing his political opponents.<sup>9</sup> This sowed the seeds for more revolution as certain sectors grew more and more dissatisfied with the current state of affairs. One such dissatisfied citizen was a young lawyer by the name of Fidel Castro Ruz.

#### CASTRO'S REVOLUTION (1956-1959)

Unemployment was widespread in Cuba during the late 1950s. Political repression was increasing, and the quality of life for the general population was steadily deteriorating. To compound the escalating problems, Cuba was basically a one-commodity, foreign-trade-oriented sugar enclave.<sup>10</sup> And Cuba's primary foreign trade partner was the United States. From 1949-1958 over 30% of the gross national product was generated by the sugar industry which also accounted for over 85% of Cuba's exports. This made Cuba highly vulnerable to the effects of price controls being regulated by the U.S. Congress.<sup>11</sup> The continued dependency on its powerful neighbor to the north added more fuel to the revolutionary fires and the continuation of the corrupt and repressive Batista regime allowed Castro and his insurgency to gain momentum. Cubans participated directly in the American economic system almost as much as U.S. citizens but without the benefits of U.S. employment rates or U.S. social service programs, and wages were dramatically lower compared to those in the U.S. Additionally, the U.S. was used as the yardstick for measuring quality of life levels for Cuba instead of other Latin American countries in the region. The disparity of the economic chasm between the U.S. and Cuba was increasing, and the political conditions created by Batista made economic reforms impossible.<sup>12</sup> On December 31<sup>st</sup> 1958, after three years of fighting, President Fulgencio Batista quit his office, taking much of the upper echelon of government with him.<sup>13</sup> One week later, Fidel Castro marched into Havana and took command. The old regime was gone and a revolutionary government was now in power.

#### CUBA-UNITED STATES CONFRONTATION (1959-1962)

As previously stated, the initial phase of the embargo was imposed due to Cuba's expropriation of U.S. property after Castro's takeover. But the sanctions were soon linked to national policy when Cuba formalized relations with the Soviet Union and soon formed an alliance that would have increased Soviet influence in the Western Hemisphere. Eisenhower initiated the sanctions in 1960 and severed diplomatic ties in 1961. Before he left office, he and his close advisors developed an operational plan to use Cuban irregulars to invade Cuba and catalyze another revolution to overthrow Castro. He would leave office before the plan was finalized and executed.

In January 1961, John F. Kennedy assumed the duties of Commander in Chief. He inherited from the Eisenhower administration the operation that became, with his approval and guidance, the Bay of Pigs invasion.<sup>14</sup> After being in office less than 90 days, Kennedy placed his trust and confidence in his experienced political and military advisors, and ordered the plan

be put into action. The operation was a failure in every respect. It set a precedent that would harden feelings between the two countries over the next 40 years, and established fertile ground for continued escalation of the Cold War with the Soviet Union. Kennedy had vowed during the election campaign to pursue a more positive policy toward Cuba and strengthened relations with anti-Castro forces in the country. After the failed invasion, Kennedy renewed his vigor on the Cuban problem and pledged a more careful policy toward Castro. Though many in Washington speculated that the U.S. might use its power to overthrow Castro, the Kennedy administration at no time seemed to have prepared for any overt application of this power in the absence of any military developments in Cuba that could be considered a serious threat to the United States.<sup>15</sup> This was not how Castro viewed the situation. He indeed felt as though there was a substantial threat from the United States for future aggression and as such, he brokered a deal with the Soviet Union to deliver and erect long-range missiles on Cuban soil that would push both superpowers to the brink of nuclear war in October 1962.<sup>16</sup>

## **SANCTIONS:**

### **COLD WAR**

U.S. economic sanctions against Cuba can be divided into two phases – Cold War (1960-1991) and post-Cold War (1991-present). During the Cold War period spanning nearly 31 years, the U.S. policy had relevancy and purpose, and clearly demonstrated U.S. resolve and consistency in its fight against the spread of communism worldwide, but more importantly the spread of communism into the Western Hemisphere. Basically, to eliminate the conditions that would allow unchecked involvement either externally by the communist bloc, or Cuba's ability to export its revolution to other Latin American countries. The issues of the U.S. – Cuba relationship during this period can be characterized by three key elements: increasing tensions between the U.S. and the Soviet Union-Cuba alliance (spread of communism), Castro's desire to export his revolution throughout South and Central America (security threat in the Western Hemisphere), and immigration issues. After the 1962 stand-off with the Soviet Union over missiles in Cuba, Castro's regime was consolidated and legitimated in the eyes of his people; this increased the anti-American fervor in the country. The Soviet Union welcomed Castro as a hero when he made a visit in 1963. With this new found elevation in status, Castro ventured out and involved himself in trying to overthrow the Venezuela government in 1963, and the Bolivian government in 1967. Both ended in dismal failure. The Venezuelan population rejected the attempt of Cuba to interfere in its internal affairs; and Che Guevara, leader of the guerrilla movement in Bolivia and a fighter alongside Castro during the Cuban revolution, was captured

and killed. Neither another Cuba revolution nor “many Vietnams” as Castro had prophesied earlier, erupted in Latin America.<sup>17</sup> After the missile crisis, Kennedy expanded the partial embargo to a total embargo by prohibiting both the travel and commercial transactions with Cuba.<sup>18</sup> President Lyndon Johnson signed the Peace for Food Act which prohibited food aid to any country that traded with Cuba or North Vietnam.

During the 1970s, Presidents Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford attempted to open dialogue with the intention of normalizing relations with Cuba, but the attempts ended without any progress. In 1975, Cuba deployed 35,000 troops to Angola just months after the U.S. modified the embargo by allowing U.S. subsidiaries in third countries to trade with Cuba. And in 1977, just one month after the U.S. lifted the travel ban to Cuba and allowed U.S. citizens to purchase up to \$100 of Cuban goods, Castro sent 20,000 troops to Ethiopia to support the Katanga rebellion.

During President Jimmy Carter’s tenure, Castro called for the removal of the U.S. base from Guantanamo Bay; Cuban-supported Sandinistas overthrew the Somoza government in Nicaragua; and the Foreign Relations Committee announced the presence of a Soviet Brigade of 3,000 troops in Cuba. At the end of the decade, Cuba had soldiers positioned in the Congo, Mozambique, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Nicaragua and Equatorial Guinea. Later, Cuba would have soldiers in Grenada and Jamaica.<sup>19</sup>

During the 1980s the focus of friction between the two countries shifted to include immigration when a migration crisis unfolded.<sup>20</sup> In 1980, an estimated 10,000 Peruvian citizens stormed the embassy in Havana demanding political asylum. Later that same year, Cuba deported over 125,000 illegal Cubans to the U.S. in a move that came to be called the “Mariel boatlift.”<sup>21</sup> In 1981-82, the two countries quietly pursued improving relations but once again they were discontinued as Castro continued his intervention policies into Latin American countries. Under President Ronald Reagan, travel and monetary expenditures in Cuba were once again banned. The U.S. intervened in the Caribbean nation of Grenada after a leftist coup, and discovered that Cuba was building an airstrip on the island that could be used to support military operations.<sup>22</sup> Radio Marti, a U.S. based radio station aimed at Cuba, began broadcasting in 1985. Cuba jammed the signal, and Castro later suspended the U.S. – Cuba immigration agreement signed earlier in 1984. Heading up a Presidential commission on Central America, Henry Kissinger reported that continued intervention by the Soviet Union and Cuba in the region posed a serious security threat to the U.S. But on a positive note, at the end of the decade, the U.S. and Cuba resigned the migration agreement of 1984, and President Reagan lifted the ban ending licensing requirements for importing recordings, printed material, and other media from

Cuba.<sup>23</sup> But tensions and doubts still remained high. Castro's actions clearly demonstrate how critical it is for him to maintain the sanctions and to keep Cuba's belligerency alive with the U.S. This keeps his revolution legitimate; it shifts blame for all of Cuba's ills to the United States; and it serves Castro's propaganda campaign well with the rest of the world.

#### POST COLD WAR (1991-2001)

The objectives of the embargo certainly changed over the years as presidents and policies have changed, and as the global situation changed. Analysts suggest there were six major foreign policy goals of the Cuban embargo: to overthrow Castro; to retaliate for nationalization of U.S. property; to contain the Cuban revolution; to break Soviet-Cuban ties; to demonstrate U.S. opposition; and to change the internal situation in Cuba.<sup>24</sup> With the collapse of communism in 1991, few of these objectives continued to have relevance. The U.S. national policy of defeating communism and fearing Castro's connection to the Soviet Union had to be re-crafted. The post Cold war period has been characterized by a continued decline in the Cuban economy and quality of life, the shift of U.S. national objectives, continued immigration issues, and human rights abuses.

The poor economic conditions have given Castro great leverage against the U.S. with his people. During the last 25 years, when the U.S. made overtures to begin talks about normalizing relations, Castro would inevitably create conditions that would violate human rights or international law; shortly thereafter all hopeful dialogue would end taking both countries back to the status quo. In August 1975, the U.S. modified the trade embargo to allow U.S. subsidiaries in third countries to trade with Cuba. Months later, Cuba responded by sending combat troops to Angola and as a result, President Ford declared that Cuba involvement in Angola ended any effort to improve relations. In December 1984, the U.S. and Cuba concluded a migration pact and Cuba agreed to take back the *Marielitos* (the boatlift). By May 1985, Castro unilaterally suspended the 1984 U.S.-Cuban immigration agreement and again talks to normalize relations are thwarted. Finally, in October 1995, President Clinton announced measures to expand contact between U.S. and Cuba, to allow U.S. NGOs to fund projects in Cuba, and to provide AID funding to U.S. NGOs for Cuba related projects. The *Councilio Cubano* was formed to organize human rights conferences for Cuba and to help economic conditions, but Cuba denied the legality of *Councilio* and Castro ordered a crackdown across the island. Members were arrested and harassed. During the same time period, Cuban MIGs shot down two civilian aircraft in international airspace killing three U.S. citizens and one Cuban resident of the U.S. President Clinton signed the Liberty and Democratic (Libertad) Act enacting

penalties for: foreign companies doing business with Cuba; permitting U.S. citizens to sue foreign investors who make use of American owned property seized by Cuba, and denying entry into U.S. for such foreign investors.

During the 1990s, there were several bills passed into law tightening the restrictions of the embargo. The 1992 Cuban Democracy Act (CDA), under President George Bush directed that foreign ships could not enter any U.S. ports if they had been in Cuban waters during the previous six months. It also made it illegal for foreign subsidiaries of U.S. companies to do business with Cuba.<sup>25</sup> But at the same time, the administration was willing to provide assistance to the Cuban people while maintaining diplomatic and economic pressure on Castro's regime. The CDA had provisions allowing interaction with Cuban residents, and in 1993, the CDA was used to help with expanded phone service, and permitted medicine and medical supplies to be exported to Cuba.<sup>26</sup> But once again, just as the administration was trying to reach out to Cuba, another event soured the progress. In February 1996, Cuban fighter jets shot down two private planes owned by a U.S.-based group of Cuban exiles named Brothers to the Rescue, a group aimed at providing aid to citizens of Cuba. Three U.S. citizens and a U.S. resident were killed.<sup>27</sup> The U.S. responded in March of 1996 by drafting the Cuba Liberty and Democratic Solidarity Act (Libertad Act) or the Helms-Burton Act, after its sponsors Senators Jesse Helms and Dan Burton. It was signed into law by President Bill Clinton the same month. This Act codified the embargo; Congress now had to approve any lifting of the embargo, and provisions of the law required that Cuba must have a new government and that neither Castro or his brother, Defense Minister Raul Castro Ruz could be in control. In order to be considered a transition government, Cuba had to release all political prisoners, schedule free elections, establish an independent court system, and allow for a free press.<sup>28</sup>

A State Department information paper released in 1998 reiterated President Clinton's position: "The fundamental goal of United States policy toward Cuba is to promote a peaceful transition to a stable, democratic form of government and respect for human rights. Our policy has two fundamental components: maintaining pressure on the Cuban Government for change through the embargo while providing humanitarian assistance to the Cuban people, and working to aid the development of civil society in the country."<sup>29</sup> In February 1998, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright summed up the strong feelings toward Cuba and support for sanctions when she stated, "The policy of the United States is clear. We want a peaceful transition to democracy in Cuba. It is that simple. It is that unshakeable. And towards that goal, we will never compromise our principles, nor cease our efforts."<sup>30</sup>

## CURRENT (2001-2003)

President George W. Bush announced his initiative for Cuba in May 2002. It called on the Cuban government to undertake political and economic reforms and to conduct free and fair elections for the National Assembly in the following years. It challenged the Cuban government to open its economy, allow independent trade unions, and end discriminatory practices against Cuban workers. The initiatives also included tougher inspections and enforcements of American travel and shipments to Cuba; improving the immigration process to allow for a safer and more orderly process; and creating a new Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba to help assist the U.S. in providing effective assistance to a free Cuba. This committee would be co-chaired by Secretary of State Colin Powell and HUD Secretary Mel Martinez. Finally, it asserted that if the Cuban government would take these concrete steps toward democracy, President Bush would work with the United States Congress to ease the ban on trade and travel between the United States and Cuba. It further stated: "The United States has long maintained that the Cuban government must move to a democracy that fully respects the human rights of its people. This will remain the Administration's policy."<sup>31</sup>

Since 1960, U.S. policy toward Cuba has been one of isolation through changing but comprehensive economic sanctions both from the U.S. and from other countries. The objectives for Cuba based on Cold War strategies were modified after the Soviet Union collapsed. However, the justifications for the continued isolation of Cuba through 43-year-old sanctions are now being questioned. The last UN vote was 167-3 against. The United States remains the only country applying sanctions.

## OPTIONS

### MAINTAIN STATUS QUO

The goal of driving Castro from power failed throughout the Cold war and afterwards. Analysts have identified three main reasons for the failure of the sanctions to lead to the desired outcome: Cuba was able to circumvent the embargo by developing ties with the Soviet Union; Castro turned the sanctions into a successful information campaign to rally national support; and the goal of overthrowing Castro by economic sanctions alone proved too difficult to achieve. Working against unilateral sanctions, Cuba easily bypassed U.S. intentions by developing its ties with the Soviet Union, and developing trade with other states. Since the U.S. was responsible for over 60% of the exports from Cuba, U.S. policymakers assessed that America was the only store in town, and that U.S. sanctions would bring Cuba to her knees. But Cuba turned to the Soviet Union and others; Canada, Japan, Mexico and others never fully complied

with the sanctions. According to Donna Kaplowitz, Professor and President of Cuba Research Associates, "Even subsidiaries of U.S. corporations in third countries capitalized on the attractive Cuban market between 1975 and 1992 when such trade was permitted."<sup>32</sup> This prompted Congress to pass the Cuban Democracy Act in Oct 1992 prohibiting such activities.

Castro will continue to rebuke overtures of help from the U.S. because accepting help would prove his revolution was a failure and damage him politically. In an interview given in October 1992 To Isabel Pisano of the Rome L'ESPRESSO, Castro stated, "I am fighting the Yanks, the imperialists, hegemony, and overbearing arrogance.....Europe cannot allow Cuba to be turned into a new Puerto Rico, a new Miami. Cuba has a historic past and much, much greatness."<sup>33</sup> Maintaining the status quo on economic sanctions will reap negative results and the loss of economic opportunity for both countries. Based on testimony during a September 2003 Congressional Finance Committee hearing, Under Secretary of State Al Larsen stated, "The International Trade Commission has estimated that, in the absence of sanctions, U.S. exports to Cuba could grow to more than \$1 billion. Meat exports from the U.S. could be as much as \$76 million, wheat exports \$52 million."<sup>34</sup> The market potential is remarkable and the U.S. has lost sight of this potential. With U.S. willingness to deal with other countries that violate conditions we set for Cuba, and the decision for the U.S. to pass up this economic opportunity can lead one to logically conclude that this may be a personal issue toward Castro, and fear of political fallout from the Cuban-American lobby for showing any positive gestures toward his regime.

Castro can continue to convince the Cuban people that the U.S. is to blame for all the ills the country is suffering, and it will keep him elevated as a leader who has stood against the U.S. and defied any "imperialistic" intervention. In another interview discussing sanctions, he stated, "It is an unfair, harsh, cruel blockade, which includes medicines and foodstuffs. It was imposed 35 years ago. It is one of the longest blockades in history, and the most unjustified of all."<sup>35</sup>

Based on current policies, the U.S. cannot expect that Castro will reverse his position and comply with the stated criteria to have the sanctions lifted. Castro would never accept open and democratic elections, or treating the entire Cuban population with equality and dignity, or independent trade unions, or the move towards a more capitalistic economy. Over the years, Castro has rebuked every overture offered by the United States. It does not serve him politically, nor does it serve his control over the Cuban population.

In a 1994 interview, a reporter stated to Castro, "The United States wants your head." Castro replied, "I give it to them. My head for Cuba's independence. My head for the revolution. My head for socialism."<sup>36</sup> Castro fears any intervention from the United States

based on the troubled U.S.-Cuban relationship, and the United States' demands regarding how Cuba should be governed. Castro has stood behind this principle since 1959, and 43 years of sanctions have not persuaded him to think or act any differently.

By maintaining the status quo, the U.S. eliminates its ability to take the lead and develop the economic conditions on U.S. terms. By maintaining our current course, we allow other countries to take advantage and leverage this advantage to develop ties that could thwart U.S. goals. China and Russia certainly have the motive and the means to undercut the U.S. in this area. The U.S. has been accused of maintaining double standards with our policies toward Cuba. The current demands required for Cuba to meet in order to reverse the sanctions revolve around human rights, free elections, free trade and a democratic society. But the U.S. has dealt with Vietnam, China, North Korea, Indonesia and even Russia when these countries did not completely meet all the criteria we were demanding from Castro. From 1966-1998 the U.S. supported President Mohamed Suharto and provided economic aid even without democratic elections.<sup>37</sup> Even Mexico, although not as adversarial as Cuba, has not been an ideal neighbor with its illegal immigration, drug trafficking and border problems that pose just as big of a threat to the U.S. as anything Cuba has done. But we have not imposed sanctions on Mexico for 40 years. In a report to the Armed Forces Services Committee in February 2000, 'Military Threats and Security; Challenges Through 2015', Vice Admiral Thomas Wilson, Director of the Defense Intelligence Agency did not even mention Cuba.<sup>38</sup>

#### LIMITED ENGAGEMENT (PARTIAL LIFT OF SANCTIONS)

In contrast to maintaining the status quo, this course of action would demonstrate to the world U.S. willingness to facilitate better relations and bring Cuba into the Western Hemisphere mainstream, and it would go a long way toward improving U.S. credibility within the UN. In 1993 the UN voted 88-4 condemning the embargo, and the last vote was 167-3 against. The U.S. is the only country imposing any sanctions against Cuba.

To begin lifting sanctions in a piecemeal fashion over extended periods will reap similar results as maintaining the status quo. Castro has clearly demonstrated his unwillingness to discuss any overtures by the U.S. to bring about any substantive changes and normalizing relations with the U.S.; nor is he willing to meet any of the demands for lifting the sanctions. It is clear by his speeches and interviews, Castro is deeply committed today as he was in 1959 to keeping Cuba free of any and all "imperialistic" intervention. In an interview conducted in 1994 Castro reiterated the conditions necessary for the normalization of ties with the United States:

First of all, for the blockade to end.....Second, for the United States to resign itself to the fact that Cuba is an independent, sovereign country. Third, respect our people's right to choose the political, social, and economic system they believe most fair. These are the three essential factors. We do not have anything against the United States. We have not blockaded the United States. We do not want to change the U.S. social system; we do not seek to establish socialism in the United States.....we are therefore not trying to rule the United States, nor diminish its independence one iota. It is not that we have a problem with the United States. It is the United States has a problem with us.<sup>39</sup>

Castro's hold on power would be threatened and he stands to potentially lose any hold on Cuba and the rhetorical and psychological power of his stance as a "David" against the U.S. "Goliath." Additionally, Castro would not want to be perceived by his people or the world as giving in to Washington. History has shown over the last 40 years negotiations that resulted in positive gains were later retracted because of Castro's negative actions, and it could be argued that it was because he feared losing his domestic leverage derived from demonization of the U.S. Partial lifting of the embargo coupled with settlements of provisions in the Libertad Act would call for political suicide for the Revolution and Castro would avoid this at all costs.

#### TOTAL ENGAGEMENT (COMPLETE LIFT OF EMBARGO)

To lift the embargo in total unilaterally would accomplish several goals: it would allow Cuba to see herself as a giant killer and victor in the 50 year long battle with America; it would deny Castro the initiative and help eliminate any recourse he would have to sabotage any prolonged negotiations; it would deny Castro and the Cuban people the ability to blame the U.S. as the reason for its sad economic state and sub-standard conditions; and it would begin to bring Cuba into the global market. The sanctions have been a great propaganda tool used very effectively by Castro. Although Castro could still continue to be disruptive, he would in essence lose the conditions by which he has been so successful in his manipulation. By having the imperialistic superpower to the north continue its choke hold on the tiny island, Castro can continue to fuel the flames of his revolution and nationalism to thwart the savage aggression.

By eliminating the sanctions completely, the U.S. would negate Castro's decades-long propaganda campaign that has been so effective in controlling his people, maintaining the status of his revolution and earning him "respect" for standing alone against the U.S. By allowing travel to Cuba, the U.S. would allow Cuban citizens to have more exposure, better understanding, and possibly an increased demand for democratic policies and free market enterprise. This would also place the burden of responsibility for Cuba's future squarely on Castro's shoulders. Blame would thus be removed from the United States. And with President Bush, this is more than just a political or economic issue. It is one of principle as well which

would be hard to argue in light of the events occurring on 11 September 2001. Commenting on the long standing economic sanctions in May 2002, President Bush stated:

The sanctions the United States enforces against the Castro regime are not just a policy tool, but a moral statement. It is wrong to prop up a regime that routinely stifles all the freedoms that make us human. The United States stands opposed to such tyranny and will oppose any attempt to weaken sanctions against the Castro regime until it respects the basic human rights of its citizens, frees political prisoners, holds democratic free elections, and allows free speech.<sup>40</sup>

Eliminating sanctions completely would not by any means guarantee democracy or human rights improvements in Cuba, but it can certainly be stated that these sanctions over the past half century have failed to accomplish the same. Nor can we expect that by tightening the sanctions we achieve anything other than an increase in the suffering of the Cuban population. In contrast, we have offered assistance to other countries under similar conditions. Nixon did it with Mao; Carter worked with the Shah of Iran; Reagan supported Saddam Hussein in his fight against Iran; Clinton did it with North Korea and China to the tune of Most Favored Nation status and a \$60 billion annual trade surplus.<sup>41</sup>

#### RISKS

Domestic politics can dictate foreign policies. And the influence of domestic politics is strong with respect to Cuba.<sup>42</sup> The Cuban American National Foundation (CANF) is an anti-Castro organization founded in 1981 with the sole purpose of being the voice for Cuban-Americans supporting a continued hard line stance against Castro's regime. For politicians both in Congress and the White House to discuss action running counter to CANF's agenda could be politically damaging. The CANF has donated over \$27 million into the American political system and has been influential in national legislative affairs throughout the 1990s. CANF supported Senator Robert Torricelli (Dem-NJ) with donations of over \$120,000. The CANF was instrumental in stopping Congressional efforts to shut down Radio Marti in 1997. Even though polls show that CANF is not the majority voice among Cuban-Americans and does not represent American domestic views as a whole, it is nonetheless a powerful lobby that keeps government focus on the issues even when mainstream American does not.<sup>43</sup> To argue a soft position toward Castro could lead to being labeled a communist sympathizer. This argument would be hard to counter since a communist is still in power. Politicians could risk a great deal when they bring forth discussions about a change in attitude and policy toward Castro. This is a policy failure and one that requires a radically different approach.

## RECOMMENDATION

A change in U.S. policy is long overdue. Cuba is no longer trying to export its revolution and it can certainly be said that Castro poses no economic or military threat to the U.S. In 1997 and 2000, the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) reported Cuba was not a threat. Since 1989, Cuba has cut its military budget in half. By totally lifting sanctions and opening complete trade and travel with Cuba, we will demonstrate a positive willingness to integrate Cuba into the family of nations within the Western Hemisphere. Castro would no longer be able to expound the relevance of the revolution as necessary to counter what he claims are the aggressive, imperialistic aims of the U.S., and as a means of countering the sanctions. This would create the conditions we seek to accomplish with our national policy of spreading values and democratic ideals. Kenneth Maxwell, the Director of the Council on Foreign Relations' Latin American Program, argues that, "The embargo has failed and that major changes in U.S. policy are needed-not simply 'tinkering at the edges.' I have always believed that openness is the best policy, and that contact, not ostracism, is a greater threat to dictatorships, be they of the left or the right."<sup>44</sup> Even President Bush gave evidence that he believes in the same principle when he stated in a speech he gave October 2003:

We continue to break the information embargo that the Cuban government has imposed on its people for a half a century. Repressive governments fear the truth, and so we're increasing the amount and expanding the distribution of printed material to Cuba, of internet-based information inside of Cuba, and of AM-FM and short wave radios for Cubans. We know that the enemy of every tyrant is the truth. We're determined to bring the truth to the people who suffer under Fidel Castro<sup>45</sup>

Both Cuba and the U.S. have a great deal to gain by tearing down the barriers to normalized relations. There would be some political risk. CANF is not among the majority, although a powerful lobby that could influence voters, and staunch supporters of the embargo in Congress would use this as leverage to give the administration a black-eye. But the political risk would be minimal compared to the economic, diplomatic, and global gains. As James Glassman, a Fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, writes, "If Americans truly believe in economic freedom, how can we perpetuate a policy that not only flouts that principle but which hasn't worked anyway? How can the U.S. say that capitalism and free trade are worthy goals, yet every day limit Cubans' ability to participate in such activity?"<sup>46</sup>

## **CONCLUSION**

The 43 year stand-off between the U.S. and Cuba has not been a success for either side. The sanctions have failed to accomplish any of the stated objectives for the U.S., and the Cuban people have suffered poor living conditions and a repressive government. To continue the current policy is futile and it appears that for the near term, the U.S. is content on waiting for Castro to die. The struggle of wills has favored Castro and only by lifting the sanctions will we be able to completely disarm his ability to wage any type of information operations against the U.S. and to keep his revolution alive. We cannot expect these sanctions to increase the economic conditions to any point where Castro would step down, nor can we expect the Cuban people to finally rise up and revolt to establish a democratic form of government. Our policy should begin to focus on restoring better living conditions and a quality of life to the Cuban people, and opening up trade and travel between the two countries. Former President Carter in a speech to Cubans on his historic visit to Cuba in May 2002 said: "Our nations have been trapped in a destructive state of belligerence for 42 years. And it is time for us to change our relationship and the way we think and talk about each other."<sup>47</sup>

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## ENDNOTES

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<sup>2</sup> "U.S. – Cuba Relations, Issues and Controversies," March 30, 2000, FACTS.com; available from <http://www.2facts.com>; Internet; accessed 28 October 2003.

<sup>3</sup> Peter Schwab, *Cuba, Confronting the United States Embargo* (New York, St Martin's Griffin, 1999), vii.

<sup>4</sup> Philip Bonsal, *Cuba, Castro and the United States* (London, University of Pittsburgh Press, 1971), 4.

<sup>5</sup> Alan West, *Tropics of History: Cuba Imagined* (Westport, Bergin & Garvey, 1997), 191-192.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 192

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 192

<sup>8</sup> James Suchlicki, *Cuba From Columbus to Castro* (New York, International Defense Publishers, Pergamon-Brassey, 1986), 133.

<sup>9</sup> West, 192

<sup>10</sup> Suchlicki, 135.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 135.

<sup>12</sup> Leslie Bethell, *Cuba a Short History* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993), 89.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 95.

<sup>14</sup> Bonsal, 181.

<sup>15</sup> Bonsal, 186.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 186-187.

<sup>17</sup> Suchlicki, 172.

<sup>18</sup> Karl Pelverts, *Cuban Economic Sanctions: The Time Has Come to Lift Then and Move Forward*. (Strategy Research Project. Carlisle Barracks: U.S. Army War College, 16 March 2002), 2.

<sup>19</sup> "Chronology of Cuban Affairs 1958-1998," U.S. Department of State; available from <http://www.usembassy.state.gov/havana>; Internet; accessed 23 September 2003

<sup>20</sup> "U.S. – Cuba Relations," November 15, 1999, U.S. Department of State; available from <http://www.state.gov/www/regions/wha/cuba>; Internet; accessed 18 September 2003.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Kaplowitz, 3.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> "U.S. – Cuba Relations," November 15, 1999.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> "Administration Decries House Move to Ease Cuba Trade Embargo," September 10 2003, U.S. Department of State; available from <http://usinfo.state.gov/utis/printpage.html>; Internet; accessed 23 September 2003.

<sup>32</sup> Kaplowitz, .

<sup>33</sup> "Castro on Economic Situation, U.S. Elections," October 11 1992, Rome L'ESPRESSO, interview by Isabel Pisano; available from <http://lanic.utexas.edu/la/cb/cuba/castro/1992/19921011>; Internet; accessed 22 November 2003.

<sup>34</sup> "U.S.-Cuba Economic Relations", Congressional Finance Committee Hearings, 4 September 2003; Available from [http://web.lexis.nexis.com/universe/document?\\_m](http://web.lexis.nexis.com/universe/document?_m); Internet; accessed 21 November 2003.

<sup>35</sup> "Castro Views U.S. Blockade, South Africa," Daily Report, 8 May 1994. Interview by Caribbean Broadcasting Union reporter Sharon Marshall. Available from <http://lanic.utexas.edu/la/cb/cuba/castro/1994/19940508>; Internet; accessed 22 November 2003.

<sup>36</sup> "Castro Views Blockade, Immigration Accord", EL NACIONAL, 25 September 1994, interviewed by special correspondent Manuel Abrizo. Available from <http://lanic.utexas.edu/la/cb/cuba/castro/1994/19940927>; Internet; accessed 22 November 2003.

<sup>37</sup> Schwab, 166.

<sup>38</sup> Reinaldo Velez, *U.S.-Cuban Relations: A Quest for Change*. (Strategy research Project. Carlisle Barracks: US Army War College, 5 March 2001), 17.

<sup>39</sup> "Castro Views U.S. Blockade, South Africa," Daily Report, 8 May 1994.

<sup>40</sup> "Administration Decries House Move to Ease Cuba Trade Embargo."

<sup>41</sup> Frank Scofi, "Position Paper on the United States Trade Embargo Against Cuba." The Green Party of New Orleans, 2 May 1999. Available from <http://www.gpnj.org/cuba.htm>; Internet; accessed 22 November 2003.

<sup>42</sup> David Mitchell, *Sanctions Against Cuba: A Flawed U.S. Policy* (Strategy Research Project. Carlisle barracks: U.S. Army War College, 4 April 2000), 10.

<sup>43</sup> Kaplowitz, 205

<sup>44</sup> U.S.-Cuba Relations, 30 March 2000.

<sup>45</sup> Bush Steps up Pressure on Cuba: Cuba must Change, 11 October 2003.

<sup>46</sup> CUBA-Cuba Relations, 30 March 2000.

<sup>47</sup> "Former CUBA President Carter Makes Historic Trip to Cuba." World News Digest, 16 May 2002. Available from <http://www.2facts.com/stories/index/2002250100.asp>, Internet; accessed on 28 October 2003.



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