

The Executive Memorandum

The Heritage Foundation

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U.S. SANCTIONS BELONG ON HAVANA, NOT PORT-AU-PRINCE

In response to a growing Cuban refugee crisis spurred by the anti-government riots in Havana earlier this month, the Clinton Administration has made broad changes in United States Cuba policy. Refugees fleeing Fidel Castro's repression will be held in detention camps in the United States and at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, instead of being processed for permanent residency in the U.S.—the U.S. practice since passage of the Cuban Refugee Act of 1966. Moreover, the U.S. will block U.S. residents from sending cash to relatives and friends in Cuba, sharply reduce flights from the U.S. to Havana, and bring charges of human rights abuses by Castro before the United Nations.

The Clinton Administration's new policy toward Cuba is indistinguishable from its Haiti policy. In a series of measures announced in May and June of this year, the Administration halted international flights into and out of Haitian capital of Port-Au-Prince, cut off international credit for prosperous Haitian business and political leaders, and restricted the amount of money Americans are allowed to send family and friends in Haiti. At the same time, the Administration worked hard to get a U.N. resolution that condemns Haiti's military junta and calls on member states "to use all necessary means to facilitate the departure from Haiti of the military leadership."

In modifying U.S. Cuba policy, the White House appears to be responding to charges of inconsistency regarding Cuba and Haiti, particularly with respect to refugees. There have even been charges of "racial overtones" advanced to explain the policy differences. But rather than trying to achieve an artificial "consistency" between two very different situations, the Administration should seize this opportunity to draw very clear distinctions between them and modify its policies toward each accordingly.

By attempting to put its Cuba and Haiti policies on an equal footing, particularly with regard to the status of refugees, the Administration implies that the crises in these two countries spring from similar sources. But this is not true. Cuban refugees are fleeing a country whose economy has been exhausted by 35 years of communism. This did not become apparent until the fall of the Soviet Union and the loss of the \$6 billion a year Castro received from the Kremlin to prop up his failed experiment. Since then, the Cuban economy has declined to the point at which illegally held U.S. dollars are the de facto currency and Cuba's own peso has become worthless. The U.S. embargo of Cuba, imposed by President Kennedy in 1963, has been largely undermined since the mid-1970s when the Organization of American States "set free the member states to follow their own policy...with the Republic of Cuba." Despite subsequent tightening by Ronald Reagan and George Bush, the impact of the embargo has paled in comparison to the punishment inflicted on Cuba by three and a half decades of Soviet-subsidized communism.

By contrast, Haitian refugees are fleeing a country whose subsistence economy has been destroyed by U.S. economic sanctions. Some 95 percent of light manufacturing jobs have vanished because of the sanctions, which were significantly tightened in June 1994. Since sanctions were imposed in 1991, three times as many refugees have fled Haiti as in the ten years prior to the sanctions. Administration officials are aware that the sanctions are destroying the Haitian economy; they declare, however, that sanctions are necessary to get at the leaders of the

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military junta. In a July news conference, Clinton's Haiti adviser, William H. Gray III, acknowledged that "increasingly difficult economic conditions...have sent Haitians to the seas in unprecedented numbers."

By crafting essentially identical policies in response to two very different situations, the Administration has determined its own case against Castro by putting him on par with the petty military junta in Haiti. Castro, who dispatched 40,000 troops to Angola at the height of the Cold War, who financed and equipped communist anti-U.S. regimes throughout the Western Hemisphere, and who permitted the Soviet Union to bring the world to the brink of nuclear war during the missile crisis of 1962, is to be treated no differently than a Haitian general and a ragtag band of poorly armed and ill-trained thugs. Worse, the Administration has even threatened to invade Haiti to remove the junta, while appearing patiently prepared to wait out Castro's final days.

Changing Policies . . . Once Again. The current crisis in Cuba, which may signal the "endgame" for Castro's reign, is an opportunity for the Administration to apply the Haiti policy it should have followed from the outset. To focus U.S. resources on handling the security and immigration dimensions of Castro's inevitable (if not imminent) collapse, the Administration should modify its Cuba and Haiti policies. It should:

- ✓ **Lift the economic embargo of Haiti.** As job creation is allowed to take place, the prospect of a stream of future refugees will be reduced substantially. At the same time it lifts the embargo, the Administration should repatriate the nearly 15,000 Haitian refugees being detained at Guantanamo Bay Naval Base in Cuba.
- ✓ **Enter into new negotiations with Haitian leaders.** The newly formed National Committee of Mediation would be a good place to start. This committee is comprised of Haitian business, academic, and political leaders and strongly supported by the democratically elected Chamber of Deputies, including its 1993 president Duly Brutus. President Clinton should appoint a bipartisan delegation to meet with the committee and determine the areas of potential compromise that will allow for the installation of a democratically elected president and dismissal of the military junta.
- ✓ **Reinforce the U.S. naval base at Guantanamo.** An influx of Cuban refugees should be expected as the Castro regime continues its collapse. Moreover, the base itself might become a target for Castro should he decide to go down fighting. If he goes voluntarily, U.S. military forces should be available to help maintain order in Cuba. The President should order the Marine Brigade preparing to invade Haiti to redeploy to Guantanamo Bay, and should provide sufficient logistic support, including arms and ammunition, to the base to permit sustained military operations on the island.

CONCLUSION

As the Castro regime totters, President Clinton has an opportunity to push it over and at the same time correct a flawed policy toward Haiti. History and the American people will not look kindly upon an American President who fails to highlight the very real distinctions between Haiti and Cuba and craft his policies accordingly. Given the crisis in Cuba, under no circumstances should an invasion of Haiti be considered plausible or rational. Clinton should declare as much, and prepare for the long-awaited end to the Cuban communist dictatorship.

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