

## **Introduction**

The transition to freedom will present many challenges to the Cuban people and to America, and we will be prepared. America is not alone in calling for freedom inside of Cuba. Countries around the globe and the United Nations Human Rights Commission increasingly recognize the oppressive nature of the Castro regime, and have denounced its recent crackdowns. We will continue to build a strong international coalition to advance the cause of freedom inside of Cuba.

President George W. Bush  
October 10, 2003

For more than four decades, Fidel Castro's destructive policies at home and abroad have caused great hardship for the Cuban people. He has systematically undermined the democratic principles and fierce national pride of Cuba, destroyed its economy, subverted his neighbors, and launched bloody military expeditions around the world.

Under Castro, Cuba's economic and social prospects remain bleak. Following the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the end of massive subsidies, the Cuban economy contracted by nearly 40 percent, compared to its level in 1989, and it has not recuperated all of that loss. Absent fundamental reforms, there is little prospect of rebuilding the country's capital base.

The diversion of scarce resources to sustain the regime's control has had a dramatic impact on the Cuban people's welfare. Health and nutrition have deteriorated significantly. Chronically low levels of investment have produced a severe housing shortage and a serious deterioration of Cuba's infrastructure. Ever increasing numbers of Cubans are involved in the black market and other illicit activities to survive in a dysfunctional economy.

Cubans continue to be denied fundamental freedoms. They cannot form independent, alternative political parties outside of the communist party, elect representatives of their own choosing, form free associations, or

freely express themselves. They are denied recourse to an independent judiciary that could protect their rights. Absolute political control remains the paramount objective of the regime.

Cuba, tragically, remains the outcast in the Western Hemisphere's democratic community of nations. Yet it has been the historical role of the United States to support the Cuban people's aspirations to hasten the day when they can restore their country to a respected, peaceful, and constructive role in the international community.

Chapter 1 of this report thus identifies additional means by which the United States can help the Cuban people bring about an end to the Castro dictatorship, taking into account the various methods the regime has instituted in recent years to sustain itself in power. The strategy is multi-dimensional: adopting measures to empower Cuban civil society; breaking the regime's information blockade of the Cuban people; reducing financial flows to the regime; undermining the regime's "succession strategy" (i.e., from Fidel to Raul Castro) by increasing pressures on the ruling elite and its principal instruments of coercion/control; aggressively increasing public diplomacy efforts abroad to counter Cuban propaganda; and encouraging multilateral efforts to challenge the Cuban regime.

There is no way to predict exactly what form a transition in Cuba will take, but what is certain is that soon the Cuban people will be freed from Fidel Castro's repressive rule. Clearly, the agents of change are the Cuban people, who are struggling to define Cuba's future. Based on the experience of recent history, one can predict that when given the opportunity, the Cuban people will choose democracy and a market-based economy.

What follows in Chapters 2 through 6 is a survey of the areas in which the U.S. Government can assist a free Cuba in all facets of its reconstruction and renewal. This document proposes a wide range of actions that the U.S. Government might propose to a Cuban transition government. They are not intended to be a prescription for Cuba's future.

The Cuban people will determine the transition and their specific assistance needs. It is likely that a Cuban government embarked upon a democratic transition will have aspirations and needs similar to those of other transition countries from former communist rule. As such, a free Cuba can be expected to seek assistance:

- To meet critical humanitarian and other important needs early in the transition essential to relieving social hardship and initiating the reactivation of the economy;
- To help build essential democratic institutions, both in the government and civil society;
- To help establish the policy, institutional, and legal reforms necessary to stimulate the domestic private sector; meet the long-term social needs of the population; attract foreign investment; meet conditions for lending from international financial institutions; and otherwise lay the basis for economic recovery; and
- To address the degradation of its infrastructure and environment, which, as in other countries freed from communism, have seen serious deterioration in the areas of water and sanitation, power, telecommunications.

The fundamental goal of any U.S. assistance to a free Cuba must be to empower and respect the sovereign rights of the Cuban people. Empowering them will mean improving their economic and social well-being, helping them reconstruct a democratic civic culture through education and institution-building, and supporting them as they transform themselves and Cuban society.

This report also seeks to dispel misperceptions regarding the future challenges and opportunities that Cuba will face once the transition process begins. The Castro regime attempts to manipulate information on conditions internally and developments abroad to engender popular fears regarding the future prospects of a Cuba without Castro. The choice for the Cuban people is not between the present and the past, as the regime would have the people believe; it is between the present repression and economic malaise and a future of freedom and opportunity for all Cubans.

Cuba has excellent prospects for achieving a democratic society and sustained economic growth following a transition. It has a number of advantages that many of the former communist countries lacked. It is a relatively well-integrated society with a single language and a relatively

educated, flexible, and mobile workforce that can be readily absorbed into new economic activities. The Cuban people's strong entrepreneurial spirit is also well established. Cuba also will be able to draw upon the support of a large overseas Cuban community with extensive business and technical expertise, market connections, investment capital, and a commitment to help their families and fellow Cubans on the island. Finally, a Cuba in transition can count on strong support from the United States.

Well-conceived and implemented political and economic transition programs that lead to democracy and a market-based economy are mutually supportive. A democratic government, a free press, an active civil society, and the rule of law will help ensure that a new Cuba is worthy of all her citizens.

Cuba has the human and natural resources to become a free and prosperous nation. When it undertakes a transition to democracy, Cubans from all walks of life, from San Antonio to Maisi, can count on the United States and the international community to help them forge a peaceful future, free from repression and economic misery. Cuba will then take its rightful place in the democratic community of nations, befitting its long history of struggle for freedom.