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MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

**CUBA IN TRANSITION: COMMUNISM VS CHARISMA
“WHO WILL EMERGE AS CUBA’S NEXT LEADER”**



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| Abstract For the past 40 years Cuba has maintained a socialist society firmly engrained in ideological beliefs. The beliefs of communism has shaped the hearts and minds of thousands of cubans. This paper provides a future perspective on Cuba's transition as well as identifies potential actors who will emerge as potential leaders once Fidel Castro is gone. Additionally, the paper will propose that Communism may not survive once Fidel is gone. In fact, the paper proposes that it has been Fidel's Charisma that has allowed him to remain in power and not communism. | | |
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Title: Cuba in Transition: Communism Vs Charisma “Who will emerge as Cuba’s next Leader”

Author: Major Antonio Colmenares, U.S. Marine Corps

Thesis: This treatise proposes that it has been Fidel Castro’s Charisma that has allowed him to remain in power over the past forty years. It also proposes that communism may not stand once Fidel is gone from the scene. And finally, it proposes who the likely successors will be once Fidel is gone.

Discussion: Fidel Castro has been in power for almost half century. He is the last remaining dictator in the Western Hemisphere. He has continued to be a thorn in the side of the United States and has boldly defied any attempts to overthrow his government. Has it been the Communist Institution that has allowed him to remain in power? Or has been something else much different and highly unique? The paper examines recent Cuban history and it proposes that it has been Fidel Castro’s Charisma (Caudillo) that has allowed him to remain in power. The evidence provided to support this proposal was the collapse of communism and the Soviet Bloc in the late 1980’s. If communism and the Soviet Union were the driving force behind Fidel’s power base then by now we would have seen the collapse of Cuba. However, Cuba survived the end of communism and the drying up of support from the Soviet Union. By 1994, Cuba had hit rock bottom and by late 1995 it had started a slow rise in economic growth. In fact, it has enjoyed a modest 2 percent growth since 1995. Instead of communism collapsing or imploding within Cuba, it has actually maintained its party hard lined tactics. Instead of Fidel collapsing under the tremendous economic pressure, he was able to revitalize a once stalled revolution, by calling for greater sacrifices and by redirecting the country’s ills toward the United States. After establishing that it has been Fidel’s Charisma and not communism that has sustained him in power, the paper looks at likely actors that will emerge as Cuba’s next leader.

Conclusions: In the final analysis, it was proposed that charisma, and not communism has allowed Fidel Castro to remain in power for almost half a century. The likely actors that emerged as potential leaders for Cuba were the Military, the Communist Party, the Domestic opposition and the Miami Exile community. It was also determined that the military was inherently strong, the communist party inherently weak, the domestic opposition of an undetermined strength and the Miami exiles in an unlikely position given the amount of time that they have spent out of Cuba. It was determined that Fidel Castor’s brother Raul would be the most likely actor to assume the leadership of Cuba. Aided by the military and possibly would only be in that position for a short time given his age and lack of charisma.

Chapter 1

Understanding the Man and the Ideology

The Essence of a Dictator

Fidel Castro has held power in Cuba for over four decades, a period of rule that makes him one of the world's most durable leaders. During that long period, he has never faced a serious internal disturbance or external threat. Unlike most strongman rulers of the contemporary era, he has through much of that period been something of a cult figure, even a sex symbol outside of his own country and perhaps inside as well.¹ It is never easy to judge what people living under authoritarian rule think of their leader, since what they are compelled to say to foreigners (or even to one another) may be very different from what they really think. But, as we shall see, there is substantial reason to think that Castro has enjoyed a broad base of genuine support within his own country. Speaking with a few Cubans who had recently arrived from Cuba for a short stay in the U.S. to visit family members, it was apparent that each one of them had a deep respect and overwhelming support for Fidel Castro. All of these Cubans grew up under Castro's rule and each believed that it is the U.S. who should be blamed for Cuba's problems. The visible Cuban opposition to Castro has been confined almost exclusively to the U.S. and primarily to the city of Miami, Florida. That opposition has failed to create any significant impact within Cuba itself, and it is

¹ Peter Bourne, Fidel: A Biography of Fidel Castro. (New York: Dodd Mead & Co., 1986), p. 201.

open to question after a generation of being in exile whether the opposition has any real contact with the realities of present day Cuba.²

With the coming of the 1990s, however, Castro and the political economic system he has created in Cuba were faced with an unprecedented challenge. The challenge has been posed by the progressive disintegration of the Soviet Bloc followed by the collapse of communism within the former Soviet Union. This challenge has had economic, political, military, and ideological (spiritual) dimensions. In the face of this challenge, the question of the fate of Castro and of Castro's Cuba has acquired a new immediacy. We must begin to ask whether Castro can survive the current crisis. And, whether he does or not, will communism survive? To answer these questions, I will argue that it is Fidel Castro's Caudillo (Charisma) and not the influence of communism that will form the basis for future change. If that is the case, then the most important question that must be answered is-- "Who will lead Cuba into the 21st Century?"

What Lies at the Heart of Cuba?

To answer what lies at the heart of Cuba, we must first ask, what is the likely resolution of the current crisis facing Cuba (a crisis triggered by the fall of Soviet communism)? Then we must ask, has the point of greatest danger already passed as communism in the Soviet bloc was swept away? Or will the crisis continue to grow in intensity? Finally, what is the nature of Fidel Castro's hold on

² Nestor T. Carbonell, And the Russians Stayed. (New York: William Morrow 1989), p. 306.

Cuba? Is the idea of communism central to Castro's political standing? If so, then he must be gravely weakened by the collapse of communism essentially everywhere outside of East Asia. If, however, Castro is fundamentally a charismatic personal leader, a traditional Latin American caudillo in communist garb, then the fall of communism as an ideology and a world power bloc may not threaten him in a truly fundamental way.

Even if Castro is not toppled, America is still left with the question of the fate of post-Castro Cuba, since he must eventually pass from the world stage. In answering this question, we will find that the "weighting" of relative advantages and disadvantages is reversed from those used in considering the fate of Castro's rule in the nearer term. That is, if the political system is foremost communist, then there is a substantial possibility that the Communist Party and its related institutions (particularly the military and the internal security and police system) can sustain themselves even after Castro is gone. If, on the other hand, the essence of the Cuban system is the charismatic personality of Castro, the prospect of outliving him is much reduced. The death or incapacitation of a charismatic leader is always a time of crisis, particularly when it was the leader's own personality that was central to the success of his rule.

The central argument of this paper can be stated as follows. First, we will suggest that Fidel Castro is a caudillo first and foremost and a communist only second. This is not to say that Castro is not a sincere communist or that the communist system is a sham. Neither appears to be the case. It will be argued, however, that the basis of Castro's hold on the Cuban people is personal and emotional and not primarily rooted in the ideology of communism. "Castroism"

has been fairly characterized as “more ‘machista-leninista’ than traditional” communism.³ Therefore, the potential fall of international communism outside of East Asia (China, Vietnam, and North Korea) does not pose Castro’s loyalists with any truly fundamental crisis of spiritual confidence. Their emotional investment is primarily in El Lider himself, not in his ideology.⁴

A second argument made in this paper is that the period of maximum potential instability in Cuba has, at least in the short run, already passed. The Cuban people and the Castroite elite have already assimilated the reality of communism’s fall, and they have already endured the cutoff of support and supplies.

The final argument will address the likely actors who could potentially assume the mantle of leadership after Fidel Castro is gone. These actors vary significantly in age and experience, but are all either part of the military establishment or of the communist party elite.

Communism in Crisis

The nature of the economic, political, military, and ideological threats posed to Castro, and to Castroite rule by the fall of Soviet communism is essentially straightforward.⁵ The Soviet contribution in the form of direct aid and less directly in the form of guaranteed markets for Cuban products, combined with access at below market prices to Soviet oil and industrial products, accounted for a

³ Georges Fauriol and Eva Loser Eds. Cuba: the International Dimension. (New York: transaction Books 1990), p. 9.

⁴ “El Lider,” term used in Latin America to describe the leader of a country or institution.

⁵ Castroite, A term used to refer the system under Castro’s rule.

substantial portion of Cuba's economy. In the past few years, Russian-Cuban trade has fallen off dramatically from \$8.7 billion in 1989 to an estimated \$500 million by 1998.⁶ The removal of this economic umbilical had a direct and visible impact on the Cuban people in the form of tightened rationing, a severe shortage of fuels and industrial supplies, and a sharp overall reduction in Cuba's standard of living.⁷

The political and military dangers are equally straightforward. Cuba's ties with the Soviet Union made it a member of a major global power bloc and gave it a protective umbrella that sheltered it from any latent threat posed by the United States. In the past, Cuba could be assured of the automatic diplomatic support of the Soviet Union, its Eastern European subject allies, and other nations in the Soviet orbit (e.g., Vietnam). The presence of Soviet troops on Cuban soil, even if only a token force, was an effective "tripwire" serving the same purpose as U.S. troops in West Berlin. Additionally, the United States could not contemplate an outright military invasion of Cuba without breaking the Cuban Missile Crisis Agreement, which guaranteed to the Soviets that the U.S. would not invade Cuba, for as long as they kept ballistic missiles out of Cuba. The threat of ballistic missiles being placed in Cuba has essentially disappeared with the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The disappearance of the Soviet bloc and then of the Soviet Union itself has stripped Cuba of these political and military shields. The post-communist governments of the former Soviet bloc are indifferent at best to Castro and

⁶ Robert S. Gelbard, "The Cuban Democracy Act and U.S. Policy toward Cuba." U.S. Department of State Dispatch #3, 17 August 1992, p. 658.

⁷ Pedro Roig, "Cry Freedom," The Economist, 325, 26 December 1992-8 January 1993, p. 53.

Cuba's fate.⁸ In the summer of 1992, Boris Yeltsin announced that the remaining Russian troops would be removed from Cuba.⁹ Even if conservative former hardliners were to return to power in Russia, there is a great probability that they would find themselves fully preoccupied with asserting themselves at home. They would have neither the time, money, nor the inclination to make commitments or concessions with Cuba.

Therefore, in the starkest terms, Castro's Cuba has been thrown to its own resources. If, for whatever reason, the U.S. were to launch a military invasion of Cuba, it is implausible that any third power would intervene. If an internal rebellion were to break out, the government would have only its own resources, while the rebels would almost certainly be able to count on assistance from the Florida based Cuban community, and most likely on the direct support of the United States.

The fall of Soviet communism has also put Castro and Castro's Cuba in a dilemma, facing an ideological (spiritual) crisis. When Castro came to power and adopted a communist system in the late 1950s and early 1960s, it was relatively easy to believe that communism was in fact the way of the future. The Soviet economy was growing at a swift rate and overtaking the U.S. economy in such traditional measures of industrial might as steel production. Soviet space triumphs also painted a vivid picture of a communist lead in high technology. What is now called the Third World was breaking free of Western colonial domination, and much of it was adopting socialist ideologies.

⁸ Michael H Eriman and John M. Kirk Eds, Cuban Foreign Policy Confronts a New International Order, (Boulder: Lynne Reinner 1991), p. 12.

⁹ Marlin Fitzwater, "Russian Troop Withdrawal from Cuba." [Official Statement]. U.S. Department of State Dispatch #3 21 September 1992, p. 720.

Although communism in Cuba failed to provide the promised miracles, there were still grounds for confidence in the 1970s. Health care and education were greatly improved over pre-Castro conditions, at least for the mass of the people. Individual and property taxes were repealed. And property, although confiscated by the government, was divided up and given as land grants to those who agreed to use it under the conditions imposed by the government (mainly to produce tobacco and sugar cane). Abroad, the capitalist West and the United States in particular were wracked by violent protest in the 1960s and inflation, oil “shocks” and other economic difficulties in the 1970s. Within Latin America, the early attempts of Castro to “export revolution” came to a dismal end with the capture and death of Che Guevara. But as late as 1979, with the successful Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua, and the growing civil war in El Salvador it might be suggested that revolutionary conditions were emerging elsewhere in Latin America.

The late 1980s, in contrast, had supplanted the hope of progress by the reality of retrogression. Rather than delivering a better life for Cubans, a new generation faced calls for greater sacrifice. But by then, it might well seem to have been a sacrifice for a losing or lost cause. Soviet and Eastern European communism had collapsed, not in the face of attack from the West (from which it might be imagined to rally and recover) but from the weight of its own internal contradictions and inadequacies.

This might, for a Cuban communist, pose not merely the intellectual challenge of arguing why the “way of the future” was receding instead of advancing, but also, the emotional (and as we may suggest, ideological) challenge of sustaining

a belief in a worldview that was falling rapidly. It is not impossible to meet this challenge with renewed belief. The adherents of many religious movements have been unswerved from their faith by the failure of their prophets' expectations to be fulfilled. But faith in communism, a worldly, materialistic and historicism doctrine would seem to be peculiarly subject to being undermined by events.

For all of the reasons enumerated above, Cuban communism and the rule of Fidel Castro seemed to be facing an unprecedented threat in the early 1990s. Their foreign economic, political, and military support had been suddenly and unexpectedly removed. The historical communist movement of which they claimed to be a part and which they held to be inevitable was deferred to an uncertain future and at worst was revealed as an error or a sham. Speculation began to grow in the last years of the 1980s that Castro, once isolated, might prove more vulnerable than he had ever seemed in the past. It became possible to seriously imagine that he might fall. To borrow a phrase from aerodynamics, the period of maximum dynamic instability and greatest stress upon the Castroite system was probably reached between 1989, when the Soviet bloc in Eastern Europe broke apart, and 1991, when the coup against Mikhail Gorbachev failed. This is the period in which Soviet economic assistance was cut off, sending the heavily subsidized Cuban economy into a tailspin. It was also the period in which the potential for demoralization within the communist elite, as they saw their allies toppled with little effort to reverse the momentum, was at its greatest.

Conversely, this period was the potential "window of opportunity" for anti-Castro Cubans (both within and outside of Cuba to take action). If they were

going to capitalize on the potential for disaffection among the masses and demoralization among the elite, this was the time to do so. It is worth noting that euphoric anticipation was the implicit feeling among the Miami Cubans; a wave of near-hysteria swept through the community in 1990 in the belief that Castro's fall was imminent.¹⁰ Bumper stickers declared "First Daniel, Then Manuel, Next Fidel," referring to the successive falls of Daniel Ortega in Nicaragua and Manuel Noriega in Panama. Cuban exiles eagerly anticipated that Castro would be next.

Yet there was little sign of disaffection or demoralization in Cuba itself, nor of any attempt (planned or spontaneous), to foment or take advantage of the destabilized conditions. Castro and those around him responded to the economic challenge with belt-tightening measures. The political challenge was met with exhortations for further sacrifice and a call to struggle for "Socialism or Death," which became their official slogan.¹¹ To all outward appearances, the Cuban people have responded, if not with enthusiasm, then at least with resignation and acceptance. A relatively small number of individual Cubans continued to escape from the island, but there has been no sign of major resistance and relatively little sign of active resentment.

By now the Cuban economy and society seem to be adjusting. According to one expert on the Cuban economy, the point must soon come, if it has not already been reached, at which the Cuban economy will hit bottom.¹² Eventually, the Cuban economy will reach an equilibrium at which it can sustain itself without Soviet aid. At that point, the slide in Cuban living standards will cease. If things

¹⁰ Sandor Halebsky and John M. Kirk Eds. Transformation and Struggle: Cuba Faces the 1990's. (New York: Praeger 1990), p. 37-39.

¹¹ Halebsky and Kirk, (1990) p. 39.

¹² G H. Maybarduk, The State of the Cuban Economy. (Miami: University of Miami 1998-1999).

do not get better, at least they will no longer get worse. In fact, Figure 1 depicts that Cuba hit rock bottom in 1993 and since then has shown an average steady growth between 1.2 to 2.5 percent of its Gross Domestic

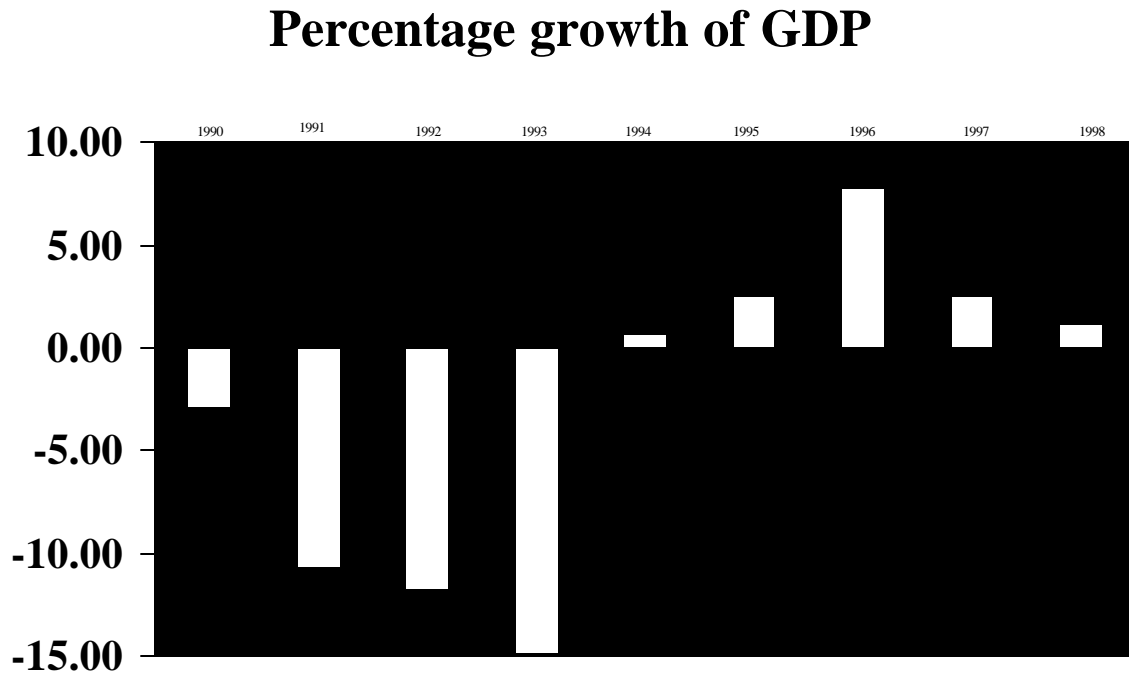


Figure 1, GDP 1990-1998

(Source: extrapolated from [The State of the Cuban Economy 1998-1999](#), by Gary H. Maybarduk)

Product (GDP). Therefore, there is strong reason to believe that Castro and the Castroite systems have weathered the crisis posed by the fall of the Soviet bloc. Barring some unforeseeable international development, it is difficult to see how any external event in the future could have a comparable disruptive impact. Nor, so long as Castro remains in good health, is it easy to foresee any internal development that would threaten him as much as the events of the late 1980's.

Chapter 2

The Latin Factor

Castro's Stage

In Latin American history, very few institutions have shown themselves able to transcend the cult of personalism and therefore preserve institutional continuity through successions. It is for this reason that Latin America has been the land of the coup. The only two institutions that have shown a high degree of stability were the Spanish monarchy and the Roman Catholic Church.

The chronic instability of post-independence Latin America stands in stark and striking contrast to the political quiescence of the region in the two and a half centuries between the end of the Conquest era and the outbreak of the independence movement. Through much of this period, Spanish rule in Latin America was upheld by no more than a few thousand regular troops, themselves of rather doubtful quality. A mere three thousand regulars, for example, held what became Mexico, as late as 1758.¹³ It is worth noting that this quiescence persisted in Cuba to a considerable degree for nearly a century beyond the end of Spanish rule on the mainland. By the late nineteenth century, Spanish governors and troops were contending in a guerilla war with an independence movement, but there is little sign that they would have been defeated and compelled to withdraw had it not been for U.S. intervention in the Spanish-

American War of 1898.

The other Latin American institution that has shown great cohesiveness and persistence is the Catholic Church. Since it has never held political power directly in its own right, it cannot be compared in this respect to the Spanish monarchy. However, it is possible and relevant to compare the hold of Catholicism on Latin American hearts and minds with the potential hold of communism.

It has been pointed out that one reason the Anglo-Americans tend to be largely indifferent to and somewhat contemptuous of Latin American traditions is that they cannot identify culturally with its “Catholic, corporate, organic, hierarchical, authoritarian, elitist, non-egalitarian and patrimonialist underpinnings.”¹⁴ But, except for Catholic, non-egalitarian, and to a lesser extent patrimonialist, all of these terms could be applied handily to the Marxist-Leninist ideal. Indeed, while Marxism-Leninism is egalitarian in principle, it certainly recognizes the “revolutionary vanguard” in practice.

This cultural organism, combined with its heritage of social and economic division, makes Latin America in some ways a “natural” for Marxism-Leninism. But Latin American communists seem never to have achieved the organizational impersonality that characterizes both the Catholic Church and successful communist movements in other parts of the world. Instead, Latin American communism has in large measure been typified by romantic but unsuccessful figures such as Che Guevara.

¹³ John J. Johnson, The Military and Society in Latin America, (Stanford: Stanford University Press 1964),

Fidel Castro Ruz



Born: August 13, 1926; Mayari, Cuba

Education: Graduated, Colegio Belen, Havana, 1945; PhD (law), University of Havana, 1950

Occupation: Lawyer, revolutionary leader

Family: Divorced, 1955; 7 children

Religion: Excommunicated Roman Catholic

Early Years: Practiced law, 1950-52; Led attack on Moncada Barracks, Santiago de Cuba, 1953; Captured, imprisoned, 1953-55. Exile in Mexico and United States, 1955-56; Returned to Cuba and led armed attacks against government of Fulgencio Batista, 1956-59; Forced Batista into exile, 1959.

Political Career: Prime minister, 1959-76; Head of State, Council of State President, Council of Ministries president, 1976-

Fidelismo

Castro himself fits this mode as a romantic figure, combining romanticism with considerable success. He has been characterized as the embodiment of the

p. 18.

¹⁴ Howard Wiarda, In Search of Policy, (Washington: American Enterprise Institute 1984), p. 22-23.

“revolutionary image.”¹⁵ He has an instantly recognizable popular image--a dashing figure clad in snappy fatigues and a cigar in his mouth (although he rarely smokes any more due to health concerns). Additionally, he boldly defies the powerful United States that lies a mere ninety miles from his shores.

Cults of personality have been constructed around other communist leaders. Examples such as Lenin, Stalin, Mao Zedong, and Ho Chi Minh, are all standard portraits of communist leaders, which most Americans probably recognize. But the conventional images of Lenin, Mao, and Ho at least carry the connotation of age. They are pictured as father figures or at least as schoolmaster figures. In sharp contrast, Fidel Castro, though now seventy-four, is enduringly frozen in the international public image as a relatively young man. Indeed, he long enjoyed a status as something of a male sex symbol.¹⁶ This is something that would be quite unimaginable of any other reigning communist leader.

In short, though there is nothing unusual about communist cults of personality, Castro's cult of personality is distinctly unusual by communist standards. We may perhaps better understand it by turning to traditional Latin American images. Here, we will recognize Castro much more readily. He is the embodiment in modern and leftist dress of the classic Latin American Man on Horseback.¹⁷ The unabashed visual masculinity symbols (the cigar, the fatigues), the sex appeal, the personal courage (whether in defying the United States or walking in public without visible regard to personal security), all are very much in accordance with traditional Latin concepts of the heroic personal leader.

¹⁵ William E. Rariff Eds., The Selling of Fidel Castro, (New Brunswick: Transaction Books 1987), p. 131-133.

¹⁶ Bourne, (1986) p. 201.

¹⁷ John Rothschild, Latin America Yesterday and Today, (New York: Praeger 1973), p. 158-161.

One of Castro's earliest inheritances was anti-Americanism. His father, a traditional conservative, evidently resented the United States for having "stolen" Cuba from Spain.¹⁸ As a child and adolescent, young Fidel lived in the section of Cuba most under the influence of the United Fruit Company and had personal experience with its often high handed manner.¹⁹

Later, Castro seems to have drifted among ideologies, the one fixed pattern being a dedication to radical, often violent change, combined with a persistent hostility toward the United States. As a high school student, he dabbled in Fascist activism. Later, in college he turned towards the study of Marxism. When he came to power in 1959, he was not yet clearly a communist, but "belonged to Cuba's vague populist political tradition."²⁰ However, many older Cubans believe that it was the unwillingness of the United States government to recognize Castro as a legitimate head of state, early in the revolution, that led him to embrace communism as an alternative to some other form of government.

Organizational Problems

The central role of Castro's personal charisma has had important institutional results, or rather resulted in the failure of important institutions to develop. "Bad organizational habits" were brought into the management of state enterprises, and former guerilla leaders who still tended to think in terms of their familiar and dramatic military experiences headed political departments.²¹ In particular, the

¹⁸ Bourne, (1986) p. 16.

¹⁹ Bourne, (1986) p. 20.

²⁰ Fauriol and Loser, (1990) p. 42.

²¹ Halebsky and Kirk, (1992) p. 78ff.

communist party organization and other institutions outside of the military never took full form.²²

More fundamentally, the central and personal role of Castro impeded the full development of a communist system. According to one scholar, “There is a fundamental disjunction between charismatic leadership and socialist polity.”²³ To institutionalize the system would be to render Castro less essential, something Castro would not accept nor permit.

Thus, Castroite Cuba has been marked by uncertainty. The early élan was largely dissolved by 1970, a disastrous year in which an over-ambitious goal of producing ten million tons of sugar fell short by nearly fifteen percent.²⁴ Other crises struck about the same time, notably the failure and death of **Che Guevara**, showing that Latin America was not after all ripe for revolution.



The charismatic figure of Castro was, however, able to survive and transcend these failures. By the 1980s, Cuba was moving in economic terms in a more liberal direction. But by 1985, well before any Gorbachev era reforms in the Soviet Union could have had an impact, the Cuban economy was facing a foreign exchange crisis.²⁵ Castro responded by swerving away from liberalization and toward renewed emphasis on state controlled programs, the same approach that had failed so notably in 1970.

In early 1993, Cuba held its first ever-parliamentary elections of the Castro era. Though they were one-candidate elections, they appear to have been genuinely secret ballots, and the results give some hint of the degree of support

²² Lockwood, (1990) p. 366-368.

²³ Lockwood, (1990) p. 371.

²⁴ Halebsky and Kirk, (1990) p. 39-40.

²⁵ Halebsky and Kirk, (1992) p. 15ff.

or disaffection towards the government. Nationwide, 7.2 percent of voters cast blank or spoiled ballots; this rose to 14.3 percent in Havana. About another four percent voted for one candidate only, leaving other “races” blank. This may suggest that ten or fifteen percent of Cubans are significantly disaffected and perhaps as many as a quarter in the Havana area. In the wake of the election, Castro announced that he “hoped” to retire within five years.²⁶ Of course, that would have meant that he would have retired in 1998. Only recently have indications surfaced of a possible transfer of power, as recent promotions and movements of high government officials may be a prelude to a major upcoming event. If this is the case, then let us examine who the likely actors may be.

The Cuban People

Given Fidel Castro’s background and predilections, it probably did not matter whether Castro “started out” a communist or not. His anti-Americanism, populist nationalism, and the availability of the Soviet Union as a potential ally and counterweight to the U.S. (and the only such potential ally and counterweight available) made it nearly inevitable that he would drift toward the communist orbit. By early 1961, of course, the fissure was complete and the U.S. and Cuba clashed in the ill-fated Bay of Pigs exile invasion.

There are many reasons why the Bay of Pigs operation failed, and its fate remains a matter of passionate disagreement. But one reason is surely the very fact that so many anti-Castro Cubans were in exile rather than at home where

²⁶ Roig, (1993) p. 54.

they might foment disaffection. It can be argued that Castro has implicitly understood that “permitting emigration is the fundamental equivalent of tranquillizing a disaffected people.”²⁷

Between 1959 and 1988, some one million Cubans left their homeland, nearly three-quarters of them settling in or around Miami.²⁸ Approximately a quarter million left in the first years between 1959 and the Cuban Missile Crisis of October 1962. An additional four hundred thousand left on twice-daily “freedom flights” between 1965 and 1973. Finally, about 125,000 left in the Mariel boatlift of 1980. The first and second waves of emigration were largely drawn from the upper and upper-middle classes. The “Marielitos” were more of a mixed group, and the few thousand common criminals that Castro included among them sullied their reputation.²⁹

On the one hand, this large loss of population, predominantly from the more educated segments of society, cost Castro’s Cuba a great part of the human resources it could have used in modernization. On the other hand, emigration was an effective “safety valve,” and the people who left were in large part those who would never have given a wholehearted contribution to the Castroite system. Even those among the exiles who intended to carry on guerilla warfare were placed in a situation where their motivation would tend to be swiftly sapped. A guerilla whose alternative to remaining in the bush is imprisonment or execution will soon become hardened to his new life. A guerilla whose alternative is a comfortable life in Miami is far likelier to gradually lose the will to fight.

After the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962, the prospect of direct U.S. military

²⁷ Fauriol and Loser, (1990) p. viii.

intervention against Castro's rule became minimal and Castro and his associates were faced with the task of reconstructing Cuba's economy and society. However, they found the military challenge much more exciting. "Armed struggle has remained fundamental to Castro's mystique."³⁰ We have already noted such personal characteristics as habitually appearing in military fatigues. Castro's "managerial" approach followed the same lines. "The Cuban military," we are told by a sympathetic observer, "is the focus of revolutionary leadership."³¹ Castro has kept the military in the forefront of his reconstruction plans. A sizeable portion of Cuba's \$16.9 billion GDP (about 6 percent) goes into keeping the Revolutionary Armed Forces (FAR) strong and relevant.

²⁸ Carbonell, (1989) p. 305-306.

²⁹ Carbonell, (1989) p. 305-306.

³⁰ Furiol and Loser, (1990) p.51.

³¹ Fred C. Judson, Cuba and the Revolutionary Myth, (Boulder: Westview Press 1984), p. 3.

Chapter 3

Succession of Power

Aside from all the other considerations listed in the preceding two chapters, Fidel Castro is no longer a young man. At seventy-four years of age, he might enjoy another five or ten years of vigorous health or, at least as likely, he could begin to fail physically and mentally within a few years. Certainly, one way or another, the end of Castro's reign is by now far closer than it's beginning. But Castro has proven to be both resilient and unswerving. He has withstood the collapse of communism outside of Cuba. And if anything, the uncertainty of communism elsewhere in the world has added fuel to his anti-American rhetoric, and has rejuvenated his stalled revolution. We can then conclude that communism in Cuba exists because of Castro, and not the obverse. The future of communism in Cuba then seems dubious at best without Fidel Castro.

Personalism

The argument that the heart of the Castroite system is based on the personality of Fidel Castro himself vice communist ideology has an obverse. The obverse is that once Castro passes from the scene, through either death or incapacitation, the future prospects of the Castroite system may possibly become extremely dubious. There is, as will be shown later, little sign that either

the Cuban system can sustain itself without a strong leader or of other strong personalities capable of filling Castro's shoes. In communist Cuba, it has been said, "after forty-one years, Fidel Castro is still Cuba's indispensable man."³²

Succession of national leadership is always a time of crisis for political systems. Even where the institution of hereditary rule has been established, history shows numerous instances when revolution has occurred. Regimes that have come into being under a charismatic revolutionary leader are particularly vulnerable during succession. The designated successor may fail to display the sort of charisma needed to retain the support of his predecessor's followers. Or, the founding leader may have cut down or blocked the rise of any strong potential successor on the grounds that such a person was also a potential challenger.

In the case of Castro, there are elements of both of these patterns at work. His most trusted and loyal advisor has been his brother Raul, but he lacks Fidel's charisma. At 69 years of age, Raul is also of an unsuitable age to carry the revolution into a new generation. However, he remains Fidel Castro's most likely replacement, and in recent months certain actions taken by the Cuban government indicate that Raul is being positioned to assume the leadership of Cuba. Other strong successors have been shoved aside or officially disgraced when they became too popular, potentially cutting into Fidel's personal following.³³ One such person was General Arnaldo Ochoa Sanchez, who was arrested in June 1989. The General was charged with drug trafficking and with violating the moral and legal socialist laws. He was convicted on July 11th, and

³² Lee Lockwood, Castro's Cuba, Cuba's Fidel. Rev. ed. (Boulder: Westview Press 1990), p. 357.

put to death by a firing squad two days later. Those close to the General have claimed that the charges were a ruse to cover up the real reason for his arrest. General Ochoa, who had grown enormously popular with the military, was a potential challenger to Fidel's power base, and was in a position to attempt a military coup, which was obviously unacceptable to Castro.³⁴

On the whole, communist systems have shown themselves to be relatively exempt from the worst effects of succession crises. Stalin had already consolidated much power before Lenin died, and the post-Stalin collective leadership blended relatively smoothly into the ascendancy of Khrushchev. In Soviet history, only the removal of Khrushchev had the quality of a palace coup. The attempted repetition, aimed at Gorbachev in 1991, failed because the system was already moribund for other reasons than succession issues. In China, a palace coup removed Madame Mao and the rest of the Gang of Four before they could consolidate power after Mao's death. Subsequently, China has had an essentially bureaucratic collective leadership. The same can be said of Vietnam in the post-Ho Chi Minh era.

All of these examples testify to the bureaucratic cohesiveness of communist party leaderships. As suggested above, however, Cuba is much less a "model" communist State than was the Soviet Union or is China and Vietnam. The Castroite system duplicates all the communist forms, but depends much more on the personality and charismatic figure of Fidel himself for its cohesiveness. Institutionalization has traditionally been weak in Castro's Cuba.³⁵ Much of the

³³ Pedro Roig, "Grandpapa Fidel" *The Economist* 326, 6 March 1993, p. 45-48.

³⁴ Jose F. Alfonso, *The Ochoa Affair: A Majority Faction in the Revolutionary Armed Forces*. Cuban Armed Forces Review, (Radio Marti—Cuban Situation Reports May-August 1989, No.2, Vol.5).

³⁵ Lockwood, (1990) p. 366-368.

development of the communist system has been characterized by “bad organizational habits” brought to administrative tasks by former guerilla leaders.³⁶ If this is true, then a logical conclusion would be that *Castro* lies at the heart of Cuba. And if we accept this conclusion, then what are the future prospects for communism in a Cuba without Fidel?

The “Actors”

The four “actors” that we may readily identify as sources for a potential successor to Cuba are the Communist Party, the military, internal dissidents, and the Cuban exile community centered in Miami. We have already discussed the prospects of the communist party to a considerable degree, reaching the conclusion that it lacks the depth of cohesiveness and sense of mission needed to persist in a Cuba without Castro and in a world without an international communist movement. Truly the predictions by George F. Kennan nearly 50 years ago that “a communist system forced to live on its own resources faces inevitable change” is today echoing throughout the Cuban landscape.³⁷

The Communist Party

It is important to note three individuals who are strong leaders within the communist party, and who would be in a position to either challenge or influence political change. All three have long-standing ties to the military and could

³⁶ Halebsky and Kirk, (1992) p. 78f.

possibly count on support from numerous top military officials.

Dr. Ricardo Alarcon de Quesada has been a member of the communist party's Central Committee since 1980. He participated in the Cuban revolution, organizing student movements in Havana and later helping to establish the present day communist structure. He has held numerous top-level positions within the



Dr. Alarcon

Cuban government: Ambassador to Trinidad and Tobago, Director for Latin American Affairs, and Ambassador to the United Nations. He has close ties with both Fidel and Raul Castro, and is one of their most trusted advisors. Dr.

Alarcon is a key figure within the communist party and will be looked at to provide direction and support. He is a moderate communist, and would probably continue to support the party line.



Dr. Balaguer

Dr. Jose Ramon Balaguer Cabrera has been a member of the Central Committee since 1975 and is a close friend of both Fidel and Raul Castro. During the opening days of the revolution, in 1957, he was arrested and served a year in prison. After his release, he rejoined Fidel Castro in the mountains of Oriente province. He has held numerous top-level positions; however, his most prominent position has been personal physician to both Fidel and Raul Castro. Dr. Balaguer is in Fidel's inner circle and commands enormous respect. He is a serious communist hard-liner and will staunchly defend the party structure and ideology.

³⁷ Dr. Bernard W. Aronson, and Dr. William D. Rogers, Special Report: U.S.-Cuban Relations in the 21st Century, USIA Copyright © (1999) by the Council on Foreign Relations ®, inc. Washington D.C. p. 3.

Dr. Carlos Lage Davila is the Economic Czar and is regarded to be one of the brightest and most competent members of the Central Committee. He is considered to be a liberal communist and advocates switching to a communist system modeled after the Chinese system.



Dr. Lage

All three of these individuals could prove to be prominent in any government change. And each one of them could be a potential Vice Presidential candidate.

The Cuban Military

The military is an obvious candidate for power in any Latin American country. Since its inception, the FAR's mission has been to protect and continue the revolution's accomplishments and preserve its status quo. It sees the United States as its principle external threat. To carry out this mission, Cuba's armed forces utilizes multiple doctrines of warfare, conventional, unconventional, and irregular warfare, that are implemented depending on the existing situation. There exists a conventional doctrine for the FAR, which is based on a "system of scientific criteria" of the principles of military science and operational as well as tactical art.³⁸ A basis for such doctrines can be attributed to the influence and training by the former Soviet Union's military. It can be said that the FAR has adopted Soviet military doctrine and organizational principles, with some modifications to suit the smaller size and less sophisticated armament of the

³⁸ Olivo Verde, Defense of the Socialist Homeland, 6 March 1986.

Cuban forces.³⁹

The FAR is comprised of three separate branches: the Army (Ejercito 150,000 troops strong), the Navy [Marina de Guerra Revolucionaria (MG) 5,000 troops strong] and the Air Force and Air Defense Forces [Defensa

Antiaerea y Fuerza Aerea (DAAFAR) 10,000 troops strong]. The Army, which is the largest of the three branches, is further broken down into three Corps responsible for three separate regions. The

Western Army Corps, is led by Major General Leopoldo Cintro Frias, and is headquartered in Havana. The Eastern Army Corps, is led by General Ramon Espinosa Martin, and is headquartered in Santiago de Cuba. Lt.

General Espinosa is believed to be Fidel Castro's choice to head the Ministry of Interior. This will make Lt. General Espinosa the number three man in the government of Cuba. The Central Army

Corps, is led by Major General Joaquin Quinta Sola, which is headquartered in Matanzas. See Figure 2 for Map illustration and Army Corps locations.

The Army Corps are well trained and well equipped. More than thirty percent of those in uniform have combat experience. Corps-wide training is conducted twice a year and the operational objectives are focused on deterring an invading force (primarily the United States). However, in the past three years training has taken a back seat to economic endeavors. Under a new economic reconstruction plan, all military forces are required to work four months out of the year harvesting crops or



MaiGen Frias



LtGen Espinosa



MajGen Sola

³⁹ Leon Goure, War of all the People: Cuba's Military Doctrine, In Irving Louis Horowitz, ed. Eight

upgrading infrastructures within their assigned regions.



FIGURE 2

(Figure 2, Source: Jane's World Armies. 1996. Washington, D.C.: Jane's Information Group)

Western Command

Headquarters (HQ) -> Havana

Central Command

Headquarters (HQ) -> Matanzas

Eastern Command

Headquarters (HQ) -> Santiago de Cuba

The other relevant forces are under the control of the current Minister of the Interior, which is led by Lt. General Abelardo Colome Ibarra (considered to be Fidel Castro's choice to head



LtGen Ibarra

the Armed Forces, a title held by Raul Castro during the past 40 years. This will quite possibly make him the number two man in the government). The State Security, Border Guards, Revolutionary National Police and Special Battalion of Police number more than 25,000 troops, and are primarily responsible for enforcing communist ideologies and protecting Fidel Castro. Any future successors will need the complete support of the Ministry of Interior and its security forces if they are to maintain control. These security forces are also well trained, well disciplined, and are the most loyal to Fidel Castro.

Castro has continued to engage in worldwide military operations, most notably in Angola and most recently in the Solomon Islands. A report filed by a Foreign Affairs Correspondent in Canberra noted that the Solomon Islands government had requested military support from Cuba in an effort to put an end to the ethnic clashes taking place throughout the island chain. The Cuban government indicated a willingness to provide aid and support measures in return for de-facto diplomatic recognition and possible involvement in joint mineral ventures in the Solomons. The disclosures are deeply concerning to leading Pacific countries, including Australia, which fears that the ethnic clashes could escalate into another Bougainville-style conflict if the Solomons opt for a full-scale military solution.⁴⁰ As can be concluded by this report, Castro continues to engage and export his military forces, whenever and wherever, in an attempt to further legitimize his socialist government and increase his resources. Additionally, in recent months the Cuban government has stepped up its dialogue with the

Chinese and North Korean governments. Other reports also confirm that the Russians are looking at renewing their military ties.⁴¹ This should be taken as a clear signal that the Castro government is continuing to build diplomatic relations with other communist governments. In fact, a report submitted by the Defense Intelligence Agency confirmed that the Cuban government in collaboration with the Chinese, North Koreans and Russians have been constructing tunnels on the North side of the Island in preparation for a possible invasion by the United States. The report notes that the bunker construction was carried out throughout the 1990's despite severe economic problems facing Castro's communist government.⁴² Again, this is another indication of Castro's willingness to spend money on his military at the expense of other economic programs, and quite possibly, at the expense of the Cuban people.

Military organization lends itself automatically to institutional cohesiveness and internal hierarchy. The Cuban military can also, as we have suggested, lay claim to the cult of Castro to a greater degree than the party can. It is worth recalling that Fidel has almost always appeared in public in fatigues, a gesture that associates him with the military as surely as it disassociates him with the civil party apparatus. Moreover, the military can also lay claim to being the repository of Cuban nationalism, as the nation's potential defender against U.S. intervention, either directly in the form of American troops or indirectly in the form of the Miami-based exiles. Cuba's military strength remains relevant and quite

⁴⁰ Paul Daley, "Cuba may intervene in Solomons conflict," Foreign Affairs Correspondence-Canberra 18 May 2000.

⁴¹ Xinhua News Agency "Chinese Defense Minister Meets Cuban Guests," Beijing, China 27 June 2000.

⁴² Bill Gertz and Rowan Scarborough, "Fidel's Underground" The Washington Times, 8 December 2000.

capable of opposing internal unrest.⁴³ The military thus appears as a far stronger contender for power than the communist party. In fact, recent news reports reveal that top ranking military officials have been promoted and are preparing for a potential transition of power. General Espinosa, as mentioned earlier, was promoted to his present grade and is being positioned to assume the position as head of the Ministry of Interior. This will make the current head of the Ministry of Interior, General Ibarra, available to take over as head of the Armed Forces a positioned currently held by Raul Castro. This leads observers to speculate that Raul Castro will assume the leadership of Cuba in the near future. Whether he has the ability to keep the government together or not, he will set the stage for whatever events may follow.⁴⁴



Gen Raul Castro

The Domestic Opposition

The Cuban opposition is a contender only in a theoretical sense. An organized opposition within Cuba, so far as identified at present, is largely theoretical. This, one may argue, is due to the combination of three factors. One is effective repression; second is the Cuban heritage of political passivity; and third, and perhaps the most important, is the presence of nearby Florida as an “escape valve” for the disaffected.

The real effectiveness of repression and escape in deferring the buildup of a

⁴³ Rear Admiral Eugene Carroll Jr., The Question of the Week, Center for Defense Information, Program No. 391, 15 October 1997. pg. 1.

⁴⁴ Pablo Alfonso, Number Two Prepares to take Power, Government & Politics, Miami Herald 4 Feb. 2001.

domestic opposition is difficult to judge. Outside of Poland, it is worth remembering, that since the 1970's little organized opposition was visible in Eastern Europe prior to the collapse of communism. Yet anti-Communists at once came out of the woodwork and moved into power in these countries when their communist leaders began to fall. Likewise, it is quite possible that once the towering presence of Castro is removed, a network of critics of the existing order will swiftly emerge, capable of challenging the party and the military. Alternatively, such opponents might ally themselves with elements of the military, perhaps younger, more liberal elements. Anticommunist intellectuals could arguably offer such officers an ideology (an intellectual and moral glue for their movement) in turn for armed support from within the military to serve as protection against more conservative elements within the armed forces. Only in recent months have there been signs of a new and unexpected domestic threat: "*Informaticos*," a new wave of internet resistance fighters who have defied government rules and are causing major headaches for the Cuban government. They represent a vocal and technological resistance to a government that has sought to stifle the flow of information since the beginning of their revolution four decades ago. Encouraged by tentative government steps to wire the country, the growing number of Cubans who ignore official prohibitions to look at foreign news pages and listen to pirate music sites are speeding along Cuba's plodding journey into the information age.

The possible presence of any other latent resistance movement within Cuba is a possible wild card among several post-Castro prospects. It is neither known

how strong this factor may be, nor if it has any significant existence at all. Only when Castro passes from the scene, or if an unforeseen crisis shakes up the country, will anyone know what role, if any, domestic opposition could take in shaping post-Castro Cuba.

The Exiles

Finally, there are the “Miami” Cubans. Undoubtedly some Cuban exiles imagine themselves returning to their homeland after Liberation or even returning to lead the Liberation upon Castro’s demise. The Cuban American National Foundation based in Miami has shown signs of regarding itself as a potential government-from-exile. It has reportedly drafted a constitution, and Milton Friedman, a well-known economist, is said to have assisted in drafting a free market recovery plan for the Cuban economy. Up until two years ago, the organization had placed all its hopes and leadership in one man, Jorge Mas Canosa, who was regarded as a potential post-Castro President of Cuba.⁴⁵ However, those hopes died in 1998 when Mas Canosa passed away unexpectedly. Since then, there has been no clear leader who could don the mantle of a possible president-in-waiting. A number of other Cuban-American organizations have also aspired to play a role in the establishment of a new government in Cuba, but many of their members are far too old, and have lost touch with a generation of Cubans that have grown up under Castro’s rule.



⁴⁵ Halebsky and Kirk, (1992) p. 38.

Historically, long-term exiles have seldom retained much credibility in their former home. The greater portions of the Miami exiles have been away from their homeland for a generation, while the younger generation grew up in the United States. However great their emotional attachment to Cuba, they are fundamentally North Americans of Cuban heritage, not native-born Cubans. When the Cuban-American National Foundation held a 1990 event in the Orange Bowl, featuring an address from then President Reagan to the Cuban people, the stadium was practically empty.⁴⁶ This perhaps suggests the degree to which the exiles' passions have in fact become attenuated. There have been moments of unity and nationalism, most recently seen this past year during the Elian Gonzales saga. But that too has died down and most of the exiles are back to being content and living out their dreams in the United States. Meanwhile, present U.S. policy toward Cuba is relatively sterile. It neither brings about Castro's downfall nor encourages the sort of bloodless evolutionary change that might serve the interests of the U.S., neighboring countries, and the Cuban people themselves. In fact, after speaking with a government analyst, the (Unclassified) U.S. intelligence position has dramatically changed over the past 10 years. Very little surveillance is conducted and most information that is gathered is done through a passive approach.

Peaceful change would not suit the right-wing Cuban exiles' purposes at all, for that would leave them without a role to play in the future of Cuba. The only way they can hope to gain power in Cuba is as the result of a bloody conflagration. They therefore have no interest in establishing a dialogue, or in a

⁴⁶ Halebsky and Kirk, (1992) p. 69f.

process of gradual reform.⁴⁷ In fact, Emeido Oliva, the deputy military commander of the failed Bay of Pigs invasion, and a former U.S. Army Reserve Major General, recently agreed to an interview with the Miami Herald. During this interview he stated, “I see only a single solution for ridding Cuba of Fidel Castro: a military one.” He continued, “the solution to the Cuban problem lies not in another exile army, but in the Cuban armed forces reaching a conclusion that Castro does not offer anything to the Cuba of the future...I don’t want to put down the dissidents. I think it’s great to have factions in Cuba, but that will not get rid of Castro. The solution will come from the Cuban Revolutionary Armed Forces.”⁴⁸

The exiles’ prospects of having a future voice in Cuba would be further dimmed if (as is possible, particularly among the more conservative elements) their program included the return of expropriated property holdings to former owners. It is unlikely that many Cubans, however disgusted with communism after Castro’s demise, would readily accept the handing over of much of the island’s land and other property to virtual foreigners pressing land claims over a generation old.

Of the four possible contenders for leadership in post-Castro Cuba--the communist party, the military, the domestic opposition, and the Miami exiles—one most likely concludes that the military is inherently strong, the party and the exiles inherently weak, and the domestic opposition of indeterminable potential strength. This evaluation lends itself to the supposition that the communist party and the exiles would quickly fall out of the running, leaving the Army and possibly

⁴⁷ Rear Admiral Eugene Carroll Jr., USN.Ret Cuba: A New Approach, Center for Defense Information,

the domestic opposition, in a position to lead a post-Castro Cuba.

This analysis as presented so far assumes that the actors in shaping Cuba's post-Castro Cuba are primarily Cuban. There are two other related factors, however, that could also have an influence. One is the possibility of U.S. military intervention.

It has been argued that the U. S. could have served its interests by military action against Castro's Cuba in 1962, at the time of the Cuban Missile Crisis.⁴⁹ Even discounting the possibility of a Soviet response, this seems improbable. In 1962, the early opposition had largely fled, and Castro was still riding high on nationalistic fervor. Intervention then, even if militarily successful, might have caused more problems in the long run than it solved. And as discussed earlier, the Cuban Missile Crisis Agreement between the United States and the Soviet Union removed the possibility of any further attempts at U.S. military intervention.

But, in the context of potential future instability within Cuba, possibly a civil war between liberal and hard-line factions, U.S. intervention becomes much more "credible." While it is extremely unlikely that the U.S. would invade Cuba in order to place the Miami exiles in power, "required" U.S. intervention as a result of an internal Cuban crisis would surely enhance the Miami exiles' influence. In any case, it seems remote that Cuba will be considered much of a military threat to the U.S. given the fall of communism worldwide. If any threat is considered, it is the possibility of mass immigration, and a repeat of the 1980 Mariel boatlift.

A recent study conducted by the Council on Foreign Relations makes numerous recommendations relative to U.S. intervention in Cuba. None of the

October 3, (1996) Pg. 3.

recommendations proposes armed intervention, and several noted political scientists advocate continued economic sanctions.⁵⁰ Furthermore, the United States has been roundly condemned by Latin America and the United Nations for continuing to isolate Cuba. These governments and institutions believe that relaxation of U.S. pressure on Cuba will improve the latter's relations with all Latin American states.

To further pursue this notion, reports written by Rear Admiral Carroll USN-Ret., Deputy Director, Center for Defense Information, presents a typical argument for easing the economic sanctions. Admiral Carroll writes: "Paradoxically, now is the time to move, while Castro remains securely in power. The conventional wisdom in Washington that no resolution of our sterile confrontation with Cuba is possible until Castro is gone is completely mistaken. Now is the time to negotiate new arrangements based on sensible, constructive compromises and settlement of long standing issues. Agreements reached with Castro will be implemented promptly because he can turn the agreements into reality."⁵¹ He continues to say, "it is ironic indeed that the best chance to see Castro surrender power at an early date is to do exactly what the anti-Castro elements in Florida oppose. Mutually beneficial arrangements and improved political and economic relations with Cuba would certainly speed the liberalization of Cuban social, political and economic institutions. Castro would become an increasingly irrelevant anachronism."⁵² It is important to note that the vast majority of Cuban exiles wholeheartedly disagree with the Admiral's

⁴⁸ Don Bohning, Bay of Pigs Vet Speaks Up, Miami Herald Interview, 16 August 2000.

⁴⁹ Fauriol and Loser, (1990) p. 31

⁵⁰ Aronson and Rogers, (1999) p.4-5.

⁵¹ Carroll, (1996) p.4

assertions and, in fact, he is regarded in certain Cuban circles to be somewhat eccentric and radical with regards to Cuban issues.

The other possible outside factor that should be taken into account is the state of the world, and more particularly of Latin America. If Western democratic ideas are perceived as advancing nearly everywhere, as they were in 1989 – 90, this would give an important psychological boost to any factions promoting such ideas. If, however, democratic ideas were seen as in retreat, particularly elsewhere in Latin America, their adherents would be correspondingly weaker in contending for the leading role in Cuba.

In that regard, the current situation is not altogether promising. In the late 1980s, democratic institutions were triumphing, at least superficially, throughout almost all of Latin America. At one time it could be proclaimed that every government in the region - save Cuba's - had been elected. However, most of the new democratic governments are only weakly established, lacking institutional solidity and public support, while deep social and economic divisions persist.⁵³ In Peru, Alberto Fujimori has led a sort of presidential coup, and only recently abdicated his power and resigned as President of Peru. The position of liberalism in Latin America remains clearly precarious. Although somewhat unlikely, if Latin America should swing toward authoritarianism or radicalism in the next few years as it has at times in the past, this could have a profound, as yet unforeseeable effect on post-Castro developments in Cuba.

⁵² Carroll, (1996) p.5

Probable Outcome

As late as the middle 1980s, it was widely believed that communist systems were massively entrenched everywhere where they had been established. The comprehensive control of the party establishments over economic, social, and political life, and the access to and unhesitating use of efficient instruments of repression seemed to give communist rule a nearly unshakable solidity. It was hoped by opponents of communism that the system might “eventually” liberalize or decay, but there was no expectation of this in the foreseeable future. This consideration applied to Cuba as to all other communist countries.

The events of the late 1980s and early 1990s dramatically disproved this assumption. Communism as it had been known collapsed entirely throughout the former Soviet orbit, though what will ultimately replace it is not yet known. We are now entitled to regard Cuban communism as sharing the potential fragility of Soviet communism.

It has been argued, however, that what has sustained communism in Cuba has not been the institutions or even ideology of communism, but the commanding personality of Fidel Castro. As long as Castro retains his focus, motivation and vigor, preserving his charisma and mystique, he should remain in power. But, once Fidel Castro is removed from the scene (most likely by natural causes) the situation changes entirely.

A strong communist party organization has never been established in Cuba. Upon Castro’s demise, the most probable effective contenders for power are the

⁵³ Abraham F. Lowenthal, Latin America: Ready for Partnership? Foreign Affairs, (1998) p. 82-96.

Cuban military and a potential domestic opposition of Cubans disaffected with the Castroite system. However, the military has the edge, and with its solid structure would most likely overcome any opposition. Within the military, a number of potential leaders could assume the leadership of Cuba, but will they have the charisma to maintain the unity of country and the party? The most probable successor would be Fidel Castro's brother Raul, even though he lacks youth and Fidel's charisma. Two other contenders are General Ibarra and General Espinosa, both of whom are hugely popular within the military establishment, have political experience, and are younger than Raul. But they too lack the charisma needed to sustain a country latent with deep economic and social problems. It is also possible that some elements in the military might make common cause with the latter. The fate of Cuba could also be shaped by possible U.S. intervention now that the Soviet threat has diminished, and less directly by the trend of developments in Latin America. In any scenario, the common thread that will be required to implement and sustain a government will be the Cuban Armed Forces.

In the historical long term, Fidel Castro is much more likely to be remembered as one of Latin America's most notable caudillos than as the harbinger of a new social and economic system.

We have concluded that Raul Castro, supported by the military establishment, is the most probable actor that will assume the leadership of Cuba in the foreseeable future. If this is the case, then we need to answer one final question; are there any implications that will affect the U.S. government when Cuba changes leadership?

Potential Implications for the U.S.

A number of potential implications may surface for the U.S. as a result of a leadership change in Cuba. First, the U.S. government must be prepared to react to the overwhelming celebrations and euphoric feelings that will prevail throughout the exile community. Second, the U.S. must be prepared to respond to possible boatlifts from disaffected Cubans and, quite possibly, boatlifts from Miami-based Cubans in support of the disaffected. Finally, if a moderate communist government emerges the U.S. must be prepared to extend an olive branch to that new government and offer both economic and political support. However, if a more radical government emerges, then the U.S. should be prepared to tighten and widen the economic sanctions.

Celebrations will dominate the scene both in Miami and in other Cuban communities throughout the United States. The authorities must also be prepared to respond to potential disturbances as radical exile groups attempt to deliver their own form of justice on those Cubans that have been categorized as Castro sympathizers.

A possible “Mariel” boatlift may again take shape when Fidel is finally out of office, regardless of who assumes Cuba’s leadership. This will require a quick response from the U.S. government, primarily in the area of maritime support.

A potential moderate communist government may emerge, even if Raul takes over. This will mainly depend on his choice for Vice President and the potential ideological change once Fidel is gone. However, it is more likely that a radical government will emerge and the U.S. must be prepared to react with political

resolve. The U.S. must guard from possible asymmetric attacks from this new radical government, specifically in the areas of information technology and computer cyber attacks. A recent report, filed by the Washington Post, outlined the results of the Senate Intelligence Committee hearings, in which Admiral Tom Wilson, head of the Defense Intelligence Agency, testified as follows: “Cuba may be preparing a cyberattack against the United States...there’s certainly the potential for them to employ those kind of tactics against our modern and superior military.” He also stated that Cuba’s conventional military might be lacking, compared to the U.S., but that its intelligence operations were substantial.⁵⁴

In any event, it should be clear that certain implications would emerge as a result of a Cuban leadership change. The U.S. government should take every measure necessary to ensure that it is prepared to meet this situation. But the U.S. should also look at this as a new or fresh opportunity to improve our relationship with our southern neighbor.

⁵⁴ McCullaugh, Declan Feds Say Fidel is Hacker Threat. The Washington Post, 9 February 2001.

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Preface

I have been interested in Cuba's history and present situation for as long as I can remember. My father Jose Antonio Colmenares to whom I dedicate this research paper influenced me. Although no longer living, he had a profound influence on everything that I have accomplished during my past 23 years of service to this nation. My father was an incredible person who devoted all his life to the liberation of Cuba, and to the belief that Cuba should be free and democratic. I also want to pay tribute to my mother, Soledad Colmenares Carmona, who stood by me during some of the most difficult moments in my life. Also, special thanks to my wife Barbara for her patience during the research and preparation of this paper.

Cuba is a land full of possibilities. Unfortunately it is the last remaining totalitarian state in this hemisphere. I fully believe that I am destined to play a role in its transition, which makes the training and education received by me of vital importance. I have dedicated a fair amount of time thinking about what will happen when Fidel Castro is no longer in power. Unfortunately, every thought has negative outcomes, which leads me to believe that much bloodshed and civil unrest will take place before a democratic state is established.

I would also be remiss if I were not to acknowledge the United States of America's greatness, for not only allowing my family to immigrate to this nation, but also for allowing all those thousands of Cubans who have arrived since the ascension of Fidel Castro. I would also like to give special thanks to Dr. Norman Cigar and LtCol Barile for their mentoring and patience. This paper could not have been possible without their

support and help. LtCol Bright was also instrumental in providing initial guidance and ensuring that I stayed focused on the MMS process. Finally, I hope that the information contained in the following pages provides a useful insight for understanding Cuba's future transition.