

# Myths about Cuba

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## Abstract

Cuba is not perfect. Blocaded and subjected to the unrelenting harassment and aggression by the most powerful military machine of the history of humanity for five decades cannot avoid suffering from deficiencies, shortages, distortions, inefficiencies and other difficulties. However, since literally 1959, the Cuban revolution has been subjected to a defamation campaign that has managed to embed a demonized depiction of her reality in the brains of millions of innocent consumers of mass media “information”. This “achievement” has been repeated for five decades and the essential elements of such a depiction are that the Cuban regime is essentially an obsolete, fossilized, crumbling, totalitarian communist dictatorship headed by a megalomaniac, bloodthirsty tyrant. Such depiction, or varieties of it, contribute to shape public opinion which helps justify US policy against the island and significantly obfuscates ordinary people’s understanding of the complexities of the Cuban revolution, including the almost totality of the enormous amount of positive features of the revolution.

His article aims at deconstructing this fallacious though no less powerful mythology that has been constructed about Cuban reality, not an easy task that sometimes reminds us of Thomas Carlyle biographer of Oliver Cromwell, who said he “had to drag out the Lord Protector from under a mountain of dead dogs, a huge load of calumny.” All proportions guarded, it must have been much easier for Carlyle to remove the mountain of dead dogs from the memory of Cromwell than to undo the infinite torrent of calumnies that falls on Cuba, when the object of enquiry is not even yet dead, nor has it fallen into oblivion as it had occurred with the 17<sup>th</sup> century English revolutionary by the time of Carlyle.

*Key words:* Cuba. Revolution. Reality.

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## Introduction

On February 19, 2008, Fidel Castro announced that he was retiring as the head of state of Cuba, post he held for nearly half a century, news which has been welcome with a large number of articles in the world media openly welcoming his political departure from the reins of power in the Caribbean island and expressing the desire that this be followed by a “democratic transition”. The “transition” of power from Fidel to his brother and a collegiate team, which began with his sudden illness back in July 2006, has taken place in an orderly manner, carried out through existing legal, political constitutional procedures, has provoked no crisis or anxiety of any kind whatsoever in Cuba itself, has had no economic effect at all, and has left the Bush administration in the position of powerless if hostile observer incapable of having influence in the process that his departure may have unleashed. Interestingly, most of the corporate media has covered the event with an unusual modicum of balance.<sup>1</sup> It feels as though the media, as well as everybody else, are being compelled to distance themselves and take a longer view in order to better comprehend why and how did Fidel Castro both manage to last so long in power and arrange such a calm and untroubled transfer of the reins of government. In interview with *Democracy Now*, Peter Korbluh of the National Security Archive summed up the pundits’ bewilderment thus:

I think its is a momentous occasion because rulers like Fidel Castro somewhat traditionally leave power in a coffin or during a military coup, I mean here he has basically I think kept his legacy of revolutionary leadership by leaving under his own terms by helping to usher in a very smooth transition, almost seamless transition to his brother and to younger disciples of both Castros who I think will emerge on Sunday [24 Feb, 2008] and in the days thereafter to lead Cuba. So Castro has not only lived to see the institutionalization of his revolution and the passage of power peacefully to another generation.<sup>2</sup>

Many an analyst and pundit explains this away by – grudgingly – recognising Fidel’s exceptional qualities and seek an understanding of Fidel himself in psychological portraits which will add little to our understanding of the reasons for the political longevity of the revolution. A more fruitful approach would be to try to explain Fidel – notwithstanding his exceptional qualities – by looking at the revolution rather than the other way around. This is what we endeavour in this article.

## Ajaundiced view

Ever since the collapse of the Soviet Union, there has been a systematic effort on the part of anti-Cuban publicists to paint Cuba in the worst possible light which at its worst goes like this: the Cuban regime is essentially an obsolete, fossilized, crumbling, totalitarian communist dictatorship headed by a megalomaniac, bloodthirsty tyrant. Such depiction, or varieties of it, both contribute to shape pu-

blic opinion which helps justify US policy against the island and significantly obfuscates ordinary people's understanding of the complexities of the Cuban revolution, including its many strong points.<sup>3</sup>

Understanding the relationship between the spread of the view that Cuba is a decrepit dictatorship run by the tyrannical rule of one man that does not have the support of the Cuban people and US foreign policy towards Cuba is crucial. The majority consensus in the US on Cuba is maintained, legitimised and perpetuated by such myths. In fact, most things about Cuba cannot be understood unless they are placed within the geopolitical context the Caribbean island finds itself in. It has been said with some fairness that the tragedy of Cuba is to be so far from God and so close to the United States. This can be demonstrated not only in connection with the overwhelming presence and influence of the United States on Cuba since 1959, but in the close relationship between the two nations going back well into the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. As early as the 1810s John Quincy Adams and President Thomas Jefferson advocated the annexation of Cuba because it was a natural frontier of the United States and indispensable for the security of the Gulf of Mexico.<sup>4</sup> Ever since, United States leaders have never quite abandoned the idea that Cuba is integral to their geopolitical system and their geography. In the 1840s-1850s President Polk, whilst busily annexing Texas and then half of Mexico (California, Nevada, Arizona, Utah, New Mexico), was offering US\$ 100 million to Spain for the cession of

Cuba to the Union. Polk also encouraged and/or turned a blind eye on the activities of Narciso López, leader of the Cuban oligarchic political movement known as *annexationism*, which aimed at annexing Cuba to the US through military expeditions, organised from US territory. In 1853 US President Franklin Pierce offered Spain US\$ 130 million for Cuba without success. US territorial expansion came to a temporary halt between 1861 and 1865 due to the Civil War, but continued immediately after that when in 1867 the US purchased Alaska from Russia for US\$ 7.2 million. In 1887 President Grover Cleveland proposed Brazil the establishment of a *Zollverein*, a custom union between the two countries. And in 1889, the US organised the second Pan-American Conference, aimed at the adoption of a single US-dominated currency by all the countries in the continent. The commercial and military expansion of the United States after the Civil War was indeed staggering. By 1890 the US had the fourth largest navy in the world, was the second industrial power in the world, its capitals were vigorously seeking investment outlets and sources of raw materials. The Caribbean and Central America first, and then, the rest of the continent were the "natural" areas for the activities of US capital. By 1890 US capital controlled about 90% of the commercialisation of Cuba's sugar and about 50% of the Cuban land devoted to the cultivation of sugar cane.<sup>5</sup> So when in 1895 José Martí led the second war of national liberation, the United States was anxious to ensure that the nationalists would not be victorious. Thus, the

US militarily intervened to “help liberate” Cuba from Spanish despotism and repression. The result was 4 years of US military occupation (1898-1902) and the creation of the conditions to turn Cuba into a protectorate, which it effectively became in 1903 with the insertion of the Platt Amendment clause in the Cuban constitution by which the United States had the right to military intervention in the island, should Cubans “jeopardize” the hard-won independence from Spain. The US possession of the Guantanamo naval base stems directly from the 1898-1902 period of US colonialist intervention.<sup>6</sup> Cuba remained a US protectorate until Castro’s revolution in 1959. The last ambassador to Cuba, Earl T. Smith said in September 1960:

Until the advent of Castro, the United States was so overwhelmingly influential in Cuba that... the American Ambassador was the second most influential man in Cuba, sometimes even more important than the President [of Cuba].<sup>7</sup>

Since then, 10 Presidents of the United States have tried in different ways to overthrow the Cuban Revolution (without success thus far). The need to legitimize domestically and justify externally this policy of aggression against a sovereign nation has led to one of the most ferocious and longest propaganda campaigns ever undertaken against an underdeveloped country. The essential view in Washington on Castro’s Cuba has remained unchanged ever since President Eisenhower ordered preparations for a US-sponsored military invasion back in 1959-1960. This stance was in Washington’s view amply

confirmed by the events surrounding the October 1962 missile crisis. As the Cuban revolution unfolded after Castro’s coming to power, the US political establishment was gripped by a debate which was to lay down the foundations of the framework that would inform US policy towards Cuba for the next half a century. Democratic presidential candidate, John Kennedy, castigated the ‘softness’ of the Eisenhower administration towards the *Fidelista* threat describing the revolution as a: “Communist menace which has been permitted to arise only 90 miles away from the shores of the United States.” Republican presidential hopeful, Richard Nixon, retorted: “There isn’t any question but that the free people of Cuba – the people who want to be free – are going to be supported and that they will attain their freedom.”<sup>8</sup> At the time *The Wall Street Journal* reported “There are at least fifty different Cuban bands conspiring here” and “there is every indication that at least some [of them] are being allowed to function without much, if any interference”. In a later edition the Journal reported: “[...] it’s no secret that this country is already furnishing weapons and supplies to anti-Castro forces in central Cuba’s Escambray mountains and training counter-revolutionaries in Florida and Guatemala.”<sup>9</sup>

The US political establishment consensus on Cuba has not changed much since its beginnings in 1960 but has got significantly worse under the current Bush administration. One of its authoritative spokespersons on Cuban matters said in October 2003:

That Castro runs a dictatorship which denies Cubans their basic rights was not a surprise to us. But for many, it was a revelation, and one that has helped us all – Americans, and our allies around the world – to recognize that we all agree that the Cuban regime has betrayed its people politically and failed them economically. We recognize that the Cuban people will be best served by an end to the dictatorship, followed by a full transition to democracy characterized by open markets and the respect for human rights. Our commitment to helping Cubans achieve genuine democracy is an important unifying concept, drawing us together on an issue more often marked by disagreements.<sup>10</sup>

The US propaganda machine not only is very powerful but is far broader than just what is directly available to the government, and its message is echoed with additional strength – not only on Cuba – by the corporate media. There is no doubt that the media play a crucial role in buttressing the 50-year long consensus on Cuba.<sup>11</sup> But it is even broader than that. It has international dimensions both because the US corporate media (CNN, FOX, etc.) are multinationals of the information but also because a great deal of the world corporate media agree with the key political message emanating from the US government. Most analysis in the world media in the advanced countries contain some, sometimes all, and, at best, at least one of the above myths when reporting about Cuba. This is very much the case with British newspapers such as *The Guardian*, *The Independent*, certainly *The Times*, and *The Daily Telegraph*. One should add *The Financial Times*, and also

*The Economist*.<sup>12</sup> We have become accustomed to see in this reporting what is very much a Cold War framework, which finds echoes in many a politician, in Europe, and within some of the key political structures of the European Union. This is well prepared propaganda which is fed daily and relentlessly through the world media by a powerful, extremely well funded, overstaffed, and highly motivated propaganda apparatus of the US government with a coordinated structure with ramifications in the State Department, the US Congress, the CIA, the FBI, the National Endowment for Democracy and a range of para-state organisations such as the Cuban American National Foundation, as well as a rather large number of bodies around the world such as the Madrid-based Hispanic National Foundation and the International Foundation for Liberty, also based in Madrid. In Europe it involves Reporteurs Sans Frontiers, based in Paris, plus a myriad of pro-US states, such the Czech Republic, a few Central American countries, and occasionally countries such as Uzbekistan, Romania, or the Marshal Islands. This is a powerful array of forces, indeed.

An example of this in Great Britain took place on 31 May, 1992, when the *Sunday Times* magazine published a special feature on the “imminent” collapse of the Castro regime. The title was telling: *Gone to the devil*. Inside a picture of Fidel’s triumphal entrance to Havana in 1959 had the caption: “Cuba 1959: everything was going to be rosy. But far from becoming the flagship of communist utopias, Cuba has sunk to a rotting outpost, where the former

compadres live for a bowl of rice and beans each day. And they blame Fidel Castro.”<sup>13</sup> Notwithstanding the fact that Cuba’s economy faces structural difficulties, not all of which can be attributed to the collapse of the Soviet bloc, it is also true that Cuba has rather strongly recovered from near collapse and that, 16 years later, its system has not fundamentally changed and yet the corporate media prejudiced view of Cuba – such as the one quoted – persists so resiliently it is necessary to examine the key components of this view. This is what this paper endeavours to do.

Before delving into the matter it is necessary to reject the simplistic portrayal of Cuba by a few of its supporters abroad as a proletarian paradise where all workers know, write and recite poetry; where the people dream of Marti and Che everyday of their lives, where the rivers carry chocolate and where all the problems confronted by Cuba’s economy, society and politics is due to the island’s capitalist encirclement and or the result of some imperialist plot (or some version of this). This is clearly nonsense and, despite the intentions of its enthusiastic supporters, it tends to be unhelpful, mainly because it obscures the reality of Cuba by simplifying *ad absurdum* the country’s complexities. Cuba is a poor Caribbean country, with a strong legacy of colonialism in its economic and cultural structures (Cuba was, de facto, a colony until 1 January 1959), poor energetically, subjected, as other Third World societies to the ruthless and exploitative consequences of the international division of labour. Furthermore, Cuba’s

leaders and Fidel himself, have over the years pointed out the mistakes, distortions and difficulties associated with their own management of Cuban affairs.

## The mainstream, corporate media portrayal of Cuba

For the purposes of analysis we have divided the mainstream view of Cuba into four categories:

- 1) Totalitarian dictatorship. Fidel rules through the Cuban Communist party, which imposes its primacy through the all powerful state security apparatus, and a neighbourhood-based spying system over a population who are denied of their most basic human rights.
  - a) The oppression of the Cuban people by this dictatorship is so great that only repression keeps them from rising up against this tyranny; thus Fidel is kept in power by his feared state security apparatus.
  - b) Cuba is full of political prisoners who are imprisoned because of their political views and the island is just a gigantic concentration camp; some of these publicists even suggest that Fidel is worse than Hitler.
- 2) Fidelfobia. Everything begins and ends with Fidel; once he is gone, the whole of the revolution will go with him; varieties or sub-varieties of this myth are:

- a) Fidel decides everything: the economy, politics, foreign affairs, agriculture, biotechnology, cinema production, sports, rubbish collection, even street potholes.
  - b) The death of Fidel will lead to the complete disorganisation of the state apparatus which will split along fractions of power lines, with the army, the party leadership, the trade unions, the enterprise managers, the privateers, entrenching themselves as warring factions, situation which will lead to a civil war, thus necessitating the military intervention of the United States.
  - c) Leaders of these very same state institutions are just waiting for Fidel to go so that they can begin the process of capitalist transformation of society along the lines of the corrupt misappropriation of state assets that took place in Eastern Europe.
- 3) The Cuban economy, because it is socialist, is full of distortions, irregularities, inefficiencies, maldistribution, clogged-up state bureaucracy and stifling norms and regulations and has been kept going for so long just due to Soviet aid; private enterprise, however small, is transforming it from the bottom up.
- a) The emergence of the market and of private enterprise is going to make capitalism break out vigorously in the island; *The Economist* has even suggested that it would take 45 minutes to restore capitalism in the island: the time a flight from Miami to Havana takes.
  - b) The market reform has turned Cuba into a massive bordello where thousands if not tens of thousands of women have turned to prostitution and everybody is involved in petty economic corruption.
  - c) In comparison with most Latin American countries Cuba has failed to improve the economic wellbeing of its population and has remained something like two decades behind. (c.f., Miguel Angel Centeno, Society or Latin American Studies key note speech at Leiden, Holland, April 2004); view also put forward in the *Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba* (May 2004), official document of the State Department oriented to achieve a transition to a market economy in Cuba.
  - d) Fidel uses the embargo to rally the population behind the regime using nationalist rhetoric; in the context of the small rise of a private sector in Cuba, the end of the embargo would show up the catastro-

phic economic failure of the communist regime thus bringing about its demise.

- e) The current embargo and hostility of successive US administrations towards Cuba is not so much the result of their deeply-seated resentment and annoyance at having a communist neighbour just 90 miles away, nor is it due to the small Caribbean island challenging the US hegemonic position in the region, but the inability (if not the impossibility) they have had to withstand the pressure of the Cuban-Americans and the strong lobbying activities organised around the Cuban American National Foundation.
- 4) Cuba's well developed biotechnology establishment and its chemical industries are used to develop biological and chemical weapons with the potential capacity for mass destruction with terrorist purposes against the United States and the rest of the free world. John Bolton, former US Undersecretary of Arms Control, has made this accusation several times. Other members of the Bush government, notably Roger Noriega, formerly in charge of Western Hemispheric Affairs, and Colin Powell, former State Secretary, have echoed it as many times. Cuba is a rogue state.

## Demystifying the myths

- 1) Totalitarian dictatorship. Fidel rules through the Cuban Communist party, which imposes its primacy through the all powerful state security apparatus, and a neighbourhood-based spying system over a population who is denied of their human rights.

This is the most favourite myths and it forms part of many an assumption of both young career as well as seasoned journalists in the media in many countries when reporting on Cuba. This framework is aimed at creating in the reader/viewer the impression that the Cuban population live in total fear for their lives, jobs, housing and freedom and can be (and are) arbitrarily arrested or imprisoned and/or maltreated for the slightest deviation from the political or social state/party dictated behaviour. An all-powerful and omnipresent state security apparatus ensures total an abject compliance to communist rule in the island.

As with everything else Cuban the reality is far more complex. Cuba is not a liberal democracy where citizen's participation counts only once every four or six years. With regards to a politically active citizenship, Cuba's system compared say, to the United States, might be deemed to fare better since in order for an individual to become a representative of the people, does not require him or her to be a millionaire. And in Cuba it matters less whether you are black, white or anything in between, whereas, in the United States, the record on race discrimination le-

aves a great deal to be desired. Furthermore, the level of electoral participation in Cuba is immensely higher than in the United States where ordinarily, Presidents can be elected with as low as 26% of the electorate. And where, sometimes significant levels of fraud are required, such as in the 2000 election of George W. Bush when the disenfranchising of Blacks, Latinos and pensioners in the state of Florida took place on scandalous levels. In the general elections of 1992-1993 in Cuba, only 0.27% of the population abstained, 3.03% of the ballots were blank, 3.97% were spoiled, and 93.26% were positively cast. In the 1997-1998 general elections the electoral trends remained almost unchanged: 1.65% abstention, 3.30% blank, 1.65% spoiled ballots, and 93.41% of votes positively cast.<sup>14</sup> The regime has been obtaining the lowest percentages of support in Havana which, by being the capital city, concentrates the worst problems regarding transport, housing, food distribution, electricity supply, health care, and so forth. To the sceptics who would refuse to believe this as a genuine expression of the Cuban people's will, one can only point out the fate of the Soviet Union or Eastern Europe, where not even the most repressive measures or skilfulness of those in power, were able to stem the surge of opposition to the regime. Once the people withdrew their support from the regime, nothing can really stop its downfall. As evidence of the huge amount of popular support the revolution enjoys, the Pope's visit to Cuba in 1995 which, to many an observer, was to trigger, as in Poland, a process of mass di-

sobedience that would end the Castro regime, produced no political complications of any serious kind to the regime. It must be borne in mind that these elections and the Pontiff's visit took place in a context of the loss of 85% of foreign trade, an immensely strengthened economic embargo by George Bush Senior, a decline of about 35-40% of its GDP, and near to total economic isolation between 1991 and 1994. There is no question that the Revolution enjoys enormous popular support.

Characteristics of the Cuban political and electoral system:

- Universal, automatic, and free voter registration for all citizens with the right to vote, from 16 years of age.
- Direct nomination of candidates by the voters themselves in public assemblies (in many countries the political parties nominate the candidates).
- Non-existence of discriminatory, expensive, offensive, defamatory, and manipulated electoral campaigns.
- Absolutely clean and transparent elections. The ballot boxes are guarded by children and young pioneers [*like our boy scouts*] are sealed in the presence of the population, and the votes are counted in public, open to national and foreign press, diplomats, tourists, and everyone who wishes.
- The requirement that election be by majority. A candidate is elected only upon receiving more than 50%

of valid votes cast. If this result is not achieved in the first round, the top two vote-getters will go to a second round.

- The voting is free, equal, and secret. All Cuban citizens have the right to vote and to be elected. As there is no party list, votes are cast directly for the desired candidate.
- All representative bodies of state power are elected and replaceable.
- All elected officials must account for their actions.
- All elected officials can be recalled at any time during their term.
- Legislators are not professionals, and as such do not receive a salary.
- A high rate of public participation in elections. In every election since 1976, more than 95% of those eligible have voted. In the 1998 election for Deputies, 98.35% voted. 94.98% of the ballots cast were valid, 1.66% were annulled, and only 3.36% were blank. [*Blank ballots are considered to be votes against the system, and invalid ballots are widely viewed in a similar manner, though as we saw in Florida they may also result from voter error*].
- Deputies to the National Assembly (Parliament) are elected for a term of 5 years.
- The make-up of the Parliament is representative of the most diverse sectors of Cuban society.
- One deputy is elected for every 20,000 inhabitants or fraction over 10,000. All municipal territories are represented in the National Assembly, and the nuclear base of the system, the electoral circumscription, actively participates in its composition. Every municipality will elect at least two deputies, and beyond that a number in proportion to the population. 50% of the deputies must be delegates of the electoral circumscriptions, and those delegates must live in the territory of that circumscription. [*The electoral circumscription is the lowest-level (i.e. local) elected body*].
- The national Assembly elects the Council of State and its president, who in turn is both Head of State and Head of Government. This means that the Head of Government must be elected twice: first by popular vote as a deputy, in free, direct, and secret vote, and then by the deputies, also in a free, direct, and secret vote.
- As the National Assembly is the supreme organ of state power, and the legislative, executive, and judicial functions are subordinate to it, the Head of State and Government cannot dissolve it.
- Legislative initiative is the privilege of multiple actors of the society, not just the deputies, the Supreme Court, and the *Fiscalía*, [*Prosecutor's Office*] but also of workers', students', women's, and social organizations as well as the citizens themselves, requiring in

this case that at least 10,000 citizens with the right to vote exercise the initiative.

- Laws are submitted to a majority vote of the deputies. What is specific to the Cuban method is that a law is not brought to a discussion of the plenum until such time, by means of repeated consultations with the deputies, and taking into account the proposals they have made, as has been clearly demonstrated that there is majority consent for its discussion and approval. The application of this concept acquires greater relevance when it involves the participation of the population, together with the deputies, in the analysis and discussion of strategic issues. In these occasions the Parliament moves to centers of labor, of students, and of *campesinos*, giving life to direct and participative democracy (from the Cuban constitution).<sup>15</sup>

There is another reason why people support the revolution. Cuba's popular democracy operates in tandem with the socio-economic rights of the population, that is, the country's political representation at the parliamentary and political level is a pretty accurate reflection of the social and economic structure of the population. This means that individual deputies have an obligation but also an incentive in defending the specific interests of the group of people they represent if they are to be elected in the first place, let alone re-elected, i.e., students, workers, professionals, have

the political and constitutional means to have their interests promoted at the highest political level. Furthermore, the level of renewal of deputies at the 1997-98 election shows a vigorous citizen's participation: 62.07% of the deputies were not re-elected showing that the Cuban political system does not suffer from fossilization. The total number of deputies is 609 and they originate from all quarters of life, socially, ethnically, geographically, professionally, and gender-wise. 35.96% (219) are women, 99.1% (603) have had university and secondary education; 32.84% (200) are black or mulatto; 144 deputies work in production and services, 3 are religious leaders; 21 are researchers; 38 work in the field of culture; 40 are members of the armed forces; 68 are leaders and officials of the communist party and the UJC; 57 are mass and students organisations cadre; 47 work in the judiciary; 150 are leaders of the local Popular Power Committees; and 67 of the latter, are presidents or vice-presidents of Popular Councils.<sup>16</sup>

Furthermore, there is another, less formal, mechanism available to the Cuban people. When and if the authorities have implemented something they dislike or disagree with, they make it unworkable or discuss it with the relevant authorities until the latter budge. A North American scholar has researched into the latter, showing how these informal means always end up sending the right signal to pretty receptive authorities.<sup>17</sup> There was a manifestation of the latter with the nation-wide discussion about the austerity economic policy to be adopted in order to

face the near-catastrophic crisis brought about by the collapse of the Soviet Union. “During the economic crisis in the 1990s, more than 3.5 million Cubans participated in 80,000 assemblies in which one million speakers took the floor, raising 500 issues.”<sup>18</sup> And the original proposal was modified in favour of working people. One would be hard put to find any government in the world prepared to have that broad level of national consultation to discuss an economic austerity package that must be adopted, let alone, a government ready to amend the policy in the light of the discussion in favour of working people.

Additionally, the high level of education of the population makes it unlikely and unfeasible the erection and/or the perpetuation, with any credibility, of a totalitarian police state (in Cuba or anywhere else for that matter), particularly because sciences, humanities, arts, and other subjects, unlike in the Soviet bloc, were not restricted by a state ideological dogma. Cuba has 40 universities, dozens of technical and technological institutes, and hundreds of research centres of every variety. All of them have a vibrant intellectual life, with published journals, annual conferences, scientific papers, articles, reviews, debates and such like, publicized widely to the community in the respective academic or scientific disciplines. A number of them enjoy a well deserved reputation. There is additionally a vigorous debate going on all the time about the state of the economy, the assessment of existing policies, the balance or otherwise of the macroeconomic factors, foreign investment,

industrial production, the private sector, levels of employment, the impact and distribution of dollars among the population, and so forth. One can mention the *Centro de Estudios de la Economía Mundial*, the *Centro de Estudios de la Economía Cubana*, and the *Centro de Investigaciones de la Economía Internacional*, and the journals *El Economista* and *Cuba Siglo XXI*, among many others that confirm these assertions. Such a context is not conducive to the establishment of a police state.

Paradoxically the geographical proximity of the United States and its highly aggressive and hostile stance acts as deterrence against generalized repression by the Castro regime against the population of the island. Were such levels of repression to be unleashed it would politically alienate a sizeable section of the people, thus creating a potential mass base for US military intervention. It is because such levels of repression do not exist that the United States has been unable to seriously undermine the huge prestige and credibility the Cuban Revolution has among its own people. Seen the issue in this light it becomes understandable why Fidel and the Cuban regime have maintained the allegiance of the population for so long.

Any mistake or miscalculation (one is bound to remind oneself of the tragedy surrounding the Grenadian Revolution) is likely to trigger the most ferocious and devastating US military aggression against the island. The integrity and safety of the revolution has been the result of ensuring maximum political unity within the island, hence the single party. It is unima-

ginable that any other political party in Cuba will not be used by the United States and its allies as the legitimating vehicle to destabilize and ultimately overthrow the revolution. The single party regime is, of course, unsatisfactory and controversial and it is the one feature that gives credence to the charges of totalitarian dictatorship. However, in the light of its own 50 years of experience with the United States, the Cuban government, with plenty of justification, has been ruling a country under siege. Suffice to mention the proven US or US-sponsored 638 assassination attempts on Fidel's life, the longest and most comprehensive economic blockade ever imposed on any nation in time of peace, one military invasion, regular threats of military attack, a long catalogue of terrorist attacks, including chemical and biological warfare, economic sabotage, and an aggressive media policy in the form of Radio and TV Marti, all amply documented, to understand the consequences for political pluralism that the desperate search for absolute unity of the people under such circumstances has had.<sup>19</sup>

2) *Fidelfobia*. Everything begins and ends with Fidel. Once he is gone, the whole of the revolution will go with him.

*Fidelfobia* has a grain of truth in that the Cuban Revolution is so intimately associated with the *Líder Máximo* that it is unimaginable to think of it without him being at its centre. The fact that this has been the case for 49 years makes the myth all more credible. Furthermore, Fidel has a charismatic, overwhelming, fascinating

personality. Not through fault of himself he has been at the centre of controversy and of the fault lines of the East-West, capitalism-communism world divide in one of its hottest epicentres on earth and in history for most of the post-war era. There have been several biographies of Fidel, most of which tend to portray him as a cunning, Machiavellian, egocentric individual whose main, if not only, objective is to have absolute political power and who would have engineered the gradual elimination from the Cuban political scene of alternative leaders such as Che Guevara or Camilo Cienfuegos, who might have contested the position of the *Líder Máximo* or whose charisma or prestige might have overshadowed him.

A couple of examples positing this view will suffice. In the inside cover of a biography of the Cuban leader written by Robert Quirk there is this gem: “[...] as Cuban Maximum Leader he insisted on meeting his visitors at odd hours long after midnight when they were edgy and most vulnerable.” In the same book we also find “from an early age he had exhibited a fascination with violence and with weapons – the larger the better. Not yet ten, he took aim at his mother’s chickens with a shotgun”.<sup>20</sup> You can imagine the rest of this biography. Even serious works such as Lea Anderson’s biography of Che put a sinister aura around the alleged disagreements between Fidel and Che over several issues, notably over alignment with the USSR, hinting that Fidel had managed to manoeuvre, persuade or cajole Che into accepting an internationalist mission in

the Congo in the 1964 as a way of “getting rid of him”. Che’s tragic guerrilla adventure in Bolivia was part of the same objective.<sup>21</sup> Jorge Castañeda’s *La Vida en Rojo* (biography of Che)<sup>22</sup> asserts that Fidel simply got rid of him. Another writer, who devoted important part of his life to do *Fidelfobia* and wrote exaggerations about Fidel for over 30 years, was Guillermo Cabrera Infante, a Cuban national, resident in London and a literary writer of exceptional talent. Many of his articles were compiled in a recent publication with the ingenious title *Mea Cuba*<sup>23</sup> where he suggests that death is the way of the Revolution “a revolutionary always digs graves. In fact, he does nothing but dig graves -most of the time other people’s graves, as has been amply proved by Stalin, Mao, and Fidel Castro”. His dislike for the Revolution that once he enthusiastically supported is unequivocal: “In Cuba dreams are the only private property. On the other hand nightmares are all nationalized.” His fixation is so great that at one point in the book he says that Cuba suffers from *Castroenteritis*. In fact, Cabrera Infante goes as far to assert that Fidel is worse than Hitler, which is not just preposterous but delirious. It is only very recently that some balance has been brought in with the documentary by Estela Bravo,<sup>24</sup> *Fidel, the untold story* (released as DVD in 2001) showed on British TV in 1999 to commemorate the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the revolution; or, the world-acclaimed documentary by Oliver Stone, *Comandante*.

The fact of the matter is that Fidel’s persona seems to provoke either unrestrai-

ned reverence or deep hatred. This stems from the enthusiasm or deep hostility that the Cuban revolution elicits around the world. Fidel can’t help it and he compounds the problem by remaining faithful to the original principles of the revolution.<sup>25</sup> Few mainstream politicians in the world can make the claim to have remained faithful to principles. The corporate media, wielding its enormous world influence, repeats versions of *Fidelfobia* almost daily. An article in *Time* magazine explained why by 1993 he was still in power. “Through a combination of charisma, national pride and repression, he still holds the island’s fate in his hands.”<sup>26</sup> *The Economist* stated “He is all that Cubans have, the personification of the state on which they have learned to depend.”<sup>27</sup>

Cuban reality, however, has shown conclusively, Fidel’s hugely symbolic and overarching presence notwithstanding, that the country is led by a well integrated collective leadership which runs the state machinery from the very top to the very bottom. It is simply folly to argue that Fidel decides everything. There are not enough hours in the day, enough days in the week or sufficient months in the year for him to be physically on top of everything that happens in every field. The cadre who are in charge of the ministries (now and before the collapse of the USSR) impress by their competence, know their field quite well, are efficient, rarely doctrinaire about the running of their individual ministries, are aware of international trends, and have a significant input into the decision-making process at the national level through the

National Assembly and the Council of Ministers. This is clearly the case in the economic field where José Luis Rodríguez, Minister of Economics, and Carlos Antonio Lage, Vice President, and architect of the current economic reform, are the key to how the economy is run. The same applies to the field of Foreign Affairs where Roberto Robaina previously and now Felipe Roque, both ministers of foreign relations, in conjunction with Ricardo Alarcón, President of the National Assembly, make also key inputs into the decision-making process to decide policy in this pretty important and delicate field. The same goes for Education, Health, Sports, Culture and so forth. Cuba, under the conditions of siege it is subjected to by the most powerful nation in the history of humanity, could simply not have survived and achieve the enormous development and successes in so many areas, had one individual run the state single-handedly as the myth suggests.

Furthermore, Cuba is a highly educated society whose manifestations can be found in all fields such as arts, painting, music, literature, cinema, philosophy, chemistry, biotechnology, medicine, social sciences, computing, and so forth. The international cinema festival held every year in Havana causes national and international interest, with long queues of Cubans who are keen to see and judge the latest Cuban and Latin American films. Cinema directors such as Santiago Alvarez, Sara Gómez and, the maestro, Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, are responsible for cinematic jewels such as “*Now*”, “*De cierta mane-*

*ra*”, “*Death of a bureaucrat*” and “*Strawberry and chocolate*”. With the exception of “*Now*”, the other three films take a critical look at various aspects of the revolution. The same applies to literature where to the traditional good quality stuff written by world-acclaimed Cuban writers such as Alejo Carpentier, José Lezama Lima, Virgilio Piñera and Lydia Cabrera, there is now a new generation of writers such as Leonardo Padura and Juan Pedro Gutiérrez as well as young poets such as the “*Novísimos*”.

True, when Fidel goes, Cuba will never be quite the same again. But to imagine, suggest or prophesy that once he is no more there will be chaos, civil unrest and disorganization which will require external or internal (or both) military intervention is just fantasy, just as much as the idea that the cadre immediately below him are biding their time for the moment of Fidel’s demise to proceed to restore capitalism in earnest.

3) The Cuban economy, because it is a socialist economy, is full of distortions, irregularities, inefficiencies, maldistribution, clogged up state bureaucracy and stifling norms and regulations and was kept going for so long just due to Soviet aid. Private enterprise, however small, is transforming it from the bottom up.

This myth has lost its appeal somewhat after the irrepressible rise of capitalism in the island its advocates have been predicting for the last 13 years, failed to materialise. However, it still informs the

media images of TV screens and newspapers around the world when dealing with Cuba. The basic idea is that Fidel socialist economics have brought ruin to the country and the economy of the beleaguered island. Words usually are accompanied by images of dilapidated buildings, 1950s US cars, people queuing up somewhere, shops with empty shelves and the like. These images continue to fill the pages of newspapers articles and TV news programmes when it is well known that since 1994 Cuba has been experiencing sustained economic growth, significant levels of foreign investment, re-invigoration of its agricultural and industrial sectors, strong expansion of its services sector, and steady and solid reinsertion into the world economy with strong links with the Western Hemisphere (except, of course, the US), the European Union, in particular and more recently, Venezuela and China.

Having said all of that, the economic difficulties faced by Cuba after the disappearance of the Soviet Union, especially in the period 1991-94, cannot be underestimated. Nor can it be argued that all of the economic problems Cuba has had began with the collapse of the Soviet bloc or be attributable exclusively to the US embargo, even though they do account for a large part of them. Although it was not entirely Cuba's fault, the excessive specialisation on sugar cane cultivation and sugar production, are responsible for some significant structural distortions the economic has had over a long period. There has undoubtedly been too much centralisation of economic decision-making, and, arguably,

Cuban socialism socialised too much of its economy back in the 1960s. These indeed led to inefficiencies, red-tape, distribution problems, bottlenecks, technological backwardness, and so forth. Nevertheless, no fair assessment of Cuban economic development will be possible without taking into account the distortions that the US blockade brings about, or the inordinate amount of resources that must be diverted into defence in readiness to the ever-present US military aggression. Cuba's economic inefficiencies and problems must be compared, however, to the much worse distortions, inefficiencies and absurdities of the economies of her capitalist neighbours in the rest of the continent. Looked at in this light Cuba is a good example of, at least, what not to do.

In terms of a national project of development, however, the Cuban experience is rather successful. No other Latin American country has been able to feed, house, give medical attention, educate, and guarantee a large number of social rights and benefits to their population as Cuba has. Cuba has more doctors and teachers per head of the population than any other country in the world. Cuba's infant mortality is one of the lowest in the world and it is lower than in Washington DC. The morbidity structure of the country resembles that of an advanced nation such as the United States' nor one which typifies those of the Third World.

Most efficiency gains made in the sugar industry during the Soviet period (essentially through mechanization) went to improve the socio-economic conditions

and raise the material and cultural levels of the population. And, although largely because of the US blockade there are shortages of basic medicines, “The island nation is at the cutting edge of biotechnology and amazes visiting scientists”, as stated in a heading of a *Financial Times* special supplement.<sup>28</sup> In terms of health provision Cuba compares well even with countries such as Great Britain. The statistics in the table are eloquent in this regard.

UK- Cuba medical statistic compared		
Population	UK	Cuba
	55 million	11.2 million
Health budget as % of GNP	8%	13%
Cost per capita	£750	£7
Nº of doctors	74,000	64,000
Nº of GPs	30,000	30,000
GP/patient ratio	1:20,000	1:600
Medical schools	12	21
Medical students annual intake	4,500	6,000
Nurses in local practice	10,300	37,000
Infant mortality	6/100,000	7/100,000
Children reaching 5 years	99%	99.1%
Life expectancy	M 74 / F 79	M 74 F 76

Source: Steve Wilkinson, “The threat is real – why we say Hands off Cuba”, Cuba Sí, Special Edition 2003, p. 5.

Additionally, Cuba has thousands of doctors and other technical workers assisting Third World countries. Cuba

maintains cooperative agreements within many sectors with 155 countries; more than 42,000 professionals and technicians are offering their services in 102 nations. Currently 53,000 young people from 89 countries are being trained in and outside of Cuba. The majority of the cooperative efforts being undertaken are related to health needs. More than 30,000 doctors and health techni-

cians are working in 71 countries in Latin America, the Caribbean and Africa. Cuban doctors provide medical attention to 60 million people around the world, offering services never before available in some of the most remote areas of these countries. With Cuban help, 300 million people have been treated, two million surgeries performed and nine million children vaccinated. Thirty ophthalmological centers have been built in eight Latin American and Caribbean nations. Operation Miracle, in cooperation with Venezuela, has returned the sight to thousands, and approximately 600,000 patients have benefited from surgery using the latest technology. Just recently this miracle has been extended to Africa.

In “2006-2007, more than 8,800 new health professionals received their degrees in Cuba, close to 1,800 from outside the country, in Medicine, Dentistry, Nursing and Health Technology. This year’s graduating class was the third from the Latin American School of Medicine (ELAM) and included eight students from the United States.”<sup>29</sup>

As to the predictions that the restoration of capitalism is just around the corner in Cuba, they thus far have proved to be thoroughly wrong. In fact, the statistics showed that the private sector, which has indeed grown significantly, represents about 25% of GDP, leaving 75% in which the state, directly or indirectly, is dominant. Furthermore, the dynamics of mainstream neo-liberal economics do not work in Cuba not only because it is based on socialist foundations but because the chief promoters of neo-liberalism on a world scale, namely, the IMF and the World Bank have no influence in Cuba.

That is, world capital is in no position to impose austerity packages on its population or privatisation programmes. A cursory look at the rest of Latin America (let alone Africa or India) and it becomes immediately apparent why the Cuban people cannot be blamed for not adopting capitalism. By 2003, 44% of the region's population (about 224 million people) had become massively impoverished.<sup>30</sup> Between 1970 and 2004 capitalism brought about a near-catastrophic decline in people's standard of living in Latin America. It is not Cuban socialism that has failed but IMF-inspired, Multinationals-led neo-liberalism that has. Argentina, once the IMF-show case in the region facing economic meltdown and unprecedented impoverishment in 2001 confirms this.

It is true that the economic reforms Cuba has been obliged to take in order to ensure the survival of the socio-economic and political gains of the revolution have had a significant negative impact on the levels of equality that used to exist previously in the island. Now some market mechanisms operate bringing with it unavoidable social differentials with some Cubans earning extra income in hard currency (especially those who service the tourist industry such as the *paladares*, family restaurants), or, particularly, independent farmers supplying the cities with foodstuffs. Additional to these groups there are musicians and artists and those who receive remittances from relatives in Miami, who sometimes get pretty large sums of money in hard currency. The essential division consists between Cuban earning hard currency and those earning pesos. Perhaps the most intractable

phenomenon that has arisen out of the market economic reform is *jineterismo*. Many think that *jineterismo* is identical to prostitution, but it is a broader problem. With the rise of tourism a layer of people have "specialised" on obtaining hard currency from tourists through semi-legal or simply illegal transactions, one of which is prostitution. These include from the smiling young man offering *Cohiba* cigars as tourists stroll the streets of Havana at exceptionally low prices, to women who accost them offering themselves as company of the escort type. It is literally impossible to establish with absolute accuracy the number of prostitutes in Cuba, and since the regime's crackdown in 1999 their numbers have declined significantly. Furthermore, the near-miraculous recovery of the economy has made prostitution less attractive to young women. Most information of knowledgeable sources put the figure at few thousand but they all point out that any figure is bound to be an underestimate. Nevertheless, it is significantly smaller than the numbers hostile reporting suggests. This is a far cry from the claim that in the late 1980s, Cuba began to promote its tourism industry to increase money coming into the country and began promoting its women as sensual, educated and eagerly willing to fraternize with foreigners, implying that the Castro's government had hit a gold mine: selling its women. "*The flesh trade is Havana's hottest commodity.*"<sup>32</sup> Even Bush took the matter up at a Tampa rally in Florida in June 2004 to secure the Cuban-American vote by saying "The dictator welcomes sex tourism".<sup>33</sup> In typical fashion, Bush did not feel the need to provide any evidence to back up the allegation.

The charge that Fidel likes the blockade to stay in place because it helps rally the population behind the regime is not true either. In this view, with the blockade gone, the demise of the regime will be certain in a matter of few months. The facts do not bear out such view. Cuba has tabled a resolution to the UN General Assembly condemning the blockade and demanding its immediate and unconditional lifting, for 16 consecutive years (last vote in November 2007 produced an even greater number in favour than previously: 184-4). Cuban authorities are busily seeking US commercial partners for when the blockade is actually lifted and trade between Cuba and the United States has grown under the very Bush administration like it did not since 1959.<sup>34</sup> The contention is just unalloyed propaganda.

Let's now deal with the argument used both in Capitol Hill and the White House that the Cuban-American lobby is so powerful and its techniques of lobbying so effective that US foreign policy towards Cuba has been hijacked by organizations such as the Cuban American National Foundation that even if the US President was willing to change policy towards the island, it would be unable to do so. This is just false, every administration since John Kennedy has made use of the exiles to engineer or justify its own foreign policy towards Cuba. Both Republicans and Democratic administrations alike know that the participation and endorsement of its Cuba policies by the exile community brings about a modicum of legitimacy in the eyes of its own depoliticized population. The links of the CANF, its terrorist activi-

ties against the Cuban state, and the CIA or State Department Cuba policies are many and close ones. From the Bay of Pigs to the Brothers to the Rescue, it is always the US state apparatus that invariably lies behind what the Cuban-Americans do. They have very little independence. It is unimaginable that the CANF would launch itself into the carrying out of terrorist actions against Cuba without the approval or endorsement of the CIA, the State Department, the Pentagon, and, where appropriate, the President himself.<sup>35</sup> The continuity of this type of US policies towards Cuba has been subject to informed criticism by Wayne Smith, once ambassador to Cuba and in charge of the Office of US interests in Havana for many years once the two countries broke off diplomatic relations.<sup>36</sup> At any rate, the Elian Gonzalez case demonstrated conclusively that Washington can, if willing, challenge and defeat a committed CANF-inspired anti-Cuban political campaign. Gore's pandering to them during the 2000 election only proves that nothing short of a break with CANF can begin to create the conditions for ending the Republican stronghold on Florida.<sup>37</sup> Conversely the opposite is the case (the state protection being furnished to the convicted terrorist Posada Carriles by the US authorities must be understood as a signal encouragement to the illegal anti-Castro activities of CANF and its allies).<sup>38</sup>

4) Cuba's well developed biotechnology establishment and its chemical industries are used to develop biological and chemical weapons with the potential

capacity for mass destruction with terrorist purposes against the United States and the rest of the free world. Cuba is a rogue state. John Bolton, former US Undersecretary of Arms Control has made this accusation several times already. Other members of the Bush government, notably Roger Noriega, in charge of Western Hemispheric Affairs, and Colin Powell, have echoed it as many times.

Cuba does not participate in terrorist activities of any kind whatsoever. Never has done. The obvious reason for not doing so is sheer survival: the moment the US can prove that Cuba has engaged in any terrorist activity it will unleash the most almighty military attack imaginable against the island. However, this is not the reason why the revolution has never embarked on such dangerous as well as suicidal path. It comes from a set of profound ethical values that are based on Martí's teachings. To be sure the revolution has participated in support (sometimes involving substantial military support) of Third World revolutionary movements in several continents, but it has always done so with exemplary integrity and legitimacy. Che Guevara not only said this many times but actually practiced it to the point of sacrificing his own life. Cuban internationalist support for African revolutionaries did not start nor stop in Congo in 1964-65, but continued up to the decisive contribution in the Mozambican and Angolan anti-colonialist revolutions of 1974-75 in these countries to the historic defeat of the South African Defence Forces at Cuito Cuanav-

ale in Angola in 1987.<sup>39</sup> It is a well known fact that Cuba's internationalist military intervention then hastened the demise of apartheid in South Africa and made the latter's illegal occupation of Namibia come to an abrupt end. It is for this very reason that upon obtaining his freedom Nelson Mandela visited Cuba in 1991 to thank Fidel and the revolution publicly for their support. At a mass rally in Cuba Mandela said that the role of Cuban internationalist volunteers in defeating South Africa's invasion of Angola was an "unparalleled contribution to African independence, freedom, and justice".<sup>40</sup> That was Mandela's very first trip abroad after coming out of prison. All internationalist activities of Cuba have had legitimacy and have been undertaken selflessly as part and parcel of the revolution's deep belief that the struggle against imperialism is international in nature and must be undertaken wherever it is possible in the planet.

Cuba, therefore, has challenged and continues to challenge US world supremacy not only by remaining a society with a human-centred socio-economic development rather than a nation dominated by the profit motive which so much pervades the modern world. Cuba's internationalism has the objective of contributing to the well being of the majority of humanity, whereas US military interventions are undertaken to defend the narrow interests of the narrowest group of people imaginable on a global scale and with a degree of violence and terror unparalleled in history. The regular, and by now electorally synchronised with the domestic US political calendar,

charges against Cuba of terrorism, the manufacturing of chemical and biological weapons of mass destruction to be used by Fidel against the United States, are simply false. John Bolton, US Undersecretary of Arms, made the accusation already in 2002, when he alleged that Havana had a “limited developmental offensive biological warfare research and development effort” and was exporting its technology to “rogue nations”. Then again in March 2004 when Bolton went even further and repeated that Cuba has long “provided safe haven for terrorists, and has collaborated in biotechnology – including extensive dual use technologies with BW applications – with state sponsors of terror”.<sup>41</sup> Colin Powell echoed such allegations (“We do believe Cuba has a biological offensive research capability”), despite the fact that former president Jimmy Carter, who visited the island and was taken to the installations, where allegedly such weapons were being produced, had said there was no evidence of Cuba exporting or producing technology that could be used for “terrorist” purposes.<sup>42</sup> After the ‘weapons of mass destruction’ fiasco in Iraq, there can be only one single purpose for high officials in the Bush administration to be banding about such accusations, they can with justification be interpreted as preparing US domestic and world public opinion to launch some kind of military attack against Cuba. In fact the US has been trying to do exactly the latter for over 40 years and, in the process, has itself engaged in large scale, sustained, illegal and unrelenting terrorist activity against Cuba.

Additionally, the United States is the only country in the world to have used nuclear weapons against defenseless civilians leading to tens of thousands of deaths, to have used chemical weapons in inordinately large quantities against Vietnam and Kampuchea whose effects are still wreaking havoc on innocent civilians. With regards to Cuba, The United States has secretly as well as publicly endorsed, financed, armed, trained and, continues to this day, foster all kind of illegal terrorist and para-terrorist activities of sections of the exile Cuban-American community in Miami, particularly, the Cuban-American National Foundation, Brothers to the Rescue, Omega 7 and such like. In fact as late as June 2004, “known terrorists from the Florida-based Comandos F4 paramilitary organization openly spoke of their preparations for an armed attack against Cuba” appeared on Miami TV Channel 41. They were dressed in military fatigues and spoke of training sessions of the group with AK47 semi-automatic weapons and to be ready to “carry out armed acts against the Cuban government”.<sup>43</sup> There is a clear policy of tolerance which only emboldens terrorist organizations such as Comandos F4, which is busily setting up a civil-military alliance of a continental scale with like-minded elements from Venezuela such as the *Junta Patriótica de Venezuela* to collaborate and “exchange intelligence and counterintelligence” in order to fight against Hugo Chávez, Fidel Castro and Lula da Silva.<sup>44</sup> Judy Orihuela, spokesperson for the FBI in Miami, when asked about the matter, said that Coman-

dos F4 are not a priority for them. In 2000 on occasion of a meeting during the 10<sup>th</sup> Summit of the Americas, Posada Carriles was “arrested, and later convicted, in Panama for plotting to assassinate Fidel Castro by blowing up an auditorium full of students”.<sup>45</sup> When it comes to Cuba US policies are double standards with a vengeance. If the US authorities had wanted to prevent these illegal activities that violate national as well as international law they could have done.

Cuba provides one of the most efficient collaborations to US authorities in the fight against drug trafficking, has offered every help it can to assist the US authorities to combat terrorism, contributes significantly in adhering to immigration agreements with the US to avoid mass illegal Cuban immigration to the US, and Cuba is highly cooperative on questions of common security to the two nations. And yet, whenever it can Bush – and previous administrations – flout any agreement and break any commitments they may have made. They are prepared to trample over any international law, apply illegal extraterritorial legislation against the Caribbean island and simply ignore votes at the UN General Assembly against the blockade. Instead, the Bush Administration has produced a 450-page report by a so-called Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba whose Chairman is Colin Powell and which is officially aimed at hastening a “democratic transition in Cuba” being to date the most thorough attempt to cause the maximum economic harm to the island and which contains a chapter en-

titled “Establishing the Core Institutions of a Free Economy”, with the unavoidable implication that the violent overthrow of the Cuban Revolution is the pre-requisite of such a “transformation”.<sup>46</sup> This has been supplemented by another Report produced under the direction of Condoleezza Rice<sup>47</sup> – which has a secret section – and, astonishingly, by the appointment of, Caleb McGarry, as coordinator for the transition in Cuba.

## Conclusion

As we hope to have demonstrated, Cuba has been and is currently under continued threat by the aggressive policies of the United States, aggression which started nearly 5 decades ago. The Cuban Revolution took place right under the nose of the United States and against it and its trusted men in the island; the revolution embarked on a quest of recovery of the national dignity and sovereignty which had been lost by the very neo-colonialist actions of her all powerful neighbour back in 1898. The deeply-rooted national aspiration of sovereignty that has expressed itself with irresistible strength since 1868 had been frustrated and was accomplished only with the arrival of Fidel and his *barbudos* to power in 1959. The realization of Marti’s aim to have a Cuba free from imperialist encroachments in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was given a very specific socio-economic content in the 20<sup>th</sup> century: the social gains in health, education, housing, equality and the rest, which lies at the base of Cuba’s difficult, and sometimes proble-

matic successes. They are as much part of that dream of national sovereignty as the Cuban flag, the national anthem, and the Cuban basketball team. The destruction of the Cuban Revolution by the US would entail the destruction of its national sovereignty, including the socio-economic gains of the people. Despite the shortsightedness and crassness of US policies towards Cuba over these many years, US leaders know, or at least, sense or suspect that the Cuban revolution is a genuinely popular project that, despite the enormous odds it has had to confront, enjoys mass support. The US hostile discourse against the revolution is not just a series of disparate propaganda shots – although sometimes it is reduced to that – but a coherent, well developed, paradigmatic view which though in many aspects crass and Manichean, it does not lack intellectual sophistication and subtlety, but which crucially, it is very powerful and attractive to the basic political instincts of the US population. However, the more legitimacy the Cuban Revolution enjoys the greater the propaganda efforts to persuade US domestic public opinion that must be undertaken. Furthermore, the colossal propaganda undertaking to discredit the Cuban revolution has a global reach and caters for the prejudices of every group of individuals in just about any society. Its effects, despite its obvious falsifications and lies, are not to be underestimated. It is to be hoped that more objective analyses contribute to deconstruct the mountain of lies and ideological garbage under which the United States intends to bury the Cuban Revolution. This labour

of deconstruction is a difficult and sometimes it feels like Thomas Carlyle biographer of Oliver Cromwell, who said he “had to drag out the Lord Protector from under a mountain of dead dogs, a huge load of calumny [...]”. And in the case of Cuba, the object of enquiry is not even yet dead, nor has it fallen into oblivion as the 17<sup>th</sup> century English revolutionary had by the time of Carlyle.

## Mitos sobre Cuba

### Resumen

Cuba no es perfecta. Bloqueada y sometida al implacable asedio y agresión por la maquinaria de guerra más poderosa de la historia de la humanidad por cinco décadas no puede evitar deficiencias, escasez, distorsiones, ineficiencias y otras dificultades. Sin embargo, desde literalmente 1959, la revolución cubana ha sido sometida a una campaña de difamación que ha logrado incrustar una visión satanizada de su realidad en el cerebro de millones de inocentes consumidores de “información” de los medios de comunicación de masa. Este “logro” se ha repetido por cinco décadas y los elementos centrales de esta representación son que el régimen cubano es esencialmente una dictadura comunista obsoleta, fosilizada, totalitaria y a punto de desmoronarse, liderada por un tirano megalomaniaco y sanguinario. Esta representación, o sus variantes, han contribuido a crear una opinión pública que ayuda a justificar la política norteamericana contra la isla caribeña y, además, confunde

fundamentalmente la comprensión del ciudadano común y corriente respecto de las complejidades de la realidad cubana, incluyendo la casi totalidad de la enorme cantidad de aspectos positivos de la revolución. Este artículo tiene por objeto la deconstrucción de esta falaz aunque poderosa mitología que se ha construido sobre la realidad cubana, tarea nada fácil que a veces nos recuerda a Thomas Carlyle, biógrafo de Oliverio Cromwell, que dijo que “había tenido que desenterrar al Lord Protector de debajo de una montaña de perros muertos, un inmenso peso de calumnias”. Guardando todas las proporciones, debe haber sido mucho más fácil para Carlyle remover la montaña de perros muertos sobre la memoria de Cromwell que deshacer el infinito torrente de calumnias que pesa sobre Cuba. Y en el caso de Cuba, cuando el objeto de investigación no está ni siquiera muerto, ni ha caído en el olvido como ocurriera con el revolucionario inglés del siglo XVII en la época de Carlyle.

*Palabras clave:* Cuba. Revolución. Realidad.

## Notas

<sup>1</sup> See among many others The Guardian (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2008/feb/19/cuba>), El País ([http://www.elpais.com/articulo/internacional/nueva/etapa/politica/elpepuint/20080220elpepuint\\_2/Tes](http://www.elpais.com/articulo/internacional/nueva/etapa/politica/elpepuint/20080220elpepuint_2/Tes)), Financial Times (<http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/a78f84e4-dec0-11dc-91d4-0000779fd2ac.html>), The Washington Post ([http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/02/19/AR2008021902962\\_2.html?hpid=topnews&sid=ST2008021900971](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/02/19/AR2008021902962_2.html?hpid=topnews&sid=ST2008021900971)), and The New York Times (<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/20/>

[world/americas/20cuba.html?pagewanted=2&r=1&ref=americas](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/20/world/americas/20cuba.html?pagewanted=2&r=1&ref=americas)), just to mention a few.

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.democracynow.org/2008/2/19/fidel\\_castro\\_resigns\\_as\\_cuban\\_president](http://www.democracynow.org/2008/2/19/fidel_castro_resigns_as_cuban_president) (On Sunday 24 February 2008, Cuba’s National Assembly appointed Raul Castro as Fidel’s successor).

<sup>3</sup> There is a substantial body of academic literature whose research, findings and arguments help to counter the prevalent view on Cuba, among which we have KAPCIA, Antoni. *Cuba: Island of Dreams*. Oxford, England: Berg, 2000; COLE, Ken. *Cuba from Revolution to Development*. London: Pinter, 1998; FRANKLIN, Jane. *Cuba and the United States: a chronological history*. Ocean Press, 1997; AUGUST, Arnold. *Democracy in Cuba and the 1997-98 election*. Havana: Editorial Jose Marti, 1999; SUCHLI-CKI, Jaime. *Cuba: from Columbus to Castro and Beyond*. Brassey’s, 2002; SANEY, Isaac. *Cuba: a revolution in motion*. Zed Books, 2004; and more recently, GOTT, Richard. *Cuba: a new history*. Yale, 2004.

<sup>4</sup> BANDEIRA, Luiz Alberto Moniz. *De Martí a Fidel. A Revolução Cubana e a América Latina*. Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 1998. p. 14.

<sup>5</sup> For details see THOMAS, Hugh. *Cuba or the Pursuit of Freedom*. De Capro Press, 1998. Other references that cover this period of Cuban history are GOTT, Richard. *Cuba: a new history*. Verso Books, 2004; PEREZ, Louis A. *Cuba: between reform and revolution*. Oxford University Press, 2006.

<sup>6</sup> For further details see RICARDO, Roger. *Guantanamo. The Bay of Discord*, [www.cubaconnect.co.uk](http://www.cubaconnect.co.uk); on the Platt Amendment see PEREZ, Jorge Louis. *Cuba under the Platt Amendment, 1902-1934*. University of Pittsburgh Press, 1991.

<sup>7</sup> SCHEER, Robert; ZEITLIN, Maurice. *Cuba, an American tragedy*. Penguin Books Limited, 1964, p. 34.

<sup>8</sup> SCHEER; ZEITLIN, *Cuba...*, p. 198; In the legendary TV debate against Kennedy in 1960, with regards to US policy towards the Cuba revolution, Nixon barked: “What can we do? We can do what we did with Guatemala. There was a communist dictator... the Guatemalan people themselves eventually rose up and they threw him out...” (THOMAS, Hugh. *Cuba or the Pursuit of Freedom*, p. 1.300).

<sup>9</sup> SCHEER; ZEITLIN, *Cuba...*, p. 205, 209.

<sup>10</sup> Statement By Assistant Secretary Of State For Western Hemisphere Affairs Roger F. Noriega

- before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, October 2, 2003. G. W. Bush's policy on Cuba has been systematized in the 452-page Report of the Commission for a Democratic Transition to Cuba, which was complemented by Condoleezza's Rice own addition to the Report.
- <sup>11</sup> In this regard the illuminating analyses of Noam Chomsky on the US media such as *Media Censorship and Our Right to Know* and, particularly, E. Herman and N. Chomsky, *Manufacturing consent: the political economy of the mass media*, Pantheon Book, 1988 are indeed insightful.
- <sup>12</sup> Not even the BBC is immune to it, see the pretty Manichean analysis done by, otherwise, shrewd, sophisticated analyst Matt Frei, on Castro's announcement of resignation: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/7254029.stm>
- <sup>13</sup> *The Sunday Times*, 31 May 1992.
- <sup>14</sup> SALAZAR, Luis Suárez. *El siglo XXI: Posibilidades y desafíos para la Revolución Cubana*. La Habana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 2000. p. 289. Similar conclusions and analysis can be found in Canadian specialist AUGUST, Arnold. *Democracy in Cuba and the 1997-98 elections*. Editorial Jose Marti; Canada Distribution and Publishing Co., 1999; see also, SANEY, Isaac. *Cuba: a revolution in motion*. Zed Books, 2006. The elections of 1997-98 have been chosen because they took place under the very difficulties circumstances of the ravages of the Special period.
- <sup>15</sup> All data and information from *The Cuban electoral system – dispelling the myths*. <http://www.ratb.org.uk/html/electoralsystem.html>. Visited: 25 Feb. 2008.
- <sup>16</sup> Asamblea Nacional de la República de Cuba, [www.asanac.gov.cu/](http://www.asanac.gov.cu/)
- <sup>17</sup> See ECKSTEIN, Susan. *Back from the future. Cuba under Castro*. Princeton University Press, 1995; Fidel himself has confirmed how sensitive Cuban authorities are of opinion trends and moods of the population: “[...] nosotros tenemos métodos que nos permiten conocer, así como con microscopio los estados de opinión.” (RAMONET, Ignacio. *Fidel Castro*. Biografía a dos voces. Debate, 2006, p. 539).
- <sup>18</sup> JORQUERA, Roberto et al. *Cuba as an alternative*. An introduction to Cuba's socialist revolution. Resistance Books, 23 Abercrombie St, Chippendale 2008, Australia.
- <sup>19</sup> Documentary by Dollan Cannell, 638 Ways to Kill Castro, 2006; a chronological account of the US hostile acts against Cuba can be found in FRANKLIN, Jean B. *Cuba and the United States; A chronological history*. Ocean Press, 1997.
- <sup>20</sup> QUIRK, Robert E. *Fidel Castro*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1993.
- <sup>21</sup> ANDERSON, John Lea. *Che Guevara a Revolutionary Life*. Bantam Press, 1997.
- <sup>22</sup> CASTANEDA, Jorge. *La Vida en Rojo*. Espasa, 1997.
- <sup>23</sup> INFANTE, Guillermo Cabrera. *Mea Cuba*, Farrar Straus Giroux, 1995.
- <sup>24</sup> Bravo also directed Miami-Havana (1994) a balanced documentary on the “balseros”.
- <sup>25</sup> A Cuban intellectual friend told me that he preferred Raul because “he is less of a dreamer”.
- <sup>26</sup> *Time*, 6 Dec. 1993, p. 31.
- <sup>27</sup> *The Economist*, *Heroic Illusions, A Survey of Cuba*, 6 Apr. 1996, p. 4.
- <sup>28</sup> *Financial Times*, Week end, 13-14 January, 2001, “Cuba's medical revolution”.
- <sup>29</sup> MOLINA, Gabriel. White coat miracle. *Granma* 25 Oct. 2007 <http://www.granma.cu/ingles/2007/octubre/juev25/43milagro-i.html>
- <sup>30</sup> Economic Commission for Latin America, *Social Panorama of Latin America 2002-2003*, p. 45.
- <sup>31</sup> MAR, Garry. *Ottawa Sun*, Mar. 1998.
- <sup>32</sup> VANCE, Ashlee. Bush's search for clean Cuban hookers goes awry. *The Register*, 28 July 2004. [http://www.theregister.co.uk/2004/07/28/bush\\_sees\\_clean\\_cuban\\_hookers/](http://www.theregister.co.uk/2004/07/28/bush_sees_clean_cuban_hookers/). Visited: 24 Feb. 2008.
- <sup>33</sup> CBS News, *Trade with Cuba steadily rising*, 4 November 2005. <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2005/11/04/politics/main1009953.shtml>. Visited: 24 Feb. 2008.
- <sup>34</sup> For more details about these connections see CALVO, Hernando; DECLERCQ, Katlijn. *Dis-sidents or mercenaries? The Cuban exile movement*, Ocean Press, 2000.
- <sup>35</sup> SMITH, Wayne. *The closest of enemies: a personal and diplomatic account of the Castro years*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1987.
- <sup>36</sup> See The Guardian Special Report, The Elian Gonzalez Case, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/elian>.
- <sup>37</sup> Luis Posada Carriles is responsible, by his own admission, of having masterminded the blowing up of the Cubana Airlines plane in 1976 on the coast of Barbados in which 73 Cuban national lost their lives (including Cuba's national fencing team). For details of the case see The National Security Archive, Luis Posada Carriles: The Declassified Record, <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB153/index.htm>.

- <sup>38</sup> See the excellent and informative articles by BRITTAN, Victoria. Cuba and Southern Africa. *New Left Review* 172, Nov./Dec. 1988; Cuba in Africa. *New Left Review* 17, Sep./Oct. 2002.
- <sup>39</sup> See CASTRO, Fidel; MANDELA, Nelson. *How far have we slaves come?* Pathfinder, 1991.
- <sup>40</sup> Miami Herald, 31 March, 2004.
- <sup>41</sup> <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/1986074.stm>
- <sup>42</sup> *Cuba Sí*, Summer 2004, p. 9.
- <sup>43</sup> <http://www.tierradegracia.com/F4.html>
- <sup>44</sup> Medea Benjamin, Our terrorist in Miami, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/medea-benjamin/our-terrorist-in-miami\\_b\\_86155.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/medea-benjamin/our-terrorist-in-miami_b_86155.html) visited February 24 2008.
- <sup>45</sup> POWELL, Colin L. Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba. *Report to the President*, May 2004. <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/32334.pdf>. Visited: Feb. 25, 2008.
- <sup>46</sup> RICE, Condoleezza. Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba. *Report to the President*, July 2006. <http://www.cafc.gov/cafc/rpt/2006/68097.htm>. Visited: Feb. 25, 2008.
- <sup>47</sup> DEUTSCHER, Isaac. *The Prophet Unarmed*. London: Oxford University Press, 1959. p. v. Century English Revolutionary had by the time of Carlyle.