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The Re-establishment of U.S./Cuban International Relations

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The Re-establishment of U.S./Cuban International Relations

Abstract
The intention of this paper is to re-examine the past and current relations between the United States and the nation of Cuba to assess the rationale for the re-establishment of international relations between the two nations. Through an understanding of our historical relations, analysis will reveal how the United States went awry from sound international practice through our early relationship to the Cuban Revolution of 1959. Cuban/U.S. relations only worsened as Fidel Castro put his revolutionary principles into practice and drew closer to the Soviet Union until the U.S. instituted a trade embargo against Cuba during the U.S. presidential administration of Dwight D. Eisenhower. President Eisenhower successfully influenced many North and South American nations, European allies, and even key Asian nations to comply to the accords of the embargo while Cuba's ties with the U.S.S.R. and the Warsaw Pact nations strengthened. This tension developed into a military crisis when the Cuban government allowed Russian Soviet troops to erect nuclear missiles on Cuban soil within range of the United States. The subsequent progression of U.S. Presidents differed very little from the administrations of Eisenhower and Kennedy in their outlook and actions toward Fidel Castro and subsequently toward his nation. During the Carter and Clinton administrations only very limited overtures from the U.S. to Cuba were extended and yet progress in the re-establishment of U.S./Cuban relations was halted due to the reversal of many policy changes both by those administrations and by future administrations. Currently, Raul Castro is serving as President of Cuba while Fidel Castro is in poor health, yet Fidel possibly is still directing some degree of control in governmental matters. The new U.S. President, Barrack Obama, has indicated change in U.S./Cuban relations, yet thus far no U.S. policy changes have occurred concerning Cuba. The thesis of this paper is that the U.S. and Cuba both have much to gain by the re-establishment of international relations. The citizens of both nations will benefit economically and the security of the Western Hemisphere will be enhanced by the restoration of diplomatic relations and trade by the governmental leaders of the two nations. This re-establishment of international relations might best be achieved through the mediation of a third party which will be introduced as a strategy for the successful re-establishment of relations in the final section of this paper.

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The Re-establishment of U.S./Cuban International Relations

A Master's Thesis submitted to

The Faculty of the Master of Science in International Studies Program

In Candidacy for the Degree of

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By

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Abstract

The intention of this paper is to re-examine the past and current relations between the United States and the nation of Cuba to assess the rationale for the re-establishment of international relations between the two nations. Through an understanding of our historical relations, analysis will reveal how the United States went awry from sound international practice through our early relationship to the Cuban Revolution of 1959. Cuban/U.S. relations only worsened as Fidel Castro put his revolutionary principles into practice and drew closer to the Soviet Union until the U.S. instituted a trade embargo against Cuba during the U.S. presidential administration of Dwight D. Eisenhower. President Eisenhower successfully influenced many North and South American nations, European allies, and even key Asian nations to comply to the accords of the embargo while Cuba’s ties with the U.S.S.R. and the Warsaw Pact nations strengthened. This tension developed into a military crisis when the Cuban government allowed Russian Soviet troops to erect nuclear missiles on Cuban soil within range of the United States. The subsequent progression of U.S. Presidents differed very little from the administrations of Eisenhower and Kennedy in their outlook and actions toward Fidel Castro and subsequently toward his nation. During the Carter and Clinton administrations only very limited overtures from the U.S. to Cuba were extended and yet progress in the re-establishment of U.S./Cuban relations was halted due to the reversal of many policy changes both by those administrations and by future administrations. Currently, Raúl Castro is serving as President of Cuba while Fidel Castro is in poor health, yet Fidel possibly is still directing some degree of control in governmental matters. The new U.S. President, Barrack Obama, has indicated change in U.S./Cuban relations, yet thus far no U.S. policy changes have occurred concerning Cuba. The thesis of this paper is that the U.S. and Cuba both have much to gain by the re-establishment of international relations. The citizens of both nations will benefit economically and the security of the Western Hemisphere will be enhanced by the restoration of diplomatic relations and trade by the governmental leaders of the two nations. This re-establishment of international relations might best be achieved through the mediation of a third party which will be introduced as a strategy for the successful re-establishment of relations in the final section of this paper.
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1. Introduction

The study of the common history between the U.S. and Cuba will be the topic of the first part of this paper. A combination of knowing where we have been as two nations, not just through our lifetimes, but also throughout the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century should be helpful in examining our uniquely interwoven history. In this way we can examine our own attitudes in light of our forefathers’ motivations, actions, past mistakes, and successes. By successes I mean where our relations were beneficial to both the Cuban people and to us. Past mistakes refers to learning from the past and what the U.S. could have done differently to achieve a fair and balanced relationship which would have perpetuated good will and supported a lasting friendship with our neighbor to the south.

Whatever strategies we use to re-establish international relations with Cuba should be built on a clear understanding of the past - not just the most recent and turbulent conflicts of the Cuban Revolution and the Cold War but also of some of the attitudes of imperialism that stronger nations often subject weaker and smaller nations to in their efforts to take unfair advantage in trade and politics. Once nations have a clear understanding of history they should then be more able to review current trends in international relations that are effective in advancing win/win situations between (and among) nations.

Why should the United States be concerned with the re-establishment of international relations with Cuba and why now? It seems that after the fall of the Soviet Union opportunities should have been recognized by both nations to revisit our relationship
especially in terms of trade. The potential for improvement in the daily lives of Cubans and Americans in economic terms should have many powerful and positive advantages influencing our cultures, our standards of living, and should strengthen our chances for peaceful interactions in the Western Hemisphere, not only between our two nations, but also positively affecting our common neighbors. As the U.S. and Cuban relationship grows in trust, economic power, and in other cultural qualities, this should place our hemisphere in a more secure geopolitical position in relation to what we have experienced in the last fifty years. If the Cuban/U.S. relationship was greatly improved the U.S. and Cuba would be more respected by the vast majority of the world community and seen as peacemakers setting a good example as prosperous neighbors rather than enemies.

The perspective of this paper will be focused on both the United States and Cuba working together as equals in normalizing relations with each other. The economic and military benefits for our hemisphere should seem obvious for a much closer U.S./Cuban relationship, yet in fifty years time the U.S./Cuban relationship has been marked by mistrust, isolation, and even the threat of nuclear war. The opposite could be achieved with a new attitude of openness. Economic and cultural advancement within a more stable and peaceful hemisphere should be preferable to factional conflicts! The European Union (EU) is working on achieving this type of progress, and it should be realized by the member states of the Organization of American States (OAS), as well, with no nation in the Western Hemisphere excluded. Yet the lack of a meaningful relationship between Cuba and the US continues to be a “stumbling block” for our hemisphere and what could be a true family of nations.
Once trade and travel are resumed between the U.S. and Cuba not only economic benefits will result but cultural exchanges will multiply. As diplomatic overtures are made, we will be able to put many of our military defenses and offensive preparations in reserve until needed. This will strengthen our economic standing and should not ultimately make our military preparedness any less strong if we wisely assess global situations. (An attack will more than likely not come to the U.S. from Cuba or from our own hemisphere if we work on building trust in our region.) Imagine a United States and Cuba, who without trying to change each other’s economic philosophy or political system, agree to disagree yet still pursue a relationship in ways in which we will both benefit. Stronger economies should serve to establish a more peaceful existence between the two nations thereby extending to the neighboring regions of the Caribbean, Mexico, Central America, and beyond. Cuba and the U.S. have been the main antagonists in this region of North America since 1959. If our two nations make the effort to allow freer trade, cease travel restrictions, and broaden cultural exchanges, then this should establish a good model to others such as Hugo Chavez of Venezuela, Evo Morales of Bolivia, and others throughout our hemisphere and hopefully to the rest of the world.

In re-establishing international relations our similarities should be emphasized more than our differences. There are areas in which the U.S. and Cuba agree: Fidel and Raúl Castro are both concerned with illegal drugs not entering their country. The U.S. has the same concern. U.S. and Cuban federal administrations should coordinate efforts to reduce the trafficking of illegal drugs. Likewise ecological concerns are just as important to Cubans as they are to Floridians. Geography should make us natural allies. Education
is of primary importance to Fidel’s and Raúl’s Cuba. Cuba is an educational leader in Latin America with an extremely low illiteracy rate. American failing school districts in even medium-sized cities are growing with low test scores, unruly classroom environments, and large dropout rates. It is not illogical to think that a school district in Rochester, New York could possibly learn something from the educational techniques employed in Havana, - perhaps not so much in the philosophy of education as in the methods of instruction. (Every good educator knows that we can all learn from each other.) Scientific exchanges should take place also. The U.S. has a very sophisticated culture of scientists whose research and methods have benefited its population by protecting them from infectious diseases including those spread by insects and unsanitary water conditions. From what I have researched concerning Canadians traveling to Cuba, one of the biggest health advisories is in regard to diseases spread by mosquitoes. Cuba has many well-educated scientists, also, yet with joint health endeavors Cuban and American epidemiologists would only stand to benefit from each others’ work. The list of benefits is large, indeed, when two neighboring nations work together for its citizens’ common good.

If the U.S. will not try to re-establish international relations until the Cuban government becomes what the U.S. considers to be a democracy, then another fifty years may pass without significant and positive interchange happening between the two nations. The U.S. trades with the Peoples’ Republic of China which by many reports has a worse human rights record than Cuba. China is also a country with a communist government, yet China and the United States share technological, agricultural, artistic, musical, scientific, educational, and business programs. It would stand to reason that if the U.S. can conduct
business with a nation such as China on the other side of the earth, then the U.S. should
re-establish international relations with a nation located 90 nautical miles from Key West,
Florida.

During the past fifty years, there have been many forces against the re-establishment of
U.S./Cuban relations within the U.S. The Cuban-American population in Miami, Florida
lobbies, formally and informally, against Castro’s government in Cuba. They are
supported by the Cuban-American populations in other areas of southern Florida,
northern New Jersey, and New York City. The Cuban-Americans in Florida are a large
voting block that can decide the outcome of Florida’s electoral votes in U.S. Presidential
elections. G.H.W. Bush, Bill Clinton, and G.W. Bush have all catered to these voters’
sentiments during campaigns and once in office. It is natural for these Cuban-Americans
to harbor extreme negative feelings toward Fidel and Raúl Castro and the other leaders of
the Cuban Revolution. Many of them (or their elder relatives) lost land, homes, money,
other possessions and goods, their professions, relatives and loved ones, and their
homeland to the communists of the Cuban Revolution in 1959 and soon afterwards.
So it is legitimate for these Cuban-Americans to want “nothing to do with Castro”
because of these crimes and circumstances. Yet this was two generations ago and the
perpetrators of the Cuban Revolution have mostly died or are very old such as Fidel,
himself. The majority of Cuban people, today, have not committed crimes against the
majority of Cuban-Americans living in the U.S. The situation has changed to the point
that both groups have more to gain through the re-establishment of international
relations between the two countries, than otherwise. Many Cuban-Americans (and
other Americans) share many of the same (or similar) cultural attributes and have
many similar aspirations and seek many of the same goals as Cubans. Our peoples certainly have more similarities than differences, and we are approaching the time that the benefits to re-establishment outweigh the opposite. We are within the time period in which many Cuban-Americans that were born in Cuba will have their last opportunities to visit their (original) homeland and the people that they knew that remained in Cuba. The lifting of the U.S. travel ban to Cuba would enable Cuban-Americans to freely visit loved ones in Cuba even if their feelings for Castro’s government are the exact opposite of their love for the island of Cuba and many of their fellow Cubans.

Other U.S. interests such as the sugar-beet farmers in Colorado (and elsewhere) do not want Cuban competition in the area of sugar cane production, yet the broader economic benefits of trade between the two nations would raise the standard of living among many citizens of our two nations, considerably. Resorts in Las Vegas, Florida, and other places in the U.S. would also have competition from Cuba in the event that travel restrictions are lifted, yet the U.S. presents itself as an “open” society to the rest of the world. It would raise U.S. credibility to the rest of the world if U.S. travel restrictions to Cuba were eliminated, and consumers of sugar and travelers would benefit by having more choices.

A nation should do what is right for its citizens, and the U.S. government should listen to all of the voices within its borders, yet a nation should also listen to what other nations are proclaiming is just. This is especially true if a nation’s friends and allies are calling for reform, adaptation, or complete change. Citizens of nations such as Canada and Mexico trade with and travel to Cuba extensively. Most nations of the Organization of
American States (OAS) since 1975 have resumed trade with Cuba. Nations among our allies in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union (EU) have condemned the U.S. trade embargo of Cuba. So the time has come for the U.S. to re-assess its relationship with Cuba, end the trade embargo, lift the travel ban, and re-establish relations with Cuba. The U.S. should do this for the good of the American people, for the Cuban people, for our global reputation, and for the security of the Western Hemisphere. The United States has more dangerous threats directed toward our nation than the ailing Fidel Castro or the elderly Raúl Castro. The Cuban people are not our enemies but they are our potential friends. For those that would argue that Cuba should become more democratic and a freer society, what better way is there to influence them than to interact peacefully as citizens of the same region striving, when we can, for peace and prosperity?

The historical review in this paper will allude to what the U.S. could have done better in developing a more egalitarian partnership with Cuba. There have also been times during the Cold War that the U.S. had every right, according to international law, to protect its own interests and safety, as well, so this paper will not develop an argument that will condemn the United States nor will this paper fault the United States “at every turn” throughout its relationship with Cuba. This paper, also, will not argue that Fidel Castro’s record in human rights and civil liberties nor his methods in propelling his revolution were preferable to democratic alternatives, nor will this paper defend the Cuban Revolution as being necessary or intrinsically just for many, many people. It is important for people to realize that global change should not be forced because forced change is not necessarily lasting. Change begins with one’s self, and nations that wish other nations to
change need to look at their own nation, first, and then to approach other nations as a friend, - if this is at all possible. Most students of history realize that it is not always possible for nations to react with civility and peace in all global situations if a nation hopes to survive and to protect its sovereignty and culture. Keeping these truths in mind, after a historical review of U.S./Cuban relations, suggestions will be made as to strategies that may be used to help the nations of Cuba and the United States achieve a peaceful and mutually beneficial relationship.

2.1 Early U.S./Cuban Relations through the 19th and 20th Centuries to the Cuban Revolution of 1959

It is a geographical certainty that the United States and Cuba should have a unique relationship because of their close proximity to each other. Cuba is the largest island in the Caribbean Sea and located approximately 90 nautical miles from the southeastern most point of the continental United States. Cuba has an area approximately the size of the state of Pennsylvania (44,827 square miles) and lies east to west approximately 785 miles. Cuba is not an arid island as it receives adequate rain to support its agricultural economy supported by rich soil and a temperate tropical climate. Its soil also contains natural resources such as precious metals to support domestic industry with a surplus of some such as nickel suitable for international trade. With this location and a variety of products it seems natural that Cuba would be a valued trade partner with the United States. Cuba produces

...a variety of agricultural crops including sugar cane, tobacco, citrus fruits, coffee, rice, potatoes, beans and livestock. It has deposits of cobalt, nickel, iron ore, copper, manganese, silica and petroleum. The island is estimated
to have about 10 percent of the world’s known nickel reserves…¹

Yet, there have been political situations that have continually gotten in the way of Cuban and U.S. trade and friendship. There have been imperialistic attitudes perpetuated by Spain, Great Britain, and the United States, corrupt governments in Cuba throughout the last hundred years, and later during the Cold War serious political concerns involving the communist government of Fidel Castro and the subsequent struggle between the Soviet Union and the United States which brought the Western Hemisphere to the brink of nuclear war. Cuba and the United States did not arrive at their present relationship just because of Cold War events, though. Let us review what has led up to the last fifty years.

Spain ruled Cuba for approximately 400 years from the last years of the 15th century to the last years of the 19th century except for an eleven month period beginning in August 1762 when the English occupied Havana. Cuba’s indigenous populations were almost completely eliminated by Spanish soldiers and European diseases by the early 16th century. By the early 19th century the United States was exerting its influence to the north and northwest of Cuba on the North American continent including against Mexico. U.S. relations with Mexico became more stable with Mexico with the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848 effectively ending the war between the United States and Mexico, yet the United States was not ready, militarily or economically in the first half of the 1800’s, to challenge Spain in Cuba, and in any case, the U.S. Presidents in the early 19th century realized that Spanish control of Cuba was less of a threat to the U.S. than if Great Britain controlled the island. A British base on so large of an island and so close to

the U.S. was not geopolitically desirable to U.S. security. Therefore, several U.S. Presidents beginning with Thomas Jefferson supported Spain in Cuba for reasons concerning balance of power in the region of the Caribbean Sea. Thomas Jefferson instituted a “No-Transfer Principle” in Cuba and elsewhere in the Caribbean. This included policies and actions that favored Spanish control over Cuban independence.

This “No Transfer Principle” was a guideline for U.S. Presidents throughout the 19th century, notably James Madison, James Monroe, and John Quincy Adams all of whom understood the strategic importance of Cuba and the great naval might of the British Empire. John Quincy Adams as Secretary of State in 1821 outlined the position of the U.S. in terms of the Western Hemisphere in case there was any doubt among the European powers. His work became the Monroe Doctrine in 1823 which basically told Great Britain, France, Spain, the Netherlands (and the rest of the world) “hands off” regarding any new possessions (or changes in ownership) of all lands in the entire Western Hemisphere. The US felt confident enough in its growing strength to “stand up for itself” and declare that the entire New World was to be in its sphere of influence. Europe had its own wars to contend with, and as it was some time before the Spanish American War of 1898, so the declaration of the Monroe Doctrine (for the time being) kept the European powers at bay.

However, the prevalent American philosophy of Manifest Destiny most assuredly struck at least some of the people in Cuba, Mexico, and in other places throughout the Western Hemisphere as hypocritical because this philosophy could have been seen as being in conflict with biblical principles that are more inclusive and egalitarian in nature
and certainly in conflict with several of the Ten Commandments concerning covetousness and theft. Since many Americans claimed to have been adhering to a life resting upon Christian principles the concept of Manifest Destiny ironically clashed with a life that desired to follow the teachings of Jesus as revealed by the Bible. Also, in the hearts of many Christians and others throughout the Western Hemisphere the institution of slavery was in conflict with Christian principles. Slave rebellions and independence movements were common in the Caribbean and Latin America during the first half of the 19th century. The U.S. still had slave labor supporting major sectors of its economy in its southern states. Western expansionism included wars of the American settlers and the U.S. Army against American indigenous groups who lost their lives and their land. Mexican (and Spanish) people lost the same at the hands of the more powerful Americans. This was all happening on land that the U.S. government was in the process of claiming and acquiring not through peaceful methods nor was this achieved through the way of Christ’s teachings.

Clifford L. Staten writes on page 25 of The History of Cuba that major slave rebellions in Cuba happened in 1826, 1837, 1843, and 1844. A few years later the U.S. was at war with Mexico. In 1854 U.S. President James Polk outlined a plan called the Ostend Manifesto. The intent of this plan was for the U.S. to purchase Cuba from Spain. The Ostend Manifesto had the support of many U.S. slaveholders because they looked to Cuba as possibly a future additional southern state that would help maintain a political balance of power in the U.S. Congress against the northern states that were increasingly advocating the abolition of the institution of slavery in the U.S. In Cuba the common man was at the mercy of the rich landowners and the Spanish ruling class who were not
known for their kindness or their just rule. All of these things happening in one
generation must have made many people in Cuba feel that they were in a precarious
position. The government in Madrid rejected the U.S. offer and continued their rule of
Cuba without improving the economic, social, or political conditions for the majority of
Cuban peasants.

In 1868 the (first) War for Cuban Independence began and lasted ten years. The
nationalistic movement in Cuba was such that many different groups unified in
opposing Spanish rule on the island. The U.S. had been content with the Spanish in
control for reasons already stated plus the political situation in Cuba had allowed the U.S.
to trade more or less unencumbered. The main relationship that the U.S. had with Cuba
up to this time was in trade especially with the U.S. purchasing sugar which would not
change (other than to increase in amount) all the way up to the Cuban Revolution of
1959. The U.S. was also conflicted about helping the Cuban rebels in their first war of
independence since the U.S. Civil War had just ended a few years earlier. Americans
were weary of war and in the process of rebuilding politically and economically. Another
reason that U.S. leadership was hesitant to help the Cuban rebels was because the rebels
were divided over the issue of slavery. Since the U.S. had finally decided the slavery
question on its own soil the Americans were not eager to support the rebels who were not
all abolitionists in philosophy or in practice.

Some weapons and supplies did arrive from the U.S. to the Cuban rebels, but this was
without any real consistency and could not be relied upon since U.S. policy did not
officially recognize the Cuban independence movement. The First Cuban War for
Independence failed with Spain regaining control although with less real power and with a loss of confidence. The island was in shambles, economically, with loss of life, property, and environmental damage being characteristic features. To add to Cuba’s troubles the sugar beet industry in Europe was doing very well and, worldwide, increased production of this competitor, drove Cuban sugar cane prices down. Many sugar plantations and tobacco farms went bankrupt. U.S. investors stepped in and gained economic advantage from the situation by obtaining ownership of many Cuban businesses and gained control over large sections of the Cuban economy. This was not completely negative for Cuba since there were positives outcomes through the investments and technological advancements introduced by American businessmen who employed technicians and experts in many fields. The U.S. helped modernize Cuban agriculture and other industries which Cuba would have been hard-pressed to accomplish on its own without the capital and degree of expertise that the Americans brought. The Cuban infrastructure had been largely destroyed by ten years of war, as well, which was rebuilt through American investment and technology.

U.S. capital and technology was used to modernize the sugar mills and make them more efficient. For example, Atkins and Company of Boston became the proprietors of the Soledad Plantation near Cienfuegos and several other surrounding plantations. By 1894, Atkins Soledad was one of the largest sugar plantations in the world with 12,000 total acres, 23 miles of private railroads, 5,000 acres of cane and 1,200 men employed at harvest time. This centrale represented a combination of foreign capital, technology and efficiency that changed the social organization of sugar production in Cuba.2

So to be sure, U.S. foreign investment was a mixed blessing for Cuba. The economy was rebuilt, improvements were made, modernization happened, efficiency and production

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2 Ibid., p. 35.
was increased, and jobs were created. The standard of living of those Cubans employed was raised, yet in many ways Cubans were not in control of their country anymore than when Spain dominated the island. To many Cubans it was just a matter of American businessmen replacing the Spanish elites. Some aspects of culture changed away from Spain and more in the direction of the United States as large sections of the island were relegated to new foreign control. Much of Cuban society was rearranged by outsiders coming from the U.S., and this happened in some cases to too great of an extent causing resentment to grow among nationals. Some outsiders treated nationals in condescending ways, and society was altered in negative ways rather than the country being enhanced. Foreign investment should have been more thoughtfully considered, and both nationals and foreigners should have been more sensitive to each other’s culture, more egalitarian in their outlook, and more just in the economic distribution of wealth generated.

By the late 19th century trade had greatly increased between the U.S. and Cuba. Spain was still in political control of Cuba, yet Cuba began to rely on the United States, economically, for the lion’s share of its trade, investments, and capital.

By 1894, the United States had invested more than $50 million in Cuba, purchased 87 percent of Cuba’s exports and accounted for almost 40 percent of the island’s imports.³ Cuba’s growing economic relationship with the United States created not only greater wealth but also greater confidence among Cubans. Nationalism grew. Leaders from the First Cuban War of Independence such as Martí, Gómez, and Maceo were in exile but had not given up their plans for Cuban independence.

³ Ibid, p. 36.
The McKinley Act made trade more advantageous for both the U.S. and Cuba by ending import tax on molasses and sugar in 1890. In contrast, Spain was not helping the Cuban economy in its policies of raising tariffs and taxes, and took over the farms and plantations of landowners that they considered to be unsympathetic or unsupportive of the Spanish rule of the island. The Spanish government in Madrid reneged on its promises of political reform made in the late 1870’s at the end of the First War of Cuban Independence. In essence, the Spanish continued to limit Cubans, politically, by not allowing Cubans any greater control over their own local governments. This set the stage for the Second War for Cuban Independence.

When interfacing the Second War for Cuban Independence with American presidential administrations is that it is important to note that this war was from 1895 to 1898. It began during the second administration of President Grover Cleveland and ended during the first administration of President William McKinley. (Cleveland’s two terms were not consecutive with President Benjamin Harrison serving in between Cleveland’s two terms.) What further complicates matters is that the Second War of Cuban Independence is referred to by some sources as the Cuban Civil War as some Cubans aided the Spanish authorities and did not fight for Cuban independence. Lastly, the fight for Cuban independence was largely waged as a guerrilla struggle with the Cuban rebels basing their operations from the countryside with the Spanish in control of the largest urban centers. The war ended the same year as the Spanish American War began. The United States declared Cuba independent from Spain. The Cuban rebels did not win militarily against the Spanish but won their independence as a result of intervention from the United States. (These points of reference should serve to clarify any possible confusion
concerning this time period and the struggle of the Cuban people to achieve independence from Spain and the American military’s intervention.)

Many Cuban landowners throughout the war called for U.S. intervention. Hundreds of thousands of Cuban peasants were being rounded up by Spanish troops and put into concentration camps. For the first two years of the (second) Cuban War for Independence many supplies were sent to the Cuban rebels from the United States even though President Cleveland had publicly stated that he was not in favor of Cuban independence. Public opinion in the U.S. was largely against the Spanish for the atrocities that were being reported to the American public. These propaganda efforts were largely justified and organized by José Martí’s journalistic Cuban Junta based in New York City. McKinley pressed for a compromise, and a new government in Madrid offered Cuba autonomous local governance rights in January of 1898. Rebel leader Maximo Gómez would not compromise and rejected all Spanish offers and vowed to continue the struggle for complete Cuban independence. At this point President McKinley was coming under increased pressure from American businessmen and investors to protect their investments and property. As American lives were at risk and thousands of Cubans had already lost their lives, the American public became increasingly more vocal in favor of Cuban independence. McKinley sent the American battleship Maine to restore order in Cuba. On February 15, 1898 the Maine blew up in Havana Harbor. Two hundred and sixty U.S. sailors (some sources say 266) died. US naval experts that were sent to investigate the explosion determined that the sinking was the result of a mine. Many Americans jumped to the conclusion that the Spanish were responsible. The U.S. Congress declared war on Spain after Spain failed to accept President McKinley’s subsequent demands:
When Spain rejected McKinley’s demands for an armistice and an end to the concentration camps, war became inevitable. Congress proclaimed Cuba independent on April 11, pledging in the Teller Amendment not to annex the island. Spain severed diplomatic relations, and Congress declared war on April 25. (1898)

The Spanish American War only lasted ten weeks with the U.S. handily defeating the Spanish on land and at sea. Many Spanish ships were sunk and there was even a U.S. victory off the coast of the Philippines in the Pacific Ocean. In the Caribbean region the U.S. military was in control of both Cuba and Puerto Rico by the end of the war.

One could argue that U.S. involvement in Cuba helped Cuba to achieve independence from Spain and this is true, yet it is in the way one nation helps another nation that is important, too, and for what purposes. U.S. policy motivations were largely for economic reasons, and these policies had been on-going throughout several U.S. presidential administrations. In 1848 President James Polk put forth an offer of $100 million to Spain to buy Cuba. In 1854 President Franklin Pierce offered $130 million. In the last months of the Second War of Cuban Independence President McKinley offered $300 million. Spain refused all of these offers, and after McKinley’s offer was refused he agreed with U.S. investors and businessmen to intervene in Cuba’s war, militarily. Clifford Statten writes that:

The United States did not allow the black Cuban troops, who had fought the Spanish for three years, into the city to participate in the surrender ceremony.

The war ended officially on December 10 with the signing of the Treaty of Paris. Cuban officials were not asked to participate. The exclusion of Cubans from the decision-making process at the end of the war foreshadowed future Cuban relations with the United States.  

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The newly-found independent nation of Cuba, initially, was not allowed to celebrate its independence from Spain. U.S. troops barred the Cuban rebel army from the victory celebrations in the two largest population centers of Havana and Santiago. The rebel army was also not allowed to be present when Spanish officials and soldiers left the island and returned to Spain. The official reasons given were to “maintain order” and so that celebrations would “not get out of hand,” but Cubans took this as inappropriate and justifiably felt that the U.S. military and government officials were being overly-paternalistic, arrogant, and racist. The U.S. military occupation of Cuba lasted from January 1899 to May of 1902.

General Leonard Wood was the second U.S. general in charge of the U.S. military occupation of Cuba. Wood made recommendations to U.S. Secretary of War, Elihu Root, and Root relayed recommendations to U.S. Secretary of State, John Hay. Author, Clifford L. Statten claims that “the U.S. military appropriated the Cuban treasury and its public revenues” and disbanded the majority of the Cuban army. The U.S. military rebuilt the infrastructure of the island, restarted the educational system (with American textbooks translated into Spanish), and oversaw free elections. Health facilities were built and many improvements related to sanitation, education, and transportation were implemented;

The American Sanitary Commission eradicated yellow fever, although its success was based largely on the research of Cuban scientist Carlos Finlay, who correctly linked the disease to mosquitoes. ⁶

Meanwhile American investors clamored to buy up businesses and land in Cuba at “rock-bottom” prices.

⁶Ibid., p. 41.
Between 1898 and 1900 farms changed owners at a rate of almost 4,000 a year. Estates were abandoned and property values fell dramatically. Land could be purchased at one-tenth to one-twentieth of its value prior to the rebellion.⁷

In September of 1900 free elections were held and a Cuban Constitution was begun, yet it was written with strong U.S. involvement. Many people, especially Cuban people, look at the involvement of the U.S. as overly paternalistic therefore over-reaching and condescending toward the sovereignty of Cuban nation. The Platt Amendment to the Cuban Constitution is a U.S. intervention that is an example of the proceeding statement. The Platt Amendment continues to be controversial to this day even though it was somewhat “neutralized” by U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Good Neighbor Policy in 1933. That being said, the U.S. naval base at Guantanamo Bay is a reminder and a legacy of the Platt Amendment:

The McKinley administration was determined to set out terms that would protect American property and the rights of minorities. Congress enacted eight provisions, which together are known as the Platt Amendment. These stipulated that Cuba would lease naval bases to the United States, make no treaties with a foreign power that might impair its independence, and acquire no debts it could not pay. On June 12, 1901, the Havana constitutional convention (by a majority of one) added the Platt proposals. The constitution, modeled on that of the United States, also provided for universal suffrage, separation of church and state, a powerful president who could serve two terms, and a relatively weak senate and chamber of deputies.⁸

Thomas M. Leonard, author of Encyclopedia of Cuban-United States Relations, says that “the Cubans only accepted the Platt Amendment to end the U.S. military occupation,” and the U.S. did, in fact, leave on May 20, 1902. However, leading the Rough Riders,

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⁷ Ibid., pp. 41-42.

⁸ See Rogoziński, A Brief History of the Caribbean, p. 206.
Colonel Theodore Roosevelt - hero of the battle of San Juan Hill (July 1, 1898) and the eventual siege against the fort at Santiago, became U.S. President in the aftermath of the Cuban Constitution. Roosevelt’s Corollary of December 1904 extended the definition of the Monroe Doctrine so as to promote greater U.S. military control throughout the Caribbean Sea. The guidelines of this corollary established U.S. foreign policy in this region until 1928 when the Clark Memorandum strongly renounced the intent of the Roosevelt Corollary. The Clark Memorandum laid the groundwork for a “softer” U.S. approach in Cuba, the Caribbean, and in the entire Latin American region. The Roosevelt Corollary was eventually rejected by U.S. policy makers in favor of the Good Neighbor Policy in 1933.

The very earliest relationship between the nations of Cuba and the United States can be summarized by saying that the U.S. sought to extend its influence beyond its own borders. Several times the U.S., by force or by the threat of force, has sent ambassadors or U.S. battleships to insure political stability to protect American business and political interests. A good example of this was on May 31, 1912 when the U.S. Marines aboard the USS Nebraska were sent to Cuba to put down a black uprising in Daiquiri (Oriente Province) to protect U.S. lives and property. U.S. politicians and policy makers up to the time of President Franklin D. Roosevelt (FDR) strongly believed that Cubans needed U.S. help in learning how to govern in a democratic fashion including how to apply civil codes and practice sound judicial procedures and even to be responsible with their own national treasury. Yet, through economic interchange Cuba has benefited, greatly, with the U.S. purchasing large quantities of sugar and other products at very profitable prices for Cuba and by selling American products at affordable prices which has helped Cuba to
achieve a very high standard of living in relation to the rest of the Caribbean region. The U.S. has invested huge sums of money in rebuilding the infrastructure of Cuba after its wars of independence and lent its expertise in virtually all areas. Yet imperialistic attitudes that seek to impose foreign culture with little sensitivity to the host nation have fostered resentment among many Cubans, too. Perhaps Cuba’s economic needs and the many ways that Cuba has benefited, economically, are the main reasons that Americans,’ sometime over-bearing, presence was tolerated as long as it was by Cuban society.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Good Neighbor Policy softened the official attitude of the U.S. toward Cuba, to a small degree, as economic and social encroachment continued. Due to Cuba’s sugar production and other U.S. supported economic ventures, Cuba continued to enjoy economic prosperity by Caribbean regional standards, yet many of Cuba’s early presidents, as well as later presidents, ruled more as dictators appropriating national treasuries as if federal monies were their own personal fortunes. Corruption and repression were defining characteristics of many of Cuba’s rulers. General Machado y Morales was such a ruler. U.S. President Franklin Roosevelt dispatched Ambassador Sumner Welles to intervene during a time of extreme political unrest in Havana. Riots in the streets of Havana were in protest of Machado’s corrupt regime. When Welles first arrived Machado refused to resign, but after losing the support of most of his officers in the Cuban army Machado escaped certain death by fleeing office on August 12, 1933.

It was again U.S. intervention that placed the new provisional president, Carlos Manuel de Céspedes, into office. Céspedes served until Sergeant Fulgencio Batista y Zaldivar put a gun to Céspedes’ head, arrested him, and replaced Céspedes with Professor Grau on
September 4, 1933. This is known as the Sergeants’ Revolt of 1933. Batista brought Ramón Grau San Martín to the presidency of Cuba because the university students were rioting against Céspedes, and Havana was in civil chaos. Céspedes had put severe restrictions on the universities and took away other civil liberties. The army had joined the university students in their demands. Grau was popular with the students, and Batista thought that he could control Grau. Yet Grau was not popular with the U.S. because he was a socialist with the support of the Cuban communist party. Ambassador Welles influenced FDR not to recognize Grau’s presidency. It was another American, Jefferson Caffrey, that encouraged Batista to rid Cuba of President Grau. Carlos Mendieta was “named” president with Batista’s sanction and U.S. endorsement.

For twenty-five years (1933-1958) Batista was either the “outright ruler” or the “man behind the presidency” in Cuba. Although Grau San Martín served again as president when he was elected in 1944, Batista remained undisputed leader of the Cuban army and was very influential in many political manipulations. Grau’s rule initially accomplished some improvements in Cuban society, mostly because in those four years of Grau’s rule sugar cane production and sales were so high, yet Grau’s term ended in an all-time high of Cuban political graft and corruption. The next president of Cuba was Dr. Carlos Prío Socarras. Although freely elected, Prío proved to be as corrupt as most Cuban presidents to date. Prío was disposed of in a coup d’état by Fulgencio Batista on March 10, 1951.

The American administrations tolerated the violence, corruption, injustices, and political upheavals that were happening in Cuba as long as they did not interfere with American economic interests and as long as the communist party was kept from power. Batista
was someone who the U.S. policy makers looked at as being able to keep some semblance of order in Cuba. U.S. lives, property, and other interests were protected as Batista manipulated the Cuban political process, endorsed and dismissed presidents and congresses, and suppressed undesirable opposition to the army and to himself. Batista was largely successful throughout most of his career. In July of 1940 Batista was elected President of Cuba in a free election and served four years. Batista’s years as president were very good years for Cuba’s sugar crop. The U.S. purchased 100% of Cuban sugar exports from 1942 to 1945. U.S. companies such as Coca-Cola, Hires Root Beer, and Hershey’s Chocolate were some of the biggest buyers. However, organized crime, both Cuban and American factions, was rampant in Havana. Yet, Batista endorsed policies as far back as the 1930’s that provided a contrast to the corruption and repression that were also present under his direction. Cubans enjoyed Batista-supported policies that provided social services and labor rights to workers that gave the common man and his family benefits and job security. These innovations included reduced hours yet guaranteed jobs for satisfactory workers, unemployment insurance, pensions, the right to organize within unions, and increased control over one’s land, farm, and/or lease.

Batista’s second dictatorship was not the result of a free election. In early March of 1951 Batista arrived back to Cuba from Florida. His intent was to run for the Cuban presidency for a second term. Assessing that he would not win, he took the presidency by force on March 10th in a coup that ousted President Prio. Yet, during Batista’s second presidency the Cuban economy was strong. Agricultural grew, mining was developed and was profitable, livestock and ranching enterprises successfully produced beef and other products to a surplus, tourism was “booming,” foreign investments supported the
economy, sound public works in Havana such as dependable water and sewage systems were enhanced, and affordable housing was available. However, like Batista’s earlier term in the 1940’s, gambling and crime were overly-prevalent especially in Havana.

The Cold War added a further strain on Cuban society. The Cuban communist party was growing and resented Batista’s involvement with corruption and with the United States. In Cuban society there were both socialist and communist factions that wanted power and wanted Cuban society to be ordered in a different way. The state of affairs in Batista’s regime was “fertile ground” for enough discontent in society to foment the beginnings of what would later become the Cuban Revolution. On July 26, 1953, in conjunction with former President Prio Socarras, a group of approximately 130 men: some socialists, some communists, university students, intellectuals, and possibly a few peasants, raided the Cuban army barracks at Mocada in southeastern Cuba. (It is a widely-held theory that Prio supported Castro in some way, but the exact nature of his involvement has never been proven.) The attack did not succeed. Some of the rebels were killed in the attack, many (some sources say 68) were subsequently executed, and (approximately) 32 imprisoned. Several dozen men escaped. The leader of the raid, Fidel Castro (Ruz) and his brother, Raúl, initially escaped but then were apprehended. They were sentenced to 15 years in prison on the Isle of Pines. In 1954 Batista ran in the next presidential election which was “fixed” from the start. Batista “won,” and after several months Batista released all prisoners in Cuba in a general amnesty. Fidel and Raúl Castro walked free on May 15, 1955. After less than two months of speaking and writing against the Batista regime Fidel and Raúl left for Mexico to prepare for a violent overthrow of Batista’s government.
A year and a half later in December of 1956 a force of 80 men were led by Fidel Castro, his brother Raúl, and the Argentine former medical student and socialist Ernesto “Che” Guevara, to the Cabo Cruz peninsula of Oriente Province in southeastern Cuba to organize a rebellion against Batista’s government. Forces of the Cuban army met the rebels upon landing and killed 62 men. Of the original force only 18 men escaped into the Sierra Maestra Mountains. This is where a mythology begins to take shape. The Cuban Revolution was not a peasant up-rising, yet the revolution did eventually gain much popular support by the end of 1958. The leaders of the Cuban Revolution were university-educated intellectuals and mostly from wealthy families. Most of the leaders and organizers were born and brought up in cities and not in rural villages. The Castro brothers themselves were from Oriente Province along the northern coast where their family owned a large sugar plantation. Fidel Castro went to a prestigious preparatory school in Havana and later studied law at the University of Havana. The Sierra Maestra rebels became known as the July 26 Movement after the raid on Moncado in 1953, yet “Che” Guevara was not in Moncado. Fidel met Ernesto Guevara in Mexico when he was in self-imposed exile. So it is questionable how many of the 18 men who escaped into the mountains of Sierra Maestra could have actually been at Mocado on July 26 in 1953 besides the Castro brothers, and the Cuban Revolution was not a movement of “the people” or the common man. The Cuban Revolution was led by well-to-do (former) postgraduates (including former law and medical students) who rejected the status quo of their nations.

Fidel was a master at propaganda. In a little bit more than two months after escaping into the mountains Fidel arranged for Herbert Matthews, a journalist from the New York
Times newspaper, to meet with him in the Sierra Maestra’s to record Castro’s struggle. “Robin Hood” comparisons were made and Matthews wrote about Castro in “freedom fighter” terms in more of an idealistic framework rather than in a serious journalistic manner that relied on factual truth. How much was Matthews’ efforts to create a romantic hero for his subscribers and readers and how much was Fidel’s efforts to successfully deceive Matthews is anyone’s guess, but there is even a story of how Raúl kept marching the same Cuban men back and forth past Matthews to create an illusion that Castro’s rebel army was larger than it actually was. When Matthews’ article came out in the New York Times, it stated that “Castro commanded a large army.” Since only 18 men escaped barely ten weeks earlier, I doubt that Castro’s force could have actually been considered a large army in relation to Batista’s army at the time. However, Jan Rogoziński writes in A Brief History of the Caribbean that a significant number of Americans’ imaginations were captured by Fidel Castro after the New York Times article appeared.

During 1958 the Roman Catholic Church in Cuba pressured Batista to leave office. Since the Catholic church was the only major church in Cuban society, to lose the religious support of the Roman Catholic hierarchy was extremely detrimental to Batista’s administration. Equally devastating, during the same year in March, the U.S. government ceased to supply the Cuban army with armaments. In April of 1958 a small general strike drew attention to Castro’s efforts. Castro received some ideological support from Cuba’s communist party and among some workers in the more populated cities of Cuba such as Havana and Santiago. Yet it is likely that Castro’s success relied more on the growing discontent with the corruption within the regime of Batista (and the withdrawal of US
weaponry supplies from that regime) than with Castro’s actual popularity or his military power which at this time was an illusion. Yet Fidel Castro’s popularity began to grow exponentially, through 1958 due to many factors.

One of Castro’s greatest strengths was in his ability to influence and lead not only those around him but to build a strategy that would eventually influence the masses in Cuban society. One could say that Castro was a master planner and a supreme propagandist. All through 1958 Fidel Castro was able to broadcast propaganda by radio to the Cuban public. He voiced a message of moderation and democracy. He promised an end to political corruption, a restoration of democratic constitutional principles, and emphasized the Cuban economy. Castro managed popular perception, masterfully, had perfect timing, was opportunistic, and had a plan for government before he actually took control.

Throughout 1958 the communist party in Cuba (the Partido Socialist Popular Party or the PSP) increasingly threw support to Castro.

During the summer of 1958 and without U.S. support Batista sent the Cuban army to the Sierra Maestra Mountains to break Castro’s relatively small force. Even though Bastista’s army included airplanes, tanks, and 12,000 soldiers they were unsuccessful. Later that summer, Castro’s small rebel army was on the move east toward the capital. After a small turnout in the Cuban presidential election in November (which was popularly-known by the Cuban public to have already been fixed) Batista must have realized that his days were numbered. At dawn on the morning of January 1, 1959 Fulgencio Batista escaped on an airplane taking a large amount of public funds with him. Che’s forces arrived in Havana on that same night. Fidel arrived a week later riding in a tank. Castro was able to
move into power because of the power vacuum that was created when Batista fled to the Dominican Republic. American politicians did not interfere. They must have thought that it was Latin American politics as usual.

2.2 Cuban/U.S. Relations through the First Twenty Years of the Cuban Revolution

It is ironic that after more than sixty years of U.S. interventionist activities in Cuban affairs, during the Eisenhower administration the U.S. chose not to interfere, at least initially, during Castro’s take over of the Cuban government in 1959. U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower was pro-capitalist and had his “hands full” with the Soviet Union in Berlin and Eastern Europe. He was dedicated, as U.S. President Harry S. Truman was before him, to stemming the spread of communism throughout the world. Now Cuba was precariously close to becoming a communist state in the Western Hemisphere and was located only 90 miles from the United States! If Cuba was going to develop into a base for the spread of communism throughout the Caribbean region and Latin America then one would think that the United States would have “nipped the Cuban Revolution in the bud.” The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) of the United States had clearly identified Raúl Castro and Ernesto “Che” Guevara as communist sympathizers, yet Fidel Castro’s political intentions they were less sure of:

The early months of 1959 were, in Eisenhower’s words, the “testing phase” of U.S. policy toward the revolution. The administration viewed the Castro brothers and Che Guevara with deep skepticism, but the presence of “Cubans of ability and moderation” in the new government gave U.S. officials reason to hope that the revolution’s moderate faction might “check the extremists.” Moreover, the president later recounted, the great popularity which Castro then enjoyed throughout this hemisphere and the world gave us no alternative but to give him his chance.

Our first actions, therefore, were directed to give Castro every chance to establish
a reasonable relationship with us... We sharply curbed all inclination to retort and strike back at his early diatribes against us, leaving the way open to him to climb off of this line and get down to the serious business of running the affairs of his country responsibly.

Before the first six months had ended, it was clear Castro had failed this test.⁹

Fidel Castro, the supreme propagandist, had successfully kept the United States “off balance” concerning his political intentions in his first weeks in power. He had certainly made enough speeches about the “Yankee imperialist” and hurled insults, called the U.S. names, and even bragged how if the U.S. sent its soldiers to Cuba to attempt to destroy his revolution then the U.S. will find “200,000 U.S. soldiers dead.” Yet, Castro at other times spoke in conciliatory tones to the press, radio, on television, and to journalists concerning the U.S. even publicly apologizing for the “200,000 dead” comment. This was, in part, what accounted for the initial U.S. confusion regarding Castro’s early political plans for his nation. It is true that in the early years Fidel often confided in his brother, Raúl, how he viewed the Soviet Union with skepticism and how he was not prepared to trade one imperialist overlord (the U.S.) for another (the U.S.S.R.). Thomas G. Paterson’s Contesting Castro: The United States and the Triumph of the Cuban Revolution explains that Fidel Castro came to the United States in April of 1959 under the invitation of the American Society of Newspaper Editors. Castro met with U.S. Vice President Richard M. Nixon. Nixon judged Castro “either incredibly naïve about communism or under communist discipline.” So it would seem that Fidel Castro was not overtly communist in his perspective and in his plans for his nation in the very beginning of his rule. Yet perspectives often change when circumstances change, and the

⁹ Michael Grow, U.S. Presidents and Latin American Interventions, Pursuing Regime Change in the Cold War (University of Kansas, USA: University of Kansas Press, 2008), p. 37.
relationship that developed between the United States and Cuba in the first two years after the revolution served to drive Fidel Castro farther away from developing a positive relationship with the U.S. and, out of necessity, into an “ever-increasingly” closer association with the Soviet Union.

The culture in Washington D.C. was not warmly receptive to Castro in April of 1959. U.S. President Eisenhower purposefully avoided meeting Fidel Castro by leaving Washington D.C. to play golf in Georgia! This was not only rude but also not very wise for a U.S. President to socially and politically ignore a head of state that could go “either way” between friend or foe to the United States. Nixon bragged, insensitively, that he spoke to Castro “like a Dutch uncle” which alludes to acting in an over-directive, condescending, and paternalistic manner. So the way people are treated, when they are treated badly, may often “push” them into an opposing camp. When heads of state act badly toward each other it forms negative feelings that may have negative consequences for their nations’ future international relations with each other.

The Eisenhower administration should have realized obvious geopolitical and historical truths concerning Cuba and concerning past Cuban/U.S. relations. Cuba is an island nation, and island nations usually develop economic dependencies on larger nations that have more diverse economies. In Cuba’s case, the essence of this was their sugar cane crop. Cuba never had enough of a diversified economy that it did not have to ultimately rely on its sugar production and subsequent sales. Cuba’s main customer for many decades had always been the United States. If the US was not to have friendly relations with the new government in Cuba then there was a good chance that Cuban sugar sales to
the U.S. were going to decrease or “drop off” completely. Who would fill this gap and buy Cuba’s sugar in this Cold War situation? The answer should have been obvious to the Eisenhower administration. A small country such as Cuba would sometimes need a stronger “older brother” in times of trouble, as well. In Cuba’s case this had been the U.S. for sixty years, sometimes because Cuba asked for U.S. assistance and other times the U.S. would take it upon itself to intervene (or interfere) and “act the bully” without being asked. In time the absence of the U.S. would be filled by another superpower. In the case of the Cold War it should have been more than obvious to the Eisenhower administration that Cuba would, more than likely, “gravitate” toward the Soviet Union for military assistance if the U.S. and Cuban relationship was such that Cuba felt threatened by the U.S. or if the U.S. promoted imperialist activities toward Cuba.

The U.S./Cuban relationship went from bad to worse. Castro voiced enough anti-American rhetoric and pro-socialist/communist sentiments that Washington could not help but be “put on alert.” Castro expropriated large farms with a communist-style agrarian reform. The National Institute of Agrarian Reform (INRA) was organized to mobilize Cuban peasants to work and militarily defend Cuba’s nationalization programs. By the middle of May 1959 many large Cuban farms and most U.S. farms, utility and transportation companies, and other U.S. businesses had been taken over by the Cuban Revolutionary government. The foreign companies that remained were forced to pay 60 percent of their income to the Cuban government. Cuban communications concerning trade pacts and other matters increased with the Soviet Union. Castro’s connections with Cuba’s communist party, the Partido Socialista Popular (PSP), increased and Castro named a member of the PSP, Antonio Núñez Jiménez, to head the INRA. By the later half
of 1959 Castro had clearly indicated himself as a communist, and Washington recognized that Cuba was becoming a communist nation.

By the beginning of 1960 Castro was courting the Soviet Union and began to align his nation with the Eastern Bloc. Business was still being conducted between Cuba and the Western nations but increasingly on Castro’s terms. Cuba was beginning to resemble a communist-styled dictatorship with little or no democratic features. All important governmental decisions were made by Castro’s inner circle of advisors with Fidel firmly in charge. Cultural choices were increasingly being directed by the state including in the areas of education, health, and concerning individuals’ vocations. The Roman Catholic Church was not outlawed but greatly marginalized by the revolutionary government’s all-encompassing influence over Cuban society. Many of the promises of the revolution were reversed. Democracy and freedom of choice in society decreased as Castro’s government sought to control as much of Cuban society as it could. Opposition to the government was not tolerated. Loyalty to Castro’s revolutionary plan for Cuba was what kept people secure. Moderates in the government left for the United States or other countries as did many professionals including many teachers, scientists, engineers, and other technicians who were experts in their fields. The overwhelming majority of people that left were of the middle class and members of the Cuban elite. Of the middle-aged people that left, in most cases, this represented the most educated population of this group. As Castro’s government grew closer to the Soviet Union US/Cuban relations deteriorated:

The Soviet Union and Cuba signed a five-year trade agreement in which Cuba would deliver 1 million tons of sugar annually in exchange for Soviet crude oil and the Soviets extended $100 million in credits to Cuba so it could purchase industrial equipment. On March 4, 1960, the ship La Coubre, loaded with
weapons acquired in France, exploded in Havana Harbor. Castro blamed the CIA and gave a defiant anti-American speech that day in which he ended with what would become the most important slogan of the revolution, “patria o muerte!” (“fatherland or death”). Two weeks later, President Dwight D. Eisenhower approved the development of a covert operation designed to topple the Castro government.\textsuperscript{10}

The covert operation that Eisenhower approved involved arming several hundreds of Cuban exiles to be trained in Guatemala and an initial $13$ million in funds for training. The number of trained guerrilla forces would grow to more than $1,500$ men by the time of the Kennedy administration when the invasion at Bahía de Cochinos (Bay of Pigs) and Playa Girón actually happened. Many people assumed that this event was “the straw that broke the camels back” in U.S./Cuban relations, and no doubt it was the lowest point up to that time, yet there were also other earlier factors that contributed to the deterioration of Cuban/U.S. relations. Many Cubans that showed opposition to the growing communist influences in Castro’s government were beaten and jailed. Hebert Matos who served with Castro in Sierra Maestra spoke out publicly against communist influences in the new Cuban government in June of 1959. Matos was sentenced to twenty years in jail for anti-revolutionary behavior. Another prominent Cuban dissatisfied with Cuban revolutionary developments was the head of the Cuban air force, Pedro Díaz Lanz. Lanz defected to the U.S. in June of 1959 because of the communist direction Castro’s revolutionary government was going and spoke regarding the political changes happening in Cuba in the U.S. Yet, there were thousands of people in Cuba that did not escape Cuba and were executed or jailed for long prison sentences.

In June of 1959 Eisenhower directed the major American oil companies in Cuba not to

\textsuperscript{10} See Staten, The History of Cuba, p. 95.
refine Soviet crude oil. Texaco, Shell, and Standard Oil complied. By late July of 1959 all foreign oil companies in Cuba were nationalized by Fidel Castro. The following month Eisenhower countered this action by ceasing to allow the purchase of Cuban sugar by the United States. By September 1959 all U.S. companies in Cuba were nationalized. The U.S. Trade (or Economic) Embargo went into effect in August 1960 and remains in effect to this day, yet more dangerous developments were to happen.

Before and after the Bay of Pigs invasions there were many insurgencies against Castro’s government intensifying during the second half of 1959 when Castro’s government opted to become pro-communist:

For the next year, Castro and his rebel army fought counterrevolutionary groups and Miami-based Cuban exiles who used air bases in southern Florida to engage in assassination attempts, provide arms to counterrevolutionary groups to burn crops, bomb sugar mills and attack ships bound for Cuba. The U.S. failure to disavow these groups and prevent these activities was enough evidence for Castro to assert U.S. complicity in these actions. In fact, the CIA developed at least eight different plans designed to assassinate Castro over the next five years.\textsuperscript{11}

It was during the administration of U.S. President John F. Kennedy (JFK) that the Bay of Pigs invasion happened on April 17, 1961, two days after U.S.-trained Cuban exiles flying U.S. B-26 bombers destroyed much of Cuba’s (small) air force. The invasion force was exclusively made up of Cuban men with no U.S. military present. The force of 1,297 men were met by Castro’s army, and 1,189 men of the invasion force (some sources indicate 1,180) were captured:

Castro’s air force soon sank two of the brigade’s transports with most of the ammunition and radio equipment. When bombs hit the CIA command ship, the rest of the fleet fled, leaving almost 1,500 men stranded. After two days

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., p. 92.
of fighting, Castro’s army took 1,189 prisoners. After exploiting and humiliating them in mass trials, Castro sold his prisoners to the United States for $53 million in ransom.

On May 1, before a mass meeting of 2 million, Castro boasted of having defeated a Yankee-sponsored invasion. The Bay of Pigs fiasco disillusioned anti-Castro forces both inside if Cuba and in the United States. Moreover, the invasion gave Castro an excuse to move against his foes. More than 100,000 persons were imprisoned, and no one opposing the government remained free after this time. The resistance in Cuba never recovered, and opposition to Castro was now centered in Washington, D.C.\textsuperscript{12}

What did continue was the CIA attempts to try to assassinate Fidel Castro. Through many sources one will discover that the methods of these attempts were quite bizarre, much like a Sean Fleming novel rather than anything that actually would remind one of serious foreign policy attempts to improve matters in the Western Hemisphere. It is no small wonder that Castro would rely on the Soviet Union for protection from the United States. Castro asked Nikita Krushchev for military advisors to come to Cuba to help train his military and asked permission from the Soviets to purchase weaponry from Poland, some of which had nuclear capabilities. The Soviets agreed with Castro’s requests and coupled military assistance with generous economic aid. From late 1961 through 1962 forty-two thousand Soviet troops were sent to Cuba. However, when Castro allowed Soviet troops to set up intermediate range and medium range ballistic (nuclear) missiles (IRBM) and (MRBM), U.S. President Kennedy justifiable and wisely would not allow these dangerous developments. Kennedy would ensure the safety of the United States, but how he would enforce that security and how he would delivered that message to the Soviets, Kennedy did not rush into but deliberated with his Executive Committee of the National Security Council (EXCOM) for many days weighing the alternatives from his advisors as

\textsuperscript{12} See Rogoziński, A Brief History of the Caribbean, p. 238.
to the best strategy to safeguard the United States. Several things were certain. There
were Soviet nuclear missiles on Cuban ground, they were within range of the U.S., and
Kennedy was resolved that those missiles would be removed, either by peaceful methods
or by war. JFK in the end used a combination of cautious diplomacy and deliberate force
yet did not attack Cuba or the U.S.S.R. naval ships or ground forces:

In mid-1962, the Soviets began secretly delivering bombers and ballistic missiles
capable of carrying nuclear warheads deep into the United States. By September,
at least 42 missiles and dozens of nuclear warheads were in place. Although Russian
leaders denied everything, U-2 spy planes provided photographic evidence of missile
emplacements.\(^{13}\)

In reading Robert F. Kennedy’s (RFK) book, *Thirteen Days (A Memoir of the Cuban
Missile Crises)* it becomes obvious (if one does not realize this already) that U.S.
reconnaissance of various regions throughout the Western Hemisphere (and other places
in the world) is necessary. Before and during the missile crisis men such as Soviet
Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko and Soviet Ambassador to the United States Anatoly
Dobrynin continually lied to RFK and other members of EXCOM about Soviet missiles
being present in Cuba. This is no doubt why President Kennedy had U.S. officials, such
as Adlai Stevenson, show the U-2 photos at the United Nations (UN) during the crisis.
U.S./Cuban/U.S.S.R. relations were at their most dangerous during these two weeks in
the middle of October 1962:

On October 22, President Kennedy asked Khrushchev to withdraw the bombers
and missiles already in Cuba. He also imposed a naval blockade along a line 500
miles from the island. United States naval forces were ordered to stop, inspect,
and disable (but not sink) Russian vessels carrying offensive weapons. Confronta-
tion between the two superpowers seemed inevitable. U.S. military forces and the
Strategic Air Command were placed on full combat alert. Soviet ships continued

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\(^{13}\) Ibid., p. 240.
toward Cuba, and work on the missile sites was speeded up. The world seemed to be on the brink of World War III. Then on October 27, Premier Khrushchev wrote the president that he would pull out the nuclear missiles if the United States would agree not to attack Cuba. Khrushchev did not consult Castro...\(^{14}\)

There was quite a bit more to this situation than the above quote indicates as negotiations between JFK and Khrushchev continued for several days. The U.S. agreed to remove its nuclear Jupiter missiles from strategic NATO locations at bases in Turkey to reassure the Soviet Union of its safety and America’s good will and to help Khrushchev “save face” during negotiations, and U.S. naval ships forced several Soviet ships to retreat and did not allow any Soviet ships with armaments, that could endanger the U.S., through to Cuba. Yet the above quote reveals several important things concerning foreign relations. The U.S. never negotiated with Castro or the Cuban government directly, and the U.S.S.R. did not consult the Cuban government, either. Both superpowers asserted their complete independence from the lesser power. The U.S. asserted its influence and superior position in the region effectively restating the Monroe Doctrine, and President Kennedy dismissed any formerly-held Soviet theories concerning his inexperience or weakness.

RFK’s memoir, *Thirteen Days*, Raymond L. Garthoff’s *Reflections on the Cuban Missile Crisis (Revised to Include New Revelations from Soviet & Cuban Sources)*, and *The Kennedy Tapes: Inside the White House during the Cuban Missile Crises* (edited by Ernest R. May and Philip D. Zelikow) are all sources that reveal *just how close the world came* to nuclear war. JFK’s thoughtfulness, timing, diplomacy, and courage should be evident to readers of these three works. President Kennedy averted a nuclear war and

\(^{14}\) Ibid., pp. 240-241.
compelled the Soviets to dismantle and remove all of the nuclear missiles from Cuban soil. JFK’s final decision on how to handle the crisis and his diplomacy with the Soviet Union also saved Cuba from destruction whether Castro realized it or wanted to admit it or not. Credit also should be given to the U.S. Navy for carrying out its instructions with intelligence, efficiency, and courage. President Kennedy exhibited the best kind of presidential leadership by listening to his advisors in EXCOM, fully, before deciding on the best actions to safeguard the U.S. and the world. Kennedy informed Congressional leaders, presented the crisis at the right time to the American public in a television address, kept in continual contact with Premier Khrushchev, and enforced an effective military quarantine (blockade), yet was still completely prepared with the U.S. Air Force, in ready position, if circumstances necessitated a more aggressive response as events unfolded. I was a twelve year old boy watching President Kennedy’s television address to the nation as the crisis was happening, and I can remember thinking how lucky I and the nation were to have JFK President of the United States at that time.

Rogoziński continues telling the story of the Cuban Missile Crisis (which the Cubans refer to as the October Crisis and the Russians call the Caribbean Crisis.) Rogoziński’s account reinforces the idea that JFK’s actions were correct:

Castro learned of the U.S.-Soviet compromise while talking with Che Guevara. In his rage, Castro kicked the wall, breaking a mirror. Hoping to launch nuclear warheads against Washington and New York, the Cuban leader sent troops to seize the missile sites. Despite casualties, the Russians successfully defended the sites and later took the missiles and bombers back to the Soviet Union. While there was no formal announcement of the U.S.-Soviet agreement, all succeeding presidents acted as if Kennedy had firmly pledged that the United States would never invade Cuba.\footnote{Ibid., p. 241.}
U.S. Air Force reconnaissance continued to fly over Cuba for fifteen years ensuring that no more Soviet offensive weapons were being deployed in Cuba. In 1970 U.S. jets detected a Soviet nuclear submarine facility being built in Cienfuegos, Cuba. The U.S. persuaded the Soviets to discontinue construction. Presidents Johnson and Nixon kept the status of U.S./Cuban relations from “boiling over” even as the Cold War “raged” in so far as Cuba was actively supporting revolution in South America and Africa. The U.S. Trade Embargo against Cuba was formally and practically applied to a greater degree in 1964 pulling most member nations of the OAS into the embargo against Cuba, but in 1975 the U.S. agreed to let these same nations decide their own course. Most OAS members resumed trade with Cuba at this time except for the U.S.

A positive development in U.S./Cuban relations was the signing of an airline anti-hijacking agreement on February 15, 1973 which was the result of a U.S. proposal made three months earlier. There was a relaxation of trade sanctions against Cuba by the U.S. (indirectly) by the U.S. allowing third parties to sell some U.S. goods (such as U.S. automobile parts) to Cuba by way of other nations serving as middlemen in 1974, and there were even two U.S. Senators that visited Cuba and secret talks in New York City about the possibilities of the re-establishment of U.S./Cuban international relations later the same year. A year later that possibility was reduced by Cuba’s involvement in Angola, and President Gerald Ford’s announcement that U.S./Cuban diplomatic relations would not commence as long as Cuba was involved in revolutionary activities in that African nation. Four months later, this situation had not changed, and U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger restated the U.S. position on conditions for the re-establishment of relations. In October of 1976 a Cuban airplane blew up, and a former American CIA
employee (who was also a Cuban exile) was blamed. Castro subsequently cancelled the U.S./Cuban anti-hijacking agreement. U.S. President Jimmy Carter relaxed travel restrictions on Cuban-Americans visiting relatives in Cuba, but twenty years after the Cuban Revolution Cuba's involvement in Central American and African conflicts plus the CIA's discovery of 3,000 Soviet troops in Cuba (who had been in Cuba since 1962) soured U.S./Cuban relations once again.

2.3 The Last 30 Years of U.S./Cuban Relations

In the last thirty years there has been little change in U.S./Cuban relations. When one thinks of the years from Cuban independence to the Cuban Revolution, in many ways, U.S./Cuban relations were much better in those fifty years than in the last fifty years. Fifty years is a long time. It is the span of two generations. In the case of Cuba it means that many Cuban-American children have never met their grandparents living back in Cuba. Between 1959 and 2009 the years 1959 to 1962 would have to be considered the lowest point in U.S./Cuban relations because of the U.S.-supported Bay of Pigs invasion, U.S. government (CIA) attempts to assassinate Fidel Castro, and the Cuban Missile Crisis. After briefly reviewing the years between 1979 and the present, it will be a pleasure to explore a few ideas on how to reverse the historic trends in U.S./Cuban international relations.

In 1980 Fidel Castro expanded his own role in his government by, personally, taking over several additional government ministries. Castro's actions were looked upon by the U.S. government as moving even further away from democratic governance. In the same year Castro announced in April that anyone wishing to leave Cuba, could, and in a five month
period almost 125,000 people left Cuba from the port city of Mariel. This aggravated tensions between the U.S. and Cuba especially in southern Florida because almost 4,000 of the émigrés were considered undesirable persons including criminals (political and otherwise), mental health patients, and poor people with very few skills.

The next year both Colombia and Jamaica broke off diplomatic relations with Cuba. U.S. military exercises increased in the Caribbean region. The Cuban government reacted to U.S. actions by preparing for a possible U.S. invasion of its island. In 1982 Cuba continued its military buildup, and U.S. President Ronald Reagan warned Cuba that the U.S. would not tolerate instability in the Caribbean region. The Argentine/British conflict in the Malvinas/Falkland Islands added to U.S./Cuban tensions as Cuba offered aid to Argentina and the two countries signed a trade deal. The U.S. and Britain, of course, are strong allies, thus U.S. military exercises continued to increase in the Caribbean region perhaps to keep Cuba’s naval personnel busy watching the U.S. Navy in the Caribbean and to keep the Cuban navy “tied up” so that they did not sail south along the Argentine coast. U.S. travel restrictions tightened, and money allowed to be spent in Cuba (by the few Americans who were allowed to travel to Cuba by the U.S. State Department) was limited to necessities, and other purchases were sharply curtailed by other restrictions and by being taxed at a high percentage by the U.S. government upon return.

In 1983 Castro “reached out” to the nations of Mexico, Panama, Colombia, and Venezuela in an effort for all parties to de-escalate military arms shipments for struggles in Central America, especially in Nicaragua. Military advisors were being sent to Nicaragua by Cuba, the US, and even a few from the above mentioned states. Castro
said that he was willing to limit these advisors. On October 22 Cuba decreased its military involvement in Grenada. Three day after Cuba reduced its military involvement in Grenada the U.S. invaded Grenada with 8,000 troops. The U.S. military took 642 Cuban troops as prisoners. Most of the Cubans that were captured claimed that they were "construction workers," yet U.S. troops clearly identified 43 Cubans as military personnel. Besides Cuban troops captured twenty-four Cubans were killed by U.S. soldiers and fifty-seven Cubans were wounded.

The following year Cuba began to withdraw troops from several African nations, including Angola and Namibia, yet U.S. military exercises continued to increase in the Caribbean. Positive developments such as immigration talks between the U.S. and Cuba began. Most admirable were Jesse Jackson's efforts in securing the release of twenty-six political prisoners from Cuban jails after his June of 1984 visit to Cuba.

In 1985 relations between the U.S. and Cuba continued to "see-saw." Church freedoms continued, but for the most part, U.S./Cuban relations did not improve as the year continued. Fidel Castro and U.S. presidents have had a history of "you did this, so now I'll do that..." type of thing. As childish as this is, this was to continue throughout 1985. The U.S. radio broadcast "Radio Marti" was a propaganda effort to influence Cuban listeners. Castro took exception to this U.S.-sponsored initiative and cancelled the U.S./Cuban immigration and repatriation agreements that had been worked out between the two nations only five months earlier. This was unfortunate because both nation's citizens had benefited by enjoying more personal choice during the previous five months. By October President Reagan cancelled almost all other U.S. travel to Cuba.
The next year saw little improvement in international relations except in the area of religion. An international conference in February of 1986 was hosted by the Roman Catholic Church in Cuba. Bishops from all over the Americas came including Bishops from the United States. An official from the Vatican City also attended. In this framework the conference was successful, civil, and no negative publicity resulted.

The following year Radio Marti continued and its perceived effect was that it strengthened opposition against the regime of Fidel Castro. One of Castro’s responses to counter Radio Marti’s effect was to allege that U.S. spy activities were being based at the U.S. Interests Section in Havana. The U.S. Interests Section was a bureau that U.S. President Jimmy Carter began to improve U.S./Cuban relations and to facilitate progress toward the normalization of affairs between the U.S. and Cuba. Its role is similar to an embassy, yet during 1987 the functions of the U.S. Interest Section were dramatically reduced. President Reagan was steadfast in his opposition to communism and his insistence that the Cuban government reform toward democratic principles before his administration would take any steps toward normalizing relations between the U.S. and Cuba. However, by November 20, 1987 Cuba and the U.S. had reinstated the original U.S./Cuban immigration policy of 1984 which was much more limiting in scope than what many Cubans had hoped would develop.

With Ronald Reagan as U.S. president and Russia and Eastern Europe increasingly becoming disillusioned with both communism and the nuclear arms race, tensions increased between Cuba and the U.S.S.R. In the late 1980’s Cuba was receiving less military and economic aid from the Soviet Union than it had enjoyed during the early
1980’s. In the first half of the decade Cuba had grown accustomed to generous Soviet aid. In return Cuba had backed the U.S.S.R. by going in tandem with the Soviets in joint military ventures to support regime changes in many places throughout the world.

Communist pro-Soviet governments received Cuban troop support in addition to military assistance and financial support from Moscow. Nations that received some sort of support from the Soviet Union, Cuba, or from both nations in the early 1980’s included North Korea, Libya, Ethiopia, Nicaragua, South Yemen, Grenada, El Salvador, Colombia, and Guatemala. Cuba sponsored guerrilla training camps for individuals that were or would become insurgents in their own countries. Sent from the Soviet Union and/or Cuba to Angola and many other places were: civil servants, engineers, doctors, teachers, and experts in agriculture and in many other fields. Yet in the late 1980’s Cuba was “in the business” of exporting revolution without the enthusiasm and support from the Eastern Bloc nations and the U.S.S.R. When Castro sent in military advisors to Panama, Nicaragua, and Grenada, the U.S. stepped in to reverse the political developments with open military action, such as in Panama and Grenada, or covertly, such as in Nicaragua. For instance, in Panama by the end of 1989, US troops had arrested General Noriega, in his own nation, and had brought him to the United States to stand trial and to serve time in an U.S. federal prison. Soviet aid had by this time almost totally “dried up” to the entire Caribbean and Central American region, and U.S. influence was beginning to hold sway throughout the Central American and Caribbean regions, even in places such as El Salvador. From 1989 to the end of 1991 Eastern Europe and Russia were transformed by more democratic governments. Communism went out of favor with the majority of people who would institute change in Eastern Europe and in Russia. Ties
between Cuba and the former Warsaw Pact were no longer as strong as they once were and trade dramatically decreased.

Reduced goods and capital in Cuba in the 1990’s had a devastating effect on the health of the people and the economy of Cuba. Shortages and the rationing of goods became commonplace in Cuba. By 1994 Castro legalized the U.S. dollar and certain free market practices because he thought that these measures were necessary to help the Cuban economy. This was a very hard time for most Cuban families and workers. Basic necessities were hard-to-come-by. Even products like soap and subsistence food were scarce. Cuban society since the revolution had prided itself on its educational and health programs, yet health decreased to a level that did not support Cuba’s population. Water and electricity were provided by the government to the people only on alternate days. This period in Cuban history would become known as the “Special Period.” This period with these conditions lasted for several years, so one would think that with the fall of communism in Eastern Europe and Russia and with U.S. and Chinese relations “thawing,” perhaps Cuba and the U.S. would relax tensions concerning each other, yet U.S./Cuban relations did not improve:

President George H.W. Bush even vetoed a bill in 1990 that would have made it difficult for subsidiaries of U.S. companies in other countries to trade with Cuba. In this case, the lobbying efforts of IBM, Exxon, ITT and others that traded with Cuba via third countries were successful. It looked like President Bush was moving to change U.S. policy toward the island.

But the presidential election of 1992 and the power of the anti-Castro Cuban American National Foundation (CANF) brought an abrupt end to any thaw in U.S. policy. President Bush added the condition that Cuba must hold free and fair elections before the United States would consider normalizing relations.¹⁶

¹⁶ See Staten, The History of Cuba, pp. 133-134.
In the U.S. the Torricelli Act (Cuban Democracy Act) was put into effect in 1992: With Democratic presidential candidate Bill Clinton catering to CANF, President Bush decided to support the passage of the bill and signed it in Miami just before the election. The Torricelli Act prevents subsidiaries of U.S. companies in other countries from trading with Cuba even if those countries allow trade with the island. It also prevents ships that dock in Cuba from coming to the United States for six months and allows the president to stop U.S. foreign aid to any country that conducts business with Cuba. Finally, it allows the president to give assistance to Cuban dissidents. Even though Canada and U.S. allies in Europe opposed the Torricelli Act and resented what they considered to be U.S. intervention into their own trade policies, President Bush and the incoming President Clinton continued to take a hard line against Cuba.\(^\text{17}\)

The above law was a reintroduction of a similar 1990 bill. President H.W. Bush signed the Torricelli Act with President Clinton re-affirming the law several years later. In 1996 the Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity Act (the Helms-Burton Act) was also made law which:

allows American citizens to sue foreign corporations whose trade or investments profit from any properties that were expropriated by the Castro government after 1959. It allows the U.S. government to penalize foreign companies that conduct business in Cuba. Finally, the act added another condition for the normalization of relations with Cuba: that no government with Castro or his brother, Raúl, would be acceptable to the United States.\(^\text{18}\)

Even though President Clinton had begun the People-to-People initiative, a hard line was taken toward Cuba during his presidential administration. Probably the single event during these years that did the most damage to U.S./Cuban relations was when two U.S. civilian airplanes were shot down by the Cuban air force in international waters on February of 1996. U.S. restrictions against Cuba continued to stay firmly in place.

The U.S. trade embargo against Cuba has been *loudly spoken against* by many members

\(^{17}\) Ibid, p. 134.  
\(^{18}\) Ibid.
of the UN General Assembly, continually, since 1992 and by the OAS since 1993. U.S.
business concerns have increasingly lobbied against the trade embargo but to no avail.
Pope John Paul II spoke out against the embargo in 1998. The Clinton administration
under the philosophy of the People-to-People initiative relaxed some restrictions and
allowed greater travel, direct food, medicine, and mail services from the U.S. to Cuba.

Since 2000, Cuba has attempted to purchase $73 million worth of grain from the U.S., yet
President G. W. Bush, under pressure from the Cuban-American lobby in Miami, did not
allow the deal to be finalized. Ironically, because of the harsh limitations of the Special
Period, Cuba has changed many of its economic policies in ways that the U.S. has (in the
past) advocated but not because of U.S. pressure resulting from the trade embargo.
Similarly, with China and Russia, Cuba has changed some of its economic policies in the
direction of the free market because of its own desires and out of economic necessity.
Yet, U.S. and Cuban relations have yet to normalize fifty years after the Cuban
Revolution, and U.S. travel restrictions to Cuba and the U.S. trade embargo against Cuba
are still in full effect.

3.1 An Approach to the Re-establishment of International Relations

between the United States and Cuba

Relations between Cuba and the U.S. are very similar now to how they have been for
most of the past fifty years. From the time the trade embargo was put into practical
application (during the Eisenhower administration) to the present (spring 2009)
U.S./Cuban relations have been almost non-existent. Free trade certainly does not happen
between the two nations. Certain goods such as medicines and some staple foods are
sometimes allowed to be exported from the U.S. to Cuba. This beneficial and legal trade
should be looked at by U.S. policy makers as a firm foundation on which to build toward
the development of a mutually beneficial trade policy for both nations in the future. Our
two nations should look at the re-establishment of trade relations as an opportunity to
construct and then expand on a unique bartering system where products traded emphasize
health, education, nutritious foods, peaceful technologies, and other products that are
representative of the best that the U.S. and Cuba have to offer each other. As trust is re-
established and as economic benefit is realized by both nations, trade should expand to
include the sharing of sophisticated technologies for agricultural, medical, and other
scientific advancements to enhance both national groups. Food product exchange remains
one of the biggest reasons that U.S./Cuban trade relations should be re-established. Even
the communist government of Fidel Castro has indicated to the U.S. government that
U.S. corn and wheat would be beneficial products for Cuba to purchase. The U.S. has
always had a need for sugar that can be transported to the U.S. from a short distance, and
precious metals such as nickel and other minerals which Cuba possesses can be mined
and traded to the U.S. for food and technical products.

The current travel restrictions from the U.S. to Cuba are in place so that American
citizens’ paperwork has to be processed by the U.S. State Department when citizens
apply for visas. Individuals have to fill out forms stating the reasons for their desire to
travel to Cuba. Reasons for which visas are usually granted are: academic, some specific
business that the U.S. government allows, special international conferences and
competitions such as international conferences on the global environment, athletic
competitions, or seminars of a religious nature. Yet, overwhelmingly, the most high
profile reason why American citizens travel to Cuba is to visit friends and relatives. The majority of Americans that go to Cuba repeated times are usually those Americans that have strong Cuban connections such as family. Besides these Cuban-Americans there are a wide range of other individuals in America that are simply curious about Cuba. From this group is a subset of Hispanic people who are American citizens such as Colombian-Americans, Mexican-Americans, Puerto Rican-Americans and other American citizens that speak Spanish as their first language.

Besides Hispanic citizens there are other American citizens who may or may not speak Spanish but who are curious to travel to Cuba for personal, cultural, and/or educational reasons. These people include travelers who enjoy learning about other cultures and meeting people. Reasons for travel include: adventure travel, scientific study such as the study of botany and living environments, geographical and/or geological study, and others who are interested in global issues, current events, journalism, political issues, music, art, and athletics such as scuba diving and other water sports. I am among this group of educational travelers that enjoys learning about different cultures, meeting new people, learning new things, adventure, and sports.

When I called the U.S. State Department to ask about my own chances to travel to Cuba to enrich my research for this thesis project I was given positive encouragement from a U.S. State Department official named Hector. Hector indicated to me that my request for a visa to travel to Cuba for my specific educational reasons would probably be granted, yet he told me that the visas for these reasons usually take 35 to 40 days (and sometimes longer) to be granted. Obviously the paperwork, the cost, but especially the length of time
that it takes for an American to be granted a visa to travel to Cuba can be impractical and may dissuade many Americans. If the “hoops” that the U.S. State Department “compels” U.S. citizens to “jump through” are too numerous or take too long for many travelers who have very specific reasons to travel to Cuba, then what of the casual tourist who simply wants to enjoy the sun on a Cuban beach, gamble, sample seafood and exquisite Cuban dishes, and soak up the atmosphere of a night out in Havana dancing to the Cuban beat? U.S. tourism to Cuba would be very profitable for Cuba. A healthy travel exchange between the U.S. and Cuba would be beneficial to the U.S., also, as I believe that many Cubans would enjoy visiting many cities in the U.S. such as New York, Miami, Las Vegas, Los Angeles, Chicago, and places such as the Grand Canyon and athletic events such as major league baseball and football games and competitions such as the Kentucky Derby.

Yet, most likely it is not the casual travelers that will “spark the fuse to reignite the flame” of U.S./Cuban relations. I will suggest in this thesis paper that a practical approach to re-establish U.S./Cuban relations could lie in utilizing the power of the Christian Church. In practical terms this would involve both the Cuban and U.S. governments “reaching out” to a specific Christian group to work as a go-between to mediate between government officials of the two countries. The Roman Catholic Church and other Christian churches among the Protestant denominations have been concerned for the material and spiritual needs of the Cuban people during the Cuban Revolution and since the revolution. Fidel Castro allowed Pope John Paul II to visit Cuba in 2002 and speak to the Cuban people. This visit by the pope established a relationship between post-revolutionary Cuba and the Roman Catholic Church. Neither the Christian faith, in
general, nor the traditional Catholic way of life has been emphasized in the years after the Cuban Revolution. Neither Fidel nor Raúl Castro have ever expressed a strong personal Catholic faith, so the Catholic faith was decidedly put on "the back burner" in Cuban culture during the last fifty years. Those strong in the Catholic faith living in Cuban in the decades since the revolution have generally "kept a low profile." Yet since the pope's visit to Cuba, the Church has regained some validity in Cuban society, and effective Roman Catholic mediators might be a key to better relations between the U.S. and Cuba.

Obviously the federal governments of Cuba and the U.S. have not been successful in resolving past difficulties nor have the governing administrations of these two countries been able to carry on peaceful and productive relations with each other. The Castro brothers have been in control of Cuba during eleven U.S. presidential administrations. Thus far, neither side has been able to establish normal relations with each other even to the point of easing political tensions enough to see the areas where we do agree so that mutually-beneficial matters may be pursued. Since national leaders have not achieved economic, ecological, or hemispheric security issue discussions on their own, the time has come for Cuban and U.S. officials to solicit "outside" help from an international organization that specializes in bringing together diverse ethnic, religious, and/or political groups that are in conflict with each other. My suggestion for a (hopefully successful) strategy for the U.S. and Cuba to re-establish international relations is for the two nations to enlist the help of the Sant'Egidio Community of Rome and their conflict managers or negotiators (experts in peaceful negotiation techniques) to mediate between representatives of the two federal governments during the re-establishment of diplomatic relations.
There have been several influences leading to my decision concerning which approach I believe would be the most effective in helping Cuba and the U.S. to achieve normal relations. The coalition governments of Great Britain and Israel incorporate the idea of compromise which is an effective tool in achieving peace between groups that are in conflict. The European Union (EU) regularly works with several politically, economically, culturally, and linguistically diverse national groups and draws upon each member nation’s strengths in a coalition-style continental government to make changes, reforms, and innovations directly effecting most of Europe. Commonalities in geography (location) lend themselves to economic and other cultural interchange to all of the member states’ advantage. Economic growth, ecologically-sound practices, and the security and peace of the European continent are some of the main goals of the EU. The EU’s determination, open-mindedness toward diverse cultures, and past compromises should serve as a good example to the governments and citizens of Cuba and the U.S. Even though the U.S. and Cuba have had a major military confrontation (the Cuban Missile Crisis) and even an invasion at the Bay of Pig, member states of the EU such as Germany, Austria, France, Great Britain, Italy, Spain, and others have had terrible wars among each other for hundreds and hundreds of years and even lasting throughout the twentieth century. If the EU can work together to achieve common goals then so should Cuba and the U.S. Some might think that the antagonism between the Castro brothers and past U.S. presidential administrations is just too much negative history for both sides to hurdle, yet the history of Northern Ireland has been much more antagonistic for hundreds of years including the violence from the late 1960’s to just 2 years ago. Yet the people and parties of Northern Ireland, Great Britain, and the Republic of Ireland came together
in 1998 and signed the Belfast Accords. Greater peace and social justice was not achieved immediately, and moderates such as Nobel prize winners David Trimble and John Hume (representing the Unionists and the Nationalists in Northern Ireland politics, respectively), were not able to achieve the proposed goals of the Belfast Agreement of 1998. It was not until the spring of 2007, when hard-liners Ian Paisley and Martin McGuinness won in the last Northern Ireland elections, that peace seems to have been achieved in Northern Ireland. Paisley and McGuinness have both had personal and public political histories of extremism. Ian Paisley (presently the First Minister of the Northern Ireland Parliament is Peter Robinson) represented the uncompromisingly pro-British Unionist cause of the Orangemen of Northern Ireland and Martin McGuinness of Sinn Fein represented the Nationalist cause of a united Ireland in which Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland would become one political state. With extremists like these two men – once sworn enemies – now able to compromise and hold the top two positions in the new Northern Ireland Parliament perhaps Raúl Castro and Barrack Obama will also find some common ground and allow the negotiators of the Sant’Egidio Community to mediate between their representatives and eventually normalize relations between their two countries.

The conclusion of this thesis’ paper will be to describe the Sant’Egidio Community’s methods and history in solving conflicts among warring groups and to suggest that it is the Sant’Egidio negotiators/mediators that should be enlisted by the Cuban and American governments to normalize relations between the two nations. Precisely because the Sant’Egidio Community is a non-governmental international organization and because of their strong “track record” in helping to facilitate peaceful dialogue - that has led to
peaceful relations between various groups – one could expect positive results by the enlistment of this organization’s help in the re-establishment of US/Cuban international relations.

4.1 The Sant’Egidio Community’s History and Methods

Andrea Riccardi began an organization to help the poor living outside of Rome, Italy in 1968. In time his organization became known, internationally, as the Community of Sant’Egidio (CSE.) Riccardi was not yet twenty years old in 1968, yet he and a small group of friends from high school were moved by the conditions of the poor in the slums outside of Rome near the Cinodromo. Their work was based on their Christian faith and involved prayer, studying the Holy Scriptures, sharing the Gospel, and charitable acts such as organizing events to feed, cloth, and otherwise care for the poor. In time the CSE would set up “Schools of Peace” or “People’s Schools” to educate the children of the poor.

The CSE has many programs today. Their programs care for the homeless, provide food for the poor, assist the elderly, disadvantaged, and other marginalized people such as newly-arrived immigrants, political prisoners, orphans and other children that are in need. Today the membership of the CSE includes more than 50,000 lay members living in more than 70 countries. The CSE international peace movement is called “Peace People” and works to lend support to refugees of war. The “Peace People” of the CSE is represented by more than 10,000 members from more than 95 nations. The motivating force behind the CSE is its Christian faith. The CSE’s working philosophy is rooted in the belief that poverty is the “Mother of War,” so the CSE often works at a “grassroots” level with the poor people of nations that are at war with another nation or that are
involved in civil war. This explains the majority of the CSE’s work, but they are best known, internationally, for their work as conflict mediators or negotiators for peace between or among warring groups. The Sant’Egidio negotiators (SEN) are usually asked by the United Nations (UN) or the warring parties, themselves, to come into a situation and broker for peace in a war or conflict situation.

The SEN’s methods are low-key. They come into a situation and slowly build trust between the groups by showing each side that they have more in common with each other than their apparent differences would indicate. The SEN also emphasize that each side would have more to gain by having peaceful relations with the other side than what they now experience with their current broken relationship. Initial negotiations are done in secret, and it is not until both sides are committed to the peace process and agree to some common goals that the process is made public. At that time the SEN continue to mediate between parties and also continue to work in the community with the children in the Schools of Peace and with the poor in providing material and spiritual support. In the case of Cuba and the United States, the CSE’s community work may or may not be a component. This would have to be agreed upon by the U.S. and Cuban government officials, and although it is usually a very important aspect of the CSE’s work, it is not the subject of this paper and it most likely would not be looked upon by the Cuban officials as something that the CSE would have to concern themselves with if the initial talks were held in Havana.

A partial list of the CSE’s SEN successes include: Mozambique, East Timor, Kosovo, Bosnia, Burundi, Herzegovina, Zimbabwe, Botswana, Albania, Lebanon, El Salvador,
Kenya, South Africa, Guatemala, Chad, Togo, Sudan, Ivory Coast, Serbia, and Malawi. Success has been to varying degrees and in some of these nations peace has been more enduring than in others. The only country that I researched in which the SEN did not have an appreciable measure of success was in Algeria, and even there the CSE, through the efforts of the SEN, “planted the seeds of peace” in its document referred to as the “Rome Platform.” This document may still be useful as a “blueprint for peace” if Algerian parties choose to take advantage of this strategy for peace in their society.
Conclusion

The SEN’s work as mediators in both Guatemala and El Salvador is well-known to Fidel and Raúl Castro. In both cases peace was achieved. In Guatemala peace was restored in 1996 after thirty-five years and more than 150,000 deaths! Part of the Guatemalan success was because of the SEN’s ability to keep the dialogue between warring factions open and on-going with no over-lapping discussions that were outside the main goals that both sides agreed upon. The SEN worked to help both sides realize that the most important commonality that each side possessed was their love for their country. Likewise, both Americans and Cubans love their countries, desire to trade and work for prosperity, and value peace and security in the Western Hemisphere. In all of the successes that the SEN have had in a very long list of nations, the conflicting parties had experienced far more violence than Cuba and the U.S. have experienced from each other in the last several decades. By comparison, the U.S. and Cuba, I would think, mostly just have their national pride to “get over.” Both Cuba and the U.S. have very different economic and political systems, yet they do not have to change these things. The SEN are experts in helping conflicting parties realize what is really important in the resolution of difficulties between two sides.

The fact that the Community of Sant’Egidio is motivated by a Christian faith should be a plus in the eyes of both Cuban and U.S. officials. It should certainly not be a deterrent in working with the two sides as it possibly could have been in the case of Algeria. That being said, I never got the sense in my research of the CSE that the SEN were heavy-handed nor did I get the sense that they projected themselves as being anything other than
objective when dealing with groups of other faiths outside of the Christian perspective. The fact that the CSE is Roman Catholic should not be offensive, either, as Cuba has had a Roman Catholic past and the U.S. has strong Roman Catholic connections throughout its nation. Yet the SEN do not evangelize when they mediate and are professional mediators that stay focused on the need for peaceful relations between the groups that they mediate between, so religion is not the issue in negotiations even though the Christian way of life is the CSE’s discipline and their belief in the tenets of Roman Catholicism is their motivation.

The U.S. and Cuba would be wise if they would enlist the help of a non-governmental agency such as professional mediators to help re-establish diplomatic relations between our two countries, as the Sant’Egidio negotiators of the Community of Sant’Egidio have an accomplished record and they genuinely bring friendship and professionalism wherever they go. Perhaps both U.S. and Cuban officials would be on their “best behavior” if an objective third party was present, intervening, and encouraging. With respected international mediators helping with the negotiations, U.S. and Cuban officials would have “the spotlight” of the international press off of them as negotiations would begin behind closed doors and progress would be confidential until the time came that both sides would agree to make public statements. In this way quite a bit of the pressure would be off of the process until goals were set and the process of diplomatic relations restoration was agreed upon. The particulars of a trade relationship and the abolition of travel restrictions could be worked out as the process continued, yet just the act of sitting down at a table and beginning an open dialogue could be facilitated by the SEN. The respectability of the CSE is a strong factor for success, and I do not think that Cuba and
the U.S. would want to fail when so many smaller nations have succeeded with the Sant’Egidio negotiators. Add this to the benefits that two neighbors, that are only 90 miles apart, could gain and you have a formula for success. Lastly, grandstanding and the risks of not “saving face” are minimized when two groups have a mediator, and the responsibility of the process is shared among a larger group of team players with objectivity being increased.

With so many factors pointing to the increased chances for success the objections to seeking out and using the SEN of the CSE as a strategy in the re-establishment of international relations between Cuba and the United States are illogical. A successful outcome would be a Western Hemisphere that would be more peaceful and secure with the two main antagonists in the region enjoying greater economic prosperity and a friendlier social relationship that would enhance the cultures of our two peoples.

Hopefully as time goes on, many in the Cuban American community will be supportive of actions taken by citizens of both Cuba and the United States that will lead to improved relations between our two nations. As time heals some of the hurt and injustices, most people should understand that both nations have more to gain from the re-establishment of relations than the perpetuation of our division. The new U.S. President, Barrack Obama, has called for the process to begin with less travel restrictions for U.S. citizens who have relatives living in Cuba, and the U.S. news agencies announced on April 17, 2009 that Raúl Castro said that nothing should be barred from “the table of discussion” during the up-coming conference of the Organization of the American States. Both of these overtures should be looked at as at least a start to the re-establishment of
international relations between the U.S. and Cuba.
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