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SECTION 3

Divider Title: _____

Miami lawmakers warn against easing sanctions on Cuba

By CAROL ROSENBERG
Herald Staff Writer

WASHINGTON — Miami's Cuban-American Congress members used the House floor Wednesday to defend the U.S. embargo on the island, warning that Fidel Castro is still an enemy of America.

"Despite the end of the Cold War, Castro continues to espouse a hard line . . . proclaiming 'socialism or death,' ranting about a final reckoning with the United States, and punishing any Cuban who advocates genuine political or economic reform," said Rep. Lincoln Diaz-Balart, a Miami Republican.

He also said those who advocate

Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen advocated several provisions she said would 'further tighten the noose on the Castro dictatorship.'

easing the sanctions do not understand that provisions already exist to send medicine and other humanitarian aid to the island.

Diaz-Balart and fellow Miami Republican Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen spoke during a period of nondebate when some members were given five minutes each to talk on the topics of their choice.

Ros-Lehtinen advocated several anti-Cuba provisions, which could reach the House floor today, that

would "further tighten the noose on the Castro dictatorship while protecting American interests."

They include reducing foreign aid to any country that helps Cuba finish its Juragua nuclear power plant; creating a reporting mechanism on implementation of the 1994 immigration accords; and requiring that the administration periodically give Congress the names of companies and people under investigation for violating

the part of the Helms-Burton law that denies U.S. visas to foreign corporations that traffic in illegally confiscated American property in Cuba.

"The Clinton administration's enforcement of this section of Helms-Burton has been shameful, as only a few companies have been sanctioned despite evidence that dozens of companies are in violation of this section," Ros-Lehtinen said.

Diaz-Balart also charged that the Department of Defense was preparing an assessment of Cuba's military capabilities that could cause the State Department to recommend removing the island from the government's Terror List.

The so-called pariah list, which includes Iraq, Syria and North Korea, prevents the United States from doing certain business with countries that it considers state sponsors of international terror.

But State Department sources said that Secretary of State Madeleine Albright had no intention of recommending that President Clinton remove Cuba.

Sun-Sentinel
SOUTH FLORIDA**PAGE 1 NEWS SPORTS BUSINESS FEATURES** **Classifieds**

INTERNET EDITION



Castro greets the pope
Jan. 25

RELATED STORIES● [Facts about Cuba](#)**RELATED LINKS**● [Cuba Net, Web site containing links to uncensored news from Cuba](#)**Clinton may ease humanitarian deliveries to Cuba***March 19, 1998 8:30 p.m. EST*

WASHINGTON (AP) -- Responding to humanitarian concerns, President Clinton is expected to reinstate direct flights to the island and allow U.S.-based exiles to send money home to family and friends, officials said Thursday.

The moves, prompted in part by the January visit to Cuba of Pope John Paul II, were recommended by Secretary of State Madeleine Albright. A formal announcement could come as early as Friday.

As part of the package, Clinton is expected to take steps to end cumbersome procedures for the delivery of medicines to Cuba and also to endorse a legislative proposal to permit increased humanitarian relief to needy Cubans.

Cuban President Fidel Castro has denounced that proposal and said he supports an alternative bill before Congress that would allow the unrestricted sale of food and medicine to Cuba.

The Senate Foreign Relations Committee chairman, Sen. Jesse Helms, R-N.C., expressed strong opposition to the pending announcement.

Marc Thiessen, a Helms spokesman, said, it was a serious mistake for the administration to implement Cuba policy by executive order at a time when Helms was trying to achieve a bipartisan consensus for a humanitarian relief program for Cuba.

The U.S. officials, who spoke on condition that they not be identified, said the measures are likely to have a beneficial impact on the Roman Catholic Church in Cuba, which is responsible for distribution of humanitarian supplies from the United States.

As more and more relief supplies are delivered to the church, officials expect there will be a corresponding increase in the number of Cubans who will look favorably on the church, now the only significant independent institution on the island. Strengthening of the church was a priority goal of the pope when he visited Cuba.

Officials stressed that the measures are an attempt to assist the Cuban people without strengthening Castro. No easing of the U.S. embargo against Cuba is planned.

Ending the ban on direct flights would allow humanitarian cargo to be shipped straight to Cuba without a costly detour through a third country. The move also would benefit journalists, athletes and others eligible to travel to the island. The prohibition on tourism in Cuba by Americans remains in effect.

Officials acknowledged that Clinton's attempt to punish Castro by outlawing remittances to Cuban families has backfired. The ban was widely ignored, the officials said.

Beyond that, an increase in the number of dollar-holding Cubans would diminish their reliance on the government for their survival and create a greater sense of independence, the officials said.

Without confirming that any changes are planned, presidential spokesman Mike McCurry noted that Albright was deeply impressed, during her recent meeting with

the pope, by his expressions of concern over the suffering of the Cuban people.

The ban on direct flights and on dollar remittances to the island were imposed by Clinton two years ago after Cuban MiGs shot down two unarmed Miami-based planes that were flying north of Cuba. The four Cuban exiles aboard the planes were killed.

Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, R-Fla., who was born in Cuba, said restoring the direct flights would be a reward for the Castro government.

"By lifting the ban, it sends a signal to Castro that he has been absolved in the deaths of those four innocent men," she said. "That's a terrible message. Castro has not behaved any better toward the Cuban people than when the president imposed sanctions."

The planes belonged to Brothers to the Rescue, a Miami group whose co-founder, Jose Basulto, also criticized the pending move.

"I never expected Clinton to do any better," he said from his home in Coral Gables, Fla., "This has been his line, his way. I believe it is wrong. He is damaging the Cuban people's interest. It is not going to help the Cuban people at all."

Ros-Lehtinen joined with another Cuban-born Florida Republican, Rep. Lincoln Diaz-Balart, in denouncing what they called the unilateral relaxation of sanctions against Cuba.

"Rather than providing Castro with the hard currency he seeks, the administration should find ways to seriously and effectively assist the internal opposition in Cuba, as was done in Poland," the lawmakers said in a statement.

But Rep. Lee Hamilton, D-Ind., praised the proposals. "These steps, though long in coming, are the right ones," he said.

Rep. Joe Moakley, D-Mass., who visited Cuba in January, welcomed the proposed moves, calling them "a major step towards alleviating the suffering of the Cuban people."

Rep. Jose Serrano, D-N.Y. said the administration plan "goes a long way in bringing about the kind of relationship we should have with Cuba."

The centerpiece of U.S. policy is an economic embargo that has been in place since 1960. Over the years, the embargo has been tightened considerably although some humanitarian exceptions have been allowed.

The Washington Office on Latin America, which monitors political and humanitarian issues in the hemisphere, praised the proposals as a "small but important step" in responding to humanitarian needs in Cuba.

Frank Calzon, head of the Center for a Free Cuba, said, "No one could be against helping the people of Cuba but the U.S. needs to take every step to ensure that the humanitarian assistance is not used to make available additional resources to strengthen Castro's repressive apparatus."

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U.S. To Ease Curbs on Relief to Cuba and Money to Kin

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By STEVEN ERLANGER

WASHINGTON -- At the urging of Pope John Paul II, President Clinton will ease American restrictions on aid and travel to Cuba, and on money sent to relatives there by Cuban-Americans, senior American officials said on Thursday.

While stressing that Clinton will keep the economic embargo on Cuba, the officials said that he wanted to respond to the pope's January visit to Cuba and plea to help the church carry out humanitarian and religious activities that do not benefit the communist Cuban government of Fidel Castro.

The moves do not convey any approval of Castro, a senior official said, but are based on the conclusion that the pope's visit "created space for people to act in opposition to Castro."

For the first time since 1994, Clinton will allow Cuban-Americans to send money directly, and legally, to relatives in Cuba through licensed agencies. Cuban-Americans will be able to send up to \$300 every quarter to each household, or up to \$1,200 a year.

Clinton will also allow certain charitable and humanitarian organizations, like the Roman Catholic Church and the Catholic charity Caritas, to charter flights directly to Cuba from the United States. These flights may carry goods for humanitarian purposes or passengers with humanitarian or emergency needs.

Clinton will also announce a streamlining of the licensing procedure that allows the Roman Catholic Church and other non-profit organizations to

A/S

export and sell pharmaceuticals to Cuba, while letting the organizations themselves ensure that the drugs go to the proper recipients, and not the state.

And Clinton will say that he is willing to work with Congress on legislation to ease the export of needed food to Cuba.

Some congressional criticism was immediate. Rep. Lincoln Diaz-Balart and Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, both Florida Republicans, issued a joint statement accusing Clinton of seeking "to unilaterally relax sanctions on the Castro tyranny," and said that the pope's visit "should not be used as a pretext to soften sanctions."

Ms. Ros-Lehtinen said that permitting flights and remittances reduces the price Castro is paying for shooting down two unarmed civilian aircraft, flown by Cuban exiles testing the regime, in international waters on Feb. 24, 1996.

But others in Miami cheered the decision and said it was another sign of needed change. "It was overdue," said Armando Garcia, vice president of Marazul Charters, the biggest retailer of flights to Cuba in Miami. "Miami's not the same as it was two or three years ago. People are losing their fear of speaking up."

Larry Birns, director of the Council on Hemispheric Affairs here, said he thought the administration's decision would find general approval. "There will be some gnashing of teeth in Congress, but with the pope sanctioning such assistance and excoriating those who don't help, it seems to me the administration will emerge relatively unscathed by its actions," Birns said. "It will also win points with the European Union and the rest of Latin America, which has been caustic in its criticism of U.S. policy to Cuba."

✓ At Clinton's request, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and National Security Adviser Samuel Berger developed the recommendations. Albright went to Miami herself in late February to talk to church leaders and Cuban-Americans, including the families of the pilots killed in February 1996.

On March 7, Albright discussed Cuba in a conversation with the pope at the Vatican and the importance of his 1979 visit to Poland in ending communist rule there. His visit to Cuba could be a similar "point of departure," she told him, saying that as an Eastern European refugee from communism herself, she understood the importance of the church in a society under communism.

After the meeting, Albright wrote Clinton a memo.

In it, she drew an analogy to what happened in Poland after the pope's visit and said that Cuban-Americans gave her the impression that the pope's visit to Cuba had provided encouragement and oxygen to those opposed to the Cuban government, and that the Roman Catholic Church -- with its 4 million adherents, its uncensored sermons, and its non-state access to the population -- represents an important opening for Washington to work through.

But what Clinton will do, officials say, is mostly a reversion to practices

existing when he himself took office. In August 1994, Clinton responded to an organized outflow of Cuban boatpeople by banning remittances.

Even so, Birns said, some \$700 million a year in illegal remittances get through to Cuba, and some 40 percent of all Cubans already have access to dollars through these remittances or through tourism.

Clinton suspended direct flights to Cuba on Feb. 26, 1996, two days after the shoot-down, and both the economic embargo itself and the ban on direct flights were included in the Helms-Burton bill that Clinton signed in March 1996.

Clinton was criticized at the time for giving in to a political firestorm and signing the bill, which, until the shutdown, had little chance of passage, in order to win Florida in the 1996 election, which he did after having lost it in 1992.

One congressional staffer said on Thursday that it was not clear Clinton has the authority himself to allow direct flights, since the ban is covered under the legislation, which does allow special waivers. But officials said that while the details are still being worked out, the intention is to make it easier for direct flights to take place to cut the costs to the Church and charities of flights they were sending anyway, through third countries.

Officials said they are trying to simplify the procedure for sending pharmaceuticals to Cuba and selling them, which has been permitted since 1992.

After the pope's visit, Sen. Jesse Helms, the Republican from North Carolina, announced that he would introduce legislation designed to increase humanitarian assistance to Cuba and allow direct flights to deliver it. On Thursday, his spokesman said he was offended by Clinton's unilateral actions.

"This is a major mistake," said Helms' spokesman, Marc Thiessen. "It seriously complicates our ability to get through legislation to provide increased humanitarian assistance to the Cuban people."

The move to ease the Cuban sanctions had been gathering strength, even before the pope's visit. The end of the Soviet Union made the idea of a Cuban threat to America seem implausible, if not laughable, and the recent death of Jorge Mas Canosa, whom Birns called "the most forceful and politically influential Cuban-American figure, with the key to back door of White House," took some political sting from the Cuban-American lobby.

John Howard, director of international policy for the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, said that an end to the embargo would bring quicker benefits of freedom, the same argument the Europeans make.

In January, the chamber joined groups like the Association of Manufacturers in advocating an immediate lifting of restrictions on the sale of food, medicine and medical equipment. "But that's only a first step," Howard said. "When you end these embargos, free markets and free societies follow."

Eddie Levy, chairman of Jewish Solidarity and the Cuban American

Defense League, which defends freedom of speech in Miami, is taking 34 people and 2,200 pounds of food and medicine to Cuba on Sunday.

He said that the disagreement over the travel issue -- and the fact that one faction of the Cuban American community pushed for restrictions on travel while tens of thousands of others visit Cuba regularly -- demonstrate that the Cuban-American community is much more diverse in its views than people in Washington realize.

Shortest total solar eclipse of the decade occurs on Oct. 24

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U.S. to Ease Some Curbs Against Cuba

Officials Link Changes To Pope's January Visit

By Thomas W. Lippman

Washington Post Staff Writer

Friday, March 20, 1998; Page A01

President Clinton has decided to allow Cuban Americans to resume sending money directly to relatives on the island and to permit charter flights from the United States to Cuba in an effort to capitalize on a changed atmosphere in Cuba inspired by the visit of Pope John Paul II, senior administration officials said yesterday.

In addition, the president will instruct the Treasury Department and other agencies to simplify licensing procedures for exporting medicine and medical devices to Cuba and to expedite the processing of license applications.

The White House is expected to announce the changes today, senior officials said. They described the president's decision as an effort to bolster the status of the Roman Catholic Church in Cuba and decrease the dependence of the Cuban people on state organizations.

Clinton's decision marks the first relaxation of U.S. policy toward Cuba since Cuban jet fighters shot down two unarmed small planes operated by a Miami-based Cuban exile group in January 1996, killing four crew members.

Officials insisted, however, that the moves do not signal a weakening of the long-standing U.S. embargo on trade with Cuba, which they said remains the cornerstone of efforts to isolate and undermine the communist regime of President Fidel Castro. Senior officials said Clinton has the authority to make the changes by executive order and does not need legislation. Congressional action would be required to scrap the embargo because it was written into law in the 1996 Helms-Burton Act, which Clinton signed reluctantly after the shootdown of the planes.

Before the shootdown, Clinton said last November on "Meet the Press," he wanted "to open up with Cuba, to have a gradually evolving relationship" if Castro eased his repressive policies. The relaxation of restrictions to be announced today, however, "is a response to what the pope did, not a response to anything Castro has done," a senior official said.

As news of the impending modifications filtered out yesterday, advocates of lifting the embargo hailed the decision as a good first step, while anti-Castro hard-liners blasted it as an unwarranted

A/ARA-TS

gesture to a dictator who responded to the pope's visit with a new crackdown on dissidents.

Reps. Lincoln Diaz-Balart (R-Fla.) and Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-Fla.), Cuban Americans, said in a statement that Clinton "once again makes clear that he seeks to unilaterally relax sanctions on the Castro tyranny. Rather than providing Castro with the hard currency he seeks, the administration should find ways to seriously and effectively assist the internal opposition in Cuba."

Officials close to Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright said she took soundings in Florida's Cuban American community during a recent trip to Miami and came away convinced that some Cuban American groups favored the types of measures the administration will announce today.

Albright recommended the modifications to Clinton after she met with the pope in Rome on March 7. Once implemented, they will substantially reinstate the rules that were in place before the refugee crisis of 1994 and the 1996 shutdown of the planes.

The pope sharply criticized the U.S. embargo during his visit to Cuba in January. But the premise underlying the president's decision, officials said, is that the visit, the first papal trip to Cuba since Castro came to power in 1959, showed that Cubans want and need organizations not controlled by the state to help ease their poverty and political isolation, and that the church may be prepared to take on that role.

"The pope's visit has created a different dynamic," a senior official said. "Castro is not going to change, but what is happening here is that there is a desire of the [Cuban] people to expand on the space that has been created" between them and the Castro government. "What we have to do is sideline Castro as much as possible" by showing Cubans that the outside world cares about them and by encouraging nonstate organizations such as the church to become more active, this official said.

As described by senior officials, who insisted on anonymity, the president's initiative is consistent in motivation with an initiative by the anti-Castro Cuban American National Foundation to send donations of food and medicine to the island through church-affiliated organizations.

A similar proposal was offered by Roger Noriega and Marc Thiessen, aides to Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Jesse Helms (R-N.C.), a dedicated foe of Castro who authorized the two to travel to Cuba during the papal visit.

But Clinton's order goes beyond what the foundation or the Helms aides were prepared to accept, Thiessen and others said yesterday.

"They are making a terrible mistake, which potentially endangers months of efforts to build consensus behind legislation to get humanitarian aid to the Cuban people," Thiessen said after Albright met with Helms yesterday.

"We emphatically opposed any reestablishment of direct flights and direct remittances to Cuba," said Jose Cardenas, Washington director of the Cuban American National Foundation. He said Clinton's decision to allow Cuban Americans to send \$1,200 annually to relatives on the island would bolster Castro because the only place Cubans can spend dollars is in groceries and pharmacies operated by the state.

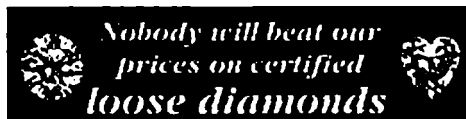
A senior administration official disputed that statement, however, saying that legalization of the dollar in Cuba has created "an immense black market" in which Cubans able to obtain U.S. currency can buy from many vendors. In reality, State Department officials said, the impact of the new rule permitting remittances is likely to be minimal because Cuban Americans are sending hundreds of millions of dollars a year to the island through third countries.

Allowing charter flights directly from the U.S. mainland to Cuba by church-affiliated groups and other nonprofit organizations, however, would greatly reduce the cost of shipping medical supplies, officials said.

"I would say this is an important step in the right direction," said John Howard, international policy director of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, which seeks an end to the embargo. "It should not be confused with more important steps that need to be taken to end the embargo."

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The Boston Globe

FRIDAY, MARCH 20, 1998

US to ease restrictions on Cuba

Clinton will announce lifting of ban on flights, remittances

By David L. Marcus
GLOBE STAFF

WASHINGTON - President Clinton has decided to loosen restrictions on Cuba for the first time in six years, surprising and angering hard-line exile leaders.

Clinton will restore direct flights to Cuba and allow family members in the United States to send medicine, clothes, and cash to relatives on the island. The president will announce the changes today, aides said.

The relaxation of the rules delighted the Massachusetts delegation in Congress, which has urged Clinton to abandon his tough Cuba policy. Today's announcement is only the beginning, said Representative James P. McGovern of Worcester. He said Clinton has promised gradually to allow more religious, cultural, and educational exchanges between the United States and Cuba.

As expected, the news angered several members of Congress. "I do not believe that unilateral concessions to Castro without corresponding improvements in his human rights record will bring us any closer to the ultimate goal of freedom for the Cuban people," said Senator Robert G. Torricelli, a Democrat from New Jersey, where there are many Cuban exiles.

Representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, a Cuban-American who is one of Fidel Castro's most fervent opponents in Miami, charged that restoring direct flights to Cuba will send "a terrible message."

Allowing direct flights and remittances would reverse bans imposed by the US government in 1996 after Cuba shot down two planes flown by anti-Castro activists, killing the four aboard.

In statements yesterday, the White House and State Department

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US to ease restrictions on Cuba today

■ CUBA

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downplayed the significance of the changes. But in conversations, officials acknowledged that they didn't want the news to leak out until Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright had a chance to phone several Republicans in Congress. As one official familiar with the details said, "It's Cuba. Minor things are big

Ban on flights, remittances to be lifted

deals when it comes to Cuba."

The changes will have immediate effects on nonprofit groups. Catholic Relief Services, for instance, has \$1 million worth of insulin in a refrigerated warehouse in Queens, New York. The group has been planning to send the insulin by boat to Canada and then to Cuba, a costly endeavor

that would involve delays and paperwork in three countries. Now the group can fly the insulin directly to Cuba.

Economists estimate that exiles currently send more than \$800 million a year to friends and family in Cuba. Most of this money arrives through third countries to avoid US

Treasury Department restrictions. Under the new rules, exiles will be allowed to send \$1,200 per household every year. They also will be allowed to visit family members in Cuba.

The last easing of restrictions took place in 1992, when the Cuban Democracy Act allowed for more telephone calls, visits, and gifts. But Congress and the president have tightened the rules since then. By doing so a few months before the

1996 elections, Clinton dampened criticism from Miami's older exiles, who tend to be the most passionate anti-Castro activists.

For years, officials in the Clinton administration have quietly complained that the embargo irritates Canada, Mexico, and European allies in a misguided effort to placate Miami voters. But the officials had predicted that Clinton, eager to help Vice President Al Gore in the Florida primaries in the year 2000, would not tamper with the rules.

Albright made the recommendations to Clinton after talking to Pope John Paul II in Rome last month, officials said. The pope visited Cuba in January and called on the United States at that time to end the 35-year-old embargo.

"In the wake of the pope's visit there has been a lot of consideration in our government about how we address some of the real humanitarian needs of the people of Cuba who have suffered under the yoke of totalitarianism for too long," White House spokesman Michael McCurry said.

The measures do not affect most American businesses. Still, they represent an unusual step toward help-

ing ordinary Cubans cope with shortages of food and medicine. Critics of the embargo - ranging from American executives to doctors' associations - say the Cuban people are suffering needlessly.

One of the most ardent critics of American policy is Cardinal Bernard Law, the archbishop of Boston. Law was traveling in Rome yesterday, but in the past he has called for a commission to draw up a Cuba policy that encourages democracy and ends malnutrition and disease on the island.

In a March 13 speech to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in Somerville, he said: "Change is occurring in Cuba. The question is, do we have the political and moral courage to change?"

Four Democratic members of Congress from Massachusetts - McGovern, J. Joseph Moakley, Richard E. Neal and William Delahunt - traveled to Cuba for the pope's visit. In a letter to Clinton's national security staff several weeks ago, they, too, urged a new approach to Cuba.

Yesterday, McGovern said: "It does not make a lot of sense to continue to isolate Cuba. We're really interested in a thawing of relations and this is a significant move." Moakley saluted Clinton's plans as "great, great news. ... I guess the president is listening closer to the pope than we thought he was."

The State Department stressed that the embargo will not be lifted, and most trade and investment in Cuba is still banned.

Diego Ribudeneira of the Globe staff contributed to this report.

Cuban-Americans divided

In Miami, White House move stirs range of reactions

By Teresa Mears
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

MIAMI — For Eddie Levy, direct flights from Miami and Cuba can't resume soon enough.

He and 34 others are scheduled to leave Sunday with 2,000 pounds of food and medicine for members of Cuba's Jewish community, which they have been helping for the last five years.

"I have family in Cuba, and there is no president in the world that is going to tell me I can't visit my mother if she needs me," Levy said. He added that he had moved to America in 1955 just so he could enjoy such freedoms.

But to Miami's Cuban-American members of Congress, the Clinton administration's decision to soften sanctions "absolves and forgives Castro for the brutal murders of February 24, 1996," when the Cuban military shot down four Cuban-American pilots.

"It is time to help the opposition within Cuba overthrow the dictatorship, not to help Castro by easing sanctions," Representatives Lincoln Diaz-Balart and Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, both Republicans, wrote in a joint statement.

The issue of whether it is right to travel to Cuba or to send money to family members living in Cuba has long divided Miami's Cuban-American community. While many Cuban-American leaders strongly support the ban on travel, more than 80,000 Cuban-Americans travel to the island annually.

Two years ago, President Clinton banned direct flights from Miami to Cuba, in response to the shooting down of the four

pilots. But the same companies that had run the direct charter flights were still allowed to fly to Cuba; they just had to stop over in another country. That raised the price of the flights from \$250 to \$399 round-trip and increased the travel time from 45 minutes to three or four hours.

"The restrictions on travel in

**'When the US
canceled flights,
what they did
was make
delinquents out
of thousands of
people.'**

EDDIE LEVY
Cuban-American in Miami

reality didn't stop the people from traveling to Cuba," said Armando Garcia, vice president of Marazul Charters, Miami's biggest retailer of flights to Cuba.

Clinton also had banned Cuban-Americans from sending cash to family members on the island, but the remittances had continued so openly that people who carried the cash ran ads in the newspaper.

Cuban-Americans are allowed to travel to Cuba once a year to visit family members in cases of "extreme humanitarian need." Journalists, academics, and humanitarian workers also can travel to Cuba legally, but some require advance permission from the US government.

Thousands of ordinary Americans skirt the travel ban by going through a third country, a common route taken by Cuban-Americans visiting family members or carrying cash into Cuba.

"When the US canceled flights, what they did was make delinquents out of thousands of people," Levy said. He, like Garcia, said that the disagreement among Cuban-Americans over travel and remittances demonstrates that their community is much more diverse in its views than Washington realizes.

"That shows you that the Cuban-American community is not a monolithic community, which they (the hard-liners) have been able to make people in Washington think they are," Levy said. "Cubans are not all the same."

A number of Cuban-Americans who had not returned to their homeland since they left in the 1960s returned to Cuba to see Pope John Paul II. Since the visit, more people in Miami have begun to discuss travel to Cuba, and Catholics in Miami have discussed whether to set up direct relationships with Cuban parishes.

Garcia said traffic at his agency had risen only slightly since the pope's visit, but that the number of inquiries was up sharply. "Miami's not the same as it was two or three years ago," he said. "People are losing their fear of speaking up."

The most recent demonstration of Miami's openness to more direct relationships with Cubans on the island came last month, when Cuban singer Carlos Varela gave a concert in a private home.

The Miami Herald

www.herald.com

FRIDAY, MARCH 20, 1998

For home delivery

U.S. to ease Cuba restriction

Policy affects travel, cash transfers

By **CHRISTOPHER MARQUIS**
Herald Staff Writer

WASHINGTON — Reacting to Pope John Paul II's call to help the forces of change in Cuba, the Clinton administration is expected to announce a series of measures today that would roll back restrictions on air travel, cash remittances and medical sales to the island and clear the way for food transfers.

The package of steps, which Secretary of State Madeleine Albright outlined to

lawmakers Thursday, would allow Cuban Americans in Miami once again to board direct flights to Havana once a year on an emergency basis and send up to \$300 every three months to relatives on the island through licensed brokers.

The planned changes drew swift praise from Catholic leaders and some exiles, who rallied to the Pope's appeals to bolster the Catholic Church in Cuba and take "practical steps" to improve living conditions of the Cuban people.

"The U.S. Catholic Conference welcomes this signal of a beginning of a change in U.S. Cuba policy," said Thomas Quigley, Latin America advisor for the U.S. bishops. "It clearly matches some of what the church in Cuba and in the U.S. have been asking for."

But the reforms were instantly denounced by Cuban-American lawmakers as a political victory for Cuban

PLEASE SEE CUBA, 23A



*Secretary
State
Madeleine
Albright
outlined
package
lawmakers
Thursday*

CALIFORNIA HILLSIDE CRUMBLES



**Miami to
headquarters
of trade**

Panama, Mexico
chosen as future

U.S. to ease policy on Cuba, including travel, cash transfers

CUBA, FROM 1A

President Fidel Castro and a step toward more regular ties with the island.

"We are not going to let [President] Clinton proceed along the path of normalization. Period," said Rep. Lincoln Diaz-Balart, R-Miami.

The administration's package would also help U.S. pharmaceutical and medical equipment companies sell their products in Cuba. Although such sales are already legal, the change would reduce the paperwork burden and help identify medicines that would not likely be used for reexport or torture and the groups that could monitor their use.

Bipartisan work

Clinton is also expected to order his aides to work with bipartisan congressional leaders on legislation to facilitate shipments of food to ordinary Cubans, whether in the form of donations or sales. Officials said the president is considering supporting a bill backed by Sen. Jesse Helms, R-N.C., and the Cuban American National Foundation to make federal funds available to charity groups to send food to Cuba.

Taken together, the changes represent the most sweeping policy shift toward Cuba since 1996, when Clinton angrily agreed to tighten the U.S. embargo and punish the Castro government for shooting down two civilian planes piloted by the exile group Brothers to the Rescue.

This time, however, Clinton's shift is in the direction of reducing tensions with Cuba, and seems aimed at reviving a dormant policy of outreach to nongovernmental players on the island. The measures are to be taken by executive order and do not directly contravene the 35-year trade ban, which was codified into law by Congress in the Helms-Burton Act of 1996.

Trying to keep momentum

The steps come weeks after the president dispatched Albright and other aides to gather opinions in Miami, at the Vatican and on Capitol Hill, with eyes on continuing the momentum of the Pope's trip to Cuba in January.

State Department spokesman Jim Foley, who declined to discuss specifics of the package Thursday, said only: "These consultations have been about finding ways in which we can assist the Cuban people without re-energizing the government. A decision is in the final stages, and we hope to be able to make an announcement in the next few days."

But a senior administration official, speaking anonymously, said he believed the Pope's visit has stirred wide support for deepening the humanitarian aspect of U.S. policy.

"There seems to be a broad-based consensus that it was an important event, that Cubans are increasingly looking to a Cuba beyond Castro, and that we need to help them prepare the steps toward a peaceful transition," the official said.

The administration's package also would help U.S. pharmaceutical and medical equipment companies sell their products in Cuba.

U.S. officials denied feeling pressured to respond to overtures by Castro, who in recent months has granted limited freedom to church leaders, authorized the celebration of Christmas and released as many as 300 common and political prisoners.

Reciprocity urged

U.S. Catholic leaders have strongly urged Washington to reciprocate with gestures that would consolidate the Cuban church's new political space.

Boston Archbishop Cardinal Bernard Law, who was in Cuba for the papal visit, last week said Castro "has been a promoter, not an obstacle" to expanding religious freedom.

"Change is occurring in Cuba," Law said in a speech at Harvard University. "The question is, do we have the political will and moral courage to change?"

But Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, R-Miami, said easing sanctions that were imposed to punish Castro sends the wrong message. Clinton banned all remittances to Cuba — except those to cover the cost of family immigration — dur-

ing the 1994 rafters exodus from Cuba, and cut off flights in 1996 after Cuban fighters killed the four Brothers to the Rescue air-men.

"It means Castro's out of the penalty box," said Ros-Lehtinen, who conceded that the U.S. steps would find some support among exiles. "We're forgiving him for killing four innocent people."

Some exiles praise lifting restrictions; others skeptical

By FABIOLA SANTIAGO
Herald Staff Writer

Cuban exiles who want to visit relatives on the island and help them financially — and Catholics embarked on a campaign to send humanitarian aid to the church in Cuba — welcomed the Clinton administration's plan to ease travel restrictions and resume direct Miami-Havana flights.

"It's wonderful news. This was a necessary step," said Elena Valdes-Crespo Freyre, an exile pilgrim who went to Cuba for the Pope's visit and is helping channel exile aid through the Cuban Catholic Church. "This is going to make it much easier to send humanitarian aid instead of logistically trying to figure out how to go through Canada or another third country. That was ludicrous and crazy."

Her husband, Pedro Freyre, a Kendall lawyer, agreed.

"It cuts out the middle man, and you get more help to the people of Cuba directly — not to the government but to the people of Cuba," Freyre said.

Others skeptical

Other exiles were more skeptical, but felt the relaxation of travel sanctions against Cuba were necessary to help strengthen the work of the church in Cuba after the papal visit.

"This is a measured response on the part of the administration to the Pope's appeal. The ball is now in Castro's court," said Rafael Peñalver, a Miami lawyer active in Cuban issues.

However, Peñalver noted, "I would strongly object to any further steps toward normalization unless Castro makes significant political concessions, including restoration of basic rights to the Cuban people."

One prominent exile's reaction was of pain and disgust at the decision to lift the sanction Clinton imposed two years ago after Cuban MiGs shot down two Brothers to the Rescue planes, killing the four pilots.

"This is an insult to the memory of the pilots killed that day, and I resent it from the deepest part of my heart," said Jose Basulto, pres-

ident of the group that patrols the Florida Straits searching for Cuban rafters.

"They have been ignored and forgotten," he said. "This is another effort to forward, not the national interests of the United States, but private interests of those who want to open Cuba for the international trade, for the American who wants to make use of the cheap labor that exists in Cuba."

The Pope's visit, Basulto said, is "a smoke screen."

"Nothing has changed in Cuba," he said.

'Hypocritical'

The new measures, which include allowing family remittances from exiles of up to \$300 every three months, "are hypocritical," Basulto said.

Just days ago, he received a Treasury Department letter denying a Brothers to the Rescue request to send financial help in the amount of \$10,000 to \$50,000 a year to the dissident group Concilio Cubano.

The Treasury Department letter, obtained by The Herald, says the request to aid Concilio Cubano is being denied because "the remittances proposed in your application could result in harassment or imprisonment of its members," among other reasons.

Other exile reaction wasn't clear Thursday.

The Cuban American National Foundation, which was pushing in Washington its own controversial proposal to send humanitarian aid to the Cuban people, did not return calls from The Herald.

But Ninaska Perez-Castellon, a

foundation director who hosts a radio show on WBBA-1140 AM, railed against the administration's move. She told listeners it was prompted by "a collusion of characters — fakes and opportunists who want to do business with Cuba."

Listeners who called in mostly

agreed with Perez-Castellon, but some called to support the relaxed measures.

Finding consensus on Cuba policy is nearly impossible, exiles say.

"Whenever you try to touch Cuba policy, people are going to disagree," said Valdes-Crespo Freyre. "That is just reality."



Basulto



E. Freyre

U.S. Sees Aid to Cubans as Means to Topple Castro

By TYLER MARSHALL
TIMES STAFF WRITER

WASHINGTON—President Clinton, acting in the wake of Pope John Paul II's recent visit to Cuba, is expected to announce a new package of measures today aimed at improving conditions for individual Cubans while eroding support for Fidel Castro, the country's longtime Communist leader.

According to a senior administration official, the measures will streamline procedures for sending medical supplies to Cuba, authorize direct humanitarian flights from the United States to the island and legalize limited remittances from Cuban Americans to relatives in Cuba.

"The idea is to help the people but hurt Castro," summed up the official. "We have to prepare for the post-Castro era."

By working through nongovernmental relief organizations—including those operated by the Roman Catholic Church—in implementing some of the measures, the administration hopes to strengthen institutions that are outside of Castro's immediate grasp. In the process, it hopes to foster an environment for opposition political movements, added the official, who asked not to be identified.

The steps represent a significant reversal of U.S. efforts in recent years to topple Castro by isolating Cuba from the world community, and they could face some resistance on Capitol Hill.

Rep. Robert Menendez (D-N.J.), a Cuban American, labeled the measures "outrageous."

"It will reward the Castro regime, despite its continued repression of civil and human rights in Cuba, by providing Castro with desperately needed hard currency," Menendez said.

Marc Thiessen, spokesman for Sen. Jesse Helms (R-N.C.), criticized the president's timing—claiming the measures could jeopardize efforts to build bipartisan support in Congress for bills containing similar action.

"What they are planning is a

major mistake," he said. "They are moving ahead unilaterally, and that seriously, seriously complicates efforts to build support for what we are doing. If the aim is to ease humanitarian suffering for the Cuban people, this is not the way to do it."

Helms coauthored the 1996 Helms-Burton Act, which tightened the decades-old embargo of Cuba. Thiessen and others questioned the legality of the president acting by executive order to overturn provisions that they insist are covered by the act.

Others, however, applauded the package.

"The president is right to take a step forward to help the Cuban people," said Rep. Lee H. Hamilton (D-Ind.), one of the most respected voices on the House's International Relations Committee. "Instead of a policy of isolation, the United States should engage the Cuban people and foster an active civil

society to help pave the way for a future peaceful transition to democracy."

While administration officials said details of the measures are still being worked out, Clinton is expected to announce four specific steps that will:

- End the intentionally cumbersome procedures for authorizing shipments of medical supplies to Cuba by simplifying paperwork. Sales of medicine to Cuba were first authorized by Congress in 1992.

- Legalize the remittance of as much as \$1,200 a year for each family from Cuban Americans in the United States to relatives in Cuba. While legal remittances were suspended in 1994, many Cuban Americans have continued to send money illegally. Administration officials claim that as much as two-thirds of this money is siphoned off in bribes by corrupt Cuban officials before it reaches the intended family. They also argue

that alternative sources of money, if regularized, would help create income that is independent of the Cuban state and thus indirectly support alternative forms of leadership.

- Resume humanitarian charter flights of cargo and people to Cuba directly from the United States. For the most part, these flights were suspended in 1996 with the passage of the Helms-Burton Act, which requires such aid from the U.S. to depart for Cuba from a third country. Licenses for such human-

itarian flights also will be distributed more easily.

- Urge Congress to join in a bipartisan search for ways to ease restrictions on food shipments to Cuba imposed in 1992.

According to senior administration officials, the initiative grew out of a meeting among Clinton, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and National Security Advisor Samuel R. "Sandy" Berger before

the papal visit to Cuba in January. At that meeting, Clinton asked his two senior foreign affairs specialists "to keep their eyes open for what happens" during the trip and later asked them to formulate possible policy recommendations.

Albright last month traveled to Florida to consult with the politically potent Cuban American community there, both to test the waters for such an initiative and to better assess the feasibility of using relief groups linked to the Catholic Church to help implement it.

Administration officials see the Catholic Church as an ideal vehicle for building an alternative source of power in the country.

"It has 4 million members, access to the population and uncensored sermons," said one official. "It can give people the chance to build their own space [outside of government control]."

A-ARA-P

Clinton to Ease Travel, Aid Limits on Cuba

By CARLA ANNE ROBBINS
Staff Reporter of THE WALL STREET JOURNAL
WASHINGTON—President Clinton has decided to loosen travel and humanitarian-aid restrictions to Cuba.

The new regulations, which come two months after Pope John Paul II visited the island and denounced the U.S. embargo, would roll back punishments imposed by Mr. Clinton after a 1994 immigration crisis and the 1996 downing of two unarmed civilian airplanes.



Fidel Castro

Direct flights to Cuba will again be permitted for family reunions and to transport humanitarian aid. Procedures for selling medicine to Cuba also will be streamlined, and Cuban-Americans will be allowed to send \$1,200 a year per household to relatives on the island.

The 36-year-old Cuban embargo's stiff prohibitions on commercial trade and tourist travel won't be changed; nor will the 1996 Helms-Burton law that penalizes foreign companies that invest in Cuba.

A senior U.S. official said the moves aren't a reward for Cuban leader Fidel Castro. Instead, the official said, they are intended to bolster Cuba's Roman Catholic Church and civic opposition groups that are "trying to expand a [political] space created for them" by the pope's January visit. The goal "is to sideline Castro as much as possible," the official added.

The pontiff had pressed for religious

and personal freedoms in Cuba and denounced the U.S. trade embargo as "ethically unacceptable."

The visit also has prompted new calls in Congress to modify or soften the embargo. Most surprising, conservative GOP Sen. Jesse Helms of North Carolina, author of the 1996 Helms-Burton law, has said he will propose legislation to authorize the use of U.S. government funds to purchase food aid for Cuba's neediest and political opponents — so long as it is distributed by the church or other truly independent charities.

Secretary of State Madeleine Albright

met with Sen. Helms yesterday evening to explain the president's decision. Afterward, Mr. Helms's spokesman called the changes "a big mistake" that would "seriously complicate our efforts" to build bipartisan support for humanitarian-aid legislation.

The Helms proposal has been criticized by Congress's three Cuban-American members, who argue that it would weaken the embargo.

U.S. officials said that President Clinton asked his top foreign-policy advisers last month to find a way to "sustain and

build on the political space" created by the pope's visit. In recent weeks Ms. Albright has discussed possible policy changes with Miami political leaders and with the pope during a visit to Rome.

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce and a small, but growing number of conservatives also have joined in the call for a softening of the embargo. The Helms proposal is seen by some as an attempt to head off more sweeping changes; in particular, a proposal by Connecticut Democrat Sen. Christopher Dodd to allow the unrestricted

sale of food and medicine.

But the Helms plan, developed with the Cuban-American National Foundation, the key exile lobby, could give important aid to the Cuban people and strengthen the Catholic Church at a time when it has begun to speak out for human rights in Cuba.

As a result of the pope's visit, the Castro government has loosened some restrictions on the church and has released almost 90 political prisoners. But it continues to keep another 400 opponents jailed, including prominent pro-democracy activists.

(A/ARA)ZP

Cuba proposal is already in practice

Exiles know how to get by embargo

By Deborah Sharp
USA TODAY

MIAMI — President Clinton's plan to soften U.S. relations with Cuba is being roundly denounced within this city's hard-line exile community.

But as a practical matter, thousands of Cuban-Americans already find ways around the restrictions the president wants to lift: flying to Cuba to visit relatives and sending money to help them survive in a shattered economy.

"All this does is make it easier and cheaper for people who have been violating the embargo to do this," said Dario Moreno, a political scientist at Miami's Florida International University.

In addition to reinstating direct flights from the United States and allowing families to send relatives up to \$1,200 per year, the president is expected to make it easier to send food and medicine to the island.

Cuban-Americans currently have to travel home or send family care packages by going through third countries.

Strongly in favor of a change: The Miami-based

charter and travel companies that help Cuban-Americans fly to the island and send packages home.

Last year, more than 50,000 Cuban-Americans went to the island, and \$275 million was sent there, according to the U.S.-Cuba Trade and Economic Council.

The expected change would be the first easing of U.S. policy since 1996, when Clinton banned direct flights and family remittances. That action came as retaliation after Cuban jets shot down two small, unarmed planes from the United States. Four Cuban-Americans died in the attack.

"Maybe the president wants Cuban exiles to forget Monica Lewinsky for a while," said Tomas Regalado, a city commissioner and talk radio host. "I don't understand this policy: Fidel Castro gets something, and we get nothing in return."

Others were cautiously optimistic: "I think there's a true will on the part of the president to bring about democratic change in Cuba," said Miami anti-Castro activist Ramon Saul Sanchez, whose Democracy Movement often stages freedom flotillas in the Straits of Florida. "But this is a very fine line we have to walk."

► Expected change, 1A

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25TH STORY of Level 1 printed in FULL format.

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USA TODAY

March 20, 1998, Friday through Sunday, FIRST EDITION

SECTION: NEWS; Pg. 1A

LENGTH: 248 words

HEADLINE: Clinton to ease aid access to Cuba

BYLINE: Lee Michael Katz

BODY:

President Clinton today is expected to ease restrictions on direct flights, humanitarian aid and money transfers to Cuba, a move prompted by Pope John Paul II's historic visit to communist Cuba in January.

"The response of the Cuban people to the pope's visit has convinced me we should continue to look for ways to support Cuba's people without supporting its regime," Clinton plans to say in a statement.

Under the plan, U.S. residents will be allowed to send \$ 1,200 a year to relatives in Cuba. Passenger charters and humanitarian aid flights to Cuba will no longer have to fly through third countries.

U.S. officials also said they would streamline aid procedures to Cuban church groups, a plan likely to strengthen the Roman Catholic Church in Cuba. But they insist the 36 year-old trade embargo is intact.

Hard-line opponents of President Fidel Castro criticized the plan. "We believe it sends an egregious and wrong signal to the regime," said Jose Cardenas of the Cuban American National Foundation.

Clinton's move rolls back a 1996 decision to suspend direct flights to Cuba. The action came after Castro's regime shot down four unarmed Cuban-American pilots.

"In effect, President Clinton absolves and forgives Castro for the brutal murders," said Reps. Lincoln Diaz-Balart, R-Fla., and Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, R-Fla., in a statement.

The pope's trip was a major step toward religious freedom under Castro, who seized power in 1959.

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

LOAD-DATE: March 20, 1998

26TH STORY of Level 1 printed in FULL format.

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Chicago Tribune

March 20, 1998 Friday, NORTH SPORTS FINAL EDITION

SECTION: NEWS; Pg. 1; ZONE: N

LENGTH: 1331 words

HEADLINE: U.S. SET TO EASE CUBA SANCTIONS;
CLINTON TO PERMIT HUMANITARIAN AID

BYLINE: By Ginger Thompson, Tribune Staff Writer. William Gibson and David Cloud of the Washington Bureau contributed to this report.

BODY:

Responding to pressure from the Vatican, the Clinton administration is expected to announce Friday that it will relax some sanctions against Cuba to make it easier for the island nation to receive humanitarian assistance.

Administration officials said President Clinton is prepared to allow humanitarian groups to fly shipments of food, medicine and medical supplies directly to Cuba from the United States. Except in a handful of cases, groups such as Catholic Relief Services, which ships some \$4 million worth of medicine to Cuba each year, are required to fly their loads into a third country and then on to Havana.

The flights would likely be made available to religious officials, human-rights advocates and journalists, while keeping intact restrictions against tourists and business people.

Clinton also is expected to announce he will allow Cubans in the United States to send \$300 every three months to relatives on the island. Cuba receives an estimated \$800 million each year in remittances, according to a United Nations report. That amount surpasses Cuba's net income from tourism and sugar, and officials estimate that legalizing remittances could double the amount of cash sent to the island.

In another action to ease the flow of humanitarian aid, the administration is expected to streamline the licensing process for the sale of medical supplies to Cuba.

The moves would reverse some of the sanctions Clinton imposed two years ago after the Cuban air force shot down two private aircraft operated by an exile group called Brothers to the Rescue, killing four people.

The changes come two months after Pope John Paul II's visit to the island, the first time a pope had set foot on Cuban soil. He implored Cuba's government to open itself to the world and for the world to open itself to Cuba.

Since that visit, Cuban President Fidel Castro has released some 200 political prisoners. Numerous delegations of American business people, clergy and politicians have visited Cuba to explore ways to improve U.S. relations with the Cuban people, particularly fledgling independent groups.

Chicago Tribune, March 20, 1998

Earlier this month, Pope John Paul II spoke with Secretary of State Madeleine Albright about Cuba during her visit to Rome. Albright, in the aftermath of the 1996 shootdown, had angrily set aside diplomatic reserve and said of the Cuban pilots, "This is not cojones, this is cowardice!"

Apparently, however, her position was eased by Pope John Paul II.

"She talked to the pope about this and about the subject of building up the (Roman Catholic) Church as a counterweight to Castro," a senior administration official said. "Obviously, the pope's visit and the climate it created merited some action on our part."

The official reaffirmed the government's support for the trade embargo, calling it the "cornerstone" of U.S. policy toward Cuba and of the Helms-Burton Act, a measure passed in 1996 to punish businesses that do business with Cuba. He said the administration's actions are not aimed at "re-energizing" the Cuban government.

However, the expected easing of sanctions has caused a stir from Washington to Miami. Humanitarian and human-rights groups hailed the expected Clinton announcement as "a step in the right direction." Tom Garofalo, a spokesman for the Baltimore-based Catholic Relief Services, said direct flights would make it cheaper and less complicated to ship medicine and food to Cuba.

Since the pope's visit to Cuba, Garofalo said, CRS has seen a significant increase in contributions for Cuba. This year, he said, the agency expects to double the amount of medicine and supplies it will send to the island's 11 million people.

"A combination of the pope's message and the worldwide exposure that Cuba received has really made a difference," he said. "For the first time, people in the United States got to see what Cuba is like. They heard Cubans talking to reporters about how difficult things are because they cannot get food and medicine. I think that has made a real impact."

Baltimore Mayor Kurt Schmoke, who visited Cuba last week, also praised Clinton's decision as "an excellent move." He said that while he was in Cuba, he learned that some \$6 million in medicines was deteriorating in American warehouses because the U.S. would not allow it to be shipped directly to Cuba.

"The delay would in no way benefit the interests of the United States or of Cuba," Schmoke said. "I am pleased to hear about this positive change."

Leaders of Cuban exile groups expressed outrage over the relaxing of sanctions. Ninoska Perez, spokeswoman for the Cuban American National Foundation, said she was disappointed that the Clinton administration is allowing itself to be influenced by humanitarian groups, business leaders whose only interest is making money off Cuba and the Catholic Church.

"I believed this was a country where the Church did not dictate politics," she said. "The embargo has been put in place for very good reasons that have not changed. There is still repression in Cuba. The jails are still full of political prisoners. The people of Cuba have not had a free and fair election in 39 years."

Chicago Tribune, March 20, 1998

"There is no reason for the United States to change its policy until Castro changes."

Political analysts, however, say the easing of U.S. sanctions against Cuba might indicate that the mood of the Cuban-American community is changing. Since the death last year of Jorge Mas Canosa, a well-connected Castro opponent who almost single-handedly orchestrated U.S. policy toward Cuba, Cuban-Americans with more moderate views are gaining strength and making their voices heard.

The Cuban-American National Foundation, which was founded by Mas Canosa, is supporting a still-evolving proposal by Sen. Jesse Helms (R-N.C.) to send federal relief to Cuba. The plan would allow the government to make millions of dollars available to groups such as Catholic Relief Services to buy U.S. goods and distribute them to independent groups in Cuba.

Congress also is scheduled to act this session on a proposal by Sen. Christopher Dodd (D-Conn.) that would eliminate almost all restrictions on humanitarian aid to Cuba.

Maria de los Angeles Torres, a Cuba scholar at DePaul University, said that until recently such plans were considered almost blasphemous among most Cuban-Americans. "People used to get bomb threats for making those kinds of suggestions," she said. "Now, the sentiment to help Cuba is being openly expressed in political circles."

Wayne Smith, former head of the U.S. Interests Section in Havana, has noticed the same shift. "My take on it is that the administration is willing to (ease sanctions) because Cuban exiles are split and the hard-liners do not carry the weight they once did."

They have, however, remained vocal. Cuban-American members of Congress, who expressed confidence that they had fended off changes in U.S. policy after the pope's visit, expressed shock and anger when Albright informed them on Thursday of the president's plans.

"All this does is send a political victory to Castro. It makes you wonder about President Clinton's insatiable urge to do favors for Castro," Rep. Lincoln Diaz-Balart (R-Fla.) said. "While Castro is beating people over the head and throwing them in dungeons, President Clinton looks for wiggle room under current law to send a signal of good relations to Castro. It's pathetic."

Diaz-Balart noted that Clinton could not completely lift the U.S. embargo because the Helms-Burton law prohibits him from doing so without consent of Congress. "And you know we're not going to change that law," he said.

The Cuban government reacted cautiously to the expected changes.

"Our whole position is the blockade should be over," said Luis Fernandez, spokesman for the Cuban Interests Section, the unofficial Cuban embassy in Washington. "That's a positive step, but it's not the end of the blockade."

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

LOAD-DATE: March 20, 1998

Chicago Sun-Times

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President OKs flights to Cuba

March 20, 1998

BY GEORGE GEDDA ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON--Responding to humanitarian concerns, President Clinton is expected to reinstate direct flights to Cuba and allow U.S.-based exiles to send money home to family and friends, officials said Thursday.

The moves, prompted in part by the January visit to Cuba of Pope John Paul II, were recommended by Secretary of State Madeleine Albright. A formal announcement could come as early as today.

As part of the package, Clinton is expected to end cumbersome procedures for the delivery of medicines to Cuba and also to endorse a legislative proposal to permit increased humanitarian relief to Cubans.

Cuban President Fidel Castro has denounced that proposal and said he supports an alternative bill before Congress that would allow the unrestricted sale of food and medicine to Cuba.

The U.S. officials, who spoke on condition that they not be identified, said the measures are likely to benefit the Roman Catholic Church in Cuba, which is responsible for distribution of humanitarian supplies from the United States.

As more and more relief supplies are delivered to the church, officials expect there will be a corresponding increase in the number of Cubans who will look favorably on the church, now the only significant independent institution on the island. Strengthening of the church was a priority goal of the pope when he visited Cuba.

Officials stressed that the measures are an attempt to assist the Cuban people without strengthening Castro. No easing of the U.S. embargo against Cuba is planned.

Ending the ban on direct flights would allow humanitarian cargo to be shipped to Cuba without a costly detour through a third country. The move also would benefit journalists, athletes and others eligible to travel there. The prohibition on tourism in Cuba by Americans remains.

Officials acknowledged that Clinton's attempt to punish Castro by outlawing remittances to Cuban families has backfired. The ban was widely ignored, the officials

said.

Beyond that, an increase in the number of dollar-holding Cubans would diminish their reliance on the government for their survival and create a greater sense of independence, the officials said.

The ban on direct flights and on dollar remittances was imposed by Clinton two years ago after Cuban MiGs shot down two unarmed Miami-based planes that were flying north of Cuba. The four Cuban exiles aboard the planes were killed.

Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-Fla.), who was born in Cuba, said restoring the direct flights would reward the Castro government.

“By lifting the ban, it sends a signal to Castro that he has been absolved in the deaths of those four innocent men,” she said. “That’s a terrible message. Castro has not behaved any better toward the Cuban people than when the president imposed sanctions.”

The planes belonged to Brothers to the Rescue, a Miami group whose co-founder, Jose Basulto, also criticized the pending move.

“I never expected Clinton to do any better,” he said from his home in Coral Gables, Fla., “This has been his line, his way. I believe it is wrong. He is damaging the Cuban people’s interest. It is not going to help the Cuban people at all.”

But Rep. Lee Hamilton (D-Ind.) praised the proposals. “These steps, though long in coming, are the right ones,” he said.

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Clinton set to ease sanctions on Havana

Proposal angers Cuban-Americans

By Tom Carter
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

The White House is prepared to allow a resumption of direct flights to Cuba for the first time since the shooting down of two aircraft over the Straits of Florida two years ago and to ease other sanctions, congressional sources said yesterday.

White House spokesman Michael McCurry declined to specify what steps would be taken but said President Clinton would make an announcement today.

Cuban-American congressmen reacted with outrage, claiming the easing of sanctions would dishonor the four Miami men killed when their small planes were shot down by Cuban fighters on Feb. 24, 1996.

"By lifting the sanctions, President Clinton is absolving and forgiving [Cuban President] Fidel Castro for those murders," said Rep. Lincoln Diaz-Balart, Florida Republican.

Rep. Robert Menendez, New Jersey Democrat, argued that only Congress has the authority to ease Cuba sanctions.

"The administration's proposal ... will [provide] Castro with desperately needed hard currency," he said. "It is my belief that the administration does not have the

authority under U.S. law to undertake the measure included in this proposal."

Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright phoned several congressmen yesterday morning to seek support for allowing resumption of the flights and lifting a ban on sending money to the island nation.

Mrs. Albright told the lawmakers she was also recommending that the president ease restrictions on the sale of medicines to humanitarian organizations. The need for medicine in Cuba was highlighted during Pope John Paul II's visit there in late January.

"In the wake of the pope's visit there has been a lot of consideration in our government about how we address some of the real humanitarian needs of the people of Cuba, who have suffered under the yoke of totalitarianism for too long," Mr. McCurry said.

"There will be several things that I think the president will address tomorrow."

The United States banned remittances to Cuba and began requiring special permits to fly to the island in August 1994. Flights were banned altogether after the two planes belonging to the group Brothers to the Rescue were shot

down.

Mr. Clinton was expected to announce that Cuban-Americans will be allowed to send up to \$1,200 a year to their friends and relatives in Cuba, the same amount they were allowed to send before 1994.

In 1995, the last full year in which direct flights were allowed, more than 120,000 journalists, Cuban-Americans and government officials with special permits visited Cuba on regularly scheduled flights from Miami to Havana. Lifting the flight ban would not permit tourist travel to Cuba.

Luis Fernandez, spokesman for the Cuban government in Washington, said he would not comment until there is an official announcement from the U.S. government.

"What is clear is that the blockade policy should be lifted. It is inhuman," he said.

A State Department official said the moves were being taken in response to the pope's historic visit to Cuba.

Based on the visit, consultations with the Catholic Church, Mrs. Albright's trip to the Vatican two weeks ago, and discussions with the Cuban-American community, "the general consensus is there is a valuable opening now," a State Department official said.

The Clinton administration is seeking "ways in which we can expand support for the Cuban people without benefiting the Cuban gov-

ernment," he said.

He said the administration would continue to maintain the 35-year-old economic embargo on Cuba and to support multilateral efforts to press for democracy there.

Mr. Diaz-Balart, who received a 20-minute call from Mrs. Albright yesterday, said the secretary of state "said the president is seriously considering this, but my impression is that it is a done deal."

Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, Florida Republican, said the decision showed a lack of regard for the families of the dead Cuban-American fliers.

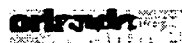
"Clinton is letting Fidel out of the penalty box and those people are still dead and their families still grieving," she said. "This administration looks for any excuse, any excuse at all, to loosen the noose around Castro's neck."

Others on Capitol Hill were pleased, however.

"I think the pope's visit, the pressure religious and business groups are putting on the State Department, and even a shift in attitude in the Cuban community, has caused the administration to begin these moves," said Rep. Esteban E. Torres, California Democrat.

"I read this as support of my legislation," said Mr. Torres, sponsor of a bill to lift the ban on sales of food and medicine to Cuba.

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Clinton set to let Cuba get U.S. aid

By William E. Gibson

Washington Bureau

Published in The Orlando Sentinel, March 20, 1998

WASHINGTON -- Responding to pleas from Pope John Paul II, President Clinton plans to announce a change in U.S. policy today to open the flow of money and medical supplies to Cuba and allow direct flights bringing humanitarian aid to the island.

Clinton's strategy is to aid the Cuban people while pressuring their government, and to build up the Roman Catholic Church to counter Fidel Castro's regime, administration officials said Thursday.

Though not a dramatic shift in policy, even these small steps angered Cuban-Americans in Congress, delighted aid groups, pleased the Catholic Church and gave new hope to those who want to end the U.S. embargo of Cuba.

The most immediate beneficiaries will be Catholic relief workers in Miami who are struggling to double their aid package to Cuba this year.

"This would be a godsend," said Peter Coats, spokesman for the Archdiocese of Miami.

The archdiocese wants to send hundreds of pounds of bandages, syringes and other disposable medical supplies donated by a pharmaceutical company. Last month, Catholic charities sent 50,000 pounds of food to Cuba through Canada, although the goods were warehoused in Miami.

The change in U.S. policy comes two months after the pope's historic visit to Cuba and two weeks after he met with Secretary of State Madeleine Albright at the Vatican.

The pope lashed out at the embargo as a divisive policy that hurts the poor, prompting Albright to recommend measures to help the Cuban people.

The president plans to announce today that new licensing procedures will be devised to:

- Allow direct humanitarian-aid charter flights between the United States and Cuba. Detailed rules still must be devised. They likely will allow direct flights by religious and human-rights workers and journalists, but not tourists or business people.

- Permit Cuban-Americans to send \$300 every three months to family members in Cuba. This would restore rules that were in place before a wave of rafters fled Cuba for the United States in 1994.

- Streamline licensing for the sale of medical supplies to Cuba, a process now sharply restricted. Arrangements will be devised by U.S. agencies to ease those restrictions in the next few months.

Direct flights to Cuba were cut off in 1996 after Cuban jet pilots shot down two civilian Brothers to the Rescue planes that operated out of South Florida.

Albright first gained worldwide fame in the aftermath of the shootdown when she angrily set aside diplomatic reserve and said of the Cuban pilots, "This is not cojones; this is cowardice!"

But the pope's criticisms of the embargo and his meeting with Albright this month persuaded her to ease the travel ban and to seek ways to aid the Cuban people.

``She talked to the pope about this and about the subject of building up the (Catholic) church as a counterweight to Castro," a senior administration official said Thursday.

U.S. officials, nevertheless, reaffirmed their get-tough embargo policy, designed to squeeze the Castro regime economically and encourage political reforms. They said the changes will not affect the Helms-Burton Act of 1996, which brings sanctions against those who do business with Cuba.

Cuban-American members of Congress, who thought they had fended off changes in U.S. policy after the pope's visit, were shocked and angry when Albright informed them on Thursday of the president's plans.

``All this does is send a political victory to Castro. It makes you wonder about President Clinton's insatiable urge to do favors for Castro," Rep. Lincoln Diaz-Balart, R-Miami, said. ``While Castro is beating people over the head and throwing them in dungeons, President Clinton looks for wiggle room under current law to send a signal of good relations to Castro. It's pathetic."

Diaz-Balart noted that Clinton could not otherwise ease the embargo because the Helms-Burton law prohibits him from doing so without consent of Congress.

The Cuban government reacted cautiously to the planned changes.

``Our whole position is the blockade should be over," said Luis Fernandez, spokesman for the Cuban Interests Section, the unofficial Cuban embassy in Washington. ``That's a positive step, but it's not the end of the blockade."

Cuban-Americans had conflicting thoughts about the ban on flights and limits on aid.

Their most potent lobbying arm, the Cuban American National Foundation, issued a statement reaffirming its opposition to direct passenger flights and remittances to Cuba as ``an egregiously wrong signal" to Castro and the international community.

Deborah Ramirez and David Cloud of the Sun-Sentinel, South Florida, contributed to this report.

[Posted 03/19/98 9:43 PM EST]

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Newsday (New York, NY)

March 20, 1998, Friday, NASSAU AND SUFFOLK EDITION

SECTION: NEWS; Page A04

LENGTH: 643 words

HEADLINE: U.S. TO ALLOW AID, KIN'S VISITS TO CUBA

BYLINE: Ken Fireman. WASHINGTON BUREAU

DATELINE: Washington

BODY:

Washington - The Clinton administration plans to announce today a resumption of direct air flights to Cuba for humanitarian purposes such as visits of relatives and delivery of food and medicine, administration officials said.

The resumption of the flights, which were suspended two years ago after Cuban planes shot down two exile-piloted aircraft over the Florida Straits, is one of three measures the White House plans to announce that will ease restrictions on U.S. contact with Cuba.

The other moves will allow Cuban-Americans to send up to \$1,200 a year to close relatives in Cuba and will streamline licensing procedures for medical shipments to the island, said the officials, who asked not to be identified.

White House officials portrayed the measures as narrowly crafted exceptions to the strict economic embargo Washington has imposed on the Communist-ruled island for more than three decades. They said the moves signaled no change in Washington's longstanding policy of trying to isolate the regime of Cuban President Fidel Castro.

Rather, they said, the measures were primarily a response to Pope John Paul II, who criticized the U.S. embargo and advocated greater international contact with Cuba during a visit to the island in January.

"All the central, basic elements of our policy are going to remain in place," said White House spokesman Mike McCurry. "But . . . we were deeply impressed by the pope's expression of concern for the humanitarian suffering of the people of Cuba, and there have been some efforts under way in our government to address that."

The relaxation of the air ban will allow only charter flights licensed by the U.S. government, and only six categories of people will be eligible to travel on them: those visiting relatives, those delivering humanitarian assistance, journalists, scholars, U.S. government employees and religious workers, the officials said.

That would amount to a return to the policy that had been in place until February, 1996, when Cuban planes shot down two of three small Cessnas piloted

Newsday (New York, NY), March 20, 1998

by anti-Castro Cuban exiles. Havana said the downings, which killed four people, occurred over Cuban waters; Washington said they occurred over international waters. In the ensuing furor, the United States took several steps aimed at punishing Castro, including suspending all direct air flights.

The move to allow Cuban-Americans to send money to relatives back home restores a policy that had been in place until late 1994, when the Republican victory in that year's congressional elections prompted a general toughening of U.S. policy toward Cuba.

The change in licensing procedures relaxes regulations put in place shortly after the 1996 shoot-down to curb possible diversion of humanitarian medical supplies for commercial purposes. Officials said the administration is confident it can continue to prevent such diversions while expediting deliveries.

White House aides said they have discussed the moves with members of Congress and leaders of the Cuban-American community. While they acknowledge expecting some negative reaction, they say they hope for support of the measures.

The Cuban-American National Foundation, a conservative Miami-based group, reacted negatively. "Such a unilateral change in policy would be a wrong signal to send at this time to the Castro dictatorship and the international community," said Ninoska Perez, a spokeswoman. "This is like rewarding Castro for killing American citizens. . . . Four lives were lost, but it doesn't matter."

Two Cuban-American members of Congress, Lincoln Diaz-Balart and Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, also blasted the decision. "With this action, President Clinton once again makes clear that he seeks to unilaterally relax sanctions on the Castro tyranny," the Florida Republicans said in a joint statement.

LANGUAGE: English

LOAD-DATE: March 20, 1998

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The San Francisco Chronicle

MARCH 20, 1998, FRIDAY, FINAL EDITION

SECTION: NEWS; Pg. A20

LENGTH: 674 words

HEADLINE: Cuba Conference Sponsors Accuse U.S. of Meddling
Some participants were denied visas

BYLINE: Charles Burrell, Chronicle Staff Writer

DATELINE: BERKELEY

BODY:

Sponsors of a controversial conference on Cuba at the University of California at Berkeley yesterday accused the U.S. government of trying to undermine the event, while a Florida congressman called the forum a "'propaganda mechanism'" for the Castro government.

Faculty members professed surprise that the academic gathering had turned into what one called "'an international incident.'"

The two-day "'Dialogue With Cuba'" conference begins on campus this morning, but 11 of the 19 participants invited from Cuba will not be there because the U.S. State Department has denied them visas.

"'We were outraged that our government would use the visa approval process to undermine a legitimate academic conference,'" Professor Ling-chi Wang, head of the campus ethnic studies department and a chief organizer of the event, said at a news conference.

State Department officials said the visas were denied under a directive issued in 1985 by then-President Reagan banning visits by high-ranking officials in Cuba's government and Communist Party. Several of the invited Cuban professionals are also members of the Cuban parliament or other government or party organs.

Some of the missing Cubans made videotapes that will be shown at the forum, and others will be replaced by Cubans from the country's diplomatic mission in Washington, Wang said. Americans from various professional fields also will be on the panels covering race, health, environment, U.S.-Cuba relations and other topics.

Meanwhile yesterday, GOP Representative Lincoln Diaz-Balart of Miami issued a statement attacking the conference for not including Cubans opposed to Fidel Castro's government and for not having a panel devoted to human rights in Cuba.

Diaz-Balart called it "'completely unacceptable'" for UC not to invite Cuban dissidents and to "'systematically deny the existence of human rights violations in Cuba, to serve as a propaganda mechanism for a terrorist state like Castro's.'"

The San Francisco Chronicle, MARCH 20, 1998

Diaz-Balart is a native Cuban who represents a largely Cuban American district. His aunt was the former wife of Castro and mother of Castro's only recognized child.

His attack stood in contrast to a letter signed by 21 congressmen last week in support of the conference. And it touched off a spirited defense of the conference at yesterday's press briefing, held at Berkeley's Durant Hotel to introduce the visiting Cubans.

"We're here in the pursuit of knowledge, not pursuit of politics," said Carlos Munoz Jr., a professor of ethnic studies.

"We didn't want to have any . . . shouting matches," Wang said. The Cuban participants were selected by various departments on campus as experts in their fields "regardless of political beliefs," he said.

Delvis Fernandez Levy, executive director of the Washington-based Cuban American Alliance, spoke of the "silent majority of Cuban Americans who say enough is enough," and want to see normalized relations with Cuba.

"I think it is unlikely that all Cubans in Miami think like certain Cubans in Congress," he said.

Wang said he'd heard reports of flyers being distributed in Miami attacking the conference. "I think people in California should have a right to put on an academic conference and not allow anyone from Florida to tell us who to invite and who not to invite," he said.

Associate Professor Percy Hintzen, chairman of African American studies, said, "We thought this was going to be a nice little academic conference like we have all the time at the University of California. All of a sudden it exploded into an international incident."

A further frustration for organizers was that some of the 11 Cuban musicians who were to perform in Berkeley last night also had their visas denied and were stuck waiting for entry in Toronto, Wang said.

A year's planning preceded the forum, which Wang called "the most comprehensive conference of its kind in the last 39 years." It was 39 years ago that Castro came to power.

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

LOAD-DATE: March 20, 1998

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Today's News

U.S. to ease sanctions on Cuba

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Connections

A ban on direct flights to Cuba will end, exiles will be allowed to send \$100 a month to the island, and delivery of food and medicine will be speeded.

By DAVID ADAMS

© St. Petersburg Times, published March 20, 1998

The freeze in U.S. relations with Cuba is showing the first signs of a thaw.

President Clinton is expected to sign an executive order today loosening restrictions on travel to Cuba and allowing more food, medicines and money to be sent to island, administration officials say.

The announcement surprised and angered hard-liners in Miami's Cuban exile community who have been pressing for even tighter economic punishment of Fidel Castro's Communist government.

But the policy change wasn't altogether unexpected, coming two months after Pope John Paul II's momentous visit to Cuba during which he said the American embargo was "ethically unacceptable."

Perhaps moved by such a public attack, the Clinton administration almost immediately began reviewing some of the harsher elements of the embargo. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright met privately with the pope this month, followed by meetings last week in Miami with Cuban exiles.

Details of the four-point policy shift remain sketchy.

But according to U.S. officials, Clinton's new policy ends a two-year ban on direct flights from the United States to Cuba. However,

travel will be restricted to Cuban-Americans, who are allowed to visit once a year for humanitarian reasons, and U.S. travelers in exempted categories, such as journalists and businessmen with Treasury Department licenses.

The order restores permission for Cuban exiles to send as much as \$100 a month to relatives on the island. In a concession to the Catholic Church, a provision will also allow cargo planes of donated food and medicines to fly directly to the island.

A fourth measure will ease restrictions on the sale of medicines to Cuba, although this will still require a license.

The new policy is being described by some analysts as a potentially explosive political decision that could mark the beginning of the end of the three-decade embargo.

But others are more cautious. "Anyone who thinks that these changes are the first and last act of the Cuba play are sadly mistaken," said John Kavulich, president of the U.S.-Cuba Trade and Economic Council, a private New York-based group that monitors developments on behalf of U.S. business interests.

U.S. officials concede the new policy does little more than reverse two presidential orders dating back to 1994, as well as softening a 1992 embargo law. One White House official said the president's announcement effectively returned U.S. policy to the status Clinton inherited from the Bush administration.

Even so, the four new measures undo key elements in U.S. policy on Cuba. Lifting the ban on direct flights reverses the Clinton administration's immediate response to the shootdown of two light planes by the Cuban air force in February 1996 in which four Cuban exiles died. Financial remittances were

cut off in the summer of 1994 when Castro allowed thousands of Cuban rafters to head for Florida.

Albright first gained notice on Cuba issues after the shootdown, when she angrily set aside diplomatic reserve and said of the Cuban pilots, "This is not<I> cojones, <P>this is cowardice!"

But the pope's sharp criticisms of the embargo and his meeting with Albright persuaded her to seek ways to aid the Cuban people. "She talked to the pope about this and about the subject of building up the church as a counterweight to Castro," a senior Clinton administration said on Thursday. "Obviously, the pope's visit and the climate it created merited some action on our part."

In concrete terms the four measures will dramatically shorten the current four-hour journey from Miami to Cuba via third countries such as Mexico and the Bahamas. A direct flight takes only 30 minutes.

Officials point out that the ban on financial aid from Cuban-Americans is widely ignored, to the tune of an estimated \$800-million a year. Also, officials point out that the more people who receive dollars from Miami, the fewer Cubans who are dependent on Castro.

The White House says that while it expects to hear howls of dismay from political hard-liners in Miami, it is confident of a broad consensus of support nationally.

Experts have also warned that Cuba's volatile political situation could spark a new refugee exodus at any time. In which case, they advise, anything that can be done to ease the daily economic plight of Cubans will reduce the threat of massive migration.

Officials insist that the policy changes don't signify any intention to lift the embargo, which bans most trade and investment in Cuba.

But that is no consolation to hard-line exiles in Miami who fear the Clinton administration is selling out Cuba policy. The city's two Cuban-American members of Congress -- both Republican -- were quick to condemn the president, as was the powerful Cuban American National Foundation.

"By lifting the ban, it sends a signal to Castro that he has been absolved in the deaths of those four innocent men," said Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen. "Are we saying two years is enough? Is that all that these deaths meant?"

"I consider this an insult to the deaths of our four comrades," said Jose Basulto, president of Brothers to the Rescue, the exile organization whose two planes were shot down in the 1996 incident. "It's an insult to their memory, and another treason by the Clinton administration to the Cuban people."

State Sen. Mario Diaz-Balart said it was "just one more step of the Clinton administration to appease the totalitarian regime of Cuba."

But such sentiments may be waning -- even in Miami.

"Since the pope's visit, there has been a groundswell of support in Miami for a change of policy," said Damian Fernandez, professor of international relations at Florida International University.

Like other critics of U.S. policy, Fernandez doesn't see an end of the embargo soon. "But this decision shows movement," he said. "It's really welcome. I don't think we should minimize it."

Ralph Fernandez, an outspoken Cuban-American lawyer in Tampa, thinks Albright's plan is a good idea.

"Changing times call for changing tactics," said Fernandez, who has represented political prisoners. "I concur that some concessions

can be made with the optimism that Castro will follow and make some concessions himself."

-- Information from Times wires was used in this report.

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National

Clinton lightens-up on Cuba restrictions

Cox News Service

MIAMI -- President Clinton was expected to soften America's hard-line stance toward Cuba today by re-authorizing direct flights to Cuba, as well as remittances from Cuban-Americans to family and friends on the island, drawing outrage from Cuban exiles here.

A U.S. State Department official emphasized, though, that the moves do not indicate a long-term thaw in the ice-cold relationship shared by the United States and the government of Cuban President Fidel Castro.

But experts on Cuba said that they could be a sign that the increased pressure being put on the Clinton administration by businesses and the Roman Catholic church to ease the U.S. embargo might be working.

Secretary of State Madeleine Albright recommended the actions to Clinton in response to Pope John Paul II's visit to Cuba in January, during which he urged the world to open up to Cuba and reiterated his opposition to the 37-year-old economic embargo against Cuba.

Albright discussed Cuba with the pope during a visit to the Vatican earlier this month.

The State Department official said that, as a result of the pope's visit, there has come a "moment of opportunity" during which the U.S. government must seek ways to expand support for the Cuban people without benefiting Castro's regime.

The Clinton administration is expected to allow direct flights for some passengers, and for humanitarian groups to transport medicine and food to the island.

The State Department official said that he interpreted "direct flights" to mean charter flights, mostly for family members, and not commercial flights.

He said that U.S. citizens still will be prohibited from spending money in Cuba, a prohibition made under the Trading with the Enemy Act of 1963.

The Clinton administration also is expected to allow Cuban-Americans to send up to \$1,200 a year to family and friends in Cuba, and to ease restrictions on the sale of medicines to humanitarian organizations in Cuba.

The ban on direct flights was imposed in February 1996 just days after Cuban warplanes shot down two civilian U.S. aircraft, killing four members of the exile group, Brothers to the Rescue.

The ban on remittances was imposed in 1994.

In a written statement, the Cuban-American National Foundation (CANF), the nation's most powerful Cuban exile group, said: "Such a unilateral change would be the wrong signal to send Castro at this time. It risks unraveling the strong bipartisan support in Congress for the current policy on Cuba."

U.S. Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, R-Fla., said Clinton's announcement would be seen as a reward for the Cuban government.

"By lifting the ban, it sends a signal to Castro that he has been absolved in the deaths of those four innocent men," she said. "Castro has not behaved any better toward the Cuban people than when the president imposed the sanctions."

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Clinton to ease Cuba sanctions

By Bruce Clark in Washington

President Bill Clinton is to announce an easing of some US sanctions against Cuba, including the ban on direct flights, US officials said yesterday.

The measures to be laid out today or shortly afterwards do not imply any lessening of the economic embargo against Havana's communist regime, the officials said. But the changes are intended to ease the plight of the Cuban people.

The measures are a follow-up to Pope John Paul's visit to Cuba in January, and they in effect reverse the extra sanctions that were imposed on Cuba two years ago after two unarmed private aircraft were shot down over the island, killing four Cuban-Americans.

Among the changes are a lifting of the ban on financial assistance from Cuban-Americans to their family and friends on the island. Now they will be able to send \$300 every three months.

Direct flights will be allowed for humanitarian cargoes and some passengers, but the ban on US citizens taking holidays on the island will remain in force.

It will also be made easier to send food and medicine to Cuba for distribution by the Roman Catholic religious authorities and other non-government agencies. The latest measures were recommended to the US president by Madeleine Albright, the secretary of state who earlier this month conferred with Pope John Paul about the island.

Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, a Republican Congresswoman close to the Cuban-American community in Florida, deplored the initiative on grounds that Cuban leader Fidel Castro would treat it as a reward.

"By lifting the ban (on

direct flights), it sends a signal to Castro that he has been absolved in the deaths of those four innocent men," she said. This was unjustified, she said, because "Castro has not behaved any better towards the Cuban people than when the President imposed (extra) sanctions."

Administration officials strongly denied that the latest measures implied any easing of US policy towards the Castro government, and argued that they could help to weaken his authority.

One official said the visit of the Pope, who criticised both communist repression and the US embargo, had made it easier for people to act in contravention of the Castro government's wishes, and this trend should be encouraged.

The easing of the sanctions regime will be warmly welcomed by most Latin American leaders whom Mr Clinton will meet at a summit next month. But it may also stiffen the determination of Republican legislators to use the sanctions available under US law to punish non-US companies investing in Cuba.

● Cuba's image as a world sporting giant, hit by defections of baseball and boxing stars, has suffered a fresh blow with four fleeing baseball players and a trainer reported missing in the Florida Straits, reports Pascal Fletcher from Havana.

Hopes were fading yesterday for the five men who, according to reports in Miami citing family members, left the communist-ruled island last March 10 in a small boat and have not been heard from since. A US coast guard search for them in the Florida Straits was being scaled back in the absence of any sightings.

In Havana, officials offered no information about the five.

(HARA)
AP

The Miami Herald

www.herald.com

SATURDAY MARCH 21 1998

F

Albright proposes new view of C

By **CHRISTOPHER MARQUIS**
Herald Staff Writer

WASHINGTON — Unveiling liberalizing steps designed to promote peaceful change in Cuba, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright on Friday called for a "new era of fresh thinking" in America's approach to the island.

"The Cuban people are beginning to think beyond [President Fidel] Castro," Albright said. "We need to do the same."

It was not immediately clear whether Friday's actions would mark the full extent of the administration's "beyond Castro"

U.S. should think beyond Castro rule, secretary says

■ U.N. REPORT ASSAILS U.S.-CUBA RELATIONS, 19A

approach. To some analysts, the measures virtually tapped out the president's limited authority on Cuba, a power he largely ceded to Congress by signing the Helms-Burton Act of 1996.

The president is unable to lift

the economic embargo of Cuba, which was codified into law by Helms-Burton. The only other major policy options he has not exercised are his right to negotiate with Castro or to loosen restrictions on Americans visiting the

island.

Spurred by strong congressional pressure, administration officials have repeatedly rebuffed Cuban government efforts to expand a series of talks on migration to cover other issues. And Albright said Friday that the president did not envision opening Cuba to U.S. tourists.

Administration officials have long moved cautiously on Cuba, fearful of losing support among Cuban-American voters in Florida and of facing hostile question-

PLEASE SEE ALBRIGHT, 19A



A right roses new approach

ALBRIGHT, FROM 1A

ing by Republican lawmakers who oppose any thaw with Havana. The recent call by Pope John Paul II for an opening toward Cuba provided a measure of political cover for Friday's moves — but not enough to placate hard-line foes of Castro.

Albright outlined four changes in U.S. policy that she said would help strengthen the Roman Catholic Church in Cuba, expand civil society and reduce Cubans' dependence on the state — without fundamentally undercutting U.S. efforts to isolate the Castro regime politically and economically.

The changes, according to State Department and White House officials, could lead to the resumption of direct flights between Miami and Havana "within weeks," and allow Cuban Americans once again to send cash legally — up to \$1,200 a year — to relatives on the island.

Although details remain sketchy, officials described the following administration measures:

- Resume direct humanitarian charter flights to Cuba. President Clinton halted such flights after Cuban air force MiGs shot down two civilian planes flown by members of the exile group Brothers to the Rescue on Feb. 24, 1996. All four pilots were killed.
- Allow Cuban Americans to send up to \$300 every three months to family members on the island.

- Streamline the issuance of licenses to U.S. pharmaceutical and medical equipment companies to sell their products in Cuba.

- Work with bipartisan congressional leaders to adopt legislation that would lead to food transfers, whether in the form of sales or donations.

Lula Rodriguez, an advisor to Albright on Cuban matters, said the secretary of state was acting in part on recommendations she received when she met with leaders of the Cuban-American community during a visit to Miami this month.

Castro, interviewed by CNN in Havana on Thursday, described the easing of sanctions as "really positive and constructive." The measures "will help create a better climate in relations between the United States and Cuba," he said. Relatives of the downed pilots in Miami had mixed feelings.

"I'm honestly not in accord with that. I'm a radical," said Eva Barba, whose son, Pablo Morales, was one of the four Brothers to the Rescue pilots killed when Cuban MiGs downed their Cessnas on Feb. 24, 1996. "What can a

mother say, when her son has been blown to bits in the skies."

"What's most important to me is that human rights be respected," said Miriam de la Peña, mother of another slain Brothers pilot, Mario de la Peña. "When it comes to policy, I don't know what's best for the people of Cuba. It's good that the medicine will reach them directly, because the people are not to blame for the fact that their leaders are terrorists." Exile activists were sharply divided in their reactions.

"It seems to me that U.S. policymakers are beginning to pay attention to the complaints of the international community and to adopt an intelligent policy toward Cuba," said Eloy Gutierrez Menoyo, president of Cambio Cubano, a Miami-based organization that favors peaceful transition toward democracy on the island.

"We trust that Cuba will respond with an intelligent policy, too," Gutierrez added. "If we want [the Cuban people] to be able to run, we must first help them to crawl."

Radio host Ninoska Perez Castellon, director of The Voice of the Cuban American National Foundation, disagreed.

The Clinton administration "has lifted the sanctions imposed after a crime for which [Fidel Castro] has shown no remorse," Perez said. "It hid behind the Pope's statements and lifted the sanctions."

Roberto Rodriguez Aragon, president of the Cuban Patriotic Junta, an umbrella group of various exile organizations, called the announced steps "another



TIM CHAPMAN / Herald Staff

VOICING CONCERN: Relatives of the four Brothers to the Rescue pilots shot down two years ago protest the proposed easing of U.S. policy toward Cuba. From left, front row, are Maggie Alejandre Khuly, Ana Alejandre Ciereszko, Mirta Costa and Mario de la Peña. From left, back row, are Cristina Alejandre and Mirta Costa Mendez.

betrayal" of the Cuban exile community, "comparable to April 17," a reference to the failed Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961.

"It seems wonderful to me," said Maria Cristina Herrera,

director of the Miami-based Center for Cuban Studies. "Let's hope no obstacle will halt the positive flow."

Herald staff writer Cynthia Corzo contributed to this report.

Albright says Cuba will remain under tight economic embargo

Castro praises easing of sanctions; others criticize decision

By Richard Whittle

Washington Bureau of The Dallas Morning News

WASHINGTON — Cuba will remain under a tight U.S. embargo despite President Clinton's decision to relax curbs on sending medicine and money to the island, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright said Friday.

"We will maintain economic pres-

■ Cubans jubilant. 17A

■ Defectors' fate unknown. 17A

sure through the embargo and the Helms-Burton Act," Ms. Albright said, referring to a law that imposes penalties on foreign companies that make certain investments in Cuba.

Despite that explanation, the administration's decision won praise from Cuban leader Fidel Castro and criticism from Sen. Jesse Helms, R-N.C., chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and co-author of the Helms-Burton Act.

Mr. Castro, in an interview with CNN, characterized the measures as "really positive and constructive," although he said they must be studied before Cuba could offer a definitive reaction.

He added, however, that the steps would "aid in creating a better climate of relations between the United States and Cuba. ... We are confident that one day they will improve."

Ms. Albright said she and Mr. Helms discussed the administration's decision at length on Thursday. But the senator issued a statement complaining of the "administration's decision to make controversial changes in U.S. policy by what amounts to the use of executive fiat."

"I am puzzled that the administration chose to act alone — in a manner that was certain to provoke harsh criticism — when so many in Congress, including me, were willing to work with them," Mr. Helms said.

Ms. Albright said the administration would "continue to shine a spotlight on Havana's prisoners of conscience and call for their release."

"And we will not forget that, 25 months ago, three U.S. citizens and one legal resident were shot down in international airspace," she added.



Associated Press

Secretary of State Madeleine Albright suggested helping the Cuban people "without helping the Cuban government."

Mr. Clinton tightened restrictions on dealings with Cuba in 1996 and backed the Helms-Burton legislation after Cuban MiG fighter jets shot down two unarmed civilian aircraft flown by Cuban exiles on a protest mission. The exiles were over international waters at the time.

Formally announced at the White House by press secretary Mike McCurry, the new measures include:

■ Asking Congress to approve legislation to "meet humanitarian food needs" in Cuba.

■ Expediting the issuance of licenses to sell medical supplies to the island. "We will continue to verify that medicines reach the Cuban people and are not diverted to other uses," Ms. Albright pledged.

■ Approving direct charter flights

to the island for humanitarian purposes. "We will allow humanitarian but not tourist or business flights," Ms. Albright said.

■ Allowing Cubans in this country to send as much as \$1,200 a year to "close relatives" on the island. Such remittances have been barred since 1994. But a State Department fact sheet acknowledged that many Cuban-Americans have been sending them "outside authorized channels."

Speaking to reporters at the State Department, Ms. Albright stressed that the relaxations were a response to Pope John Paul II's January visit to Cuba, not a reward to Mr. Castro.

"We're taking these steps now, not because of anything the Castro regime has done, nor are we doing it to improve official relations with the government of Cuba," Ms. Albright said. "On the contrary, we are acting because of the new possibilities that exist outside the government."

Ms. Albright said that when she met with the pope in Rome this month "he expressed support for steps that would reduce the suffering and isolation of the Cuban people."

She added that over the past month she had consulted with the Cuban-American community in Florida and elsewhere.

"Not surprisingly, there is a divergence of views," Ms. Albright said. "But there is agreement that the pope's visit generated huge amounts of energy and excitement within Cuba, and that we should explore ways to help the Cuban people without helping the Cuban government."

In a written statement, Mr. Clinton said the response of the Cuban people to the pope's visit had "convinced me that we should continue to look for ways to support Cuba's people without supporting its regime, by providing additional humanitarian relief, in-

creasing human contacts and helping the Cuban people prepare for a peaceful transition to a free, independent and prosperous nation."

Mr. Helms said he agreed that "now is the time to pursue the opportunities created by the pope's visit, by supporting the Catholic Church and by decreasing the Cuban people's dependence on the Castro regime. But there is a right way and a wrong way to do it."

Mr. McCurry said the administration had "consulted extensively with members of Congress" before deciding on the measures. "We believe there will be support for the decision of the president today," he said.

Key Democrats in Congress issued statements backing the decision.

Sen. Christopher Dodd, D-Conn., a senior Foreign Relations Committee member, said the steps would put American policy "on a higher moral standing."

Rep. Lee Hamilton of Indiana, senior Democrat on the House International Relations Committee, said the administration's action would ease the burden of the U.S. embargo on the Cuban people.

"It's in our interests to help the suffering Cuban people and to begin the move toward the post-Castro period," Mr. Hamilton said.

But members of Congress with Cuban-American constituencies were critical.

"I do not believe that unilateral concessions to Castro without corresponding improvements in his human rights records will bring us any closer to the ultimate goal of freedom for the Cuban people," said Sen. Robert Torricelli, a Democrat from New Jersey, which has a large Cuban exile population.

Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, R-Fla., a Cuban-American who has been a leading anti-Castro voice, said the measures would send a "terrible message."

"We are forgiving Castro for the death of poor, innocent American citizens," Ms. Ros-Lehtinen said. "I wish we would be a little tougher with the dictator."

Human Rights Watch, which opposes the U.S. embargo, praised the administration's decision. And the director of the group's Americas Division immediately wrote to Mr. Castro requesting permission to visit the island to investigate the state of human rights there.

The moves also won applause from business groups that want to see the U.S. embargo lifted. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce called them "good first steps," as did USA-ENGAGE, a coalition of 661 small and large businesses and associations that oppose economic sanctions.

"I think there are some who are going to say we did too little, there are some who are going to say we've done too much," said Jim Dobbins, the National Security Council's top expert on inter-American affairs. "We think this strikes the right balance."

Cubans call easing of restrictions a miracle

U.S. initiative kindles hope that economic embargo may be lifted

By Alfredo Corchado
and Tracey Eaton

Mexico City Bureau of The Dallas Morning News

MEXICO CITY — Cubans on the streets of Havana were jubilant Friday as the word spread that the Clinton administration was loosening economic sanctions against the Marxist regime.

"Now we're waiting for the miracle of miracles, the lifting of the embargo," said Mariana Solano, a housewife in Havana's Miramar neighborhood.

The White House initiative announced Friday eases restrictions on travel to Cuba and makes it easier to send cash, medicine and humanitarian relief to the island. In an interview with CNN, Cuban President Fidel Castro called it a positive and constructive move.

Even so, he and other Cuban officials were cautious in their assessment of the U.S. initiative.

Luis Fernandez, a spokesman for

the Cuban Interests Section in Washington, D.C., said it would take time to study the plan.

"The rational and the correct thing would be to lift the embargo," he added. "Nonetheless, we think these measures, accompanied by the usual anti-Cuba rhetoric, are a clear recognition of the absurdity of the blockade against Cuba."

The White House move comes less than two months after Pope John Paul II's historic visit to the island.

"This is the second miracle in Cuba this year," said Havana resident Rolando Chávez, who considers the pope's visit the first miracle.

"The easing of travel and other restrictions has recharged the Cuban spirit," said Havana religious scholar Enrique López. "People are happy and are celebrating in their homes, calling their relatives in the United States. This is really special."

"I also think this will strengthen the church. It gives the church more

credibility with Cubans and the government," he said. "The church is proving to Fidel that it can deliver on promises, and Fidel is responding in kind. We're seeing the fruits of a new relationship between government and church and hopefully between the Cuban and American governments."

In Miami, Cuban-Americans said it will now be easier to visit relatives in Cuba because they'll be able to take direct U.S.-Cuba flights and not go through Mexico, Jamaica and other countries.

"I hope the next announcement is that the government is lifting the embargo," Miami resident Elias Felipe Suárez said. "The only people its hurting are the Cubans."

Some exiles criticized Mr. Clinton, saying any loosening of sanctions only helps Mr. Castro stay in power. To that, Mr. Suarez said, "They need to move on and leave their rage and anger behind. Life goes on."

29TH STORY of Level 1 printed in FULL format.

Copyright 1998 Daily News, L.P.
Daily News (New York)

March 21, 1998, Saturday

SECTION: News; Pg. 6

LENGTH: 442 words

HEADLINE: DECISION LEAVES CASTRO FOES COLD

BYLINE: By JORGE FITZ-GIBBON

BODY:

President Clinton's decision to ease restrictions on food and medical shipments to Cuba yesterday got a chilly response from local Cuban-Americans, many of whom view it as a sign of warming relations with the island.

Secretary of State Albright's assurances that the U.S. was still no friend of Cuban leader Fidel Castro did little to ease their worries.

"It's a very nice package humanitarian aid," said Camilo Fernandez, head of Asociacion Pro Cuba in Elizabeth, N.J. "Who's going to oppose that? But no one talks about respect for human rights in Cuba. That's what we want."

Elizabeth accountant Pedro Gonzalez called the move "a huge mistake."

"My father is in Cuba, my sister is in Cuba, and I have three nieces and two nephews there," Gonzalez said. "But this is like a person having cancer and you're giving them an aspirin."

Relief groups currently must apply for two-year licenses to ship humanitarian supplies to Cuba, a lengthy and restrictive process, said Margaret Ratner, director of the U.S.-Cuba Medical Project.

Clinton's move means that the U.S. will reduce the red tape American organizations and citizens must go through to send humanitarian aid to Cuba, a nation under a U.S. economic embargo for more than three decades.

It also allows Cubans to receive \$ 300 every three months from relatives in the U.S. and permits humanitarian visits by family members once a year aboard chartered flights.

"It's absolutely positive," said John Kavulich, president of the Manhattan-based U.S.-Cuba Trade and Economic Council. "What this is going to do, in short, is help the U.S. business community sell more health-care products in Cuba."

But the changes worry many Cuban-Americans in the tri-state area who fled Castro's government and have remained adamant in their demands that any warming of relations must coincide with his departure from power.

"We all want to help our families in Cuba," said Lazaro Alvarez, a Kearny, N.J., attorney. "I have family in Cuba, too. But do we really want to help them by sending them a few dollars, or do we really want to help them by building a

Daily News (New York) March 21, 1998, Saturday

better society for them to live in?"

"It's wrong," agreed Virgil Cabello, Union City, N.J., housing director. "What the President has done with this move is tell Fidel Castro, 'You don't have to change, and we're going to relax our restrictions.' "

Others, like Jose Tito Fernandez, co-founder of the Cuban Community Center in Yonkers, used stronger language.

"I consider this an act of treason," Fernandez fumed. "I say no, no, no, no. While that man is in charge over there, I will contribute nothing."

LOAD-DATE: March 22, 1998

74TH STORY of Level 1 printed in FULL format.

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Newsday (New York, NY)

March 21, 1998, Saturday, NASSAU AND SUFFOLK EDITION

SECTION: NEWS; Page A07

LENGTH: 532 words

HEADLINE: LIFT OF SOME LIMITS GIVES CUBA BOOST

BYLINE: By Michele Salcedo. STAFF WRITER

BODY:

Just two months ago, Josefina Nuevo saw for herself how the 30-year economic embargo had affected Cuba. The government was still in place, but the people were ravaged.

"After 30 years, it was a shock to go back," said Nuevo, of Holbrook, who was among the group of pilgrims who traveled from New York in January to witness Pope John Paul II's historic visit to Cuba. "We got there at night and there were no lights; everything was dark. There was a lack of food, of medicine. You'd walk to the store to buy a bottle of water to take to mass, and there wasn't any."

But Nuevo and other Long Island residents with Cuban ties hope Friday's announcement that the United States will lift restrictions on humanitarian aid and allow direct travel and family remittances to Cuba will be the beginning of change for the country. The changes are expected to be phased in within several weeks. Both President Bill Clinton and Secretary of State Madeleine Albright said the steps were made possible by the Pope's January visit.

Long Islanders were happy that the Pope's appeal for compassion was at least partly responsible for the shift from the 36-year-old U.S. policy of isolating the Communist-ruled island.

"The hope was this: That Fidel would convince the world to lift the embargo that is punishing the Cuban people," Nuevo said. The United States' reaction is "a great thing," Nuevo said on her way to a mass at St. Patrick's Cathedral in Manhattan commemorating the Papal visit to Cuba. "This is the beginning. Bit by bit there will be a peaceful transition. With the remittances from the families, people there will be able to buy simple things."

Gail Furman, a Manhattan psychiatrist, returned Friday night from an eight-day fact-finding trip with Fundacion Amistad, Friendship Foundation, a group organized by Luly Duke of East Hampton to provide humanitarian aid to Cuba.

"One of the women in our group borrowed a ration card from a cousin to get food," Furman said. "She stood on line for two and a half hours, and when she finally got up to the person, they ran out of food. They told her, You can come back tomorrow and try.' It's very demoralizing.

Newsday (New York, NY), March 21, 1998

"There's no detergent to clean the floors of the hospital, so health care is compromised because of that. This loosening means that there will be delivery of critical services."

Ray Lopez, of Hempstead, knows firsthand the effects of Cuba's government. His uncle was a political prisoner for 20 years. Lopez himself fled Cuba with his family. At the age of 12, he picked tomatoes for 50 cents a bucket on U.S. farms to help support the family. In 1980, he spent a month in Mariel, the Cuban port city, to get his brothers on the boatlift to freedom. Still, he said, he is realistic about the need for the United States to send humanitarian aid to his homeland.

"Even my family members were saying, Why don't they allow at least humanitarian aid and medicine as well," Lopez said. "There are Cubans, friends who disagree with me. The bottom line is we all want the same thing. We want democracy in Cuba. The idea is to help the people. It's not about communism or conservatism. It's about human beings."

GRAPHIC: AP Photo- (Madeleine) Albright discusses developments Friday.

LANGUAGE: English

LOAD-DATE: March 21, 1998

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Sun-Sentinel (Fort Lauderdale, FL)

March 21, 1998, Saturday, FINAL EDITION

SECTION: NATIONAL, Pg. 11A

LENGTH: 485 words

HEADLINE: CLINTON POLICY TAKES AIM AT CASTRO;
CUBAN LEADER CALLS MEASURES 'POSITIVE'

BYLINE: Staff and wire reports; Business Writer Doreen Hemlock contributed to this report.

DATELINE: WASHINGTON

BODY:

The Clinton administration's move to increase humanitarian assistance to the Cuban people has a parallel goal of easing President Fidel Castro's grip on power, President Clinton said on Friday.

Castro spoke positively of the steps, though his foreign minister's comments were biting. In this country, Republican House Speaker Newt Gingrich denounced the effort as giving "something for nothing."

In South Florida, companies that offer charters to Cuba expect the measures will reduce airfares and boost the number of flights to the island. Airfares from Miami have jumped from \$ 255 to \$ 399 over the past two years, since Clinton banned nonstop flights to Cuba, forcing planes to land in a third country, such as the Bahamas, between Miami and Havana.

Widely advertised by administration officials beforehand, the measures announced Friday include a resumption of direct flights to Cuba and increases on sending of cash remittances to the island by U.S.-based family members.

A ceiling of \$ 1,200 a year was reinstated, to take effect in several weeks. Even when family remittances were banned, some economists estimated that up to \$ 800 million or more of hard currency funds were finding their way to the island each year, sent by Cuban exiles to their families.

Clinton said the steps were made possible by the January visit to Cuba of Pope John Paul II.

In an interview with CNN, Castro called the measures "really positive and constructive" but said a thorough analysis is required for a final judgment.

Castro said the measures will improve the climate in U.S.-Cuban relations, but Secretary of State Madeline Albright declared that the new policy has no such objective.

As part of the package, Clinton took steps to end cumbersome procedures for the delivery of medicines to Cuba and also said he will work with members of Congress to see what can be done legislatively to increase humanitarian aid.

Sun-Sentinel (Fort Lauderdale), March 21, 1998

The lower airfares should help boost demand for travel, increasing the number of charters from Miami beyond the current tally of seven a week.

"People are still going to Cuba through Santo Domingo, Mexico and the Bahamas, but more would go if they can travel direct," said John Cabanas, the owner of C & T charters, which operates flights to Cuba.

"I'd say 55 percent of Cubans visiting family are older than 60, so flying through third countries is inconvenient and difficult," he said.

Although the measures are humanitarian, Clinton stressed that the steps could ease the tight control Castro has wielded over his people for 39 years.

Clinton said the measures are designed to "build further on the impact of the pope's visit, to support the role of the church and other elements of civil society in Cuba and to thereby help prepare the Cuban people for a democratic transition."

Business Writer Doreen Hemlock contributed to this report.

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Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

March 21, 1998, Saturday, SOONER EDITION

SECTION: LOCAL, Pg. A-4

LENGTH: 263 words

HEADLINE: CUBA SUPPORTERS LAUD CHANGE, SEEK NORMALIZATION OF RELATIONS

BYLINE: CAROLINE ABELS, POST-GAZETTE STAFF WRITER

BODY:

It was purely coincidental that Pittsburghers working to strengthen ties between Pittsburgh and its sister city of Matanzas, Cuba, chose last night to hold an informal talk about their recent trip to Matanzas.

Earlier in the day, the United States announced that it would ease trade sanctions on Cuba, and members of the Pittsburgh-Matanzas Sister City Project had that on their minds as they met in City Council chambers.

The group applauded the restoration of direct humanitarian charter flights to Cuba and the decision to allow Cuban-Americans to send money to relatives living in the country.

But members of the group said the actions didn't go far enough.

"Nothing short of full normalization of relations with Cuba is acceptable to me," said Councilman Jim Ferlo, who was instrumental in the establishment of Matanzas as a sister city of Pittsburgh last year.

Raphael Noriega, general secretary of the Cuban Interest Section who came up from Washington, D.C., for the meeting, told the group that "all of our people are being so manipulated by the U.S. But we are as human as you are."

Members who visited Matanzas in late February said they were pleased to learn that Matanzas will name one of its bridges after Pittsburgh.

In addition, Matanzas students sent pen-pal letters to local seventh-graders, and the University of Pittsburgh and the University of Matanzas are discussing possible joint programs.

Pittsburgh City Council passed a resolution Jan. 20, recognizing Matanzas, which is on Cuba's northwest coast, as a sister city.

GRAPHIC: PHOTO (2), PHOTO: Steve Mellon/Post-Gazette: Stanley Cohen on the eighth floor; of his Penn Avenue business with some of the medical and religious supplies he; will deliver to Cuba. (Photo, Page A-1); PHOTO: Jose Goitia/Canadian Press: An employee of a state-owned pharmacy in; Havana's Miramar neighborhood reaches for medication while tending to a; customer yesterday in Cuba. At left is a portrait of Cuban revolutionary hero; Che Guevera.

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Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

March 21, 1998, Saturday, SOONER EDITION

SECTION: LOCAL, Pg. A-1

LENGTH: 784 words

HEADLINE: CUBA HELPER CLOSE, BUT NO CIGARS;
DESPITE A CHANGE IN GOVERNMENT POLICY, A SQUIRREL HILL MAN LEARNS THAT GETTING;
TO CUBA IS STILL SOMETHING OF A DUBIOUS PROPOSITION.

BYLINE: JONATHAN D. SILVER, POST-GAZETTE STAFF WRITER

BODY:

For a few brief hours yesterday, Stanley Cohen basked in a Caribbean glory that wouldn't be his.

In his mind's eye, he saw himself leaving his Squirrel Hill home tomorrow with a bundle of humanitarian goods, hopping a flight to Miami, spending the night, and then traveling DIRECTLY to Cuba on a plane ride that would last maybe 45 minutes.

The word directly is very important, and not because in the hub-and-spoke world of U.S. airlines direct flights often seem harder to come by than legally imported Cuban cigars.

No, it is important because yesterday the Clinton administration announced that direct humanitarian flights will recommence between the United States and Cuba, the tiny island of defiance and the bearded dictator.

As a result, for the first time in two years, aid missions will be able to go straight from U.S. soil to Cuban sand without being routed circuitously to, say, Mexico, Canada or the Bermuda Triangle.

Cohen, a businessman and self-styled humanitarian who has traveled seven times to Cuba to deliver medical and religious supplies, thought his Sunday charter flight to Havana might be at the vanguard of U.S. policy: Numero uno to arrive direct, that is.

Cohen hoped he would be saying goodbye finally to the wasted stopovers in Nassau that add up to 3 hours to his trips there and make connections a nightmare on the way back.

Unfortunately for him, the U.S. State Department had other plans. Direct flights won't resume for "a few more weeks," according to a state department official in Washington.

What's more, it hasn't even been finalized yet from which cities direct flights will originate, or which charter companies will be eligible to operate them, the official said.

Nevertheless, when the new rules take effect, not only will Cohen be less inconvenienced, the supplies he now ships through Canada and Mexico should be

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, March 21, 1998

cheaper to send and take less time to arrive.

In some cases, time is of the essence. Right now in Havana, the Jewish community's kosher butcher is recovering from a kidney transplant and needs dialysis, according to Eddie Levy, who heads the Miami-based group Jewish Solidarity.

To have dialysis, the butcher needs equipment that will be carried to Cuba - via Nassau - by Wendy DeRoy, also of Squirrel Hill and a friend of Cohen's.

DeRoy is the director of the Allegheny-Ohio Valley region of B'nai B'rith, a Jewish organization. A total of 21 B'nai B'rith members will be flying to Havana on tomorrow's aid trip, each bearing a special permit from the U.S. Treasury Department and up to 70 pounds of antibiotics, soap, toothpaste, aspirin, vitamins, medicines, perfume and, in some cases, candy.

They will gather in Miami, board a plane run by C & T Charter that seats about 200 people, mostly Cuban-Americans, and take off along a heading that spans a shark-infested stretch of the Atlantic Ocean.

For Cubans, who are chafing under a U.S. embargo, the evaporation of aid from the former Soviet Union, and a lack of medical supplies, the lifeline provided by humanitarians is critical, Cohen said.

Cohen, the owner of Art R. Cohen Co., which sells Christmas ornaments and storefront display equipment, warehouses the goods earmarked for Cuba on the eighth floor of his building on Penn Avenue.

To reach it, you take a freight elevator and step out into a huge, cluttered space where boxes containing medicine, toys, clothes, Torah covers and prayer books are strewn.

"I have cases of Floxin. They're worth about \$ 6 a pill," Cohen said, circling a bunch of boxes and bending down to sort through one.

He moves around and plucks a small bottle with a purplish liquid out of another box.

"This Benadryl is for children, for allergies. How'd you like to have a child that is coughing and sick and you couldn't do anything?"

Cohen is a self-starter who moves in curious circles. In his office, he has a picture of himself with Ed Koch. Another shot, this one taken by him, shows an armed man standing guard during a coup attempt in Venezuela. Without any prodding, Cohen produced from a pocket an open letter from U.S. Rep. William Coyne, D-Oakland, that requests the reader to render Cohen any help he might need while in Cuba.

Cohen began his humanitarian career by helping refuseniks. He said he was detained once by the KGB. Then he saw a documentary on Cuba's roughly 1,500 Jews, a population he didn't even know existed. He went for a visit, wandered Havana's seaside promenade, explored its old city and its three functioning synagogues, and he was hooked.

"I've just got to help them," Cohen said. "It's more than I ever bargained

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, March 21, 1998

. for. It's becoming a full-time job.''

GRAPHIC: PHOTO (2), PHOTO: Steve Mellon/Post-Gazette: Stanley Cohen on the eighth floor; of his Penn Avenue business with some of the medical and religious supplies he; will deliver to Cuba.; PHOTO: Jose Goitia/Canadian Press: An employee of a state-owned pharmacy in; Havana's Miramar neighborhood reaches for medication while tending to a; customer yesterday in Cuba. At left is a portrait of Cuban revolutionary hero; Che Guevera.

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The Tampa Tribune

March 21, 1998, Saturday, FINAL EDITION

SECTION: NATION/WORLD, Pg. 2

LENGTH: 762 words

HEADLINE: Castro cautious about easing of restrictions

BYLINE: PHIL WILLON; of The Tampa Tribune

DATELINE: WASHINGTON

BODY:

In response to gains made after the Pope's visit to Cuba, President Clinton Friday eased restrictions on the island.

President Clinton Friday announced his support for lifting U.S. trade restrictions on food and medical sales to Cuba, a move he hopes will strengthen the Catholic Church and other humanitarian groups and hasten the demise of the island's communist government.

Cuban President Fidel Castro, in an interview with CNN, reacted cautiously to the announcement, but said he expected the policy change to "aid in creating a better climate of relations between the United States and Cuba."

Clinton also lifted the ban on direct airplane flights to Cuba to deliver humanitarian aid, and established a new licensing program to allow Cuban-Americans to send \$ 300 to their families in Cuba every three months.

Pope John Paul II's historic visit to Cuba two months ago prompted Clinton's decision because, he said, the outpouring of support the pontiff received from the Cuban people convinced him the U.S. needed to "support Cuba's people without supporting its regime."

"The measures I have announced today are designed to build upon that visit, to support the Cuban people through the hardships and difficulties ahead, to contribute to the growth of a civil society and to help prepare for a peaceful transition to democracy," Clinton said in a statement released by the White House.

Clinton's announcement was both jeered and cheered by members of Congress. U.S. Sen. Jesse Helms, R-N.C., chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, strongly opposes the policy changes and ripped into the president for not consulting with Congress before making the announcement. Helms said Clinton's action may douse any hopes of bipartisan legislation to ease U.S. trade restrictions on food and medicine shipments to Cuba.

"The administration's decision to make controversial changes in U.S. policy, by what amounts to the use of executive fiat, has seriously set back our efforts," Helms said Friday.

The Tampa Tribune, March 21, 1998

Castro resents Cuba being treated as a charity case and wants an end to the nearly 40-year U.S. trade embargo against the island so normal trade can resume.

Helms was instrumental in tightening those trade restrictions when he drafted the Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity Act, which punishes foreign firms doing business in Cuba.

Clinton signed the legislation shortly after Cuban MiGs shot down two unarmed American aircraft flying near the island, killing four members of the Cuban-American, Anti-Castro group Brothers to the Rescue.

Friday's announcement was the first sign U.S. policy toward Cuba was becoming less hostile. The most significant shift would be lifting the ban on U.S. food sales to Cuba, which would require congressional approval. Direct sales have been outlawed since 1964, and the 1992 Cuban Democracy Act prohibited U.S. companies from selling food to Cuba through subsidiaries in other countries.

Despite the criticism from Helms, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright on Friday said she remains confident the Clinton administration and Republican leaders in Congress can work together and develop bipartisan legislation to meet Cuba's humanitarian food needs.

"We're taking these steps now, not because of anything the Castro regime has done," Albright told reporters. "On the contrary. We are acting because of the new possibilities that exist outside the government's control."

Lifting restrictions on humanitarian aid will help ease the suffering and isolation of the Cuban people, and strengthen the role of the church and other nongovernmental organizations best suited to bring about a peaceful transition to democracy in Cuba, Albright said.

"The Cuban people are beginning to think beyond Castro. We need to do the same," Albright said.

Those possibilities became apparent after the Pope's visit in January, when he delivered a clear, unambiguous message that human rights should be respected and freedom should prevail, said Albright, who met with the pontiff earlier this month.

The pope delivered a similar message in Poland when it was still behind the Iron Curtain, and he helped bring about historic political change in Eastern Europe. While the situation in Cuba differs greatly, the Pope's visit made Cubans realize they "shared a deep bond not controlled or created by the state," Albright said.

Clinton's Cuban policy changes will go into effect in coming months. Phil Willon is The Tampa Tribune's correspondent in Washington and can be reached at (202) 662-7673.

GRAPHIC: PHOTO,
Madeleine Albright said thinking goes beyond Castro. AP photo

LOAD-DATE: March 22, 1998

8TH STORY of Level 1 printed in FULL format.

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Austin American-Statesman

March 21, 1998

SECTION: News; Pg. A15

LENGTH: 505 words

HEADLINE: Report criticizes Cuban rights record, U.S. embargo; As U.S. prepares

BYLINE: CLARE NULLIS

BODY:

GENEVA -- The longstanding U.S. embargo against Cuba has provided the communist island with a ready pretext'' for repressing its people, a report prepared for the United Nations said Friday.

The accusation came the same day the Clinton administration reversed a ban on direct flights to Cuba -- especially for humanitarian aid -- and on money -- up to \$1,200 a year -- being sent back to the island by U.S.-based exiles. President Clinton took the action, he said, in an effort to build on what he called the important psychological boost'' of Pope John Paul II's recent historic visit to Cuba.

Clinton described the new policy as one that would continue to encourage democratic efforts within Cuba.

The response of the Cuban people to (the pope's) visit has since convinced me that we should continue to look for ways to support Cuba's people without supporting its regime,'' Clinton said.

The president also called for streamlining the delivery of medicine to Cuba, and said he wanted to work with Congress on the transfer of food to the Cuban people.''

An administration spokesman said much of the assistance the United States aims to provide the Cuban people will be channeled through the Catholic Church and other nongovernment organizations.

Cuban Foreign Minister Roberto Robaina mocked the concession in a speech to the U.N. Human Rights Commission.

We do not need scraps disguised as humanitarian aid,'' Robaina said. We won't sacrifice our principles in exchange for imperialist pardons.''

He denounced the U.S. embargo, imposed in 1960, as the most flagrant, massive and systematic violation of human rights of our people.''

We are talking of a true war of economic and psychological attrition which has lasted four decades and cost our country \$60 billion -- not to mention the human victims, which are beyond price,'' Robaina said.

The 31-page U.N. report, prepared by Swedish human rights expert Carl Johan Groth, cited findings of the American Association for World Health that show

Austin American-Statesman, March 21, 1998

malnutrition has grown since the embargo, while access to safe drinking water and to medicine have diminished.

And while the report noted that the Cuban government continues to violate human rights, it also placed blame on the United States, saying the embargo contributes to the rigidity of the system currently in place.'

The embargo serves as a ready pretext for keeping the population under strict control and for punishing or suppressing those who work for political change or social space for the individual,' the report said.

Groth's report primarily covered 1997 and did not detail developments since the pope's visit in January. He welcomed the pope's calls, however, for better observance of all human rights and an end to Cuba's international isolation.'

The report will be considered by the human rights commission.

American-Statesman Washington staff writer Larry Lipman contributed to this report.

LOAD-DATE: March 24, 1998

10TH STORY of Level 1 printed in FULL format.

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The Des Moines Register

March 21, 1998, Saturday

SECTION: Main News Pg.003

LENGTH: 506 words

HEADLINE: Clinton relaxes restrictions on Cuba
New policy allows aid, continues to encourage democratic efforts

SOURCE: Cox News Service

BODY:

Deck: The president's order will permit assistance of food, medicine and cash to the Cuban people.

Cox News Service

Washington, D.C. - Hoping to build on what he called the "important psychological boost" of Pope John Paul II's recent historic visit to Cuba, President Clinton unveiled measures Friday to ease restrictions on humanitarian assistance to and family contacts with the Cuban people.

Advertised by administration officials beforehand, Clinton described the new policy as one that would continue to encourage democratic efforts within Cuba while providing the Cuban people with enhanced humanitarian assistance in terms of food, medicine and cash.

"The response of the Cuban people to (the pope's) visit has since convinced me that we should continue to look for ways to support Cuba's people without supporting its regime," Clinton said.

The president's executive order -which does not require congressional approval -will allow the resumption of direct humanitarian flights between the United States and Cuba and the transfer of \$ 1,200 a year between Cuban Americans and relatives in Cuba.

The president also called for streamlining the delivery of medicine to Cuba, and said he wanted to work with Congress on the "transfer of food to the Cuban people."

Both Clinton and U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright denied that the move -which would return restrictions to roughly where they stood in 1994 - signaled a warming of relations between the United States and the 39-year-old dictatorship of President Fidel Castro, or that they would seek to overturn the 37-year embargo on trade between the United States and Cuba.

During his January visit to the Communist island, Pope John Paul harshly criticized the U.S. embargo because of the hardships he said it imposed on the Cuban people.

Albright, commenting on recent meetings she held during the past several weeks with leaders of the Cuban exile community in South Florida, acknowledged

The Des Moines Register, March 21, 1998

the opposition of some groups to relaxing restrictions, but said there was "agreement that the pope's visit generated huge currents of energy and excitement within Cuba, and that we should explore ways to help the Cuban people without helping the Cuban government."

Albright added that the administration was not changing policy "because of anything the Castro regime has done. . . . On the contrary. We are acting because of the new possibilities that exist outside the government's control."

An administration spokesman said much of the assistance the United States aims to provide the Cuban people will be channeled through the Catholic Church and other nongovernment organizations.

Clinton's announcement drew mixed reactions from the Cuban government Friday.

Speaking before the details of Clinton's plan was unveiled, Castro told CNN that the moves looked "positive to us," but Cuban Foreign Minister Roberto Robaina told reporters in Geneva that the measures were "a cosmetic operation. It does not go to the heart of the problem."

LANGUAGE: English

LOAD-DATE: March 24, 1998

72ND STORY of Level 1 printed in FULL format.

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News & Record (Greensboro, NC)

March 21, 1998, Saturday, ALL EDITIONS

SECTION: GENERAL NEWS, Pg. A5

LENGTH: 585 words

HEADLINE: U.S. EASES SOME CUBA RESTRICTIONS

BYLINE: Knight-Ridder News Service

DATELINE: WASHINGTON

BODY:

Cuba will remain under a tight U.S. embargo despite President Clinton's decision to relax curbs on sending medicine and money to the island, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright said Friday.

"We will maintain economic pressure through the embargo and the Helms-Burton Act," Albright said, referring to a law that imposes penalties on foreign companies that make certain investments in Cuba.

Despite that explanation, the administration's decision won praise from Cuban leader Fidel Castro and criticism from Sen. Jesse Helms, R-N.C., chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and coauthor of the Helms-Burton Act.

Castro, in an interview with CNN, characterized the measures as "really positive and constructive," though he said they must be studied before Cuba would offer a definitive reaction.

He added, however, that the steps would "aid in creating a better climate of relations between the United States and Cuba. ... We are confident that one day they will improve."

Albright said she and Helms discussed the administration's decision "at length" on Thursday. But the senator issued a statement complaining of the "administration's decision to make controversial changes in U.S. policy by what amounts to the use of executive fiat."

"I am puzzled that the administration chose to act alone - in a manner that was certain to provoke harsh criticism - when so many in Congress, including me, were willing to work with them," Helms said.

Albright said the administration would "continue to shine a spotlight on Havana's prisoners of conscience and call for their release."

"And we will not forget that, 25 months ago, three U.S. citizens and one legal resident were shot down in international air space," she added.

Clinton tightened restrictions on dealings with Cuba in 1996 and backed the Helms-Burton legislation after Cuban MiG fighter jets shot down two unarmed civilian aircraft flown by Cuban exiles on a protest mission. The exiles were over international waters at the time.

News & Record (Greensboro, NC), March 21, 1998

Formally announced at the White House by press secretary Mike McCurry, the new measures include:

Asking Congress to approve legislation to "meet humanitarian food needs" in Cuba.

Expediting the issuance of licenses to sell medical supplies to the island. "We will continue to verify that medicines reach the Cuban people and are not diverted to other uses," Albright pledged.

Approving direct charter flights to the island for humanitarian purposes. "We will allow humanitarian but not tourist or business flights," Albright said.

Allowing Cubans in this country to remit as much as \$ 1,200 a year to "close relatives" on the island. Such remittances have been barred since 1994. But a State Department fact sheet acknowledged that many Cuban-Americans have been sending them "outside authorized channels."

Speaking to reporters at the State Department, Albright stressed that the relaxations were a response to Pope John Paul II's January visit to Cuba, not a reward to Castro.

"We're taking these steps now, not because of anything the Castro regime has done, nor are we doing it to improve official relations with the government of Cuba," Albright said. "On the contrary, we are acting because of the new possibilities that exist outside the government."

Albright said that when she met with the pope in Rome earlier this month "he expressed support for steps that would reduce the suffering and isolation of the Cuban people."

LOAD-DATE: March 22, 1998

70TH STORY of Level 1 printed in FULL format.

Copyright 1998 The News and Observer
The News and Observer (Raleigh, NC)

March 21, 1998 Saturday, FINAL EDITION

SECTION: NEWS; Pg. A13

LENGTH: 297 words

HEADLINE: Clinton eases some sanctions against Cuba

BYLINE: SCRIPPS HOWARD NEWS SERVICE

BODY:

WASHINGTON -- It's going to be cheaper for humanitarian groups to send food and medicine to Cuba, and easier for Cuban-American exiles to go home on charter flights under an executive order President Clinton signed Friday.

But while the United States is easing sanctions imposed in 1996, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright said the 38-year-old economic sanctions aren't changed by the executive order.

Under the measure, the administration will:

- Streamline procedures to license medicines to be sent to Cuba, a provision sought by manufacturers of medical devices.

- Restore direct humanitarian charter flights for both passengers and shipments of humanitarian aid. This measure was sought by Catholic relief organizations, which say their shipping costs tripled after direct U.S. shipments to Cuba were suspended in 1996. Commercial U.S. airline connections to Cuba still would not be restored.

- Permit Cuban-Americans to send up to \$ 300 per quarter to relatives still living in Cuba.

Albright said the easing of sanctions doesn't reflect any shift in American policy toward Castro. She said restoring humanitarian shipments of aid, and taking other steps to bolster the role of the Catholic Church in Cuba will ease the transition once Castro is gone.

Albright said that Pope John Paul II's visit to Cuba this year has "opened up new opportunities" on the island.

Most of the sanctions lifted Friday were imposed in 1996 after Cuban MiGs shot down two American planes, killing four Cuban-Americans involved in rescuing Cubans trying to leave the island.

Rep. Lee Hamilton of Indiana, ranking Democrat on the House International Relations Committee, said the administration's action is aimed at lessening the burden of the U.S. embargo on the Cuban people.

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

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BLACKHAWK DOWN

COLLECTOR'S EDITION

The Inquirer
SMTWTFS

March 21, 1998

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PHILLY NEWS

World

Clinton says shift on Cuban aid tries to ease Castro's grip

By George Gedda
ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON -- The Clinton administration's move to increase humanitarian assistance to the Cuban people has a parallel goal of easing President Fidel Castro's grip on power, President Clinton said yesterday.

Castro spoke positively of the steps, though his foreign minister's comments were biting. In Washington, House Speaker Newt Gingrich (R., Ga.) denounced the effort as giving "something for nothing."

Widely advertised by administration officials beforehand, the measures announced yesterday include an end to bans on direct flights to Cuba and on the sending of cash remittances to the island by U.S.-based family members.

Officials said it would be several weeks before the changes took effect.

Clinton and Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright, in separate statements, said the changes were made possible by the January visit to Cuba of Pope John Paul II.

Reaction among private groups and members of Congress was mixed, and there were even differences of opinion between Castro and his foreign minister, Roberto Robaina.

In an interview with CNN, Castro called the measures "really positive and constructive" but said a thorough analysis would be required for a final judgment.

In contrast, Robaina, speaking in Geneva, said: "We do

not need scraps disguised as humanitarian aid. We won't sacrifice our principles in exchange for imperialist pardons."

Castro said the measures would improve the climate of U.S.-Cuban relations, but Albright said the new policy had no such objective.

As part of the package, Clinton took steps to end cumbersome procedures for the delivery of medicines to Cuba and said he would work with Congress to see what could be done legislatively to increase humanitarian aid.

Gingrich expressed strong opposition to the new policy.

"Fidel Castro is a murderer, a tyrant and a thug," he said. "Any weakening of the U.S. sanctions against Cuba will be seen as a victory for his brutal, iron-fisted tactics. When it comes to Cuba, why does the administration always trade something for nothing?"

The measures were hailed by several Democratic lawmakers and by private groups involved in humanitarian assistance to Cuba.

"It's going to make a difference," said Tom Garofalo, spokesman for the Baltimore-based Catholic Relief Services. The ban on direct flights has required the agency to send assistance through third countries, which often has meant a fourfold increase in costs, he said.

Kate Higgins, of the Catholic Medical Mission Board, said the circuitous routing of aid to Cuba often cut months off the shelf life of the antibiotics and other medicines earmarked for the island.

Although the measures are humanitarian, Clinton and Albright stressed that the steps could ease the tight control Castro has wielded over his people for 39 years.

Clinton said the measures were designed to "build further on the impact of the Pope's visit, to support the role of the church and other elements of civil society in Cuba, and to thereby help prepare the Cuban people for a democratic transition."

Albright said the United States was acting at this time because "of new possibilities that exist outside the [Cuban] government's control."

She said the basis of any dictatorship's power was control. "The more dependent people are on the state, the more they are controlled," she said.

"We can help to lessen the Cuban people's dependence on the Cuban state by addressing humanitarian needs, aiding the development of a civil society, and strengthening the role of the church and other nongovernmental organizations.

"By so doing, we can begin to empower Cuban citizens and help them prepare to make a peaceful transition to democracy."

The comments appeared aimed at placating some Cuban Americans and others who oppose the policy on the ground that it means additional hard currency for Cuba.

"We are undermining the changes we want to see happen in Cuba," said Rep. Robert Menendez (D., N.J.), whose parents were born in Cuba.

Two Cuban-born Florida Republicans, Reps. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen and Lincoln Diaz-Balart, said the administration should focus on supporting Cuba's underground opposition.

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CUBA

HERALDLINK FULL STORY

Published Monday, March 23, 1998, in the Miami Herald

Dissidents welcome moves to ease embargo

From Herald Wire Services

HAVANA -- A Cuban dissident group has welcomed the new measures taken by the Clinton administration to ease the embargo on Cuba, but demanded that the Cuban government facilitate Cubans' travel abroad as well as travel to the island by Cubans living in exile.

The Christian Liberation Movement, directed by Oswaldo Paya, welcomed the U.S. relaxation of direct travel, money remittances and medicine shipments to Cuba.

"But we demand from the [Cuban] government . . . the right of Cubans to maintain these exchanges" between those who live outside and those who live on the island, said a statement released Saturday.



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Financial Times (London)

March 23, 1998, Monday LONDON EDITION 1

SECTION: THE AMERICAS; Pg. 04

LENGTH: 356 words

HEADLINE: Low-key Cuba welcome for relaxed US embargo

BYLINE: By Pascal Fletcher in Havana

DATELINE: Havana

BODY:

A US move easing some sanctions against Cuba but maintaining the long US economic embargo against the communist-ruled island has been greeted cautiously by the Cuban government as "a drop of water in the desert".

Cuban state media reported without comment US President Bill Clinton's announcement on Friday that charter flights from the US to Havana would be resumed and Cuban exiles in the US would be allowed to resume sending cash to family members on the island.

But officials were quick to point out that the move, as presented by Madeleine Albright, secretary of state, did not remove or substantially alter the 36-year-old US embargo against Cuba nor the 1996 Helms-Burton law which further tightened the economic squeeze.

Of Mrs Albright's assertion that the move fell within the US strategy of seeking a "peaceful transition to democracy" in Cuba, the Prensa Latina news agency said: "The White House continues blindly in its attempt to impose on Cuba changes which Cubans alone should decide."

Speaking in Geneva before Friday's announcement, Cuba's foreign minister, Roberto Robaina, said the US measures, details of which had already been leaked, looked like a "cosmetic operation" that did not "go to the heart of the problem". He said Cuba wanted to see a complete lifting of the US embargo.

Nevertheless, it appeared that Cuban leaders, though considering the US move insufficient, did not want to dismiss it completely lest this discourage efforts in Congress to push through legislation which would ease the embargo by allowing humanitarian sales of food and medicine to Cuba.

In an early reaction as news of the latest US move was breaking, President Fidel Castro had commented that it seemed "positive".

As part of the measures, Washington said it would "streamline and expedite" the granting of licences for the sale of medicines to Cuba, which is already permitted under the embargo.

Mrs Albright said the administration would also seek bipartisan legislation to "meet humanitarian food needs on the island" as part of a strategy to "help the Cuban people without helping the government".

Financial Times (London) March 23, 1998, Monday

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

LOAD-DATE: March 23, 1998

36TH STORY of Level 1 printed in FULL format.

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March 24, 1998 Tuesday, NORTH SPORTS FINAL EDITION

SECTION: NEWS; Pg. 15; ZONE: N; Around the world.

LENGTH: 146 words

HEADLINE: NO TIT-FOR-TAT TO END EMBARGO, OFFICIAL SAYS

BYLINE: From Tribune News Services.

DATELINE: HAVANA, CUBA

BODY:

Foreign Minister Roberto Robaina said Monday that Cuba was studying a U.S. decision to relax some sanctions on the island but felt no need to respond with any move or gesture to get Washington to lift its embargo.

Robaina, visiting Moscow, was asked whether Cuba would take steps after Friday's announcement by Washington that some U.S. sanctions against the communist-ruled island, including a prohibition on direct charter flights, would be lifted.

"We did not blockade the United States or impose restrictions, so we don't have to do anything for this blockade to be lifted," he said, according to the Prensa Latina news agency.

He was referring to the 36-year U.S. economic embargo against Cuba, which U.S. officials said Friday would be kept in place as part of the government's efforts to achieve "a peaceful transition to democracy" on the island.

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

LOAD-DATE: March 24, 1998

6TH STORY of Level 2 printed in FULL format.

Copyright 1998 The Financial Times Limited
Financial Times (London)

March 24, 1998, Tuesday USA EDITION 1

SECTION: US AND CANADA; Pg. 06

LENGTH: 566 words

HEADLINE: Swords sheathed over Cuba

BYLINE: By Nancy Dunne in Washington

DATELINE: Washington

BODY:

Washington's steps to ease some sanctions against Cuba coincide with moves by the US and EU away from confrontation in the World Trade Organisation over US sanctions against companies which invest in the communist-ruled island.

Sir Leon Brittan, vice-president of the European Commission, was at the State Department last week for further talks on the Helms-Burton law, which requires the administration to bar executives from companies which use or buy expropriated property once owned by US nationals.

It is almost a year since the EU suspended a complaint against the Helms-Burton legislation in the WTO while negotiating a multilateral pact over the handling of expropriated assets. The talks were expected to be completed in a year.

With the year's deadline approaching on April 11, the pact has yet to be completed, but Sir Leon has shown no interest in reinstating the case. The talks are "making steady, if slow, progress", he said and are about half done. He dismissed the notion of a deadline. The EU could always re-introduce its complaint, he said. This avoids the confrontation that trade officials had feared would severely damage the WTO. The danger was that the EU would win its case, but the US would refuse to acknowledge the WTO's jurisdiction over what American officials insisted was a national security issue.

The strength of the WTO dispute panel system has rested on members' compliance with panel decisions - even when its rulings require tough political choices by losing parties. The US, for example, has made no move to act unilaterally against Japan when a panel ruled in Tokyo's favour on a US film case.

Sir Leon praised the US move as "a positive step". If the US were to reverse course on its embargo to Cuba, Helms-Burton would no longer stand as the irritant it is in US trade relations with the EU, Canada, Mexico and others.

US officials say they have no intention of ending the embargo unless Cuban President Fidel Castro schedules free elections and releases political prisoners. But pressure has been building for a new US policy on Cuba.

More than 50 US businessmen recently travelled to Cuba to meet top officials. "The American delegation saw first-hand the harmful effects of a society

Financial Times (London) March 24, 1998, Tuesday

isolated from American influence," said Frank Kittredge, vice-chairman of USA Engage, a group of 661 small and large businesses, agricultural groups and trade associations. "It's time to completely overhaul America's policy toward Cuba."

The businessmen said the administration had begun to realise that it had more flexibility than before on Cuba in the wake of the Pope's visit. There is now a split in Miami's politically potent Cuban-American community on the embargo.

The Cuba Committee for Democracy, a group of moderate Cuban American academics, professionals and businessmen, also praised the action, and backed legislation in Congress to lift bans on sales of food and medicine.

The Miami Herald called for "changes in the embargo that would encourage people-to-people and humanitarian contact with individual Cubans."

Although opposed to moving too quickly, Madeleine Albright, US secretary of state, said last week the US would maintain economic pressure but would also explore ways to help Cubans without helping the government. "The Cuban people are beginning to think beyond Castro," she said. "We need to do the same."

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

LOAD-DATE: March 24, 1998

7TH STORY of Level 2 printed in FULL format.

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The Independent (London)

March 24, 1998, Tuesday

SECTION: COMMENT; Page 21

LENGTH: 1073 words

HEADLINE: Has Bill Clinton pulled off a foreign policy triumph?; on a presidential comeback

BYLINE: Mary Dejevsky

BODY:

ACCORDING to current Washington wisdom, President Clinton is so distracted by sex allegations and legal battles that he cannot concentrate on affairs of state. His presidency is over, killed off by his libido. No less an authority than Watergate hero Bob Woodward and his Washington Post colleague and Clinton biographer, David Maraniss, have made the case. So it must be true.

But with the White House now decamped to Africa for almost two weeks and the mist of sex allegations starting to clear, the joke may be on America. Perhaps it is not the President who has been distracted by Paula- Monica-Kathleen et al, after all, but the US political and media establishment, with public opinion not far behind. Maybe they are all having such a rip- roaring time frolicking in the ongoing soap opera of risk, gossip and innuendo, that they have failed to spot something much more important: the great American ship of state is being slowly turned and redirected, almost unopposed.

Consider the following. Last Friday, the US Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright, with President Clinton's blessing, announced a sharp change in policy towards Cuba, the last remaining Communist country in the western hemisphere, and a perpetual irritant to the United States. For years, Washington has aimed to bring about the demise of Fidel Castro by squeezing his people until they rebelled. Last week, thanks in part to the mediation of Pope John Paul II, that policy was abandoned. The US will now work to undermine Castro's rule by making Cuban life better.

There will be more money from abroad, more medicine, thanks to a reduction in red tape, and more food, through new export arrangements. In a nod to domestic hardliners, Washington will maintain its economic embargo and its Helms-Burton law requiring sanctions against third parties doing business with Cuba - but what price such grandstanding once food and medicine from the United States are exempt?

This week, despite a last-minute hiccough, the US Senate could approve the expansion of Nato to include the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland, after only a few hours of low-key debate. Just a few weeks ago, Nato expansion was seen as President Clinton's big political battleground for 1998. The mood of the Republican-majority Congress was considered threateningly isolationist. Senators were thought reluctant to commit more money to Europe. They were worried, we were told, about the cost of admitting new members, the dilution of Nato's military preparedness and the risk of offending Russia.

The Independent (London), March 24, 1998

In the event, Nato expansion cleared the crucial Senate foreign relations committee with barely a murmur against. Last week, it started its passage, almost unhindered, through the Senate. Not only were Americans more interested in Paula-Kathleen-Monica, so, it seems, were their elected representatives.

And what of Iraq, the bogey of US foreign policy for the best part of a decade? Since the eleventh-hour agreement on weapons inspections clinched by UN Secretary General Kofi Annan four weeks ago, US officials have been strangely quiet. The New Year belligerence from Washington which suggested Iraq was ready to poison the world with anthrax, VX and other unspeakable substances, has faded to silence. US troops are still in the Gulf, on alert, but little is heard about them now and their numbers could soon be reduced. It is whispered even that UN inspectors may not find any more weapons: in which case, the less war-mongering the better. On Iraq, a US retreat is at hand.

And what about the UN itself? An outburst from Congress about the unacceptability of "subcontracting" US foreign policy to so suspect a body was short-lived. Admittedly, American dues to the UN are still unvoted and unpaid, but in Washington the recognition has spread that he who does not pay his dues cannot expect UN support.

A rethink is also in train with Iran - until recently as great a Satan in the demonology of US foreign policy as Iraq. Two months ago, Washington responded coolly to an olive branch extended by the newly elected Iranian President, Mohammad Khatami, courtesy of CNN. It took its time to "study" the televised interview. Officially, that study period continues. Washington still demands "deeds, not words". But in practice, here, too, the US is shifting.

Mr Khatami called for "popular diplomacy" - exchanges of unofficial envoys - before official relations got going. The US wanted official talks first. It said no, but apparently meant yes: visits are now encouraged. In echoes of ping-pong diplomacy with China, an American wrestling team went to Iran this month. Barely acknowledged in the US, it was feted in Iran - then welcomed back at the White House by the President. Jaw-dropping stuff, except that no one noticed. They were too busy laughing about Paula, Kathleen, Monica and the rest.

Meanwhile, the quest for peace in the Middle East, the issue that has been a priority and touchstone for US foreign policy over decades, has been quietly downgraded. Washington, it seems, can now live without forging a durable peace for Israel, just so long as there is no outright war and the American domestic political constituency is suitably distracted - which, of course, it is.

Added together, these are momentous changes. America's ship of state is cumbersome and switches direction only slowly. Officially, the Middle East still heads the US foreign policy agenda. Nato expansion must still be argued through. Iran, Iraq and Cuba are still enemies that have an emotional hold on American opinion far beyond their offensive capacity, and Europe and Russia are still baulking at US attempts to make them join Washington's private fights.

But when Americans eventually awake from their White House sex dream, they could find a friendlier world out there: a bigger Atlantic alliance; a less threatening Iraq; a more moderate Iran; a less truculent Cuba; and Europeans and Russians no longer grouching about Washingtonian arrogance, but helping build those diplomatic bridges the United States so badly needs.

The Independent (London), March 24, 1998

Not a bad tally for a President supposedly so distracted that he is losing his grip? Bill Clinton is either the most fortunate president this century or a consummate political operator who could emerge a statesman - a man who woos the world as persistently as he woos women (though perhaps to happier effect).

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

LOAD-DATE: March 24, 1998

8TH STORY of Level 2 printed in FULL format.

Copyright 1998 Toronto Star Newspapers, Ltd.
The Toronto Star

March 24, 1998, Tuesday, FINAL EDITION

SECTION: OPINION; Pg. A15

LENGTH: 759 words

HEADLINE: U.S. embargo on Cuba running its course

BYLINE: BY STEPHEN HANDELMAN TORONTO STAR

DATELINE: NEW YORK

BODY:

IT'S NOT EASY for a government to admit mistakes, especially ones that last 36 years.

Last Friday, President Bill Clinton lifted restrictions on sending food, money and humanitarian aid to Cuba that had been imposed since 1994.

But he was also, in effect, launching a process that will eventually end the economic embargo on Fidel Castro's regime established by President John F. Kennedy's administration four decades earlier.

It still remains an open bet which will actually draw to a close first: the embargo or the Castro regime. The 72-year-old Fidel, whom the embargo was intended to topple, seems determined to die in office.

American officials insist the embargo is equally in for the long haul. The latest measures "do not reflect a change in policy," Secretary of State Madeleine Albright insisted last week.

Yet, since the death last November of Jorge Mas Canosa, the fierce Cuban-American lobbyist who single-handedly kept America's Cuban policy in the era of the Cold War, the foundations of that policy have crumbled.

Political support even in Miami, the hotbed of anti-Castro revanchism, has noticeably weakened as the aging exile community is replaced by new groups urging dialogue with Havana.

Pope John Paul II's visit earlier this year lifted the Iron Curtain around the island. His subtle attacks against both the embargo and Cuban political oppression made clear that engagement could be more effective than the cold shoulder.

If it were not for Monica Lewinsky and the Washington sex scandals, which pushed the papal visit off the front pages, the U.S. domestic drive for a policy change might have been even stronger.

As it is, the Pope's diplomacy provided suitable cover for an American re-examination. James Dobbins, a special assistant to the president for inter-American affairs, said the papal trip strengthened the influence of Cuban "non-governmental organizations" like the Catholic church - and therefore

The Toronto Star, March 24, 1998

created the basis for a future civil society.

A lot of critical governments, from Canada to Europe, have been saying that all along. Nevertheless, Washington's willingness to accept reality is worth welcoming.

For all its rhetoric, the embargo has harmed Washington as much as it has Cuba. Not only has it failed in its primary aim of changing the Cuban government, it has isolated Washington in the hemisphere and alienated most of its friends.

It has, in fact, given Castro a perfect excuse for continuing the state of siege which has kept his island cut off from even the political transformations experienced in other parts of the communist world.

Saying he now wanted to look "beyond" Castro, Clinton hinted he would soon be presenting legislation to widen still further the breach in the embargo. The legislation would allow, among other things, unrestricted export of foodstuffs.

"The over-arching goal of American policy must be to promote a peaceful transition to democracy on the island," Clinton said.

All the same, Washington has reached a critical point.

Some critics argue last week's moves barely return American policy to the mid-1990s, before the new Cuban cold war triggered by the shooting down of American pilots in 1996.

The Helms-Burton law enacted that year to penalize foreigners who own "expropriated" U.S. property is still in place.

Even if American thinking about Cuba is undergoing a radical change, future moves must be tied to a genuine policy shift. It's not enough to allow the embargo to wither away through inattention, which is what was happening before Helms-Burton.

The future is not hard to predict. Castro's death will set off a struggle for power on the island that is certain to shake the hemisphere.

The Miami exile community, local opposition groups and governments throughout Latin America will be drawn into the confusion.

We can only guess at the internal political debate, but it's safe to assume the transition will be troubled - if nothing else because so few of the foundations for a reasonable transfer of power appear to be in place.

Investors hoping to pour in will be stymied by the uncertainty. Those already there may be paralyzed.

Washington, as the most powerful hemisphere player, needs to show it has become seized of the issue. It's time to develop an active disaster plan, perhaps starting at next month's hemisphere summit in Santiago.

Papal diplomacy and embargo politics have had their day. The real world is approaching fast.

The Toronto Star, March 24, 1998

Stephen Handelman writes Tuesday and Sunday on world affairs.

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

LOAD-DATE: March 25, 1998

U.S. seeks Pope's help to free four Cubans

By JUAN O. TALLAYO
Herald Staff Writer

Underlining Pope John Paul II's increasing role in Cuban affairs since his trip there, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright visited the Vatican on Tuesday and urged the pontiff to help free four top political prisoners.

Vatican officials would not say whether they will relay Albright's request to Havana, but they were clearly pleased with what one called "a sign of U.S. confidence" in the Roman Catholic Church's growing influence in Cuba.

U.S. officials said Albright met with the Vatican secretary of state, Cardinal Angelo Sodano, to explain Washington's shifts last week to ease U.S. sanctions and step up humanitarian aid to Havana. It was her second visit to the Vatican this month.

Albright also said the Clinton administration wants to expand U.S. aid to the Cuban branch of Caritas, the church's charity agency, but cautioned it must continue "working independently of the Cuban government," one aide said.

Albright hit hardest on the issue of political prisoners, the aides added, requesting the Pope's help in winning the release of an unknown number of inmates and specifically mentioning Cuba's four leading dissidents.

They are Vladimiro Roca, Felix Bonne, Marta Beatriz Roque and Rene Gomez Manzano, leaders of the Internal Dissidence Working Group. Arrested last year and still awaiting trial, they were excluded from the release of nearly 100 dis-

sidents that Cuba carried out last month at the Pope's request.

Albright also told Sodano that Cuban police have made 20 new arrests of dissidents since last month, and forced some 20 of those released in February to seek asylum abroad — despite John Paul's request while in Cuba that any prisoners who were freed should be allowed to remain in the country.

U.S. officials said Albright emphasized to the Vatican that Washington's relaxation of sanctions was designed to help the Cuban people while President Clinton intends to continue using the embargo to push President Fidel Castro toward political and economic reforms.

"We believe it is essential for the rest of the world to make sure that rogue states in no way are a threat to the rest of society," said an official accompanying Albright.

"Her basic message is that we're not doing this for you, Fidel, that our policy remains essentially the same and that the [U.S. trade] embargo remains in place," he added.

John Paul has become something of a lightning rod on Cuba since his visit there Jan. 21-25, with dissidents asking the church to cast a protective mantle over them, and the Castro government quietly considering a new law that would legitimize most church activities.

Albright's aides told reporters in Rome that last week's easing of sanctions was adopted as a gesture to the Pope, and not to Castro.



HERALDLINK FULL STORY

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Exiles react to Clinton's Cuba policy shift

By **CHRISTOPHER MARQUIS**
Herald Staff Writer

WASHINGTON -- Five days after the Clinton administration announced a series of moves to reach out to the Cuban people, the action continues to mobilize exile activists, alternately drawing praise, skepticism and criticism.

While many Cuban Americans have largely taken the change in stride, the policy switch has caused consternation among politicians and exile leaders. It has exacerbated tensions between Cuban-American lawmakers and the largest exile lobby, the Cuban American National Foundation, and produced angry exchanges between the administration and some of its key Democratic advisers on Cuba.

Florida lawmakers said this week that the reaction of Miami exiles to the policy shift has been relatively muted. Chief among the changes was President Clinton's order to renew direct flights between Miami and Havana, which were cut off in 1996, and to once again allow the direct transfer of cash to relatives in Cuba, a practice banned since 1994.

Aides to Sen. Bob Graham said Wednesday his office had mostly heard from callers who were in favor of the moves. Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen said those calling her tended to lean the other way, but were not strenuously opposed.

"Nobody's saying this is going to further cement Castro in power," she said. "This is just where we were two years ago."

Nevertheless, virtually everyone who follows Cuba policy senses that the new course could herald a broader change in the U.S. posture -- and possibly a first step toward greatly improved relations with Havana. That prospect, which the administration denies, has stirred a beehive.

Several dozen members of the exile group Unidad Cubana flew here Wednesday to honor Congress' three Cuban-American lawmakers for staunchly rejecting all efforts to weaken the U.S. embargo.

Although the legislators were powerless to stop the administration's changes, leaders of Unidad Cubana praised Reps. Ros-Lehtinen, Lincoln Diaz-Balart -- both Miami Republicans -- and New Jersey Democrat Bob Menendez for providing a bulwark against any warming trend toward Cuba.

"If we drop our guard, they're going to eat us alive," said Juan Ruiz, president of the umbrella exile organization, which counts 70 anti-Castro groups among its members.

In a statement, Unidad Cubana asserted that the overthrow of the Fidel Castro government is "the only solution" to the Cuban crisis, and that no change in U.S. policy is warranted, because nothing on the island has changed substantively. Wednesday's display of support for the lawmakers was necessary, the statement said, "in view of the confusion that some of the exile organizations have created by changing this stand."

The Cuban American National Foundation surprised many of its adherents in January by drafting a proposal that would have sent federal food aid to Cuba for the first time since the 1959 revolution. The proposal, which was drawn up with aides to Sen. Jesse Helms, R-N.C., angered the Cuban-American lawmakers who feared it would invite attacks on the embargo in the aftermath of Pope John Paul II's visit to the island.

But while the foundation wrangled with its erstwhile allies, the administration co-opted the proposal, which was precisely the sort of humanitarian gesture that U.S. officials had hoped would demonstrate their solidarity with the Cuban people. With the pope decrying the embargo and the staunchly anti-Castro foundation acknowledging need on the island, the administration felt it had the political cover to welcome such a step.

As a result, Clinton's package included a request for Secretary of State Madeleine Albright to work with members of Congress toward drafting legislation that would ease the transfer of food to the island.

Helms' staffers blasted the announcement as an end-run. They said it could ultimately hurt the prospects for food transfers because Clinton's identification with the proposal would sap its credibility among Republicans.

The foundation was uncharacteristically quiet in Washington, although it voiced some displeasure through its Spanish-language radio station in Miami.

The foundation saw the administration's move as a problem, sources said. Foundation President Pepe Hernandez and other officers called on several lawmakers this week, saying they hoped to craft an entirely new proposal for legislation on Cuba.

"They see themselves being marginalized from the debate," said one source who met with Hernandez and others this week. "They're desperate to do something so they can say they're back at it."

Jose Cardenas, the foundation's Washington representative, declined to comment this week.

Finally, three Democrats who have long helped guide U.S. policy toward Cuba have privately voiced dismay at the administration, aides said. Sens. Graham and Bob Torricelli, D-New Jersey, and Rep. Menendez, have complained to U.S. officials that they were not adequately consulted on the policy shift, which they said threatens to unravel a predominantly bipartisan policy.

 **The PointCast**

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CORRESPONDENT'S LETTER BY JUAN O. TAMAYO

Perceptions can't mask Cuba's ills

In Moscow, it was called the McDonald's Syndrome. In Havana, it might be called the Sherritt Syndrome. By whatever name, it can lead to unpleasant surprises.

It is the tendency of some foreigners to try to gauge events in any hard-to-understand country with the yardsticks they used at home or in other countries.

Thus, when a McDonald's opened in Moscow in 1990, many foreigners hailed it as evidence of success in Soviet efforts to build a capitalist economy on the ruins of communism.

See how Moscow is progressing, many argued. There's Coca-Cola and Mars bars and Pizza Hut and even direct telephone dial to the West.

Foreigners understood, in a fuzzy sort of way, that the empire was dying. That explained the cheap prices, the surplus of hookers, the hundreds of poor who lined up every day under the Kremlin walls to sell an old coat, a pair of boots, a bottle of brandy.

But the foreigners knew more about McDonald's. They saw it as a sign of progress, and believed it was time to invest in Russia, to send in young, aggressive scouts to look for business openings.

One Irish correspondent in Moscow was pressed by his newspaper to stop writing so many Moscow-is-collapsing stories. Why not be more upbeat, and write about how Irish beer was now on tap around the corner from the KGB.

His answer, in a message composed during a late-night drinking session: "Because this country is dying, no matter how many McDonald's it has."

Sometimes, I wonder if the same gap between outside perception and inside reality also exists in Cuba today.

Cuba's official 1998 portrait is one of stability, of slow but real progress after the economy all but collapsed between 1989 and 1994. And all the numbers, whether from Cuban or independent sources, unquestionably support that image.

Yet average Cubans on the island insist that life is bad these days, perhaps worse than ever. The gap in perceptions in Cuba indeed appears to be as huge as it once was in Moscow.

Tourism and mining are booming, and the Toronto-based Sherritt International is leading a pack of foreign investors pumping money into the energy sector, telecommunications, shipyards and other industries.

The Internet has reached Havana, the government's budget deficit is under control, there's direct dial to the United States from major hotels and there are even two fast-food chains, Burgi and Rapido.

So why do so many Cubans say that life is worse, that food is less available and of lower quality than five years ago, that public transportation is again awful after a brief upturn in 1996?

One Miami resident who flew to Cuba this week to visit relatives for the first time in one year said almost everyone she has seen complained that life has gotten tougher, not better, in the past year.

A poll carried out surreptitiously in January by academics in Mexico's University of Guadalajara showed 76 percent of Cubans believed that their lives were worse than in 1993, and 18 percent said they were better.

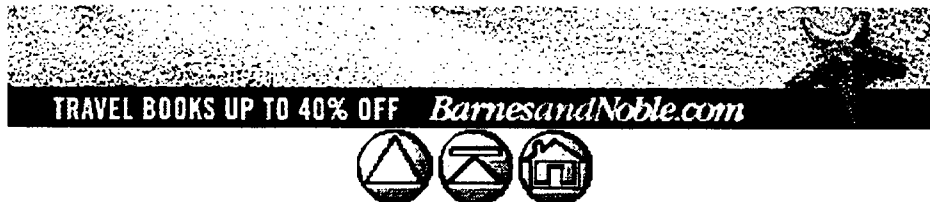
How to explain the gap?

Perhaps life is in fact improving, and Cubans are simply grouching too much. Perhaps life is indeed

improving, but just too slowly for an increasingly exhausted and hopeless people.

And perhaps life is in fact not improving at all. Perhaps all those solid economic numbers and foreign investments are just more mirages, like Pizza Hut by the Kremlin.

In a country as opaque as Russia was then, and Cuba is now, your guess is as good as mine.



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