

## COMMENTS ON

### “Cuba and American Public Opinion” by Fisk

René Pérez-López

In a nut shell, the author poses the question: is U.S. foreign policy toward Cuba subject to elite opinion? The way Dan Fisk has written his paper becomes a consultation of data that has been available for some time but that no one has taken the time to analyze as minutely as he has. The consequence of this method is that the paper takes the reader through territory at times feeling like a secure plain, and at others like the meeting place of two tectonic plates. Will the executive survive the pressures of elite opinion? Will the executive, in the face of Helms-Burton's proposed legislation, and influenced by elite opinion (editorials), veto or approve it?

The answer documented amply by Fisk is that the executive tapped directly into grassroots public opinion on Castro and his regime when faced with the need to act in the face of the shooting down of the Brothers to the Rescue planes. Therefore the executive nodded on the legislation, something totally unexpected. The executive ignored elite opinion which was two pronged: 1) do something to stand up to the killers of the pilots; and 2) do not sign the Helms-Burton Act.

Interspersed throughout the paper are examples of the close relationship of American press coverage of Cuba and oceanic change in opinion/policy regard-

ing Cuba. Two salient examples are the Hearst yellow press in the nineteenth century and Herbert Matthews' reporting on Castro that made him a beacon for Cuban history and for Cuban-United States relations for over 40 years.

Fisk has done a massive amount of research to document his work, and we should all be grateful to him for doing so. He used extensive written records and electronic databases. Shifts in opinion and their interplay with executive action are handled astutely by Fisk, who shows his capable and experienced hand as a political practitioner.

Fisk's conclusions reaffirm that average American and elected public officials are more in sync than we are willing to believe, especially in the face of a very powerful media. Latent public opinion is a phenomenon that merits a great deal more research, in view of its underestimated power through its links with Americans' value system.

With the heavy influence of the executive branch over media coverage of wars in recent times, and with a public that seems to bypass elite opinion in forming its views on foreign policy, is it healthy that media coverage and policymaking are both in the hands of one entity?