

The Blockade as a Double-Edged Sword

Roberto Regalado

Notwithstanding an ongoing commitment to redouble its efforts, Cuban socialism has not taken full advantage of its own human and material resources to develop its productive forces. Cuba's achievements in research and scientific development must be justly lauded.¹ However, when it comes to agriculture, industry, and other sectors of the economy, it is a different story, one that recalls a kitchen that functions with what we call "street gas." Whenever "street gas" runs out, stoves turn off. The Cuban economy "turned off" suddenly when commercial relations, cooperation, and collaboration ceased with the Soviet Union and other Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON) members. Similarly, much—but not all—of the economy "turned off" when relations were drastically curtailed with Venezuela and other members of the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America, as well as with other Latin American countries governed by left and progressive parties, due to the overthrow, defeat, or outright betrayal of eight of these ten governments and the tightening of the siege against the remaining two.



The questions, then, are: Will Cuba be extended solidarity and aid from other countries or groups of countries, comparable to what it once received from the Soviet bloc and Venezuela? This time, will Cuba be capable of creating its own "biogas plant" to keep its stoves burning independently (or, at least, less dependently) of foreign sources? In the event that the blockade is lifted, would it be far-fetched to think that the United States could become our new "principal supplier," by virtue of the economic and trade relations that would develop, including mass tourism?

¹ ↪ Roberto Regalado, "[El 'Triángulo de las Bermudas' por el que navega Cuba: Acumulación de problemas propios, doble filo del bloqueo y reflujos de la izquierda latinoamericana \(I\)](#)," *América Latina en Movimiento*, April 15, 2021.

In Cuba, economic takeoff has proven elusive due to a range of factors, including its small geographical size and lack of natural resources; underdevelopment arising from its colonial and neocolonial past; destruction caused by weather and

Not all of Cuba's problems fall into these categories. There is a fourth category—a subjective factor—that includes what we could have done but did not, as well as what we can do today but do not, with our own resources, as limited as they may be.

climate events; the unjust and unequal international economic order; the collapse of the USSR-centred postwar Euro-Asiatic bloc; the present difficulties of Venezuela's Bolivarian Revolution; unfavourable changes in the continental political map with respect to left and progressive movements; and, of course, the most damaging obstacle of all, the genocidal, unilateral, and extraterritorial blockade imposed by the United States.² These factors, along with others, have

something in common: they are unavoidable for Cuba. Some are beyond its control (its small size, for example), some can only be resolved in the long term (like underdevelopment), and others are dependent on interaction with external forces (such as normalising relations with the United States). However, not all of Cuba's problems fall into these categories. There is a fourth category—a subjective factor—that includes what we could have done but did not, as well as what we can do today but do not, with our own resources, as limited as they may be.

From 1960 to 1972, Cuba received arms, oil, and credits from the Soviet Union to defend itself against aggression, neutralise the effects of the U.S. blockade, and embark on its initial trial-and-error efforts to achieve economic development. From 1972 to 1985, Cuba maintained very favorable relations with the USSR and other COMECON members. Between 2004 and 2016, it established mutually advantageous relations with Venezuela—which proved decisive in the recovery from the nadir of the Special Period—and other Latin American nations governed by left and progressive parties, even as trade with China increased and intensified. However, Cuba failed to take advantage of either of these two periods to lay the foundations for endogenous economic and social development. Both when it enjoyed propitious external relations for building up its productive forces and when it was left to its own devices, the Cuban state had the manoeuvring room to adopt and implement the appropriate measures. Consequently, the nation's current economic and social situation is not solely the result of external factors—Cuba's own actions and errors matter too.

It is not inconceivable that the U.S. blockade against Cuba may one day end. One only need recall that there have been two processes of normalising relations between the two countries, one under the administrations of Gerald Ford (1974–

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77) and Jimmy Carter (1977–81), and the other under Barack Obama's second administration (2013–17). Could the lifting of the blockade be a panacea for the Cuban economy's ills? The question necessarily raises others: Could achieving the Cuban Revolution's historic goals depend on whether the U.S. government "decides" or "does not

decide" to lift the blockade, whether out of self-interest or due to international pressure, or some combination of these and other factors? What would happen if the blockade never ends? Would it be impossible for the Cuban Revolution to achieve its goals? Would it be forced to renounce them? Would the end of the blockade imply the end of attempts to destroy the revolution? After all, is not U.S. policy still hostile to China despite having established diplomatic relations with it on January 1, 1979? Does it not also harass Russia, which became a capitalist country on December 25, 1991? Does the improvement in U.S.-Cuba relations under the Obama administration and the subsequent reversal thereof under the Donald Trump administration indicate that U.S. policy toward our country will not necessarily follow a stable line?

² ↪ Instead of the traditional practice of alluding to the *European bloc* or the *Eastern European bloc*, I prefer to refer to the *Euro-Asiatic bloc* as the USSR was a union of European and Asian republics, and because socialism in Mongolia succumbed to the same fate as the "bloc."

Considering these issues, it is necessary to distinguish between our right and duty to struggle against the blockade and our expectations regarding what one can and cannot hope for if it is lifted.

The Regional Context of the Cuba-U.S. Dispute

For the United States, the Cuban Revolution is, simultaneously (1) an obstacle to its longstanding annexationist ambitions, (2) a geopolitical challenge in what it considers its “own backyard,” and (3) an issue of domestic politics, manipulated to a great extent by Cuban-American counterrevolutionary organisations, created and promoted in the interests of ultra-reactionary sectors of powerful U.S. elites. These three elements play decisive roles in U.S. policy toward Cuba in a general sense and, of course, would shape the U.S. position in any future process of normalisation of bilateral relations, just as they did in the past.

The triumph of the Cuban Revolution on January 1, 1959, became an obstacle to the entrenchment of U.S. domination in the hemisphere at a time when the United States believed the ideal conditions were in place for its imperial designs. The conclusion of the Second World War, which transformed the United States into the planet’s principal imperialist power, and the outbreak of the Cold War, which was instrumentalised to establish military dictatorships and authoritarian civilian governments, enabled the United States to impose its hegemony throughout the region. Hence, the overthrow of president Jacobo Arbenz in 1954, liquidating the 1944 Guatemalan Revolution, was used by the United States to impose the right of interference on the Organization of American States (OAS) and to suppress the principle of non-intervention, which had been grafted to the OAS Charter under the influence of the then recently created United Nations. It was the culmination of a long and bumpy process to construct a system of hemispheric domination that began with the First International Conference of American States in 1889–90.

In the early postwar years, the broadening and deepening of U.S. domination over Iberian America advanced more rapidly in the political and military realms than in the economic sphere. This reflected the priority given to reconstructing the economies of its allies in Europe, in the context of the Cold War and the “containment of communism.” Europe was the primary export market for U.S. capital and goods. Thus, although Washington did leverage its new global supremacy to extend and strengthen its hemispheric domination, resources were limited.

Two factors widened the doors to U.S. economic penetration in Latin America in the late 1950s. First, the advancing industrial reconstruction of Western Europe allowed the United States to reorient and diversify its international economic relations. Second, the fall in world demand for primary products, which had risen during the war and in the initial postwar period, was a fatal blow to the developmentalist model that Latin America had first adopted during the First World War and intensified during the Great Depression. Thus, on the one hand, the United States was already primed to completely assume the role of hegemonic neocolonial power in Latin America, left vacant by the United Kingdom since 1929, and, on the other hand, frustrated Creole elites had become more inclined to accept this new foreign penetration.

The very moment the United States believed it had vanquished all obstacles to the realisation of the dream of its

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“founding fathers”—namely, the expansion of U.S. domination to every corner of the hemisphere—the Cuban Revolution emerged as a formidable opposition to these ambitions. The example of Latin American and Caribbean people writing their own history sparked a new surge in popular struggles in the region. From that moment on, the priorities of U.S. policy

toward Latin America would be to destroy the Cuban revolutionary process and to annihilate the political and social forces in other countries then initiating a new stage in popular struggle.

The repertoire of collective actions taken by Washington to isolate and blockade Cuba, via the OAS, is far-ranging: in 1959, it engineered the “reaffirming of collective support for representative democracy”; in 1960 came the Declaration of San José; in 1962, Cuba was expelled from the Inter-American System; and, in 1964, came the collective severance of

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diplomatic, consular, and trade relations. The use of force usually took two forms: (1) actions designed to produce an immediate or short-term overthrow, and (2) revenge-motivated strangulation measures as reprisal for Cuban resistance, which also serve as a long-term strategy of destruction. Actions in the first category have

included: the initial sabotage and terrorist activities directed by a CIA task force created in 1960; the 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion; Operation Mongoose, following the failed invasion; putting the world on the precipice of nuclear war during the missile crisis of October 1962; and the counterrevolutionary bands that operated until their end in the late 1960s. The strategies of political isolation, economic warfare, and the commercial blockade—which is not only bilateral, but also extraterritorial—and the manufacturing of “dissidents” have been maintained until the present day, with constant efforts to make them harsher.

Nevertheless, when, at the end of the 1950s, the United States expected to fully benefit from its newly entrenched neocolonial domination in Latin America and the Caribbean, it was forced to devote three decades to: (1) attempting to annihilate the revolutionary Latin American generation forged in the heat of the Cuban Revolution; (2) breaking up the social and political alliances constructed during the developmentalist period; and (3) laying the foundations for restructuring the region and transforming the function of its states, based on the doctrine of neoliberalism. These were the functions of the “national security” states that blighted the region from 1964 to 1989.

Washington’s Latin American strategy suffered a new setback with two interrelated terminal crises unfolding during the late 1980s and early ‘90s—namely, that of real existing socialism in the postwar USSR-centred Euro-Asiatic bloc (requiring a redirection of U.S. imperial resources and strategy away from Latin America) and that of revolutionary insurgency within Latin America as a means for conquering state power via what Antonio Gramsci called the “war of manoeuvre.” Both terminal crises led the United States to “file its teeth” in order to—at long last!—fully enjoy the fruits of its hemispheric domination. To that end, between 1989 and 1993, Washington deployed a veritable grand design for restructuring the Inter-American System. However, from the U.S. perspective, the results proved counterproductive as unprecedented conditions were actually created for progressive social reform and/or revolution by means of a “war of position,” in Gramscian terms.

Neither armed struggle as a means of gaining power nor the Soviet model of a party-state symbiosis, adopted by the

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Cuban Revolution after its conquer of power, are direct references for the emerging projects and processes in Latin America, be they reformist or transformational. Despite these new conditions, Cuba remains the most formidable obstacle to U.S. domination in the region, due not only to its resilience in the face of the blockade, but also its capacity to interact, on the basis of solidarity and mutual advantage, with new political formations. This is decisive in U.S. policy

toward Cuba, including what its ruling elites would like to “receive,” explicitly or implicitly, from a process of normalising bilateral relations.

The First Process of Normalising Relations

If Compared with the 1960s, prior to the first process of normalising relations between the United States and Cuba, the correlation of forces in Latin America had changed in favor of the left and progressives, due to the positions of the governments of general Juan Velasco Alvarado of Peru (1968–75), colonel Omar Torrijos of Panama (1968–81), president Salvador Allende of Chile (1970–73), and president Héctor Cámpora of Argentina (1973).³ Four newly independent English-speaking Caribbean nations of the time—Barbados, Guyana, Jamaica, and Trinidad and Tobago—not only reestablished relations with Cuba, in defiance of OAS protocol in 1964, but also, in conjunction with Mexico, demanded the lifting of this very OAS prohibition. After the annihilation of the guerrilla forces of comandante Ernesto Che Guevara in Bolivia (Che was assassinated there on October 9, 1967), there was no surge in the armed struggle until revolutionary forces took power in Granada and Nicaragua, on March 13 and July 19, 1979, respectively, and the subsequent outbreak of the so-called Central American conflict—all of which contributed to Washington’s changing attitude toward Cuba.

As Elier Ramírez Cañedo recounts, on November 12, 1969, toward the end of the first year of the Richard Nixon administration (1969–73), the secretary of state, Henry Kissinger, told the president: “an agreement with Cuba on hijackings would not alter the status of our relations with the [Fidel] Castro government.”⁴ This exchange happened as the fomenting of air piracy as a weapon against the Cuban Revolution backfired against the United States, which, to Nixon’s displeasure, made it necessary to negotiate an agreement with the Cuban government to eradicate air and maritime hijackings. Nevertheless, as Ramírez Cañedo writes: “On February 15, 1973, after many months of negotiations, the two countries signed via the good offices of the Swiss embassy in Havana a ‘Memorandum of Understanding on Hijacking of Aircraft and Vessels and Other Offences.’”

In the dying days of the second Nixon administration (he resigned on August 9, 1974, to avoid impeachment by Congress), Kissinger undertook “discreet moves for rapprochement with Cuba” to avert the U.S. government’s diplomatic isolation in the likely event, sooner or later, of an OAS vote to lift the 1964 sanctions. By means of complex machinations, secret conversations between Kissinger’s emissaries and their Cuban government counterparts facilitated the non-isolation of U.S. diplomacy at the sixteenth OAS Meeting of Consultation, held in San José, Costa Rica, on July 25, 1975. In effect, “the United States voted, along with 15 other nations, in favor of a resolution which permitted member states to end the sanctions against Cuba on an individual basis if they so desired and to establish whatever type of relations they deemed fit.”⁵ However, two solidarity actions by Cuba—a resolution in favor of independence for Puerto Rico, filed in August 1975 with the UN Special Committee on Decolonisation, and the arrival of Cuban troops in Angola in November of the same year—were deemed by Ford and Kissinger as obstacles to continuing the normalisation of relations.

Ford lost the presidential election of November 2, 1976, to the Democratic candidate Jimmy Carter. Ramírez Cañedo summarises the key phases of the normalisation process during the Carter administration thus:

³ ↪ Héctor Cámpora resigned as president to facilitate the election of Juan Domingo Perón to office in September 1973.

⁴ ↪ Elier Ramírez Cañedo, “Ford, Kissinger y la normalización de relaciones con Cuba,” part 1, *América Latina en Movimiento*, February 25, 2011.

⁵ ↪ Ramírez Cañedo, “Ford, Kissinger y la normalización de relaciones con Cuba.”

The thorniest issues in U.S.-Cuba relations would not be amenable to resolution given the increasing salience within the Democratic administration of making the normalisation of relations process conditional on “moderation” in Cuba’s international activism wherever U.S. interests were affected.

The least urgent problems in bilateral relations were negotiated in 1977. However, beginning in 1978, the process of “normalising” relations began freezing up and even went into reverse. In effect, the thorniest issues in U.S.-Cuba relations would not be amenable to resolution given the increasing salience within the Democratic administration of the idea of making progress in the normalisation of relations process conditional on “moderation” in Cuba’s international activism wherever U.S. interests in the context of the East-West conflict were affected, a criterion advocated by National Security Advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski.

Nevertheless, despite a freezing of the “normalisation” process observed by the Democratic administration, dialogue and cooperation in specific areas continued until the end of 1980, as did cultural, academic, scientific, and sporting exchanges. The most extensive ongoing secret conversations between the two countries took place in 1978 (in New York, Washington, Atlanta, Cuernavaca, and Havana).

There was a hiatus in these discussions in 1979, which, however, resumed with meetings in January, June, and September 1980, all of which were held in Havana.

However, by 1979, tensions in bilateral relations and in the international context, marked by the return to a time of greater confrontation between the USSR and U.S., had led Carter to sign a new presidential directive on Cuba, which superseded the directive of March 1977, namely Presidential Directive/NSC-52, drafted by Brzezinski and signed by the president on 17 October 1979. Four specific objectives were delineated in this directive: (1) to reduce and eventually remove Cuban military forces stationed abroad; (2) to undercut Cuba’s drive for Third World leadership; (3) to obtain Cuban restraint on the Puerto Rican issue; and (4) to inhibit the Soviet buildup of Cuba’s armed forces. Clearly, this directive was totally hostile to Cuba. The interesting thing is that, despite this directive’s existence, in 1980, in the middle of the Mariel boat lift crisis, Carter returned to using secret diplomacy with Cuba. Thus, through emissaries who traveled to Cuba for private conversations with Commander in Chief Fidel Castro, Carter promised that were he to be reelected in the November elections that he would move forward as never before toward normalising relations in the first months of his second administration.⁶

In another article, Ramírez Cañedo quite rightly concludes: “Even if Carter was weighing a diplomatic rapprochement with Cuba in the event of his reelection, that would have been accompanied by military threats against the island to protect the United States’ fundamental interests in the region. Another reason, then, to contemplate with little optimism the likelihood of an understanding between the United States and Cuba, as the tired old U.S. policy of the carrot and the stick had produced no results whatsoever with Cuba.”⁷

In support of this conclusion, I would like to add the following: I do not believe that, even if Cuba had checked the boxes for “good conduct” by “moderating its international solidarity,” the results of the normalisation process with the Carter administration would have been different.

Influenced by the brief “wave of moralism” set in motion by the publication of the Pentagon Papers (1971), the Watergate scandal (1972), and the revelation that the Nixon administration played a role in the coup in Chile in

⁶ ↪ Elier Ramírez Cañedo, “Carter y sus directivas presidenciales sobre Cuba,” *Granma*, October 18, 2016.

⁷ ↪ Elier Ramírez Cañedo, “Fidel, Carter y los misiones secretas de Paul Austin,” *Cuba Debate*, November 12, 2014.

September 1973, the Carter administration's Latin America policy platform was based on the reports of the Linowitz Commission, published in 1974 and 1976. The most relevant recommendations were contained in the report entitled *The Americas in a Changing World*, or Linowitz Report I. They were: to acknowledge the erosion of U.S. power in the world; to abandon the so-called special relationship with Latin America; to adhere to the doctrine of non-intervention; and to adopt a global "focus" in relations with the region's countries. Linowitz Report I suggested that the OAS institutional structure should be utilised to promote respect for human rights and avoid interregional conflicts or mediate them when they arise. This report went so far as to say that "in relation to the OAS' future—including its structure, leadership and location—the United States should primarily be guided by the initiatives and desires of Latin Americans."⁸

Prepared at the behest of then president-elect Carter, the report entitled *The United States and Latin America: Next Steps*

As a complement to what Ramírez Cañedo wrote about Presidential Directive/NSC-52, one might add that Carter ordered all U.S. government agencies to conduct an exhaustive analysis of relations with Cuba to enable the closing of potential "loopholes" in the blockade, of which Cuba might take advantage.

(better known as Linowitz Report II) advocated the urgent conclusion of negotiations on the Panama Canal Treaties; made various human rights-related recommendations; urged the Carter administration to "reopen a process of normalising relations with Cuba"; called for reducing arms transfers and avoiding nuclear proliferation in the region; advocated looking through a lens of "comprehension regarding the situation in Latin America and the region's demands"; and

spoke in favor of closer cultural exchanges between the United States and Latin America.⁹ Out of this entire agenda, Carter just barely managed to bring the signing of the Panama Canal Treaties to fruition.

Thanks to the new right offensive against the Carter administration, the Panama Canal Treaties were only signed on September 7, 1977, that is, after major delays and the imposition of many onerous conditions on Panama. Moreover, in 1979, the process of normalising relations with Cuba went into reverse. Thus, as a complement to what Ramírez Cañedo wrote about Presidential Directive/NSC-52, one might add that Carter ordered all U.S. government agencies to conduct an exhaustive analysis of relations with Cuba to enable the closing of potential "loopholes" in the blockade, of which Cuba might take advantage. The executive order could even be considered a predecessor of the Torricelli and Helms-Burton Acts.

Carter's supposed "non-intervention" in terms of defending U.S. "national interests" in armed conflicts around the world became a target for attacks by the "new right" and the "moral majority" led by Ronald Reagan. Many of these attacks also targeted Cuba, especially in relation to the island's military assistance to Ethiopia, which began on November 25, 1977, and its solidarity with the governments of Granada and Nicaragua and Central American revolutionary organisations.

⁸ ↪ Commission on United States-Latin American Relations (Linowitz Commission), *The Americas in a Changing World (Report of the Commission on United States-Latin American Relations or Linowitz Report I)* (Washington DC: Commission on United States-Latin American Relations, 1974), 51. It is also available as document no. 2, Centro de Estudios sobre América

⁹ ↪ Commission on United States-Latin American Relations (Linowitz Commission), *The United States and Latin America: Next Steps (Second Report of the Commission on United States-Latin American Relations or Linowitz Report II)*. It is also available as document no. 2, Centro de Estudios sobre América, Havana, 1980. With respect to Cuba, the *Linowitz Report II* states: "The administration's representatives should indicate to Cuba's representatives that the United States is ready to lift its embargo on food and medicines and open further negotiations with Cuba on the entire range of issues in dispute, provided that Cuba gives satisfactory guaranties that: (1) it shall provide a public, rapid and appropriate response (such as the liberation of American prisoners); (2) its troops are withdrawn from Angola and shall not participate in military interventions anywhere; and (3) it shall respect the principles of self-determination and non-intervention everywhere, and do so explicitly with respect to Puerto Rico."

Having forsaken the Latin American policy recommended by the Linowitz Commission, the Carter administration did not promote and defend “human rights” and “democratisation” in Central America, where the repression practiced by the military dictatorships of Nicaragua, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras was intensifying political, economic, and social crises. The Carter administration’s inertia was such that it even failed to retract support from the Anastasio Somoza dictatorship, clearly in its death throes. Seen in retrospect, the four years of Carter’s sole presidential mandate was a period conceded by elite circles in the United States to “exorcise” the devil that was Nixon, after which they facilitated the rise to power of an even bigger devil: Reagan. In reality, the first two years of the Carter administration proved sufficient to complete an exorcism that, needless to say, was far from exhaustive.

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Gregorio Selser argues that it fell to Carter to fulfil two mutually incompatible tasks: “in late 1976, there was a need to

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bathe in lustral waters to cleanse sins, both known and not so known.” Though “it was necessary,” on the one hand, “to restore the credibility of the U.S. political system, it was also necessary,” on the other hand, “to use force to reaffirm the global supremacy of the United States. This need to project a dovish image but execute a hawkish policy moved Selser to aver that ‘Carter’s

foreign policy was reminiscent of the two faces of Janus, with Brzezinski representing the ‘hawk’ and secretary of state Cyrus Vance, the lustrally cleansed ‘dove.’”¹⁰

The Reagan administration imposed policies based on force to resolve conflicts athwart the strategic path adopted by the United States in the 1980s. Adopting conciliatory domestic policies while following an aggressive foreign policy posed no problem for Reagan, who maintained an unvarying posture of privileging repression and violence. With Reagan, there would be no “balance of world power” as Kissinger had proposed years earlier. Allies would have to share the costs—more than the benefits—of world domination. As for the USSR, he even went so far as to challenge its right to exist, such that the doctrine of containing communism was replaced by rollback. In addition, the National Endowment for Democracy was created to destabilise and destroy “enemy” states and governments.

There was an ultra-right counterpart to the proposals of the Linowitz Report I and II (which delineated the disregarded guidelines of the Carter administration’s Latin America policy): the Santa Fe Document.¹¹ This document, which came to define the Reagan administration’s Latin America policy, called for: destroying the Cuban, Nicaraguan, and Grenadian revolutions; intensifying the war of counterinsurgency in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Colombia; instrumentalising the fight against drug trafficking as a pretext for building up the U.S. military presence in Latin America; criminalising the left; and deploying every type of pressure to impose neoliberal

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¹⁰ ↪ Gregorio Selser, *Reagan: Entre El Salvador y las Malvinas* (Mexico: MexSur Editorial, 1982), 41, 51.

¹¹ ↪ *The Santa Fe Document* (known as *Santa Fe I*). Three more versions were subsequently published: *Santa Fe II, III, and IV*.

restructuring. In this context, general Alexander Haig, Reagan's first secretary of state, accused Cuba of being the "source" of the Central American conflict and threatened to "go to the source," meaning, to engage in direct military aggression. To foment a climate favorable to the further intensification of an already extreme policy of threats, hostility, isolation, and blockade, the administration created the misnamed Radio Martí and "institutionalised" the anti-Cuba lobby.¹² In the following three decades, Reagan's successors, George H. W. Bush (Republican, 1989–93), William "Bill" Clinton (Democrat, 1993–2001), and George W. Bush (Republican, 2001–09), constantly ratcheted up a policy of hostility, political isolation, and economic blockade against Cuba.

Bush Sr. was the first to take advantage of the collapse of the postwar Euro-Asiatic bloc in an attempt to strangle the Cuban Revolution. To this end, he sought to reimpose a status quo similar to what prevailed in the hemisphere during the 1960s, when Cuba was totally excluded from the region's multilateral spaces, and a collective ban was imposed on

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1962, was established, the Bush administration unleashed a pressure campaign on the region's governments to damage and, if possible, break their bilateral relations with Cuba. In essence, Bush tried to turn back time to reimpose political isolation and the economic blockade against Cuba. Among his many actions to close the blockade's "loopholes," the signing of the Torricelli Act stands out. It was also supported by Clinton, his opponent in the November 1992 election.

In effect, Clinton subsequently enforced the Torricelli Act and, like his predecessors, restricted legal immigration and encouraged illegal emigration as a weapon against Cuba, notably when Cuba was undergoing the worst moments of its Special Period. The result was the so-called balseros (rafts) crisis of 1994. The most noteworthy of the Clinton administration's anti-Cuba actions was the passage of the Helms-Burton Act in December 1996. Rather than altering the essential nature of the blockade, this law strengthened it via the so-called Track II—an approach designed to internally

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erode, undermine, and break down Cuban society. Specifically, Helms-Burton authorised people-to-people exchanges and, in January 1999, a series of measures were announced, including: broadening the categories of persons authorised to receive remittances from the United States; the designation of new points of origin and destination for charter flights to Cuba; an increase in academic, scientific, and sporting exchanges; an indication of a willingness to reestablish postal services; and, in response to the pressure of the agricultural lobby, the authorising of food sales, but with restrictions.

Bush Jr. augmented the pressure campaign to condemn Cuba at the UN Human Rights Commission. His other anti-Cuba measures included: the creation of the Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba, chaired during his first administration by secretary of state Colin Powell, which issued its first report in May 2004, and then by secretary of state Condoleezza Rice during his second administration (its second report was issued in July 2006); the 2004 suspension of talks on

¹² ↪ For more on the author's opinions on how the Reagan administration tilted the scale to the right in U.S. society during the 1980s, see Roberto Regalado, *América Latina entre siglos: dominación crisis, lucha social y alternativas políticas de la izquierda* (Mexico: Ocean Sur, 2007), 157–64.

immigration; and the imposition of extreme restrictions on travel and remittances to Cuba, and on the granting of visas to Cuban citizens. In response to pressure from the farm lobby and in the wake of the devastation wrought by Hurricane Michelle (which led to the U.S. offer of humanitarian aid under conditions rejected by Cuba), approval was granted for food sales to Cuba, but with rigorous restrictions.

To put the anti-Cuba policies of Bush Sr., Clinton, and Bush Jr. in a hemispheric context, let us periodise Latin American history starting in 1989:

- (1) 1989 to 1994. During the presidency of Bush Sr. and the first two years of the first Clinton administration, the predominant U.S. preoccupation regarding Latin America and the Caribbean was the restructuring of the system of continental domination, based on the imposition of neoliberal democracy and transnational mechanisms designed to control and punish “infractions.”
- (2) 1994 to 1998. During the last two years of Clinton’s first administration and the first two years of his second, the continental political situation consisted of two parallel processes: a deepening of the structural and functional crisis of Latin American capitalism, provoked by the qualitative change in the system of domination; and the rise of social movements in struggle against neoliberalism, many of which became active in the political arena.
- (3) 1998 to 2009. During the last two years of the Clinton presidency and during both George W. Bush administrations, the election of progressive and left governments in Latin America successfully capitalised on the social and political effects of the concentration of wealth and took advantage of the formal political spaces of bourgeois democracy.

The blockade, which has been in existence for the entire history of the Cuban Revolution, despite brief movements

The blockade, it has always been a double-edged sword, reflecting not only Washington’s continuing enmity to Cuba and the enormous harm inflicted on the latter, but also the U.S. failure to bring Cuba to its knees.

toward normalisation, is a product of both U.S. criminal aggression and the Cuban Revolution itself. For the United States, as much as for Cuba, it has always been a double-edged sword, reflecting not only Washington’s continuing enmity to Cuba and the

enormous harm inflicted on the latter, but also the U.S. failure to bring Cuba to its knees. Given continuing Cuban resistance, the termination of the blockade, as the analysis here shows, would only be a reflection of the ongoing decline and destabilisation of U.S. empire and the enduring strength of the Cuban Revolution, a dialectical process that now implicates the fate of the entire world.

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