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A NINE-POINT STRATEGY FOR DEALING WITH CASTRO

INTRODUCTION

When he became Ronald Reagan's first Secretary of State, Alexander Haig had tough words for Cuba. He declared that "the overwhelming economic strength and political influence of the United States, together with the reality of its military power, (should be brought) to bear on Cuba in order to treat the problem at its source."¹ The "problem" to which Haig was referring was Cuba's support for violent revolution, terrorism, and the destabilization of regimes friendly to the U.S.

Now, nearly five years later, the Reagan Administration still has not crafted a policy to keep Cuba in check. Cuba remains one of the USSR's most valuable military assets, actively serving Soviet policy objectives around the world. With regular armed forces exceeding 225,000 personnel and a militia that numbers nearly a million, Cuba is a Latin American military power second only to Brazil. Cuba has played decisive roles in installing pro-Soviet regimes in Angola, Ethiopia, Grenada, and Nicaragua. Today, more than 50,000 regular Cuban troops are serving in at least sixteen countries on four continents. Accompanying them are an equal number of militarily trained "construction workers" and "internationalists."

1. Alexander M. Haig, Jr., Caveat (New York: Macmillan, 1984), p. 129.

Besides the troops garrisoning Angola and Ethiopia, Castro's forces foment violent revolution in Central America. Cuba's connection with Colombia's drug dealers and underworld is now an established fact.² Most recently, the Cuban dictator began working actively against U.S. attempts to resolve the Latin American debt crisis. It is thus clear that the Castro regime has changed little over the years.

So long as Castro remains steadfastly in the Soviet bloc and pursues his disruptive foreign policy, the U.S. must not fundamentally ease its policies toward Havana. If anything, it is time to follow Haig's advice and get tougher.

Due to serious economic and military problems, the Castro regime has become increasingly vulnerable. To exploit these difficulties, the U.S. should follow a nine-point blueprint, consisting of:

- 1) Aiding guerrilla forces fighting Cuban troops throughout the world;
- 2) Recruiting anti-communist surrogates to counter the Cubans when U.S. involvement is not feasible;
- 3) Assisting militarily counterinsurgency programs throughout the Caribbean Basin;
- 4) Marshalling economic and educational assistance to foster democracy in the Caribbean region;
- 5) Mounting a propaganda offensive in world and regional organizations to highlight Cuban violations of international law;
- 6) Encouraging Latin American democracies to participate in U.S. military exercises in the Caribbean;
- 7) Launching an ideological initiative, featuring Latin American democracies, to counter the Soviet-Cuban model of development.
- 8) Increasing cooperation between the U.S. and Latin American governments in eradicating the narcotics trade, in which Cuba is heavily involved;
- 9) Resurrecting the Central American Defense Council (CONDECA).

2. "The Cuban Government's Involvement in Facilitating International Drug Traffic," Joint Hearing before the Committee on the Judiciary and the Foreign Relations Committee, Serial No. 1-9836, April 20, 1983, U.S. Government Printing Office.

These measures should induce Castro to stop promoting revolution abroad and to ease internal repression. At that time--and only then--could Washington consider the U.S.-Cuban talks now sought by Castro.

U.S. POLICY TOWARD CUBA SINCE 1959

Fidel Castro seized power on January 8, 1959. For 24 months the U.S. maintained formal diplomatic relations with Cuba. Relations were broken only on January 3, 1961, after a series of anti-U.S. actions by Castro, culminating in the massive nationalization of U.S. property in Cuba. During the Kennedy Administration, U.S.-Cuban relations plummeted because of the 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion and the 1962 missile crisis.

Attempts at normalization of relations with Cuba began during the Ford Administration but halted after Cuba's 1975 intervention in Angola. Under the Carter Administration, agreements on fishing zones, travel restrictions, and the establishment of diplomatic interest sections in Havana and Washington were reached. Yet this diplomatic momentum did not deter Cuba from intervening in Ethiopia in 1978. U.S.-Cuban relations again plummeted in 1980 during the Mariel boatlift bringing more than 100,000 Cuban refugees to Florida. Castro exploited this by loading thousands of criminals and mentally ill on the boats.

During the Reagan Administration's first year, Castro's training and support for Marxist guerrillas in El Salvador prompted Haig to threaten to blockade Cuba. A U.S. travel ban and trade embargo were tightened as Castro increased his militia to 500,000 and escalated verbal attacks on the U.S., condemning what he called "the fascist leadership" in Washington. A secret meeting between Haig and Cuban vice president Carlos Rafael Rodriguez, in Mexico City in November 1981, failed to improve relations; a 1982 visit to Havana by U.S. Ambassador-at-Large Vernon Walters also was unproductive.

The Reagan Administration last year began talks with Havana on returning to Cuba the "undesirable" refugees who came to the U.S. in the Mariel boatlift. In December, Castro agreed to take back 2,800 Cubans over two years. He also indicated willingness to pursue bilateral discussions on other issues and hinted broadly at a desire for better relations with the U.S. But he cancelled the agreement on the "undesirables" when the Voice of America, after a very lengthy delay, began beaming its Radio Marti Spanish-language news and feature service into Cuba.

There nevertheless remains a residue of good will within the United States toward Cuba. Well aware of this, Castro seeks to play upon it to build a sympathetic constituency within the U.S. By this he

hopes to limit U.S. options in responding to the Cuban challenge to U.S. security interests.

CUBA'S STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE TO MOSCOW

Cuba provides the Soviet Union with a military and intelligence capacity in the Caribbean, an area vital to the U.S. economic lifeline. Caribbean maritime routes carry about 55 percent of U.S. petroleum imports and approximately 45 percent of all U.S. seaborne trade. Cuba is very close to the Gulf of Mexico, the straits of Florida, the Yucatan channel, and the Mona straits. In the event of a NATO-Warsaw pact confrontation, more than half of U.S. supplies to NATO would depart from U.S. Gulf ports and pass by Cuba.

From Cuban bases, long-range Soviet warplanes, such as the Tu-95 Bear D and the Tu-142 Bear F reconnaissance aircraft, now regularly patrol the U.S. east coast and the Caribbean Basin. They spy on U.S. military installations and shadow U.S. carrier groups. Sensitive maritime and space communications and even private telephone conversations in the U.S. are monitored by the Soviet intelligence facility at Lourdes outside Havana.

Castro's Cuba has become Moscow's unsinkable aircraft carrier and arsenal in the Western Hemisphere. The Cuban Army alone (not counting the one million-strong People's Militia) is composed of 200,000 men in nine active divisions and 130,000 men in 18 reserve divisions. Cuba also boasts a 12,000-man navy and an air force of 16,000 (including air defense forces), with some 285 fighter and training aircraft, 950 tanks, nearly 100 helicopters, three Foxtrot-class attack submarines, a pair of Polnocny-class amphibious assault ships, two Koni-class frigates, eleven corvettes, and approximately 70 torpedo and missile attack boats. Over the past four years the tonnage of Soviet military deliveries to Cuba has more than tripled.

In addition to some 28 surface-to-air missile (SAM) battalions equipped with Soviet SA-2, SA-3, SA-6, and SA-7 missiles, the Cuban armed forces deploy 50 Frog-4 surface-to-surface missiles, each of which is capable of carrying a 200 kiloton nuclear warhead. The batteries of modified SA-2 anti-aircraft missiles and mobile SA-6 launchers, supplied by the USSR in 1979, are largely controlled by some of the 2,800 Soviet military advisers in Cuba.

Cuba also serves as a weapons depot and conduit for Soviet-sponsored subversion and violent revolution in the Americas. Through Cuba, Moscow has provided financial and logistical support for thousands of communist guerrillas who are attacking Latin America's fragile young democracies. On the ideological front, Soviet propaganda is disseminated on Cuba's Isle of Youth, where each year

over 20,000 students from Latin America, Asia, and Africa receive scholarships to study Marxist-Leninist revolution.

CUBA AS A PROXY

Although Moscow and Havana have had their differences in the past 26 years, relations between the two dictatorships have remained close since 1968. Castro needs Soviet arms and financial support to stay in power and the Kremlin needs Cuba as a reliable surrogate and a huge military base a mere 90 miles from the U.S. mainland. There is, moreover, little that Castro could do to break his dependence on Moscow. Prior to 1968, Castro's grievous mismanagement of the Cuban economy and failed guerrilla expeditions in South America and the Caribbean had brought his regime to the brink of collapse. According to defectors, a secret agreement was signed with the Soviet Union in the spring of 1968 which effectively ceded sovereignty in exchange for Soviet economic aid.³

The Soviet political and economic investment in Cuba reaped rich dividends during the 1975 Angolan venture. Nearly 18,000 Cuban troops were rushed to Angola on Soviet transport aircraft to assist the communist MPLA in winning control of the important southern African nation. Two years later, Castro dispatched 17,000 troops to Ethiopia where, under the command of Russian generals, they installed another Soviet satellite regime. Cubans are currently flying Mi-24 helicopter gunships in Nicaragua and supervising the construction of military bases and airfields.

It is said that Cuba is a small nation with a great power's foreign policy. Today there are an estimated 37,500 Cuban military personnel in Africa and at least 6,000 in Nicaragua. Cuban troops serve in Afghanistan, Iraq, Vietnam, Laos, Guyana, and South Yemen. In this hemisphere, Cuba has been linked to the terrorist activities of such Marxist guerrillas as the M-19 movement in Colombia, the Tupamaros in Uruguay, the Montoneros in Argentina, and Chile's Left Revolutionary Movement (M.I.R.). Over the past two decades, Cuba has provided logistical support, training and intelligence to revolutionary groups in every Western Hemisphere nation, including the United States.

3. U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on the Judiciary, Subcommittee to Investigate the Administration of the Internal Security Act, October 16, 1967, pp. 1423-1424.

CUBAN-SOVIET FRICTION

There were reports this March that Cuba was disappointed with Moscow's proposed aid for 1985 (current aid is estimated at \$4.9 billion annually). Moscow, meanwhile, has been pressing Castro for higher productivity and increased exports to the Soviet bloc. There also has been speculation that Castro's absence from the March funeral of Soviet leader Konstantin Chernenko signalled his displeasure with the level of Soviet support for the communist regime in Nicaragua.⁴

Cuban dependence on the Soviet Union seems to have forced Castro into backing Soviet foreign policy positions that may be unpopular with the Cuban people. This probably also gets in the way of his attempts to play a leading role in the Third World. Cuban support for the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, for example, tarnished his claim to leadership of the nonaligned movement and may have cost Cuba a much-desired United Nations Security Council seat in 1980. Going along with the Soviet boycott of the 1984 Olympics in Los Angeles denied Cuban athletes the opportunity to compete in such events as boxing and baseball, where they were virtually certain of winning medals. This would have earned Castro international prestige and fueled Cuban patriotism.

Cuban subservience to Soviet interests also frustrates Castro's revolutionary aspirations in Latin America. Cuba at times views fomenting unrest in the region with greater urgency than does the Kremlin. There often have been intense polemics between the two countries over the pace and proper tools of revolution in Latin America.

HUMAN RIGHTS IN CUBA

Since Castro took power, he has crushed political dissent. He is quick to jail his opponents. The result: an estimated 15,000 political prisoners in Cuba's jails. Article 61 of Cuba's 1976 Constitution makes any violation of the objectives of the socialist state punishable by law. This gives Castro a free hand to imprison writers, journalists, homosexuals, religious dissenters, and farm workers. In 1983, at least 33 sugar cane workers were given "severe"

4. Dusko Doder, "Castro Faults Soviets on Managua Aid," The Washington Post, March 24, 1985.

prison sentences for trying to start a Solidarity-style trade union.⁵ Also that year, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights of the Organization of American States condemned the Cuban government for violations of press and religious freedom.

Today, Cuba has the highest per capita number of political prisoners in the Western Hemisphere. Cuban prisoners are often subject to brutal and inhumane treatment, and have been kept imprisoned even after serving their lengthy sentences. Castro has adopted the Soviet model of forced labor camps along with arbitrary executions, a lack of adequate medical attention, and psychological torture.⁶

CUBA'S CRIPPLED ECONOMIC SYSTEM

Cuba today is mired deeply in economic trouble. Castro has failed to make good his promise of higher living standards for his people. Once the third highest in Latin America, Cuba's standard of living now lags behind such underdeveloped nations as Jamaica, the Dominican Republic, and Uruguay.

Cuba is now more economically dependent on its sugar crop than it was before the revolution, despite Castro's promises to diversify the agricultural sector. In 1957, for example, sugar comprised 79.95 percent of Cuba's total exports; in 1977, the last year for which reliable figures are available, sugar accounted for 83.90 percent of total exports.⁷ It is estimated that these figures have not changed since 1977. The average annual rate of real GNP (Gross National Product) change per capita under Castro is minus 1.2 percent. Cuba has the dubious distinction of being the only Latin American country with a negative growth rate of real GNP per capita over the period 1960 to 1978.⁸ Assuming that the Cuban economy, without Castroism, would have continued to grow at an average annual rate of 3.5 percent, this means that the cumulative difference over what Cuba could have produced, and what it actually produced, between 1960 and 1978 represents a \$52 billion loss in a \$7.8 billion economy.

5. James Nelson Goodsell, "Cubans say Castro blocked Solidarity-style Union," Christian Science Monitor, May 18, 1983, p. 6.

6. In a Place Without a Soul (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Information Agency, March 1985), pp. 1-3.

7. Hugh Thomas, The Revolution on Balance (Washington, D.C.: Cuban-American National Foundation, 1982), p. 7.

8. The Wall Street Journal, December 1, 1981, p. 35.

Cuba's economy is more dependent than ever upon the Soviet Union, from which it imports 98 percent of its oil at below market prices. Last year alone the Kremlin pumped \$4.9 billion into Cuba to keep its economy afloat. Almost half of the USSR's total foreign aid now goes to Cuba and the Russians are paying four to five times the world market price for Cuban sugar. Ironically, in light of Castro's criticism of the close economic ties that his predecessor, Fulgencio Batista, had with the United States, approximately 75 percent of Cuban exports now go to the Soviet bloc; in 1957, two years before Castro seized power, only 58 percent of Cuban exports went to the U.S. Beginning in 1970, Cuban Five-Year Plans were coordinated with Soviet Five-Year Plans under the direction of some 3,000 Soviet economic advisers.

Cuba's political dependence on the Soviet Union has increased proportionately with its economic dependence. In 1972, the Kremlin took the extraordinary step of granting Cuba full membership in the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA or COMECON), thereby submitting the Cuban economy to the discipline of integration with the Soviet and East European economies. Because the Soviet ruble is the standard currency for transactions within COMECON, the Soviet Union automatically became the legal arbiter of Cuba's trade and controlled the Cuban peso's rate of exchange. This is a classic dependency feature of imperialism similar to America's colonial ties with Britain.

THE LATIN AMERICAN DEBT CRISIS

The little hard currency Cuba has is spent on interest payments on \$3.42 billion worth of loans from Western banks. Ironically, Cuba has promised to honor all of its debts, even though it urges other Latin debtor nations to default.⁹

In mid-July, Castro hosted an all-expenses-paid conference in Havana on the debt crisis which drew some 1,200 participants from Latin America and the Caribbean. Although the conference was ostensibly designed to "build a united front on the issue,"¹⁰ its real purposes were to stir up anti-U.S. feeling and drive a wedge between labor unions and moderate governments in many of the largest debtor nations. If Castro could convince Latin American workers to resist the International Monetary Fund's austerity programs, new democratic governments in Argentina, Brazil, Peru, and elsewhere may

9. "Cuba is in Good Standing With Bankers Despite Castro's Talk of Canceling Debt," The Wall Street Journal, July 30, 1985, p. 34.

10. Business Week, July 15, 1985, p. 50.

be forced to choose between domestic turmoil or repudiation of their debts.

CUBAN VULNERABILITIES

Strategic Vulnerabilities

Cuba's proximity to the U.S. makes it the soft underbelly of the Soviet political-military sphere. Castro knows that the Soviet Union will never risk a nuclear war with the United States in the defense of Cuba. This accounts for the Cuban dictator's remark that Cubans must get accustomed to the idea of fighting alone in the event of an invasion.¹¹ The Kremlin is fully aware that the U.S. considers Cuba a high priority target in the event of a major superpower conflict.

Military Vulnerabilities

Recent events indicate that in terms of resources and population, Cuba has overextended itself militarily. In the past, Castro was able to play the role of world actor only because Washington was too distracted or reluctant to support indigenous movements which opposed Cuban military challenges. This changed when Ronald Reagan took office. Not only has the Reagan Administration helped Central American nations resist Cuban pressure, it directly has confronted the Cuban buildup in Grenada. This signaled a change in U.S. policy toward the Cuban challenge in the Third World.

Cuban impotence in the face of U.S. military action was clear to all. The result: Cuba has lost its image of invincibility among Third World nations. In Angola, for example, outposts manned by Cuban troops have been overrun with increasing frequency, and UNITA forces recently dealt a decisive defeat to a Soviet-led, Cuban-supported offensive.¹²

AMERICAN OPTIONS

Washington should craft a graduated offensive strategy to exploit Cuba's growing weaknesses. For one thing, the U.S. should continue to warn Havana and Moscow that another Cuban-style, pro-Soviet, totalitarian dictatorship will not be tolerated in this hemisphere. For another, the U.S. should make it clear that the price of Cuban

11. Granma, July 30, 1967.

12. The Washington Post, October 9, 1985, p. 1.

intervention in the Caribbean Basin would be very high; retaliatory measures against Cuban nationals involved in radical factions abroad or even Cuba itself should not be ruled out.

Specifically, Reagan should pursue a nine-point policy toward Cuba. The U.S. should:

1) Increase and upgrade its counterinsurgency training and equipping of Caribbean allies. The U.S.-sponsored Regional Security Systems incorporating company-sized, paramilitary units from seven Eastern Caribbean island nations represents an important development in Caribbean regional security. This program trains security forces to fight the war of ideas and support political, economic and social reforms to combat Marxism-Leninism. Similar programs are being carried out, to a limited extent, in Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador. A broader regional integration of Caribbean defense forces would emphasize the common threat faced by all Caribbean nations and forge economic and cultural ties.

2) Augment U.S. educational assistance to instill respect for democracy and free market economic principles among the next generation of Caribbean and Latin American leaders. In 1982, more than 110,000 students from developing nations were given Soviet scholarships to study in communist bloc countries, 27,000 of whom were enrolled in Cuban "educational" programs. That same year, only 8,000 Third World students took part in AID-sponsored training in the U.S.¹³ The Reagan Administration should adopt the Kissinger Commission's recommendation for 10,000 U.S. government-sponsored scholarships for Central Americans over a ten-year period. This program should be expanded to include students from other countries in the Caribbean region, including leftist nations such as Guyana and Suriname.

3) Financially support anti-Cuban guerrilla organizations. Funding of Freedom Fighters in Central America and Africa is the most cost-effective means of reversing Cuban-sponsored revolution around the globe. Military assistance to the United Nicaraguan Opposition (UNO) in Nicaragua and UNITA forces in Angola would allow such groups to put pressure on Cuban troops stationed abroad, thus raising the financial and casualty burden of Castro's foreign adventures. "Non-lethal" aid is not sufficient. Sophisticated weaponry, including anti-tank and anti-aircraft missiles, must be provided to counter Soviet-supplied armored vehicles and aircraft. If Cuban forces are beaten in Nicaragua and Angola as decisively as they were in Grenada, the Soviet Union may reappraise its substantial investment in its Cuban surrogate.

13. AID Highlights, Vol. 2, No. 2, Summer 1985, p. 2.

4) Encourage third parties to back anti-communist forces when direct U.S. aid is not feasible. Example: Brazil and Venezuela, which strongly oppose Cuban-sponsored subversion in the Caribbean,¹⁴ could help train and equip Freedom Fighters from Nicaragua, Guyana and Suriname. Ecuador, which recently broke diplomatic relations with Nicaragua, could also join forces with the U.S. to generate moral and material support for Nicaragua's pro-democratic forces throughout Latin America.

5) Increase cooperation between the U.S. and Latin American governments in eradicating the narcotics trade. The Castro regime is actively involved in international drug trafficking, using its proceeds to finance revolution throughout the Caribbean Basin.¹⁵ Halting the flow of funds from drug sales would serve a strategic as well as moral purpose, placing a greater strain on Castro's limited economic resources, thereby making it more difficult for him to finance subversion and guerrilla warfare.

6) Counter Castro's recent diplomatic attempt to form a Latin American debtors' cartel. Castro sees this as a forum for generating anti-American attitudes and driving a wedge between the U.S. and Latin American governments. While encouraging long-term structural reforms in debtor nations, the U.S. should exhibit solidarity with its Latin American allies by joining in their opposition to the anti-growth austerity measures imposed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The Reagan Administration's new multilateral lending plan unveiled in October could stimulate growth in Latin America.

7) Publicize in the U.S. and throughout Latin America Cuba's continuing violation of human rights. The Castro regime has one of the world's worst human rights records. Ironically, some of the 15,000 political prisoners held in Cuba today are revolutionaries who fought alongside Castro yet spoke out against communism; others have been imprisoned for such "crimes" as holding religious services or writing short stories.¹⁶

8) Use organizations such as the Organization of American States and the United Nations to expose Cuba's overwhelming dependence on the Soviet Union. This would unmask Castro's claim that he is "nonaligned" and counter his attempts to serve as a model for Third World nations.

14. O Estado de Sao Paulo, February 4, 1983, p. 4; AFP, February 9, 1983.

15. "The Cuban Government's Involvement in Facilitating International Drug Traffic," Joint Hearing before the Committee on the Judiciary and the Foreign Relations Committee, Serial No. 1-9836, April 30, 1983, U.S. Government Printing Office.

16. See "Address of Elliot Abrams, 'The Cuban Revolution: Its Impact on Human Rights,'" in Department of State Bulletin 83, December 1983, pp. 36-39.

The Cuban people should be continually reminded of the economic and social progress being made by other Caribbean and Latin American nations which have not followed the Marxist-Leninist model. Comparisons of Cuba's low standard of living with more prosperous Latin American nations could be made subtly through Radio Marti or increased visits by relatives from Miami.

9) Revive the Central American Defense Council (CONDECA). U.S. support for CONDECA would be a cost-effective way of guarding the vital southern flank of the U.S. by allowing Central Americans greater responsibility for regional defense.

CONCLUSION

Any U.S. attempts to normalize relations with Cuba while Fidel Castro remains in power are extremely unlikely to halt Cuban adventurism and temper Cuba's internal repression. Castro shows no sign of substantively changing his policy of exporting violent revolution and of actively serving Moscow's geopolitical interests; his hostility toward the U.S. has never abated.

Castro's activist policies are essential to his regime's survival, power, and ideology. There is no reason for him to bargain them away for U.S. economic concessions. They are the resource of Cuban leverage in dealing with Moscow, they hold promise for finding new allies that would reduce Cuba's isolation in the hemisphere, and they buttress his claim to a world leadership role. It is, moreover, unrealistic to assume that the Soviet Union simply would abandon the leverage and military gains it reaps because of Cuba as long as the Castro regime justifies its expense.

A normalization of relations between the U.S. and Cuba would strengthen Castro's hand domestically, add to his international prestige, and reduce his economic problems. The U.S. would be seen as endorsing his radical policies. This would send a diplomatic message to Washington's Latin American allies to seek accommodation with communist Cuba.¹⁷ Rather than try to normalize ties with Havana, the U.S. should pursue the nine-point strategy and increase its efforts to check Cuban expansionist policies in this hemisphere and elsewhere.

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17. During an interview on the MacNeil-Lehrer Report, Castro stated that he would never relinquish his "revolutionary principles" and that he "would die a revolutionary."