

opinion

Americans: Butt out of other countries' affairs

The Canadian government should defend its sovereignty from U.S. strong-arm tactics

Two weeks ago, the Cuban airforce shot down two U.S. aircraft with lethal force. This incident did not occur in a vacuum, rather, it was precipitated by a concrete sequence of events.

For several years, hard line anti-Castro elements have engaged in activities aimed at destabilizing the Cuban government.

Despite claims to the contrary these groups, including the Cuban American National Foundation, Alpha 66, and most recently, Brothers to the Rescue, are political as opposed to humanitarian in orientation. Alpha 66 is described as a para-military group by independent human rights organizations. The government of

Cuba has objected to the tactics pursued by the aforementioned groups in promoting internal sedition in that country.

In the aftermath of the shoot-down incident, Canadians are presented with the Helms-Burton bill. During the past thirty-six years, the U.S. government has assumed an uncompromising stance toward Cuba. A longitudinal analysis will demonstrate that favoured policies concerning Cuba ultimately rest on tactics of intimidation and blackmail. For three decades, this strategy has — to the consternation of Uncle Sam — failed to dislodge Castro. With the passage of the Helms-Burton bill, these very tactics are now inflicted on Canada, a country which is presumably an ally of the U.S. Commenting on this reactionary piece of legislation, a Republican spokesman defined the ultimatum succinctly: "you are either for us or against us."

The Helms-Burton legislation represents a brazen assault on

Canada's sovereignty. Canada is a tolerant and this tolerance is expressed in our relationship with the people of Cuba. Now, as a consequence of external intervention, we are advised that our relationship — and hence our essence — must be re-defined. According to the architects of Helms-Burton, if we continue to engage in economic contacts with Cuba, our friendship with the U.S. is in peril.

The implications for Canada are two-fold. First, it is an affront that pre-existing relationships based on mutual tolerance are now subjected to ideological assault. Secondly — and here is the wake-up call — it is tantamount to a declaration of war. The chief proponent of this legislation, Jesse Helms, is an insufferable demagogue. His intolerance, grounded in inflexible orthodoxy, is embodied in the statute he sponsors. The message to Canada is unequivocal: worship according to our belief system or suffer the

consequences.

A final observation concerning the Canada-Cuba relationship. In contrast to U.S. policy, the majority of Canadians believe it unconscionable and indeed immoral to starve a country of 11 million people. The preceding approach is conducive to a bloodbath as opposed to meaningful reforms in Cuba. The Canadian model of foreign relations, formulated on concepts of mutual common ground and tolerance, must not be substituted by a counter-confrontational model.

It is imperative that our federal government act decisively in asserting Canadian sovereignty regarding Cuba. Moreover, let's inform Washington that our value-system, based on principles of tolerance and goodwill, is not for sale. This country must refuse to capitulate or blindly obey the doctrine of greed codified in Helms-Burton.

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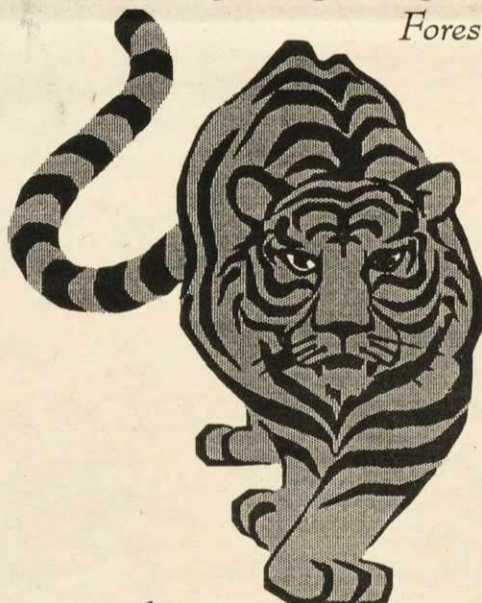
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