

the equation.²⁰ Mexico—like Canada—has at times been the fulcrum of the troubled Cuba-United States relationship, and in so doing has amassed important advantages—in commercial ties, and in projecting (internationally and nationally) its autonomy vis-a-vis the United States. In international fora, Canada (and Mexico) have both gained for supporting Cuba, developing their international profile as a regional leader. Meanwhile in terms of coopting the strong nationalist current found in both countries, both Ottawa and Mexico City have defended a policy of political sovereignty that is extremely popular in domestic politics. In this way the relationship with Cuba has generally been beneficial.

By contrast, the United States has gained little in international or domestic benefits from its policy of antagonism with Havana. The hard-ball approach of Washington, initially supported (not so) tacitly by the Fox administration, sought different goals from those of Mexico—in essence a regime change. Despite justifiable concern over the human rights situation in Cuba, Mexico does not see this goal as particularly desirable or necessary. And, even though many countries condemned the rounding up of dissidents, it is most probable that those same countries will yet again vote to support Cuba at the U.N. General Assembly in November. The attempts to use pressure tactics against Cuba failed, miserably—as Fox knows well.

This of course raises the question of where the three tango partners are headed in the new post-Iraq era of pre-emptive strikes and unilateralism, and of a decline in effective U.N. multilateralism. As Georgina Sánchez has pointed out, “Since the terrorist attacks of September 11, President Bush has designed a policy based on the old Cold War paradigm, with the world being divided into friends and enemies ... The return to a new Cold War, this time with the enemies being characterized as terrorists—among them Cuba—will increase international tensions, as well as causing obstacles to development issues and the process of international negotiations”.²¹ In those circumstances of probably heightened tension, what lessons can be learned?

The essential question is whether the best way of bringing about change in a country is through isolating it (thereby obliging it to amend its policies), or “engaging” and winning it over through the development of a sense of confidence in the partner nation. There are two schools of thought on constructive engagement. (To a certain extent Mexico has followed its own approach of co-existing with both Havana and Washington, occasionally playing one off against the other. In essence, however, its approach is closer to the engagement strategy—although it has not articulated such a policy. Moreover, clearly this approach has suffered in recent years).

A critical interpretation emphasizes that this strategy has not worked, and will not with a totalitarian regime such as that of Fidel Castro, particularly when he has significant popular support in Cuba, and can skillfully rally nationalist sentiment—admittedly, not a particularly difficult objective in the face of ongoing U.S. hostility. The essence of the argument opposing constructive engagement is that it is only through concerted pressure that change will be made to come about in Cuba. Critics of constructive engagement note that almost a decade of Canada’s pursuit of this policy has yielded disappointing results. A hard-line approach is clearly