

MUCH ADO ABOUT SOMETHING? REGIME CHANGE IN CUBA

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The incumbent Cuban regime, a personalistic and charismatic dictatorship with an idiosyncratic mix of national-military, egalitarian, anti-American and anti-capitalist as well as residual Communist elements, is difficult to place among traditional regime categories. Although the regime has passed through several distinct phases in the past forty years, there has been one dialectical constant—the dominant presence of its founder and leader, Fidel Castro. Other institutional actors respond to him directly. Though the Cuban regime is often described as “one of the last Communist” regimes, the Communist Party (PCC) did not hold its first congress until 1975, no less than 16 years after the triumph of the Revolution. It remains institutionally weak, and none of its leading figures has a social or political base independent of Fidel Castro. Moreover, the Cuban regime has a strong military component. Though the FAR is ostensibly under Communist Party control, there is ample room for doubt and/or speculation as to how effective those mechanisms are. Its leading members have been either incorporated into the highest government and Communist Party bodies, purged (as in the execution of General Arnaldo Ochoa in 1989), or accommodated by allowing them access to the lucrative realms of mixed enterprises, joint ventures, and tourism.

Our objective in this article is to ascertain the nature of the contemporary Cuban regime. This is not

merely a retrospective or academic exercise. The regime (then and now) is the starting place for whatever is to come and will condition the possibilities and direction of the country’s political evolution.¹ The first part of this article will explore what we believe was the aborted Cuban transition to post-totalitarianism in the mid-1980s and the (partial) reassertion of totalitarianism as the regime entered the 1990s. The second part, then, examines the nature of the changes experienced by both regime and society during the 1990s, leading us to characterize the regime in this more recent period as “charismatic early post-totalitarian.” The conclusion analyzes the implications of this characterization for regime change and the post-Castro future.

TRUNCATED TRANSITIONS

The Castro regime is now more than forty years old. It has survived a myriad of difficulties, not least the dramatic collapse of its sponsors in the Soviet Union. And yet the regime endures. Who does not remember the dire predictions of its imminent collapse from the late 1980s and early 1990s? And yet, if the regime has survived into the new century, it is not because it has remained the same. In fact, the continuity assured the regime by the presence of its founder has often also served to mask the dynamic changes that have occurred in the Cuban polity over the past few decades. Cuban society has changed significantly in the past two decades. Notwithstanding the repeated

1. For a first cut at this issue, see Eusebio Mujal-León and Jorge Saavedra, “El post-totalitarismo carismático y el cambio de régimen: Cuba en perspectiva comparada,” *Encuentro* 6/7 (Otoño/Invierno 1997): 115. See also Linz and Stepan for a concurrent opinion. Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996): 55.

use of the “socialism or death” slogan, there will be a major adjustment (and crisis) for the regime when Fidel Castro makes a definitive exit from the Cuban scene or is no longer able to direct the regime.

Our effort to explore the paths and conditions to the post-Castro future takes us first to the past and, more specifically, to the period 1971-1985 when the Cuban regime became closely intertwined with the Soviet Union. During this period the Cuban regime had reached a far-reaching accommodation with its Soviet counterpart; and, as it assumed its part in the “socialist division of labor,” it began, in effect, to experience a transition toward post-totalitarianism. The new partnership involved active collaboration between Cuba and the Soviet Union in the international sphere, including the deployment of Cuban troops to various parts of the Third World. The two sides negotiated the guidelines for the transfer of subsidies to the Cuban economy and the institutionalization of “socialist planning” mechanisms within Cuba. In a more political vein, the Cuban leadership moved toward the institutionalization of the role and structure of the Communist Party (PCC) as well as the ratification of a new Constitution that closely paralleled the Soviet one. Accompanying these initiatives was the creation of the farmers’ markets and other reforms which, when coupled with the favorable terms of trade and other forms of support, lifted Cuba from the doldrums of its failed 1961-1970 experiments in mobilization. Carmelo Mesa-Lago refers to the 1971-85 period as one of “moderate Soviet (pre-Gorbachev) economic reform.”² For Pérez-Stable the 1970s and early 1980s were a period “when the leadership implemented some market reforms...(and) the political system gain(ed) the normal trappings of state socialism.”³ Jorge Domínguez sees this as a period when the regime found it necessary to look for al-

lies to shore up its economic weakness in the face of the American embargo, and copied the institutional framework of its Soviet mentors and took on a distinctly “bureaucratic socialist” character.

Though these authors generally agree as to the most important events of the years 1971-1985, they bring divergent analytical lenses to the definition of what the regime type was in these years. Jorge Domínguez argues that, as the institutions of a “bureaucratic socialist” regime were consolidated during the 1971-85 period, this new regime succeeded its totalitarian predecessor from the 1960s and became the antecedent of the “authoritarian” one in the 1990s.⁴ Focusing on this same period, Carmelo Mesa-Lago argues that the Cuban regime, which had become totalitarian in the years after 1961, did not experience qualitative changes during these years. For him, any changes taking place through the 1980s were within the same regime type.⁵ Marifeli Pérez-Stable presents yet a third perspective when she advances the notion of mobilizational authoritarianism in describing the Cuban regime. Framing her analysis in terms of the literature on the institutional dynamics of state socialism and, more particularly, on the oscillation between the imperatives of “normalization” and the politics of mobilization, she concludes: “(I)nstitutionalization never reached an irreversible momentum...At the crucial crossroads of the mid-1980s when Cuba confronted a downturn in the economy and prospects of diminishing Soviet aid, (Fidel) Castro...called for cutting back market reforms and renewing mobilizational politics.”⁶

In general terms, we agree with Pérez-Stable and Mesa-Lago about the tenuousness of the “institutionalization” of the late 1970s and early 1980s. We also agree with Pérez-Stable that the failure to implement political and economic “normalization” not only en-

2. Carmelo Mesa-Lago, *Market, Socialist, and Mixed Economies* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000): 227.

3. Marifeli Pérez-Stable, “Caught in a Contradiction: Cuban Socialism between Mobilization and Normalization,” *Comparative Politics*, vol. 32, no. 1 (October 1999): 67.

4. Jorge I. Domínguez, “Comienza una transición hacia el autoritarismo en Cuba,” *Encuentro* 6/7 (otoño/invierno 1997): 9.

5. Carmelo Mesa-Lago, “Cambio de régimen o cambios en el régimen? Aspectos políticos y económicos,” *Encuentro* 6/7 (otoño/invierno 1997): 37-40.

6. Pérez-Stable, 67.

hanced the “mobilizational” style of governance associated with Fidel Castro, but also significantly narrowed the opportunities for the generation of “structures and centers of power” outside party-state institutions. We disagree, on the other hand, with Domínguez with respect to his argument that the events of the 1971-85 phase laid the foundations for the subsequent emergence of an authoritarian regime in the 1990s.

While our perspective on this period draws on some of the ideas expressed by these authors, we place our interpretation more directly within the specific context of the literature on post-totalitarian regimes. We do so because we believe that the state-society focus that is at the core of the post-totalitarian model provides greater analytical leverage for understanding the dynamics of the 1971-85 period (and its closure in the late 1980s) as well as those of the more recent phase (1991-2001).

Here we would like to review briefly the main outlines of the post-totalitarian regime type, using the four characteristics—leadership, ideology, mobilization, and pluralism—articulated by Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan. Under post-totalitarianism, politics takes on a more institutionalized form within the organizations of the state in contrast to the unpredictable exercise of power in the totalitarian order. Though *leadership* is still exercised by the ruling party, it begins to demonstrate more bureaucratic tendencies and is less subject to the arbitrary discretion of the leader. In *ideological* terms, there is a growing disjunction between the regime’s desires and capability. Ideology suffers from a much lower commitment, and it becomes more of a perfunctory ritual. *Mobilization* is also transformed. Rather than demanding open support for the regime, leaders of a post-totalitarian regime begin to expect less and the absence of open opposition is accepted as tacit approval. *Pluralism* of a mostly social and economic nature is tolerated, while political pluralism is still largely prohibited. Parallel culture, art and markets begin to coexist alongside the officially sanctioned ones,

even though less pluralism is tolerated or possible than under an authoritarian regime.⁷

We can also distinguish between early, frozen and mature post-totalitarian regimes. In early post-totalitarian regimes, there is but incipient social reform. Implied in the concept of frozen post-totalitarianism, on the other hand, is the notion that reforms are in a holding pattern, given that the regime has decided this is preferable to their deepening. Thus, under mature post-totalitarianism modest changes in the social and economic spheres remain in place, while there is still little or no political diversity. The latter has not yet had sufficient time and space to become established. In mature post-totalitarian regimes, Linz and Stepan suggest there may emerge a sufficient number of actors in the social arena to serve potentially as the opposition-in-waiting with whom would-be reformers can ally.

In applying this analytical perspective to the Cuban regime, we advance the following argument. During the 1971-85 period, the regime experienced the onset of a transition to post-totalitarianism. This was a process that reflected a strategic coincidence between the Cuban and Soviet leaderships and took Cuba out of its relative autarky. Cuba’s integration into the Soviet bloc impelled and reinforced the domestic institutional and economic changes that we outlined above.

At some point by the early 1980s, however, as the Reagan Administration moved toward a more assertive foreign policy position and the Andropov-Chernenko-Gorbachev succession occurred in the Soviet Union, Fidel Castro increasingly (and with good reason) began to doubt both the reliability and the possible consequences of the Soviet commitment. Once Gorbachev came to power in 1985, the signals became unmistakable. The Soviet decision to shift from grant to loan mechanisms, to reduce the above-market prices paid for sugar and other products, and to eliminate other concessional favors were alarm signals to the Cuban regime.⁸ Castro responded to these measures by announcing the process of *rectificación*.

7. Linz and Stepan, 48.

This was a hard line response to *perestroika* in which the reforms of the prior era were steadily undone and reformists, such as Minister of Planning Humberto Pérez, were ousted. Cuban peasant markets were shut down in May 1986, an announcement accompanied by scathing invective about the noxious growth of individualism and market forces.⁹ This rhetoric signaled the end of the transition to post-totalitarianism and ushered in an incomplete return to the mobilizational radicalism of the late 1960s, with the earlier overtures to the market replaced by appeals to national conscience, resistance, and revolutionary spirit. After setting aside the Soviet-inspired planning models of the prior era, Castro set ambitious national goals for food self-sufficiency, housing construction and other social needs through the use of voluntary work brigades.¹⁰

What factors explain the truncated transition to post-totalitarianism in Cuba during the 1980s?:

1. **The first revolved around Fidel Castro.** By the time Gorbachev came to power in 1985 and announced his program of *perestroika* and *glasnost*, he may well have anticipated how those reforms would debilitate and undermine his own system of rule. Others within the Soviet orbit may have thought the same thing, but in this and other respects Cuba and Fidel Castro had a less dependent relationship. Not only had the Soviet-Cuban relationship never been one simply of patron to client (Castro had, after all, won power on his own). What further enhanced the autonomy of the Cuban regime was the very presence and permanence of its founder. He had an authority and prestige within the regime that gave him leeway to define and re-define the regime that any successor lacked. In these respects, even as the Cuban regime entered a transition toward post-totalitarianism in the years 1971-1985, its leader-

ship situation was very different from that in most East European regimes or, even for that matter, of the Soviet Union itself.

2. **The continued vitality of ideology** (the mix of nationalism, anti-Americanism, and anti-capitalism elaborated by Fidel Castro) was a second factor. Even by the late 1970s and early 1980s, the regime had not lost its ideological moorings. Though the 1980 Mariel exodus shook the regime and demonstrated just how many people would leave the island if given the opportunity, there was still cohesion in the elite and among important sectors of society that the ideological model (and the social programs it spawned) was still viable. Ideology might have been also reinforced by the activist and nationalist foreign policy that turned Cuba into a major player in the Non-Aligned Movement and a (partial) surrogate for the Soviet Union in places such as Angola and Nicaragua. Moreover, the regime had lost neither its mobilizational nor its repressive capacity in the late 1970s and early 1980s. On the other side of the equation, the low-level of economic and social pluralism in Cuba made the truncation of the transition to post-totalitarianism easier. The introduction of market-type reforms had been very limited with the result that, with the exception of the farmers' markets, there were few, if any independent economic or social actors.
3. Finally, **the institutional weakness** of the Communist Party and the **corresponding strength** of the Revolutionary Armed Forces (FAR) are also important in explaining the truncated transition to post-totalitarianism during this period. The "normal" logic of totalitarian and post-totalitarian consolidation involves a central role for the Party. Under totalitarianism, the Party establish-

8. Mesa-Lago documents the change in the terms of aid from the Soviet Union as the USSR faced economic decline in the period 1986-1990, with terms, albeit still favorable, increasingly unfavorable to Cuba. Mesa-Lago, *Market, Socialist, and Mixed Economies*, 312.

9. Pérez-Stable, 70.

10. The production of sugar and almost all other non-sugar agricultural goods declined sharply over this period. Mesa-Lago, *Market, Socialist, and Mixed Economies*, 281-288.

es its hegemony over the armed forces and security services; under post-totalitarianism, it retains a central role, but increasingly takes on a caretaker, managerial function within the state apparatus.

Neither of these developments occurred in the case of the Cuba. The regime was born out of military struggle and, as noted before, the military organization and its relationship to the regime predated the formal establishment of the Communist Party. Both organizations were under the command and authority of Fidel Castro. Even with the “institutionalization” of the late 1970s and early 1980s, there was little doubt that PCC cadres served at the pleasure of the *máximo líder*. He was not constrained by its routines or bureaucracy, and he answered to no one else in the party leadership.¹¹

Further compounding the problem for a weakly institutionalized Communist Party was the role of the Revolutionary Armed Forces (FAR). One perspective with respect to civil-military relations has advanced the notion of a Cuban “civic soldier” – a person who, steeped in revolutionary idealism, would perform whatever tasks the regime asked of him, whether this involved *defensa de la patria* or administrative tasks related to running state-run enterprises or governmental bureaucracies.¹² This interpretation views the relationship in terms of an equilibrium. Another sharper line of argument has been advanced by Domingo Amuchástegui, who has argued that the civilian and military distinction has little validity in the Cuban case – the Communist Party is in a clearly subordinate position relative to the military.¹³

Though we do not entirely share Amuchástegui’s perspective, we do subscribe to his argument about the institutional weakness of the PCC and to the relevance he attaches to the role of the military within

the Cuban political system. The issue goes far beyond the anecdotal but symbolic circumstance of the military uniforms Fidel Castro almost invariably wears when in Cuba.¹⁴ Fidel Castro is not simply a charismatic exemplar, but a commander-in-chief whose actions are followed through the chain of command. This has been true whether he is dispatching the FAR on its internationalist missions or opting for a return to mobilization tactics. While it may be true that Castro prevents “institutionalization” in the traditional sense, it is also evident that he employs institutions to execute his strategic shifts. In an earlier era, analysts emphasized the proto-military character of Communist parties. The collapse of the Soviet bloc and the managerial transformation of those few Communist parties that remain in power rendered anachronistic such a scheme. The notion needs to be resurrected with respect to Cuba, however, not in the traditional Leninist sense where the Party is dominant and other organizations serve as its transmission belt. In the Cuban case, it is the Communist Party which has been infused by the “hierarchical” and “military” spirit of the Revolution, and Fidel Castro is its and the FAR’s commander-in-chief.

Where we do part company with Amuchástegui is with respect to his insistence on “unicellular” civil-military unity. Around the time the Cuban-Soviet partnership began to congeal in the early and mid-1970s, there was a *reparto de labores* established between the FAR and PCC. While the PCC monopolized the domestic political arena and, particularly, the economic and planning agencies, the armed forces concentrated on the internationalist missions with a proficiency that enhanced both their own and Cuban national prestige and legitimacy. That *reparto* stood until the truncation of the transition to post-totalitarianism in the mid- and late 1980s. At this time, the “experts” within the PCC were purged, and

11. Julia Preston, “The Trial that Shook Cuba.” *The New York Review of Books* (7 December 1989): 24-31.

12. For the classic formulation, see Jorge I. Domínguez, “The Civic Soldier in Cuba” in *Armies and Politics in Latin America*, eds. Abraham Lowenthal and J. Samuel Fitch (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1986): 263.

13. Domingo Amuchástegui, “Cuba’s Armed Forces: Power and Reforms,” *Cuba in Transition—Volume 9* (Washington: Association for the Study of the Cuban Economy, 1999): 110.

14. The exception was during the visit of Pope John Paul II.

instead the Party increasingly assumed the role of ideological watchdog and tribune. Coincidentally the FAR also experienced a change in its set of orders. As the new Soviet administration had embarked on global negotiations with the United States and the Cold War withered, the Cuban role in Angola and other Third World trouble-spots was coming to an end. A re-deployed FAR came home to new duties and a transformed role.

During the 1970s and into the mid-1980s, the FAR had been a privileged, but externally focused institution whose service as a praetorian guard of the international revolutionary movement brought it accolades, recognition, and influence.¹⁵ Its preeminence may have also have intensified concerns about its loyalty, or at least some authors so believe. One perceptive student of Cuban politics and the military (who interviewed many military defectors) has argued that Castro developed the *Guerra de todo el pueblo* (War of all the People) concept more than simply to mobilize the population in a self-defense effort against a potential invasion from the United States. Rather it was also intended to dilute the influence of the FAR by creating a counter-balance of “several redundant layers of the ‘people’ in uniform.”¹⁶ Fears of disloyalty might have been compounded by reports of the desertion of an estimated 56,000 soldiers in the 1983-87 period.¹⁷

The execution of General Arnaldo Ochoa in June 1989¹⁸ and the subsequent purges of the Ministry of the Interior (MININT)¹⁹ as well as the Western

Army²⁰ underscores the existence of tensions associated with the return of combat-weary and Soviet-trained veterans. Whether Ochoa had contacts with Mikhail Gorbachev or other Soviet reformists or had decided to challenge Fidel Castro is unknown and perhaps unknowable. What is more unlikely is that the drug and corruption charges made against him were the exclusive or even the primary reason for his trial and execution. Whatever the precise combination of reasons for his elimination, there is little doubt that through his execution (and that of Antonio de la Guardia), Castro sent a clear signal to any others who might harbor and express thoughts of disloyalty. This coup de main not only allowed Castro to reassert his ultimate authority, but also enabled the faction of military officers around Raul Castro (the so-called raulista group) to consolidate and extend its control over both the armed forces and the security services. The creation of a new relationship between the military and security forces resulted in a sizeable purge of the intelligence apparatus. It also gave rise to fresh opportunities for those who accepted the changed arrangement. A purged and more docile military was allowed to extend its domestic reach beyond institutional borders and into the realm of mixed enterprises, tourism, and exports. Hence, a dual process was under way in Cuba during the late 1980s and into the 1990s. As the political leadership reaffirmed its “hierarchical” and “political” control over the military, it also opened the doors to greater financial opportunities and rewards for some high-ranking officers and allowed many other officers (and

15. Greene Walker estimates 300,000 Cubans served overseas during a 16-year period. Phyllis Greene Walker, “Challenges Facing the Cuban Military,” *Georgetown University, Cuba Briefing Paper Series* no. 12, (October 1996). <<http://www.georgetown.edu/sfs/programs/clas/Caribe/bp12.htm>>

16. Enrique A. Baloyra, “Twelve Monkeys: Cuban National Defense and the Military.” Cuban Studies Association, Occasional Paper Series, Vol .1, no. 4, (November 15, 1996): 13.

17. Frank O. Mora, “From Fidelismo to Raulismo: Civilian Control of the Military in Cuba,” *Problems of Post-Communism*, vol. 46, no. 2 (March-April 1999): 25-38.

18. For one of the best treatments of the Ochoa affair, see Preston, 24-31.

19. Apparently many MININT officers were purged either because they had not thoroughly investigated General Ochoa’s activities or, more likely, because Fidel was unsure of MININT’s loyalty to the regime. Greene Walker reported that “In the reorganization of the that followed, nearly all the officers of the formerly independent ministry were dismissed and replaced with career military personnel.”

20. Richard Millett reports that up to 70 percent of the Western Army’s officers were removed in the wake of the Ochoa trial. Richard Millett, “Cuba’s Armed Forces: From Triumph to Survival.” *Georgetown University, Cuba Briefing Paper Series* no. 4 (September 1993). <<http://www.georgetown.edu/sfs/programs/clas/Caribe/bp4.htm>>

former bureaucrats) access to employment opportunities in joint venture companies and in the informal sector. As we shall discuss later, these economic outlets have probably increased the possibilities for corruption and illicit activity.

The late 1980s saw the end of the first Cuban transition to post-totalitarianism. The reassertion of Fidel Castro's foundational and personalistic authority trumped the incipient institutionalization of regime structures. The continued vitality of regime ideology, its sustained capacity for mobilization, the institutional weakness of the PCC, and the absence of significant social or economic pluralism contributed to the return to the totalitarian schemes and mobilization politics of the past. To these domestic elements of our explanation can also be added the effects of the profound crisis generated by the changes in the Soviet-Cuban relationship first and the collapse of the Soviet Union later.

THE 1990s AND BEYOND

The Cuban regime confronted an economic and political crisis of unprecedented proportions in the early 1990s. The collapse of the Soviet Union had an extraordinary and sharply negative effect on the economy, resulting in the loss of \$4 billion in annual subsidies or the equivalent of nearly 30 percent of the GDP. Exports crashed by 70 percent, imports by 75 percent. From 1989 to 1993, Cuba's real GDP dropped by nearly 35 percent, a contraction in national income second only to that experienced during the Great Depression. One estimate is that this translated into a 37 percent average decline in personal income over 1989 levels.²¹ Open unemployment and underemployment accounted for only 40 percent of the economically active population in 1994, even as the official unemployment statistics showed unemployment at under 10 percent.²² Sugar output

dropped by 39 percent, equaling US\$700 million in lost exports. There were also sustained declines in the output of non-sugar agriculture, mining, and manufacturing sectors; growing fuel scarcity which resulted in blackouts, transportation problems and factory stoppages; and, a large and growing budget deficit that was aggravated by the existence of a large black market. There, the peso traded illegally for up to 50 times the official exchange rate. As social problems and unemployment increased, so did the number of people (there were an estimated 30,000 boat people in 1993) who risked their lives by leaving on boats and rafts.

There was little doubt this economic free-fall could have disastrous political consequences for the regime. Events such as the fall of the Berlin Wall, the execution of Nicolae Ceausescu, the collapse of the East European regimes, and the demonstration and subsequent crackdown at Tiananmen demonstrated just how perilous were the waters²³ which the Cuban regime had entered. Riots and disturbances involving would-be rafters in the port cities of Cojimar and Regla²⁴ in July and September 1993 sent a clear message to the Cuban leadership.

In August 1993, Fidel Castro finally responded by announcing a broad package of measures which included legalizing the possession and use of dollars (including remittances), authorizing certain types of self-employment, the conversion of state farms into cooperatives, and the establishment of agricultural markets. The government also implemented monetary and fiscal reform measures that would cut the budget deficit sharply and reduced the subsidies to those state enterprises that lost money. The final element in the emergency economic program was the promulgation of laws allowing for greater foreign in-

21. Marta Beatriz Roque Cabello and Manuel Sánchez Herrero, "Background: Cuba's Economic Reforms: An Overview," in *Perspectives on Cuban Economic Reforms*, eds. Pérez-López and Travieso-Díaz (Tempe: Arizona State University Center for Latin American Studies Press, 1998): 9.

22. Roque Cabello and Sánchez Herrero, 11.

23. Gonzalez's felicitous phrase from Edward Gonzalez, *Cuba: Clearing Perilous Waters* (Santa Monica: RAND, 1996).

24. Amuchástegui, 113.

vestment, encouraging joint ventures, and establishing free trade zones.²⁵

There is a lively debate in academic circles over just what these changes have meant for the nature of the Cuban regime. One line of interpretation affirms that the current regime is an exemplar of “mobilizational authoritarianism” whose weak institutionalization bodes ill for a peaceful transition. Another line of argument insists the changes produced during the 1990s have created an incipient authoritarian regime in Cuba. A third approach insists that the current Cuban regime is a mixture of “sultanism” and frozen post-totalitarianism. In this view, though the regime has permitted limited market reforms, it allows no space for political alternatives and quickly marginalizes those reformists who do emerge. Focusing on the free hand Fidel Castro has to manipulate the body politic, Juan López also ascribes “sultanistic” qualities to the Cuban leader. The implications of the López analysis are clear. There is no possibility of reform, and the only transition possible in Cuba is through a bottom-up rebellion aided by “latent soft-liners,” similar to what occurred in Romania under Ceausescu. In support of this argument, López makes the case that the number of dissidents in Cuba is as large or larger than in Romania, East Germany, and Czechoslovakia.²⁶ We are not unsympathetic to many parts of the argument López presents, and we agree with his post-totalitarian characterization of the Cuban regime. We also believe there may be “sultanistic” elements to the Cuban regime or, at least, that the scope of Fidel Castro’s authority is broad and discretionary in an uncommon way. There may, indeed, be similarities in how Fidel Castro exercises his authority in Cuba and the patterns evidenced by Nicolae Ceausescu in Romania and Kim Il-Sung in North Korea. Ultimately, however, we would not label the Cuban regime as “sultanistic,” not least because of its reliance on ideology and mobilization.

These events opened the way to the most recent phase of the Cuban regime, one that we define as charismatic early post-totalitarian. Characteristic of this phase has been a profound tension. On the one hand, there is the (still) visible capacity of the revolutionary founder to limit change, to mobilize the population, and to affirm the validity of his egalitarian ideology to elites and society alike. The state fights human rights groups and the Catholic Church at every turn and for every bit of space in society. The opposition is weak, disorganized, and for good reason intimidated. On the other hand, there is growing evidence that regime ideology has been hollowed out, and there are signs of incipient economic and social pluralism in an increasingly stratified society.

But it is not simply a matter of eroded capability or the transformation of society that complicates a full return to the models of the past. Rather it is the presence of other factors over which the regime and Fidel Castro have even less control. External factors such as the manifold pressures of globalization and the obvious difficulty of finding an international partner willing to subsidize the Cuban economic experiment make autarky and a return to full totalitarianism quite problematic. There is also the looming succession crisis. Like it or not the transition to the post-Castro era has already begun and will inexorably deepen. Much as in Spain in the twilight of the Franco era, in Cuba the emerging question is *¿después de Castro, qué?* Though the answer is by no means clear, there is a time clock that has set other forces (within and outside the regime) into motion. This process is irreversible, though paradoxically, we argue, it reinforces the role played by Fidel Castro in the short term.

We turn now to examine the nature of the charismatic early post-totalitarian Cuban regime in the 1990s from the perspective of such regime components as leadership, ideology, mobilization, and pluralism.

25. Mesa-Lago, *Market, Socialist, and Mixed Economies*, 293.

26. Juan J. López, “Implication of the U. S. Economic Embargo for a Political Transition in Cuba,” *Cuba in Transition—Volume 7* (Washington: Association for the Study of the Cuban Economy, 1997): 250.

Leadership

The Cuban version of post-totalitarianism does not entirely fit within the ideal-type mold. The first and most important difference pertains to the continued presence of Fidel Castro who, as the charismatic founder of the revolutionary regime, retains broad power and influence. No one within the elite questions either his role or, ultimately, his decisions. Even regime reformers have been known to repeat the mantra—“With Fidel everything; against Fidel nothing.” Castro derives his authority from several sources. Not only is he the regime founder but also has shaped and set its ideology. He has guided the regime through many crises over the past four decades, including the very dangerous period of turbulence that followed the demise of the Soviet Union. His charisma is prototypical, its importance to the regime exacerbated by the scope of the crisis in the 1990s. Castro also continues to exercise a military-like form of authority over regime institutions, most especially the PCC and FAR. He has used both of these institutions to mobilize the Cuban population and to transmit ideological directives. In more traditional party-state systems, it is the Communist party that generates and transmits such ideology, but in the Cuban context, the party (and the military) are themselves “transmission belts” for the exercise of leadership by the charismatic, revolutionary leader.

If the Cuban regime has been characterized by stability at the top, however, flux has been much more characteristic farther down the hierarchical ladder, especially since the late 1980s. Some leaders have been purged, and many older leaders have either retired or been retired. Politburo member Carlos Aldana was ousted in 1994, as was Politburo member and Foreign Minister Roberto Robaina in 1999. The replacement of older cadres has been felt within the PCC and in the state administration. Younger party leaders have been installed in virtually every province, as well as in key state administrative posts. As Marifeli Pérez-Stable has noted,²⁷ some of the young-

er cadres who took up leadership positions within the economic ministries are “presumably more reform-oriented” than their predecessors were. Even if this were so, however, we can well suppose that, while Fidel Castro is an active presence in Cuban politics, they will be careful in expressing their views and preferences.

Once again the FAR (and the security services which fall under its supervision) provide an exception to the pattern of flux which has characterized the leadership of regime institutions. The execution of General Ochoa and the resulting purge of the Ministry of the Interior consolidated the influence of the *raulista* faction within the FAR. Over the past decade the military has been characterized not only by its cohesion but by the way the regime has relied on it to provide leadership in the economic and administrative arenas. In their dual role as security guardians and early protagonists in the process of *perfeccionamiento empresarial*, the diverse elements of the FAR are virtually assured of playing an important role not only as a source of expertise in economic reform and management but in shaping the transition to the post-Castro future.

Ideology

Why have reforms — economic, political, and social — been so half-hearted in contemporary Cuba? Why has Cuba not followed the example of China or Vietnam in enacting more thoroughgoing market reforms that could galvanize the economy?²⁸ The enduring vitality of ideology provides an important part of the answer to these questions. Fidel Castro is, after all, the ideologue of the Cuban regime. A keen observer of the ideological portents of debates in the international intelligentsia and the potential significance for Cuba, he has consistently developed rhetorical strategies for both domestic and international consumption with an eye towards defending the ideals and accomplishments of the national project.

27. Pérez-Stable, 73.

28. On balance, it may be said, Cuban economic reforms have been tepid, certainly as compared to those enacted in China and Vietnam. See González, 9.

The demise of the Soviet Union and its allies deprived the Cuban regime of an important element in its ideological underpinnings. The Revolution was no longer part of a larger, grander utopian project. Since the early 1990s, then, the regime and Fidel Castro most preeminently have sought to reenergize the ideology of the regime by appealing to the other core elements of the ideological constructs of the regime, among them nationalism, social justice, and regional solidarity. Thus, for example, in July 1992, the Cuban National Assembly unanimously approved constitutional reform that stripped the Constitution of its Soviet-era referents to “the community of socialist countries,” “proletarian internationalism,” “the leading role of the working class,” and “scientific materialism.” Replacing these and other phrasing were references to Latin America and the Caribbean, José Martí, the Cuban nation, and patriotic education.²⁹ Though not all references to Marxism-Leninism were excised, the import was clear. The amended Constitution had now been “Cubanized” to reflect the new situation. In a parallel vein, the regime has taken great pains to defend its accomplishments in the areas of health and education. This again makes sense, since it is in this area where the national project retains the most domestic and international legitimacy. Symptomatic of this defense of its social project have been the attacks the Communist Party has launched in the past year against the social activities (soup kitchens, day care centers, distribution of medicines) that the Catholic Church has organized. As he did in the 1970s with the Non-Aligned Movement, Fidel Castro has tried to position himself and Cuba in the vanguard of the strug-

gle against globalization and to employ this as a vehicle for regime re-legitimation.

The presence of Fidel Castro and his constant exhortations to revolutionary struggle and ideology place strict, if formally undefined, limits on how far government and party functionaries can deviate from the official canon of anti-capitalism, nationalism, and anti-Americanism.³⁰ As Edward Gonzalez has argued, the pursuit of deeper reform would have “high political and ideological costs for the regime. They (would) undermine (its) control over society . . . (T)hey (would) tend to demoralize the regime’s cadres.”³¹ This last point is worth emphasizing. Though reformist sectors exist within the state administration and economic ministries, Castro is probably not alone in his preference for sharp ideological identity. Linz similarly argued that mid-level government functionaries tend to resist reinterpretation of regime ideology because, for them, the ideological basis sustains the system in which they have invested their lives.³²

Even though Castro tries to keep ideological change within narrow bands, signs of erosion are more visible within Cuban society. The daily accommodations ordinary Cubans have had to make over the past decade to resolve day-to-day economic problems have undoubtedly taken a sharp toll. To survive in contemporary Cuba is constantly to break the law and its normative (or ideological) underpinnings. As ideology ceases to capture the imagination of the citizenry, a regime loses its credibility and legitimacy, both in terms of the legitimacy of the “process” and the legitimacy of “outcomes.”³³ If a regime is able to

29. Josep Colomer, “After Fidel, What? Forecasting Institutional Changes in Cuba,” paper presented as part of the conference Constitutional Law in a Post-Castro Cuba at New York University School of Law, 21 April 1997: 9.

30. At the closing session of the Federation of Latin American Journalists (FELAP) 8th Congress held at the University of Havana on November 12, 1999, Castro attacked the U.S. political system as a sham. “We prefer,” he said, “our socialism with all its imperfections; we prefer the totalitarianism of truth, justice, sincerity, authenticity; the totalitarianism of truly humanitarian feelings; the totalitarianism of the type of multiparty system we practice.” Fidel Castro, speech delivered at the Federation of Latin American Journalists (FELAP) 8th Congress at the University of Havana, 12 November 1999. <<http://www2.ceniai.inf.cu/gobierno/discursos/1999/ing/f121199i.html>>

31. Gonzalez, 9, 25.

32. Juan J. Linz, “Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes,” in *Handbook of Political Science* (Volume 3) eds. Fred I. Greenstein and Nelson Polsby, (Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley, 1975): 197-98.

33. Alan C. Lamborn, “Theory and Politics in World Politics.” *International Studies Quarterly* 41 (1997): 193-194.

deliver what are perceived as legitimate outcomes (as in health care or education, for example), the perceived “legitimacy of process” becomes less important.³⁴ Cubans might have been willing to accept restrictions on civil liberties so long as the outcomes were perceived as fair and desirable. If, however, the regime is unable to guarantee the basic necessities of life as well as the “(social) gains of the Revolution” over a sustained period of time, a serious legitimacy crisis looms. Regimes that assume complete responsibility for economic and social well-being are especially vulnerable on this score.³⁵

On balance, then, it would appear that the regime’s current ideological vigor is inferior to that which characterized it before the fall of the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, the sustained commitment of Fidel Castro and a significant number of cadres to the utopian vision are still far greater than one would expect in a consolidated post-totalitarian regime.

Mobilization

Under post-totalitarianism the willingness and capacity of a regime to mobilize the population declines. The 1991-2001 period conforms, at least in part, to this characterization. Mobilization is an instrument that can be employed at once to affirm legitimacy and to generate enthusiasm around a national project. It is also an instrument to intimidate and control the population, and as such, it functions in tandem with repression. Both mobilization and repression reflect the absolutist and “state-centered” vision of the Cuban totalitarian syndrome and its variants, but it is (analytically and politically) important to understand, as Marifeli Pérez-Stable has noted, that the regime “cannot be understood exclusively in terms of its repressive component.”³⁶ Though it is predictably very difficult and risky to ascertain just what public opinion and attitudes really are under conditions of dictatorship, it cannot be excluded that an autocratic regime may viewed by important sec-

tors of the population as legitimate or having the “right to rule.” Obviously, such sentiment may vary both in terms of its breadth and over time.

It is difficult to ascertain whether there is a “progressive loss of interest” in organizing mobilization or if “boredom and withdrawal” are part of day-to-day life in contemporary Cuba. Given the (still) dire economic situation, most Cubans are probably more concerned with finding food and earning a living (the so-called *sociolismo*) than with ideological principles or mobilization. There is ample anecdotal evidence in this regard, ranging from joke lines to movies and folk songs.

There was an evident drop in regime efforts to mobilize and repress the population in the years between 1993 and 1996.³⁷ This decline undoubtedly reflected a tactical adjustment to the economic crisis and the decision to focus on the stabilization of the economic situation. A turn toward a sharper response (especially on the side of setting clear limits on political liberalization) followed in early 1996. The downing of the Brothers to the Rescue plane, the arrest of the members of the Concilio Cubano who had organized to meet in Havana that very weekend, and Raúl Castro’s April 1996 speech at the PCC Central Committee plenum (where he lambasted reformist intellectuals and their foreign connections) sent clear and unmistakable signals in this regard. This political inflection also had its counterpart in the economic sphere, where the regime tightened controls on the informal economic actors who had emerged after dollarization in 1993 and introduced modern managerial techniques (*perfeccionamiento*) into enterprises in an effort to improve their efficiency and to reinforce their “socialist” character.

Efforts at intensifying mobilization have taken a sharper turn upward over the past two years. The Elián González affair provided a major opportunity in this regard. In what was almost a rebuff to the

34. Lamborn, 193.

35. Gianfranco Poggi, *The State: Its Nature, Development and Prospects* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990): 168.

36. Pérez-Stable, 64.

37. Pérez-Stable, 68.

“lost” generation that had come to political maturity in the 1980s and early 1990s, Fidel Castro now concentrated his attention on the “new” and younger generation. Though the exercises in mobilization were less intense than those of decades past, the capacity to assemble thousands of people, whether to demand the return of Elián or to protest the embargo, suggests an enduring, and, we believe, highly personal capacity on the part of Fidel Castro.

Pluralism

Pluralism in its various dimensions is incipient and still very vulnerable in the Cuban case—a fact which accords with the characterization of the regime as early post-totalitarian. Economic pluralism has certainly grown since the early 1990s. Self-employment has increased significantly. Between 1989 and 1999 the share of non-state jobs (mostly in agricultural cooperatives and family businesses) increased from 5 to almost 25 percent of the work force. The agricultural sector experienced dramatic changes.³⁸ Whereas in 1992 state farms controlled approximately 75 percent of land under cultivation, three years later, only 27 percent remained so.³⁹ The economic reforms of the 1990s opened up important spaces for ‘enclave capitalism’ in such sectors as agriculture, biotechnology, and tourism. Dollarization of the economy also evidently helped those sectors of society which received remittances from relatives outside the country or who ran small businesses that catered to foreign tourists. The present and future importance of these economic changes should not be underestimated. These measures opened space for new actors in the economic arena and correspond to what one would expect during a transition to post-totalitarianism in

which economic pluralism precedes political pluralism. There were, nonetheless, important limits to these reforms. The state retained control over larger enterprises and placed strict controls on the activities of private micro-enterprises.⁴⁰

No discussion of economic pluralism in contemporary Cuba is complete without a discussion of the substantial role the FAR has come to play in the economy. For the military, the collapse of the Communist regimes in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union hastened a budgetary decline already in progress. As Cuban soldiers returned from international expeditions, defense spending fell, from 9.6 percent of GDP in 1985 to a mere 2.8 percent in 1995.⁴¹ As budgets and active duty soldiers dropped, the regime opened new economic opportunities for loyal members of the FAR, extending the role of “civic soldier” from the traditional sector of agricultural production to the management of joint ventures with foreign investors. A prime example of this strategy involved the creation of the Gaviota group, an entity that has since diversified into numerous other sectors, including restaurants, resorts, and even information technology and department stores.⁴²

It may be useful to distinguish between three categories of people. A first category involves former high-ranking officers (and their families) who hold jobs because of their special links to Raul Castro and the regime. The second includes military personnel who have been assigned to state enterprises as part of the strategy of *perfeccionamiento empresarial* whose objective is the more efficient management of state resources and production. A third category involves lower-ranking retired army personnel and former

38. Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU). *EIU Cuba Country Profile 1999-2000*, (1999): 10.

39. Ann Wroe. “Survey of Cuba: Heroic Illusions: Oranges and Lemons,” *The Economist* (6 April 1996).

40. For coverage of the various restrictions on the self-employed, see Philip Peters, “Cuba’s Small Business Experiment: Two Steps Forward, One Step Back,” *Georgetown University, Cuba Briefing Paper Series*, no. 17 (March 1998) <<http://sfswww.georgetown.edu/sfs/programs/clas/Caribe/paper17.pdf>> See also Tom Gjelten, “Entrepreneurs in Cuba,” Radio report on National Public Radio, 24 July 2000.

41. EIU, 8.

42. The extent of the shift in focus is evident from the assessment by U.S. General Charles Wilhelm: “We have convincing evidence that as much as 70 percent of the effort of the existing force is being expended on agricultural and other self-sustaining activities.” Quoted in Anthony Boadle, “Cuban military no threat, turns to farming—U.S.,” *Reuters* (31 March 1998). Mora and Greene Walker discuss the activities of Gaviota in more detail. See also Gaviota’s website <http://www.gaviota.cubaweb.cu/index.asp>

Ministry of the Interior officials who are self-employed or work for foreign companies and make a living farther outside the perimeter of the formal state-controlled system. Though all of the above may be said to be developing entrepreneurial talents, most probably it will be those in the latter two categories who will create the opening wedge for an emerging capitalist class in Cuba. The entry of the military into the economic arena has obvious benefits: it offers military men a privileged lifestyle through participation in the dollar economy and presumably assures their loyalty to the regime.⁴³ Conversely, this economic role might also have more negative consequences, generating both greater opportunities for corruption as well as increased resentment of the economic gap separating some military officers from the rest of the armed forces as well as society.⁴⁴

What may be of more immediate political relevance, however, is the emergence of a cadre of technocrats and management experts within the military establishment itself. In post-totalitarian contexts such “experts” typically arise from within the party apparatus.⁴⁵ It may be one of the particularities of the Cuban case that such a pattern does not hold and, indeed, could be inverted. Thus, the primary source of “red” influence could eventually come from within the PCC (which has been the primary tribune for and defender of regime ideology since the 1980s), while the “experts” might emerge from within the military. As we shall discuss in our Conclusion, the

emergence of such tensions may be one key in understanding the dynamics of the post-Castro era.

Economic pluralism is fragile in contemporary Cuba, but it is far more vigorous than in the social sphere. Totalitarianism has had a profoundly adverse impact on Cuban society. State organizations monopolize and direct the citizenry, while civil society is still relatively weak and disorganized. The Catholic Church is undoubtedly the most important civil society organization in Cuba. Its international support network, well-defined ideology and belief structure, as well as its permanent cadre organization differentiate it from other Cuban social actors. Even so, the Cuban Church, is but a pale shadow of what its Polish or Hungarian (and even Chilean) counterparts were already during the 1970s and 1980s.⁴⁶ Those who hoped that, in the wake of Pope John Paul II’s January 1998 visit to Cuba, the Church would experience a dramatic expansion in its social presence have been disappointed. There is, however, evidence that the Church has become revitalized and has begun to develop a stronger presence in Cuban society. There are reports of increased attendance at Mass (particularly among young people), and even though there has been some drop-off since the immediate aftermath of the Pope’s visit, there is a visibly more intense commitment by those new members who have continued to participate in Church activities. The Papal visit also infused the Church hierarchy and clergy with a new sense of energy and self-confidence. Moreover, magazines such as *Vitral* and *Palabra Nueva* do press the outer edges of toleration; and, as we mentioned earlier in this article, Caritas and other Church-related organizations have tried to become more active in

43. “It is almost certainly the case that top administrators and ‘selected managers’ in the enterprises have access to dollar accounts, make high salaries and receive perks as part of the job.” Juan M. del Aguila, “The Cuban Armed Forces: Changing Roles, Continuing Loyalties,” in *Cuban Communism*, eds. Irving Louis Horowitz and Jaime Suchlicki (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1998): 668-670.

44. The differences between those who could earn dollars and those with wages dependent upon the state were depicted humorously in the film *Guantanamo*. Somewhat more formal estimates have been produced by Philip Peters, “Where Capitalists and Socialists May Agree: Future Issues In Cuban Economic Policy,” remarks at a conference of the Georgetown University Caribbean Project, Washington, DC, 20 March 2000. <www.lexingtoninstitute.org/cuba/cubaeconpol.htm>

45. Linz, 204.

46. There is little evidence to support Jorge Domínguez’s contention that the Cuban Catholic Church plays a role “comparable” to that exercised by its counterparts “under authoritarian regimes in other latitudes.” Domínguez, “Comienza una transición hacia el autoritarismo en Cuba,” 16.

providing food, medicine, and other social services to Cuban citizens.⁴⁷ The Cuban state has reacted sharply and negatively, throwing up bureaucratic obstacles and roadblocks to these efforts.⁴⁸ Most recently, an internal PCC document took the Church to task for its efforts to provide such social services and urged party cadres to combat any erosion of the state's presence in this arena.

Since the 1980s, there has been a perceptible expansion in the space the Catholic Church and other civil society organizations occupy, even though they operate under very difficult conditions. It goes far beyond the human rights groups, a commitment to which requires the willingness to be deprived of a job and to accept harassment and/or jail. These alternative groups include literary and cultural circles, gay and transvestite networks, as well as Afro-Cuban cultural and religious organizations. The vast majority of these groups are not explicitly interested in politics, but their very presence and efforts to affirm an identity suggest the growing fragmentation of the monolithic version of "Cuban-ness" that the state had successfully imposed over the past forty years.⁴⁹ There can be little doubt that the regime takes very seriously this threat to its hegemony in the social sphere. The regime has sponsored its own set of civil society

organizations (the so-called gongos—governmental non-governmental organizations), and its leaders and intellectuals take pains to insist that there is no contradiction between state predominance and the existence of (the appropriate kind of) civil society organizations.⁵⁰

If there is some scope to social pluralism in contemporary Cuba, political pluralism remains anathema. No political party other than the Communist Party is legal, and the regime alternates between outright repression and more subtle forms of intimidation against dissidents. There is some evidence of emboldened activity during the 1990s. Independent trade unions, peasant organizations, press associations, and even political parties have made an appearance on the Cuban scene, but it is important to keep in mind the sharp limitations under which they operate.⁵¹ At best these are fledgling organizations that are kept under constant surveillance and harassment by the police and the ubiquitous *Comités de Defensa de la Revolución* (CDRs).⁵²

Contemporary Cuban society exhibits signs of pluralism unimaginable in earlier phases of the Revolution. An influential article has categorized the various stages in the development of civil society as defensive, emergent, mobilizational, and institutional.⁵³ We agree with Juan Carlos Espinosa when he argues that contemporary Cuba is clearly in either the first or second stage and manifests either a defensive or

47. For an unusually good treatment of the church in Cuba, see the edited volume by Dagoberto Valdés Hernández, ed. *Reconstruir la Sociedad Civil: Un Proyecto De Educación Cívica, Pluralismo y Participación para Cuba* (Caracas, Fundación Konrad Adenauer, 1997).

48. "Agencia Fides Denuncia Persecución Religiosa en Cuba." *Radio Vaticano E-mail* N° 133—III° (November 24-30, 2000). <<http://www.vaticanradio.org/ispano/isparchi/noti133.htm>>

49. Velia Cecilia Bobes León, *Los laberintos de la imaginación: repertorio simbólico, identidades y actores del cambio social en Cuba* (México: El Colegio de México, Centro de Estudios Sociológicos: 2000): 222.

50. Rafael Rojas, "Políticas Invisibles." *Encuentro*. 6/7 (otoño/invierno 1997): 33. For a similar view from a perspective sympathetic to the regime, see Hernández, Rafael, "Hacia una nueva sociedad socialista? Cambios, crisis y configuraciones sociales en Cuba," *Nueva Sociedad* 157 (September-October 1998): 2717-2818.

51. Freedom House rankings show a steady "unfree" 7 for political rights and 7 for civil liberties ranking from 1972-76, then a decline to 6,6 from 1978-88, and a spike upward to 7,7 for the last decade. <http://www.freedomhouse.org/survey99/country/cuba.html>. Various human rights organizations (Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, among them) have reported on the continued harassment and prosecution of dissidents, coupled with the constant refusal to grant amnesty to hundreds of political prisoners. The last wave of repression is covered by Pedro Betancur, "Cuba: Repression by Harassment," *The Economist* (18 March 2000).

52. Josep Colomer, "Watching Neighbors: The Cuban Model of Social Control," *Cuban Studies* no. 31 (forthcoming).

53. Weigle, Marcia A. and Jim Butterfield, "Civil Society in Reforming Communist Regimes," *Comparative Politics* vol. 25, no. 1 (October 1992): 1-23.

emergent civil society.⁵⁴ Non-state actors (non-governmental organizations, church groups, artist networks, farmers, the self-employed, etc.) are still trying to defend their autonomy *vis-à-vis* a state whose pretensions are still to control every aspect of their behavior. What has changed over the past fifteen years is the state's capacity to control these non-state actors. At one level, the state acknowledged this incapacity in the early-1990s and enacted reforms that allowed such groups to widen their scope of activities. More recently, (relative) economic stabilization has allowed the regime to recover much of its former capacity; crackdowns on dissidents and greater restrictions on the self-employed attest to the regime's willingness and capability to circumscribe civil society activities.

CONCLUSION

The transition to the post-Castro era has begun. Change is inevitable in Cuba, and the only question is what direction it will take. This article has characterized the current regime as charismatic early post-totalitarian. In so doing we have emphasized several elements. First has been the crucial role of Fidel Castro's charismatic authority. The Cuban regime has always been his regime in a very special way, but we argue that the crisis spawned by the collapse of the Soviet Union and the looming reality of the post-Castro era have made him an even more indispensable figure for this regime. We have also noted other aspects of contemporary Cuban reality. In the economic sphere we see lowered state capacity, very limited and weakly institutionalized economic reforms, a larger number of economic actors, and growing social and economic stratification. We also emphasize the economic role of members of the FAR and raise the two possibilities in this regard. At a societal level we believe these current and former officers could become embryos of a proto-capitalist class. At the elite level we speculate that the military could spawn a technocratic class of "experts" who, in contradistinc-

tion to "reds" in the Communist Party, might press for a deeper economic reform agenda in the post-Castro era. The Catholic Church has gained space and self-confidence in the past few years, and there has been a marked increase in the number of formal and informal cultural, religious, and social organizations. Though the number of human rights groups and activists increased during the 1990s, the regime continues to harass and intimidate them. Such pressure has intensified over the past two years.⁵⁵

What implications does our characterization have for analyzing the direction of change in Cuba? First, we would like to clarify that we do not have a crystal ball. What is clear, on the other hand, is that autocratic regimes are at their most vulnerable during succession crises. This window of vulnerability is what has now opened for Cuba. Much about this succession crisis will play itself out behind closed doors, and it will not be until much later that we shall learn about what has really transpired. It is also possible that not much will happen (or at least manifest itself) in the early period of the post-Castro era. Since 1997 we have the formally designated successor—Raul Castro. We should also note that it is impossible to anticipate all or even many of the contingencies that may have an impact on the succession and transition.

Though we are uncertain about the specific trajectory of change in Cuba, we wish to be clear about some of our basic assumptions. We believe it is Fidel Castro's charismatic authority and leadership skills that have enabled the regime to retain its capacity for mobilization and to forestall a complete loss of ideological vigor. After Fidel Castro dies (or, possibly before, should he become incapacitated), there will be a pronounced leadership vacuum and a succession process that may or may not be orderly. Raul Castro may be rather more skilled than people suppose, but even so, charisma is not something that can be transferred at will. Moreover, while Raul has evident political and

54. Juan Carlos Espinosa, "Civil Society in Cuba: The Logic of Emergence in Comparative Perspective," *Cuba in Transition—Volume 9* (Washington: Association for the Study of the Cuban Economy, 1999): 346-367.

55. Betancur. See also Pax Christi Netherlands, *Report on the Humanitarian and Social Work of Catholic Church Institutions in Cuba* (13 February 2001).

management skills (not least in terms of patronage), this is not the same as possessing his brother's dexterity in anticipating and addressing international and domestic challenges.

We envision four possible paths for the Cuban regime in the wake of Fidel Castro's death or incapacity. One path would take Cuba in the direction of a return to the totalitarian past. This would entail a reaffirmation of ideology, a return to mobilization, an end to market reforms and incentives, restrictions on social and economic pluralism, and a sharp crackdown on dissident activity. A second path is a collapse scenario involving a "transition from below" and a popular revolt that would spread to sectors of the military. The third path would lead Cuba toward the stabilization of the post-totalitarian regime. Post-totalitarianism would be the staging area for the fourth path, but under this scheme the regime would then evolve toward the adoption of deeper and more significant economic and institutional reforms that, in turn, could produce a transition to democracy.

Of these paths, we consider the return to totalitarianism and collapse scenarios as the least likely to occur. We find the path to totalitarian reaffirmation problematic for several reasons. With Fidel Castro gone, exercises in mobilization and ideological vigor would not be easily sustainable, either within the elite or among members of society. Moreover, it is very difficult to imagine any actor in the contemporary international system that would be willing to finance an autarkic totalitarian project. We believe the core of the political game in post-Castro Cuba will be focused in the post-totalitarian arena, pitting those who favor a more institutionalized version of the status quo against those others who favor liberalization and deeper reforms.

The collapse scenario would probably require both a sharp rupture within the regime elite and a breakdown in the regime's repressive capacity. We do not believe sharp cleavages will emerge within the ruling elite in the short term. Neither is there likely to be a rapid breakdown in repressive capacity. Moreover, as the Cuban experience of the early 1990s demonstrated, social and economic crisis is not a sufficient condition for mass protest to emerge and regime transformation to occur.⁵⁶ That said, an exogenous shock—an economic crisis, a natural disaster, an immigration crisis, etc.—that led to rapidly deteriorating living conditions or social instability could still give rise to mass protests, at which point the military and security apparatus would have to choose between repression or disobeying orders.⁵⁷ Though this Romanian-type situation could conceivably occur, the regime has been careful to tamp down protest to avoid such tests of loyalty. In the post-Fidel Castro era, however, after fissures in the elite have already emerged, such spontaneous protests may take on a new significance.

Instead, the immediate post-Castro era will feature some variation on scenarios 3 and 4 in which the politics of elite cohesion and conflict will dominate. By saying this, we do not mean to minimize either the importance or long-term significance of structural economic changes. We believe that the nature of the Cuban regime (and the "anthropological lesions"⁵⁸ it has inflicted on society) reinforces the reasons for our focus on the elite. Cuban civil society is weak and disorganized and, for a variety of reasons, has not yet been able to articulate a credible alternative national project around which either mass publics or elites could mobilize. Civil society will not be easily resurrected; and, at least in the short term, it may not play as important a role as some transition analysts suggest.⁵⁹ We identify several groups within the regime

56. A methodological account of Theda Skocpol's work discusses how "relative deprivation" is not a sufficient cause for revolution. James Mahoney, "Nominal, Ordinal, and Narrative Appraisal in Macrocausal Analysis," *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 104, No. 4 (January 1999): 1160.

57. For a skeptical perspective on regime collapse, see Juan M. del Aguila, "Reflections on a Non-Transition in Cuba: Comments on Elites," *Cuba in Transition—Volume 7* (Washington: Association for the Study of the Cuban Economy, 1997): 192.

58. Archbishop Pedro Meurice, "Present and Future of the Church in Cuba," acceptance speech upon receipt of an Honorary Doctorate degree from Georgetown University, Washington, DC, 29 May, 1999.

and others outside it who will play crucial roles in our two most likely scenarios. On the regime side we identify the military, the Communist Party, and “technocrats” within the bureaucracy. On the other side are the Catholic Church, human rights groups, and the exile community.

Groups from within the regime will be at the epicenter of the political dynamics of the early post-Castro period. Among these, and as befits the trajectory of the regime, the military will emerge as the linchpin of regime politics. Part of their influence (its irreducible core perhaps) will derive from the monopoly they have on the instruments of violence. In addition, from their position at the commanding heights of the joint venture enterprises, current and former officers have been the primary interlocutors with international investors, and this will enhance both their resources and their influence. Moreover, though the final verdict is not yet in with respect to *perfeccionamiento empresarial*, the past decade has seen the military become the managers of last resort for the state socialist project in Cuba. Military control of the repressive apparatus and their presence in the economic spheres could leave the Communist Party as the rump enforcer of ideology and the ostensible guide of the Comités de Defensa de la Revolución. As the ideological project of the regime moves toward re-definition, moreover, the PCC may find its legitimacy further debilitated. This is less likely to occur with respect to the military that can more easily lay claim to the role of *defensores de la patria*. In contrast to the military and the PCC, the civilian technocratic elite possesses few resources. We suspect that, without Fidel Castro’s authority and resourcefulness, cleavages between party and military leaders could prove to be among the most likely destabilizing forces of the post-Castro order.

Once such breaches develop, non-regime elite actors may have a greater role and space to play in Cuban politics. The Church will probably not take an overt political role, but its calls for national reconciliation and justice will undoubtedly help shape the political agenda and provide a bridge between regime reformers and an emerging opposition. From sectors close to the Church will also likely emerge Christian Democratic groups whose social program may prove attractive to those moderate elements within the regime who are looking for a new home. Human rights groups will also become emboldened, grow in number, and their scope of activity will increase. Some of these may be transformed into political organizations. For its part, the diaspora will become an increasingly important force, not just in economic terms but as actors in constructing the new Cuban polity and identity. Perhaps because the death of Castro will open new opportunities for political change in Cuba, it may allow exiles to focus less on winning the “forty year civil war” than on exploiting political opportunities within the island.

The end of the Castro era will signal the conclusion of one project for Cuba and the beginning of a new one. As its centenary of independence approaches, Cuba confronts coincident political, economic, social, and cultural challenges which, rhetoric notwithstanding, are far from resolution. The dilemmas of nation and state building are as much ever on the agenda, and they will pose a major challenge for whatever regime emerges in Cuba over the next decade. In the meantime, we close with the hope that this article has captured the essential characteristics of the Cuban regime, past and present, and sketched some possible directions for change.

59. López, 250.