

Cuba had to further increase its dependence on sugar production in order to supply the Soviet Union with sugar in exchange for extensive technological assistance and low-cost Russian oil. It could be argued that it was in the US interest for the Cuban economy to suffer as many failures as possible, insofar as Cuba was a practical symbol of all the ills afflicting Communist countries and could serve as an example to the other countries of the region, and furthermore was a net drain on the struggling Soviet economy. These last points may explain the adamant attitude of the US for the past 30 years; they may represent unofficial objectives as important as the declared objectives.

In 1992, the US passed a law "to ease the transition to democracy in Cuba," which provoked negative reactions even from US allies due to its extraterritorial application of US law.¹⁷ The UN passed a Cuban resolution calling for revocation of the US law by a vote of 59-3 (with the US opposed, of course). This resolution does not have the force of law, however, for the General Assembly does not have the powers of the Security Council. Under the US law, foreign subsidiaries of US companies could be charged for doing business with Cuba. Vessels carrying freight to Cuba would also be banned from US ports for 6 months. While most other countries in the region have dropped their restrictions against Cuba, their trade volume remains limited, for the Cuban economy has been crippled by years of authoritarian management and neglect of market forces, not to mention the loss of Russian aid, which had become too costly.

Some believe that Cuba is on the brink of major changes. We may ask whether the US would not be more likely to achieve its goals (a return to democracy, economic reforms) by discontinuing its measures and relying on economic forces to effect a renewal of Cuba's elites. The Cuban paradox is that Castro is still in power, in the absence of a genuine international consensus on the appropriateness of sanctions in the past and despite his government's blunders. But the regime is now unsteadier than it has ever been. It has, for all practical purposes lost almost all its allies, and its human rights record is attracting increasing criticism. It may for the first time be faced with a de facto consensus which could be fatal and would likely influence the post-Castro transition.

¹⁷ Canada had to adopt its own regulations to offset the effect of this US legislation on the Canadian subsidiaries of US companies. It should be noted that we have not followed the lead of the US on Cuba, being in basic disagreement with their objectives as well as their methods.