

The President's Remarks During a Meeting With Cuban-American Leaders

March 19, 1984

Cuban Americans, perhaps better than others, appreciate what opportunity and economic freedom mean to people who are struggling to better themselves. Many of you arrived here in the early 1960's when America was enjoying high growth and low inflation. In that environment, everyone had the chance to better themselves.

But during the 1970's this shining land of opportunity, once so vibrant and vital, was ravaged by inflation and economic stagnation. By 1980 it was painfully clear to all Americans that something was seriously wrong.

So we set out to make some long-overdue changes. By reversing unwise policies of over-taxing and spending, we've put America back on track. And I'm mighty proud that when the heat was on, and the advocates of the failed policies of the past tried to get us to reverse course before our program had a chance to take hold, we stuck to our principles; we stayed the course. I think the country is beginning to understand why we did.

I firmly believe what's best for all Americans, especially those who want to improve their condition, is a policy of low inflation and strong growth. America needs jobs and opportunity, not make-work and handouts.

The Cuban community, especially in Florida and other Gulf Coast States, has become a center for commercial activity, much of it with Latin America. This has boosted our economic potential and has been a boon to our neighbors to the south. I'd like to thank you for the vital role you are playing.

You know how significant our struggle is, not only for our neighbors to the south but for the United States, as well. I can assure you today that our administration fully recognizes the vital importance of the economic, political, and military struggle going on in Central America and the Caribbean. We do not intend to let the Soviet Union, through its Communist Cuban proxies, take over that region.

Central America and the Caribbean are of the utmost strategic importance to the United States. If we don't give friends so close to home the means to defend themselves against Soviet-supported insurgents, who will trust us anywhere in the world, especially in the faraway Middle East and Europe?

To those who would spend time focusing on the flaws of our friends -- and they are far from perfect -- let me just say we all are concerned about human rights. But I believe it is being either naive or downright phony to profess concern for human rights, while pursuing policies that lead to the overthrow of less-than-perfect democracies by Marxist dictatorships which systematically crush all human rights. We've seen it happen in countless countries, including Afghanistan, Vietnam, and, yes, Cuba. In these countries there are no human rights nor any debates about human rights. There is only brutal suppression by the Communist Party. Because such regimes are at war with the basic laws of human nature, invariably they inflict great economic misery on their people. That is why it's both logical and necessary for them to conquer other lands to obtain the resources they cannot produce themselves.

What we are witnessing to the south is a power play by Cuba and the Soviet Union, pure and simple. Cuba, after nearly 25 years of so-called revolution, is an economic basket case. It cannot supply even its own needs without massive and costly Soviet subsidies. Like a roving wolf, Castro's Cuba looks to its

peace-loving neighbors with hungry eyes and sharp teeth. Our challenge is to avert a crisis before it happens -- to help our neighbors build strong economies, democratic governments, and give them weapons to counter Soviet-backed insurgency.

A few months ago, we saw this very process unfolding on a small island in the Caribbean -- Grenada. Massive stores of military supplies were being stacked high in the warehouses there. The island was living under virtual Cuban occupation. The lives of American students, as well as the islanders and, indeed, Grenada's peaceful, freedom-loving neighbors, were all being put in jeopardy. We had no choice but to join with our neighbors, at their request, and to free the people of Grenada. And that's exactly what we did.

I just have to tell you, one of my most heartwarming memories will always be of a reunion we had on the White House lawn. Students, many of whom had negative attitudes about the military before, threw their arms around the young soldiers, sailors, and marines who risked their lives to save them. Then the students introduced these military men to their parents as heroes.

Americans are a great people, and nobody should ever sell us short. And when I say Americans, I mean all of us, because from the tip of Tierra del Fuego to the North Pole, we are all Americans.

We have every reason to be confident. But if freedom is to prevail, if peace is to be preserved, we cannot be complacent. Our greatest strength is truth, because truth is on our side and with it we can and will turn the tide. Saint John said you shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free. I am very proud that we are making steady progress in our efforts to put Radio Marti on the air.

Note: The President met with the leaders in the East Room at the White House.

As printed above, this item follows the text of the President's prepared remarks as released by the Office of the Press Secretary.

<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1984/31984c.htm>