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THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

December 27, 1995

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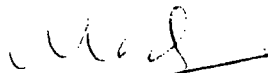
Dear Susan:

I have read with interest and care your commentary on "U.S. Policy Toward Cuba." As usual, your insights and analysis are thoughtful and very well presented. Your views closely coincide with our current policy toward Cuba, and thus not only do I agree with, but I also appreciate your commentary.

As I have said to you and others, you are the epitome of a professional and a highly respected person in foreign policy matters, particularly those related to Latin America. I look forward to our staying in touch given my current assignment with the Summit of the Americas follow-up and other matters relating to Latin America and the Caribbean.

Please give my best regards to Ted and your other Council of the Americas colleagues.

Personally,



Mack McLarty

cc: Ambassador Briggs

bec: Eric

U.S. POLICY TOWARD CUBA: HAS THE TIME COME TO LIFT THE TRADE EMBARGO?

by Dr. Susan Kaufman Purcell

Introduction

Fidel Castro's recent visit to New York, on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations, was a masterful and carefully orchestrated effort to mobilize support within the United States for a change in U.S. policy toward Cuba. His most important target was the U.S. business community, which has often remained on the sidelines during the ongoing debate over the future of Washington's Cuba policy. Wearing a business suit rather than his traditional battle fatigues, the Cuban leader spoke favorably about Cuba's economic reforms and warned U.S. businessmen that they were in danger of being left behind as their foreign competitors established footholds on the island. He also criticized Washington for being inconsistent and hypocritical, comparing the lifting of the U.S. embargo against Vietnam with the absence of similar action regarding Cuba. Castro's words reportedly were enthusiastically received by the select group of New York private sector representatives who met with him, as well as by many of the media personalities who were included in the festivities.

It is understandable that Castro's approach might seem persuasive. As many critics of U.S. policy toward Cuba have argued, the embargo has not succeeded in toppling Castro during its 35 year existence. Furthermore, the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union have removed the security threat that Cuba represented during the years of U.S.-Soviet competition. Socialism has been discredited and market economies are increasingly being established throughout the former "third world." Even in Cuba, one of the last Communist strongholds, capitalism is beginning to take root because of the imperatives of new global economic realities. Given these developments and the fact that the United States has economic and political ties with other communist governments, there are some who argue that it is time for Washington to try something new. In particular, they propose that the U.S. lift the trade embargo against Cuba that is isolating Washington more than Havana.

Among the other factors that those who criticize the trade embargo put forward is that it undermines the U.S. goal of a peaceful transition to democracy in Cuba. By imposing great hardship on the Cuban people, they argue, Washington is creating pressures on the island that will lead to unorganized violence or a civil war. Neither of these developments is in the U.S. national interest, since in addition to the unfortunate impact either would have on Cubans themselves, both

would also create a massive refugee problem for the United States and increase the odds that the U.S. would eventually have to intervene militarily in Cuba in order to establish order.

The final argument that is often made by the embargo's critics is that it endures only because a small group of Cuban Americans devote considerable money and effort to lobbying in its favor. The implication, sometimes explicit but often implicit, is that a foreign policy of the United States that is mainly a response to a politically powerful domestic group is illegitimate.

It is not possible to disprove all these arguments. Only time will tell which, of any, are valid. It is necessary, however, to raise some questions regarding some of the above assumptions of critics of U.S. Cuba policy in order to ensure that the continuing debate over the future of that policy be as informed as possible.

How Ineffective Has the Embargo Really Been?

The most popular argument raised by critics of the U.S. trade embargo against Cuba is that it has not worked and therefore should be abandoned, especially now that the Cold War is over. Yet, it is difficult to see how the embargo could have "worked" while Cuba was receiving an estimated 5-6.5 billion dollars a year in aid and subsidies from the Soviet Union. The embargo has only been put to its real test, in terms of its impact, since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the termination of Soviet aid that was in the pipeline. In reality, the embargo only began working toward the end of 1992 — three years ago, not 35.

It was also in 1992 that the U.S. Congress passed the Cuba Democracy Act or so-called Torricelli bill that, among other things, tightened the embargo by making it illegal for foreign subsidiaries of U.S. companies to trade with the island. The bill also extended the reach of the embargo to third countries by forbidding ships that docked in Cuba from docking in U.S. ports for six months thereafter.

When Cuba was receiving billions of dollars of aid from the Soviet Union, the Castro government repeatedly ridiculed the embargo, saying that since it was ineffective, it did not matter whether it remained in place or was lifted. In the aftermath of the Soviet collapse, the termination of Soviet aid, and the 1992 tightening of the embargo, however, the Cuban government changed its rhetoric and launched an intense international campaign to get the embargo lifted. Perhaps Castro was using reverse psychology to make sure that the embargo, which he needed to justify his dictatorship, would not be lifted. This has been suggested by some critics of U.S. policy. The more obvious, reasonable conclusion is that the embargo had indeed begun to hurt Cuba now that Soviet aid had dried up.