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**The Political Transformation of the Cuban Regime,
Seen Through the Perspective of Conflict
Resolution**

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I. Introduction: General Observations on Methodology

1.1 Focus and Goals of this Study

The focus of this study is the crisis the Cuban regime is facing. The idea is to evaluate, given current circumstances, its potential for limited reforms that would guarantee the political monopoly enjoyed by the current ruling elite, and the possibilities offered by alternative option: the start of a non-violent process of transformation leading to a new, democratic regime.

The goal of this analysis is to provide conclusions and practical recommendations on possible policies to be followed by governments which, acting as third parties, wish to facilitate the success of that second option, which foresees a gradual, agreed and non-violent democratic transformation of the Cuban regime.

1.2 Schools of Thought on Cuba and Choosing the Right Questions

Before examining the focus of our study, we must specify the conceptual tools we will use.

It is no secret that the challenge facing an analyst is not just to answer the questions that are in fashion, but also to make sure first of all that they are the right ones for ‘diagnosing’ problems, making a prognosis on the different ways they might evolve (scenarios) and recommending ‘therapeutic’ action.

As Karl Marx said about the philosophical thinking of his day, it often happens that not just the answers but also the questions themselves which become fashionable among intellectuals are not always the most productive ones for addressing the entire complexity of the subject being studied.

In social sciences, the questions we ask are associated with a determined paradigm we choose for analysing reality. In the case of analyses of Cuba, the interpretations –and the questions associated with them– are based on two paradigms, or schools of thought: that of the Theory of International Relations and that of Transitology.¹

These two angles of perspective and reflection have provided valuable studies, led to suppositions that are often taken as maxims and raised a variety of questions. They have also established some of the main differences with regard to political activism groups that focus on Cuba.

Perhaps the most prominent difference between the two schools of thought lies in whether they consider the core of the Cuban problem to be endogenous or exogenous. Stemming from these definitions are the roles that the two schools of thought attribute to various players in the conflict and the issues they raise in seeking an answer.

Under the Theory of International Relations, the basic problem is the conflictive nature of historical ties between the US and Cuba. It argues that Washington’s hegemony over or domination of Havana goes a long way towards explaining Cuba’s need for a revolution, its later alliance with the Soviet Union and a totalitarian regime created to protect itself from a neighbour as intrusive as it is powerful. This group of academics has a liberal wing and another which is more radical.

The liberals embrace this interpretation as part of their reform-minded criticism of what they see as the neo-imperialist slant of American capitalism. Radicals from a variety of ideological camps do

¹ Among the different trends within the Theory of International Relations, the ones which have shown the most interest in Cuba are the Realism group and those affiliated with Marxist-inspired critical theory. Analyses based on Transitology began and quickly became voluminous after the fall of communism in Eastern Europe.

so to assert that what has happened in Cuba was inevitable and that it is necessary to maintain the conflict with the US, citing ideals of emancipation that transcend the bilateral disagreement. The question that the liberals pose is how to change US policy towards Cuba. The radicals wonder how it is possible to defeat the current American policy towards Cuba in order to keep the conflict going, until final victory over imperialism and capitalism. However, both lines of thought assume that reforming or defeating US policy towards Cuba will allow the country to evolve into an efficient, democratic state. They say this is now impossible because of traditional American hostility and the persistent trade embargo.

The other perspective on Cuba comes from so-called 'transitologists'. This school of thought, which draws on studies of processes of transition towards democracy in Latin America and Europe, focuses on endogenous factors in totalitarian or authoritarian systems and compares them with other systems which have moved to regimes of democratic governance. Relying on meticulous comparative studies, this school of thought seeks to shed light on the circumstances which facilitate or hinder democratic transitions, the possible force involved and the different phases a country must go through in these processes. The basic question for this school of thought is how to strengthen the forces that drive a democratic transition, at the expense of those which represent the *status quo*.

In recent years some adherents to this school of thought have criticised some of the trends they themselves followed in the early stages of its intellectual production.² It is very important to keep these perceived errors in mind. Among the weaknesses attributed to some exponents of the first stage of Transitology's academic production, three of them stand out: (1) insufficient valuation of external factors and their ability to encourage or block processes of change; (2) an excessively teleological approach that could only envision a homogenous and inevitable destiny (arriving at a 'democracy', full stop, as if there were only one kind, and a 'market economy', also as if there were only one kind; and (3) a tendency toward Manichaeism in characterising the different forces involved, labelling those who support change as 'good' and those which resist it for some reason as 'bad'.

On the one hand, explaining democratic change in Eastern Europe without giving due credit to the effects of the then Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev's policy is as inexcusable as trying to ignore the influence of US policy on the prospects for change in Cuba. On the other hand, as recognised not only by academics but also by multilateral organisations such as the United Nations Development Program, there are no *one size fits all* formulas that represent the inexorable fate of any and all societies. Democracy and a market-based economy, beyond their generic definition, are concepts that are open to many forms of organisation and inter-relation, from which several possible models of governance emerge.

No study on Cuba should ignore the path opened and contributions made by the Theory of International Relations and that of Transitology earlier. In both schools of thought, their initial versions are being corrected, especially in Transitology. However, it is possible to use a third angle of approach which brings together better the analysis of internal and external factors and players. To this end, I advocate using the conceptual tools of conflict resolution to address the current situation in Cuba and its prospects, and for devising and implementing policies in this regard.³

² See Elemér Hankiss, 'Brilliant Ideas or Brilliant Errors: Twelve Years of Social Science Research in Eastern Europe', presented at the *Conference on Political Science Research in Eastern Europe*, Florence, 9-19/XI/2001. Many analysts who adhere to the Theory of International Relations with respect to the Cuban issue have the problem of not being interested in anything but the bilateral dispute with the US, and try to explain and predict Cuba's actions as a *rational, unitary force* but with their own understanding of 'rationality'. The transitologists, meanwhile, sometimes have a teleological sense of history and do not attach enough importance to external forces and how they affect the endogenous conflict.

³ This new field of study has not yet reached a consensus on the right name for it. The Catalan academic Eduard Vinyamata (2001) has proposed the name Conflictology, which I endorse.

The tools and prospects offered by conflict resolution, or Conflictology, allow for integrating the approaches provided by the Theory of International Relations and Transitology. Through this prism one can consider the actions of all the internal and external players, as well as their needs and interests. The field of conflict resolution centres on positive transformation of reality in such a way as to reconstruct the fabric of social relationships and its institutions in an inclusive fashion. It seeks to encourage processes of dialogue and consensus-building that culminate in agreements stressing shared responsibility for the future, rather than the ‘defeat’ of one party and its replacement by another.

The conflict resolution approach also raises other specific questions: how did the Cuban conflict originate and how did it evolve? What is the core of the conflict today? What are the current internal and external forces involved and what are their needs and interests? What does achieving a political and all-encompassing transformation of the current regime involve, and what are the prospects for doing this? What are the factors that sustain the conflict and what are connectors that might bring the different parties towards a solution and reconciliation? Can third parties help the internal and external forces find a solution? If so, how?

1.3 Dynamics of the Focus of the Study

Analysts are often asked to provide ‘a photo’ of the situation in Cuba. But this is not right because despite the inertia of the Cuban regime, the reality of which it is part is in flux. If we were to talk about metaphors, we would need a ‘video’ of Cuban society.

The revolutionary process ended in the late 1960s. The post-revolutionary society and the governing regime that it installed fell into crisis and a prolonged process of adjustment after the fall of the Soviet Union.⁴

In this half-century the context and very reality of Cuban society have experienced major changes, of which we might highlight the following: changes in the international context, (from a bi-polar world to a multi-polar one, from industrial society to one based on knowledge and information, from a multinational economy to a global economy), domestic structural changes (demographic, class, cultural, social, economic), changes in the leading domestic and internal forces (the emerging corporate, military sector, technocracy, self-employed people, Venezuela’s taking the place of the Soviet Union), a change in the mindset of rulers and those they rule, and changes in prevailing policies.

Understanding all the mutations that have taken place in and around the island is of particular importance given the fact that the ruling regime –especially in terms of its political norms– has remained relatively stable. The change in setting (local/international) that allowed the emergence of the current regime and kept it in power for nearly half a century raises a crisis of functionality for a regime that is designed to operate in a different historical context.

1.4 Opacity of Cuban Reality

An additional problem faced by analysts who study the situation in Cuba is the lack of transparency in Cuban society and the existence of a deliberate policy of manipulating perceptions of its reality, both by the government and many of those who oppose it.

⁴ Cuban sociologist Marifeli Pérez Stable provides an excellent explanation of this process in her book *The Cuban Revolution*.

The Cuban government uses open and concealed means to control the very origin of information (access to Cuban society, studies and statistics on it).⁵ The regime has encouraged the creation of a vast industry unabashedly geared toward the production of ‘knowledge’ and ‘information’ about Cuba. Working in it are Cubans and foreigners in official agencies, pseudo-official institutions, academic institutions and non-governmental organizations, media outlets and other conduits.

This disinformation industry contributes to spreading ‘statistical data’ and interpretive axioms that favour in many ways the aims of the Cuban government; in some cases these agencies belong to the government itself and in others they are institutions under its influence or have employees who support its positions or are under the direct control of Havana. But the effect is to blur the line between valuable information and that which has been manipulated. Based on them, and generating her own disinformation, Cuban intelligence’s top spy, Maria Belén Montes,⁶ persuaded her colleagues and the US government –she was head of the Cuba analysis group at the Pentagon– to accept alleged ‘truths’ that were in the interest of the island’s government. Other ‘agents of influence’ have been recruited by the Cuban government in academic milieu, multilateral organisations, media outlets and other places that serve to get out a message.

In a context of inconclusive Cold War, the US government has also backed academic centres, publications, non-governmental organisations and other bodies willing to get involved in that propaganda war from positions that favour its own stance and assumptions. So-called Cubanology in the US rose in prominence after 1959 and was marked by the Cold War premises of its government sponsors.

The challenge for an impartial analyst is to obtain quality information and at the same time avoid automatically accepting the interpretive axioms espoused by the two opposing sides. And this task is greatly complicated by the opacity of the Cuban totalitarian state, which conceals real statistics while closely monitoring the contacts of its people with members of the Diaspora or foreigners, in particular with diplomats, journalists and academics.

1.5 Influence of Personalities on Circumstances

In highly totalitarian and centralised societies like Cuba’s, those who are in top positions of power have greater freedom to make decisions and more ability to affect their surroundings than those who run a democratic country. However, in these cases, too, the principle that a man is ‘himself and his circumstances’ also comes into play.

The official rise of Raúl Castro to take over the position of Head of State has unleashed an understandable zeal to know what the man is like and how he thinks. This is not only logical but also highly necessary, given what we have already said about the leaders of totalitarian societies. But no rigorous analyst can ignore the fact that, although it is essential to know –to the extent that it is possible– what Raúl Castro wants to do, it is just as important to evaluate whether he can implement his ideas in the national and international context in which he is operating.

⁵ A meticulous explanation of the methods used to manipulate economic figures is offered by Carmelo Mesa Lago in his essay ‘The Cuban Economy at the Crossroads: Fidel Castro’s Legacy, Debate over Change and Raúl Castro’s Options’, Elcano Royal Institute, May 2007.

⁶ The importance that Havana attaches to controlling the process of producing ‘knowledge’ is revealed in an account on the unmasking of this spy, written by her captor, Scott W. Carmichael, in *True Believer*, Naval Institute Press, 2007.

II. Cuba and its Third Historic Crossroads

2.1 Political Culture

Besides two major wars of independence (1868-78 and 1895-98), Cuba suffered a racial uprising in 1912, just a decade after gaining independence in 1902 and beginning a republican form of government. The uprising ended in a massacre of those who had staged it. Among myriad other events, there was also violent resistance to the dictatorship established by General Gerardo Machado during his second presidential term, military denunciations against him that were settled with the crushing of soldiers that had voiced the criticism, the coup d'état by General Fulgencio Batista (1952), the ensuing revolution against his dictatorship (1953-59), the anti-communist civil war against the rule of Fidel Castro (1960-65), followed by episodes of terrorist violence even into the 1990s.

History shows that Cuban society has been beset by many political, social and economic conflicts that often turned violent and generated brief periods of revolution and civil war on more than one occasion. Violence has been the tool of choice for setting political differences both before and after Cuba gained independence. Political intolerance –which places top priority on ends and worries less about the means used to achieve them– has been a substantial part of Cuban culture to this day.⁷ Worship of heroes and martyrs has combined with a tendency to equate intransigence with purity of intentions. The popular notion that an exceptional leader will emerge –like José Martí– whose vision and drawing power will unite ‘the people’ in successful defence of their rights has also been part of that political culture which places less importance on the role of everyday people than it does on leaders and populist elites to support and follow.

An essential part of Cuban political culture is the premise, taken from the sermons of Father Félix Varela (1788-1853), and later from the ideology of José Martí (1853-95), in favour of a socially inclusive Republic (‘with everyone and for the good of everyone’). Disputes over the best way to actually reconcile that ethical aspiration and the failure of successive plans that aimed to achieve it form the core of the national conflicts Cuba has endured from independence in 1902 until the present.

2.2 Medium- and Long-duration Histories

The island has experienced four centuries of colonial history, more than half a century (56 years) of a republican form of government that was largely dominated by two dictators (Machado and Batista) and half a century of totalitarian rule under the same leader and government team.

Without assuming the general methodology of Ferdinand Braudel, it is useful to borrow from the *Annales* school the notion of interweaving historical processes of varying duration. In Cuba’s case, it is reasonable to identify an uninterrupted *long-duration* history centring on a fight for favourable insertion in the world system of accumulation. From the time it was ‘discovered’ by Spain until today, when Raúl Castro is considering his options, events on the island have been marked by conflict among different ideas for having Cuba join the world economy in a competitive way.

As a result of the struggle between political and social forces in this debate, Cuba has seen three *medium-duration histories*: (1) fights for autonomy or independence (1820-98); (2) the Republic (1902-58); and (3) State Socialism (1959-2008).

⁷ A special report on this issue and its link with the challenges that transitional justice poses for Cuba’s future was prepared by an independent commission sponsored by the Ford Foundation. The author was part of the commission. See Task Force on Memory, Truth and Justice, ‘Cuban National Reconciliation’, Latin American and Caribbean Center, Florida International University, 2003.

Between these histories there have been transition phases between one and another (US occupation of the island from 1898-1902; transformation of the Republican state into another based on the totalitarian version of contemporary socialism, 1959-68; and a phase of introducing flexibility and adjustments to the totalitarian model following the fall of the Soviet Union, 1993-2008).

Since Cuba gained independence in 1902, two of the histories of medium-length duration (Republican and 'socialist' forms of government) have been characterised by political, social and economic tensions in trying to reconcile three factors: (1) protection of national independence; (2) demands for an inclusive society through social justice; and (3) economic development and modernization of the country.

The celebrated Republican-era slogan 'without sugar there is no country', reflected something more than a sectoral priority of the economy. To some extent it reflected a way of thinking that gave top priority to the goal of economic development and modernisation of the country, rather than social justice (conceived as achievable gradually, as a result of economic growth) and independence (the national oligarchy saw it necessary to put up with disproportionate US hegemony in order to guarantee investment, technology and access to the American market.)

Although the constitution of 1940 –the most advanced in social terms in all of the Western Hemisphere and even among some European countries at that time– contained avant-garde social protections, it was applied only superficially by corrupt and sometimes dictatorial governments. This meant the forces that attached priority to social issues and national sovereignty remained mobilised in their respective struggles. Although the anti-Batista movement focused on overthrowing the dictatorship, the process served as a catalyst to create a broad coalition of social forces that added other goals –from structural reforms in the economy to a social democratic slant in politics– to its revolutionary intentions.⁸

Fidel Castro, freshly in power in 1959, shunned ideological labels and defined the goal of the new era as achieving a society in which there was 'freedom with bread, and bread without terror'. He thus announced he would try to wed freedom with development and social justice, but kept mum about how he would achieve this. The idea was that the national consensus reached over the Constitution of 1940, still quite advanced for that period, remained intact and Cuba would implement a government programme that would assure strict compliance with that constitution, starting with agrarian reform. But Castro had other plans.

The man who would go on to be Cuba's supreme national leader for the next half century decided with his closest aides to re-direct the radical, reformist and social-democratic-gearred slant that served as an umbrella ideology for a motley assortment of forces. In an alliance with the Communist Party, which had been wary of armed struggle, Castro moved close to the Soviet Union and paved the way for getting Cuba back into the Cold War, this time as an ally of the Eastern bloc.

Castro was willing to make a risky bet. In exchange for conspiring with one faction within his movement at the expense of the other wing, Cuba would reap economic dividends from the East-West confrontation and use them to finance successful social programmes. It would also fall under the relative protection of Soviet nuclear umbrella to boost its independence with respect to the US. With their physical needs guaranteed, as well as social inclusion and the independence of their citizens, Castro thought, Cuba needed no other freedom aside from that of mobilising in support of the revolutionary State.

⁸ See Marifeli Pérez Stable's book, *The Cuban Revolution*, first published in English in 1993 and in Spanish in 1998 by Editorial Colibrí in Spain.

The US policy of hostility towards Cuba facilitated the formation of a national consensus in favour of this radical shift, and Cuba's re-entering the Cold War provided the island with markets, technology and capital for its development. In this way, the establishment of totalitarian State socialism guaranteed resources for meeting some of the age-old demands at the heart of Cuban social conflicts, machinery of repression to keep the project going and, thanks to the confrontation with the US, nationalist rationalisation for assuring a domestic consensus and even the sympathies of a sector of the international left. By focusing attention on the bilateral conflict with the US, many people passed over the fact that the sovereignty of the people was being infringed on by the State and that national independence was yielding ground to the needs of a geopolitical alliance with the Soviet Union.⁹

However, the strategic, unilateral decision to replace a democratic regime with a totalitarian one allied with a foreign power shattered the consensus that had existed within the anti-Batista coalition. A civil war broke out in late 1959 and lasted until the mid-1960s. Dozens of urban groups took up arms, as did more than 8,000 in insurgents in rural areas all over the country, often under the direction of former leaders of the guerrilla and anti-Batista movements. Because of the war, the Havana government requested and received military support in the form of advisers and weapons from the USSR and other countries of the eastern bloc and the insurgents did the same with Washington.

Cubans on both sides of the barricades paid a high price for the internationalisation of the endogenous conflict, ie, the involvement of the US and the Soviet Union as external players in it. For Cuba, it marked the start of a dependence on Moscow that was even greater than that which the island had before with the US. For the anti-communists, dependence on Washington represented the loss of an identity as a national movement born of a domestic conflict. This allowed Castro to depict them as American puppets in a society stirred by nationalism and a regional marked by historic reserves over the policies of Washington.

The defeat of the insurgents in the civil war against the regime of Fidel Castro (1960-65) ended the military confrontation, but not the conflict that give rise to it. Indeed, the conflict continued to manifest itself in later years through terrorist acts on both sides (covert ones on the part of the government) and then through non-violent movements of dissidence and domestic opposition. The current absence of armed confrontation does not mean that the conflict has been resolved, or that there is peace, or that the current state of affairs is sustainable over the mid- and long terms. It is possible that latent violence will materialise through several channels, if internal and external circumstances encouraging it do in fact emerge. A culture of political intolerance remains in place, and is one of the worrying factors with regard to the possibility of violence. The political violence of the civil war in the 1960s transformed into reciprocal terrorist action and since the 1980s has taken the form of police and extra-official repression of dissidence.¹⁰

2.3 Transition to a New, Medium-duration History

The fall of the Soviet Union triggered the definitive structural crisis in Cuba's totalitarian state socialism and launched a process of adjustment that has yet to conclude. This phase, beyond

⁹ Two clear examples of concessions to Moscow were the granting of territory to set up military bases and station Soviet soldiers under the sole control of the Red Army –from the Cuban missile crisis of 1962 until the withdrawal in 2001 of the last military contingent, which dismantled a radio surveillance base in Lourdes– and the inclusion of a clause in the first 'socialist' constitution, in 1976, which called for eternal friendship and alliance with the USSR. As for Cuba's dependence on the Soviets, the USSR provided more than 80% of its supplies.

¹⁰ Besides well-known terrorist acts by anti-communist militants such as Posada Carriles, the Cuban government waged covert actions in Miami and Puerto Rico to kill exiled leaders. Tony and Patricio La Guardia, twin brothers, were entrusted with them, and with a plan to kidnap former president Batista on Madeira Island. The plot was aborted a day before it was to have been carried out because the ex-dictator unexpectedly died of a heart attack (author's conversation with Col. Antonio La Guardia).

changes there have been in economic policy, had a profound impact on the *political economy* of Cuban society. Monetary duality, the emergence of companies administered directly by the military, openness to foreign investment and tourism en masse, among other measures, made for a non-political source of power that had been abolished for decades: access to the dollar. Without massive subsidies from the Soviet Union, social programmes and infrastructure deteriorated and the purchasing power of Cuban wages plummeted. The state's ability to subsidize over-sized and non-productive workforces declined and unemployment –hidden with statistical tricks– shot up. This forced the government to allow home rentals and the emergence of a private sector of self-employed people.

Cuba's social and class structure were upset by these changes.¹¹ The social pyramid turned upside down, so that a hotel waiter earned more than a surgeon, a taxi driver more than a university professor. Until then, the right to enter exclusive places or have privileged access to certain services was determined by the bureaucratic and political hierarchy. Now it became possible with dollars, which could be obtained in the emerging private and self-employed sector or through remittances sent from exile by 'enemies' of the regime.

The benefactor State lost its external sustainability in this new international environment. The disappearance of the Cold War, globalisation and transition to development processes based on openness to massive and instant flows of digital information quickly transformed the island, which had been the main item of third-world development success in the museum of state socialism.

In reality, a global transition was taking place, moving towards a new technological civilisation that allowed open and enterprising societies to make huge leaps in terms of development.¹² But Cuba stuck out like a sore thumb. Its aging leaders were barely able to wake up and understand the dazzling process of global change taking place right before their eyes, and tried to interpret them through the obsolete prism of the Cold War.

After Fidel Castro's health became a permanent crisis and his brother took over, Cuba's other rulers –with an average age above 70– are nearing a historic period of change comparable only to that of the start of the Republic or the one they faced in 1959. They must choose a national strategy that is viable in the current domestic and international conditions, will achieve a national consensus on this and forge external alliances that will allow Cuba to join the new global economy, with access to markets, technology and capital.

The two previous medium-duration histories –republican and 'socialist'– represented alternative projects to insert Cuba into world, long-duration history: industrial civilisation and modern times. The republican and communist elite enjoyed massive, popular support, which is not the case at present. The current elite has to seek a readjustment of national elements to be part of post-modern civilisation, which is characterised by a world with increasingly globalised processes in which countries with a technological advantage are the ones that manage to transform into societies based on information and knowledge.

In other words, in a very short span of time (perhaps just a little more than five or 10 years) Cuba will begin a new medium-duration history in which it will seek a harmonious resolution –with an eye to a national consensus– to the traditional demands that the two previous medium-duration histories were not able to resolve satisfactorily. Once again, Cuba can succeed or fail in this venture.

¹¹ See Dr Mayra Espina Prieto, 'Complejización socio estructural de la sociedad cubana. Retos para la política social y el bienestar', in *Una mirada binacional al desarrollo regional México-Cuba*, Colegio de Tlaxcala/Fundación Ford, Mexico, 2007.

¹² See Dr Juan Antonio Blanco, *Tercer milenio: una visión alternativa de la posmodernidad*, Ediciones Acuario (by the Cuban NGO, Centro Félix Varela), 1994.

Such is the true historic magnitude of the crossroads that Cuban society faces. It is about much more than simply restoring democracy and raising living standards. For Cuba it is about finding the best system of governance for joining, in a competitive way, the new technological, information-based civilisation and the global economy.

This challenge, however, must be undertaken in a way that keeps in mind the traditional clichés that have guided Cuban history so far. In the next five years its leaders must present and implement a national plan bringing together the idea of guaranteeing Cuban independence (which would have to re-defined now in a globalised world), inclusivity, social justice (which would involve, among other things, the goal of not giving up all the advances that have been made in health care and education in the last half-century and restoring its quality), freedom (which would have to be linked to channels for significant democratic participation by civil society, *in addition* to elected representatives) and economic development. Cuban leaders are supposed to unveil their programme at the 6th Congress of the Communist Party of Cuba, which is scheduled for late 2009. But it seems unlikely that an aging leadership with mentalities fashioned a period very different from the current one will be able to grasp the magnitude of the moment even in terms of its own interests. Theirs is another vision altogether.

What most interests the current ruling elite –in fact they are obsessed with it– is how to design a plan that guarantees their own interests as a social group. At the very least this includes guarantees for their physical safety and freedom, and their assets, and retaining some kind of important role in running the country.

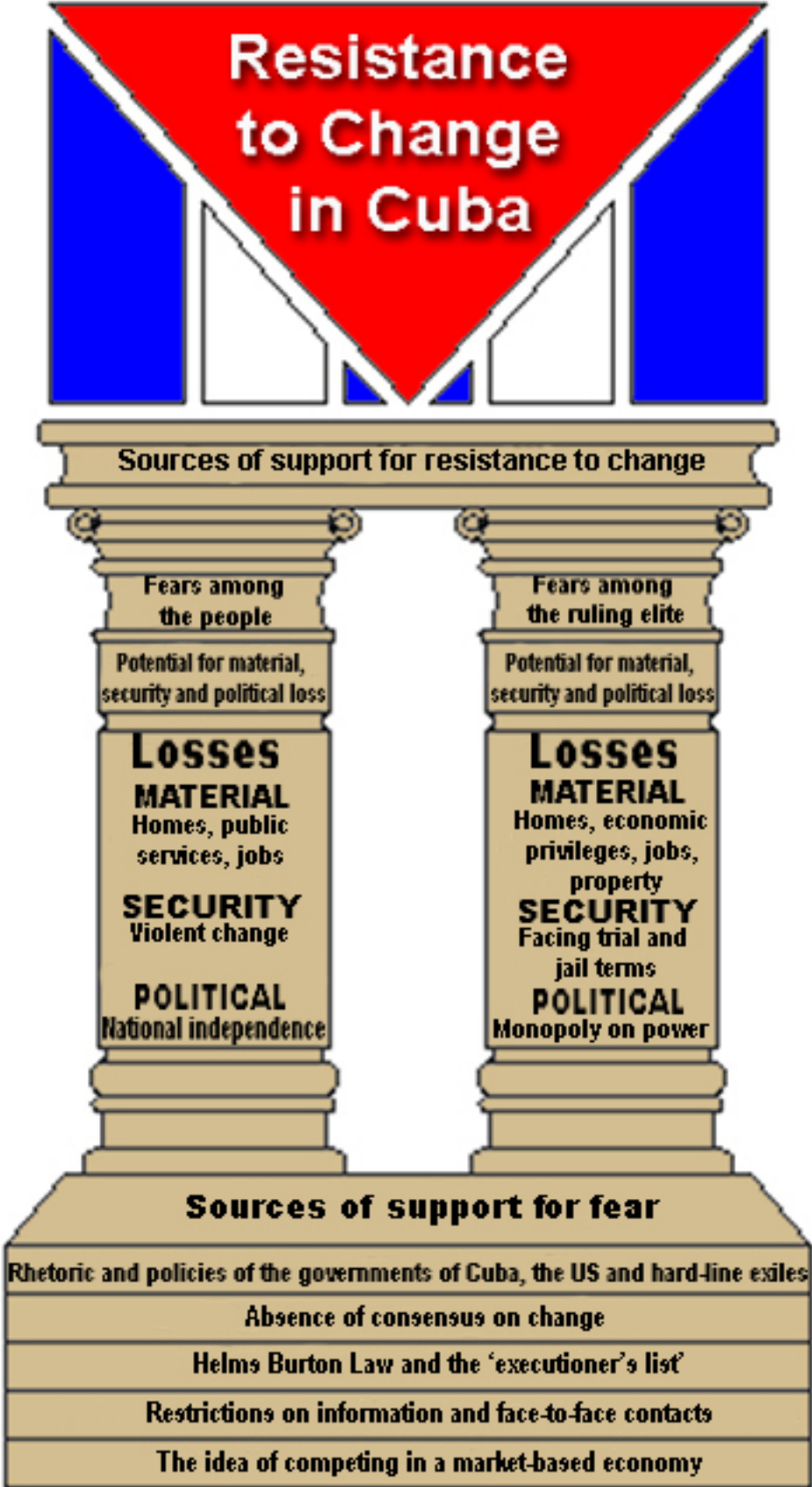
All of this means that their options for change and a national plan must clear up questions concerning their security as a hegemonic group and this can only be conceived in the following ways:

- (a) Sharing economic power but retaining a monopoly over political power (the Chinese model).
- (b) Transforming themselves from being an elite of bureaucratic power to a class of owners, while negotiating a constitutional regime that protects them from reprisals, criminal or civil suits, and expropriations.

The second option is conceivable only if, besides the political and legal guarantees that would be sought in particular by those most liable (amnesties, impunity), the ruling elite is able to negotiate its control over the armed forces and the Interior Ministry, at least until that generation of history has faded from the scene. That would mean that, in a scenario of agreed transition, there would have to be negotiations with a ruling elite that would want at least a decade before completely giving up their monopolies on the economy and the political system.

One common denominator that links the population with their leaders is the uncertainty and fear over what the future may bring. Both constitute the main pillars of resistance to change.

Graph 1. Resistance to change in Cuba



2.4 Cuba's Regime of State Socialism

By 'regime' we mean the body of norms (both legal and administrative, as well as rules of behaviour that are dictated by morals and prevailing traditions) that govern relations between the State, the Market and Civil Society. It is this regimented system of rules which determines not only the way in which goods and services are produced, but also shares of political power and socio-economic participation in the country. Its sociological use is a far cry from that used by foreign media or governments in a pejorative sense.

In the case of Cuban state socialism, its governing regime, installed in the 1960s, is of a totalitarian nature because it works on the basis of the following pillars:

- (a) One party holds a monopoly on political power and the State.
- (b) The State holds a monopoly on economic power.
- (c) The party holds a monopoly on information.
- (d) Total control on internal and external movement of persons through a system of state permits made easier by the fact that Cuba is an island.
- (e) Absence of individual freedoms and political and civil rights.
- (f) Efficient machinery of repression made up of police, surveillance and administrative control systems, absence of political or economic autonomy for citizens and the legal system currently in force.

To these general features of a totalitarian regime, Cuba added others that contributed to its stability even after the political earthquake that shook Eastern Europe in 1989. Among them, one must keep in mind the origin of the current system (a home-grown revolution), the presence of a charismatic leader, the expression (impossible in Eastern Europe) of nationalism and *third world-ism* with the defence of the communist State, errors by the opposition and in US policy toward Cuba, and Cuban leaders' ability to articulate a discourse and policy that allowed them to accrue symbolic capital nationally and internationally (with a broad sector of the left) thanks to universally available social services and solidarity with anti-imperialist movements.

One cannot explain the survival of the Cuban regime simply through isolated factors, such as efficient repression or subsidies from the Soviets or Venezuela.

The great paradox of the current regime is that the tools it has used so far to remain in power have become barriers to their reproduction and to daily governability. Cuba cannot go on offering jobs, food and essential products and services without lifting the state monopoly on the economy. It is not feasible to increase economic efficiency without giving up centralised decision-making. The State can no longer fulfil economic and social tasks without making way for autonomy and participation, both for business leaders and the emerging private sector. Nor can it be competitive so long as the Communist Party insists on having a monopoly on information and Cuba has the lowest level of Internet penetration in all of the Western hemisphere. Cuba cannot continue to ban the return of disgruntled citizens who choose to emigrate, because they take with them the talent, training and youth that an aging country needs more and more.¹³

The current Cuban regime is centralized, hierarchical, state-heavy and authoritarian, born and designed in another national and international historical context. All of this prevents it from achieving the efficiency needed to generate national wealth, contribute innovation and provide prosperity and open channels of vertical mobility that would help sustain the legitimacy of the

¹³ According to the Centre for Studies of Population and Development (CEPDE), of the National Statistics Office, Cuba ended 2006 with 3,000 inhabitants fewer than the previous year. To explain this phenomenon, demographers cite a low birth rate and emigration

system. For this reason, changing the regime –gradually but thoroughly– is critical for the governability and national security of Cuba.

2.5 The Current Endogenous Conflict and Violence

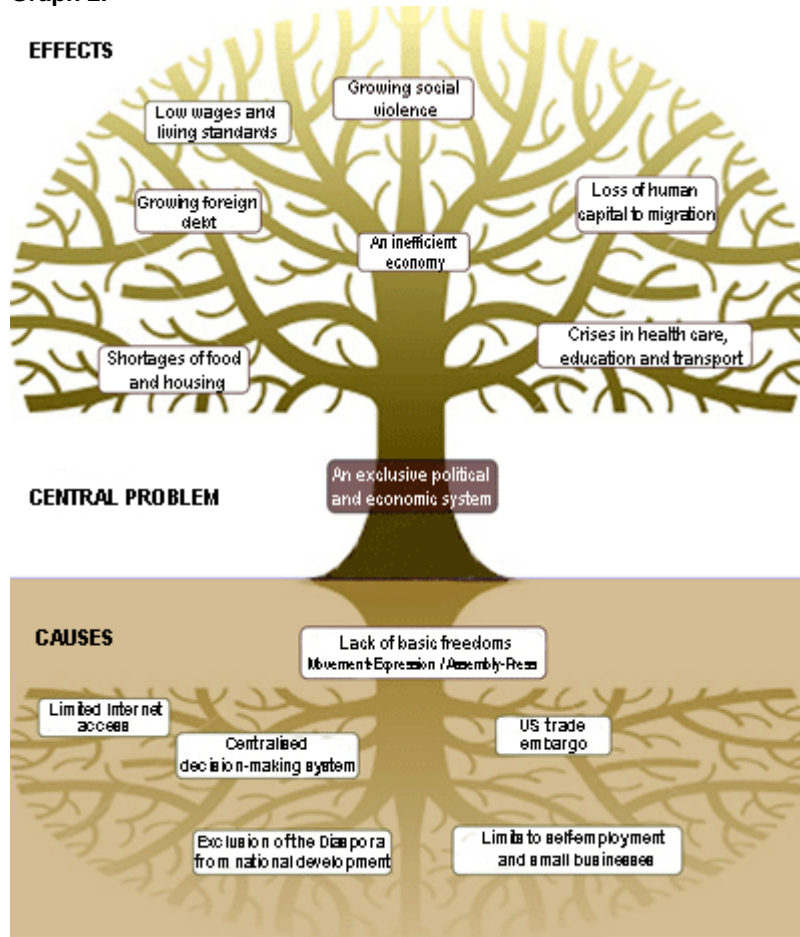
Whereas the original endogenous conflict –later made international when the US got involved– centred on socialism as a national option, the core of the current conflict is expressed in a governing regime whose main contradiction is the fact that, while it is socially inclusive, it is politically and economically exclusive.

This contradictory nature in the regime blocks the country’s ability to innovate and produce, to a much greater extent than the US trade embargo does; today the US is Cuba’s main supplier of food and its seventh-largest trading partner.¹⁴

Cubans have been able to study and enjoy a long life expectancy thanks to the inclusive nature of the country’s education and health care systems. They are also demanding significant say in decision-making processes so as to assure, among other things, that the economy can be reformed, the same economy that will soon have to support them in their old age. In the last half-century, ‘participating’ has been synonymous with mobilising to make real whatever the rulers had decided on. Ironically, in the country where everything was socialised, down to the last shopkeeper, dreams were privatised. Only the boss had the right to dream, and it was up to everybody else to fulfil his longings. The driving forces behind the quiet exodus of tens of thousands of people every year, especially young people, are these: Cubans find it impossible to seek happiness on their own, and simply cannot believe that the same group of leaders who could not satisfy their needs is now going to be capable of finding ways of making society happy.

¹⁴ See the previously cited work by Dr Carmelo Mesa Lago, ‘The Cuban Economy at the Crossroads: Fidel Castro’s Legacy, Debate over Change and Raúl Castro’s Options’, Elcano Royal Institute, May 2007.

Graph 2.



At the same time, that main conflict between the ruling regime and Cuba’s potential for development as a country generates a range of other conflicts of various types: (a) racial and regional tensions that often overlap; (b) tension among generations; (c) social tensions between those who have access to the dollar and those who do not; (d) political tensions between those who feel they will come out as ‘losers’ in any change of regime, and those who seek transformation.¹⁵

The original endogenous conflict –triggered by discrepancies over the kind of regime that should govern Cuban society after the triumph of the revolution in 1959– has evolved over the course of 50 years. Today it is expressed as an internal conflict between the installed governing regime and diverse sectors of the population which are affected by its obsolescence and unsustainability.

Cuba’s current security and defence doctrine is marred by a conceptual error which, in effect, transforms it into a doctrine that generates instability. On the basis of ideological myths from the Cold War era, the only threats Cuba perceives are external (the US and its allies). The phenomena of dissidence and opposition are not analysed as the results of things happening within the country, but rather viewed as puppets of an outside enemy. Even non-conformist kinds of behaviour and ideas not classified strictly as political (for example, musical preferences, choice of clothing, and until recently, sexual orientation) are perceived as contaminating ‘viruses’ of foreign origin (capitalism and its bourgeois tastes).

The Cuban security and defence doctrine is not prepared to face the phenomenon of the new *national dissent* because it conceives threats to the current regime as external and artificially induced.

¹⁵ See Dr Juan Antonio Blanco, ‘Cuba at a Crossroads: A Conflict Transformation Perspective’, 2008.

Since 1992, a change in mentality has been permeating all sectors of the population, and it is present in the families of the ruling elite and government officials. There is a new dissidence with respect to the status quo expressed by the current regime. This dissidence does not have a common proposal for change –nor does the traditional dissident and opposition movement– but it does share a negative few of the current state of affairs.

The international press concentrates on traditional, organised political dissidence and opposition. But this new dissidence is massive, informal and plural, blurs the line between those who hold positions in the government and those are governed.

Cubans are prone to violence, as their history shows. The fact that today most organised opposition groups and exiled Cubans advocate a political solution to the conflict is no guarantee that future events will not turn selective acts of state violence into a new situation of generalised violence. However, there is another problem: the social violence which can in certain circumstances, turn political. Cuba's security and defence doctrine and its society in general lack efficient institutional mechanisms for preventing and mediating in situations of conflict.

A regime that does not recognise conflict and dissent as being the results of its own internal logia, and which lacks appropriate institutions and leeway for mediating and redirecting conflict, is extremely fragile.¹⁶

In a country whose history is prone to intolerance and violence, the logic of externalising the origin of conflicts and dissent can easily lead to critical situations of ungovernability. The use of force to deal with situations of protest or social upheaval –including the possibility of a migratory crisis– would complicate the security situation even more rather than protect it. The always latent possibility of an escalation of violent events –through a clash between government repression and the existence of the bilateral conflict with the US– are elements to keep in mind.

III. The Rise of Raúl Castro as Head of State

3.1 Succession and Transition

Several events point to the steps the Cuban regime began to take with respect to Fidel Castro's succession, prior to his temporarily ceding power on 31 July.

In November 2005, Castro opened up the possibility of talking publicly about the moment when he would no longer be leader of the country and the prospect of the whole process being reversible. Foreign Minister Felipe Pérez Roque echoed this call. In December of the same year, he addressed the National Assembly on the challenges the country would confront in such a case, especially with regard to younger generations, their lack of commitment to the system and their attitude, which he described as individualist. Other events and a Castro interview with Ignacio Ramonet, director of *Le Monde Diplomatique*, set off rumours at home and abroad about the Castro succession issue. In the months following 1 July 2006 the apparatus of the Communist Party of Cuba was strengthened in a full-blown meeting of its central committee with the re-establishment of the Secretariat –an executive body created in 1965 and abolished in 1991– and with the adoption of a public speech by Raúl Castro in which he said the communist party was the only legitimate heir to Fidel Castro.¹⁷

¹⁶ Particularly telling is the case of an NGO that was giving courses in mediation. The colonel in charge of security at Havana airport asked the NGO's executive director for help. The officer said there had been cases of attempted hijackings of planes and his unit had no one trained in negotiation. So it had no choice but to use lethal force as its first and only recourse.

¹⁷ Cubasource, *Chronicle on Cuba*, www.cubasource.org.

The days following the temporary transfer of power on 31 July 2006, when the Castro-signed Proclamation to the Cuban People was announced, showed the features of the carefully orchestrated succession that would take place on the island. Even after the constitutional transfer of powers corresponded to the post of President of the Council of State (and, therefore, Head of State), the process of succession is still incomplete because Fidel Castro retains the post of First Secretary of the Communist Party; the fifth clause of the Constitution grants it supreme power in the country. The process succession can only be considered complete when the VI Congress of the Communist Party of Cuba chooses a new First Secretary, or when Fidel Castro is officially declared mentally incapacitated, or when he dies. Until then, his heirs will see their chances of opening up new long-term prospects sabotaged if they try to do it without his consent.

The succession of the current regime will be definitively over once Castro is gone. And, depending on how his people view events, which will always be in accordance with their own interests, there is the possibility of a non-violent transition –it could also be violent if other factors are present– in a complex and zig-zagging process. This transition period could take around five years, and the final result will depend on both internal and external factors. Such factors could lead to transitions that would be significantly different from those which are under debate today within the US government, Cuban exiles and the Cuban opposition; among them there is the always possible scenario of Cuba transforming into a *failed state*.

The most dogmatic sector of the exile community and the opposition sometimes displays a key misunderstanding of the scope of the transfer of power that is taking place. However, there is a reciprocal dynamic between the process of succession and that of the transition. They are not necessarily mutually exclusive; rather, they can be successive and complementary phases of the same process of change.

A succession that opens the way for economic autonomy of the people with respect to the State – thus doing away with one of the pillars of totalitarian control– would be an adequate *transition to transition*, so long as the political forces interested in full democratisation of Cuba have an adequate strategy for continuing to move toward that goal.

3.3 Recent National and International Changes

Starting in October 2007 and through the end of April 2008, important national and international events have had a significant impact on life in Cuba.

In the international arena, the following events had repercussions for Havana:

- The defeat of the constitutional referendum in Venezuela.
- The conflict triggered by Colombia's military incursion into Ecuadorean territory.
- The visit to Cuba by the President of Brazil –a regional power and soon to be a major producer of oil– who is willing to participate with Cuba in this transitional phase.

These events served as a wake-up call for Cuba's leaders about the risk of overstating their political relationship with President Hugo Chávez, or relying exclusively on his Bolivarian revolution. Senior Cuban officials travelled to Brazil, China and Africa in what seemed to display interest in exploring potential alternative alliances, in case events in Caracas had a negative effect on Havana. In this sense, another factor was the conflict unleashed in South America; although Fidel Castro spoke out with fervent support for Chávez and the President of Ecuador, the newly named Cuban government also took pains to protect its relations with Colombia, where it later sent a high-level delegation that was received by President Álvaro Uribe. A week after Chávez's defeat, Foreign Minister Felipe Pérez Roque announced that Cuba was prepared to sign two international human rights treaties that also covered economic, social, civil and political issues.

Also as a result of the Venezuelan referendum, the visit to Cuba by the Brazilian President Luiz Inácio *Lula* da Silva to Cuba was decided on; Madrid hosted a second round of talks with Cuba on human rights, after which a small number of ailing political prisoners were given the option of staying in jail or travelling to Spain; an EU representative was received by the Cuban Foreign Ministry to hold a preliminary exchange on the possibility of normalising relation with that bloc; and Raúl Castro met in Havana with the Secretary of State of the Vatican, in what was the first official visit received by Castro as President of Cuba.

The domestic scene was also marked by important events:

- Fidel Castro's formal retirement from his post as Head of State and the official naming of his brother Raúl as President.
- Designation of the new Council of State in which four young cadres, such as Carlos Lage, were replaced by people who are older and closer to Raúl Castro, such as José Ramón Machado Ventura.
- Discussions that took place during the examination to which Raúl Castro's speech of 26 July 2007 was subjected; during these a total of 1,300,000 questions were posed. These were in addition to those raised in the period prior to the Congress of the Cuban National Union of Writers and Artists, and during the four days that the convention lasted. All of this provides ample evidence that a significant change is taking place in the mentality and attitudes of the Cuban people.
- The holding of the Sixth Plenary Meeting of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Cuba, which convened the Sixth Congress, the first to be held in 10 years, and in which the party declared the 'end of the provisional status' decreed in 2006 because of Fidel Castro's illness.
- The gradual adoption of decisions by the new government. Part of the resolutions implemented aimed to remove irritating and unconstitutional administrative measures. These included a ban on citizens staying at hotels, or buying cell phones, DVD players and computers, although in the latter case they can still not have ready access to the Internet. Other, more promising decisions involve the de-centralization of mechanisms of decision-making, production and administration in the agricultural sector. Emphasis has been placed on the recently created Municipal Delegations, as part of a restructuring of the Agriculture Ministry which has already seen 106 state-run companies dismantled. This is a reform which needs not just a change in structures but also in the mentalities of officials and producers. It also requires an important injection of capital and adjustment of the way the new mechanism works.

3.4 Challenges Facing the Government of Raúl Castro

The need to recognise the urgent nature of transforming the current governing regime has nothing to do with the calls for a 'change in regime' that are part of the Bush administration's foreign policy. As there is more than one specific way to link the State with the market and civil society, in a democratic context and with a market economy, one can say there is more than one transition or change of regime possible in the case of Cuba. One of these is even a change to another regime of democratic socialism, as proposed in recent months by several academics in Cuba who are committed to a socialist vision of Cuban society.

The reality that Raúl Castro has inherited offers many challenges, of which we highlight these:

- (1) ***Resistance to change*** on the part of conservative forces within the Cuban leadership who only want reforms *within* the current regime.
- (2) ***The structural crisis of the current regime.*** Cuba's brand of State socialism emerged and developed in the bi-polar context of the Cold War. Cuba managed to make unlimited use of it to draw the resources it needed. In its current design, the Cuban regime does not find in the current international environment the appropriate means for sustenance and reproduction, nor is it able to generate them on its own.
- (3) ***Absence of stable allies that provide unlimited financing.*** The sustainment of the current inefficient regime depends on loans that allow it to keep the national economy afloat. Foreign investment is scant compared to that which is habitual in other countries of the region, and profits from it are shared with the investors. International aid is also low compared to that which is received by similar countries. The island does not belong to any trade bloc that provides it with privileged access to major markets like that of the US, or the EU's Cotonou Pact with developing countries. Taxes on remittances sent to the island are exorbitant, and as resources for development, cannot match the potential this money would have for generating capital and creating jobs if the recipients were allowed to take full advantage of it. Subsidies provided by Venezuela are not as large or as varied as the resources that used to come from Moscow, nor does the Chávez government display sufficient stability and permanence as did the USSR in its heyday.
- (4) ***The social situation and demographic trends.*** Cuba is ageing fast and its birth rate is falling. Furthermore, it is suffering from a loss of human capital and talent because young people prefer to emigrate to any country they can, although they prefer the US (in the last six months alone, some 11,000 Cubans tried in a variety of ways to reach the US). With an economy that suffers from low productivity and provides universal health care, education and pensions, the resources available cannot keep up with growing social expenditure stemming from Cuba's demographic trends. Pockets of poverty have spread, and are now present in almost every urban and rural region. Poverty and the lack of promise for the future does not just cause Cubans to emigrate abroad: it also causes internal displacements that increase pressure on social services in the places people move; this has led to the emergence of shanty towns outside some cities. The best-known cases are Havana and Holguín, at opposite ends of the island. Social violence and crime are on the rise. Unemployment, especially among young, urban people, and the underground market have begun to show up in significant numbers in the press and reports from government agencies.
- (5) ***The subjective state of the population.*** An insurmountable limit appears to have been reached in the ruling elite's ability to achieve a consensus in favour of the current regime. The only way to resurrect such a consensus is through relatively fast and visible improvements in every day life, in such areas decrepit public services (transport, health care, education), guaranteeing basic foodstuffs at affordable prices, construction of housing, tolerance of criticism and dissent, economic freedom for people to be self-employed and respect for the right to emigrate aboard and move around the island. In the face of those demands, the current government has begun to raise expectations of improvement by introducing changes very gradually. Mainly they have focused on lifting absurd restrictions that were in place for years, and reforms in the agricultural sector.
- (6) ***Accumulation of critical situations.*** Decades of neglect have led to a serious deterioration of Cuba's infrastructure in such as areas as telecommunications, ports, roads, public services, sewage, lighting and housing. The last issue is a delicate social problem because

there is a nationwide shortage of housing –more than half a million homes– and more than half of the existing ones are either in bad shape or critical condition, close to collapse. In Havana alone, there are some 8,000 homes with some 26,000 people in such dire straits.¹⁸

There can be no consensus without giving people the right to effective participation in the process of making decisions. Raúl Castro's call for controlled discussion of the problems that affect people has taken on momentum of its own, with pressure having emerged for systematic debates and means for making them public. Cubans also want to know what the government's plans are; so far these have not been revealed. Some of the administrative measures taken were not even published in the official press. Appeals to this effect have come from individuals and a broad range of organisations in civil society, from professional groups to others of a religious nature or the political opposition.

Discussion of the political and economic theses of the Sixth Congress of the Communist Party of Cuba –these will govern the actions of the state and society in the years to come– will provide an opportunity for Cubans committed to socialism to express their ideas on what reforms the State should undertake, and the party should endorse, for Cuban society to be truly sustainable.

3.5 Options for the Ruling Elite

Faced with this reality, Cuban leaders have three options:

- (1) ***Maintain the current regime*** by continuing to seek investment, loans and subsidies that offset its inability to generate wealth that would provide goods and services. This strategy underestimates the value of small- and medium-size, privately-owned companies, either Cuban or foreign. It favours deals with large multi-national or state-owned companies, and seeks the pipe dream of 'the big solution', such as striking oil, or discovering an HIV vaccine, or achieving an agreement with a new and stable international benefactor that would provide broad and generous financing. There is limited and controlled room for participation by civil society, even in cases where it is legally permitted.
- (2) ***Introduce some reforms to the current regime***. Maintain a total political monopoly and share economic power with the private sector –Cuban and international– in an effort to increase the supply of goods and services by freeing up commercial production. The goal would be to co-opt the support of society by raising expectations of improvement over the short term. This could allow for more activity by the officially registered civil society with an eye to luring more international aid resources. This could lead to greater leeway for freedom of expression and debate.
- (3) ***Begin the first phase of a transition toward another regime***. Share economic power with the private sector, both Cuban and foreign, and gradually introduce certain degrees of tolerance and pluralism, albeit without abandoning the Communist Party's monopoly on political power. In this phase, repression against the opposition would be lifted. The government would make way for a national dialogue with civil society –the part which is officially registered and the part which is not– with an eye to seeking a plan for sustainable national development that enjoys a general consensus.

3.6 Measures Taken

The measures taken by Raúl Castro from 1 August 2006 through mid-April of 2008 do not surpass the limits of option 1 and thus are essentially seeking continuity, even though some of them, such as

¹⁸ *Juventud Rebelde*, 30/IV/2008.

those implemented in the farm sector and the ones applied to wages, can generate their own momentum toward more radical changes at some point later.

But it is likely there will be a dynamic of advancement from one option to another, to the extent that Cuban leaders' reading of events makes such a shift recommendable for them as they work toward their strategic goal as a social group, which, for now, this is to prolong their monopoly on political power.

In the centre of these options lies social tension between demands and scarce resources, and this tension could hinder Cuba's governability if some unexpected event were to occur. Under the current circumstances, a natural disaster like a hurricane could leave thousands of people homeless and force them to flee to other provinces or cities. Examples of regions that are in critical condition are the south-eastern region of Cuba, where 58% of the population, which is mainly black, live in poverty, according to official figures;¹⁹ the Holguín region, where they have protests over evictions from poor neighbourhoods, or Isla de la Juventud; all of these have been visited recently by senior Cuban officials in their dual role representing both the State and the communist party.

Designing the future will require a lot of creative thought so as to 'think the unthinkable' and challenge old dogmas. Castro's having promoted older people to the new Council of State and the Politburo seems to go against this possibility. In the interest of efficiency there is a division of power between the State, the Party and civil society in Cuba. A genuine collegial leadership still does not exist.²⁰

The degree of liberalisation that Cuba undertakes will be determined by the government's success or failure in gaining access abroad to credit, markets and technology without having to reform the current regime. The third option would be chosen only if Cuban leaders realise it is impossible to deal with people's expectations and domestic discontent with the other two options.

3.6 Raúl Castro's Foreign Policy

From the Dividends of the Cold War to the Dividends of Peace

One thing that has been noteworthy during Fidel Castro's 22 months of convalescence is that, at least publicly, his brother Raúl seems to avoid both foreign policy issues –these were Fidel's obsession– and situations that can cause him more problems than he already had on his domestic agenda.

While Fidel Castro showed he was a genius at reaping dividends from the Cold War and seeking new allies for his anti-US crusade, so far Raúl Castro seems to want to benefit from a foreign policy of good relations; from it he wants to get economic resources, and he also wants other government to avoid interfering in his domestic agenda.

- Raúl Castro has not undertaken any anti-US initiative under Cuba's current chairmanship of the Non-Aligned Movement.
- He avoided having the President of Iran land on Cuban territory during two Latin American tours in which he visited the rest of the countries that belong to ALBA –the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador and Nicaragua)–.

¹⁹ Data provided by a researcher at the Center for Demographic Studies during a private interview with the author at the LASA congress in Montreal in August 2008.

²⁰ Many observers mistake Raúl Castro's penchant for consulting other people and delegating tasks –unlike the centralised nature of his brother– with a 'collegial leadership'. For the latter to exist, there would have to be greater internal democracy and autonomy of thought and action among the ruling elite, and these are still not present.

- From the outset he has made statements that raise the possibility of dialogue and understanding with the US after the elections in November 2008.
- Havana has kept a prudent distance from Hugo Chávez's strident criticism of Spain and Colombia, and has avoided getting involved in the conflict over the FARC.
- While Venezuela and Bolivia signed military cooperation agreements in 2006 and these were 'updated' in May 2008, Havana is not known to have joined them contractually.²¹

Cuba's attitude towards Caracas after Chávez's defeat in the referendum in December seemed more restrained than in previous years. Even though Cuba continues to implement cooperation agreements with Venezuela under the auspices of ALBA, Cuban leaders now seem to have recognised that, while Caracas is an erratic and fragile ally from which it can reap dividends temporarily, a long-term partnership like the kind Fidel Castro advocated would not necessarily last.

In the case of Spain and the EU, it is clear that interference by the ailing *caudillo* still carries enough weight to prevent a visible improvement in relations with that bloc of nations. His recent 'reflections' against the EU, published in *Granma*,²² seem untimely for an observer who does not know Castro wanted to launch that attack to sabotage Madrid's handling of the imminent internal EU discussions of its Common Position on Cuba. Fidel Castro does not want his successors to feel tempted by bridges that would give them the material possibility of abandoning the totalitarian regime he has bequeathed them. He prefers to blow those bridges up.

A series of events show that, despite Fidel Castro's reticence, there is reciprocal interest in normalising relations: exploratory discussions between the EU troika and Cuba at ministerial level in New York on 24 September 2007; Cuba's participation in the European Development Days in Lisbon, November 2007; two technical missions were sent to Cuba by the European Commission's General Directorate of Development; high-level missions by two European parliamentary groups (the Socialist Group and European United Left); and a visit by the European commissioner for Development and Humanitarian Aid, Louis Michel, from 7-9 March 2008. In May, the Cuban Foreign Minister Pérez Roque met with EU officials during the EU-Latin American summit in Lima.

Given the current circumstances in Cuba, the upcoming change in Administration in the US is important. Whoever succeeds George W. Bush will have a hard time satisfying the most conservative wing of the Cuban exile movement. Whether the winner in November is John McCain or Barack Obama, one can expect at least an easing of sanctions imposed on the sending of remittances and on trips to the island by Cuban-Americans. Obama, who is of African descent, has said that if he wins he would move towards dialogue with Havana. This would sap the 'confront the enemy' approach that Cuban leaders have used in their policy of mobilising the masses.

The Cuban government would have to rethink its discourse and find other sources of legitimacy if the American and European 'enemy', whom Fidel Castro described as 'two hungry wolves disguised as good, little grandmothers' –vanishes in a concerted diplomatic offensive by the EU and a new, Democratic Administration in the White House in 2009–.²³

²¹ Edmundo Noriega World Data Service, 'Venezuela and Bolivia Sign Military Cooperation Agreement', 23/V/2008.

²² Published in the newspaper *Granma* 19/V/2008.

²³ If Obama is elected President of the US, the regime in Havana could face the ideological impact of a new *perestroika*, only this time it would come from Washington.

At the time of writing, a new twist was unfolding in Havana in which officials were apparently trying to link the *Damas de Blanco* –a group of women seeking to get the husbands, sons, brothers and others out of Cuban jails– with the US government and terrorist elements in Miami. The humanitarian nature of the agenda of the *Damas de Blanco*, their positions in favour of reconciliation and the prestige they have earned internationally are a thorn in the side of the Cuban government.

Relations with the Diaspora and Cubans in Exile

There is a difference between the Cuban Diaspora and those living in exile. We feel the latter are people who decided to abandon their country because of certain political or moral ideas or convictions and/or legitimate fear for their freedom or safety. In some cases they requested status as refugees or political asylum. In other cases, they simply never went back to Cuba. Starting in 1959 and through the late 1970s, these people were the majority in Cuban communities abroad. After the Mariel exodus (1980) and successive migratory agreements that made it easier to leave the country, a larger number of Cubans emigrated in search of a better life, but without feeling the need to become politically active against the government. Their resentment against the regime stems from the discriminatory treatment they have received for emigrating, and all the retaliatory measures they are subjected to, even they did nothing politically to provoke them (their property is confiscated, they cannot resettle in Cuba, they need to request a permit to visit their native country and this can be denied without explanation).

By Diaspora we mean all Cubans living abroad, of which the exile community –those who are politically organised– is just a small fraction. The Cuban government might consider a policy of normalising relations with the Diaspora prior to reconciliation with any sector of the exile community. In order to do this it would have to take into account their economic and civil demands (the right to enter, leave and resettle freely, an end to policies of harassment and punishment of emigrés, a review of abusive telephone rates and the cost of processing trips and remittances, and opening up the possibility of them acting as forces for the economic development of the country). The government would also have to free nearly 200 political prisoners (a number that is insignificant compared with the 3,600 who were released in 1979) and assume a position of reconciliation with old enemies.

However, so far the attitude of the new Council of State is not encouraging. The Foreign Minister met recently with a select group of Cubans living abroad who are willing to support government policies. This was a step back in comparison with earlier meetings in which the government showed a more pluralist flexibility.²⁴

To date the government has not been receptive to calls from some influential exile groups for dialogue, non-violence and reconciliation. What remains is an obsolete vision of the exile community and the Diaspora. This does not jibe with the reality of nearly two million Cubans living all over the world, with large communities not just in the US but also in Europe and some faraway countries such as Australia. The political dynamic created by the conflict between the EU and Cuba has led to major political action by exile groups, which favour non-violent change, in Spain, Sweden and Prague. Within the US, the accumulation of various generations of Cuban exiles and the failure of programmes of violent action has meant that the highly symbolic 8th Street is fading away as the political nerve centre of the exile community in that country.

²⁴ On 19 March 2008 the Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Pérez Roque made some remarks to a group of emigrés committed to unconditional defence of government policies and these were met with broad rejection even among progressive sectors of the Diaspora and the exile community. Pérez Roque said the status of being ‘Cuban’ is an identity that comes with supporting ‘socialism’ and that this is the policy of the Cuban government. During the congress of the National Union of Writers and Artists, several figures expressed a more ecumenical position that went against what the minister had said.

The Diaspora and an influential sector of the Cuban exile community could be receptive to gestures of goodwill from the current government. But for now, the authorities seem more interested in cultivating the good will of other countries, including the US, without realizing that normalising relations with the Diaspora is more within reach and could yield more benefits, including improved relations with hostile governments.

A policy of normalising relations with the Diaspora would:

- (1) Isolate the most radical sectors of the exile community, which advocate maintaining the US trade embargo, sanctions and confrontation.
- (2) Be recognised both by the EU and the next US Administration as a change in policy to take in account when it comes to lifting sanctions and opening up cooperation.
- (3) Open up channels for an immediate flow of capital through remittances and possible micro-loans that recipients could use for cooperative production in agriculture or set up small urban companies.

Within Cuban civil society, there have been repeated calls for reconciliation with the Diaspora and an end to the policy of requiring Cubans to get permission to leave and enter their own country. This has been evident in national debate in the past few months and in the discussions that took place at the 7th congress of the National Union of Writers and Artists. One can expect that the process of discussions that will open up prior to the 6th Congress of the Communist Party of Cuba to continue this trend, with the endorsement of large numbers of communist party members.

IV. Possible Scenarios

4.1 Possible Futures

History does not have a linear, inexorable sequence leading toward any specific point. The present holds the possibility of more than one possible future. Several possible futures await Cuba, some better than others but all of them different from its present and past.

When we speak of scenarios we do not seek to announce or speculate on the way in which an inevitable future will be achieved. By *scenario* we mean the ability to imagine what alternatives are simmering in the current circumstances, and what the factors are that could boost or diminish their capacity for materialising in a new present 'present'. The scenarios discussed below evaluate the possible projections and general features that the current phase of succession could take on, and its potential for hooking up with a *transformation-transition* of greater scope.

4.2 Scenarios to Consider

First Scenario: Changes in the *Policies* of the Totalitarian Regime

Fidel Castro wants the essential part of his political legacy to carry on after he dies. This goal can be considered to have the following components: (a) a single party that centralises all political power; (b) a vast state and mixed economy (composed exclusively of foreign and state capital); and (c) a network providing universal services such as health and education that would continue to provide legitimacy to the regime and to the process Castro began in 1959 and leaves as his legacy.

The problem with this is that if the single party system and a state-heavy economy remain, it will not be possible to reach levels of efficiency needed to keep providing the services that are the underlying element of Castro's premise.

The peculiarity of the Cuban system lies in the fact that it is not self-sustainable, politically or economically. In order to give legitimacy to its political authority, it relies on confrontation with the US. And to offset its economic inefficiency it depends on external political, military and economic alliances it forges as a result of the clash with the US. The US embargo darkens this reality, rather than cause it. Cuba's economic crisis is not a condition that is exclusively dependent on circumstances –the existence of the embargo or not– but rather structural.

If Cuba started allowing visits by American tourists tomorrow, or large amounts of oil were discovered, or there were a sudden injection of capital, Cuba's track record has nothing to suggest it would make good use of those resources to meet the day to day needs of its people. Cuba wasted US\$6 billion a year in Soviet aid for three decades without generating sustainable development or eliminating shortages and rationing.

These days, despite an injection of capital and resources from Venezuela and China, everyday living standards have continued to deteriorate, as have education and health care. This is not a consequence of the Helms-Burton Law; rather, it stems from endemic economic inefficiency, a new policy of massive exportation of doctors and hospital equipment to other countries and the permanent lack of political and civil freedoms for debating the course and consequences of economic policies and options.

If this scenario of a continuity-oriented succession materializes in these conditions, dissent would increase. If it comes to this, as the regime lacks any other mechanisms for integration and creating a consensus, it would have no choice but to engage in greater constraint and try to spread fear of potential aggressive intentions on the part of the US and alleged vengeful aims by Cubans in exile. The goal of all this would be to try to keep people passive and thus keep the situation stable.

Ageing leaders (between 65 and 75 years of age) might think it worthwhile to try to stay in power for another decade, until they are no longer around, mainly out of fear that change that goes beyond their control might mean having to go on trial for human rights violations, given their personal track records. But this is not necessarily the perspective of most younger leaders. They have nothing to fear about their past and have better technical training. For the new generation of technocrats, that perennial balancing act on the verge of disaster is a situation they want to avoid, if in fact they come to play a leading role in the succession that Castro wants to orchestrate for them before he leaves this world.

For all of these reasons –both the material limits and those set by the social subjectivity of the forces of change– a process that starts off as a succession has little chance of consolidating itself as absolute continuity of the previous regime. Either its players move relatively quickly towards a new systemic definition that includes them as participants who do not monopolise events, or they face the risk of collapse just as quickly, along with what will come to be the *ancien regime*.

Second Scenario: *Structural Reform of the Totalitarian Regime Along the Lines of China*

This is what Raúl Castro will probably implement once his brother dies, and it is what is longed for by the new class of corporate managers emerging from the *nomenklatura* –both military and civilian– linked to foreign capital. This kind of project can be summed up as market-style Stalinism. In this case there would be a succession within the *nomenklatura* that would guide the process toward a managed transition. This kind of transition would be characterised by a progressively open economy, but within the most closed political system that can be sustained. Freedom of enterprise might be gradually restored, but not political or labour union freedom.

For the ruling elite, the essence of this managed transition is to achieve a soft landing into capitalism as the dominant social group in the economy and one that maintains a monopoly on

political power. If in doing so the ruling elite managed to preserve the so-called ‘achievements of the Revolution’ for everyday people (universal access to education and health care and retention of housing), and found a way to alleviate an inevitable rise in unemployment, one cannot rule out the elite winning majority support in sectors of the population willing to accept a new social pact within an authoritarian framework rather than be exposed to uncontrolled changes under new forces they do not know and which they fear, such as the exile community, the US and the domestic opposition.

The idea of ‘better something bad that you know than something good which you do not’ could come to the fore if the *nomenklatura* does not succumb to the idea of applying economic reforms with drastic measures and no political freedoms. The argument that in the future economic reforms will inevitably bring about greater political freedoms could be an attractive excuse for international investors, so long as the economic and financial rules of behaviour are clarified beforehand. In this scenario, pro-democracy forces would be perceived, at least in the immediate term, as ‘inopportune’ by certain national and foreign forces.

There are recurring signs that people who support such a managed transition –the most likely one over the short term– have tried to convince figures in the US and other western countries that this is the only plan in Cuba which can guarantee greater opening of markets and investment, with a docile workforce and sufficient domestic governability, one which will avert migratory crises and uncontrolled drug trafficking in the Florida Straits.

Third Scenario: A *Failed State*

With regard to this scenario, we can use the two definitions applied to this concept²⁵: either because we approach the issue from the standpoint of a situation in which the State has lost control, and is not in a position to sustain domestic governability, provide security and control its territory, or because we assume as much in the definition, which describes such a scenario as a situation in which conflict prevails and the social pact has been broken.

The scenario can be arrived at in two ways: as a result of the collapse of the totalitarian regime, or because of the weaknesses and absence of consensus in the ruling regime that succeeds it, even if it is ‘democratic’.

Consider the one in which there would be a collapse in authority as a result of the unleashing of events that are predictable if the current mentality continues. Public demonstrations (like those in 1994 or worse) can trigger an escalation of violence if they are met with lethal force, with or without orders from a central command. The situation created in such circumstances could cause a major change in the mindset of the Cuban people and generate significant pressure from the exile community lobby in favour of a ‘humanitarian intervention’. This could almost certainly happen in a unilateral fashion, depending on how events unfold and when (during the US election campaign or after). If security and military forces are ordered to open fire on demonstrators, there is a very real possibility of a breakdown in command by secondary-level officers.

If this scenario were to emerge, there would be greater prospects for more influence on events by the US and the most extremist elements of the exile community allied with the Bush Administration.

Comments by senior US officials to the effect that they do not want to engage in a military intervention in Cuba are credible, particularly in light of the international situation that Washington faces these days. This is seen in government reports on Cuba, which also speak of a peaceful transition to democracy.

²⁵ See Laura Tedesco, *The Latin American State: ‘Failed’ or Evolving?*, FRIDE, Madrid, 2007.

That said, it is also true that there are extremist elements within the US Administration which have said privately –simultaneously and paradoxically– that they are against intervening but in favour of the possibility of violence breaking out in Cuba.²⁶ It is very naive to think the US could avoid a direct intervention in Cuba if policies designed to unleash a domestic outbreak actually succeeded. In an era of instant news and given the influence of the Cuban vote in the key state of Florida, this is almost impossible.

The presidential elections of November 2008 could give control of the White House to the Democratic Party and perhaps maintain the control it already has in Congress. It is unlikely that this party would dare advocate radical policies such as a sudden lifting of the American trade embargo against Cuba. However, it is to be expected that if the Democrats retain control over Congress –and even more so if they win a two-thirds majority– the US could embark on new and creative policies toward Cuba. In this way it would become a force for real change in the Cuban dynamic, rather than a pretext for Cuba to reject change. In any case, over the immediate term a Democratic win might serve to stop encouraging measures that might facilitate the emergence of the failed state.

But a failed state can happen not just with the collapse of authority under the totalitarian regime but also later through weakness on the part of the regime that succeeds it with a democratic system.

A weak state with the following characteristics would be a natural partner for international, organised crime gangs and a threat to regional security: rising levels of unemployment, poverty and inequality, a society without democratic traditions, where there has never been respect for judicial institutions, with a culture of intolerance and violence, in a country subjected to economic restructuring measures with their inevitable social impact, one in which people have been trained to use weapons and thousands of them were trained in guerrilla warfare and conspiracy techniques, where there are hundreds of specialists in genetic bioengineering, some of which have worked in the armed forces in the field of biological warfare, in which hundreds of young people have been trained in offensive hacking techniques for cybernetic warfare, with weather conditions and laboratories able to produce drugs on a large scale, just 90 miles from the coasts of the world's largest consumer of drugs.

Therefore, neighbouring countries cannot be interested simply in getting rid of the totalitarian regime. In this case, unlike Haiti or other failed states, there are reasons to follow through on the process of transformation until a sustainable society is successfully established. Guaranteeing the success of the Cuban transition is an issue of regional security, first and foremost for neighbouring countries.

One might use the metaphor of Rubik's Cube to illustrate the need for achieving harmony among many elements: the State, the market, civil society, the Diaspora, the global economy and the new regime of respecting multilateral norms. It is necessary to facilitate the establishment of a democratic regime capable of successfully combining those six faces of the Rubik's Cube.

It is a good idea to clarify a point regarding this scenario. The Cuban government has used a skewed version of the scenario of a failed state to intimidate politicians in the US into thinking that accepting the current regime is the best way to avoid a massive exodus to Florida. If the US were an accomplice to the use of lethal force by the Cuban authorities to prevent such an exodus, pressure from the exile community and other governments for a humanitarian intervention would grow considerably. The way for the Cuban government to avert such a situation is to launch a meaningful process of reforms that would persuade potential migrants to try their luck at home before leaving

²⁶ Dan Fysk, of the Bush Administration's National Security Council, told the FOCAL group on Cuba, in Ottawa (which the author belongs to), that Washington has no interest in invading Cuba but would be happy if there domestic upheaval.

to start from scratch in another country.²⁷

Fourth Scenario: Transition to a Democratic Regime

Once Fidel Castro dies and his brother Raúl leaves the political scene, power could be assumed by a group of sensible people from the nomenclature itself who would brush aside those who are in line hierarchically to take over (like Machado Ventura), or other historical leaders such as Ramiro Valdés. In exchange for certain guarantees for themselves and the social group they represent, this group might be willing to start a non-exclusive dialogue on Cuba's future. In order to have a realistic chance of succeeding, such an initiative would have to involve the various sectors of the opposition and the new and influential voices that would almost certainly emerge among the population in a new context of openness and change. The goal would be to launch a path to establishing civil and political liberties until people can express themselves freely –perhaps through a combination of plebiscites, elections and constituent assemblies–. The idea of promoting such a scenario of non-violent change is already supported by a wide range of opposition groups and exiles. To have a chance of achieving a national consensus on this scenario and making it happen, the backers of this scenario would need –starting right now– the firm support of a group of influential countries offering a potential package of international aid, investment and debt pardoning. However, the opposition would have to counter the demonisation it has suffered at the hands of the government, which, along with a lack of access to the media, has meant a lack of visibility and support among broad sectors of the population.

V. Participation by Facilitators Acting as 'Third Parties'

Over the last four and a half decades there has been no shortage of governments willing to help design a reform programme for Cuba. Some governments have also offered to mediate between Cuba and the US. One can expect such efforts to emerge again in coming years. On this, we offer the following remarks:

- (a) It is highly likely that Havana will not welcome, at least in the initial phase of a succession, an effort by third countries to advise it on a process of domestic reforms or facilitate dialogue in search of a definitive solution to the conflict with the opposition and with the US.

In Cuba there are deeply rooted values and perceptions that make it hard for outside parties to intervene. The political culture of the Cuban system rejects any kind of outside mediation, sees it as interference in its national sovereignty and feels that talking about national change with the Cuban opposition is tantamount to treason.

In such circumstances, involvement by third countries can only get under way if it is a sovereign initiative by a group of governments or people backed by them who appear to be acting privately.

In Cuba's case, to make good-offices intervention depend on formal and prior authorization from the government is to doom it to failure before it even begins. But a group of governments or influential people acting on their behalf can decide to *initiate an exploratory dialogue* (not a *mediation*), separately, with Cuba, moderate sectors of the exile community, the domestic opposition and with the US, with an eye to identifying elements and prospects for an agreed solution to the conflict through a transition to democracy.

²⁷ When the reforms that allowed people to be self-employed began in 1994, the number of people trying to escape secretly to the US dropped significantly (from a conversation by this author with a senior official of the Interior Ministry in 1995).

- (b) Intervention by third countries can –mainly in its initial phase– be carried out through a group of citizens acting ‘on their own’. A small group of two or three people which, for whatever reason, the Cuban government rejects, would have a better chance of starting a process like this and protecting the governments involved from finding themselves in an uncomfortable situation. At a later stage, this group may or may not carry on with its intervention, in parallel with the governments with which they agreed to get involved.
- (c) Successful good-offices action will require finding a way to listen to and take into account the perceptions and interests of all the main players, both Cuban and foreign, that are part of the conflict, isolating those which have an interest in perpetuating it (the so-called spoilers).

A good-offices group seeking solutions to the Cuban conflict cannot ignore the desires and real needs of Cubans on the island and abroad. It is their assent and consensus with whatever new social pact is reached which, over the long term, will be the foundation for any formula for sustainable government.

For this reason, such dealings would have to find adequate and efficient ways to talk to *all* sectors of the Cuban population: the government, opposition and a broad range of citizens who reject the status quo and have chosen not to affiliate themselves with opposition groups silenced by official repression.

The most difficult task –but not an impossible one– is to convince the various parties as to where their main and most viable interests lie over the mid- and long term, and how those interests can be compatible with those of other parties, if the Cuban situation is analysed from a non-traditional perspective and dialogue is carried out with a flexible attitude. In order to do this, it is necessary to find various ways to isolate or diminish the influence of those parties interested in sustaining the conflict, as has been the case until now with Fidel Castro.

- (d) Third-party involvement to find a solution to the Cuban conflict would need a programme with incentives for both sides, and would need to be conceived in such a way as to allow them to change their respective policies. It would need multiple-track and quiet diplomacy. In this way, people acting as private citizens could operate in conjunction with other official dealings by States that back them, without the latter having to run any risk in case the talks fail.

One must encourage firm steps, no theatrical or ephemeral gestures. It is not a matter of seeking gestures that would be easy to reverse, such as only demanding the release of a few political prisoners –a gesture of good will that must be sought in order to create confidence– when they can simple be put right back in jail under laws that would remain in force and fail to meet universal standards of human rights.

By way of example, let us discuss measures agreed in the framework of a road map; the authorities might ‘unilaterally’ bring Cuban rules on migration and movement into and out of the country by its citizens in line with universally accepted standards. Washington might respond, also ‘unilaterally’, by lifting all restrictions on their citizens or Cuban-born residents travelling to the island or sending remittances there. At the same time, third parties could encourage these steps with approval of cooperation projects backed by European governments and non governmental organisations to develop small- and medium-size Cuban companies in various sectors, such as tourism.

- (e) Under the current circumstances it would be appropriate to consider creating a ‘Good Will Group’ composed of Spain, Brazil and Canada.

Besides reasons of an ethical nature, there are practical issues that would encourage some countries to get involved in good-offices diplomacy. They include the following:

- Assuring the future of their citizens' business dealings and investments in Cuba.
- Seeking a successful and peaceful transition that facilitates stability and governability in the future and this keeps the island from becoming a failed state and source of new threats for the region (such as international organised crime gangs using Cuba as a base).
- Receiving international recognition for having contributed to finding an honourable and definitive solution to a long-running situation of conflict, the perverse nature of which took the world to the brink of nuclear war in the 20th century.

VI. General Conclusions and Recommendations

First Conclusion

Cuba's ruling elite do not constitute a social group with traditions similar to those of a political class. For there to be a political class, there has to be *political room for manoeuvre* in which politics can be exercised, even if it is a matter of articulating internal, partisan consensus. So far these possibilities have been non-existent under the totalitarian regime, even within the ruling elite and its governing party. The charismatic leadership of Fidel Castro has meant there are no strong institutions or habits of collegial rule.

One of the challenges facing Raúl Castro is to strengthen the current institutions –beginning with the Communist Party of Cuba and the National Assembly– and turn a privileged, ruling elite into a real *political class* (which is still is not) and eventually into an *proprietary class* so as to assure a soft landing for its heirs in a future market-based economy.

Transforming an elite class of unconditional followers of the regime into a political class means creating room for political dialogue and debate at various levels so that, even under certain rules, these people can discuss options and alternatives without fearing reprisals.

A complete and politically-agreed transformation of the regime is unlikely while Raúl Castro is alive, unless he realises that entering into a process of agreed changes is less risky than trying to undertake them with the powers he now has. But even so, if they were to materialise, any process of dialogue or negotiation aimed at achieving this goal would have to take into account the needs and guarantees that the ruling elite will demand of their counterparts. This means there will be tension between the need to achieve an agreement for the sake of change, and future demands for justice that one sector of Cuban society will present.

Recommendation: promoting national reconciliation should be a priority starting right now. In the Cuban case –and given the limited time-frame of this Castro succession due to the advanced age of the successors– it would be a good idea to carry out reconciliation processes among people and groups as a prelude to an agreed solution. Aid agencies and private foundations should support academic gatherings on the issue of reconciliation. Other tools to be used in this phase would be documentaries, novels and books with narrative and interviews with people who suffered on both sides of the conflict; 'connectors' such as reconstruction of human networks– facilitated by digital formats such as CDs and DVDs, in addition to websites– which were broken by the revolutionary process (residents of a village, classmates, former workplace colleagues), sports activities and concerts bringing together people from the island and the Diaspora.

Second Conclusion

It is highly unlikely that Raúl Castro actually *wants* to begin a democratic transformation of the regime. In the five to eight years of active life that he might still have, one can expect him –if he feels circumstances are pushing him inexorable in this direction– to undertake a gradual economic liberalisation and introduce precise and tolerant rules for debate among supporters of the regime (but not for the opposition).

The key to pressure for democracy does not lie in whether it exists *per se* and comes from the US or Europe. The decisive factor is the way in which the Cuban people and the members of the communist party perceive reality: has Raúl improved things in a satisfactory way? If not, is it his fault and that of the current regime, or does the blame go to external factors that are thwarting the Cuban people. The debate, therefore, is not between those who favour pressure and those who oppose it. The ability of such pressure to encourage reforms depends on its not being seen by the population as arbitrary and unfair obstacles to their well-being.

In this regard it is relevant to recall that there is *negative pressure* ('I will take away something to which you are entitled') and *positive pressure* ('I could give you something that you really need and which I am not obliged to give you'). The first kind of pressure is easy to manipulate –as shown by the US trade embargo– in favour of the Cuban government; the second one causes the Cuban government to face domestic pressure for progress in order to achieve incentives (markets, investment, international cooperation) and with them improve people's living standards. Whereas a policy of *external pressure*, such as the embargo, enhances resistance to change, a package of potential incentives –a kind of Marshall Plan for Cuba– that was achievable gradually, moving toward democracy, could unleash *internal pressure* on the government to move in that direction.

It is a conceptual and political error to suppose that a strategy of *constructive engagement* should not feature pressure as one of its tools. If this premise is applied, constructive engagement is doomed to failure. The difference lies in the priority that is given to the use of *positive pressure* as opposed to negative pressure, without going so far as to renounce the latter in certain exceptional circumstances. On the other hand, to grant irreversible incentives with a verifiable commitment boosts the stance of those within the regime that oppose change; they think intransigence bears fruit if you stay at it.

Recommendation: the argument between those who call for pressure on Havana and those who advocate the idea of working with it to encourage change should be formulated in a different way. Naturally, Raúl Castro is interested in freeing himself from all kinds of pressure (internal and external) and obtaining material and financial resources so as not to have to face the need to yield, or to be able to stabilise the situation by making just minimal concessions.

It is not realistic to suppose that, without being pressured to do so, the ruling elite in Cuba is going to enter a process of dialogue and negotiation that would involve making concessions it sees as a threat to its interests as a social group. The debate should not focus on this point.

Rather, the issue is what kinds of pressure should be applied, in what context and by whom. Meanwhile, the debate should not continue to be on whether there should be cooperation programmes with Cuba but rather what projects, and for achieving what goals on the road to democracy.

It would be good for the pressure to be of the positive kind ('I could give you something that you really need') in exchange for irreversible structural changes, and that the incentives be aimed at creating a relationship that it would cost the Cuban government too much to renounce later on.

As for cooperation programmes, it would also be recommendable that these were designed in such a way that one of their effects would be to enhance the autonomy of Cuba's civil society and citizens. That would be an important gauge of the success of the programmes and a factor to take into account when it comes to designing or financing them.

For instance, it is not a matter of whether to contribute to increasing food production, but rather of knowing if the way this is carried out (the organisation that receives and administers the funds, the decision-making processes, the way the programme is implemented, who receives credit for achieving the goals that were set) helps to strengthen a group of citizens or organisations that seek to be autonomous, or simply enhances the State's policy of patronage and paternalism.²⁸

Nor is it right to give support exclusively to illegal and opposition groups as advocated by Washington. Even with organised, legal civil society, albeit with harassment and pressure from the authorities, there are groups which want to expand their autonomy and make room for genuine citizen participation, in contrast with the mobilisation that the State engages in by using such organisations. The same thing happens within some institutions such as the National Association of Small-scale Farmers and some municipalities.

Third Conclusion

Even though it is isolated, infiltrated by the police and beset with internal divisions, the dissident and opposition movement offers good potential for the process of bringing democracy to Cuba and this should not be underestimated. The repression of the movement –and the continued presence of some 200 political activists in Cuban gaols– is a clear obstacle to the full development of all the potential that exists in Cuba's relations with the EU. The case of the *Damas de Blanco* and Osvaldo Payá, who received the Sakharov prize from the European Parliament, is particularly sensitive.

For the EU to keep at a distance from the opposition and dissident movement –especially the humanitarian movement represented by the *Damas de Blanco*– as required by the Cuban government as a condition for improving relations with the bloc, would have a negative impact within the ruling elite: such a 'victory' would embolden elements who oppose change and would later be in a better position to advance their agenda of obstacles to reform. Far from seeing such a gesture by the EU as a way to move ahead with a relationship of constructive engagement, the Cuban government would interpret it as evidence that toughening your position bears fruit and that it is possible to achieve economic and financial goals without making concessions.

Recommendation: the EU should devise a policy designed to keep, in many ways, recognition of and support for those groups which offer it greater credibility, and communicate clearly to Havana that this point is not negotiable. Right now it is necessary to increase support for the *Damas de Blanco* movement, which could start suffering repression at any time. These processes of transformation are not free of internal contradictions and zig-zags. So even though such an act would not further Raúl Castro's goal of improving relations with other countries, it could nonetheless happen under certain circumstances. The best way to avert such repression against these women is to act first and explain to Havana the negative impact it would have on dialogue with Madrid, the EU and even some Democrats in Washington.

On the other hand, European countries must also make clear to dissidents and opposition members that States have to behave in accordance with international norms and cannot act with the same freedom as a private institution. In any case, support for this sector should continue and be strengthened, but always abiding by international norms.

²⁸ It is a good idea for aid agencies to consult each year the *Do Not Harm Handbook* (CDA Collaborative Learning Project, November, 2004) and make a creative adaptation of its premises to the circumstances of the Cuban conflict.

Fourth Conclusion

Until now foreign governments have largely based their analyses of the Cuban situation on two schools of thought (the Theory of International Relations and Transitology) and this has limited their approaches and their creativity. It has also set the terms –often Manichean and false– for debate on alternative policies toward Cuba.

Recommendation: governments interested in promoting change in Cuba should, at least in a complementary fashion, consider the prospects offered by conflict resolution, or conflictology. Including this third angle for examining the problem and using its tools (such as ‘conflict maps’ which are updated regularly and feature an analysis of the context, internal and external parties to the conflict and other factors) would enrich external observers’ capacity for understanding and put them in a better position to successfully have an impact on the situation in Cuba. Those countries with cooperation programmes under way with Cuba might benefit from studies of good cooperation practices in countries torn by conflict and reflect on how these practices might apply to what they are doing in Cuba. Conflict resolution has the added advantage of providing experiences and useful tools for issues that will come to take on greater importance, such as reconciliation, the processes of building a consensus and the use of dialogue techniques for identifying areas where agreement might be possible.

Fifth Conclusion

For a definitive solution to the current bilateral conflict with the US, those who make up the ruling in both countries must be made to understand that a Cuba that is independent, sovereign, based on the rule of law, democratic and has a socially responsible market economy is the best guarantee for the governability of Cuba and the national security of both it and the US. Were the current totalitarian regime to be replaced –even in an agreed fashion– by a low-intensity, deficient democracy, Cuba could become a failed state and a base of operations for organised crime networks.

Recommendation: the beginning of the succession in Cuba and the possibility of a change in US policy deserve a sovereign, discrete and early initiative by a group of countries. One first, significant step would be to reject the interventionist recommendations of the commission for transition in Cuba, created by the Bush Administration amid the initial euphoria triggered by the invasion of Iraq. A change in US policy towards Cuba, such as the one suggested by Barak Obama, would have an impact equal to or greater than that of perestroika in its day in the Soviet Union. This policy marked the beginning of the withdrawal of the external parties to the Cuban conflict. A US policy that launched the ‘disappearance’ of the enemy would leave the endogenous Cuban conflict exposed for all to see in all its dimensions.

The collective initiative we recommend is the timely creation of room for *good offices* that provides a satisfactory solution to the Cuban conflict and the bilateral one with the US, by designing a road map with commitments and incentives that serve as positive pressure with an eye to achieving significant and irreversible changes in Cuba in the next five years.

There is a window of opportunity for this running from 2009 to 2012. In this span of time one can expect more changes in Cuba, others (either major or minor) from an important outsider player (the US), the disappearance of another important external player through the departure of the Chávez government in Caracas and the replacement by 2013 of a generation of historical leaders in Havana (including the Castro brothers). In this period, the Socialist Party will continue to rule in Spain, as will Lula en Brazil. The general premises of Canada’s position toward Cuba enjoy a consensus among the country’s political parties and this gives it stability that would survive any election.

A Good Will Group with potential for applying this strategy could be made up of Spain, Brazil and Canada. This kind of strategy should be carried out through *quiet diplomacy* and could bring

together government activity with that of a group of persons acting in concert with those States which are interested in seeing the initiative make progress. Collaborating with a Good Will Group made up of those three countries might be attractive for Cuban leaders seeking outsider support. Spain provides the European connection and through it, with the ACP. Brazil provides oil, regional influence and a bridge with the IBSA Trilateral Dialogue Forum (India, Brazil, South Africa). Canada would bring to the table its special relations with the US and its NAFTA connection. The workings of such a group might also have an effect on the Paris Club to some extent.

The Good Will Group could undertake three basic missions:

- Monitor and accompany the current succession process in Cuba.
- Offer Cuba's current leaders a willingness to develop the policy of constructive engagement by helping Cuba rejoin the global economy, to the extent that the Cuban economy is restructured for this purpose and there are irreversible changes towards the democratisation of Cuban society, in terms of pluralism and political tolerance.
- Serve as managers/facilitators, if the parties so desire, of a bilateral dialogue with the US on restoring relations.

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