

CUBA'S FOREIGN AND DEFENCE POLICIES IN THE "SPECIAL PERIOD"

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper describes Cuba's successes and failures as it repositioned its foreign and defence policies to respond to Cuba's dramatic domestic changes and to the new international context after the collapse of the Soviet bloc beginning in 1989. The intention is to assist Canadian policy makers and other interested individuals in understanding the current situation and the challenges of the future.

It would be difficult to imagine a country outside of Eastern Europe more affected by the end of the Cold War than Cuba. And within that country, few structures have had to deal with more change than the Foreign and Defence Ministries (MINREX and MINFAR). MINREX replaced the remains of Cuba's activist foreign policy with a deliberate effort to avoid challenging the United States on issues the US considers vital to its interests. In defence policy, cuts in strength and capabilities led the armed forces to restrict their role to deterring potential invasion, and providing internal controls in areas such as illegal emigration, drug trafficking, and aircraft surveillance. The armed forces also became heavily involved in the tourist trade and agricultural activities in order to obtain dollars and reduce their dependence on austere government budgets.

Cuba's most impressive foreign policy success is the fact that the United States has not succeeded in isolating the island diplomatically. Cuba has also avoided isolation at the United Nations. On the negative side, it is still brought before the UN on a regular basis as a result of its human rights policies. Helms-Burton is doubtless having a serious effect on foreign investment in Cuba and on governments which might otherwise favour such investment. The voices of some key countries strongly opposing US policy on Cuba have been silenced, and most of its other Latin American neighbours are lukewarm in their support of the island.

In defence policy, Cuba's main success is that the armed forces have survived, and maintained their loyalty to the government, over the years in question. In addition, US military pressure has not been as strong as it might easily have been as a result of the 'good behaviour' of the Cuban military following changes in foreign policy priorities. On the negative side, MINFAR is only half its previous size and doubtless has less than half its former efficiency and effectiveness. Nevertheless, the armed forces are the true bulwark of the state, and are respected by the general population. They could well play a crucial role in any transition, especially one where important political forces inside and outside Cuba insist on controlled change to avoid bloodshed.

RÉSUMÉ

Le présent document rend compte des succès et des échecs qu'a connus Cuba après la réorientation de ses politiques en matière de relations extérieures et de défense en vue de répondre aux changements spectaculaires survenus dans les affaires du pays et au nouveau contexte international à la suite de l'effondrement de l'Union soviétique au début de 1989. L'objectif du document consiste à éclairer les décideurs et les personnes intéressées à la question cubaine sur la situation actuelle et à souligner les enjeux pour l'avenir.

continued on page 2



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Il serait difficile de penser à un pays, à l'extérieur de l'Europe de l'Est, qui ait été aussi durement touché que Cuba par la fin de la guerre froide. Et même à l'échelle du pays, peu d'institutions ont dû faire face à un remaniement aussi important que le ministère des Relations extérieures (MINREX) et le ministère de la Défense (MINFAR). Le MINREX a remplacé les vestiges de la politique étrangère interventionniste de Cuba avec la ferme intention de ne pas provoquer les États-Unis sur des questions que les Américains considèrent essentiels à leurs intérêts. En ce qui a trait à la politique de défense, la réduction de l'effectif de l'armée et de sa capacité opérationnelle a restreint son rôle consistant à prévenir une éventuelle agression extérieure et à exercer, à l'intérieur du pays, un contrôle sur l'émigration illégale, le trafic des stupéfiants et la surveillance aérienne. D'autre part, les forces militaires sont largement intervenues dans l'industrie du tourisme et dans le secteur agricole en vue d'acquiescer d'accroître leurs ressources financières et de pallier l'austérité budgétaire du gouvernement.

Le succès le plus éclatant de la politique étrangère de Cuba réside dans le fait que les États-Unis n'ont pas réussi à isoler le pays sur le plan diplomatique. En outre, Cuba a réussi à éviter l'isolement au sein des Nations Unies. Comme points négatifs cependant, rappelons que le pays est régulièrement cité au banc des accusés devant l'ONU en raison de ses politiques sur les droits de la personne. De plus, la loi Helms-Burton a sans contredit des effets négatifs sur les investissements étrangers à Cuba et sur les gouvernements qui, dans d'autres circonstances, seraient favorables à de tels investissements. On a également réduit au silence les principaux pays qui s'opposaient fermement à la politique étrangère des États-Unis concernant Cuba, et la plupart des pays latino-américains voisins ne soutiennent l'île de Cuba qu'avec réticence.

Pour ce qui est de la politique de défense, la plus grande réussite de Cuba vient du fait que les forces armées sont toujours en place et qu'elles ont fait preuve d'une loyauté indéfectible à l'égard du gouvernement durant toutes ces années. Qui plus est, les pressions militaires des États-Unis n'ont pas été aussi importantes que ce qu'on aurait pu anticiper, et ce grâce à la « bonne conduite » de l'armée à la suite des changements apportés à la politique étrangère cubaine. Soulignons comme point négatif que le MINFAR ne compte à l'heure actuelle que la moitié de l'effectif d'autrefois et qu'il a perdu plus de la moitié de son efficacité opérationnelle. Malgré tout, l'armée ressort comme le véritable bastion de l'État et inspire le respect de la population en général. Au moment d'une transition à la tête du pays, il est probable qu'elle ait à jouer un rôle de premier plan, particulièrement si des forces politiques à l'intérieur et à l'extérieur du pays tiennent à ce que le changement s'opère sans effusion de sang.

RESUMEN

El presente trabajo recoge los logros y fracasos de Cuba durante el reajuste de su política exterior y de defensa en el marco de los profundos cambios internos y al nuevo contexto internacional creados con la caída del bloque soviético a principios de 1989. Asimismo, este trabajo tiene como objetivo servir de referencia a los encargados de formular políticas y a cualquier persona interesada en comprender la situación actual y los retos futuros de Cuba.

Resulta difícil encontrar un país fuera de Europa del Este que sufra los embates del fin de la guerra fría con mayor fuerza que Cuba. Dentro del propio país, muy pocas instituciones han debido enfrentar mayores reajustes que el Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores y el Ministerio de las Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias (MINREX y MINFAR). El MINREX adoptó una política exterior menos activa con el deliberado propósito de evitar divergencias con los Estados Unidos en temas que ese país considera de vital importancia. En cuanto a la política de defensa, la reducción en el grueso y el número de las fuerzas armadas condujo a limitar su labor a la prevención de posibles invasiones externas y a reforzar el control interno sobre la migración ilegal, el tráfico de drogas, y la vigilancia de las naves aéreas. Las fuerzas armadas también se involucraron con gran fuerza en el sector comercial turístico y en actividades agrícolas con el propósito de obtener acceso al dólar y a reducir su dependencia de los limitados fondos gubernamentales.

El éxito más significativo de la política exterior cubana lo constituye la fracasada política de los Estados Unidos de aislar a Cuba diplomáticamente. Igualmente, Cuba ha logrado que tampoco se le excluya en el contexto de las Naciones Unidas. No obstante, el caso cubano es presentado frecuentemente ante la ONU por sus políticas en el campo de los derechos humanos. La ley Helms-Burton ha tenido, sin lugar a dudas, un impacto desfavorable sobre la inversiones externas en Cuba así como sobre aquellos gobiernos que en otras circunstancias apoyarían tales inversiones. Las voces de algunos países claves que se oponen a la política estadounidense hacia Cuba han sido silenciadas, y la mayoría de sus vecinos latinoamericanos han adoptado una postura poco entusiasta en su apoyo a la isla.

El principal éxito de Cuba en política de defensa es que las fuerzas armadas hayan sobrevivido y mantenido su apoyo al gobierno durante los años en cuestión. Además, la presión militar de los Estados Unidos no ha sido tan incisiva como lo hubiera sido gracias al 'buen comportamiento' de las fuerzas cubanas después que las prioridades en política exterior se modificaron. No obstante, tanto el número de las fuerzas como la eficiencia y la efectividad del MINFAR se han reducido a la mitad de lo que era antes. Sin embargo, las fuerzas armadas constituyen el principal bastión del estado y gozan del respeto de la población en sentido general. Las fuerzas armadas bien podrían jugar un papel protagónico en caso de una transición, especialmente en el caso de que las fuerzas políticas tanto dentro como fuera de Cuba insistan en que esta ocurra de manera ordenada para evitar derramamientos de sangre.

CONTEXT: THE SHOCKS OF 1989-1994

Events in Eastern Europe between the autumn of 1989 and the winter of 1991-1992 had shattering effects on Cuba. The island was thrown completely off balance when the Soviet bloc's economic system collapsed over such a short space of time. In July 1990, Fidel Castro declared that Cuba was in a 'special period in time of peace' and that the Cuban people would have to be prepared for sustained sacrifices in defence of the Revolution.

In less than four years Cuba's economy shrank between 35 and 50%. In 1988, the USSR imported 63% of Cuba's sugar, 73% of its nickel, 95% of its citrus products, and 100% of its electrical exports. At the same time, Moscow sold the island 98% of its fuel and 90% of its machinery and other equipment imports, and the Comecon countries accounted overall for 87% of Cuba's foreign transactions. By 1992, Havana found these arrangements had gone: 80% of its purchasing power abroad had disappeared, and the former Comecon states were now partners for only 19% of Cuban trade. Russia's trade with Cuba in 1993 had declined by a staggering 93% when compared with its 1989 level.

All segments of the Cuban population felt the effects of the collapse of the Soviet Union. These included widespread and serious illness, dangers of malnutrition in certain sectors, inadequacies in public services on a vast scale, and resultant suffering throughout the island. Conditions were worsened by state policies of stiffening the police presence among the public and reducing what were seen as 'anti-socialist' aspects of personal and collective responses to the crisis.

In foreign policy, Cuba saw many of its friends in the Americas slip away. Colombia's deepening crisis, and frequently troublesome relationship with the United States, made Bogotá increasingly unwilling to risk Washington's ire for essentially peripheral issues such as Cuba. Venezuela faced domestic circumstances which until very recently made it equally wary of entangling itself with the US over Cuba. Mexico had been Castro's most willing friend in the Americas for well over thirty years. However, in the wake of its domestic woes, and especially the *peso* crisis, Mexico decided it could not

afford to annoy the US by a too forward policy on the island's future. Havana therefore had every reason to fear attempts to isolate it even further.

At the same time, the 1992 Torricelli Bill further tightened the decades-old United States embargo of the island. The extraterritorial elements and massive impact of this bill's new measures reinforced the longstanding claim by Cuba that US policy was in no real sense an embargo but was rather a 'blockade.'

In defence, the blows were no less fierce. The 'cash-and-carry' policy that the new Eastern European governments introduced in 1990-1991, combined with an understandable reluctance to annoy the only remaining superpower on the sensitive subject of Cuba, meant that the special deals in weapons and equipment procurement of the previous 30 years disappeared almost overnight.

Spare parts for weapons, equipment and especially vehicles, aircraft and ships became virtually impossible to obtain, and the armed forces (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias – FAR) resorted to 'cannibalizing' in order to keep priority systems in operation. Fuel was another fundamental problem. The disappearance of Soviet fuel supplies meant that the armed forces' mobility was cut dramatically and its training system nearly crippled.

Warsaw Pact countries, especially the Soviet Union, had long provided many advanced courses for the Cubans. These included some jet aircraft pilot training, many armoured warfare courses, a wide range of higher command training programmes, and others involving naval weaponry, high seas operations for the fleet, and advanced intelligence methods. Such courses were wiped out as of 1991-1992, and in most cases they could not be replaced by the hard-pressed Cuban armed forces of the early 1990s.

In addition, the 'eyes and ears' of the FAR were nearly shut by the government's austerity programme and by the cut-off of assistance from the former Soviet bloc. Cuba had what many observers consider to have been the finest military and civilian intelligence network in the Third World until the end of the Warsaw Pact connection.

And while doubtless some personal connections survived the changes of the next few years, to all intents and purposes one can speak of the end of this wider window on the world that the Soviet relationship had provided for decades. The priority appears to have shifted from a wide internationalist vision to one fixed much more clearly on the only power which is now central to Cuban survival: the United States.

The armed force's personnel strength in general was also cut, by some reports upwards of 50%, as the 1990s progressed. This massive reduction in size, when added to shortages in almost all elements of the normal infrastructure of an armed force, could not help but make fundamental changes necessary. Only high priority defence taskings are continued as before. While major combat units necessary to defend against potential invasion are maintained at reasonable levels of efficiency, other units are now more often involved in raising crops or helping out in the tourist trade.

NECESSITY IS THE MOTHER OF INVENTION: CUBA RESPONDS

Foreign Policy in the 'Special Period'

Cuba's already waning support of foreign revolutionary movements collapsed. Instead, Havana preached caution to those few armed leftist organizations still active. The electoral defeat of the Sandinistas in Nicaragua in early 1990 was followed two years later by peace in El Salvador, under terms that did not meet the main objectives of the revolutionary *Frente Faribundo Martí de Liberación Nacional*. And in 1996, Central America's last insurgency, the *Unión Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca* in Guatemala, ended with wide-ranging accords that have not really shaken the domination of that country by the right. In all three cases, Cuba urged caution on its leftist friends in the region, as it has done elsewhere in Latin America, especially in Colombia.

These moves were combined with an end to all major assistance to revolutionary movements elsewhere in the world. Cuba's longstanding role in Africa is a thing of the past. And while its relationships with China and Vietnam improved as other communist governments disappeared, other Third World linkages have weakened massively.

The United States has become, even more so than in the past, the focus of Cuban policy. Defeating US moves to further isolate the regime is the central pillar of that foreign policy. While not asking to be admitted to the Organisation of American States, Havana has tried to strengthen its ties with the Latin American community in a number of other ways. The Ibero-American Summit system is a major avenue of approach here, and Cuba hosted its November 1999 meeting. Links with the Rio

Pact, Latin America's most important political consultative grouping, are also important.

The Ministry of Foreign Relations has also cultivated more local arrangements. Links with the Caribbean, especially at the economic level, have been a priority, and a number of bilateral accords and state visits to and from Caribbean countries have taken place. Among the most productive developments have been Cuba's full membership in the Association of Caribbean States since 1995, and its observer status in Caricom since 1991.

At the United Nations, Havana works hard to avoid being pilloried on its human rights record. In addition, it makes every effort to see that the US embargo is denounced by the global organization. These activities keep the Cuban delegation busy for a good part of the year. There is also a considerable effort to promote Cuba's opposition to globalization, the 'new world order', peacekeeping in its modern forms, and interventions on human rights and related issues. It reaffirms against all comers the need for respect for national sovereignty, especially now that the world is in so many ways unipolar. It believes unbridled international capitalism carries the seeds of its own destruction because it does not address its negative social consequences. And Havana believes the US is merely 'using' multilateral institutions and democratic principles in order to ensure its hegemony at the expense of respect for the rights of all nations to develop their own institutions and find their own future paths.

Further afield, relations with Canada and the European Union have taken on new significance in the 'special period'. All-important foreign hard currency investments must come from these countries if they are to be decisive in saving Cuba from even greater economic disaster. While tourism from those countries was of some importance before 1989, it has now become vital. In the last two years, Italy and Canada have vied for first place as a source of tourists, each sending around 200,000 annually to the island. It has been important to counter unfavourable views on Cuba in these key states as well, and Cuban diplomacy has taken these demands seriously.

In a sense, however, all of this is secondary to the overwhelming importance of the United States. The sole superpower sits only 150 kilometres away from the island, and is, in Fidel Castro's own words, in a 'triumphant' mood at the moment. From Cuba's perspective, Washington's increased determination to unseat and reverse the 1959 Revolution has been reinforced of late, despite the fact that no one can take seriously the island as any kind of real threat to the northern giant.

MINREX knows, however, that the US is divided on this issue, and that there are strong elements in that country

that wish relations to be 'normalized.' Electoral politics being what they are there, however, it is equally well understood that any such goal is still far off, and that Cuba must live with the current situation and attempt to mitigate its negative effects. This has not been easy in a period marked first by the Torricelli Bill of 1992, and then by the Helms-Burton Act of 1996, which further turned the screws on Cuba, and on any who might be tempted to become its partners.

Havana is determined to do nothing that will annoy the US to such a degree that things get worse. And by bending over backwards to be cooperative on drugs, illegal immigration, the US base arrangements in Guantánamo, disaster relief abroad, and other bilateral issues, it hopes that less anti-Cuban policies will eventually find support in that country. This has reinforced trends towards a greatly reduced 'internationalist' foreign policy, a less strident anti-Americanism in propaganda, an opening of the island to visits from key figures in the US, and many other new or nuanced policy stances.

Defence Policy in the 'Special Period'

The role of the armed forces has been greatly affected by the end of Cuba's 'internationalist' position in foreign policy, in combination with drastic cuts in the FAR's strength and capabilities.

The armed forces have had to find ways to obtain access to dollars. Without dollars, there would not be any fuel for training or operations, and no means of obtaining the most basic of needs. The FAR have responded with new approaches and ideas. Military industries have been founded and taken root. The armed forces have moved with a vengeance into the tourist trade, running tours and hotels, operating a taxi service, providing general and specialized air services for tourists to much of the country, and a host of other activities. This has ensured an independent source of foreign currency for the hard-pressed military. And while it has also led to some cases of corruption and consequent loss of prestige, the FAR have little choice but to engage in these enterprises if they wish to become less dependent on austere government budgets.

The FAR's high profile presence in the tourism trade is complemented by its agricultural activities. The armed forces manage wide tracts of productive land, largely but not entirely given over to sugar, which provide them with an independent source of food, and even some additional cash income. This allows MINFAR an even higher degree of autonomy vis-à-vis the government. It also permits the forces to provide personnel with what are doubtless higher levels of food distribution than those of the population as a whole. These privileges in turn help to ensure the loyalty of the officer corps, and

the FAR as a whole, to the government and the Revolution.

In its more traditional role, defence policy has aimed at maintaining key units, especially those important for deterring US attack, at high levels of readiness. In line with this, the FAR keeps in as good shape as possible those units needed for assisting in the control of illegal emigration, intercepting drug traffickers, maintaining air space surveillance and control, and ensuring calm in the border areas with Guantánamo. In other areas, however, weapons and equipment are not being properly maintained, training is suffering, morale is hardly soaring, and manpower is not being used with exclusively defence objectives in mind.

FOREIGN POLICY SUCCESSES AND FAILURES

Despite the exceptional difficulties faced by the Foreign Ministry in advancing the agenda of interests described above, there have been considerable successes for Cuban foreign policy during the 'special period'. While there have also been major failures, in the final analysis Cuban foreign policy has contributed in significant ways to the survival of the Cuban government over nearly a decade of ferociously negative conditions.

Several specific successes are worthy of mention. The most impressive is surely the fact that the United States has not succeeded in isolating the island diplomatically. Castro trumpets this as a great success for his government and no doubt it is. However, it should also be noted that many governments in Europe, Central and South America, as well as Mexico and Canada, have maintained or improved their relations with the island not because they approve of Cuba's government and its policies, but because of other factors.

Cuba is not isolated at the United Nations despite its dubious human rights record. While deeply troubled by being regularly brought before that body to defend its record, Cuba has so far avoided any significant censure on this score. In addition, votes calling on the US to end the embargo show continuing defeats for that element of US policy towards the island. If it is true that Havana has little success with its championing of 'sovereignty against hegemony', it does nonetheless continue to be a player at the UN and in the international community in general.

Cuba has maintained its membership in the Ibero-American summits since it joined in 1990, although on occasion it has been criticized on human rights and related issues. As mentioned, it was granted observer status with Caricom in 1991 (as well as with the Caribbean Economic Conference and the Caribbean Tourism Organisation), and it has been a member of the Association of Caribbean States since 1995. The Rio Group has also denounced such measures as the Helms-Burton

Bill, albeit in a nuanced way and despite clear disapproval of much of Cuban domestic policy.

On the bilateral front, there have been many successes as well. With the exception of El Salvador, as of late 1999 all Latin American countries have diplomatic relations with Cuba. Dozens of heads of government have visited the country in recent years, including the 1998 visits of the Pope and Canadian Prime Minister Chrétien. Fidel Castro has returned the favour both in Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean.

In the crucial area of narcotics, Cuba has signed and implemented agreements with the Bahamas, the United Kingdom (for its Turks and Caicos and Cayman Islands dependencies), Colombia, Mexico and Venezuela. With the last of these, Havana has had very close relations since the election of President Chávez.

Cuba has likewise been pleased to see denunciations of Helms-Burton from the European Union, Canada, Mexico, Central America, and many other directions. And there has even been the slightest of revivals of some trading arrangements with the former Warsaw Pact countries to whom Cuba was for so long closely tied.

Even the relationship with the United States is not entirely negative. The 1994 migration agreement with the US, which was expanded the next year and provides for close collaboration between the two countries in controlling illegal migration, is by all accounts functioning smoothly. The American Department of Defence (DOD) acknowledges Cuban openness on matters concerning their Guantánamo base, overflights in support of peacekeeping and disaster relief, migration control, and anti-narcotics operations. Even more telling, the Drug Enforcement Agency has praised Cuban efforts, and has called for a formal agreement with the island on joint efforts against drugs. Finally, neither side has been tempted to take overly dramatic official actions in the Elián González case (the six-year old boy rescued by US authorities in late 1999 and kept in the US), and risk upsetting the positive sides of current arrangements.

Set against these favourable elements are a series of specific reverses in foreign policy. Cuba is still brought before the UN on a regular basis as a result of its human rights policies. Helms-Burton is doubtless having a serious effect on foreign investment in Cuba and on governments which might otherwise favour such investment. The voices of some key countries, such as Colombia and Venezuela, strongly opposing US policy on Cuba, have been silenced or had their vehemence reduced. And in 1998 and 1999, Castro managed to insult the two countries that have been most constant in calling for fair treatment for the country – Canada and Mexico.

In addition, Havana has not been able to block anti-Castro exiles from having formal discussions with the Argentine, Costa Rican and Uruguayan governments in recent years. Cuba had to watch powerless when the Ibero-American summit of 1993 gave a 'strong endorsement for representative democracy', and when the Rio Group abandoned its policy of accepting 'ideological pluralism' in 1991. It must also be said that most Latin American countries formally maintain relations with Cuba, but often do not provide much assistance where the republic's real needs are concerned.

Cuba has been greatly disappointed by what it sees as Europe's kow-towing to Washington, and excessive criticism of the island's government and many of its domestic policies by Brussels and other capitals. Finally, Cuba's influence in Central America has disintegrated in the wake of successes with the regional peace process.

DEFENCE POLICY SUCCESSES AND FAILURES

The Cuban revolutionary government has survived the enormous tests of the last decade and many Cuban military officers will point to that alone as proof of the success of the defence efforts of the country. Given the number and scope of attempts to unseat the government, such claims cannot be dismissed out of hand.

The armed forces have maintained their loyalty to the government over the years in question. This is not to say that there is not major disgruntlement among officers and other ranks about conditions of service, the seemingly eternal queues and the hardships of everyday life in Cuba, in or out of the forces. But for the moment those military personnel know very well that their lot could be much worse in today's Cuba, and that they are to a considerable extent the favoured children of the Revolution.

Some other specific successes are noteworthy here. Chinese military assistance, admittedly on a moderate scale, was quickly ensured as the full extent of the crisis became clear in mid-1990. At the same time, MINFAR was able to complete acquisition of vital Mig-29 fighter aircraft just as the end of the relationship with the USSR became evident. US military pressure has not been as strong as it might easily have been as a result of the 'good behaviour' of the Cuban military following changes in foreign policy priorities. The DOD response to the Graham Amendment of 1998, calling for an investigation of the extent to which Cuba was still a threat to the US, is proof of this: the Pentagon made it clear once again that Cuba is simply not a threat to the US.

While training has been dealt a deep blow, it is still being provided to the key formations needed in the deterrence role. Since 1980, Cuba's strategic stance has been *guerra*

de todo el pueblo – ‘war by the whole people’ – emphasizing popular resistance to invasion by vast militia forces in cooperation with smaller regular armed forces. This concept has taken a body blow recently as a result of reduced resources now available for ‘popular’ defence, but so far it has not proved necessary to abandon the idea entirely.

Intelligence arrangements are a shadow of their former selves. MINFAR is itself only half its previous size, and doubtless has less than half its former efficiency and effectiveness. While tourism and agriculture add to the forces’ chances of survival, they take away from military roles and the ability to mobilize for national defence in case of emergency. The reserve system, the pillar of national defence, suffers from lack of resources and the incorporation of large numbers of personnel who during their regular service did little training of a strictly military kind.

CONCLUSION

There is little doubt now that there has been a return of confidence within the Cuban leadership. The Habanazo riots, an extraordinary explosion of social discontent in the capital city in the summer of 1994, have not been repeated. The economy, while far from booming, has shown some ability to recover from the very worst moments. Sugar, the main crop around which all things Cuban revolve, remains in the doldrums, and natural disasters seem unwilling to spare the island. Despite all this, and Helms-Burton as well, investment from abroad

has not stopped, Cuba is not isolated, and Castro is still in power. The government’s ability to adjust its foreign policy to new circumstances has contributed significantly to these achievements.

How Cuba continues to address its military problems may end up being central to the government’s survival. The armed forces are the true bulwark of the state here, as in so much of Latin America. The armed forces are virtually everywhere on the island. They are mobile, and are made more so by their independent access to fuel and to some extent spare parts. They are fit and still reasonably well trained. They are loyal and deeply linked to the Party and the Revolution and its leadership. Their own head is no less a person that the brother of the *supreme comandante* of the Revolution. Despite the occasional example of corruption, the FAR are normally considered by Cubans to be honest and properly revolutionary. And while senior officers (*pinchos*) are increasingly thought to be overly exposed to the temptations of corruption, junior officers and the forces as a whole still enjoy remarkable prestige.

All of these factors make them unique in Cuban society in terms of what they bring the government. They could play a crucial role in any transition, especially one where important political forces inside and outside Cuba insist on controlled change to avoid bloodshed. Finally, the general respect in which the FAR are held by senior US military officers, augurs well for a role for the armed forces in almost any transition scenario one could imagine.

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