

Whenever it occurs, and notwithstanding rhetoric on all sides of the political spectrum, the transition is crucial for Cuba, and indeed perhaps for Latin America. To a large extent this has already begun—as can be seen in the impact of tourism, foreign investment, and increased international contacts as the Cuban revolutionary process seeks to develop. The role of Canada thus far, in a variety of ways—from its NGO role to its successful CIDA programmes, from the role of Canadian investors to that of the hordes of sun-seekers, from its influence on the Cuban tax system to the multitude of university and community college connections—has made a significant difference. Put simply, Canada is a major player in Cuba. This approach should be continued, and indeed increased. The goal has to be for all international partners to ease Cuba through this process (however one seeks to define it) as much as possible. Any other approach—and in particular that advocated by Washington—carries very grave risks for future hemispheric order.

In many ways the Canadian role in Cuba is even more important than that of Mexico, notwithstanding cultural, linguistic and political similarities between the two Latin nations. The role of Canadian business on the island is important, to no small degree because companies like Sherritt International have been active on the island for a decade. They, and Canadian NGOs such as OXFAM-Canada and several Church-affiliated organizations, have become the model to emulate for other nations. Finally the importance of people-to-people contacts (with over 500,000 Canadians travelling to the island in 2004, the single largest national group) is great indeed. Together with a wise policy of development assistance from CIDA, they have cemented an extremely strong relationship, regardless of government rhetoric either in Ottawa or Havana. In sum, while there is much that Canada can indeed learn from an analysis of Mexico's approach to Cuba, there is also a tremendous amount that we can learn through an analysis of our own role to date. There is much that is worthy of note, and praise.