

## **ENCASA/US-CUBA**

### **Emergency Network of Cuban American Scholars and Artists for Change in U.S.-Cuba Policy**

*As Cuban Americans, we wholeheartedly reject and condemn the latest report issued by the Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba (CAFC) on the role of the U.S. in the Cuban "transition" which will presumably take place after Fidel Castro's death.*

ENCASA asserts that the newest recommendations of the Commission, endorsed on Monday by President Bush, reveal yet again that the Bush administration is **incapable of learning** from an uninterrupted 47-year record of policy failures--but that is instead bent on repeating and intensifying the same mistakes of the past, for political domestic reasons rather than through reasoned analysis based on evidence. This report is destined to **backfire** once again, as Elizardo Sanchez, of the Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation, noted of the 2004 report when he proclaimed that it "has had an effect exactly the opposite of the one you should want." These recommendations ultimately undermine both the national interests of the USA and the values and idealized that we claim to stand for.

While the report professes that its goal is the spread of democracy in Cuba, the Commission's past recommendations (strengthened by the new report) have added further restrictions on travel to Cuba by Cuban-Americans, scholars, students, and humanitarians--a foreign policy which not only belies American commitment to basic freedoms but also runs completely counter to that conducted with respect to other communist countries, for which the prevailing assumption has always been that democracy is spread through American travel and the dissemination of democratic ideals.

The report continues to be profoundly **ignorant** of a long history of Cuban nationalism and resistance to U.S. interference in Cuban affairs. The Commission, apparently in defense against similar charges raised to its 2004 report, now claims that its suggestions and assistance are offered only in the event that Cubans request these. Yet its long list of detailed recommendations, including plans for a free market economy, a U.S.-created "Cuba Civil Society Education Project," and U.S. evaluation of the Cuban healthcare system to determine "restructuring and/or modernization" (one can only assume that "restructuring" would mean the end of free health care in Cuba) tellingly reveal that the U.S. ascribes to itself a key role in determining the future of Cuba. Thus the Commission, and the Bush administration, arrogantly continue the legacy of the Platt Amendment of 1901, which ascribed to the U.S. the right to interfere in Cuban affairs and which has historically been deeply resented by the people of Cuba itself. As OAS Secretary General Jose Miguel Insulza responded to Bush's creation of the position of a U.S. transition coordinator for Cuba, "There's no transition and it's not your country." Even leading Cuban dissidents such as Oswaldo Paya have rejected any plan for Cuban transition that would come from outside of Cuba.

The report claims that its insistence on Castro's removal comes out of humanitarian concern for the conditions of the Cuban people. Yet it simultaneously suggests renewed vigor in the implementation of restrictions which limits the amount of money, medical supplies, and other necessities that Cuban Americans can send their Cuban relatives, as well as the frequency of family visits, on the specious grounds that these things help Castro stay in power. The overriding, expressed concern of the embargo all along has been to get Castro out of power, without regard to the humanitarian costs. If the U.S. government really wants an invited (rather than imposed) role in the "transition"--one initiated by the Cuban people themselves--it seems only too obvious that it would *first* need to establish itself to those very Cuban people as in some way concerned with their conditions in the present. We view the Commission's staking of this particular moral high ground, then, as particularly egregious and hypocritical. Cubans on the island don't recognize the U.S. as a benevolent protector of their rights.

The CAFC report, seemingly aware that Cubans on the island might not actually want U.S. "help," counters by granting Cuban exiles who have lived abroad for decades, and who are now largely U.S. citizens (and voters), a crucial role in the transition, saying that Cubans abroad need to be involved. ENCASA/US-CUBA, a group of national scope, numbers 144 Cuban Americans, in 26 states plus Puerto Rico, and more than 75 universities (as well as many other institutions and organizations). We represent a wide diversity of disciplines and areas of expertise. According to the CAFC, **WE ARE Cubans abroad** and we will not stay silent. We strongly urge Congress to reject the recommendations of the report, and we likewise urge our fellow Americans to reject politicians who support such failed and misguided policies.

**ENCASA/US-CUBA** is a national network of prominent Cuban American scholars, artists, and public intellectuals based in more than 75 universities and many other organizations in 26 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. A founding declaration of principles is available online at [http://www.rprogreso.com/friendly.php?pdr=Mar1622\\_06&progreso=encasa](http://www.rprogreso.com/friendly.php?pdr=Mar1622_06&progreso=encasa) .

Established in 2006, ENCASA is part of a long continuum of Cuban American political activism. Since the early 19th century, literally hundreds of organizations have emerged in the Cuban exile community to try to influence U.S. policy towards Cuba in one way or another. The majority emerged after 1959. While ours is not the first organization to advocate diplomatic, cultural, and trade relations as a means of fostering positive change in both Cuba and the United States, ours is distinguished from our predecessors in its membership, comprised entirely of scholars representing a wide variety of academic disciplines, as well as artists, writers, and playwrights. This sector of the community has produced extensive research on Cuba, but has generally kept out of the political limelight in the name of academic objectivity. We can remain silent no longer. We are committed to promoting reasoned debate in the public arena, to countering the stereotype of a monolithic Cuban American community, to challenging the disproportionate influence of an unrepresentative sector out of touch with U.S. public opinion, and to help reverse a failed policy that defies all sound principles for conducting foreign affairs.

As Cuban Americans (or "Cubans abroad," in the language of the CAFC) and as informed U.S. citizens profoundly concerned with both Cuba and the United States, we denounce in the strongest terms this latest misbegotten attempt by the Bush Administration's misnamed "Commission for Assistance for a Free Cuba" to perpetuate a politically failed and morally bankrupt US-Cuba policy.

## **TOP TEN SIGNS THAT THE CAFC REPORT IS BAD**

### *10. It is an exercise in political opportunism*

How coincidental is it that the Bush administration rediscovers Cuba on even years (2004, 2006) just before tough elections? This is a sure sign that Cuba policy is made not in the interest of the American or Cuban people but with an eye to winning a few thousand votes in Florida (and its electoral votes in presidential elections).

### *9. It is contemptuous of international law and world opinion*

At a time when the United States should be seeking to repair an image tattered by brazen disregard for international norms and for the views and rights of others, the last thing this country should be doing is reinforcing a policy already roundly condemned by almost every nation in the U.N. (The vote against the U.S. embargo of Cuba in the United Nations last year was 182-4. The 4 voting "no" were the United States, Israel, Palau and the Marshall Islands.) Yet this is what this report recommends when it seeks to tighten enforcement of extra-territorial U.S. laws designed to strangle Cuba economically by infringing on the sovereign rights of other nations.

*8. It is a failed welfare program for the professional anti-Castro set*

In the 1960s, the CIA spent tens of millions of dollars and employed thousands of Cubans in Miami in its failed campaign against the Cuban government. The U.S. government does not seem to have learned the lesson of that experience. A two-year, \$80 million program purportedly designed to help dissidents in Cuba is a centerpiece of the CAFC report. We don't have space to detail all the things that are wrong with this initiative. For starters, much of this money is sure to end up in the bank accounts of people who have made a lucrative career out of fighting Fidel Castro from the safety of the United States. Then there is the fact that the very existence of this fund of money tends to cast suspicions regarding the motives, the independence and the patriotism of anyone in Cuba who disagrees with the government. This has led some prominent members of the opposition in Cuba to reject this component of the report. Finally, there is the matter of a double standard. U.S. law does not allow foreigners even to contribute to candidates for public office here, much less allow foreign governments to financially support Americans bent on changing our political system. And how would the American people feel about those who would take foreign government money to influence politics in the United States?

*7. It is a combination of political science fiction, wishful thinking, delusion and sour grapes.*

Rather than admit the abject failure of the measures called for in the last report and, more generally, of a policy in place for almost five decades, the report seeks to cast blame on external actors, mainly Venezuela (which is mentioned no fewer than 15 times). The tone of much of the report is almost surreal and delusional in its talk about a hypothetical Cuban "transition" government and its detailed description of the policies such a government might undertake and the U.S. government actions that would result. Repeatedly, the report implies an imminent collapse and asserts cause and effect relationships without any logical, factual or historical foundation. For example: "...as we rapidly approach the transitional moment, the more economic pressure is on the regime, the greater the likelihood there will be dramatic and successful change for the Cuban people." But that has been precisely the failed approach taken by U.S. policy since it imposed a trade, travel and financial embargo on Cuba 45 years ago. In psychiatry and in the reality-based community at large, a delusion is defined as "a false belief strongly held in spite of invalidating evidence." The 2006 CAFC report is as delusional in this regard as its 2004 predecessor. Both evidence a profound ignorance of Cuban history and society.

*6. It is a model of cynicism and cruelty disguised as concern*

This is true in too many respects to describe here. The report is replete with crocodile tears and expressions of concern over the humanitarian needs of the Cuban people and promises of help--but only after a transition is under way. What about the problems faced by Cubans today? In that regard, the report recommends measures to tighten the U.S. embargo which inflicts untold hardships on the Cuban people *right now*. It is yet another version of "destroying the village in order to save it." The message seems to be that the U.S. will punish the Cuban people unless or until they change their system and their leadership, in which case they will reap rich rewards, compliments of U.S. taxpayers. Such promises are not worth the paper they are printed on, as the transition experience of Nicaragua and other countries shows. Worse, this kind of blackmail is unworthy of the United States and an insult to the dignity of the Cuban people.

*5. It infringes on the freedom of American citizens*

The report calls for tightening the enforcement of travel restrictions even further, keeping Cuba off-limits to U.S. citizens. It is yet another irony that a set of policies purportedly intended to promote freedom in another country diminishes the freedom of people in this country. What ever happened to the U.S. government's pious pronouncements of the "free exchange of ideas"?

*4. It is not about the desires and the dreams of Cubans abroad*

The same commission whose recommendations have led to Cubans in the United States being punished for visiting relatives, for sending them aid, and for having a more inclusive view of family than that approved by the U.S. government, now dares to invoke “the vital role of Cubans abroad?” What “vital role” is this—to do what the U.S. government wants and nothing else? The report states that “Cubans abroad should re-double their efforts to foster reconciliation on and off the island.” This is completely inconsistent with the tone, tenor and policy implications of the report. Is the Commission speaking in a code in which reconciliation means confrontation, isolation, and economic strangulation?

### *3. It is not transparent*

The existence of a classified secret annex, one of the more ominous aspects of this second report, recalls the long U.S. history of deniable invasions, numerous assassination attempts, sabotage, clandestine incursions, and other cloak-and-dagger operations. Given this background, and the track record of this administration, one can only imagine what items of dubious legality and sheer lunacy may be contained in this classified portion of the report.

### *2. It is not about sovereignty*

“There is no transition and it’s not your country.” We could not find words more apt than those of the Secretary General of the OAS (Organization of American States). The repetition in the report of the phrase “if requested by the Cuban transition government” doesn’t do anything to mask the sheer arrogance implicit in the ideas contained therein as well as in the very existence of the Commission and of an office of Cuba Transition Coordinator in the State Department.

The report’s emphasis on “restoring sovereignty to the Cuban people” is one of its most Orwellian aspects. A state that respects the sovereignty of another nation and its people does not produce a detailed script for the political future of that nation and that people.

More than century of repeated U.S. transgressions against Cuban sovereignty and of meddling in Cuban affairs are at the heart of much of what has gone wrong in Cuba since 1902 and of troubled U.S.-Cuba relations over the last 50 years. This report, the assumptions that underlie it, and the policies it champions, embody the same misbegotten principle enshrined in the interventionist Platt Amendment—which the United States arrogantly attached to the fledgling Cuban Constitution in 1902, giving the U.S. the right to intervene unilaterally in Cuba’s internal affairs—and in much of U.S. policy toward Cuba since. In once again resorting to a *Plattist* approach, the authors of the CAFC report have failed to learn the lesson that “we can’t solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them.”

### *1. It is about regime change, stupid*

And regime change, by any other name, by any other means, would still carry the same stench of illegitimacy and the same steep moral, human and material costs as the one the Bush Administration launched in Iraq in 2003. Make no mistake about it; this is a blueprint for accelerated regime change. Evidently, the Bush Administration has not been sobered by the disastrous result—for Americans for sure but especially for the Iraqi people and its devastated nation—of its recent adventure in U.S.-imposed regime change. Nor has it learned how far astray certain kind of exiles, with their own agendas and delusions and totally disconnected with the people back home, can lead this country.