

remind the Bush administration of the need to take it seriously. One arm in this arsenal is the Mexican approach to Cuba. The resignation of Foreign Minister Castañeda (and his ferocious opposition to the Cuban revolutionary government) on January 9, 2003 obviously facilitated this process. Once again the Cuba policy is thus being revisited in Mexico City.

What clearly does not work on Cuba is the use of pressure tactics. If the objective of the Fox administration in its policy towards Cuba is to make Havana improve its human rights policy, then it has been a lamentable failure. Washington should have learned by now, even if only the hard way, that supporting opposition groups on the island, lobbying at the U.N. Human Rights sessions in Geneva to depict Cuba as an international pariah (and thereby make it improve its human rights situation) simply does not work. Unfortunately it has of course not learned that lesson. Consistently in these situations the Cuban government has circled the proverbial wagons, appealed (successfully) to the nationalist sentiments on the island, and cracked down on government opponents. In other words the end result of this external pressure has been precisely the opposite to what had been hoped for.

The Fox government has learned this at a fairly high cost. The previous PRI administrations had played the card close to their chest, exploiting the bilateral relationship to their benefit. Never particularly at ease with revolutionary Cuba, the PRI leaders were savvy enough to know that their capacity to force Cuba to change direction was extremely limited. Nor did they really want to effect such change. They therefore refrained from trying. (It must be pointed out, of course, that the hypocrisy inherent in advocating an improvement of human rights in Cuba while these were widely abused in Mexico would have also been exploited by the domestic opposition). President Fox has learned the hard way that the Cubans are extremely tenacious when facing the human rights issue. While still refusing to abandon the time-honoured policy of non-intervention in another nation's domestic policies, the Cubans have deflected the pressure applied by Fox, and in fact have turned it back on him. The implication for all is that Fox is in fact less interested in democratization and human rights issues than he is in supporting the U.S. agenda—as was shown clearly in Monterrey.

The issue of U.S. pressure upon Mexico is of course the predominant variable in the relationship with Cuba. Given the degree of self-confidence (some would say triumphalism) in Washington's foreign policy following the Iraq conflict (and with warning shots being already fired across the bows of Syria and Iran), it is obvious that U.S. policy is in an aggressive mood. Its budget on defence is almost as large as that of all other nations in the world combined, and it clearly feels relatively comfortable if hardly completely happy with its role as an international gendarme. (The presidential elections in 2004 will also provide even more stimulus for George W. Bush to look for further opportunities to show U.S. international resolve, thereby boosting his chances to be re-elected).

Undoubtedly Washington will continue to pressure Mexico to do its bidding. The Mexican situation is more complex, however, not only because of the profoundly rooted issue of nationalism but also because of the fact that President Fox is not eligible to stand for re-election