

in Mexico in 2006. As a result his tactics may well be radically different than those adopted by his U.S. counterpart—since while he will be campaigning for his party to retain power, he will not be a candidate. The issue of Cuba will continue to be a major plank in his reform project, but it is unclear whether he will continue to push for a major improvement in the human rights record in Cuba. The role taken by Fox in May 2004—withdrawing Ambassador Lajous from Havana because of President Castro's harsh criticism of Mexican foreign policy, while at the same time condemning the latest Bush pressure on Cuba (the 500-page White House Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba, released on May 6)--reveals a foreign policy that is confused. And, while the Zedillo approach was conservative and cool towards Havana, it was at least consistent. By contrast, the approach of the Fox administration reveals a lack of focus or clear goals—and the electorate may well not be forgiving to the PAN in the next election.

The debate on whether isolation or engagement is the best policy in dealing with a nation with which one has a disagreement is a long one. Some would argue that it is only by sitting down at the table with the other party, by establishing a dialogue and expressing concerns, by developing a sense of "confianza" or trust that one can sensitize the opponent to one's own concerns. Others would posit that this simply does not work, since it is only by isolating the other party (and thereby both reducing their malevolent influence and shunning them) that any impact can be made. (A third group would argue—with some justification-- that nothing works with Cuba, and that Havana has always "marched to its own drummer," eschewing all efforts to pressure it, whether by the carrot or the stick).

The trouble with the isolation strategy where Cuba is concerned of course is that it requires a collective approach, since unilateral isolation is doomed to failure. That has not happened, and is unlikely to happen—since most countries disagree fundamentally with Washington's approach. The fact that the United Nations General Assembly has routinely rejected the isolationist route, most clearly seen in the 43-year old U.S. embargo of Cuba, shows precisely how few support this approach. This has happened during the last 11 years. Most recently—November of 2003—179 countries (96% of member countries voting) supported Cuba's position, with only three (the United States, Israel, and the Marshall Islands) voting against.

Many countries will rightfully criticize Cuba's human rights situation, although most will also recognize that this is to a significant degree the result of U.S. pressure upon the island (One must remember the litany of U.S. aggression since 1959 against revolutionary Cuba—and that Washington maintains its "Trading with the Enemy" legislation against Cuba). Most will also be displeased with the tactics employed by Washington to bully smaller nations to support them in their international crusade against Cuba—seen most clearly in the annual Geneva meetings of the United Nations on human rights.

While maintaining dialogue with Cuba has not always brought the results that Mexico has desired, it has helped to keep the door open for concessions. (By contrast the alternative policy of confrontation—as employed by the last ten U.S. presidencies—has been a resounding failure). It is therefore in Mexico's interest to maintain reasonably cordial relations with Cuba, regardless