

The United States and Cuba

December 17, 1984



United States Department of State
Bureau of Public Affairs
Washington, D.C.

Following is an address by Kenneth N. Skoug, Jr., Director of the Office of Cuban Affairs, before the "Face-to-Face" program of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington, D.C., December 17, 1984.

I appreciate very much the kind invitation of "Face-to-Face" to address you tonight on the subject of U.S.-Cuban relations.

A discussion of this subject appears timely at mid-passage of the Reagan Administration, a traditional time for stock-taking. It also comes 3 days after we completed an important agreement with Cuba on migration matters, about which I will say a few words later.

In his study of European relations in the period between the two world wars, E.H. Carr divided students of international politics into two groups. He called them—I believe without pejorative intent—utopians and realists. The utopians he described as primarily composed of intellectuals prone to emphasize idealistic considerations. By contrast, he placed diplomats and bureaucrats in the realist camp and said they liked to quote Machiavelli and Bacon.

To my knowledge Machiavelli never had much to say on the Cuban question. One of his more trenchant aphorisms for general reference, however, was that even enemies have "hidden bonds of interest." He was thinking in balance-of-power terms, counseling that one should not overly weaken a foe lest a third party gain too much in the process. We might wish, however, to inquire what kind of hidden bonds might exist be-

tween the United States and Cuba and whether they are conducive to positive or negative directions in our relationship.

Francis Bacon, who also passed in silence over the Cuban question, did recommend to his sovereign a policy of vigorous foreign involvement so that the domestic difficulties of the Stuart monarchy might be swallowed up in a wave of English patriotism. This concept, too, might have some relevance to the foreign policy of Cuba.

U.S. policy toward Cuba is shaped primarily by our perception of Cuban conduct in international affairs. Despite its size, it acts in world affairs in both a political and a military sense as a major power, with a large and well-equipped armed force—second largest in Latin America—and a history of a quarter century of foreign engagement. The Cuban Armed Forces are relatively rich in combat experience, almost all of it far from Cuban shores. Almost alone among Latin American states, Cuba involves itself intensively with the affairs of every state and virtually every political movement in the hemisphere and many even beyond. Havana is not merely aware of other states, but it knows about them in depth. It has a policy for each of them and for the region. It is one of the few states in Latin America with a sense of mission for the region as a whole, as well as a policy for Africa. Surely there are few small states in modern history which have involved themselves voluntarily in so many and so disparate foreign policy questions, not as an object but as a subject.

Under the leadership of the past 26 years, Cuba has become a crusading country. This curious internationalism might well have the collateral effect of disarming or even coopting potential domestic critics, but it seems to stem from the fundamental sense of Havana's post-1959 leadership that Cuba alone is much too small a place for so much zeal. Small wonder that Fidel Castro told a recent visitor he regretted that Cuba does not have the natural resources of Brazil or an Argentina. But he has harnessed Cuba's impressive human resources to a foreign policy of engagement which is unique among small states.

Cuba, of course, claims to be a developing country. In recent meetings of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CEMA), Cuba appeared in a role alongside Vietnam and Mongolia as the developing little brothers in a community where even the more industrialized brethren are not exactly success stories. In economic terms Cuba today is clearly properly classified as underdeveloped. But Cuba has and has had for a long time very high standards of health, sanitation, and education and had living standards in 1959 that rivaled some West European countries.

Dealing with Cubans, whether expatriates or nationals, one has the sense that while Cuba is now in an economic sense a developing country, in many other respects it remains an advanced society. Cuba was in 1959, in many respects, highly advanced. It has become paralyzed economically by mismanagement and particularly by a long-term commitment to produce sugar, a commodity decreasingly in demand on world markets and intended for a special market which can pay Cuba only in barter.

Cuba's place in international affairs seems shaped by three sets of associations. It would serve no purpose to lose sight of these underlying realities. The first and most critical is Cuba's special relationship with the Soviet Union. The second is its own revolutionary imperative, which stands apart from and is older than its ties to Moscow. The third is its self-image as a protagonist for a regional bloc in the hemisphere--"Nuestra America" in the much exploited term of Jose Marti--which would, to the extent possible, exclude the participation and influence of the United States. Through all three of these associations flows a strong hostility to the United States on the part of the Cuban leadership and a perceived need to be a leader of the so-called

nonaligned in a way which is supportive of the Soviet Union and opposed to the United States.

Cuba's Distant Friend

The Soviet-Cuban symbiosis owes its origin to Fidel Castro's assessment that his domestic and foreign policy would alienate Cuba's powerful neighbor, but that while Cuba's enemy was near, the enemy's own nemesis could redress the balance. While they may have since become close ideological kinsmen, for Cuba the U.S.S.R. was first and foremost a guarantor behind whose protection Havana felt secure in pursuing with relative impunity the radical transformation of Cuban society and the foreign policy mission which its own leadership was determined to carry out.

Moscow was also from the outset a vital source of economic aid without whose help Cuba could not have taken the course that it did. For the U.S.S.R., Cuba represented a windfall opportunity to introduce Soviet power and influence into the Western Hemisphere and to oblige the United States to address itself much more than in the recent past to the security of its own region. The new accord between Moscow and Havana also substantially increased the likelihood that future revolutions in the region would take on an East-West coloration, whatever their roots. Revolutionary Cuba thus provided the Soviet Union with a low-risk opportunity to alter the strategic balance.

Without reviewing the historic vicissitudes of the Cuban-Soviet relationship, most of which are well known to this audience, it is important to note that the fundamental elements which gave it birth have in no way lost their relevance. If anything, the contrary is true. In the 1970s the burden of this relationship on the Soviet Union grew as Cuba's economic dependence increased, but so did the value due to Cuba's unique capacity to advance objectives shared or favored by Moscow in Africa, Central America, and the Caribbean. The Cuban linchpin became more expensive, but it was still a bargain for Moscow. There is no sign that the Soviet Union is reassessing the value of Cuba or that the Cuban leadership has reconsidered the utility it derives from close alignment with the U.S.S.R.

Is Cuba a satellite or an ally? The Soviet Union has utilized its economic leverage over Cuba successfully in the past. The leverage is much stronger now due to the steady growth of Cuba's economic dependence, which in turn has come about through fundamental and probably irreversible economic decisions

as well as the change in the terms of trade between the two countries. The enhanced value of oil and the shrunken outlook for sugar have given the transfer of commodities increasingly the character of aid. The Soviet Union now provides Cuba with the ruble equivalent of over \$4 billion per year in assistance. But the recent summit meeting of the CEMA countries in Havana symbolized Cuba's status in that community and confirmed the island's economic future. No doubt as a matter of pride, Fidel Castro chafes at the notion of a subsidy, preferring to refer to the "just price" paid by the U.S.S.R. for Cuba's sugar, but he knows all the same that Moscow does not pay the same "just price" for Brazil's sugar, and he knows that with Moscow's largesse come strings of steel.

While Cuba is increasingly dependent on the U.S.S.R. and subject to Moscow's manipulation, it would be erroneous to regard it as merely a coerced Soviet satellite. In Eastern Europe there is an old joke which inquires why those states are always described as brothers of the U.S.S.R. and not merely as friends. The answer is that you get to choose your friends. Although Cuba is now a little brother in a family that has only one big brother, Havana did choose this connection. The Cuban leadership presently has a similar world view as does the U.S.S.R. It is true that Cuba asserts that it is a nonaligned state, a fiction that is as much in Moscow's interest to maintain as it is in Havana's, but the fact is that Cuba gives full support to the Soviet Union in all major questions--whether it be the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan or any issue in the United Nations. The muscle which Cuba is able to apply in Third World forums is due not only to its own fervor but to the support of its strong friend, whom it terms the natural ally of the developing world. Cuba is, indeed, subject to Soviet pressure and control, but it does not have to be coerced to assail the United States at virtually every opportunity as the universal foe.

Is there a hidden bond of interest in this? Cuba uses its hostility toward the United States to obtain a volume of assistance from the Soviet Union that Moscow gives to no other country. At the same time, though, Cuba is falling progressively further behind many Latin American countries whose standards it once surpassed. From Cuba's point of view, some redress could be obtained if the United States' embargo were lifted. Since Moscow does not oppose Cuba's efforts in this direction, probably because the U.S.S.R. would welcome a little burdensharing, Cuba could prob-

ably trade on a limited basis with the United States as it now does with some Western countries, without offending Moscow. What it could not do and still retain Moscow's favor, however, is alter its fundamental commitment to give unswerving support to Soviet policy.

In this context it is sometimes suggested that the successful Nixon-Kissinger initiative toward China could be emulated with respect to Cuba by another conservative administration in the United States. This comparison, like similar ones suggesting that Cuba could become a Caribbean Yugoslavia, overlooks the underlying geopolitical reality as perceived by those who seized power in Cuba 26 years ago. In the case of China, it had expressed substantial concern long before 1968 for its security from a nearby and none-too-friendly Soviet Union. The invasion of Czechoslovakia, which Fidel Castro felt obliged in his own interest to endorse, evoked a very different response in Beijing, which recognized that Moscow was prepared to use force against another communist country even if the victim denied any intent to leave the alliance or abandon "socialism." If China needed further persuasion, the battle on the Ussuri River in 1969 and the hints of Soviet surgical strikes against Lop Nor must have encouraged it to look to its own hidden bonds of interest with the United States. What followed was surely a creative act of diplomacy, but it was a diplomacy which rested on the firm bedrock of substantial mutuality of strategic interest.

One should not overload the circuit for diplomacy. In the case of Cuba, the U.S.S.R. is far away. From Havana's point of view, indeed, it may be slightly too far. It has been Moscow's large-scale military assistance that has enabled Cuba to conduct a militantly anti-American foreign policy. Cuba says this relationship with the Soviet Union is not negotiable. Only if Havana itself were to reassess its own fundamental objectives and decide that its interests were not being well served by present policies would there be much room for creative diplomacy.

Cuba's Revolutionary Imperative

Another basic consideration is Cuba's own revolutionary imperative, anchored in the 1976 Cuban constitution, which states that Cuba has the right and duty to support revolutionary and national liberation movements. Cuba is more sophisticated today in its approach to revolution than in the 1960s. Where once its zeal conflicted with Moscow's preference for caution, the Cubans must

now balance revolutionary aspirations against hopes for influence with other Latin American governments. But these objectives—revolution and regional influence—are not necessarily self-contradictory. Cuban support for revolutionaries has been most effective when Havana was joined by noncommunist states in the region, as in the case of the Sandinista revolution in the late 1970s.

Nevertheless, the greater sophistication in the Cuban approach to stimulation and support of Latin American revolutionaries has not diluted the aboriginal combative spirit of the Castro regime. Havana knows very well who the revolutionaries are in Latin America, and it stays in close touch with developments. That touch means everything from scholarships, financial assistance, political advice, and radio broadcasting through the hemisphere to military training and support and the provision of arms. Cuba's approach to revolutionaries who are not in power is consistently to urge the formation of the widest possible alliance on the left, not excluding alienated persons in the moderate center, with the purpose of building a successful revolutionary force. Only after the attainment and consolidation of power may the revolution begin to eat its own children.

Fidel Castro has boasted that he had to tell the Soviet Union who the revolutionaries in Latin America are. He knows them, in part because they seek him out. Cuba is a mecca for Latin American revolutionaries and many a dissident Latin American politician. Those connections win Cuba influence even where prospects for revolution are either inauspicious on their own merits or to be played down on tactical grounds. By giving thumbs up, Fidel induced guerrillas in Colombia to spare the life of the brother of President Betancur. It could also have been thumbs down or no sign at all. This sort of influence is not lost on even those political leaders who have little sympathy for Cuba or for revolution.

Cuba can also orchestrate the use of revolutionaries for political ends, even if their objective prospects for success are relatively remote. The introduction of Cuban-trained revolutionary forces into Honduras does not stem from any internal conflict and might seem akin to the old *foco* approach. Apparently, it is intended primarily as a warning to Honduras not to oppose Cuba's friends on Honduras' southern and eastern borders.

The events in Grenada last year came as a shock to Havana. It saw the loss of a protocommunist stronghold in the eastern Caribbean, the first direct

military conflict between U.S. and Cuban forces, the surrender of many Cubans who had been expected to fight to the death, the unwillingness or inability of the Soviet Union to engage itself, the alignment of almost all the English-speaking Caribbean in favor of the action, the lack of any support in Grenada itself for the discredited regime, the overwhelming backing of the American public for the action, and, to add insult to injury, the expulsion of most of the Cuban presence from a promising situation in Suriname.

As a consequence, the Castro regime had little about which to cheer on the 25th anniversary of its seizure of power. It had to do some serious taking of stock. Out of this review there seems to have emerged, alongside a greater appreciation of the remoteness of Moscow from the Americas, a redoubled sense of self-reliance and a perceived need to stress Latin American solidarity as a means of safeguarding gains in Central America.

On August 30, 1984, looking on the bright side, the head of the America Department of the Communist Party Central Committee, Manuel Pineiro Losada, enunciated four reasons why Havana did not need to be pessimistic about prospects for Latin America.

First, he said, the Cuban revolution was stronger than ever.

Second, Somoza no longer ruled in Nicaragua.

Third, the oligarchy could not destroy the revolutionary movement in El Salvador.

Fourth, representative democracies in Latin America were rebelling against "imperialist domination."

What he seemed to be saying was that Cuba, if necessary by means of a people's war, is now strong enough alone to defy the United States, that the Nicaraguan regime would be able to consolidate itself, that the guerrillas in El Salvador could, at least, not be defeated, and that the United States cannot count on support from even democratic Latin American governments.

For the present, then, Cuba's revolutionary emphasis seems first to be centered on the defense of its own revolution, then on the consolidation of the Nicaraguan regime, and thirdly on a settlement in El Salvador which advances the prospects of the guerrillas for a share of power. Cuba sees Central America as the revolutionary cockpit where its energies must now be concentrated, while at the same time acknowledging that Cuban military forces could not be reinforced in case of combat. For the moment, at least, Cuba

appears to be shaping its attitude toward other states in the hemisphere primarily on their stand on Nicaragua and El Salvador.

This more prudent tactical approach is, in part, a reaction to adverse developments. What are the hidden bonds of interest with the United States? Cuba does wish to avoid a major war in Central America where U.S. and Cuban soldiers might again come face to face. However, Havana has made clear that its support for revolution, like the Soviet alliance, is not for negotiation. It continues to support regimes or revolutionary movements patterned on the Cuban model. It is Cuba's striving, with Soviet support, to introduce Marxist-Leninist regimes throughout the hemisphere which still lies at the heart of our differences.

Cuba's America

Aside from the revolutionary imperative, Cuba also seeks to build an anti-U.S. regional bloc of Latin American countries.

There is, at least potentially, a conflict between supporting communist revolution in Latin America and the Caribbean and wanting to be accepted as a pillar of stability in the region. Cuba aspires to be accepted both as a revolutionary symbol and a leader among Latin American states. Bridging this gap in the face of historically based suspicions is no simple task for Cuba. However, historically or culturally based resentments against the United States in the region can be exploited by Cuba. Here again, criticism of the United States might be the common denominator which Havana would try to exploit in building Latin American regionalism.

Despite its emphasis on revolution, at least as a final goal, Cuba frequently appears to give priority to building a Latin American bloc. Its rush to support the Galtieri regime in Argentina is a case in point, where a chance to show Latin American solidarity against the United States weighed more for Havana than the regime's domestic policy. The current effort by Cuba to utilize the regional debt crisis is in the same spirit of putative regional alignment. If Cuba were to deemphasize violent revolution and political dictatorship in order to improve its status in the Latin American community, we might have some positive bond of interest. Even if this thrust were initially directed against the United States, we could hope that Cuba would eventually turn its human resources toward more positive objectives in the region.

Unfortunately, there is no present sign that Cuba, which allows no form of dissent at home, will be prepared to renounce its efforts to produce analogous regimes in the region.

The hard reality is that both Cuba's objective of promoting Marxist-Leninist type revolutions in Latin America and the Caribbean and its goal of creating subregional solidarity are linked to its desire to diminish American influence in the region.

Dealing With Cuba

The relationship between the United States and Cuba, especially with reference to Cuba's policies in third countries, has been essentially characterized by conflict. Unfortunately, this seems unlikely to change unless there is some fundamental reassessment in Havana of Cuba's need to act as a multiregional power in consonance with the Soviet Union.

There are some bonds of interest, however, which, while they cannot bridge the profound ideological and geopolitical gaps between us, at least allow for the solution of some important problems. While it would be an error not to try to resolve issues which seem susceptible to resolution, it would be unfounded to suppose that such efforts under current circumstances will lead to fundamental improvement in our relations. Such excessive expectations would only lead to frustration and could even undermine realistic efforts to resolve what can be resolved.

It is true that we have neither reconciled our differences with the Castro regime nor terminated its existence as a threat to U.S. interests and to those of friendly nations. We are not able to do the first because Castro's interests require an adversary relationship. Efforts to conciliate Cuba have coincided with some of the most active periods of Cuban-Soviet cooperation toward objectives inconsistent with U.S. interests. We could not do the second without direct use of military force against Cuba.

There still is room for some constructive diplomacy, however. The recently concluded agreement on migration is an important achievement on its merits and very much in the U.S. interest. It will also benefit Cuba, which would otherwise not have signed it. It is an example of a situation where we were able to find and exploit positive bonds of interest although the diplomatic process was enormously complicated by the history of the past quarter century.

The background of this problem is known to most of you. In order to relieve itself of domestic pressures, which in 1980 exploded into embarrassing diplomatic problems with Latin American states, the Cuban leadership turned to its favorite foe and opted to open its doors to a mass exodus to the United States. Among the 129,000 Cubans who came with the Mariel boatlift were several thousand criminals or mentally incompetent persons who have been a heavy burden on U.S. society and who were ineligible for lawful admission to the United States under U.S. immigration law.

A serious effort to negotiate their return to Cuba was made in the final weeks of the Carter Administration with the approval of the Reagan transition team. We offered Cuba, then, as in 1983 and 1984, the resumption of normal immigrant visa processing in the U.S. Interests Section in Havana and the resumption of a program under which expolitical prisoners and their families could come to the United States. These talks failed because Cuba would agree to consider the return of the so-called Mariel excludables only if they were returning voluntarily and only on a case-by-case basis.

It was obvious that those Cuban conditions would have frustrated any solution to the Mariel problem since hardly anyone wished to return to Cuba of his own volition. Thus the Mariel excludables continued to be a serious problem for state and local governments in the United States, for law enforcement agencies, and for the American public. The activities of this criminal element also gave an unmerited black eye to the overwhelming majority of Cubans who participated in the boatlift and, judging by public opinion polls, soured the attitude of many Americans toward refugees.

The pressures which the U.S. Government applied to Cuba were to deny issuance of preference immigrant visas in Havana and to suspend the refugee program. Obviously, both of these caused hardships to innocent persons as well, but without them there would have been no solution to the problem. Conversely, Cuba's stand cost it seriously in terms of U.S. opinion, including many persons who might otherwise have been more favorably disposed toward Cuba.

We proposed in May 1983 that Cuba simply take back the Mariel excludables, in exchange for which we would have resumed normal processing of immigrant visas. Cuba responded negatively, but in the exchange of notes which followed, it did not rule out discussing

the issue in a rather ill-defined framework of migration issues. The events in Grenada brought this initiative, temporarily, to a close. In March and again in May of the present year, we again proposed talks. Cuba ultimately agreed in principle to talk but only after the U.S. elections.

Although we found it curious that Cuba would cite our election campaign as grounds for further delay in discussing this matter, we had to accept Havana's decision. We did plan to resume a limited refugee program, unilaterally, in Havana.

At this point we were consulted by Jesse Jackson's staff as to what issues he might raise while in Cuba. We mentioned Mariel and the question of long-term Cuban political prisoners. When we learned that Fidel Castro had agreed to earlier talks, we at once proposed an early date, and Cuba agreed.

These negotiations, although strictly limited to migration issues, were encumbered by mutual fears about intentions. In the end we achieved a result which is satisfying in all respects to the United States.

The main elements of the agreement are that some 2,700 common criminals will be returned to Cuba in an orderly and phased manner, that normal immigrant visa processing will resume at

once in Havana, and that up to 3,000 ex-political prisoners and their families will come to the United States in the current fiscal year, with the expectation that this humanitarian program will continue in future years.

We were successful in this endeavor because our objectives were limited and realistic and we were prepared to offer the Cubans what they recognized was a reasonable bargain. The Cubans will be able to get one very large monkey off their backs. They will also make a lot of hard currency in the process through the charges they place on the emigration process.

Welcome as this agreement is, however, it should not be taken as indicating change in our resolve to deal firmly with Cuba's aggressive foreign policy. We do diplomacy a disservice if we exaggerate what it can accomplish. After all, Machiavelli never said that hidden bonds of interests alone would make enemies cease to be enemies. A good deal more is required.

We do not despair for the future of Cuba. A people of such enormous talents with their roots in the enlightening process of Western civilization cannot remain forever in the sway of a political doctrine which stifles human endeavor

and creativity, fails to reward initiative, does not respect human rights, and forcibly excludes the population from the political process. If, in the meantime, Cuba has anything useful to tell us, or vice versa, the means of formal communication between our two governments exist and can be used. For Cuba the way back from its present alienation from the political democracy which is advancing throughout the hemisphere will be long and arduous. Havana may someday realize that its own best interests would be served if it again joined the American mainstream. In those circumstances there would be open and obvious bonds of interest between us.

A Cuba that wished to live in peace and harmony with its own citizens and with its neighbors in this increasingly free hemisphere would be welcomed back in the comity of American states. First must come the will. Then there could be a way. ■

Published by the United States Department of State • Bureau of Public Affairs
Office of Public Communication • Editorial Division • Washington, D.C. • January 1985
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