

U.S. Policy on Cuba Beyond the Last Gasp



President George W. Bush meets with representatives of the Cuban-American community in the Oval Office on May 20, 2005.

by Philip Brenner and Marguerite Jimenez

IN THE FALL OF 2005 THE NATIONAL Intelligence Council of the CIA added Cuba to its secret list of 25 allegedly unstable countries where U.S. intervention might be required.¹ This move followed Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's appointment in July of Caleb McCarray as coordinator of the U.S. effort "to hasten the end of the dictatorship in Cuba."²

These recent measures and sharp rhetoric may be no more than the sort of mostly symbolic crumbs presidents have tossed to hardliners in the Cuban-American community for at least a quarter-century; a little payback to a constituency that solidly backed both campaigns of President George W. Bush. But U.S. policy towards Cuba is rooted in geopolitical considerations well beyond merely satisfying a domestic constituency. Cuba has once again emerged as a foreign policy concern of U.S. national security managers, and they have turned to an old stratagem of containment and isolation to address the perceived problem.

At the start of the 1990s, with the disappearance of the Soviet Union and Cuban President Fidel Castro's announcement that his country

would cease supporting armed struggle in the Third World, President George H.W. Bush began viewing Cuba as a domestic rather than an international problem and turned the policy reins over to Congress. There, virulent anti-Castro demagogues held sway, supported and often instigated by likeminded lobbyists and activists. The clout of this lobby in the legislature—and in the executive after the 2000 election—has been seen as the main source of a hostile U.S. policy.

More recently, however, U.S. policy towards Cuba has received declining support from the general public, younger Cuban-Americans and U.S. companies eager to trade with the island. In fact, majorities in both the House and Senate have demonstrated they are no longer afraid to challenge the anti-Castro lobby and have voted to modify several components of the U.S. embargo. Commerce seems to be trumping anti-Communism as the interests of Midwestern farmers increasingly overshadow those of the Florida ideologues.³

From this perspective, anti-Castro hardliners in the Bush Administration are faced with a "now or never" situation. The increasing stridency of

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REPORT: CUBA IN THE AMERICAS

U.S. policy reflects their desperation in making a last ditch attempt to overthrow the revolutionary Cuban regime. It is the final gasp of a dying policy, because as the older generation of exiles fades away, the seemingly “irrational” U.S. policy would follow them to the grave.⁴

BY LATE SUMMER 2003, RIGHT-WING CUBAN-AMERICANS WERE feeling betrayed. They had helped deliver Florida’s electoral votes to George W. Bush and believed they had gotten too little in return—despite the appointments of anti-Castro activists to key posts in the State Department,

the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the Defense Department and the National Security Council. The Administration had also denounced the Cuban government rhetorically and backed resolutions condemning Cuba at the UN Commission on Human Rights; cut off semi-annual talks with Cuba on immigration; increased funding for dissident groups on the island; and directed the U.S. Interests Section in Havana to provoke the government’s ire by openly supporting these groups.⁵ But like Bill Clinton before him, Bush had waived Title III of the Helms-Burton Act, which allows U.S.

A SAFE HARBOR FOR LUIS POSADA CARRILES

When President Bush traveled to Argentina in November for a summit with Latin American leaders, he was greeted by a formal diplomatic denunciation of his Administration’s refusal to extradite international fugitive and convicted terrorist Luis Posada Carriles to Venezuela. This followed a similar pronouncement made a month earlier at a meeting of the Ibero-American Summit in Salamanca, Spain.

“We reaffirm our commitment to fighting terrorism in all its forms and manifestations,” stated an official communiqué, “and to deny refuge to the instigators, financiers, authors, supporters and participants of terrorist activities.” In a veiled reference to Posada, the leaders continued: “we support the efforts to extradite or bring to justice the person responsible for the terrorist attack on the Air Cubana jetliner in October 1976 that cost the lives of 73 innocent civilians.”

The case of Luis Posada Carriles has become an international embarrassment for the Bush administration. Ever since Posada illegally entered the U.S. using a false passport and showed up in Miami in March 2005 expecting to be granted political asylum for his early career as a CIA anti-Castro agent, his presence in the United States has created a major quandary for the White House. Should the President stand by his repeated commitment that no country should harbor international terrorists and expel Posada to Venezuela, where he escaped from prison in 1985 while being prosecuted for the Air Cubana bombing? Or should the Administration yield to its hard-line

anti-Castro constituents in Florida and protect Posada as an emblematic figure in the history of U.S. aggression against the Cuban Revolution?

Initially, the Bush Administration allowed Posada to roam free in the Miami area despite the fact that he remains a fugitive from justice in Venezuela, had publicly admitted sponsoring a string of hotel bombings in Havana in 1997 and was most recently apprehended in Panama in November 2000 with 34 pounds of C-4 explosives in a failed assassination attempt against Fidel Castro. Then-Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs Roger Noriega publicly claimed that the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) had no idea whether Posada was on U.S. soil. Only after Posada boldly began holding press conferences, and after a series of damning declassified intelligence records on his violent past created headlines around the world, did DHS agents finally take him into custody on May 17.

The declassified U.S. intelligence documents leave no doubt that Posada has been one of the world’s most unremitting purveyors of violence, whose modus operandi was the use of explosive devices. Consider a few examples:

July 1965: CIA sources in Mexico report on a Posada plot to blow up Cuban and Soviet ships in the port of Veracruz. “Posada said he was planning to place limpet mines on either a Cuban or Soviet vessel in the harbor of Veracruz, Mexico and had 100 pounds of C-4 explosives and detonators.”

Late September 1976: A CIA source describes a Caracas fundraiser held by Posada collaborator Orlando Bosch to raise money for anti-Castro operations. “A few days after the fund-raising dinner,” adds the source,

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nationals to sue over property nationalized by the Revolution, and his other moves seemed more symbolic than substantive. Faced with growing dissatisfaction in October 2003 from a small but aggressive segment of his electoral base, Bush offered this faction the promise of a major initiative against Cuba: the Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba. He mandated the Commission “to identify ways to hasten the arrival of that day” when “Castro’s regime is no more.”⁶

The outline of the new policy became clearly evident in the “Report to the President” released in May 2004 by the

Commission. The last five chapters of the 500-page report describe a post-Castro, U.S.-governed transition to a market democracy. As Wayne Smith, the former chief of the U.S. Interests Section, mockingly observed, the detailed plans lay out how the firm hand of the United States would guide Cuba’s transition by “setting up the right kind of schools, making sure the trains run on time and all such matters. We can be sure that contracts for Bechtel and Halliburton are already planned.”⁷

Appropriately, few analysts examined these pie-in-the-sky ideas. Attention focused on the first chapter—

by Peter Kornbluh

“Posada was overheard to say that, ‘We are going to hit a Cuban airplane,’ and that ‘Orlando has the details.’”

October 7, 1976: In the first intelligence cable following the bombing of Cubana Flight 455—which killed a number of Guyanese students on their way to medical school in Havana, and the entire Cuban Olympic Fencing team—the FBI reports that their source “all but admitted that Posada and Bosch had engineered the bombing of the airline” and that the Venezuelan intelligence service was “arranging for Luis Posada and Orlando Bosch to leave Venezuela as soon as possible.”

Posada and Bosch were both arrested in Caracas and held there. In September 1985, Posada bribed his way out of prison and escaped to El Salvador where he was gainfully employed as a key operative in Oliver North’s illicit Contra resupply operations. In 1997 he proudly told a *New York Times* reporter he was responsible for a string of bombings of tourist hotels in Havana that had injured 11 people and claimed the life of an Italian businessman. “It is sad someone is dead,” he stated, “but we can’t stop.”

Now 78 years old, Posada is clearly a lifelong terrorist. But for a good part of his career, the documents reveal, he worked for the CIA. A CIA record review conducted after the bombing shows that he became of “operational interest” to the Agency in April 1965, when he was recruited, for about \$300 a month, to be a trainer in the art of sabotage and demolitions. He then left the United States in the late 1960s to join the Venezuelan secret police and create a new base for violent anti-Castro operations. He remained on the payroll as an informant until early 1976.

This background is, perhaps, a key reason why the Bush Administration has failed to either prosecute



Hundreds of thousands of Cubans march past the U.S. Interests Section in Havana holding photos of those who perished aboard Cubana Flight 455 to demand the arrest and extradition of Luis Posada Carriles.

Posada as an international terrorist or expel him as an undesirable alien. As of November 2005, Posada was being held in El Paso, Texas on the low-level charge of illegal entry. But Justice Department lawyers appointed to press a judge to deport him to Venezuela essentially yielded to the unproven arguments of his defense lawyer that he would be tortured if returned to Caracas, or worse, turned over to Cuba.

In effect, the politics of U.S. antagonism against both Hugo Chávez in Venezuela and Fidel Castro in Cuba have overridden the Bush Administration’s need for credibility in the War on Terrorism. President Bush once claimed that the community of nations could “create conditions so that those who use terror as a tool are less acceptable in parts of the world.” But his handling of the Posada case shows that there is a place where such terrorists are, in fact, accepted and even protected. ■

REPORT: CUBA IN THE AMERICAS

“Hastening Cuba’s Transition”—because it contained policy proposals endorsed by the President that would take effect immediately. These included: restrictions on family visits, so that Cuban-Americans would be able to return to the island only once every three years and would be allowed to spend no more than \$50 per day on lodging and food; restrictions on remittances, so that U.S. citizens would be permitted to send money only to immediate family members in Cuba; restrictions on educational travel, so that U.S. colleges and universities would be licensed only for programs lasting at least 10 weeks; increased funds for political opponents of the regime inside Cuba and for U.S.-based programs designed to support dissidents; and stepped-up propaganda efforts, using U.S. military aircraft to transmit Radio and TV Marti broadcasts to Cuba.⁸

The month after the report’s release, the Treasury Department’s Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) issued sweeping regulations that flowed from the Commission’s recommendations. The new rules quickly led to significant reductions in travel by Cuban-Americans

and by religious or humanitarian groups. More than 300 U.S. colleges and universities shut down their academic programs in Cuba.⁹ Marazul Charters, one of the largest providers of licensed travel between the United States and Cuba, reports U.S. travelers to Cuba declined by 80% from 2003 to 2005.¹⁰ Similarly, the number of religious or humanitarian groups traveling to the island has fallen in the past two years from 160 to 20, cutting humanitarian aid and assistance to Cuba by an estimated \$6 million.¹¹ In addition, OFAC stepped-up its enforcement of the travel ban. In all of 2004, it imposed 392 fines against individuals, but as of mid-October 2005, it had imposed 587 individual fines, already an increase of almost 50%.¹²

There is little doubt that the Treasury’s May 2004 regulations and the tougher enforcement of previous rules have hurt Cuba, but the long-term significance of these measures is less clear. In the U.S. context, several observers have suggested that the draconian rules may ultimately contribute to the embargo’s unraveling, because they anger younger Cuban-Americans who

STRANGE BEDFELLOWS AGAINST U.S. POLICY

The world of lobbying against U.S. policy toward Cuba offers an instructive lesson in the ironies and vagaries of coalition politics. Consider last April’s Cuba Action Day, which mobilized about 700 constituents from 35 states in Washington, D.C. to persuade their congressional representatives to endorse a pair of identical House and Senate bills that would roll back the 2004 travel ban. Citizen-lobbyists listened to panelists who took turns denouncing the travel ban. They included, among others, three Cuban-Americans, an agricultural exporter from Iowa and a professor.

But a bipartisan quartet of congressional representatives—Bill Delahunt (D-Mass.), Jim McGovern (D-Mass.), Jo Ann Emerson (R-Mo.) and Jeff Flake (R-Ariz.)—dominated the day’s speechifying. Their pronouncements reflect a doctrine on Cuba that gives pause to other foes of the travel ban. Flake, sponsor of the House bill and perhaps the doctrine’s most eloquent proponent, portrayed the agenda as a libertarian effort to give U.S. citizens back their constitutional right to travel, one with convenient anti-socialist benefits. “Tourism, as you all know, travel of any kind, has a

corrosive effect on repressive regimes,” Flake said. “So when Americans travel, when Europeans travel, it’s promoting individualism,” he continued, referring to the Cuban Ministry of Tourism’s recent denunciation of displays of individualism resulting from Cubans’ interactions with foreign travelers. “And that’s something we’re to be concerned about? I think we should embrace that.”

The doctrine mixes free-trader openness with standard bellicose posturing toward Castro. A 2001 op-ed written by Delahunt and the former U.S. ambassador to Trinidad and Tobago, Sally Grooms Cowell, succinctly encapsulates this vision. They wrote: “A century ago, during the Spanish-American War, the United States invaded Cuba. It’s now time for a new invasion—with academics, missionaries, investors, human rights activists, and tourists. Let the college kids of spring break be in the vanguard of that invasion.” Voiced repeatedly at Cuba Action Day, this position doesn’t stray entirely from that of the Miami hardliners. The difference is mostly tactical, since its ultimate goal is the overthrow of Castro and Cuba’s Revolution. But where the 45-year-old sanctions regime has failed, the thinking goes, open markets and interpersonal engagement will prevail.

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want to travel more frequently to the island, as well as others who want to send remittances to aunts, uncles and non-family members. The travel restrictions even prompted a group of exiles to form the Cuban American Commission for Family Rights, whose mission is “to preserve the integrity of the Cuban family and work to defeat those who want to divide it.”

Interestingly, the negative reaction by the exile community came as no surprise to Bush Administration officials, who were urged to pressure the Commission not to recommend restrictions on travel or remittances by exiles. Joe Garcia, a former head and current board member of the Cuban American National Foundation, asserted that the President’s action undermined the unity of the Cuban-American community. “It divides our base,” he said. “It’s not in his political best interest to divide a community whose support for President Bush makes Crawford, Texas, look like enemy territory.”¹³ That a politically astute administration would risk fracturing this key constituency suggests that the policy aims transcended the President’s domestic political con-

siderations. This points to the restoration of an antagonistic policy towards Cuba, rather than its disappearance.

Congressional bipartisan approval for increasing trade with Cuba and limiting the enforcement mechanisms of the embargo suggests the Bush Administration is running out of supporters for its tough Cuba policy. Yet major anti-embargo legislative initiatives were scuttled in 2003 by House Majority Leader Tom DeLay’s (R-Texas) legislative machinations. When differing House and Senate versions of the Transportation-Treasury appropriations bill went to conference for reconciliation, each version contained an identical Cuba amendment preventing the use of Treasury funds to enforce Cuba travel restrictions or travel-related transactions. Typically, a conference committee does not even look at provisions in a bill on which both chambers have agreed. But after DeLay surreptitiously removed it during conference consideration, the amendment, which would have in effect lifted the travel ban, “disappeared into the Congressional ether,” Republican Senator Michael Enzi of Wyoming caustically commented. In 2005 DeLay killed a series of amendments that would have eased embargo

by Pablo Morales

Neither of the familiar Cuba solidarity groups, the *Venceremos* Brigade and Pastors for Peace, were represented on the panel, though their flyers circulated. Both groups, which boast significant contacts with Cuban citizens, publicly violate the travel ban each year as an act of civil disobedience. A space for them to be heard at the event was apparently unworkable given the embarrassing clash of assumptions this would entail. “End the travel ban” was the day’s mantra, and reuniting families, restoring U.S. travel rights and toppling Castro were the polite rationales—less so the well-being of Cubans and certainly not aiding the Cuban state.

“It’s a very interesting phenomenon,” says Wayne Smith, a senior fellow at the Center for International Policy, which sponsored the event. “You have Jeff Flake’s approach, which is that this is the best way to bring down Castro: contacts, trade and so forth. And then you have the other side, people like me, who argue it is indeed the best way to encourage Cuba to move toward a more open society—not to bring down Castro.” Geoff Thale, a staffer at another sponsoring organization, the Washington Office on Latin America, also distances himself from the anti-Castro rhetoric prevalent at Cuba

Action Day. “I’m promoting political opening, but not outright political change,” he says. “If U.S.-Cuba relations improve, political dynamics in Cuba will change, but that doesn’t mean Castro’s downfall or market reform.” There’s a difference, he adds, between buying rice from Arkansas and setting up McDonald’s franchises.

Bonnie Massey, a seven-year member of the *Venceremos* Brigade, is grateful for the added momentum of the anti-sanctions coalition, despite its anti-Castro, neoliberal wing. She says the Brigade is willing to work with anyone, whatever their motives, on ending the embargo and travel restrictions. “This wasn’t a very popular opinion in the past,” she adds, “so I think it’s great.” Massey tells an inverted version of Flake’s democratization-through-tourism scenario. Many new *brigadistas*, she says, go to the island “with the attitude of teaching Cuba democracy,” but most return feeling they learned more and taught less. “They see a society that prioritizes children and older people, and that has an incredible health care system. People start questioning, like ‘I work every day and I can’t afford healthcare or get an education. Why is that?’” ■

REPORT: CUBA IN THE AMERICAS



Protesters at the World Youth Festival in Caracas, Venezuela in August 2005.

restrictions related to educational travel, gifts and family visits to Cuba.¹⁴ But with DeLay's own future in question since his indictment by a Texas grand jury in October 2005, embargo supporters lost an effective inside strategist.

Meanwhile, with the steady growth of U.S. agricultural sales to Cuba since 2001, the Administration found itself fending off another congressional offensive. In 2004 Cuba bought \$401 million worth of U.S. agricultural products, up from \$259 million in 2003. But from January to August 2005, U.S. food sales to Cuba dropped by 22% compared to the same period the year before.¹⁵ The main cause for the drop was a February 2005 Treasury Department ruling requiring that Cuba pay for food shipments before they leave a U.S. port. Previously, Cuba had paid for agricultural goods after inspecting the shipment while in transit, or upon its arrival to the island. In an effort to force the Treasury Department to back down from its restriction, Democratic Senator Max Baucus of Montana held up consideration of several Treasury Department nominations. He relented in July 2005 after the Treasury promised to modify the rule.¹⁶

Although the Bush Administration lost this particular battle, the fight itself indicates the President is determined to press on aggressively against Cuba despite pressures from agricultural exporters. Moreover, the loss of DeLay was not a fatal blow to the Administration's hostile Cuba policy, which now relies on Cuban-American Representative Lincoln Diaz-Balart (a Florida Republican, who gained a key leadership post on the House Rules Committee in January 2005) and on newly elected Republican Senator Mel Martinez (also of Florida and the first Cuban-American to hold a seat in the upper chamber).

CERTAINLY SOME OF THE U.S. ENMITY TOWARDS CUBA IS posturing, designed as in the past to appease hard-line

Cuban-Americans, but the renewed emphasis in 2005 on promoting democracy in Cuba—essentially code words for regime change—go beyond the usual symbolic hand-outs to Miami extremists. The post of Cuba Transition Coordinator, a person whose sole responsibility in the State Department is to plan the overthrow of the Cuban government, remained empty for over a year after the Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba recommended its creation. In announcing Caleb McCarry's appointment as Transition Coordinator, Secretary Rice strikingly described the position as "the keystone of our strategy" to "accelerate the demise of Castro's tyranny." A reliable conservative, McCarry was in charge of a USAID-funded, quasi-private "democracy" promotion program in Guatemala in the late 1980s and later worked on the Republican staff of the House International Relations Committee.

McCarry's point man in Cuba is Michael Parmly, the new chief of the U.S. Interests Section, who replaced the abrasive and ineffectual James Cason last September. Parmly is a seasoned diplomat with significant experience in attempting to create market democracies in post-conflict situations. He served as the senior U.S. advisor involved in organizing the 2004 elections in Afghanistan and was Charge d'Affaires at the U.S. Embassy in Sarajevo, tasked with implementing the Dayton Accords. In naming a highly regarded professional with Parmly's background, the Bush Administration indicated its serious commitment to challenging the legitimacy of the Cuban government and engineering a transition.

Parmly also has much more money at his disposal than his predecessor, thanks to a \$59 million budget allocation earmarked for Cuban transition efforts. This is a whopping increase of \$50 million from the year before. USAID doles out some of the money to the anti-Castro lobby in the United States, but significant amounts are spent inside Cuba, on programs designated to: "build solidarity with democratic activists"; "give voice to independent journalists"; "help develop independent Cuban nongovernmental organizations"; "[provide] direct outreach to the Cuban people."¹⁷

The Bush Administration has tried to avoid interactions with Cuba that might be misinterpreted as a diminution of its hostility. For example, in the devastating aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, Castro offered the services of 1,100 Cuban doctors to the stricken areas, a number he soon raised to 1,586. Washington made no official reply to the offer. Even Senator Martinez decried the lengths to which the Administration would go to demonstrate its hostility towards Cuba. "If we need doc-

tors,” he said, “and Cuba offers them and they provide good service, of course we should accept them, and we’re grateful for that offer.”¹⁸

From Cuba’s perspective, the most egregious recent provocation has been the U.S. government’s harboring of Luis Posada Carriles, a convicted international terrorist known to have been involved in the 1976 bombing of a civilian Cuban airliner that killed all 73 people on board [See, “A Safe Harbor...” p. 16].

In May 2005 he turned up in Miami, asking for political asylum. Bush seemed to be faced with the choice of angering Cuban-Americans if he sent Posada to Venezuela, which had demanded the terrorist be extradited, or of vitiating his bold declarations on terrorism, such as his infamous dictum: “If you harbor a terrorist, if you aid a terrorist, if you hide terrorists, you’re just as guilty as the terrorists.”¹⁹ The President chose to leave Posada dangling in limbo, languishing in a Texas jail until late September 2005, when a federal judge ruled that he could not be extradited to either Venezuela or Cuba, because both countries allegedly practice torture.

The explanation for Bush’s behavior in this case may simply be that he bowed to the demands of those Cuban-Americans who see Luis Posada Carriles as a hero. But given how central the “War on Terrorism” is to the President’s overall foreign policy agenda, he stood to benefit much more from affirming his anti-terrorist credentials than from placating Cuban exiles. An alternative explanation is that by harboring Posada, the Bush Administration sends a chilling message to Cuba, and perhaps Venezuela, that it would not rule out the use of terrorists in confronting the perceived threat these two countries pose, even at the risk of sacrificing the legitimacy of the “War on Terrorism.”

Bush Administration efforts to frame its Cuba policy in terms of U.S. national security strain its minimal credibility. Still, Cuba remains on the State Department’s list of countries supporting terrorism, despite distortions in the evidence used to justify Cuba’s inclusion. Mark Sullivan of the Congressional Research Service, for instance, observes that those who advocate that Cuba should stay on the list have succeeded in part by pointing “to the [Cuban] government’s history of supporting terrorist acts and armed insurgencies in Latin America and Africa” during the Cold War.²⁰ Yet it is not an irrational Cold War legacy that propels Bush Administration officials to consider Cuba a real threat. Daniel Fisk, now the National Security Adviser for the Western Hemisphere, clearly articulated the nature of the perceived threat at a congressional hearing in October

2005. Identifying the “strategically located Caribbean basin” as a “high priority for this Administration,” he warned of the growing influence of Cuba and Venezuela in the region:

Cuba employs diplomatic outreach, the deployment of medical personnel and services to Caribbean countries and offers of scholarships and assistance to Caribbean students to study in Cuba. Likewise, Venezuela maintains an active diplomatic presence throughout the Caribbean basin and provides aid to several of the smaller islands. Most recently, Hugo Chavez launched Petrocaribe, a scheme to create a network of state-run oil enterprises to market Venezuelan oil. Venezuela’s concept for Petrocaribe undermines the position of private sector companies in the region and advances his “Bolivarian alternative” trade and economic agenda.

Ultimately the threat is political, Fisk explains, because of “Cuban and Venezuelan attempts to drive a wedge between the U.S. and its Caribbean partners.”²¹ In effect, he is saying both endanger traditional U.S. dominance in the Western Hemisphere and are viewed as acting in tandem. Strikingly, Stephen McFarland, the U.S. Deputy Chief of Mission in Venezuela, simply switched positions in September with Kevin Whittaker, who had been head of the State Department’s Cuba desk.

Ominously, Washington’s establishment pundits have subtly embraced this security lens, which is fast becoming the standard way of describing Cuba and Venezuela. “Chavez is a man with a mission,” Michael Shifter, vice president of the Inter-American Dialogue, said in a recent interview in reference to Venezuela’s President. “He is intent on building a counterweight to U.S. influence in the Western Hemisphere.” Similarly, Jackson Diehl, a *Washington Post* editorial writer, blithely asserted in a recent column that Chávez was the “political and ideological successor to Fidel Castro” moving forward in an “aggressive attempt to succeed where Castro failed in creating an anti-American alliance.”²²

Since Hugo Chávez was elected president in 1998, Venezuela and Cuba have entered into a series of economic agreements that provide both countries with resources each respectively lacks [See, “Cuba’s Foreign...” p. 27]. Cuba receives 90,000 barrels of oil a day in exchange for sending thousands of doctors and teachers to work in Venezuela. In late 2004 Castro and Chávez signed an agreement they said formed the base of the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA), a proposed integration pact that seeks to include all Latin

REPORT: CUBA IN THE AMERICAS

American and Caribbean countries as a counter-proposal to the U.S.-sponsored Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA). Despite the uncertain future of both agreements, the rise of left-of-center governments in South America giving Cuba unusual regard adds another reason for the Administration to once again see Cuba as a foreign policy challenge.

Recent trade agreements between China and Cuba also fuel the Bush Administration's wariness about Havana. President Hu Jintao's November 2004 visit to Cuba highlighted the importance his country seems to accord its new relationship with the island. President Hu agreed to postpone the repayment of debt that Cuba incurred between 1990 and 1994, and said China would provide new credits for the purchase of one million television sets and hospital equipment. The Chinese also donated \$9 million for airport X-ray equipment and cloth for school uniforms. Cuba secured an agreement in which it will send 4,000 tons of nickel per year to China through 2009 in return for a \$500 million investment to finish the construction of a large nickel plant in the province of Holguín. The investment is projected to double the island's nickel production. Cuban trade with China is now 10% of the island's total international commerce, and it ranks China as Cuba's third largest trading partner behind Spain and Venezuela.²³

The concern about China's relationship with Cuba is two-fold. First, China's investment reinforces Cuba's ability to withstand U.S. pressure, reducing the leverage exercised by the Bush Administration. Second, the investments underscore a growing Chinese strategy in Latin America of securing long-term access to badly needed natural resources. In 2004, nearly half of China's foreign

direct investment went to Latin America, whereas only 23% went to Asia. Similarly, China's bilateral trade with Latin American countries grew from \$12.6 billion in 2001 to \$26.8 billion in 2003.²⁴

With these geopolitical considerations in mind, U.S. policy towards Cuba has in many ways reverted back to its Cold War aims. After the 1962 missile crisis, U.S. officials largely abandoned the goal of militarily subverting the regime, and focused instead on containing Cuba's influence in the Third World. Containment, with its components of subversion and destabilization, has once again emerged as the favored goal, not as an irrational vestige of the Cold War, but as a rational response to a perceived menace. The threat is not so great to warrant direct U.S. intervention, even if the United States had the military capacity to invade Cuba, which it does not. But by the Administration's calculations, Cuba's renewed challenge to U.S. hemispheric dominance does warrant hostility—isolating it, denigrating it and keeping it on edge so that it wastes resources on defenses against the possibility of a U.S. attack.

U.S. sanctions themselves are too insignificant to have a fatally destructive impact, as the recovery of the Cuban economy—particularly with the growing ties with countries like China and Venezuela—continues to show. Yet this does not suggest that sanctions are merely payback to Bush's conservative Florida supporters, and so would consequently disappear without Cuban-American pressure. They serve a rational purpose within the hegemonic logic and unremitting confrontational stance that guides Bush Administration policies, which in the Cuban case are rooted in a new assessment of "the Cuban threat." ■

Cuban Development in the Bolivarian Matrix

by Pedro Monreal

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LAST SUMMER, THE HAVANA AIRPORT BUZZED with traffic. Caracas had become the most connected city to Havana, with Venezuela quickly becoming one of the top senders of travelers to the island. Most of the Venezuelans arriving at the airport came to the island seeking medical attention; in the opposite direction, thousands of Cuban doctors were leaving for

Venezuela. The scene signaled a new pattern of Cuba's participation in the global economy.

Cuba's main airport had quickly gone from being the port of entry for Europe and Canada's sand-and-sun enthusiasts to becoming the country's veritable hospital waiting room. Several tourist establishments began housing medical patients from Venezuela and other

U.S. Policy on Cuba Beyond the Last Gasp

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Cuban Development in the Bolivarian Matrix

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Cuban Civil Society: I. Reinterpreting the Debate

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