

CUBA AND THE GULF PACT: A TRANSITION INTEGRATION PROJECT

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“Para Cuba que sufre, la primera palabra.”

—José Martí Pérez

The recent fainting spell that Fidel Castro, the Cuban leader, suffered during a speech he was making at a mass rally in Havana has renewed the interest in studying a post-Castro scenario. Castro's mortality, a taboo topic in Cuba, as well as the course its government and system will take after his death or physical incapacity, is again in many Cuban officials' minds, whether they will admit it or not. Cuba does indeed have a formal mechanism of succession where, like in the old days of kingdoms and fiefdoms, Fidel has appointed his brother Raúl to succeed him as Cuba's President, Party Secretary General, and Leader of the Revolution. But some of us seriously question whether such hereditary transfer of powers, if it ever actually happened at all, could last. For such succession would supersede at least two complete generations of competent and devoted Cuban revolutionaries (let alone the Cuban opposition) who would continue to languish while the “orthodox” old guard holds on to their positions of power and privilege.

Such hereditary power succession, in strongly personal regimes such as Castro's, has rarely occurred in modern history. Franco's death quickly fostered a pluralistic transition in Spain; Caetano's succession of the Salazar regime barely lasted in Portugal; and Péron's wife was unable to control Argentina, after her husband's death, just to mention a few recent examples. Even within Miami's Cuban-American National Foundation (CANF), these days we are observing a generation struggle for the control of this organization. Mas Canosa's son, who recently inherited the CANF leadership from his father, does not seem to hold the same control of the organization that the senior Mas did. History does not support a successful or lasting hereditary power transfer in Cuba.

It is our hope and expectation that, within a short period of time after Castro's death or incapacitation, a more open leadership, interested in implementing a careful, deliberate and peaceful transition to pluralism and open economy, would take over the reins of the Cuban government. In such a case, appropriate structures that facilitate this transition and that

1. The opinions expressed here are entirely the responsibility of its author and not necessarily those of any organization the author is affiliated with. The author is indebted to biologist Angel Fernández Montiel, of the Universidad Veracruzana and Gulfnet, for his help in obtaining background information about the Pact and for many email exchanges and helpful comments. We have had the opportunity to teach in the Universidad Veracruzana and are well aware of this institution and of its excellent computing facilities. This author is also indebted to Prof. Francisco Marmolejo, Executive Director of CONAHEC and a friend of the Juárez-Lincoln-Martí International Education Project, for his help in obtaining an account in Gulfnet (which is supported by CONAHEC) and for helping us establish many useful contacts within the Gulf Pact organization. Finally, the author greatly appreciates the challenging comments and questions received from many colleagues and from two panel discussants, which were developed in detail in the discussion section. These included M. Font, S. Lippe, C.A. Montaner, A. Fernández-Abril, J. Alvarez and A. Luzárraga.

strengthen its development should be put in place. It is the purpose of this paper to present one of such structures, which a transition government in Cuba could avail itself since the very beginning of its work, and discuss its implementation as a viable model.

A stable Cuba in transition needs a context to relate to, and within which to feel safe. It is a fact that for the past forty years, the relationship between the United States and Cuba has not been amicable. Hence, there is a need for third parties, intermediaries that can contribute to ease the normalization process of Cuban relations with the United States, as well as with the rest of Latin America. We propose Mexico as one such intermediary, via the Gulf Pact.

There exists a strong commonality between Mexico and Cuba, both historical and socioeconomic. Both countries were colonized by the same European nation, hence both speak the same language and have the same cultural background. Even during colonial times, Mexico's Viceroy's often trained for their job as Cuban Captain Generals. Cuba is a closed, one-party system in dear need to open up. Mexico, which until recently had an authoritarian, hegemonic-party system, is currently living a very interesting peaceful transition to an open, multiparty one. Mexico and Cuba share geographical closeness to the United States and have lived peculiar experiences derived from such closeness. Finally, Mexico and Cuba are also geographically part of the Gulf of Mexico basin, and this opens the door for using a very interesting experience that has recently started there: the Gulf Pact.

The Gulf Pact, better known as the Association of the States of the Gulf of Mexico (Acuerdo de los Estados del Golfo de México, AEGM) includes all the U.S. and Mexican States that border onto this Mediterranean sea. The island that closes such sea, "la llave del Golfo" as it has traditionally been known, is precisely Cuba. Hence, it would only be natural that Cuba would eventually insert itself into the Gulf Pact, fulfilling this way two very important transition objectives: economic growth and political stability.

The first steps toward any transition are certainly difficult and crucial and may seal its ultimate success or

failure. Finding mechanisms that allow both, the United States and Cuba to establish contacts, interact together at a negotiating table and "save face" both domestically as well as in front of the world, is a key issue. The current animosity prevents them from establishing such first contacts by themselves—but through the Pact they may overcome this. In addition, there are important socioeconomic benefits that Cuba can derive from its membership in this regional group. These two reasons make it extremely important to fully discuss and carefully consider Cuba's insertion into the Gulf Pact, as part of the framework and mechanisms of Cuba's inevitable transition process.

In the rest of this paper we present an overview of the Gulf Pact Agreements and of their six working groups. Then we discuss how these six groups or "mesas de trabajo" can help Cuba in advancing in this new direction as well as in enriching the Pact organization as a whole. Then, we discuss some challenges and problems raised by our proposal. Finally, we conclude with some recommendations about how to establish the groundwork for achieving Cuba's integration and provide some information sources and further references about the Gulf Pact.

THE GULF STATES AGREEMENTS

The *Acuerdos de los Estados del Golfo de México* (AEGM), also referred to as the Gulf Pact, is an association of eleven states in the United States and Mexico that border this international Mediterranean sea basin. The Gulf Pact was signed in 1995, in Campeche City, capital of the State of Campeche, Mexico, to foster international collaboration between autonomous state governments in the areas of ecology, economics, education, tourism, etc.

The Pact was the result of ample negotiations and from the recognition that, in this modern world, large ecosystems such as the Gulf of Mexico can no longer survive nor function, divided into separate parcels of independent and disconnected national units. Such a policy would only bring about long range disaster to all interested parties.

Given the above rationale, it was only natural that the Juárez-Lincoln-Martí International Education

Project became interested in the Gulf Pact. The Project is dedicated to the improvement of education as well as to the study of ecological problems precisely in the three areas where the Gulf Pact is active: Mexico, the United States and Cuba.

At this time, eleven states are members of the Gulf Pact. In the United States, the states of Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and Florida. And in Mexico, the states of Tamaulipas, Veracruz, Tabasco, Campeche, Yucatán and Quintana Roo. This paper analyzes the possibilities and repercussions of Cuba, a key non-member within the Gulf region, in joining the Pact.

The Gulf Pact functions through six different committees or working groups (*mesas de trabajo*). These are:

1. Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries
2. Tourism Industry
3. Commerce, Finance and Investment
4. Education and Culture
5. Transportation, Communications and Infrastructure
6. Health, Ecology and the Environment.

These committees or working groups are supported by a selected group of universities and organizations. Among the most prominent supporting universities are those of Texas and Florida (at Gainesville, Tampa and Miami) and the University of Veracruz (Xalapa).

Among the most supportive private and public groups and organizations in the United States are the Gulf Coast Division of the Chamber of Commerce (Tampa), the Tampa-Veracruz Port Agreements (1993), the Regional International Affairs Committee (RIAC) of the Tampa-St. Petersburg-Clearwater area, the University of Southern Florida's (Tampa) Latin American Initiative, the Gulf Information Network (GIN), the Gulf Ports Association and the Environmental Cooperative Committee. It is noteworthy to mention that the General Secretariat of the Pact resides in the Tampa Bay area and is currently starting its web page.

Among the Pact's most supportive Mexican institutions is the Universidad Veracruzana (UV) state-wide

system and, in particular, its main campus in the city of Xalapa, Veracruz. The UV maintains a Web Page and Information system portal (<http://gulf.org/>) currently under transition to the Pact General Secretariat. The UV's Chancellor, Dr. Arredondo, is also the Chairman of the Pact's Education and Culture working group, as well as a past Chairman of AMPEI, the Mexican international education association.

Finally, the Pact has also received the support of several international institutions, such as the Western Interstate Committee on Higher Education (WICHE), the Educational Leadership Network (ELNET) and the Consortium on North American Higher Education Collaboration (CONAHEC). These three U.S.-Mexico-Canada non-profit organizations sponsor cultural and international education activities. Dr. Francisco Marmolejo, Executive Director of CONAHEC, has been especially instrumental in these activities, through the creation and support of the UV Gulfnet web page.

Of all of the Pact's working groups, the most active and successful has been the Education and Culture Committee. It has met five times in the 1995-98 period. The last meeting took place in Villahermosa, Tabasco (Mexico) in August of 2000. There, a new action plan was drafted, with three lines of work:

- Inter-sector strategic alliances, that establish links and develop activities with other working committees of the Gulf Pact (since, by their nature, the activities of the higher education institutions reach into the areas of all the other Pact working groups).
- Establishment of scholarships, research and exchange regional programs, including the search for potential funding to support them.
- Basic education and distance learning activities, since the Working Group has been more concerned with higher levels of education and the crucial basic education areas also need attention and development.

The main problem in the development of the above-mentioned activities is finding sufficient funding to support them. At this time, funding opportunities are sought via COMEXUS, the Mexico-U.S. Com-

mittee that directs the Fulbright-García Robles program and other cultural endeavors such as the Ford Foundation, which has supported CONAHEC and other Mexico-U.S. activities.

As a relatively recent organization, there is still some apathy and disbelief in certain quarters regarding the Pact's practical effectiveness and capabilities. However, the different committees are successfully approaching and resolving such concerns.

CUBAN OPPORTUNITIES IN JOINING THE GULF PACT

As discussed above, one of the two main reasons for proposing that a transitional Cuba joins the Pact is to help shore up the necessary stability during the difficult transition to pluralism and open economy. Since both Cuba and Mexico, a current Pact member, have strong similarities in several Pact areas, their joint membership in the Pact may provide mutually reinforcing services in complementary areas. In addition, Cuba's membership may provide yet another opportunity to positively interact with the United States in a buffered context. Thus, Pact membership may contribute to successfully attack and resolve the U.S.-Cuba political differences of the past forty years.

Membership in a joint organization would enable Cuba and Mexico to become, instead of competitors, cooperating countries that coordinate their policies and share costs and responsibilities. Such membership could also entice more U.S. corporations to consider a transitional Cuba as another attractive capital investment area, thus contributing to further develop the region as a whole and Cuba's post transition economy, in particular.

We would now like to quickly overview specific opportunities for Cuba, in the six areas comprising the Gulf Pact:

Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries

Mexico and Cuba have many similar export products. Thus, they could establish joint coordinating boards to study issues of marketing, prices, new trade agreements, etc. In areas where different products are available, they could establish exchange agreements. They could also establish technical cooperation and

development programs, including the creation of joint facilities for basic and applied research, for technical training and for commercialization of products. As some agricultural products may induce an adverse ecological impact, agreements for the protection of habitat and species and for the control of damages from unexpected ecological or natural events could also be established.

Tourism Industry

There are several large tourist centers in the area, such as Cancún in Mexico and Varadero in Cuba, that could benefit from exchanges of experiences, training, etc. Mexico could provide Cuba with aid in the development of small and medium businesses and the U.S. could provide capital and know-how for large scale ones, as well as its large population of potential tourists. Tourist resorts could also establish joint programs to attract and retain a larger clientele in the very competitive Caribbean region.

Commerce, Finance and Investment

Cuba has completely state-owned and -operated business and financial markets. One of the key changes in a transition would consist in opening business, investment and commerce to the whole of the Cuban people, something currently reserved for the State and for foreign corporations. The establishment of new credit institutions, their know-how and borrowing skills, development of small and medium enterprises, etc., is something Cuba thoroughly needs and something that Mexico and the United States can both provide.

Education and Culture

Currently there exist intensive educational exchanges between Mexico and the United States and between Mexico and Cuba. By joining the Pact, Cuba could also establish and extend such exchanges with U.S. institutions and help Mexico more effectively participate in its current programs. At this time, many of the existing U.S.-Mexico agreements link only Mexican universities with U.S. community colleges. Cuban membership may help enhance the links of Mexican universities to full U.S. research institutions as well as to current Cuban ones.

Transportation, Communications and Infrastructure

Both Cuban and Mexican transportation networks and infrastructure are in dear need of improvement. Telephone, railroads, and air and sea port facilities, in particular, would greatly benefit from an influx of capital and from technological advances. A good infrastructure is also a key to the establishment and enhancement of all other areas of cooperation. As before, establishment of joint boards, agreements, working groups, standards, technical protocols and training programs and exchanges of personnel would greatly enhance this activity.

Health, Ecology and the Environment

The Gulf of Mexico remains, above all, an immense ecosystem. Hurricanes, atmospheric changes, oil spills, fish depletion, coral reef problems, and so on, affect each and every Pact member, irrespective of country. Hence, this is a crucial area and one where joint programs and basic research offices, joint agreements, exploration, exploitation and preservation efforts are in order. Health programs should be established with a regional outlook, especially since large regional exchanges of peoples and products are envisaged. Here too, regional technical exchanges, training and basic ecological research agreements would enhance all members' interests.

Cuba, Mexico and the U.S. all have ample experiences in these areas, as is well known by this author, who has worked in several of the Pact areas in the three countries involved. Some of these experiences are complementary; others are not or have been developed at different levels, by the three neighboring countries. However, a broader exchange would not hinder the efforts of any member state. On the contrary, it would enhance them all. Take a worst case scenario and assume that one of the Pact members is farther advanced than all the others in one specific area. Then, providing training and exchange facilities to the other members could only enhance such advanced member's research institutions, no least than by providing its faculty with many well-prepared and highly motivated students and interns to work with.

DISCUSSION

The initial (working) version of this paper, presented at the ASCE 2001 meeting, has circulated widely. The author has benefited from very insightful comments, questions and suggestions. Some of them are discussed in this section.

Both discussants agreed that the paper presents a novel and interesting approach to using the participation in international groups that deal with "necessary" issues (e.g., ecology) to provide a structure that strengthens the political process (e.g., transition). And they would like to see some supporting theory behind it.

Since our approach is novel, there is a limited body of work that we can refer to. This author, for example, has researched for the past several years some socioeconomic areas affected by a Cuban transition and ways to approach such transformation during and after a peaceful transition to pluralism and an open economy. In Romeu (1995), he has compared Cuba's socioeconomic conditions to those of three other Latin American countries. This supports his selection of Mexico in the present model. He discussed in Romeu (1998) some transition problems arising in the areas of faculty development. Similarly, he has discussed in Romeu (1999) the formation of international professionals, and in Romeu (2000), necessary changes for research institutions in Cuba, which are important areas that the Gulf Pact also addresses.

Several other authors have also dealt insightfully with the problems of a Cuban transition, but from a different perspective. Their works can also be found in ASCE proceedings, among other places. Three very interesting contributions are those by Felipe Pazos (1991), Ernesto Hernández-Catá (1993) and C. Richard Nelson (1995), which we briefly comment below.

In his seminal paper Felipe Pazos (1991) discusses the importance of analyzing the main problems Cuba will face during a transition to pluralism. Pazos enumerates the nine key ones, according to his experience. These include reconverting the state economy to a market one, re-orientation of foreign markets, attracting foreign capital and formation of entrepre-

neers. We cannot find a single of Pazos' areas which is not enhanced by (or indirectly supported) by our proposed insertion of Cuba in the Gulf Pact agreement.

Hernández-Catá (1993) presents an interesting and effective comparison between the Russian transition experience and that (future one) of Cuba. We strongly agree with the economic similarities he identifies. However, there is a strong difference in the geopolitical area. Cuba is a small, former enemy, only 90 miles away, whereas Russia is a big, also former enemy, but at the other end of the world, and one which maintains some power and world status. This difference makes the prospectus of a peaceful transition a very concerning and risky endeavor for the Cuban *nomenklatura*. And this is one of the two big issues that our present model tries to address via the structure of the Gulf Pact.

Finally, Nelson (1995) presents a roadmap for restructuring U.S. relations with Cuba, whose set of assumptions require a "cooperative" government in Cuba. The purpose of both our proposed structure and model is, precisely, to establish a network of support and a structure that enables the members of a transitional Cuban government the assurances to become "cooperative" with that of the United States, and negotiate in good faith.

One reader is concerned with the potential use of the Gulf Pact, by Cuba and Mexico, to establish a sort of "cartel" and fix prices for their export products. Another reader, also with economic concerns, states that Mexico and Cuba are natural competitors and will never cooperate, precisely because they produce similar products for the same markets. Both are valid questions, which can be addressed simultaneously. Cartels can be made illegal in the Gulf Pact bylaws. However, pooling Mexican and Cuban resources for better marketing their similar products (at a free-market price) is not illegal and would indeed foster the cooperation (in lieu of competition) between them. Conversely, playing countries against each other is never a good recipe for making longstanding friends.

Another commentator suggests that the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and not the Gulf Pact should be the first international organization that Cuba should enter. It is very doubtful that a distrustful Cuba would seek to join NAFTA, nor that a distrustful United States would encourage it. The Gulf Pact, however, is a smaller, local organization with very strong common interest and a good, common friend (Mexico) and would not present such problems. NAFTA would be a good, subsequent step, to consider once a stable transition is under way.

Yet another commentator questions how is it that only states are Pact members, both in the U.S. and Mexico, and we are proposing that Cuba (a nation) becomes a member. This is a very valid and complicated issue, still open to debate. The intent of this proposal is to provide a context and support mechanism for a transition in Cuba. Hence, our interest is in integrating Cuba to the Pact. The alternative is integrating only its three occidental provinces: Pinar del Rio, La Habana and Matanzas. But this poses additional problems. These are much smaller than any of the Pact's current integrating states, creating a large imbalance. Then, we see large difficulties in having Cuban provinces join the Pact when the two nations (Cuba and the United States) currently do not even have diplomatic relations.

Finally, several readers are concerned about our statement that Mexico would provide a bona-fide ombudsman for both, the Cuban and U.S. governments, in developing working conditions for a transition to an open political and economic system. Such objections are based on the "history of collaboration" with the Cuban government that Mexico has allegedly maintained for the past forty years, which troubles many Cuban exiles.

This writer is well aware (having lived and worked in Mexico and having extensively read the history of this country) both of the support that Mexico has provided to the Cuban government as well as of the lax standard with which it has assessed its many human rights violations. However, this situation is not unique to Mexico but is shared by other democratic

governments in Iberoamerica such as those of Spain, Argentina, etc.

Any unbiased reader of XX Century Iberoamerican history will find reasons of such common behavior, which has greatly complicated the internal Cuban political problem. Hence, if we want to find an ombudsman, it will have such characteristics, too.

On the other hand, precisely past support from countries like Mexico and Spain provide the basis for us proposing them as viable and bona-fide ombudsmen in the, process of jump starting a transition. Mexico has the added ingredient that it is also undergoing a political and economic transition (from a hegemonic party and state-oriented economic system to one of political and economic pluralism). Hence, Mexico can also contribute some interesting insight into the transition process that Cuba also has to follow.

Finally, only if in a pragmatic move all interested parties place the long-range interests of the Cuban Nation and its Project above those of political parties and ideology (as it occurred, for example, in Spain in 1975) may this unique window of opportunity that presents to us now, be seized. The alternative to a peaceful transition is too sad and costly to be even considered here.

CONCLUSIONS

The intent of this paper is two-fold. First, to bring to the forefront the Gulf Pact agreements. Unfortunately, the Pact is not well known even by many of those who, irrespective of the Cuban issue, live in this geographical area and could benefit from it or should work to enhance it. Second, to present it as a viable model to those studying the future Cuban transition possibilities, as a valuable support structure.

This author grew up (through high school, military service in the labor camps, university and several years as a professional in government service) under Castro's regime. Many of his colleagues are currently mid-level functionaries in Cuba. We are convinced that, in Cuba and under the proper conditions, many if not most would be willing to negotiate a transition to an open society that does away with the present socioeconomic problems. We also believe they face

the uncertainty of the new course and the unwillingness of the old guard. The solution consists in moving beyond the old guard ideologues, as it occurred in Spain after Franco's death. But for this we need a minimum level of confidence. And to establish and sustain it, we need a nurturing and supporting mechanism. We propose the Gulf Pact as an alternative.

We believe that Cuba's membership in the Pact would help sustain its difficult transition as well as greatly enhance the Pact and its members. Cuba has achieved a high level of technical development and is ready for an opportunity to free its forces. The U.S. can provide its technology and capital to a new transitional Cuba. And Mexico can provide its ample practical experience in developing small/medium businesses within a Latin American context, something that Cuba has missed in the past forty years. A transition and Pact membership, therefore, seem to be two compatible and mutually supporting opportunities for Cuba and for all.

Finally, a long-term stable Gulf of Mexico region is a net benefit to all, especially to the United States, who is the wealthier and stronger partner. The Gulf is the outlet of most of what is produced in the U.S. Central Basin, i.e., between the Appalachian and the Rocky Mountains. Thus, having politically and economically stable neighbors is in the best interest of the United States and would only enhance the security and geopolitical interests of that country.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Cuba will not join the Gulf Pact by magic. Nor will it join it in the present political conditions. It is necessary for all parties involved (Cuban government, Mexico, the United States and Cubans in the island and abroad) to take an active part and work toward it.

A transition, or at least an effective and credible first step toward a transition to a pluralistic and open market society in Cuba, is necessary. Otherwise, Mexico would be the first country to suffer from a totalitarian Cuba joining the Pact, as it would be the weaker of the three if Cuba remains a government-controlled economy and becomes a member state of the Pact. How this transition is achieved and imple-

mented is in the hands of the Cuban government officials and the Cuban people.

Mexico, a prominent Latin American country, has a vested interest and a moral obligation to contribute to the return of Cuba to a normal situation, just as it contributed, via Contadora and other groups, to resolve the situations in Chile, Nicaragua and other countries in the region. The Estrada Doctrine of non-intervention never prevented Mexico from serving as an intermediary in any of the above-mentioned conflicts and it should not do so in this case either. On the contrary, helping defuse a potential problem only contributes to a healthier region where the Estrada Doctrine may flourish for all.

The United States, after the demise of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, no longer has a serious military concern regarding Cuba. At this time, it may even consider the Cuban regime in the

same terms it considered other dictatorships or authoritarian regimes of the region in the past. But peacefully contributing to foster a more open society anywhere is a legitimate objective not only of the United States, but of all the other countries in the region.

Finally, we can never lose from sight that the future of Cuba is essentially a matter for Cubans, both inside the island and abroad. One of the unfortunate consequences of forty years of the present regime is that ten percent of the Cuban population has had to go into exile, mostly in the United States, but also in many other countries. All of us have a stake and all of us should contribute, with good will, good judgment and good conscience, to the re-establishment of the national project, “con todos y para el bien de todos.”

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RELATED INTERNET ADDRESSES

Association for the Study of the Cuban Economy (ASCE). Proceedings in the Internet:
<http://lanic.utexas.edu/project/asce/transition.html>

Consortium on North American Higher Education Collaboration (CONAHEC):
<http://conahec.org/>

Educational Leadership Network (ELNET):
<http://elnet.org/>

Gulf Net at Universidad Veracruzana:
<http://golfo.org/English/>

Gulf Pact General Secretariat, Tampa:
<http://www.gomsa.org/>

Juarez-Lincoln-Marti International Education Project:
<http://snycorva.cortland.edu/~matresearch/>

Universidad Veracruzana: <http://www.uv.mx/>

Western Interstate Committee on Higher Education (WICHE): <http://www.wiche.edu/>