3 CUBAN EXCEPTIONALISM

By Jeremy Kinsman, 2010; revised 2013

INTRODUCTION

The *Handbook* presents individual country case studies in order to record the practical activity that diplomats from democratic countries have performed there in support of civil society, democracy development and human rights. Situations can, and often do, resemble each other in some recognizable respects. Our aim is to enable diplomats and civil society partners in the field to obtain insights and guidance from actions taken elsewhere, without, however, suggesting that the experiences in one country can simply be transposed directly to another, since the trajectory of each country's development is singular.

The *Handbook* inevitably tries to illuminate the prospects of democratic transition in the countries in question. The case of Cuba is extreme, and in many ways unique. Since the late nineteenth century, Cuba's history has intertwined in a singular relationship with one country, the United States. The mutual enmity between the two governments for much of the last 50 years has had a direct impact on conditions inside Cuba. Anything that diplomats of democratic countries can do in support of Cuban democracy development pales in significance to the potential effect of placing US-Cuba relations on a normal basis, possibly for the first time.

Change at Long Last?

Cuba remains the only country in the western hemisphere that does not practice some form of electoral democracy. A quarter-century after the abandonment of communism in Europe and the adoption of the market economy in China, Cuba is only now groping toward change. It has been tentative. Expectations that Cuban communism would be merely the last domino to fall failed to recognize a signal difference with Eastern Europe, where the regimes were judged to be collaborating with an outside oppressor, the USSR. The Cuban government still presents itself as the patriotic defender against an outside threat.

However, the threat is clearly diminished. The Obama administration is pursuing a policy of constructive engagement with Cuba. The US desire to see human rights prevail on the island is undiminished, but systemic hostility to the regime has been put aside. The "US economic embargo on Cuba, in place for more than half a century, continues to impose indiscriminate economic hardship on Cubans, and has failed to improve human rights in the country" (Human Rights Watch, 2012). However, the US administration is doing what it can within the constraints imposed by the Helms-Burton Act to expand people-to-people contacts and to enable Cuban-Americans to contribute to the welfare and economic prospects of Cubans by interpreting the embargo in more permissive ways.

There is no question now that for its part, Cuba is undertaking a process of economic reform. However, Alvaro Vargas Llosa (2011) reminds us that Fidel Castro has summed up the reforms as being designed "to preserve socialism." Llosa recognizes the readiness "to make concessions in many areas. But not on the definitive issue: the monopoly of power" (ibid.). Also in *The Globe and Mail*, Professor Arturo Lopez-Levy is cited as pointing out that "They are trying to let the economic genie out of the bottle while keeping the political genie in. That's not going to work" (Verma, 2011).

The economic reforms are increasingly extensive, but they are as yet unaccompanied by political reforms, apart from the announcement that President Raúl Castro will step down at the end of his five-year term in 2018. Julia Sweig and Michael J. Bustamente (2013) describe this "new moment in Cuba" arriving "not with a bang but rather on the heel of a series of cumulative measures — most prominent among them agricultural reform, the formulation of a progressive tax code, and the government's highly publicized efforts to begin shrinking the size of state payrolls by allowing for a greater number of small businesses. The beginnings of private credit, real estate, and wholesale markets promise to further Cuba's evolution. Still, Cuba does not appear poised to adopt the Chinese or Vietnamese blueprint for market liberalization anytime soon."

The process will likely quicken when Fidel Castro leaves the scene definitively. Although an orderly succession has obviously occurred as he retired from public office in July 2006, and ostensibly turned power over to his brother Raúl, the question arises whether anything really significant can change as long as he maintains his moral influence over the country, even if he is without direct control of all details as before. Having described himself in 1961 as a "Marxist-Leninist until I die," he recast himself in post-retirement writings as a "utopian socialist," adding that "one must be consistent to the end."

From the outset, the regime has been symbiotically identified with its *comandante en jefe* who led the revolution that propelled it into power on January 1, 1959. The regime he built over the decades "is not the German Democratic Republic," as one diplomat in Havana phrased it, but it is an authoritarian one-party state that has used an Orwellian security apparatus to rein in and quash democratic impulses over five decades, often citing the threat from the US as the rationale. Much of the world

respects the ability of Castro's Cuba to have stared down and survived determined efforts by successive US governments to end the regime by invasion, attempted assassination, a CIA program of subversion and a punitive economic embargo. But democrats continue to rebuke the regime for its invocation of these real threats to Cuba's sovereignty to justify the continued and even tighter suffocation of human and civil rights of Cuban citizens.

This case study identifies activities by diplomats and democracies in support of Cubans' efforts to secure rights at home, including discussion of widening democratic space and simultaneously to partner Cuban economic openings in a supportive way. The study reports that until recently, these efforts tended to bounce off a tightly controlled and controlling regime that veers between self-confidence and paranoia, and discounts the pertinence of mutual leverage.

In consequence, diplomatic efforts meant to support democracy development remain especially challenged in today's Cuba. Diplomats have to manage seemingly competing professional obligations of non-interference, official engagement, a long-term developmental perspective and democratic solidarity, but signs of change are clearly present in Cuba. Coming years will engage democrats in support of efforts by the Cuban people to pursue aspirations for more significant change. However, here, as elsewhere, it will be up to Cubans themselves to accomplish.

CUBAN HISTORY

In few countries are the links between history and the present as evident on the surface as in Cuba, where the struggles and passions of the last 150 years still play out in national psychology and perspectives today. Christopher Columbus made trans-Atlantic landfall on Cuba on October 27, 1492, on his epic voyage of "discovery." By 1511, Spain had declared the island a Spanish possession and within decades, the Taino-Arawak peoples were eliminated by a combination of harsh repression, suicide, European diseases and assimilation. Except for a brief occupation of Havana by the British, Cuba remained in Spanish hands for almost 500 years, until 1898. During the nineteenth century, the island economy prospered from sugar and tobacco production that relied heavily on African slave labour until the abolition of slavery in 1886.

Influenced by European and American revolutions, a vibrant national identity emerged over time, generating a movement for independence whose moral animator was Father Félix Varela (1788–1854), one of the first great protagonists of non-violent civil resistance. Several rebellions were harshly dealt with preceding the Ten-Year War that cost tens of thousands of Cuban lives and even more on the part of the Spaniards, until a negotiated compromise, which led to the abolition of slavery in 1886.

Since adolescence, José Martí (1853–1895) was devoted to the quest for an independent and non-racial Cuba, causing his imprisonment and exile. In 1881, the

nationalist writer and poet found his way to the US and began in earnest to mobilize support for an armed incursion of exiled patriots to throw the Spaniards out of Cuba.

Anxious to pre-empt the impulse toward annexation by expediting national independence as a *fait accompli*, José Martí was killed not long after he had joined the insurgents in 1895. By the following year, the rebels had succeeded in controlling most of Cuba. A growing set of frictions with Spain added to public sympathy in the US for the Cuban patriots, making the option of war against Spain popular. As future President Theodore Roosevelt wrote, "This country needs a war."

The rebellion against Spanish rule that broke out on the island in 1895 (without the exile invasion force whose ships had been impounded) suited the long-standing aversion of the US to European possessions in the western hemisphere that was codified as doctrine by US President James Monroe in 1823. The annexation of Cuba had been openly espoused by later US presidents Polk and Pierce.

In 1896, US Secretary of State James G. Blaine secretly tried to buy Cuba from a resistant Spain, but when the USS *Maine*, sent in aid of US citizens fearing for their safety, mysteriously blew up in Havana harbour in 1898, the US used it as a *casus belli*.

The latter stage of the Cuban War of Independence thereby became known in the US only as part of the larger Spanish-American War. Within the year, US intervention was decisive. Peace negotiations with Spain, from which Cubans were excluded, handed Cuba over to the US, who then occupied the country for four years. However, because the joint resolution of Congress authorizing the use of force to help the Cuban rebels had an amendment (the Teller Amendment) forbidding annexation, the US consented to Cuban independence in 1902.

As historian Alfredo José Estrada (2008) has written, it was America's "first experience of nation-building." President McKinley instructed the military expeditionary chief General Wood to "try to straighten out their courts, [and] put them on their feet as best you can. We want to do all we can for them and get out of the island as soon as we safely can" (ibid.).

But nation-building went hand-in-hand with a profitable reciprocity treaty awarding US business and trade a privileged place in the Cuban economy. Moreover, Cuban sovereignty was diluted by the "Platt Amendment" passed by US Congress in 1901 and inserted into the Cuban Constitution, which gave the US the right to intervene if its citizens or property were endangered. Indeed, US troops occupied Cuba on the occasion of various uprisings thereafter between 1906 and 1909, in 1912, and between 1917 and 1920. The amendment was abrogated in 1934.

The Twentieth Century until 1959

Cuba's enjoyment of independence was repeatedly spoiled by dictatorship and corruption. In 1925, modernizer Gerardo Machado was elected president, but soon gave in to the temptations of dictatorship. His rule was ended by violent opposition (The *Abecedarios*) and after a brief, idealistic, but chaotic socialist period, the army

seized power in 1933. Authority, initially from behind the throne, was in the hands of ex-Sergeant Fulgencio Batista.

Batista initiated a democratic process and the adoption of a progressive constitution in 1940, following which he was fairly elected president, signalling the debut of Cuba's only 12 years of democracy, recalled later as the "politics of disappointment." The 1944 election was won by progressive Ramón Grau San Martin, who presided over a rising economy but also much corruption and gangsterism. His successor in 1948, Carlos Prío, brought little positive change.

Before scheduled elections in 1952, Batista seized power, suspended the constitution he had helped design and began a darker chapter of dictatorial violence and widespread corruption. Middle and upper classes prospered, but poorer people languished as disparities widened. The Batista regime's staunch anti-communism appealed to the Cold War outlook of US authorities at the expense of Cuban human rights. In 1953, a group of rebels, led by young lawyer Fidel Castro, attacked the Moncada barracks. Released from prison in 1955 for his part in these attacks, Castro organized a rebel force in Mexico that landed and launched a disciplined mountain-based guerrilla campaign, under comandantes Che Guevara, Raúl Castro and Camilo Cienfuegos in 1956. The campaign drew decisive support from peasants, sugar workers, students and their own persistence.

The Castro Victory and Its Aftermath

The hundred thousand or so refugees that followed Batista's flight from Cuba on December 31, 1958 in the inaugural wave to Miami were mostly embittered by what they had lost to the new regime.

Initially, the prevalent international reaction to the Castro victory was that despotism had been turfed out by an idealistic cause. At first, Castro tried to showcase an inclusive social-democratic coalition of a wide variety of opponents to Batista. After these attempts were shelved, disillusioned democrats began to join professionals and small businessmen to abandon what seemed to be rapidly becoming a militant ideological monolith.

As part of the process of "draining the swamp," several hundred executions took place at Havana's La Cabaña fortress, after summary trials. But as Jon Lee Anderson (1997) reports, "There was little public opposition to the wave of revolutionary justice at the time. On the contrary: Batista's thugs had committed some sickening crimes, [and] the Cuban public was in a lynching mood."

But, Anderson adds, "Whatever the 'necessity' of the revolutionary tribunals, they did much to polarize the political climate between Havana and Washington" (ibid.). The gap widened as Castro's anti-Washington rhetoric escalated and his plans to nationalize American assets in Cuba clarified. Guevara upped the ante by urging violent revolution throughout the hemisphere, which Anderson calls "a siren call to would-be revolutionaries and an implicit declaration of war against the interests of the United States" (ibid.). So began a half-century of mutual enmity.

The Castro Years, 1959–

This is not the place, however, for a detailed analysis of the dramatic history of Cuba over the last half-century. The regime was from almost the outset in a psychological and real state of siege: the failed US-financed Bay of Pigs invasion in February 1961 was the only military attack, but there were repeated attempts to assassinate Castro over the years — most notoriously as part of "Operation Mongoose," one of the biggest CIA covert operations ever undertaken. Diplomatic relations with the US were severed in 1961. Subsequent events — from the fateful Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962, which brought the world perilously close to nuclear war, through the passage by the US Congress of the Helms-Burton Act in 1996, which tightened the devastating economic embargo on Cuba — perpetuated the state of militant readiness that the Cuban leadership has invoked to justify the necessity of its strict authoritarian control.

There is no question that the revolution of 1959 had wide popular support, having overthrown what was widely held to be a tyrannical regime. Most citizens took patriotic pride in Cuba's new stature in the eyes of the world. There was also initial enthusiasm about exporting the Cuban revolution throughout Latin America but it waned and eventually died in Bolivia in 1967 with Guevara, who had become by then a revolutionary freelancer without much active Cuban government input. Cuba did take up arms in support of liberation causes, most prominently in Angola, where a Cuban expeditionary army numbering as many as 55,000 fought for years to support the leftist People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola against South African proxies. The costs to the apartheid regime were so huge that South Africans today credit Cuba with having done more to bring down white minority rule than anyone else from outside. (More than 2,000 Cubans died in the Angola fighting.)

Today, Cuba does not support armed insurrection or terrorism. At the time of the Boston Marathon bombing in April 2013, the Cuban government sent its condolences to the American people and reiterated that it "rejects and condemns unequivocally all acts of terrorism, in any place, under any circumstance, and with whatever motivation." Reflecting the unreality that still unhelpfully colours US official attitudes about Cuba, the US State Department spokesman responded that there are nonetheless "no current plans" to remove Cuba from the exclusive list of state sponsors of terrorism, which also specifies Iran, Sudan and Syria.

Over recent decades, Cuba's international "brand" became much more identified with the export of health services: 36,000 Cuban doctors are in service in over 70 countries, providing poor neighbourhoods medical facilities for the first time, such as the Barrio Adentro project in Caracas, Venezuela. South Africa pays Cuba to supply doctors to replace the many who have emigrated in the post-apartheid era. Cuba provides medical services in Venezuela in return for oil, and Cuban emergency relief teams were among the first to support relief efforts after the tsunami in Indonesia in 2004, a major earthquake in Pakistan in 2006 and were prominent closer to home more recently in earthquake-devastated Haiti. The Misión Milagros has brought

hundreds of thousands of poor Latin Americans to Cuba for eye surgery and sent teams of Cuban eye doctors abroad.

In those 50-plus years, the Cuban government achieved important social goals. Diplomats in Cuba caution that whoever follows will have to accept that these achievements will need to be built upon, not dismantled. Cuban leaders, including Raúl Castro, have confided that they are struggling to find a way to enlarge the rights of individuals while conserving the sense of social solidarity they consider the hallmark of the Revolution.

Indeed, Cubans have never been as healthy, educated or more or less equal. The Cuban government states that a population that was only 60 percent literate in 1959 is 100 percent literate today, and 94 percent of Cubans finish secondary school. Today, there are 80,000 doctors compared to 6,000 at the time of the revolution (3,000 of whom emigrated). Life expectancy and infant mortality data rival those in Canada and the US, and are the best in Latin America. Latin American diplomats report that people struggling against criminal gangs in their region envy Cuba's relative absence of street violence.

The political attempt to re-engineer society along Marxist lines, however, had far-reaching social and economic consequences. Increasing ideological militancy and police control contributed to declining support, though there is no reliable way of estimating approval ratings, apart from the enduring efforts Cubans make to emigrate. The number of Cuban emigrants and families in the US today is well over a million.

Following nationalizations of private enterprise and the confiscation of US businesses, the re-engineered socialist economy became mired in centralized control and leaden bureaucracy, especially after Fidel Castro nationalized 60,000 small businesses in 1968. Social gains that also had to struggle against the effects of US sanctions were slowed. The withdrawal of Soviet "fraternal" subsidies (amounting to 21 percent of the Cuban GDP) after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 essentially ended the radical Cuban social experiment. Having been overreliant on the Soviet bloc (to the extent of 80 percent of trade), Cuba faced a grave economic crisis. The government responded by suspending its economic orthodoxy to accommodate pragmatic measures under "the special period in times of peace," which introduced limited private small enterprise (self-employment or trabajo de cuenta propia) and permitted the use of foreign hard currency.

Recovery staggered, further hindered by devastating hurricanes in recent years. The collapsed sugar market has never recovered. Some reforms initiated during the "special period" authorizing the emergence of semi-autonomous enterprises and research centres were rolled back a decade later. A senior economic minister told an ambassador several years ago that the state's position as employer had dropped from 98 percent to 97 percent, but had returned to 98 percent. Diplomats report that officials who had launched new ventures and centres with government favour found themselves in sudden disfavour and relegated to a limbo of obscurity. Today, the pendulum has swung again toward liberalization of the economy more dramatically

than ever. The effects, including on the rights of civil society, will be watched and, as appropriate, supported, with real and widespread interest.

CUBA TODAY: SOCIO-ECONOMIC ATROPHY

In 2004, the RAND Corporation wrote of "a vast array of dysfunctional legacies from the *fidelista* past." In general, public grievances are less related to human rights than to improving the material conditions of day-to-day living. Seventy percent of Cubans were born after 1959 and relate less to the revolutionary enthusiasm of earlier years. Cuban youth in the main wants what youth everywhere seeks, free access to popular outside cultural goods, lifestyles and freedom to travel.

Economic Reforms

The reforms announced over the last several years are an attempt to address this. Taken together, they represent the biggest shakeup of the economy since Fidel Castro expropriated small businesses in 1968, although moving in the opposite direction.

The regime under Raúl Castro appears committed to trying to improve the economy. Castro's steps to lighten the bureaucratic controls that he repeatedly criticizes, and to decentralize, have to confront ossified structures and the practical effect is diminished. About 60 percent of the economy is under the direct control of the self-financed Revolutionary Armed Forces (FAR) that constitute a powerful state-within-the-state with separate infrastructure for food, energy and transport for its members' benefit. But all in all, as Sweig and Bustamente (2013) report, "services in Cuba make up close to 75 percent of the island's GDP," limiting impact of reform on a better record of productive growth.

The reforms undertaken tentatively beginning in 2006 reflected, to some extent, a pragmatic current among political elites. Raúl Castro's own political appointees tend to be older military intimates. They are described as status quo-oriented, but not necessarily hardline ideologically. They seem mindful, however, of potential resistance from more ideological loyalists, and pay heed to the destabilizing effects of "shock therapy" in Russia and elsewhere that would in any case be anathema to a population fearful of weakening entitlement programs that at least keep everybody afloat. Nonetheless, even the most orthodox socialists were reported to see the merits of permitting the safety valves of some economic reforms, provided egalitarian principles remain paramount.

However, the differences between those who have access to the convertible currency economy and those who don't are already corrosive enough. There is a consensus among observers that the population is idle, underemployed and apathetic, worn down by the struggle to feed families from meagre personal food rations that half of the population, who lacks access to the convertible currency economy, has to rely on. Even Fidel Castro is reported to have acknowledged (to Julia E. Sweig) that the economic system no longer works, including for the regime.

In the last year, additional new reforms have taken a more definite character. Rights have been established to allow Cuban citizens to buy and sell personal property (though only second-hand cars), open businesses, hire employees and engage in self-employment in 181 categories (though still excluding professions). The government's announcement that it will reduce the number of public employees by hundreds of thousands aims at putting 35 percent of the economy in private hands by 2015. Food rationing will also be phased out. In 2009, Raúl Castro enabled small private landholdings to try to improve food production, as Cuba is now massively dependent on food imports. The US is the main supplier, as food products have been excepted from the US embargo under strict terms of cash prepayment. Finally, foreign investors can lease government land for up to 99 years.

People-to-People

As of January 14, 2013, exit controls are lifted, permitting Cubans to travel abroad. While they must still apply for a passport, early indications are that the passport regime is generally permissive. Cubans can stay or live abroad for a longer period of time before relinquishing Cuban citizenship.

The Cuban rulings need to be seen against US government relaxation of the rights of Americans to travel to Cuba for widely interpreted religious, educational and cultural travel, in addition to the lifting of limits on the rights of naturalized Cuban-Americans to visit Cuba and limits on the amounts of financial remittances they can send. In 2012, the number of Americans visiting exceeded 400,000, and Americans sent over US$1 billion of financial support and goods to Cuba.

The South Florida anti-regime Cuban contingent in Congress attempted to turn the regulations back to those applying during the Bush administration (maximum remittances of US$1,200 and only to immediate family; travel to Cuba only once every three years), but failed to gain support. The additional context is the effort to enable Cubans to enjoy electronic contact with the outside through upgrades to Internet connections and cellphone availability. Both of these technologies are expensive, but usage has increased to 1.5 million phones, up from 330,000 five years ago. The increased contact with the outside through travel and electronic access can be assumed to have the effect of increasing the appetite for political change.

Political

From the outset, the regime has maintained pervasive supervision of the population, making ample use of the Comités de Defensa de la Revolución that engage citizens as watchdogs in every block and workplace.

The question for observers is whether, despite piecemeal concessions, Cubans are likely to see any significant weakening of doctrinaire political control as long as Fidel Castro is alive. Most acknowledge thus far, it has proven to be wishful thinking to believe that pragmatic specific reforms lead inevitably to wholesale

political change, as a kind of Cuban perestroika. "Elections" to local councils and state organs remain resolutely single-party.

On the eve of the regime's fortieth anniversary, Human Rights Watch (1999) wrote of the "highly effective machine of repression." Only a few years later, in March 2003, police arrested 75 democracy proponents. They have at last been released after the intervention of Cardinal Jaime Ortega. The government has pressured most of them to leave for exile — mostly to Spain, which also helped broker their release.

In 2011, the Cuban Council of Human Rights issued a list of 43 prisoners of conscience remaining in Cuban jails. A good number were prosecuted mostly as recipients of US financial aid, with internal security operatives who had infiltrated NGOs appearing as state witnesses. The propaganda machine remorselessly attacked civil society representatives as a mercenary fifth column serving Cuba's enemies.

Cubans who criticize the government are subject to criminal charges. In 2011, four Havana dissidents were sentenced to three to five years for distributing leaflets urging an end to the Castro brothers' rule. Human Rights Watch (2012) reported over 3,000 arbitrary detentions to prevent individuals from attending meetings or events. The Cuban government refuses to recognize human rights monitoring as a legitimate activity and has arrested members of human rights group attempting to visit a dissident on a hunger strike in a hospital. The question is what the impact will be of an expanding civil society.

Civil Society and the Opposition

The notion of civil society acting independently of government, that is at the core of democratic development, was, by definition, abhorrent to old-line Soviet-style Marxists. From the start, the regime appropriated Cuban patriotism as the central theme of the revolution's narrative, ultimately incarnated by the government. The external threats produced national security laws declaring the acceptance of foreign funds to support change to the Cuban system to be seditious. The views of those who advocate change are represented as being inherently anti-Cuban.

Yet, in 1992, Fidel Castro himself referred to civil society in positive terms internationally. The partial withdrawal of the state in the "special period" opened up spaces that were filled by informal arrangements among people that laid the beginnings of civil society. But a backlash in official opinion once the economy began an uneven recovery in the mid-1990s caused Cuban authorities to label notions of civil society and democracy as being part and parcel of aggressive campaigns from the US for regime change.

A pattern emerged that once an advocacy organization became prominent or effective beyond a certain point, it was shut down. An early example was the Cuban Committee for Human Rights, formed in the 1970s among imprisoned socialists and supporters of the 1959 revolution disillusioned by monolithic political control. In 1997, members of the Working Group of the Internal Dissidence were jailed, followed by more arrests in succeeding years.

The most high-profile advocacy initiative was the Varela Project, winner of the European Parliament's Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought and lauded publicly by Pope John Paul II and former US President Jimmy Carter on visits to Cuba. Animated by Oswaldo Payá, who had earlier founded the Christian Liberation Movement, the Varela Project took advantage of a provision of the 1992 Cuban Constitution, collecting the requisite 10,000 signatures to petition the right to a popular referendum on basic freedoms of association and the press, free elections and the right to operate a private business. It also called for an amnesty on political prisoners. The government crushed the initiative by organizing its own referendum, in which eight million Cuban citizens were herded into voting for a constitutional amendment making socialism permanent. Then, it seized 22 of the most prominent supporters of the Varela Project in its mass arrests in March 2002.

Oswaldo Payá was not among them, perhaps because of his international prominence. He continued his efforts through the Christian Liberation Movement, and by starting the Cuban Forum, which encourages discussion meetings in peoples' homes. In July 2012, Payá died in a car crash under controversial circumstances. The Cuban authorities claim the car's driver lost control and hit a tree. Paya's daughter (and the driver) claim the car was run off the road from behind by a security chase car.

While it remains subject to considerable surveillance, some observers comment that the regime has become more tolerant of civil society's efforts to organize informal discussions, showing a post-Fidel measure of acceptance that the population increasingly needs and expects a debate about the country's political future. Overall, there is public fatigue over official propaganda and intrusion into personal lives, and Raúl Castro has dialled down the propaganda volume.

But analytical opinion cautions that the discouraging material conditions mean that achieving a multi-party political system is not top in the list of Cubans' priorities. People want less economic control. They accept the social and egalitarian values that animate the Cuban revolution, but deplore inefficient and demeaning delivery of social and other services.

Despite the hard line that has persisted since 1996, civil society has continued to expand in a piecemeal fashion, including in rural areas, especially to fill the gaps created by the inadequate social delivery by the government, which itself faces an overcrowded agenda. While not presenting themselves as advocates of political change, such civil society groups obtain pertinent experience in local and personal initiative, from handling the functional issues at hand, to laying the foundations for building what the China case study refers to as the "ecology" of pluralism.

In the 1990s, the Concilio Cubano emerged as an umbrella group of 135 small organizations, including professional associations and independent journalists. It was blocked from meeting in 1996 and not revived. But over 2,000 NGOs with specific functional objectives are inscribed officially.

The Independent Library Movement addressed a gap in access to books in Spanish and built a network of over 100 libraries with over 250,000 users. Though non-

political in practical purpose, its founder, human rights activist Ramon Colas, was forced into exile in 2001.

The labour movement is dominated by the official Workers' Central Union of Cuba, which is an instrument of regime control, but two more independent labour groups have emerged: the United Council of Cuban Workers and the Christian International Labour Movement.

Founded in 1996, the Federation of Latin American Rural Women has collected over 100,000 signatures for a petition protesting the inequity of a dual-currency economy, which they maintain is unfair to poorer Cubans without access to convertible pesos.

Having been identified as a supporter of Spain and then of Batista and other dictators, the Roman Catholic Church is greatly diminished institutionally in Cuba, reduced to only 300 priests, half of which are Cuban. But religious faith is by no means extinguished.

In 1992, the Cuban government dropped the country's formally atheistic character and returned the right to worship without official stigma. By the 1990s, the Catholic Church was giving thought to its social role and began a non-political program of small projects for citizens, such as daycare centres for single mothers and facilities for the elderly, which also have the effect of creating a sense of personal empowerment flowing from self-administered activities.

The Church has not become a conduit for open political challenge as in Poland in the 1980s, but it has created a space for open discussion and is supported by congregants across the country. Raúl Castro held an unprecedented four-hour meeting in May 2010 with Cardinal Jaime Ortega and the Archbishop of Santiago de Cuba, Dionisio Garcia. This has led to further discussion between Church and State, resulting in the set of concessions regarding jail sentences of prisoners of conscience, including the announced release, mostly into exile, of the remaining 52 prisoners arrested in March 2003.

A variety of congregational and religious assemblies are able to draw resources from corresponding religious communities in the US and elsewhere. For example, the traditional Afro-Cuban religious practice Santería remains part of Cuban national culture.

A plethora of associations and cooperatives have emerged for developmental purposes, working on alternative energy, agriculture and the restoration of local buildings, sometimes involving wholesale community development such as the El Condado movement aimed at remodelling the city of Santa Clara.

Artistic, intellectual and research circles have banded into informal groups. Rock music has attracted a strong following of young people, which authorities have belatedly (and without much credibility) tried to align with.

All in all, diplomats and other observers judge that the foundations of civil society, while rudimentary, are taking root, providing foreign democratic partners with a growing variety of non-state partners. Moreover, Cubans are becoming eager to take responsibility for their own lives and, for the first time, political choices.

In *The New York Review of Books*, Jose Manuel Prieto (2011) chose the image of "growing up," which Russian civil society members also chose to describe the progress of civil society in Moscow to the *Handbook* project. Prieto writes about "the reserves of people waiting to be allowed to live an adult life. The protector state, now in retreat, educated and instructed them but also immobilized them and made them dependent, confining an entire population to a prolonged childhood. The time has come to allow them to grow up" (ibid.).

Cuba's Relationships with Community of Democracies Member States

Cuba's foreign relationships have varying degrees of intensity. As described above, its relationship with the US is overwhelmingly the most important from every point of view. There is scarcely a family without relatives in the US. US policies on permissible remittances from family members, as well as on visits, are therefore of primary importance on the island. In relaxing the regulations that had been considerably hardened by its predecessor, the Obama administration has changed the whole tone of the US-Cuban relationship. In 2010, US visas were again being provided Cuban artists and performers to tour in the US, such as the emblematic poet-singer Silvio Rodríguez.

The Helms-Burton Act, however, is rooted in law, and many of the provisions of the US embargo cannot be changed by executive order. Yet, as time goes by, the ability of the harder-line exile community in South Florida to dictate terms of the relationship between the two countries diminishes. A growing number of US voters would share the consensus among non-US democratic representatives in Cuba that the US embargo and policies have been counterproductive, enabling the regime to justify strengthening its control over the population. A 2010 article by Human Rights Watch monitors Nik Steinberg and Daniel Wilkinson judged that "It is hard to think of a US policy with a longer track record of failure."

Professor Lopez-Levy has observed that the fault with US policy is that it "wants to start at the end" (cited in Verma, 2011). The Helms-Burton Act indeed rooted its embargo provisions not only in Cuba adopting a multi-party democracy, but also on the Castros being no longer in office.

Fidel Castro has always turned US policy to his advantage and has mobilized Cuban fears that the Cuban-American community aimed to restore economic and political control over the island. Cuban citizens are generally reported to be bitter about the hardline from either side: the Cuban authorities who care more about ideology than the plight of Cubans; and US authorities and lawmakers who chose to tighten sanctions and the embargo at the moment of greatest economic hardship for Cubans. By all accounts, ordinary Cubans hope the Obama administration will succeed in inducing flexibility, a relaxation of enmity and also of Cuban controls.

The Obama administration has initiated talks with Cuban authorities over immigration and overflights, as well as preliminary talks on the prospects for improving the relationship. Though Fidel Castro has never accepted the premise of

"normalization" in exchange for democratization, it is implicit that both sanctions and Cuba's continuing imprisonment of prisoners of conscience must ultimately be bargaining tools in a larger picture.

The Cuban government has recognized the need to diversify relationships, having learned a harsh lesson from overdependence on the USSR. There has been something of a revival of relations with Russia, and China has become Cuba's second-largest trading partner.

Cuba's other relationships have, in some ways, been strengthened in recent years. Virtually all Latin American countries now have diplomatic representation in Cuba, especially since Cuba stopped supporting leftist uprisings in Central America in the early 1990s. Indeed, Cuba is seen by Latin Americans to have played a constructive role in mediating conflicts in the region. Generally, in line with historic Latin American neuralgia toward outside interference in domestic affairs, Latin Americans take a hands-off attitude toward Cuban governance. Cuba has been admitted to the Rio Group, devoted to economic cooperation among Latin American and Caribbean countries. Though the US has continued to resist the idea (advanced by the former Government of Canada) of inviting Cuba to Summits of the Americas, Fidel Castro was enthusiastically welcomed at the first Summit of Latin America and the Caribbean on Development hosted by Brazil, which excluded the US.

A wave of electoral victories of the left and parties long enjoying close relations with Cuban political elites, and once in office, several leaders, such as Brazilian President Luiz Inácio "Lula" da Silva, Bolivian President Evo Morales or ex-Chilean President Michelle Bachelet, also reciprocated for past Cuban support. Mexico has recently restored a productive level of political dialogue after tensions with ex-President Vicente Fox, strengthening economic relations and consulting on other issues of mutual importance such as illegal migration. President Lula da Silva, who visited Cuba several times during his tenure as president, paid a state visit to Raúl Castro in 2008. He announced a major economic assistance and development package that situates Brazil as a central partner, particularly in the energy development field.

It is unclear if Venezuela's role as a high-profile ally of the Castro regime will survive the death of President Chávez in March 2013. Venezuela has propped up the Cuban regime financially by providing most of Cuba's oil in exchange for "tens of thousands of Cuban doctors and security advisers. Nicolás Maduro, Venezuela's new president, has pledged loyalty to Cuba. But his narrow, disputed election victory [in April, 2013] and Venezuela's nosediving economy, mean that Cuba needs other options" (*The Economist*, 2013).

Dr. Julia Sweig (2009) points out that Cuba's emphases on social justice resonate in Latin American public opinion. This may explain the paradox that, while many have only recently overcome the abuse of human rights at the hands of military regimes, they nonetheless fail to criticize Cuban human rights abuses. Dr. Sweig (ibid.) assesses that "Latin American governments today generally see gradual reform under Raúl as the path most likely to bring about a more plural, open society

on the island," a judgment corresponding more to the dispiriting material conditions in Cuba than to the reawakened aspirations of the people.

Canada and the European Union have always maintained relations with Cuba and have opposed Helms-Burton both for its negative impact on Cuban development and for its extraterritorial projections of US law, which foreign partners judge to be unacceptable. But "Western" democracies have also been firm about the unacceptability of Cuba's disregard for human rights and for the holding of prisoners of conscience.

After the arrests of 75 democracy activists in March 2003, the EU and its diplomatic missions in Cuba placed a severe downgrade on relations, which was only removed in 2009. There are varying degrees of warmth or lack of it among EU countries individually. Spain is the most active, including fast-track access to Spanish citizenship for Cubans with at least one Spanish grandparent, and productive partnerships in such areas as the environment, disaster preparedness and relief, and science and technology. The Czech Republic probably represents the other end of the EU scale, reflecting the priority that the former communist country places on democratic transition, and also the convictions on human rights of former President Václav Havel, who founded the International Committee for Democracy in Cuba. (The Fidel Castro government had supported the 1968 USSR invasion to crush Czechoslovak political reform). Individually, other EU countries have tried to engage the Cuban government more intensively in the last few years. The European Commission has become a Cuban development partner, but has done so in tandem with a high-level EU-Cuba dialogue on human rights.

Canada has maintained political engagement with Cuban authorities, while arguing with them "nose-to-nose" for the space to continue contacts with civil society. Although Cuba normally discounts economic leverage, the Cubans do care about their image in a country such as Canada, which sends so many tourists to Cuba and continues to be an economic partner.

There are indications that Cuba knows it needs to reach out to major democracies to balance what will likely be a wave of activity from the US if and when relations do become more normal. Cuban leaders have told European partners they would like to think that Europe's greater emphasis on social democracy will enable Cuba to cement some of the social principles of the revolution amid inevitable change.

The Cuban authorities have been cracking down on corruption in the last few years and have prosecuted several foreign businessmen in the process.

RESOURCES AND ASSETS OF DEMOCRATIC DIPLOMATS IN CUBA

The Cuban government is not isolated from the representatives of foreign democratic governments, as is Zimbabwe, nor is it indifferent to foreign views — the foreign press section of the Foreign Ministry is its biggest department.

Cuban authorities can and do turn access for foreign diplomats on and off, depending on behaviour, though the regime rarely goes so far as to request withdrawal of diplomatic representatives. Democratic diplomats exercise their **immunity** in order to meet with civil society, speak freely and even demonstrate solidarity with the victims of human rights abuse. On the other side of the coin, there have been ample reports in the past of diplomatic immunity being violated by random if systemic acts of harassment and intimidation, against mainly US diplomats, their dependents and even their pets.

Diplomats have been able to count on the **support of home authorities** for diplomatic activity corresponding to the policies of the sending government at a given time. The most protagonistic approach was assigned to US Interests Section Chief James Cason under the Bush administration from 2002 to 2005. As he took up his duties as head of the fully staffed diplomatic mission located within the Swiss Embassy, Cason recalls his political instructions: "You are not at a mission. You are on a mission…to support the democracy movement." In doing so, Cason antagonized Cuban authorities. It was an outcome that would not have been considered productive by other countries whose relationships were less officially hostile, but it was one that Washington (and Miami) at the time seemed to want. Writer Daniel P. Erikson (2008) explains that: "Castro and his top ministers despised Cason (who 'could not have cared less what Cuban officials thought' of him, his focus [being] wholly on supporting Cuba's nascent opposition movement). But they also found his overt support for Cuban dissidents to be politically useful, because it helped them to make the argument that opposition to the regime depended on overseas sponsors. Many Cubans in the system with reformist instincts found that the US Interests Section had become such a hot potato that they were forced to give it a wide berth." On the other hand, Mr. Cason's support for Cuban would-be democrats may well be remembered long after tit-for-tat antagonisms between the governments are forsaken.

The remarks of former UK Ambassador Dianna Melrose (in office 2008–2012) to a UK website on Cuban issues typify the dual track approach that most home authorities expect of their democratic diplomats — much as described elsewhere in the *Handbook* by US Ambassador McFaul about dual track diplomacy in Moscow. Ambassador Melrose spoke on the website and in an extensive interview with Patrick Pietroni (2009) of her commitment to constructive engagement with the Cuban government, but she underlined that the notion of "mutual respect" cannot be invoked to fend off criticism of the suppression of human rights in Cuba where "people are locked up for criticising the government" without "mutual respect also by the Cuban government for the European Union and the values important to us, including commitment to full civil and political rights, democratic freedoms, freedom of expression: all the rights that are fundamental to our society." On this basis, EU diplomats have continued their contacts with a range of opposition and other figures in civil society, confident they will have support at home for activities that demonstrate solidarity with those persecuted for their principles.

Former Canadian Ambassador Michael Small was always clear with Cuban authorities that his mandate was "to talk with the whole range of the country," and he was not curbed in making contacts with civil society. Bruce Levy (2009), head of the embassy's political section told a Washington conference (Cuba: An International Perspective), "we hope to see a peaceful transition to a democratic free-market system, and we use our many links to promote our values. Our two countries make it a policy to speak to each other frankly and respectfully, even on issues where the two sides disagree." The mutual respect is no doubt a function of the extent of ongoing relations.

Diplomats committed to maintaining contact with civil society and offering solidarity with human rights defenders come from the missions of several democratic countries in Cuba. The Awards to Committed Diplomacy in Cuba, offered in 2010 by Centro Para la Apertura y el Desarrollo de América Latina for "showing solidarity towards democrats in the island and for taking committed actions" on "human rights violations," honoured three diplomats from Germany, two from the US and one each from Poland, the Czech Republic and Norway. Diplomats interested in making civil society contacts on a trip also met conscientiously with Cuban official contacts. The Cuban authorities expected a certain balance. If the emphasis became tilted toward dissidents, the official contacts were cut off and diplomats were left with only dissidents to meet.

Diplomats recognize the reality that they have limited direct **influence** on any top-down regime whose political priorities are wholly internal. However, Raúl Castro has acknowledged that Cuba has to modernize, and to do this Cuba needs partners. Cuba has specific development needs and not a lot of strategic leverage over countries able to address them. This situation creates some political capital that embassies can deploy.

Financial assistance is a resource of diplomatic missions that ought to correspond to a dire shortage of resources on the part of Cuban NGOs. US agencies have very large amounts of money to disperse from funds authorized by Congress. The vast majority is spent on programs and NGOs outside Cuba, through the 1992 Cuban Democracy Act that authorized direct US funding of NGOs seeking non-violent change. Authorities have vigorously objected to embassies' direct funding of civil society groups, especially advocacy NGOs. In practice, because it was controversial, such funding often became divisive, and as mentioned, placed some Cuban recipients in a position of vulnerability. Apart from the US, diplomatic missions in Havana generally do not provide funds to support political dissidents, but they pursue the opportunity to fund developmental activities in Cuba, often preferring projects undertaken at the municipal level by local authorities or co-ops.

That some US funds were channelled to Cuban civil society via NGOs in newer democracies such as the Czech Republic and Poland is an example of **solidarity** among democracies, though most embassies of democratic countries in Cuba confide it would have been counterproductive in recent years to be closely associated with

the US Interests Section on political issues which, in the words of a US diplomat, seemed "radioactive" because of the explicit US regime change agenda.

On the issues, EU countries struggled to work out a common position, but there were until recently few formal **demarches** of the EU representatives together with non-EU partners. Over the last two decades, "like-minded" embassies, including Sweden, the Netherlands, Canada, Chile, Mexico, Spain and Britain have regularly compared notes on the ground in Havana, though they do not coordinate activity in any organized way.

The election of a new US administration in 2008 made the working relationships among embassies in Havana more productive, and mutually reinforcing acts of human rights support and on development assistance issues have been more frequent.

Community of Democracies diplomats have consistently maintained the **legitimacy** of their solidarity with those seeking freedom of assembly and speech, and human rights defence. Cuba signed the Santiago Declaration in 1991, containing the "commitment to democracy, the strengthening of the rule of law, and access to effective justice and human rights." In 2008, Cuba signed the UN Covenant on Civil and Political Rights that guarantees such rights, as well as the freedom to leave the country; however, Cuba has still not ratified the covenants and there is little evidence of concrete rights becoming more available. Still, the fact that Cuba claims to be a democracy further legitimizes the right to support Cubans who seek debate about democratic norms.

APPLICATIONS

The Golden Rules

Listening, Respecting and Understanding

Understanding Cuba and its nuances is a challenge for any foreign observer; there are angles and complexities at every turn. Diplomats are reminded constantly of the need to respect the Cubans' sense of their history, both to understand the present and to grasp the fundamentals of national psychology. Many of Cuba's social organization structures are unique to that society.

Over the years, diplomats from democracies have balanced ambivalence and nuance against the need to contest the categorical denial of fundamental human rights inherent in such official acts as the harsh sentences meted out to dissidents and reformers arrested in March 2003. Though those arrested then have been released, the regime continues cynically to denigrate activists and to prosecute them. Diplomatic missions continually register their deep respect for the courage of dissidents, described by Llosa (2011) as "those who resist the dictatorship in difficult, even heroic, conditions," who continue to protest violations of human rights and who pay a high price for taking a stand, often extended to their families.

In recent years, however, the need for democratic diplomats to support those raising a voice in legitimate opposition has, in practice, had to take account of the greater vulnerability direct contact and especially direct financial support can trigger. In April 2007, Oswaldo Payá and Marta Beatriz Roque, founder of the Assembly for the Promotion of Civil Society, who had been jailed in 2003 on trumped-up charges of "acts against the independence or territorial integrity of the state," joined other democrats in stating that "achieving changes in our society is a task corresponding to Cubans and only Cubans, to define and decide freely and democratically the future of Cuba without foreign intervention." In short, supportive diplomats acknowledge they need to know when to keep their distance from those engaged in a struggle with authorities who monitor events closely, and especially contacts with foreign embassies in Cuba.

Cautious sensitivity applies to relations with Cuban officials, as well as with civil society activists. Diplomats observe that members of the political elite, even very senior figures, such as deposed former Cuban Secretary of the Council of Ministers and Vice President Carlos Lage Dávila, can abruptly back off from what had been effective mutually beneficial contacts out of a need to avoid any accusation of "dangerous associations" from security personnel. In periods of thaw, such as the mid- to late-1990s, younger officials were able to enjoy foreign contacts that, in periods of retrenchment, were held against them at a cost to their careers. The question being asked on all sides is whether the atmosphere is changing again for the better in this respect, and if so, if it will last.

Sharing

Sharing among embassies is routine practice, though some are more like-minded than others. The EU, of course, shares systematically among member-state embassies, and keeping balance and avoiding duplication in development assistance efforts. On political and human rights issues, some embassies — possibly those with fewer concrete interests at stake in Cuba — take stronger declaratory positions. There is acknowledgment of the potential for an informal division of labour and differentiation of role among democratic embassies, especially in the EU. EU diplomats have teamed up to support victims of political persecution and their families, and to demonstrate public solidarity with peaceful demonstrators.

Truth in Communications

Reporting

Analysis of the situation in Cuba has been an ongoing duty of diplomats for many years; a local form of "Kremlinology" has grown out of the need to decipher opaque relationships in the FAR and in upper reaches of the Communist Party.

As elsewhere, there have been major episodes of wishful thinking and cases of telling authorities at home what they wished to hear. In episodes of attachment to

the status quo resembling *Handbook* descriptions of poor readings of countries later affected by "the Arab Spring," Morris Morley (2004) cites CIA field officers on how, prior to January 1, 1959, "Ambassadors Smith and Gardner were both absolutely convinced that Castro wasn't going to come out of the hills. They believed what Batista told them and didn't see that changes were going to come."

Contemporary diplomats do not accept, obviously, the assessments of the Cuban regime at face value. They anticipate that the current repressive system will founder once Fidel Castro disappears from the scene. But they acknowledge that there is a risk of reporting isolated reforms, gestures or contacts as already heralding the beginnings of more important structural change that has still not emerged in any fundamental rights-altering way, even if hopeful signs tempt a limited optimism.

Informing

Cuba has been a closed society as far as information is concerned. There is no access to foreign news outlets, though bureaus of foreign media are in place. There had been a short-lived tolerance and growth of autonomous media in the late 1990s, but following a crackdown on independent commentators and outlets a decade ago, none of the periodicals then published still exists, with the exception of the official *Gazeta* of the Union of Writers and Artists.

Cuban journalists have been jailed for accepting financial aid from the US. The harsh fact is that there is no independent alternative in Cuba to state-owned TV and to the propagandistic Cuban news service *Granma*. The online newspaper *Candonga* in Holguín has been blocked and its director, Yosvani Anzardo Hernández, was detained by police for two weeks and threatened with prosecution because he was acting as a correspondent for a Miami news site. Contact with foreign press is punishable in Cuba with sentences of up to 20 years. The Writers in Prison Committee of PEN International urges democratic governments to pursue the release of journalists among the prisoners of conscience in Cuban jails.

Nonetheless, the appetite of Cuban scholars and intellectuals for access to outside contacts and materials is undiminished. A semi-autonomous magazine of social commentary, *Temas*, is printed in and distributed from Colombia and has sustained a fair measure of free-wheeling debate, mirrored by its regular monthly public discussions of current social and economic issues. Some embassies help start-up magazines by providing access to newsprint.

If scholars are keen to connect with sources outside Cuba, the interest of younger Cubans in being able to connect with the outside and with each other via social media and the Internet presents Cuban authorities with almost existential challenges. Cuba has the lowest Internet user rate in the hemisphere. Until very recently, the Internet has basically not been available or affordable to citizens, though it has become possible to acquire laptops, albeit at costs prohibitive for the vast majority. An active blogging community, typified by the widely admired "Generation Y" blog of Yoani Sanchez who provides an accurate account of the daily life of the Cuban people, has

operated in Cuba, but most of its readers are by definition abroad, accessed through servers off the island.

The regime seems finally to have recognized that Cuban youth access foreign websites and social networks through bootleg connections and has finally accepted the inevitability of greater openness. A submaritime communications link to Venezuela has been built, which will afford less expensive and faster communications than the present system of satellite downloads, although the prospects of it being used to transmit a wide range of free information are far from clear.

In 1983, the US, whose resident Cuban exile community argues that Cubans are brainwashed by the absence of alternative and objective views, inaugurated Radio Martí which broadcasts to the island, much as Radio Free Europe did to communist countries during the Cold War. The Cuban government eventually jammed the broadcasts, which are mostly heard on shortwave elsewhere in the hemisphere. Public distrust of the US agenda and the tone of hostility to the revolution about which Cubans are conflicted, raise questions whether Radio Martí has much concrete purpose, especially as commercial radio from Miami floods Cuba as it is.

The US Interests Section and embassies of other democratic countries have always made available news and information bulletins about world events and bilateral relations. Some welcome Cuban Internet users to embassy facilities; however, a student reported being hauled off to a police station after a free Internet session at the US Interests Section (*The Economist,* 2011).

The US Interests Section has also organized meetings and workshops, and distributed publications and information material at every opportunity, making the information program its central activity. In 2006, the Interests Section ratcheted the campaign for freer information upward by installing an electronic news ticker along the top of its Havana building, attempting to rebut Cuban government claims and views. The Cuban authorities countered with a massive protest, constructed a plaza for popular demonstrations against the US adjacent to the building, and attempted to block the electronic ticker from view by masses of black flags.

The tit-for-tat campaign spurred on by Fidel Castro and the Bush administration has since been de-escalated, and the Obama administration pulled the plug of the electronic ticker in July 2009. Here too, the question arises as to where freedom of information access in Cuba is going. The evidence seems clear that the authorities know that there is no chance of Cuba going to the next level of economic development without enabling participation in the global information revolution.

Working with the Government

Advising

The prevailing approach of diplomatically represented democracies in Cuba toward working with the Cuban government is to do so without forfeiting the need to

dialogue on human rights and to demarche the Cuban authorities when the situation calls for it.

A dominant theme of foreign analysis expects that significant political reform in Cuba is more likely to emerge from circles and developments within government than from its fragmented political opponents who are not well-known to a public immersed in state propaganda, and in any case, are preoccupied by bread-and-butter issues. Few Cuban officials, however, allow themselves to be perceived by foreigners as potential agents of democratic change. Still, the functional value of developing a wide range of confidence-building contacts among government officials, including in the FAR, is undoubted. US and Cuban military authorities have cooperated on issues arising from the US presence at Guantánamo and on maritime patrolling against drug trafficking; Canadian federal police work with the Cubans on trafficking issues; and several democracies' intelligence agencies have working relationships with Cuban counterparts at the Ministry of the Interior on concrete issues where notes can usefully be compared.

The Cuban regime projects an air of supreme self-confidence that narrows opportunities for diplomats to advise the government. But confidence-building activities addressing Cuban concerns are possible. The challenges of delivering large amounts of humanitarian aid in the aftermath of devastating hurricanes, costing 20 percent of GDP, engaged the Cuban authorities for the first time in working partnerships with foreign agencies and NGOs, prominent among them, Catholic Relief Services. Several embassies work on a variety of infrastructure and social issues with municipal levels of government and local co-ops, such as projects for restoration of historic monuments, buildings and whole neighbourhoods, partnered by agencies of EU member states.

US authorities have worked effectively with their Cuban counterparts over hostage and other emergencies, even at the height of tension in relations. Under the Obama administration, there is an increase in contacts, though diplomats report disappointment among Cubans that controls persist over scholarly and cultural exchanges. Cuban authorities allowed US military overflights for emergency relief operation after the Haiti earthquake, and Cuban medical teams participated in the international effort there, which represented a change from earlier international humanitarian operations in Haiti, when the Canadian prime minister's suggestion that Cuban cooperation be engaged ran into political complications.

Dialoguing

Dialoguing with Cuban authorities takes place at the political level — with possibly increasing degrees of frankness — with ministers and senior officials from Europe, Latin America and North America. Diplomats report that senior Cuban officials take non-polemical dialogue seriously. Several ambassadors report that it is productive not to work human rights into every discussion. This may have the effect of adding force to specific demarches on human rights.

However, declarations made by Western ministers for the benefit of their domestic audiences tend to undermine the credibility of such demarches in Cuban eyes. Publicly announced exercises in passing prisoners' lists generally remained without outcome, deflected with answers like, "We'll check," or "It's on Fidel's desk." But private communications in 2008 by then Cardinal Secretary of State Tarcisio Bertone and Pope John Paul II during his own visit in 1998, did have a more productive effect, as have the discussions undertaken by Cardinal Ortega, leading to release of the 52 remaining prisoners arrested in March 2003. Carefully pre-negotiated outcomes for specific head of government visits have obtained exit permits for designated Cuban activists accepted for asylum in the country concerned. This was done without publicity.

Reaching Out

Connecting

Connecting to civil society is essential to most democratic missions, though how to do so is carefully considered. It is obvious that civil society in Cuba is underdeveloped, not well networked, and could benefit from international contacts and non-political support, but the benefits to members of civil society have to be weighed against the risks of their being accused of being subject to foreign influence.

In 2011, the Community of Democracies bestowed a Palmer Award on Dutch diplomat Caecilia Wijgers in recognition of her support for civil society opposition groups in Cuba. She personally helped to distribute their positive literature (denounced as "subversive material and enemy propaganda" by security authorities) to other members of civil society.

British Ambassador Melrose echoed the position of several ambassadors of Community of Democracies countries when she stated, "We don't accept any government can tell us who we can or can't speak to. There are British and other EU ministers who would very much like to come to Cuba. But they insist on being able to have meetings with both their Cuban government counterparts and with whoever they choose from the peaceful opposition."

US diplomats from Washington relaunched immigration talks, which had been broken off by the US in 2003, shortly after President Obama's inauguration in 2009-2010, but made a point of meeting privately with opposition figures after concluding the round of talks with officials. Cuban spokesmen initially reacted wildly to the meetings, accusing the US officials of "plotting subversion" with "dozens of their mercenaries." US Assistant Secretary Crowley responded that "meeting with representatives of civil society who simply want a voice in the future of their country is not 'subversive.'" On February 23, 2010, Ricardo Alarcón, president of the Cuban Parliament, lowered the tone of Cuban reaction, observing that such meetings with civil society are not apt to "rupture the dialogue."

Democratic embassies follow different practices for purposes of connecting to specific figures of the peaceful opposition. Many designate officers within the embassy as the primary contact, without diminishing the ambassador's political commitment. Some missions, and notably US personnel, stress the symbolic importance of the head of mission being seen personally in acts of personal solidarity and outreach.

Some ambassadors make a point of not hosting political opposition figures at their official residences, instead receiving them privately in the embassy chancery. To meet opposition figures outside, some heads of mission tend to join events that include political activists hosted by other embassy officers. As Ambassador Melrose points out, visiting ministers and senior officials of Community of Democracies countries often insist on including in their programs meetings with opposition figures, but they also generally do so privately at their embassy chancery.

Embassies play an essential role in brokering and encouraging people-to-people exchanges with groups in their own countries. Cubans are deeply committed to high performance in culture and sports, and avidly welcome connections with partners and to events abroad. The Cuban authorities are wary, and of course the hardening of US rules on exchanges has limited interchange with America in recent years, though it is now showing signs of revival.

Convening

Convening opposition or civil society members invites friction with the Cuban government, but several democratic embassies have offered embassy venues for workshops or discussions on a good offices basis without specific political goals on issues that Cubans need to resolve among themselves.

Over recent years, different democratic embassies have taken a variety of approaches to inviting civil society representatives and political activists to official receptions. As Cuban authorities object to their presence, some embassies give two distinct receptions on national holidays, while others continue to mix them together, accepting that there will, in consequence, be fewer (if any) higher level representatives from the government. Cuban authorities can be volatile when embassies alter practice in favour of greater presence of democracy activists: one year, the authorities withheld an embassy's permit to clear liquor and wine through customs until after the reception — to which dissidents had been prominently invited — had taken place.

Facilitating

The fragmentation of Cuban democratic opposition poses the question of whether democratic embassies could facilitate greater cooperation by offering their neutral good offices to groups seeking to work together more effectively, as has been done in authoritarian settings elsewhere, such as Chile or South Africa. In Cuba, that would be difficult to do, except very indirectly. Embassies also facilitate contacts

between Cuban citizens and family members outside Cuba, with several making Internet access available for this purpose.

Cuba has succeeded in exporting into exile much of its opposition. Several democracies facilitate refugee status for those seeking or having to leave Cuba, especially the US, Spain, Canada, Mexico, France and Chile. These are occasionally, as mentioned above, negotiated outcomes of high-level official visits.

There has been a long tradition of the Cuban exile diaspora seeking harmony of purpose with activists inside Cuba (Jose Martí's sojourn in the US prior to the 1895 rebellion comes to mind). Democratic governments and institutions abroad frequently sponsor workshops and colloquia on Cuban human rights issues. Because of the state control of media, however, these events have minimal direct resonance within Cuba, insulated by barriers to information from outside. Cuban writer Raúl Rivero was sentenced to 20 years in prison in 2003, but released in 2004 on health grounds. He expressed appreciation for his refuge in Spain, where he acknowledged that "the community has been very welcoming…The journalistic community has embraced me" (cited in Erikson, 2008). The harshness of conditions in Cuba, however, provided him with little opportunity for reconnecting. While the direct connections between dissidents outside and civil society inside may not be robust, the knowledge inside that such mobilization of outside democrats occurs provides moral reinforcement for Cuban democrats.

Financing

Financing civil society and NGOs is controversial and subject to close official scrutiny. Direct financial support for opposition groups has resulted in accusations that they are "mercenaries," and embassies avoid those situations. But fast-disbursing small amounts of support from the mission funds of democratic embassies can be of great value to groups working on development and social issues. Embassies value the opportunities that emerge at local levels for small projects where there is less likelihood the partnerships can be misconstrued as having a political rather than developmental, or even humanitarian, agenda. Sometimes, they make contributions anonymously.

Showcasing

Showcasing experience and creative cultural performance is central to public diplomacy in Cuba. Cuban artistic and cultural life has always been vibrant. Though constrained on issues of self-expression with any political implication, graphic art, music and dance are among art forms where Cuban performance has created an audience avid for connections to performance from outside.

Cuban youth are keen to have the opportunities to consume international popular culture. The rock music scene has emerged in strength and after an extended critical attitude, the regime has bowed to the inevitable strength of popular culture.

Embassies are able to invite external experts in a range of activities where the Cuban system needs development, or where the delivery of services falls short, as well as scholars to engage with Cuban researchers and academia. For some years, Canadian cooperation was typical in lending the benefits of Canadian experience to institution building that is not overtly political, but contributes to the habits of transparency and accountability, such as the development of effective committees in Parliament, systemically greater accountability of ministers and an ombudsman's office in government — though it should be noted there is considerable criticism in Canada over neglect of these practices in recent years at home. Another notable emphasis has been on decentralized partnership activity working with Cuban unions and housing, food production or microfinancing co-ops in the provinces.

Showcasing political examples can also be effective. The Cuban ambivalence about US involvement in Cuban affairs has always had at one pole the "America of Abraham Lincoln," whose Emancipation Proclamation had enormous impact on an island where, at the time, about half the population was composed of slaves and freed slaves originally from Africa. There are differing views as to the extent to which race relations are vexed in Cuba today. Ostensibly, Cuban society is non-racial, but interest is high in others' experiences in managing pluralistic societies. This is a difficult topic for Cuba's monolithic socialist model.

Defending Democrats

Demonstrating

Demonstrating solidarity with persecuted peaceful democracy activists is part and parcel of embassy support for the rights of freedom of assembly and speech that democratic countries represent. Embassy personnel can often provide a local focus to recognition extended by their governments and parliaments to local democrats, such as successive resolutions of the European Parliament criticizing Cuban human rights violations.

In bestowing an international profile along with its annual Andrei Sakharov Award, the European Parliament may also have afforded recipient Oswaldo Payá a degree of insulation from direct persecution. But this was not the case for the Damas de Blanco ("Ladies in White"), who also received the Sakharov Award. The Damas de Blanco are wives of prisoners of conscience, arrested in March 2003 and only released in 2010. To express their silent protest, the women attended mass on Sundays in Santa Rita Church in Havana's Quinta Avenida in Miramar before proceeding on an authorized 12-block walk in public. Clearly, the dignity and moral force of their protest irked authorities to the point of retaliation. In April 2010, pro-government groups harassed the Damas de Blanco (a frequent act of organized intimidation called an acto de repudio), at one point confining them under harsh abuse for several hours. In March 2012, several were arrested for deviating from the prescribed route. Diplomats responded in support. US diplomat Lowell Dale

Lawton attended mass with the women, and German and Czech embassy officers Volker Pellet and Frantisek Fleisman accompanied them on their walks.

Verifying and Witnessing

Verifying and witnessing is an important embassy function in regard to such acts of intimidation. Chris Stimpson of the UK Embassy described his presence as a witness at the confrontation with organized counterprotestors as constituting observation "to monitor human rights and freedom of expression."

Members of Cuba's dissident group Ladies in White demonstrate during their weekly march in Havana, Cuba, Sunday, January 30, 2011. Ladies in White is an organization created by wives and mothers of political prisoners. (AP Photo/Javier Galeano)

There are also efforts to verify the health of prisoners of conscience. Cuban authorities do not grant human rights monitors access to their prisons. Recently, some prisoners of conscience have undertaken hunger strikes. One of the 75 arrested in March 2003, Orlando Zapata Tamayo, died as a result of his hunger strike on February 23, 2010. Foreign leaders, such as US Secretary of State Clinton and Spanish Prime Minister Zapatero condemned the act, which Amnesty International called "a terrible illustration of the despair facing prisoners of conscience who see no hope of being freed from their unfair and prolonged incarceration." The Mexican and Chilean parliaments adopted similar declarations. President Raúl Castro expressed unusual public regret for Zapata's death, though the authorities then arrested dozens of his supporters to prevent them from attending the funeral. It was, however, attended by diplomats from several countries. There have been concessions since, worked out in a meeting in May 2010 between Raúl Castro and Cardinal Ortega. At the meeting, measures were taken to ensure adequate hospital treatment for sick

prisoners and to move prisoners to their home provinces to facilitate family contacts and in July 2010, all 52 remaining prisoners from March 2003 were released.

In August 2009, five EU diplomats from Sweden, the UK, Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic brought food and clothing to the wife of Darsi Ferrer, imprisoned without charge in July the day before he was to lead a demonstration for human rights. The Cuban Foreign Ministry protested that "the EU is putting in danger the political dialogue begun with Cuba," but as Sven Kühn von Burgsdorff, an EU mission spokesman in Havana restated about the EU's policy on the occasion of relaunching the dialogue, "there is no reason to lack trust in our desire to do both things at the same time — improve dialogue with the government, and with civil society, including the peaceful opposition."

Such acts by diplomats, demonstrating solidarity and witnessing events, have the effect of offering some protection to activists and human rights defenders who have already courageously crossed the line of protest so that gestures of moral support for their rights do not expose them particularly to greater danger.

Direct acts of protection have also been performed by embassies in Havana over the years. Dr. Sweig (2009) records the most prominent of these:

> By March of 1980 a handful of Cuban citizens had already smuggled themselves into foreign embassies in search of asylum. The Peruvian embassy was one target, and the Peruvian government was not at the time disposed to return the intruders to Cuban authorities. Later that month, when several Cubans crashed a bus into the gate of the Peruvian complex and provoked a violent incident with Cuban soldiers, Fidel responded by removing all police protection from embassy grounds. Within 48 hours, over 10,000 citizens had taken refuge inside the gates.

Ernesto Pinto-Bazurco Rittler was the chargé d'affaires of Peru at the time and a staunch defender of non-violence, democracy and human rights in Cuba. He met with Fidel Castro and refused to hand the asylum seekers over to Cuban authorities. In 2012, Ambassador Rittler was awarded a Palmer Prize by the Community of Democracies.

The episode led to the Mariel boatlift, once US President Carter said he would open America's doors to Cubans wishing to leave. Fidel Castro took up the offer, and within months, 125,000 Cubans emigrated.

SUMMING UP/LOOKING FORWARD

Cuba represents a complex challenge for democratic diplomats today. Pressing the regime to drop its absolutist doctrines in favour of a full-blown democracy is unrewarding in practical terms, and yet, a relativist approach that concedes that the

denial of essential and universal human rights can be overlooked is not one that most members of the Community of Democracies can accept.

Clearly, in Cuba, a transition is actually already underway. A successor to Raúl Castro, the Minister of Education, Miguel Díaz-Canel Bermudez, has been designated. An era will end. The outcome is unpredictable, though it is clear that the Cuban population, especially younger Cubans, want to be part of their open hemispheric world and the wider world. Diplomats in Cuba from democracies represent links to that aspiration and are its witnesses on behalf of democrats everywhere, all the while trying to engage the Cuban authorities in activity and contact that will help improve the situation of Cubans today.

There is an irreducible quid pro quo the EU and other democratic partners and their embassies keep in mind.

The US administration is also working for more normal relations. Perhaps US President Obama's words of advice for Spanish Prime Minister Zapatero in 2010 best sum up the prognosis, "Have the Foreign Minister (Miguel Angel Moratinos) tell the Cuban authorities we understand that change can't happen overnight, but down the road, when we both look at this time, it should be clear that now is when those changes began."

Ted Piccone (2013) of Brookings underlines that "the trend toward reform in Cuba is evident." He argues that the "new circumstances in Cuba offer President Obama a rare opportunity to turn the page of history from an outdated Cold War approach to a new era of constructive engagement." Undoubtedly, it will be welcomed by Cubans themselves.

In April 2013, Yoani Sanchez, who had finally been granted permission to travel abroad, addressed an audience in Miami, rejecting the false notion that Cubans had to choose between "the Cuba of Fidel" or "the Cuba of Miami." They are not, in her words, "two separate worlds, two irreconcilable worlds," but belong both "to the Cuba of Jose Martí."

At the Community of Democracies' tenth anniversary ministerial meeting, held July 2-3, 2011 in Kraków, Poland, Father Jose Conrado of Santa Teresita de Jesus parish, Santiago de Cuba, received the Bronislaw Geremek Award for his longstanding and courageous dedication to the defense of civil and human rights in Cuba.

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