

of the degree of political discord, and no matter how convoluted and inconsistent that policy is.

### **The Lessons for Canada**

Canada has maintained more or less the same approach to Cuba since diplomatic relations were formally established in 1945. Going further back—and the establishment of consular relations in 1903—one has the advantage of an even longer trajectory. Admittedly there have been problems along the way (even during the Chrétien years), but in general the approach—very similar to that shown by Mexico—has oscillated between relative distance and closeness. There has never been a sense, however, that the relationship was imperilled, no matter how great the disagreements. What is common to this century of bilateral relations for both countries is the need to sit down and discuss differences with Cuban officials, since bluster and pressure have simply not worked. Nowadays this policy is known as either “constructive engagement” or “pragmatism with principles”. Regardless of the tag, the essence of the approach is to negotiate fairly and with transparency.

Mexico has traditionally followed a very similar approach—although clearly it has not pursued as deliberate an approach as Canada has with its clear intent, particularly seen in the last decade, of “engaging” Cuba. By contrast Mexico has simply co-existed with Havana, “going with the flow,” and using shared Latin sensibilities to maintain a relationship that seemed to function fairly well—but rarely going above and beyond the call of deliberately seeking to improve relations. (And of course it should be pointed out that the approach of the Fox government is significantly different from that of any of the previous governments during the past century). They were simply there—and both countries seemed to get along quite well. As we have seen, one could argue that this defence of the status quo was done largely for domestic political gain, emphasizing Mexico’s independence from Washington’s long reach.

That said, it is clear that such a policy touches a respondent chord throughout the Americas, where U.S. expansionism, unilateralism, and commercial, cultural and political clout are reasons for ongoing concern. (Indeed a successful Canadian approach to Cuba can also serve U.S. interests in the long run, even if Washington is unaware of this-- and probably would regard it as a ludicrous suggestion. This, however, should be made clear to the Americans, through a variety of potential initiatives—either national or bilateral—undertaken by Mexico and Canada). Regardless of the motivations, Mexico has played its cards well—recognizing its limits, using its relationship with Cuba for domestic and international political gain, and also occasionally expressing its concerns with Havana. It is a lesson from which Canada has also benefitted. Indeed relations with Cuba—as an illustration of an alternative policy to dependency upon the United States—can be a positive experience in political terms. (Given the increase in U.S. tendencies to unilateralism, and rising international concern at this approach, it is perhaps time to reassess the advantages of a more diverse foreign policy, particularly in the Latin American