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**COMMUNISM
IN CENTRAL AMERICA
AND THE CARIBBEAN**

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COMMUNISM
IN CENTRAL AMERICA
AND THE CARIBBEAN

Edited by
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2 | CUBA

William M. LeoGrande

Located only ninety miles south of Florida and dominating the eastern approaches to the Caribbean basin, Cuba has long been of major economic and strategic interest to the United States. Despite Spanish colonial restrictions on trade outside the empire, the United States became Cuba's principal trade partner early in the nineteenth century. Over the following decades several U.S. administrations tried to purchase Cuba from Spain, but the Spanish were unwilling to part with the island.¹ At the turn of the century, when U.S. investors began to explore business opportunities beyond continental North America, the proximity of Cuba made it a logical choice for foreign investment. The collapse of the world sugar market in the 1890s and the resulting bankruptcy of the Cuban economy provided an ideal opportunity for foreign investors and marked the first large-scale acquisition of Cuban property by U.S. citizens.² Cuba, like Mexico, has sometimes suffered for its nearness to the United States. Cuba's second war of independence (1895–1898) aroused strong feelings in the United States, which were whipped to feverish intensity by journalistic sensationalism. Also, war damage to U.S. property on the island helped to enlist powerful private interests on the side of intervention. In 1898, the United States entered the war, quickly defeated Spain, and occupied Cuba.

The Spanish-American War revived the doctrine of Manifest Destiny, as the United States acquired its first colonies, Puerto Rico and the Philippines. President Theodore Roosevelt and Adm. Alfred Thayer

Mahan believed that a global geopolitical role for America required naval power—specifically, a Central American canal and the naval outposts necessary for its defense. Cuba's geographical position thus made it strategically important.³

A friendly Cuba was considered essential to American economic and military security. The U.S.-imposed Platt amendment to the Cuban Constitution of 1902 reduced Cuba to a virtual protectorate by prohibiting it from signing any foreign agreement inimical to U.S. interests and by giving the U.S. government the right to intervene in Cuban domestic affairs in case of political turmoil. Several times in the early decades of the twentieth century, the amendment was invoked to justify the landing of American troops in Cuba. The Platt amendment and subsequent U.S. interventions imparted a distinctly anti-U.S. flavor to Cuban nationalism.⁴

One of the top priorities of the revolutionary government that came to power in 1959 was to reduce Cuba's economic and political dependence on the United States. Since ousted dictator Fulgencio Batista had long been a friend of the United States, Fidel Castro and his guerrillas were wary of the U.S. reaction to their revolution. Neither Cuba nor the United States were particularly diplomatic during 1959 and 1960. Castro berated U.S. imperialism; the United States denounced Castro's radicalism. Although Cuba's transition to socialism was due largely to domestic social and political dynamics,⁵ there is no doubt that the collapse of friendly relations between Cuba and the United States left moderate, pro-American domestic political forces isolated and impotent. As the rhetoric grew vitriolic, relations between the United States and Cuba rapidly deteriorated, and the spiral of hostility became irreversible.⁶

The strategic consequences of this enmity proved to be great. Faced with U.S. economic sanctions and the threat of military intervention, Cuba sought security through reliance on the Soviet Union. Soviet military assistance armed the Cuban government against both internal and external enemies. Soviet economic aid ensured Cuba's survival following the severing of Cuba's close economic ties with the United States.⁷

The Evolution of Cuban Socialism

By the end of 1960, most of the Cuban economy had been nationalized, and the nation's new leaders confronted two central tasks: the development of a planned economy and the creation of a new political system.

The radical redistributive policies of 1959–1960 stimulated demand, brought the economy's excess capacity into production, and produced

two years of rapid growth. On the basis of this success, Cuban leaders adopted an ambitious strategy of industrialization and agricultural diversification away from sugar. The immense cost of industrialization, however, exceeded the financial capacity of the Cuban economy. Disruptions in production caused by the abolition of the market and the exodus of managerial personnel led to a severe recession in 1962. As sugar production fell, so did foreign exchange earnings, producing a major balance of payments crisis. The Soviet Union financed this deficit with trade credits, but was unwilling to underwrite such massive shortfalls indefinitely. In 1963, after consulting with the Soviet Union, Cuba abandoned the industrialization strategy in favor of an export-oriented strategy emphasizing Cuba's comparative advantage in sugar. The receipts from sugar exports were then to be used to develop the rest of the economy.⁸ The government set ten million tons of sugar by 1970 as both an economic and a political goal.

This new development strategy was as overly optimistic as its predecessor. The previous record for the Cuban sugar industry was approximately 7.5 million tons. Meeting the 1970 goal required a 33 percent expansion—an immense investment over a very short period. The planning apparatus created during the 1960s proved too rudimentary to manage such rapid growth. In 1970, Cuba produced 8.5 million tons of sugar—a new record, but still far short of the announced goal. Even this was purchased at great cost to the rest of the economy. In a final effort to meet the goal, planners diverted resources from other economic sectors, causing major losses in virtually every other area of production. The failure was a political defeat as well. For half a decade, the 1970 sugar harvest had been the symbolic test of the revolution's progress. In the wake of the failure, Cuba's leaders not only revised economic policy but also reassessed Cuba's political structures.⁹

Cuba was the first country to have a Marxist-Leninist revolution without a communist party in the vanguard of the revolutionary struggle. The old communist party had played only a marginal role in the insurrection. After Castro's victory, it was only one of several revolutionary organizations forming the new political system. The most important group was Castro's Twenty-Sixth of July Movement. The victorious guerrilla army that defeated Batista and took effective control of the island in 1959 constituted the more radical wing of this movement—an important factor in determining the revolution's leftist course over the two years after 1959.

The creation of permanent political institutions in Cuba proceeded slowly, largely due to Fidel Castro's charismatic style of political leadership. Much of the revolution's popular support was support for Fidel;

the leaders of the revolution, Castro foremost among them, were unwilling to jeopardize this support by institutionalizing the regime too rapidly. This caution was reinforced by the first few experiments with new political institutions, virtually all of which were disappointments.¹⁰

The most significant of these experiments was the 1961 attempt to build a new vanguard party by merging the old communist party, the Twenty-Sixth of July Movement, and a student group (the Revolutionary Directorate) that had also fought against Batista. The new party, the Integrated Revolutionary Organizations (Organizaciones Integradas Revolucionarias; ORI), quickly fell under the control of the old Communists, whose organizational experience was superior to that of other members. In early 1962, an attempt by some old Communists to usurp control of the revolution provoked a public denunciation of the ORI from Fidel Castro. It was dismantled within months, and Cuba was once again the only Marxist state without a ruling communist party.

Although a new communist party (Partido Comunista de Cuba; PCC) was inaugurated in 1965, it did not really rule. Its committees rarely met, and its membership in 1969 was only 0.7 percent of the population (relatively only a tenth as large as the average ruling communist party).¹¹ Control of the political system remained in the hands of Fidel Castro and his closest advisers—the revolutionary family who had fought together in the mountains.

The event that finally led to the institutionalization of the revolution was the failure of the 1970 sugar harvest. The leadership's conclusion that the weakness of Cuba's institutional structure had been one of the key causes of the failure initiated a decade of institution building. Within five years, the PCC expanded nearly fivefold and began to play the leading role typical of ruling communist parties. But institutional changes were by no means restricted to the party. The administrative bureaucracy was completely reorganized, and a legislative branch of government was created. Begun in the mid-1960s, the Organs of People's Power provided for more direct popular participation in Cuban politics, especially at the local level, than had been possible in the early 1960s. These elected assemblies also supervised the performance of the bureaucracy, a task the PCC had performed poorly.¹²

The 1970s witnessed both a political and an economic rationalization. Rising world sugar prices at mid-decade benefited the economy, and Cuba appeared on its way as a showcase of socialism in the Third World.

The 1980s, however, brought new problems. The most dramatic indication of the crisis was the exodus of some 120,000 refugees in early 1980. The principal catalyst for this flood was an economic recession.

Crop diseases decimated both the sugar and tobacco crops, two of Cuba's largest export commodities. The consequent drop in foreign exchange earnings forced a reduction in imports, producing a decline in both economic growth and consumption.¹³ The government's mismanagement of the economy aggravated the resulting shortages, and the regime now seems willing to experiment with some limited economic reforms that would give market forces a larger economic role.¹⁴

Various factors have intensified the political impact of Cuba's economic difficulties. As a result of agreements concluded between the Cuban government and representatives of the émigré community abroad, 110,000 exiles visited Cuba in 1979. Many brought with them consumer goods unavailable in Cuba. For the Cubans who had lived through two decades of austerity, the sharp contrast in living standards between themselves and the visitors was demoralizing. Cuba's commitments in Africa have also sparked a feeling that large-scale aid to foreign governments is a luxury for the austere Cuban economy.¹⁵

As the Cuban revolution enters its third decade, its political and economic problems are serious, though not yet as serious as the problems encountered in 1970. Neither the economy nor the government is on the verge of collapse.

Cuban-Soviet Relations

The Soviet Union did not rush to aid the Cuban revolution. For the first eighteen months after the guerrillas' victory, the Soviets did little more than establish normal diplomatic and trade relations with the island.¹⁶ Even this contributed to the deterioration of U.S.-Cuban relations, however, since the United States was unaccustomed to diplomatic relations between the Soviet Union and Latin American countries.

The cautiousness of Soviet policy was intended to provide no excuse for a direct U.S. intervention against the revolutionary government. The USSR maintained this policy until the United States canceled Cuba's sugar quota in mid-1960. The Soviets thereupon moved boldly to provide large-scale economic and military assistance to the hard-pressed government.

The Bay of Pigs fiasco in April 1961 cemented the new Cuban-Soviet alliance. The installation of Soviet intermediate-range ballistic missiles in Cuba was a logical extension of the partnership. For Cuba, the missiles provided a deterrent against a U.S. invasion. For the Soviet Union, they were an opportunity to reduce U.S. nuclear superiority. The withdrawal of the missiles, however, nearly shattered the alliance. The Cubans felt betrayed at being stripped of their deterrent and insulted at

being left out of the negotiations that resolved the crisis. In early 1963, Cuba signaled the United States that it was interested in rapprochement, but President Kennedy's assassination halted the dialogue. Similar initiatives in the summer of 1964 were no more productive.

During the remainder of the decade, Cuba expanded and deepened its ties with the Soviet Union despite serious ideological differences. In the late 1960s, Cuba's radical foreign and domestic policies, including an economic strategy emphasizing central planning and a near exclusive reliance on moral incentives, drew sharp Soviet criticism. Carmelo Mesa-Lago has described this period as the "Sino-Guevarist" stage of the revolution because Guevara was its chief exponent and because it closely resembled Chinese theories of development.¹⁷ The Cubans openly disparaged the use of material incentives and market-oriented reforms in other socialist countries—most notably in the Soviet Union—hinting that they augured the restoration of capitalism.

Despite such attacks, the Soviets continued their large-scale economic aid to Cuba, in effect financing Cuba's "ultraleft" experiments. Only one incident suggests Soviet sanctions. In 1967, Soviet petroleum shipments to Cuba were delayed, ostensibly for lack of transport. Normal shipments resumed after several months, but many commentators interpret this incident as a warning to Cuba that there were limits to Soviet tolerance for Cuban deviations.¹⁸ Cuban economic policy did not change after this incident (though it did after the failure of the 1970 sugar harvest), but Cuban-Soviet relations did begin to improve.

Cuba's foreign policy in the late 1960s was aimed at aggressively exporting revolution to Latin American participants in the Organization of American States' (OAS) embargo of Cuba. The Soviets criticized this strategy as ineffective, but Cuba generally denigrated Soviet reservations as self-serving. The Soviet Union's pursuit of détente seemed to Cuba an abdication of socialist internationalism, and the Cubans vocally demanded increased Soviet aid to revolutionary movements abroad.¹⁹ Cuban criticism, however, did not result in any reduction in Soviet military aid. In 1968, Cuba's attacks on Soviet foreign policy waned, and Castro endorsed the Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia.

Soviet-Cuban relations in the late 1960s were complex and multifaceted. Despite major ideological and political friction over foreign and domestic policy, the bedrock of the relationship—economic and military aid to Cuba—was virtually unaffected by the polemics. The Soviet expansion of economic aid in 1971 after the less than successful 1970 sugar harvest markedly improved Cuban-Soviet relations.

Economic and political reforms in 1971 brought the Cuban system

into much closer alignment with Soviet practice, thereby eliminating one major source of discord. At the same time, Cuba abandoned its policy of exporting revolution, largely because of its ineffectiveness. For the first time, Cuba officially endorsed the Soviet doctrine of peaceful coexistence.²⁰

In 1975–1976, Cuban-Soviet collaboration rose to new heights as Cuba dispatched some 36,000 combat troops to help the Popular Movement for Liberation of Angola defeat its rivals and their international allies (Zaire, South Africa) in the Angolan civil war. Although available evidence suggests that the initiative was Cuban, it was nevertheless made possible only by Soviet logistical support. In 1978, the two allies mounted another joint venture, this time to help Ethiopia's leftist government defend the Ogaden region against Somali aggression. By the late 1970s, Cuba and the Soviet Union were cooperating in several African and Middle Eastern countries.²¹ These ventures, combined with Cuba's role as chief spokesman for the socialist camp within the non-aligned movement, provided the Soviet Union with the first, big tangible benefits from its two decades of aid to Cuba.²²

Since the early 1960s, the Soviet Union has provided all the military equipment used by Cuba's armed forces. After the Angolan civil war, the technological sophistication of Soviet arms assistance increased considerably, as did the amount, which reached a level approximately twice that of the early 1970s.²³ Several thousand Soviet military advisers assist the Cuban armed forces in areas ranging from technical advice to combat training. Maneuvers conducted in 1979 by some 2,000 Soviet military personnel set off the celebrated "Soviet combat brigade" crisis.²⁴

The Soviet Union has also provided economic assistance to Cuba since 1961. The largest component of the Soviet aid package during the 1960s and early 1970s was balance of payments credits. Cuban-Soviet trade perennially resulted in a Cuban trade deficit, which the Soviet Union then absorbed by granting credits on concessionary terms. By 1973, such credits totaled nearly \$2 billion. Since 1973, the major means of aid has been preferential pricing. The Soviet Union pays premium prices for Cuban sugar and nickel while charging below-market prices for petroleum. In essence, this new accounting procedure simply shifts the financing of the trade imbalance from credits to grants. As the Cuban economy encountered difficulties in the late 1970s, the level of Soviet economic aid grew from approximately \$600 million per year in 1971–1974 to \$2 billion per year in 1975–1977 and \$3 billion in 1978–1979. Soviet aid between 1961 and 1981 totals over \$16 billion.²⁵ The floundering Cuban economy may well require even greater infusions of

Soviet aid in the years ahead, but since the investment has finally begun to pay political dividends, the Soviets will almost certainly provide whatever is necessary.

As Cuba enters the 1980s, its relationship with the Soviet Union is as close as at any time since 1959. The Reagan administration's hard line on Cuba, including threats of military action against the island, has sharply increased the Cubans' perception of a U.S. menace. In early 1981, Cuba seemed to respond to this perceived danger by drawing closer to the Soviet Union.

In an address to the PCC's Second Congress in December 1980, Castro endorsed the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and provided what amounted to a justification before the fact of a Soviet invasion of Poland.²⁶ The quid pro quo was not long in coming; in an address to the Czechoslovak party congress in April 1981, Soviet party chief Leonid Brezhnev singled Cuba out as an "inseparable member of the socialist camp"—a clear warning to the United States that military action against Cuba would provoke a superpower confrontation.²⁷

But despite the close coordination that now characterizes Cuban and Soviet foreign policies, it is a mistake to view Cuban policy as merely derivative. The Cubans have long had their own view on a correct revolutionary foreign policy and have pursued it consistently with or without Soviet support.

Relations with Latin America

The ideology of the Cuban revolution has always had a strong internationalist dimension. Even before Cuba adopted a socialist path of development, its new leaders offered the island as a haven to revolutionaries from around the hemisphere and in some instances supported their activities. Nor was Cuban support limited to the Western Hemisphere; assistance to anticolonial movements in Algeria and Portuguese Africa dates from the earliest years of the revolutionary government.²⁸

In the 1960s, the example of the Cuban revolution spawned guerrilla movements in most Latin American nations. Cuba endorsed virtually all of them and provided material assistance to many. Since the Cuban revolution lacked the classic Leninist requirement of a vanguard party in the early 1960s, it gave rise not only to Castroist guerrillas seeking to emulate Cuba's revolutionary experience but also to a new theory of revolution. The strategy of Régis Debray, a French journalist turned Cuban revolutionary, depreciated the significance of orthodox communist parties, lauding instead the vanguard role of the guerrilla army. De-

bray, in a sense, inverted Mao Zedong's famous dictum: in Latin America, the gun would control the party.²⁹

Cuba's support for Latin America's guerrillas and its endorsement of Debrayism brought it into conflict with the hemisphere's communist parties, most of which were pursuing united or popular front strategies emphasizing electoral competition. When Cuba sponsored the Tricontinental Conference in 1966, it invited few communist parties from Latin America to this unprecedented international assembly of revolutionaries.³⁰ The Soviet Union's attempt to mediate the conflict between Cuban Communists and their hemispheric colleagues was unsuccessful. Cuba's unyielding support for armed struggle and its hostility toward peaceful coexistence strained Cuban-Soviet relations in the late 1960s, though never to the point of causing an open break between them.

The insurrectionary activities of the late 1960s met with little success. Latin American guerrillas were no match for the counterinsurgency forces deployed against them under the security assistance programs of the U.S. Alliance for Progress. Che Guevara's death in Bolivia in 1967 while trying to create a *foco* for continental guerrilla war prompted a re-evaluation of the Debrayist strategy of revolution. By 1969, Cuba had for all practical purposes abandoned the policy of indiscriminate material support for guerrilla movements.³¹

For several years, no replacement for the defunct strategy of exporting revolution emerged. From 1968 to 1972, Cuba turned inward, preoccupied with the drive to produce ten million tons of sugar in 1970 and its aftermath. This retreat from foreign involvement was so startling that it led at least one commentator to describe Cuba's domestic preoccupation as "socialism in one island."³² When Cuba re-emerged on the world scene in 1972, its foreign policy was considerably changed.

The guerrilla movements that Cuba supported in the late 1960s had failed to achieve any success through armed struggle, but in several Latin American countries, the left was making gains through unexpected methods that Cuba had always disparaged. In Chile, the Popular Unity electoral coalition of Communists and Socialists won the 1970 election; in Peru, the military government appeared to be enacting a revolution from above; and in Argentina, the Peronist left had returned from the political wilderness through the election of Héctor Cámpora. All three countries broke OAS sanctions against Cuba by re-establishing diplomatic and economic ties. In the new international climate of *détente*, even conservative Latin American regimes showed a willingness to normalize relations with Cuba. The newly independent nations in the English-speaking Caribbean, historically more politically independent of the United States, promoted Cuba's reintegration into hemi-

spheric affairs. Not having been targets of Cuba's earlier efforts to export revolution, these states were less fearful of Cuban subversion. Indeed, several Caribbean nations were ruled by left-leaning populist governments.

As a result of such favorable developments in the early 1970s, Cuba adopted a hemispheric foreign policy much more conciliatory and tolerant of ideological diversity. Rather than seeking to end its isolation in the hemisphere by revolution, Cuba sought to do so by diplomacy—establishing normal state-to-state relations whenever it found willing governments. Inevitably, this new strategy required a sharp reduction in aid to guerrilla movements. Cuba continued to be a haven for Latin America's revolutionaries, but its program of arms assistance virtually halted.³³

Cuba's conciliatory approach to its neighbors had considerable initial success. Until finally relaxed in 1975, the OAS sanctions were undermined by a continuous stream of defections during the early 1970s. Even the United States appeared willing to renew normal diplomatic and economic ties, and secret negotiations between the two states began in 1974.³⁴

By the late 1970s, however, progress on the diplomatic front had halted. Cuba's military involvement in Angola and Ethiopia, both carried out in coordination with the Soviet Union, demolished prospects for normalization of relations between Cuba and the United States. These conflicts initiated a new cold war, with Cuba once again the focal point of the growing antagonism between East and West.³⁵

In Latin America, the departure of Cuban troops for Africa resurrected the fears of the late 1960s—Castro once again seemed to be pursuing a militant policy of promoting revolutions abroad. Although no Latin American governments broke relations with Cuba over Angola and Ethiopia, the process of reintegrating Cuba into the inter-American community slowed perceptibly.³⁶

Cuba entered the 1980s with a three-tiered policy toward the hemisphere. Its relations with its neighbors run the gamut from cordial to hostile, and Cuba has distinct policies for different categories of nations. The largest group consists of those countries that maintain normal state-to-state relations with Cuba, ranging from warm to merely "proper" (for example, Mexico, Argentina, Ecuador, Peru, Venezuela). Toward these countries, Cuba continued to pursue the conciliatory diplomatic strategy it adopted in 1970.

Cuba's relations with Mexico have improved noticeably in recent years. New commercial agreements, including one for Mexican petroleum, indicate that Mexico's increasingly activist policy in the Carib-

bean will not ignore the Cubans. During a trip to Cuba in 1980, Mexican President José López Portillo even promised Mexican support for Cuba should the United States become actively hostile.³⁷

Cuba's relations with Venezuela and Peru, however, deteriorated after the occupation of the Peruvian Embassy compound in Havana by some ten thousand Cubans in April 1980. The incident strained Cuba's relations not only with Peru but also with Venezuela, since Venezuelan policy toward those seeking asylum in their Embassy was the same as Peru's. Shortly after the incident, Venezuela released several Cuban exiles accused of the 1976 sabotage of a Cubana airlines flight that exploded after leaving Barbados, killing everyone aboard. Cuba denounced their release in the strongest possible terms; and Venezuela, for a time, considered breaking relations with Cuba.³⁸ The implications of Cuba's dispute with Peru and Venezuela could be profound since the Andean Pact nations were in the forefront during the 1970s of those advocating Cuban reintegration into the inter-American system. If Cuba's relations with the Andean states do not improve, it is doubtful that Cuba's overall strategy of reducing tensions with its Latin American neighbors will progress appreciably in the near future.

Cuba's efforts at diplomatic reconciliation were not uniformly successful, and there remains a small group of countries (Chile, Uruguay, Brazil, El Salvador, Guatemala) whose relations with Cuba are as hostile today as they were in 1965. (In early 1981 Colombia and Costa Rica became the two latest members of this group when they severed relations with Cuba.) During the 1970s, the Cuban press regularly denounced their authoritarian governments, but Cuban policy essentially ignored them. Promoting insurrection against these governments would have undermined Cuba's strategy toward the rest of the hemisphere.

CENTRAL AMERICA

In Central America, Cuba modified its policy of reduced support for revolutionary movements in 1978-1979. The failure of the policy of exporting revolution during the late 1960s had convinced the Cubans that prospects for revolution in Latin America were dim, a conclusion that led to the adoption of the diplomatic strategy. But the unsuccessful September 1978 insurrection in Nicaragua persuaded the Cubans that they had underestimated the strength of the left in Central America. In late 1978 and early 1979, Cuba began once again to provide material assistance to guerrillas operating in Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala. The Sandinistas in Nicaragua were first beneficiaries of this new policy.³⁹

Cuban assistance, however, was much more circumscribed than it

had been in the previous decade. The Sandinistas received only a few crates of arms; Cuba's major contribution to the revolution in Nicaragua was to help mediate divisions among the three factions of the Sandinista movement. Several reasons lay behind Cuba's reluctance to become too deeply involved in supplying arms to the Nicaraguan left. Foremost was the fear that a major involvement would undo Cuba's diplomatic progress in its relations with moderate governments in the hemisphere. Another concern was that a significant Cuban presence would provoke U.S. retaliation. Although the United States did not desert Anastasio Somoza politically until the very end, neither did Washington come to his aid by supplying him with arms. Had the Cubans been more deeply involved in the Nicaraguan insurrection, the chances of U.S. intervention would have been much greater and the hemisphere's resistance to Secretary of State Cyrus Vance's 1979 suggestion for an OAS peacekeeping force might have been considerably less. Indeed, Latin Americans met Vance's attempt to justify the peacekeeping force by referring to Cuban involvement in Nicaragua with skepticism.⁴⁰ Further, the Nicaraguan revolutionaries were already receiving adequate support from other quarters, notably Costa Rica, Panama, and Venezuela.

The Sandinista victory renewed Cuba's faith in the revolutionary potential of Central America—particularly of El Salvador and Guatemala. In 1979 and 1980, Cuba provided limited quantities of arms to guerrilla forces in El Salvador. Following the pattern established in Nicaragua, Cuba acted as a consultant on strategy and helped to unify the fragmented Salvadoran left—to the Cubans a necessary condition for victory.⁴¹

In late 1980, the Salvadoran guerrillas began preparations for a massive offensive to achieve victory before Reagan's inauguration. According to U.S. intelligence reports, large-scale arms shipments began entering Salvador in late 1980, some of which came from Cuba through Nicaragua.⁴² Although the size of the shipments was a matter of some controversy, it seemed clear that the Cubans had increased their logistical support to the Salvadoran guerrillas in late 1980 and early 1981. When the guerrillas' general offensive in January failed, the flow of arms ebbed.⁴³ The danger of greater internationalization of the conflict remained acute, however.

Through 1979 and 1980, guerrilla forces in Guatemala gained significant strength, and the level of internal conflict grew accordingly. While there is as yet no evidence of sizable Cuban arms shipments to the Guatemalan left, the potential for such support is obviously real, especially in light of Cuba's role in Nicaragua and El Salvador.

Cuba has maintained close and cordial relations with the new Nic-

araguan government. Although the Nicaraguan government has pledged to allow political pluralism, it is dominated by the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN). The FSLN's Marxism is more orthodox than that of left-wing regimes in the Caribbean; and the revolution in Nicaragua has thus far been more thoroughgoing than the populist changes in Jamaica, Guyana, or Grenada.⁴⁴ This, combined with Cuba's support for the FSLN since the late 1960s, has brought Cuba and Nicaragua very close.⁴⁵

Within days of Somoza's downfall, Cuba pledged to help rebuild the Nicaraguan economy. Since then, Cuba and Nicaragua have signed cooperative agreements in the fields of health, education, agriculture, and construction. About 2,500 Cuban technicians and advisers were in Nicaragua in late 1979; most were involved in the literacy campaign, which was modeled after the Cuban effort of 1961. Some Cuban advisers also work with the Nicaraguan armed forces and security ministries.⁴⁶

As Nicaraguans search for a viable political and economic structure to replace *Somocismo*, Cuba has cautioned moderation. Fidel Castro has become a close adviser of FSLN leaders, but his advice tends toward pragmatism, not militancy. Cuba paid a heavy price for its rapid transition to socialism in the early 1960s—the exodus of the technically skilled middle class, dependence on the Soviet Union, and hemispheric isolation. Castro has reportedly advised the Nicaraguans to avoid Cuba's mistakes by following a moderate economic policy that retains a substantial private sector and can gain the confidence of international financial institutions and the United States. Ironically, Cuba's influence has kept more militant leaders of the FSLN from radicalizing the Nicaraguan revolution.⁴⁷

In early 1981, the Nicaraguan government felt itself under increasing external threat. The ongoing war in El Salvador, combined with the Reagan administration's anticommunism and its suspension of aid to Nicaragua, convinced at least some FSLN leaders that efforts to overthrow the government were in gestation. Nicaragua's enemies were by no means wholly imaginary: ex-members of Somoza's National Guard launched periodic forays into Nicaragua from training camps in Honduras and border tensions with the Hondurans were on the rise.⁴⁸

In the event of war between Nicaragua and Honduras, the Nicaraguan government might ask Cuba for direct military aid in the form of arms, advisers, or even troops. Such a scenario would fit precisely the conditions under which Cuba has dispatched combat troops abroad in the past: a friendly government under external attack. Given the close relations between Cuba and Nicaragua, Cuba would be highly likely to respond positively.

THE CARIBBEAN

The newest aspect of Cuba's policy in the Western Hemisphere is the effort to expand its influence among the English-speaking states of the Caribbean.⁴⁹ When reconciliation with Latin America stalled in the mid-1970s, Cuba turned to the Caribbean as a region where it might cultivate new friends. Cuba had paid scant attention to this area in the 1960s because most of the territories were still colonies. Thus, relations with the region were not hindered by earlier Cuban efforts to foment revolution in these states.

The principal instrument of Cuban policy in the Caribbean has been economic assistance to those states willing to establish cordial relations. Although Cuba has few resources, the economies of the Caribbean islands are small enough for even limited aid to have a significant impact. Cuban aid consists primarily of human capital—technicians, laborers, and teachers whose salaries are paid by the Cuban government.

Cuba has been only marginally more successful in the English-speaking Caribbean than in the rest of Latin America. Barbados, Trinidad-Tobago, Jamaica, and Guyana established diplomatic relations with Cuba in 1972 in disregard of the OAS sanctions.⁵⁰ But relations with Barbados and Trinidad-Tobago never evolved much beyond "proper" state-to-state relations.⁵¹ Indeed, as Cuba has expanded efforts to build its influence in the Caribbean, relations with conservative governments in the region have suffered. The worst setback came in mid-1980 when Cuban fighter planes attacked and sank a Bahaman naval vessel in Bahaman waters. Although Cuba eventually apologized for the attack and paid compensation, the incident shocked many governments in the region, making them newly wary of Cuban military power.⁵²

The emergence of "Caribbean socialism" in Jamaica, Guyana, and Grenada seemed to provide a set of states with at least some ideological affinity with Cuba's own development model, and it was to these states that most economic aid has been channeled. Even in these cases, however, Cuba's success has been relatively limited.

Guyana's warm relations with Cuba date from the early 1970s when, in an about-face, Guyanese President Forbes Burnham declared himself a Marxist and Guyana a "cooperative republic."⁵³ This new course has been characterized by moderately socialistic policies domestically and fairly radical ones internationally. During the 1970s, Burnham sought an activist role for Guyana in the nonaligned movement, where it sided with the radical wing. As Cuba became chief spokesman for the radical states in the late 1970s, the two countries often found themselves ideological allies in the political battles of the Third World. The coinci-

dence of Cuban and Guyanese international views blossomed into friendship when Burnham allowed Cuban transport planes en route to Angola to refuel in Guyana in December 1975. Over the next few years, Burnham signed several economic and technical agreements with Cuba. Some of these provide for Cuban aid to Guyana, especially in the field of sugar production; but Cuba's overall aid has been relatively small. About one hundred Cuban advisers are in Guyana.⁵⁴

Domestically, Burnham's Marxism has always been more rhetorical than real. His conversion was largely attributable to the growing popularity of his chief rival, the communist Cheddi Jagan. The latter's credentials as a Marxist are more reputable than Burnham's, and the Cubans would probably not be upset to see Jagan replace Burnham as prime minister. In 1980, Burnham seemed to reverse course once again, returning to the conservative domestic policies he had championed before 1970. The key event in the turnabout was Guyana's willingness to accept the International Monetary Fund's economic stabilization plan in order to secure funding to develop an aluminum industry.⁵⁵

Burnham's more conservative domestic course has been accompanied by rising tensions with Cuba, including accusations that Cuba has aided Jagan and has not observed its fishing agreement with Guyana. Cuban influence thus seems to be waning in one of the three Caribbean states that have been among Cuba's closest friends.⁵⁶

The overwhelming victory of Edward Seaga's Jamaican Labor Party in 1980 was a much severer blow to Cuba's efforts to expand its influence in the Caribbean. Jamaica had been Cuba's most consistent friend in the Western Hemisphere since the 1972 election of Michael Manley. While Manley's radical, populist "socialism" differed considerably from Cuban Marxism-Leninism, there was nevertheless a degree of ideological closeness. As an avid participant in the nonaligned movement, Manley pursued a foreign policy that was often in agreement with Cuba's. When Cuba's intervention in Angola damaged its relations with a number of governments in the hemisphere, Manley's support was unequivocal: "We regard Cuban assistance to Angola as honorable and in the best interests of all those who care for African freedom."⁵⁷

Cuba's economic assistance program to Manley's Jamaica was typical of such programs elsewhere. Since Cuba lacks the resources to provide financial aid to friendly governments, it concentrates on providing skilled labor in such fields as health, education, construction, transportation, and communications. Cuba and Jamaica had cooperative economic agreements in all these areas, and Jamaica was host to nearly a thousand Cuban economic advisers, by far the largest Cuban aid mission in the Caribbean.⁵⁸

As the largest of the English-speaking islands, Jamaica has historically been a political bellwether for the Caribbean. Manley's move to establish close ties with Cuba was widely interpreted as presaging a general increase in Cuban influence in the region; Manley's defeat may well herald a decline in Cuba's regional position. Seaga waged his campaign in part against Manley's ties with Cuba, and one of his first official acts was to expel the Cuban ambassador.⁵⁹ No doubt Seaga will now join with other conservative governments in the area in a general effort to stem Cuban influence.

The new revolutionary government in Grenada is Cuba's one remaining close friend in the Caribbean. Cuba greeted the ouster of Eric Gairy by Maurice Bishop's socialist New Jewel Movement in March 1979 as a revolutionary breakthrough in the region. When Bishop requested military aid to thwart any attempt by Gairy to return to power, Cuba responded quickly by providing light arms and a few dozen military advisers.⁶⁰

The sudden blossoming of Cuba's relationship with Grenada worried the United States, which warned Bishop that a close relationship with Cuba would prejudice relations with Washington. The Grenadian government reacted acrimoniously, and diplomatic relations with the United States have been deteriorating ever since.⁶¹ The rhetoric of the New Jewel government has been strongly "anti-imperialist," and Grenada has ostentatiously sided with the Soviet bloc internationally; it was, for example, the only noncommunist government to vote against the January 1980 U.N. resolution on withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan.

Cuba's economic aid program to Grenada concerns the United States more than the New Jewel's diplomatic sallies against Washington. Cuba has provided construction workers and heavy equipment to help build a major airport in Grenada, which Bishop's government portrays as a means of stimulating tourism, thus diversifying the island's spice economy. Washington worries that the airport has potential military value for transport of Cuban troops abroad. The general support of Grenadan businessmen for the project as economically vital to the island's future has not allayed U.S. fears.⁶²

Cuba's Challenge to the United States

What sort of challenge does Cuban activity in Central America and the Caribbean pose for the United States? Revolutionary Cuba's objectives have been remarkably consistent: (1) to ensure its own security in what has long been a hostile environment; (2) to promote domestic eco-

conomic development by establishing diverse international economic linkages; (3) to increase Cuba's prestige and influence worldwide; and (4) to encourage Cuban-style revolution. The translation of these objectives into practical policy will depend on the international circumstances Cuba faces in the 1980s. The basic contours of policy, however, will probably conform to those established in the late 1970s.

For several years, Cuba's overall approach to Central America and the Caribbean has been primarily a diplomatic and economic strategy of seeking friendly relations with governments that have ideological affinity with Cuba. The principal instruments of this strategy are economic assistance and diplomatic cooperation in such international groups and organizations as the United Nations and the nonaligned movement.

The military dimension to Cuba's Western Hemisphere policy is overshadowed by the economic and diplomatic dimensions. Cuba's military involvement in the region consists of a few advisers (in Grenada since 1980 and in Nicaragua since 1979) and limited material assistance to revolutionary movements in the northern tier of Central America. There is no doubt that Cuba supports the guerrillas and hopes for their victory. But it is also true that the relatively restrained Cuban aid to revolutionary groups has not been a major factor in the internal policies of any nation in the region.

For two decades, Cuban and U.S. relations have been marked by mutual hostility. At first, U.S. policy aimed to overthrow Castro's government; later the intent was to isolate and contain it. Successive administrations in Washington have viewed Cuba as a threat to a wide range of U.S. interests in the region. Political and diplomatic interests seemed threatened by the emergence of a vocally anti-U.S. government within "our own backyard." Economic interests seemed endangered by the prospect that other countries in the region might seek to emulate Cuba's socialist transformation. But Washington's greatest concern has been the perceived security threat that Cuba poses. Rooted in the very real threat posed by the 1962 Cuban missile crisis, this anxiety was reinforced by Cuba's military involvement in Africa. These events illustrate the two distinct security concerns of U.S. policymakers: that Cuba might act as a base for Soviet military action against the United States; and that Cuba might threaten U.S. allies, thereby weakening the global geopolitical position of the United States.

The first danger is potential rather than actual. In the event of global war between East and West, Soviet forces operating out of Cuba could disrupt U.S. sea transport and thus require the deployment of U.S. forces that could otherwise be used elsewhere. But this danger must be

weighed against the probability of global conflict and against the significance that Cuba would have in such a conflict. Realistically, this danger, though not imaginary, is not major and thus ought not determine the overall thrust of peacetime U.S. policy toward Cuba.

The second danger is more immediate but is also more difficult to assess. Cuban aid to friendly governments and to revolutionary movements abroad is surely aimed at promoting Cuban national interest, but to what extent does it pose a serious threat to the interests of the United States? One of the principal challenges to the United States in the Caribbean and Central America is to forge a policy that does not allow bilateral relations with the nations of the region to be distorted by our preoccupation with Cuba. Many nations would prefer to maintain cordial relations with both the United States and Cuba. Cuba is striving to build a network of friends in the Caribbean with an economic assistance program that speaks directly to the area's social and economic needs. In Central America, the United States has yet to devise a successful policy for coping with the political turmoil born of poverty and repression. Cuba may stoke the fires of Central American revolution, but Cuba did not light them, and Cuban inaction would not lead to their dying out.

Washington's reaction to Cuban activism in Latin America has often been to see it almost exclusively in national security terms. By responding to such activism with military assistance (in Central America) or a higher military profile (in the Caribbean), the United States has caused even friendly nations such as Mexico to worry more about U.S. intervention than about Cuban subversion. It is an ironic response because the United States is well-positioned to meet the challenge on Cuba's terms—that is, diplomatically and economically. The United States has more to offer in this regard than Cuba will ever have, if Washington can learn to respond to the economic needs and political demands of other Americans without demanding ideological conformity.

Notes

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23. See the discussion of Cuban-Soviet military relations in U.S., Congress, House, Subcommittee on Inter-American Affairs, *Impact of Cuban-Soviet Ties*

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24. For a review of this crisis, see *Washington Post*, October 16, 1979.

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