

U.S.–Cuba Relations: Trends and Underlying Forces

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This briefing paper outlines the recent developments in U.S.–Cuba relations and analyzes whether these represent the beginning of a defining shift in U.S. policy towards Cuba. It assesses the forces within the U.S. political landscape that shape policy towards Cuba, and explores whether the newly emerging forces of change are strong enough to overcome the combination of factors that have maintained virtually intact the decades-old U.S. policy of economic and political isolation of Cuba.

In resolving the Elián Gonzalez situation, both the U.S. and Cuban governments were on the same side of the issue, working against the traditional leadership of the Cuban exile community, toward the reunification of the boy with his father. Other recent developments in U.S.–Cuba relations include the approval of a bill to partially lift the Cuban embargo, so as to allow the sale of food and medicines to the island, and the relaxation in 1999 of regulations which have paved the way for increased family visits and remittances to Cuba, and a greater number of cultural and academic exchanges between the two countries.

It is widely believed that pressure from Cuban exiles has been the major factor that has kept the U.S. policy towards Cuba essentially immutable for four decades. In reality, the pressure from Miami did not begin to exert itself until after 1980, with the election of Ronald Reagan as President. Prior to that time, the establishment and continuation of a hostile policy towards Cuba resided exclusively in Washington, with Cuban exiles playing merely a supportive role. Reagan's presidency, however, led to an increased participation of Cuban-Americans in the U.S. electoral system, and prompted the formation of a powerful exile lobby group in Washington. These developments led Cuban exiles to play a key role in influencing Washington's actions towards Cuba.

In the past decade, however, a number of forces for change in U.S. policy have emerged due to the transformations of the post-Cold War era, and the end of the perceived threat to U.S. national security posed by Cuba as a Soviet ally and as a player in international conflicts. This new context has resulted in a growing interest among U.S. businesses to invest and trade with Cuba, as well as increased support in the U.S. Congress for ending sanctions and embargoes. The increased ideological pluralism within the Cuban exile community and the weakening power of traditional exile groups also represent important shifts.

The analysis suggests that the pro-embargo forces are not inherently powerful, but that they are influential because they are the most committed players on the field. To date, Cuba has not represented a substantial economic or political prize to merit actively pursuing a change in the course of U.S.–Cuba relations for those who favour change. The prospects for change, therefore, rest on the growing possibility that U.S. interests, rooted in economic, trade, immigration, or national security concerns, might grow sufficiently in the future to overcome the pressures to maintain the embargo.

RESUMEN

El presente trabajo esboza los sucesos más recientes en las relaciones entre Estados Unidos y Cuba, y en que medida tales sucesos constituyen o no indicios de un giro en la política estadounidense hacia la isla. Se analizan también los grupos que dentro del panorama político de E.E.U.U. diseñan la política hacia Cuba, y hasta que punto la aparición de nuevas fuerzas a favor de un cambio de política poseen la solidez necesaria para vencer la combinación de factores que han mantenido prácticamente inalterable la política de aislamiento político y económico de Cuba durante décadas.

En el caso de Elián González, tanto el gobierno de Cuba como de Estados Unidos asumieron una misma postura de oposición a los líderes tradicionales de la comunidad cubana del exilio y a favor de la reunificación del niño con su padre. Más recientemente los Estados Unidos han aprobado un proyecto de ley que levantaría parcialmente el embargo para permitir la venta de medicinas y alimentos a la isla. Igualmente, la flexibilización en 1999 de ciertas restricciones ha permitido el incremento de las visitas y remesas familiares a Cuba, así como el aumento de los intercambios culturales y académicos entre los dos países.

Muchos piensan que la casi inmutabilidad de la política norteamericana hacia Cuba durante cuatro décadas se debe a la presión que han ejercido los exiliados cubanos, cuando en realidad, esta presión no comenzó hasta después de 1980 con la elección de Ronald Reagan como Presidente. Previa a esa fecha, el establecimiento y continuidad de la política hostil de E.E.U.U. hacia a Cuba se generaba en Washington, y la comunidad exiliada solo tenía un papel de soporte. La presidencia de Reagan propició el auge de la participación de los cubanoamericanos en el sistema electoral estadounidense, así como el establecimiento en Washington de un poderoso grupo de cabildeo integrado por exiliados. Estos hechos desembocaron en que los exiliados cubanos adquirieran una influencia clave en la determinación de las prácticas norteamericanas hacia Cuba.

Con el fin de la guerra fría, y ante la desaparición de la amenaza que podría representar Cuba como aliada de los soviéticos, y como partícipe en conflictos internacionales, en la última década han aparecido nuevas fuerzas que abogan por un cambio de política. Este nuevo contexto ha propiciado el creciente interés de la empresa norteamericana en invertir y comerciar con Cuba, así como un mayor apoyo del Congreso por acabar con todo tipo de sanciones y embargos. La diversificación ideológica en el seno del exilio cubano, y el debilitamiento del poder de los grupos tradicionales del exilio constituyen también cambios importantes.

El presente análisis señala que los sectores a favor del embargo no son infaliblemente los más poderosos, sino que son los más enfrascados en sus propósitos y por ende tienen mayor influencia. Hasta el momento, el tema de Cuba no ofrece ninguna distinción política o económica relevante como para incentivar un activismo más intenso por parte de aquellos que abogan por buscar un cambio en las relaciones entre Estados Unidos y Cuba. Por lo tanto, las crecientes perspectivas de cambio dependen de que los intereses de Estados Unidos — arraigados en consideraciones económicas, comerciales, de inmigración y seguridad nacional — aumenten lo suficiente como para vencer los obstáculos que se interponen al levantamiento del embargo.

INTRODUCTION

A few hours after Elián González was taken forcibly by the U.S. government from the home of his Miami relatives in April 2000, Cuban President Fidel Castro addressed a mass rally in the province of Matanzas and declared that in 41 years of revolution “this was the first day of truce and justice” in the relations between Cuba and the U.S. The statement was all the more remarkable, given that the rally was a commemoration of the 39th anniversary of the victory by Cuban forces over a U.S.-backed invasion by a brigade of exiles at the Bay of Pigs.

If only for a day, the little boy’s saga seemed to have ended the decades-old standoff between Washington and Havana. In resolving Elián’s situation, both governments seemed to be on the same side of the issue, working toward the reunification of the boy and

his father. Their common antagonist was Washington’s long-time ally in the anti-Castro struggle: the traditional leadership of the Cuban exile community. It was as if the Cuba–U.S. relationship had been turned on its head.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN U.S.–CUBA RELATIONS

Many believe that the Elián case may well come to represent the greatest defeat for anti-Castro exiles since that failed military action nearly forty years ago. The basis for such a sweeping statement is the indication that the conflict over the little boy has crippled the influence of Castro’s antagonists in the U.S. and opened the door to what the exiles have long been trying to prevent: a rapprochement between the two governments.

In the Elián saga, wrote one columnist in the *Los Angeles Times*, "...the big losers are Miami's exile hard-liners, so desperate to wreak revenge on Castro that they picked a public-relations turkey." In the *New York Times*, another writer asked the Secretary of State to "end the Miami Cubans' kidnapping of U.S. Cuba policy..." And the *Chicago Tribune* in its April 15th editorial noted that Miami Cubans "...have banded together on a fanatical crash-and-burn strategy that has discredited them in the eyes of the American public." The paper then called on the U.S. "...to wrest our Cuba policy from the hands of Miami's lunatic fringes...and begin normalization of trade and political relations with the island." Those sentiments were echoed throughout much of the U.S. press in the weeks when the fate of Elián occupied the headlines.

Coinciding with the dramatic events surrounding the little boy were other developments that in a less spectacular fashion have also helped to open the door to a softening of the U.S.'s Cuba policy. One is the push by agricultural producers in the U.S. to be authorized to sell to Cuba, a move that originated with the Freedom to Farm Act of 1996. The law gave U.S. farmers access to foreign markets to compensate for the end of automatic government subsidies, so that now "...right-wing farm-state Republicans... no longer toe an anti-Communist hard-line" on trade issues, according to Sarah Wildman, writing in *The New Republic*. One result of this new alignment of forces, coupled with a general anti-embargo and pro-trade mood in the U.S. Congress, is the recently approved bill to partially lift the Cuban embargo. This agreement allows for the sale of food and medicines to the island, although under restrictive conditions.

That pro-trade sentiment also led Congress to support the efforts of the Clinton administration to enact permanent trading relations with the People's Republic of China, a move that served to highlight the apparent contradiction of the U.S.'s Cuba policy. Advocates of trade with China repeatedly made the argument that increasing trade would be helpful in opening up the country to the influences of democracy and capitalism. Why, many asked, does that not apply to Cuba as well? It was a contradiction that was difficult to resolve and eloquently made the case for changing U.S. policy towards the island.

These recent developments follow on the heels of the relaxation in 1999 of regulations by the Office of Foreign Assets Control of the U.S. Treasury Department. The amended regulations expand the categories of persons that can travel to Cuba without a specific license and also facilitate family visits and remittances to the island. While the new regulations do not represent a sea change

from previous restrictions regarding travel to and from Cuba, they have paved the way for a greater number of cultural and academic exchanges between the two countries, and demonstrate a willingness on the part of the Clinton administration to make some changes within the strict parameters imposed by Congress through the 1996 law known as the Helms-Burton Act.

It appears therefore, that there are some shifts underway that go beyond the all-too-brief anomaly of the Elián saga. But the question remains: Are these recent shifts and realignments strong enough to overcome the combination of factors that have maintained virtually intact the U.S.'s decades-old Cuba policy? The answer rests on an analysis of the uneven balance between the forces of inertia and the forces of change that has thus far determined U.S. policy towards the island.

THE FORCES OF INERTIA IN U.S.-CUBA POLICY

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It is widely believed that pressure from Cuban exiles has been the major factor that has kept the U.S.'s Cuba policy essentially immutable for four decades. In fact, however, the pressure from Miami did not begin to exert itself until after 1980. Prior to that time, the establishment and continuation of a hostile policy towards Cuba resided exclusively in Washington, with exiles playing a merely supportive role, as exemplified by the failed Bay of Pigs invasion. President Eisenhower, in one of his last actions

in office, severed ties with the Cuban government in January 1961, citing Cuba's expropriation of U.S. property. A year later, Kennedy enacted the embargo. Successive administrations in the 1960s and 1970s adhered to the principle that the U.S. would not re-establish relations nor grant diplomatic recognition to what it regarded as hostile or rogue regimes. Cuba had not only behaved badly in wiping out the overwhelming U.S. economic and political presence on the island, but, at the height of the Cold War it had switched to Moscow's side and attempted to export its revolution to Latin America. In that context, both Republican and Democratic administrations had absolutely no basis or motivation to alter the outlines of the policy established by Eisenhower and Kennedy and end the isolation and embargo of Cuba. On the contrary, throughout the 1960s there were even U.S. government sponsored attempts to destabilize the Castro government.

The experience of the Carter administration (1977-1980) with Cuba illustrates the overwhelming pressure and difficulties that obstructed any move to soften U.S. policy. To date, Carter has been the only U.S. President to make a concerted effort to normalize relations with the island.

He opened the U.S. Interests Section in Havana and authorized the establishment of a Cuban Interests Section in Washington. But in the late 1970s, Cuba continued to behave badly, from the U.S. perspective, by committing a burgeoning number of troops to Africa. After those troops entered Ethiopia, the Carter administration found it very difficult to justify making any positive overtures to Havana, much less lifting the embargo and normalizing relations.

Until 1980, it was therefore Washington, waging a Cold War and intent on punishing and destabilizing the government in Havana for its misdeeds, that carried the ball in pursuing the policy of hostility and isolation. Starting in 1980, however, a new set of forces and actors comes into play to help maintain, and even reinforce, that long-standing policy. It was the year that marked the beginning of a shift in the role of Cuban exiles from mere agents or implementers of U.S. policy to directors of Washington's actions towards Cuba.

The catalyst for the entry of Cuban exiles as principal players in the U.S.'s Cuba policy was the presidential election of 1980. The candidacy and election of Ronald Reagan in that year had two consequences: it dramatically increased the participation of Cuban-Americans in the U.S. electoral system, and it prompted the formation of an exile lobby group in Washington. Up until then, many Cubans in the U.S., especially the elderly, had been slow to apply for U.S. citizenship, and thus become eligible to vote, despite having long met the necessary requirements to do so. The reluctance was based on the persistence of an "exile" ethos, which caused them to focus on the affairs of the homeland, in the hope of a possible return in the future. Many Cubans in the U.S. have clung to an image of themselves as "reluctant" migrants, rejecting U.S. citizenship. The Reagan candidacy, however, made participation in the U.S. electoral system consistent with the exile agenda of recovering the homeland. The Republican candidate was viewed as an ideologically committed anti-Communist who would be really tough on Castro. Furthermore, it was important to vote against the incumbent, whose administration was perceived as disastrous for the exile's anti-Castro cause. Becoming U.S. citizens and voting in the presidential election, far from being an indication of assimilation in the U.S., was actually a strategy within the traditional exile agenda.

By the mid-to-late 1980s, this surge in electoral participation had created a noticeable Cuban-American voting bloc in Florida and, to a lesser extent, in

New Jersey, both key electoral states. Politicians quickly learned that those blocs were easily swayed by supporting a hard-line against the Cuban government. That tactic has been used widely by both Republican and Democratic candidates for Congress and the Presidency. A related development was the election of Cuban-Americans to Congress, starting in the late 1980s. These members of Congress, numbering three at present, have placed a priority on maintaining and strengthening current U.S. policy towards Cuba.

The election of Ronald Reagan helped to foster another important vehicle through which exiles could control the direction of U.S. policy towards Cuba. By 1980, a successful entrepreneurial class with accumulated surplus capital had emerged within the Cuban-American community. This new prosperity could be tapped to create a presence in Washington which would further the anti-Castro agenda, and the election of a president perceived as friendly to that cause seemed a propitious moment for such a step. This convergence of economic and political conditions made possible the creation of the Cuban American National Foundation (CANF).

Up until the founding of the CANF, the principal exile organizations were engaged in strategies that can best be described as marginal, or even shadowy: covert activities, terrorism, street demonstrations, boycotts, and so forth. The CANF, however, followed the traditional formula of legitimate U.S. interest groups: campaign contributions, political fundraisers, lobbying, information dissemination, media relations, etc. It was anti-Castroism in "the American way." With offices in Washington and Miami, during the 1980s and into the early 1990s the CANF occupied the

centre stage in the Cuban-American community's struggle against the Cuban government.

CANF members are typically successful business people who have made their wealth in the U.S. and give thousands of dollars annually to further the organization's work. The ultimate goal of their lobbying efforts is to overthrow the Castro government through a policy of hostility and isolation spearheaded by the United States. The CANF played a critical role in the passage of both the 1992 Cuban Democracy Act (the "Torricelli Act") and the 1996 Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity (Libertad) Act (the "Helms-Burton Act"), both of which tightened the U.S. embargo on Cuba. It was largely responsible for the establishment in the late 1980s of Radio and TV Martí, stations under the auspices of the U.S. government that broadcast to Cuba.

Starting in 1980, however, a new set of forces and actors comes into play to help maintain, and even reinforce, that long-standing policy. It was the year that marked the beginning of a shift in the role of Cuban exiles from mere agents or implementers of U.S. policy to directors of Washington's actions towards Cuba.

THE FORCES FOR CHANGE IN THE U.S.'S CUBA POLICY

In the past decade, the strongest force for change in U.S. policy towards Cuba has been the transformations of the post-Cold War era. The collapse of centrally-planned economies in Eastern and Central Europe and the subsequent realignments in the world's economic and political order have made the U.S.'s Cuba policy grossly archaic in the eyes of many. Cuba was plunged into a severe economic crisis as a result of the loss of aid and subsidized trade from the former Soviet bloc. With the island in such dire straits, and with its military and security activities drastically curtailed, it became increasingly difficult to see Cuba as a threat to the United States, especially with the end of Cold War confrontations.

The economic crisis that enveloped Cuba in the early 1990s (the "Special Period", as it is called in Cuba), forced the government to allow foreign investment in Cuba under joint operating agreements between foreign corporations and the state. European and Canadian capital entered the island, substantially changing the complexion of a centrally planned economy. U.S. corporations with an interest in Cuba watch unhappily as these foreign competitors obtain a foothold on the island, while they are kept from doing business there due to the embargo. Given the absence of any clear national security interest in keeping Cuba isolated, throughout the 1990s there was an ever-increasing questioning of the wisdom of continuing the policy. The current move to allow the sale of medicines and food to Cuba stems precisely from a growing awareness that the U.S. is losing potential markets in the island. This trend has also manifested itself in the increasing percentage of Americans, as reflected in public opinion polls, which seem to favour a new policy towards Cuba. It is safe to say that among U.S. business leaders (and in the U.S. population as a whole) there is currently a majority that supports the end of the current Cold War relationship with Cuba. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce, as well as delegations of local and Congressional leaders from various parts of the U.S., have visited Cuba and returned with criticisms of the current U.S. policy. Other sectors of U.S. society, notably academics and humanitarian groups, have long advocated changes to that policy.

The fall of the Berlin Wall also had a particular impact on the political landscape of the Cuban community in the U.S. Cuban exiles that had long struggled to overthrow an entrenched Communist regime, now had in Eastern Europe an operational model of how such a thing might

be accomplished. Rather than the overnight "rupture" scenario traditionally envisioned by the exiles, the new model seemed to involve an evolution that might be led by elements from within the system, a process that could be helped by openness rather than hostility. Consequently, some Cuban-Americans, including some traditional hard-liners, began to espouse a strategy of promoting a relaxation of tensions with Havana and engaging elements within Cuba. The rise of this new orientation led in the 1990s to the establishment of several organizations, such as Cambio Cubano and the Cuban Committee for Democracy, that espouse an elimination of hostility and emphasise constructive relations with the Cuban government. These new organizations have been committed to a peaceful transition to democracy that would not be based on confrontation and hostility.

These developments served to broaden the ideological spectrum of Cuban exile politics, creating new voices that argued against a continuation of the current U.S. policy.

Although these new elements do not yet represent a majority opinion within the Cuban-American community, they have served to challenge what had been a monolithic image of exile politics, providing support for initiatives that challenge the traditional course of U.S.-Cuba relations.

Perhaps an even greater challenge to the continuation of a policy of isolation towards Cuba has been the large number of Cuban-Americans whose only motivation is to visit and help family and friends on the island. This group of people represents a major point of contact between the two countries. Remittances and family visits provide Cuba with more foreign exchange than

its tourism industry, with estimates ranging between U.S. \$400 million to U.S. \$800 million annually.

The rise of these new tendencies within the Cuban-American community has coincided with the decline in the influence of the Cuban American National Foundation during the past couple of years. The death in 1997 of Jorge Mas Canosa, the CANF's founder and leader, left a void that has been difficult to fill, even by his anointed successor, his son, Jorge Mas Santos. The elder Mas was a shrewd and talented political figure who was able to further the organization's agenda in Washington at the same time that he appealed to the CANF's constituency in Miami. In addition to Mas' death, the CANF has also suffered recently from its own past successes. The passage of the Helms-Burton Act in 1996, which CANF helped push through Congress, essentially left the organization without an agenda in its

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most active arena: the U.S. Congress. After Helms-Burton, there was little else for the group to do on Capitol Hill, except defend what had been enacted. The saga of Elián González has further weakened the position of the CANF, not only in Washington but, more importantly, in Miami. Its reputation in Miami as an organization with clout in Washington suffered a setback when Foundation leaders were evidently unable to influence the U.S. government's decision to return the child to his father, despite Jorge Mas Santos' personal involvement as an advisor to the child's Miami relatives.

THE BALANCE SHEET

The above presentation of the forces for inertia and for change can be summarized in the following balance sheet of factors underlying U.S. policy towards Cuba:

Forces favouring inertia:

- The long-standing hostility of the U.S. government towards the Castro regime, seeking to punish and overthrow the Havana government for the confiscation of U.S. property on the island, its alliance with the Soviet Union, and its foreign adventurism.
- The growth of Cuban-American electoral strength in the key states of Florida and New Jersey.
- The election to Congress of Cuban-Americans committed to a hard-line stance towards Cuba.
- A substantial lobby effort in Washington by Cuban exiles to maintain and strengthen the embargo and to enact initiatives designed to pressure the Castro government.

Forces favouring change:

- The end of the Cold War and of the perceived threat to U.S. national security posed by Cuba as a Soviet ally and as a player in international conflicts, making the current policy toward the island appear archaic.
- The growing desire on the part of U.S. business concerns, especially agricultural interests, to compete with non-U.S. firms which in recent years have been encouraged by the Cuban government to invest in, and trade with, Cuba.
- The growing support in the U.S. Congress, especially among Republicans, for ending embargoes and for expanding overseas markets for American products.
- The rise within the exile community of ideological pluralism and family visits and remittances, forces that have recently eroded the monolithic influence

that Cuban-Americans have exerted in keeping the island isolated.

- The weakening of the influence of the CANF, an organization that had exerted a major influence in Washington during the 80s and 90s, on behalf of a policy of hostility towards Cuba.

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As one looks at the above balance sheet it may seem incomprehensible that, at least thus far, the forces of inertia have evidently had greater weight and have managed to maintain U.S. policy towards Cuba virtually intact for nearly forty years. Cuban-Americans, after all, do not represent the most important voting bloc in either Florida or New Jersey, and the three Cuban-American members of Congress only represent about one-half of one percent of the U.S. House of Representatives. The Cold War has long been over, and the Cuban-American lobbying effort in Washington is waning. At face value, those factors do not seem formidable enough to maintain a policy that is widely criticized within many influential circles in the U.S. How, then, can one

explain the apparently greater influence of the forces that favour maintaining the current policy?

A QUESTION OF PRIORITIES

The critical difference between the opposing forces on the balance sheet is in their priorities. While support may exist among business interests and other concerns in the U.S. for lifting the embargo and improving relations with the island, the status of U.S.–Cuba relations is not among their top priorities. By way of example, if a survey were conducted of the CEOs of the Fortune 500 companies regarding their views on Cuba policy, the vast majority would likely express their support for normalizing relations. But when those same corporate executives spend time with a member of Congress, or a member of the Cabinet, or even the President of the United States, they are not likely to even mention Cuba. In fact, for most Americans, Cuba is not on their radar screens, except when extraordinary events, such as the Elián story or a dramatic exodus from the island, bring Cuba to their attention. Furthermore, the U.S. electorate in general is not likely to judge candidates at any level of public office by their views on Cuba policy.

To be sure, many in the U.S. have demonstrated through the years a commitment to normalizing relations with Cuba, but they have lacked sufficient political clout to accomplish it. Indifference probably best describes the general sentiment in this country towards U.S.–Cuba relations. Even among those who could exert the

necessary political influence and have voiced support for changing the policy, there has apparently been an unwillingness to engage in the heavy lifting required to do so. Evidently, Cuba has not represented a substantial economic or political prize to merit actively pursuing a change in the course of U.S.–Cuba relations. It has simply not been a political priority for those who favour change.

In contrast, the Cuba issue is the only priority for the exile community. When Cuban-American exile leaders, local officials, or members of Congress have access to a member of the Cabinet, or a U.S. State Department official, or even the President of the United States, they will talk about Cuba first, and then they will talk about Cuba some more. As is the case with the foes of abortion or gun control, the impact of anti-Castro exiles demonstrates what a highly committed single-issue constituency can accomplish, even if it may represent only a minority view within U.S. public opinion. Cuban-American voters, for example, have demonstrated a penchant for judging candidates for public office, at all levels, according to the views they may hold on Cuba and U.S.–Cuba policy, over and above any other issue. The clearest example of this is the overwhelming support that the newly-naturalized Cuban-American elderly gave to Ronald Reagan at the polls in 1980 and again in 1984, despite the disastrous consequences of his administration for government programs designed to assist senior citizens. As the Elián case demonstrated, this phenomenon explains why even local officials in Miami must adhere to an anti-Castro line, even if it may conflict with their responsibilities in managing their localities. This is also why the Cuban-Americans in the U.S. Congress have as their priority maintaining current policy, and why presidential candidates are loathe to take a contrary stand on an issue that is capable of swaying a respectable bloc of voters in two key electoral states. That fact of presidential politics must be seen in the context of the point made earlier: the low priority that Cuba has among the U.S. electorate in general. There is simply no political advantage in urging an end to the embargo and calling for a normalization of relations.

These electoral realities are reflected in the exiles' lobbying efforts in Washington. There has thus far not been a focused or sustained lobbying effort to change Cuba policy that is comparable to that of the CANF and other anti-Castro groups that operate in Washington. As one State Department official once put it: "On Cuba, we do listen more to the CANF than to anyone else. We have to, they are the only ones who are always in our

face." The anti-Castro lobby benefits not only from the absence of a significant opposition, but also from the fact that they are not working to change policy, but to maintain it.

THE PROSPECTS FOR CHANGE IN THE FUTURE

Given the unequal balance toward the forces that defend the current U.S. policy, is this policy destined to continue indefinitely or at least for the foreseeable future? At times, it appears that way. Despite the aftermath of Elián and the current strength of anti-embargo, pro-trade forces, it appears that changes in U.S. Cuba policy

will come very grudgingly. The pro-embargo forces, even at the nadir of their influence, were successful in significantly weakening the bill that partially lifted the embargo on food and medicines, attaching an amendment that prohibits U.S. institutions from financing sales to Cuba.

There is nevertheless some basis for optimism for those who advocate lifting the embargo and normalizing relations with the island. The analysis above suggests that the pro-embargo exile forces are not inherently powerful, but that they are influential because they are the only committed players on the field. The playing field of U.S.–Cuba relations has largely been left vacant by those who might have the interest and the influence to change policy. The prospects

for change therefore rest on the possibilities that such an interest, rooted in economic, trade, immigration, or national security concerns, might grow sufficiently in the future to overcome the pressures to keep the embargo.

The China-Taiwan case illustrates such a change in scenarios. Prior to 1971, the pro-Taiwan lobby was seen as extremely powerful, preventing any U.S. rapprochement with China. However, once Richard Nixon decided that U.S. national security interests were served by travelling to China, the Taiwanese lobby was no longer able to keep the previous policy on course.

In the Elián case, the Clinton administration was determined to return the boy to his father, guided by what it perceived as the law, parental rights, and the weight of U.S. public opinion. It therefore paid scant attention, even in an electoral year, to the outcry and strong pressure applied by Cuban exiles in Washington and in the streets of Miami. A more telling example occurred in the spring of 1995, when the U.S. was facing the prospect of a long, hot summer in Cuba with 35,000 Cuban rafters in makeshift quarters at the naval base in Guantanamo. The warnings of the U.S. military regarding the volatility

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of the situation, urgently relayed to the White House by members of Congress visiting the base, led to the decision to admit the rafters into the U.S. To mollify anti-immigrant sentiments in the U.S., as well as to stop the migration at its source, the U.S. secretly negotiated an agreement with the Cuban government to return to the island any future rafters interdicted at sea by the Coast Guard. It was anticipated that the agreement would be strongly denounced in Miami (as indeed occurred when was announced), but that did not prevent the Clinton administration from forging ahead with the secret talks and entering into an agreement, totally ignoring anti-Castro exiles. In that case, the development of a sufficiently strong reason for approaching and even negotiating with the Cuban government effectively trumped the influence of those exiles.

Unless something unforeseen and dramatic occurs (something that can never be discounted when it comes

to Cuba), it is likely that the forces for changing U.S. policy will grow in influence and urgency. The passage of time is in itself a powerful ingredient, making the policy progressively more archaic. The forces that arose during the first half of 2000 may well be the beginning of a defining shift in U.S. policy. José Cárdenas, a CANF official in Washington, admitted as much in *The Miami Herald* on June 25: "The farm lobby and 'big business' coming together have definitely altered the political landscape... For the first time, there is a stalwart, bona fide movement against sanctions." Another pro-embargo source, an aide to a Cuban-American member of Congress, gives perhaps the best summary assessment of the situation of those who support the current policy: "It's like living in a castle under siege. We're safe now, but over the years the continued pounding is weakening the foundations. I don't know how long we can last."

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