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## Organization of American States (OAS)

### Topic A: Relations with a Post-Castro Cuba

After being in power for 46 years, Fidel Castro has wielded more power over the course of Cuba's history than perhaps any individual. He has presided over both economic and military crises, vacillating relations with two twentieth-century superpowers, and the struggle of domestic political dissidents, exiles, and multiple governments in the Western hemisphere to control Cuba's fate. The death of this charismatic leader is on everyone's minds: as he coped with orthopedic injuries, which forced him into a wheelchair in 2004, and intestinal surgery in 2006 which left his brother Raul temporarily in charge, countries within the Organization of American States have been forced to begin to plan for the possibility of Fidel not returning to power and the end of Castro regime and the beginning of a new one of an unknown character. By looking to Cuba's past, the OAS must anticipate what could occur in the aftermath of Castro's passing – and what this organization can do to ensure a bright future for the island.

#### **History of Castro's Regime: Caught Between Two Superpowers**

The combination of sour relations with the U.S. and excessive dependence on the Soviet Union has greatly influenced Castro's policies through his regime. Castro's reforms following his rise to power in 1959 caused ties with the U.S. to weaken. In his attempt to purge supporters of former dictator Batista from his government, Castro imposed prison sentences of up to 30 years

and executed about 700 political opponents, according to some estimates. The Urban Reform Law of 1959 deprived pro-Batista individuals and large property owners of their land, which was then re-distributed to form cooperatives under the Agrarian Reform Law. Disillusioned with these reforms, as well as the institution of wage and price controls, over 200,000 people, including wealthy property owners and middle-class professionals, left Cuba between 1959 and 1962. They were not the only ones disgruntled with Castro's changes, however: even though at this point Castro possessed no known ties to Communism, the U.S. began to worry about Communist influences in his policies, particularly because American businesses owned "75 percent of Cuba's fertile land, 90 percent of its public services, and 40 percent of the sugar industry." (Encarta) After Castro nationalized the property of U.S. oil companies that had declined to refine crude oil imported from the USSR, the U.S. government attempted to destabilize Castro's regime by reducing the sugar quota on July 3, 1960. When Cuba confiscated U.S. sugar plantations, the U.S. Department of Treasury declared a trade embargo on the island. Ultimately, following Cuba's expropriation of all American property in 1961, the U.S. severed diplomatic ties with Cuba. In addition, U.S. President John F. Kennedy approved the Central Intelligence Agency's plans to conduct an invasion by Cuban exiles of the Bay of Pigs. When the exiles were easily defeated, the Cuba celebrated the defeat of the greatest military

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power in the world. Such post-victory enthusiasm for Castro's regime enabled him to imprison or detain over 100,000 people for allegedly seditious behavior, cancel elections, and annul the 1940 constitution. The Bay of Pigs Invasion, moreover, led Castro to seek closer ties with the USSR: he declared himself a Communist as well as his intention to enact socialist policies and requested military and economic aid from the Soviet Union in December of that year.

The Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962 evinced Cuba's status as a nearly powerless entity trapped in the tension-filled struggle between the two superpowers of the Cold War. When U.S. spy planes discovered that Soviet Premier Khrushchev had shipped to Cuba nuclear-enabled missiles capable of reaching the U.S., Kennedy imposed a naval blockade on Cuba, and a stand-off ensued between the American and Soviet leaders. Eventually, the two came to an agreement by which Khrushchev would recall his ships headed for Cuba and take down the nuclear sites, while the U.S. pledged not to invade Cuba and to remove its missiles from Turkey. Castro, however, had no influence on the agreement. Also in 1962, the Consultation of Foreign Affairs Ministers agreed to strip Cuba of membership in the Organization of American States.

These challenges in the early years of Castro's governance were coupled with economic ones. While policies aiming for a more equitable distribution of wealth succeeded in increasing the per capita income of the bottom 40% of the Cuban population, Castro failed in his attempt to mobilize his people to produce 10 million tons of sugar in the 1970 harvest through largely voluntary labor – a project that damaged both public morale (in its failure) and other industries, which sacrificed workers for the cause. In the 1970s, desperate for the USSR's economic aid,

Cuba agreed to mold its bureaucracy into the Soviet model.

The 1970s brought several significant improvements. First, the bureaucratic reforms that accompanied assistance from the Soviet Union reduced Castro's authority in economic matters but allowed him to focus more on political reforms, as he approved the 1976 constitution, which – in writing, if not in effect – gave the people more say over their leaders and legislation. Second, Cuba gained from the tempering of animosity between the USSR and U.S.: the Organization of American States voted to allow member states to independently define their relations with Cuba. However, while U.S. Presidents Ford and then Carter attempted to enhance diplomatic ties with Cuba, they slowed such efforts when Cuba intervened to “export revolution” in Angola and then Nicaragua.

In the next two decades, Cuba's economic problems became particularly apparent. In response to the attempts of several thousand Cubans to request asylum from the Peruvian embassy in Havana, President Carter offered to grant asylum to all. When Castro then permitted emigration, 120,000 Cubans chose to leave for the U.S. This massive departure revealed that persisting economy adversity and minimal political freedoms had provoked widespread discontent. The collapse of the Soviet Union compounded such hardships: Soviet premier Mikhail Gorbachev's announced in 1989 that the USSR could no longer provide \$5.5 billion in annual subsidies to Cuba. Dependent on the sugar trade, Cuba was soon forced to import this commodity from Brazil and other countries in the Caribbean to sell to Eastern Europe. Cuba had to borrow money to do so and accumulated a large debt, which continues to burden its economy today by directing funds away from welfare programs. To finally put an

end to Castro's regime, in 1992 U.S. Senator Robert Torricelli sponsored the Cuban Democracy Act, which punished foreign subsidiaries of U.S. companies as well as other countries involved in trade with Cuba. Needless to say, Cuba experienced a period of severe economic privation – termed by Castro as a “special period in the time of peace” – that involved black-outs, food shortages, and the attempted escape to the U.S. of thousands of Cubans. In 1993 and 1994, over six thousand reached the coast; many others died in transit.

Two primary incidents marked U.S.-Cuba relations around the turn of the century. First, the Cuban air force shot down two planes belonging to the Cuban exile organization, Brothers to the Rescue. This event encouraged Clinton to sign the Helms-Burton law, which punished states or individuals engaged in commerce with Cuba and imposed heavy fines or jail sentences on U.S. citizens traveling to the island. Second, the rescue in 2000 of Elian González, a young Cuban boy who attempted to reach the U.S. by raft with his mother, off the American coast led to a controversy over whether Elian should remain in the U.S. or return to Cuba to be with his father. While Castro proclaimed that Elian had been effectively kidnapped, the Miami community where his relatives lived adamantly demanded that he be granted refuge in the U.S. A refusal by the U.S. Supreme Court to hear the case led to Elian's return to his country of origin.

### **Cuba Today: Six Parties**

To understand the prospects for Cuba after Castro's death, one must analyze the roles of seven parties: foreign businesses, dissidents, refugees, Venezuela, the United States, and the Miami-Cuban community, and the Cuban government.

#### *Business*

Increasingly oppressive regulations under Castro hinder the growth of small businesses. In 2004 Castro declared that he would permit no new businesses in 40 of 170 categories in an apparent attempt to rescind market-based concessions he had offered after the USSR collapsed. In addition, handicraft merchants can only sell their wares if the raw inputs can be found in government-administered stores, since all inputs must be purchased there. With these regulations, Castro succeeded in closing 2000 small enterprises in June 2005 alone. The number of licensed entrepreneurs, such as restaurant owners, manual laborers, or beauticians, reached its apogee in 1990s at 240,000; the number has since fallen under 140,000. Castro has come down hard on foreign businesses as well. Over 50% of 800 foreign companies registered in 2002, 400 firms in free-trade zones, and 400 out of 700 joint ventures have left Cuba because of regulations unfavorable to business. Most of these firms operated in sectors identified by Castro as “strategic:” tourism, energy, cigars, rum, telecoms, mining and biotechnology. Foreign diplomats in Havana argue that “the official fear that [private businesses] had become too successful” – more successful than the gov't. at satisfying Cubans' needs – resulted in more stringent regulations. Minimal investment in infrastructure creates further disincentives to business: in the summer of 2005, Cuba faced “daily power cuts of up to 18 hours; a water system that leaks more than it delivers; dilapidated and overcrowded homes; [and] cratered roads and scarce public transport,” among other problems.

#### *Dissidents*

Castro's regime confronts mounting resentment from dissidents and average

citizens alike. In March 2003, the government arrested and sentenced 75 political dissidents to lengthy imprisonment, sparking international protest. Many of those imprisoned were people associated with the Varela Project, an initiative led by Oswaldo Payá Sardiñas to activate a clause in the Cuban constitution that recognizes petitions demanding political reform so long as they are signed by over 10,000 citizens. Although the Varela Petition, which demanded freedoms of expression, association, press, worship, free enterprise, amnesty for political prisoners, and electoral reform, gained enough signatures, it was rejected by the Cuban government, which argued that petitions may not call for reform that changes the constitution. However, Payá, who in 2002 received the Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought from the European Parliament, remains free. Two hundred dissidents gathered in a highly unusual public meeting in May 2005, passing a “resolution in which they described Cuba's system of government as Stalinist and its economic policies as obsolete.” Yet the dissident movement continues to be limited in numbers and plagued by both internal factions and government persecution. It succeeded in planning several protests in Havana in July 2005, but the government immediately organized counter-demonstrations in support of Castro, which easily overpowered the protesters. About 30 dissidents were arrested, but most were soon freed. Martha Beatriz Roque, Felix Bonne and Rene Gomez, who organized the May meeting, were among those detained. Castro has always claimed that “dissidents are not representative of public opinion, but rather mercenaries in the pay of the US,” a statement that the U.S. Interests Section in Havana repeatedly denies. Castro’s stance enables him to reject the notion that his own

policies are in any way responsible for domestic dissatisfaction with his regime.

### *Public Frustrations*

Discontent, however, is not restricted to subversives. Energy and water shortages have incited the general public to engage in street demonstrations and produce graffiti critical of Castro. Cubans continually try to escape to the U.S. using risky methods: many build their own rafts with inner tubes and other supplies that include old cars, trucks, refrigerators, bathtubs and surfboards. According to Camila Ruiz, the director of government relations at the Cuban American National Foundation, “People are so desperate they’ll try to find any avenue out of the island. There are very limited options. And these people will go on anything that floats”. The current U.S. “wet-foot, dry-foot” policy – a rule enacted by the 1966 Cuban Adjustment Act by which Cubans who succeed in reaching land are usually permitted to stay in U.S., while those found at sea are sent back to Cuba – effectively encourages Cubans to flee. A U.S. Coast Guard spokesman attests to the statistic that at least 200 refugees have died in their attempted escape over past 5 years, and probably many more. Thus far in 2005, the Coast Guard has encountered 1500 people en route to the States. However, the Cuban government holds that attempts to escape are illegal: Even though U.S. will give visas to such professionals as doctors and teachers and young people of an age that makes them eligible for the military, the Cuban government. will not let them depart. Responding to the numbers of people that die in the Florida Straits each year, Castro blames U.S. policies: he maintains that the wet-foot, dry-foot legislation “encourages dangerous, illegal migration.” He claims, “Lives have been lost for the last 40 years since they created that law,” and further

maintains that the U.S. policy has resulted in a trafficking market, which prices the assisted migration of a single Cuban at \$10,000. U.S. Interests Section, however, repudiated this, identifying Castro's assertion as "a cynical attempt to deflect blame" from his government.

Castro has responded to expressions of hostility to and discontent with his government by making a slew of promises. On July 26, the anniversary of the 1959 revolution, Castro gave a speech intended to temper discontent: he pledged that GDP would rise by 9% this year, despite the 40% decrease in sugar production last year, that he would eradicate power outages and construct 100,000 new homes, and that Chinese buses and trains would soon arrive from China. Earlier this year, Castro officially proclaimed that the economic crisis following the Soviet collapse had ended. It remains to be seen whether such superficial declarations can quell popular frustrations in the long-run – or after the charismatic leader's death.

#### *Venezuela and the United States*

Castro had recently sought to strengthen his relationship with Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez by supporting his attempts to propagate a revolutionary ideology throughout Latin America. In July 24, 2005, Chávez began to broadcast Telesur, a regional television channel back by Argentina and Uruguay that aims to "let Latin Americans see themselves 'through their own eyes'" and thereby serve as an alternative to CNN. Telesur has greatly exacerbated Venezuela's relations with the U.S., which claims that such a medium represents a way for Chávez to transmit propaganda. In response to the Telesur initiative, Connie Mack, a Florida Republican Congresswoman, led the the House of Representatives in ratifying an

amendment to the Foreign Appropriations Act that called for "rival propaganda broadcasts."<sup>(1)</sup> Noting the rise of U.S. animosity – faced by Castro's government for decades – toward Venezuela, Castro has identified Chávez as a useful ally. A partnership has ensured whereby Venezuela pledged to use oil revenues for housing construction in Cuba and offered subsidies amounting to 1.3 billion dollars in free oil in 2004, or 80,000 barrels per day. The Cuban government then sells this crude oil in South and Central America.<sup>(300)</sup> Furthermore, Castro signed an agreement stipulating that Venezuela would increase subsidized exports to Cuba, in exchange "for the services of 17,000 Cuban doctors." Thus, the Cuban-Venezuelan alliance has allowed Cuba to circumvent the U.S. embargo and contribute to Venezuela's mounting regional power as it competes with the U.S. for influence in Latin America. The two countries are also attempting to send doctors to other countries in need, which Cuba has done independently for decades – doctors that author Humberto Fontova identifies as "military and security 'advisors.'" Skeptics of the Castro-Chávez alliance refer to this joint effort as "doctor diplomacy" that takes advantage of poor people to garner international support."

Regardless of the truth of this statement, Cuba is indeed facilitating Venezuela's rise as an alternative pole of power to the U.S. in Latin America. Castro and Chavez announced their intent to create a rival plan to the Free Trade Area of the Americas, which they referred to as a "moribund plan" endorsed by the U.S. However, only Cuba supported Venezuela's proposal: Cuba remains the only country in the region in accord with Chávez's disregard for "representative democracy" or regional organizations like the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. When Castro and Chavez were together during

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Chavez's fourth visit to Cuba in nine months in late August of 2005, they were lauded by members of the audience that included ex-Salvadoran guerrilla leader Shafick Handal and former Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega. Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque declared, "It is a great privilege for all of us to see you here together... We feel like we are living a special moment, and that, in Latin America, Cuba is not alone." Cuban and Venezuela countries further talk about "a regional revolution in which Latin American nations stand united against threats of U.S. hegemony – an attractive vision for regional groups who complain of U.S. meddling." Jaime Suchlicki, a Cuba expert at the University of Miami, claims they are "trying to export the revolution in opposition to the United States." Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, moreover, says the two are "fomenting instability in Latin America," an accusation rejected by Castro and Chávez.

Talk of the Cuban-Venezuelan relationship for awhile centered on the trial in the U.S. of a Cuban dissident. Luis Posada Carriles was arrested in Panama in November 2000 for plans to assassinate Castro while he attended a summit in that country. Panama pardoned Carriles, at which point Cuba severed diplomatic ties with Panama. Posada has also claimed he organized several bombing attacks on tourist sites in Havana; the Venezuelan government further accuses him of planning in Caracas the 1976 bombing of a Cuban airliner that led to the deaths of 73 people. Yet neither Cuba nor Venezuela currently has Posada in custody: he entered the United States through Mexico in March 2005 and is seeking asylum. Because he was accused of illegal immigration, he has remained in a federal detention center in Texas since May of 2005. An American judge said Posada would be sent to Venezuela if he is not granted asylum. However, a former

Venezuelan official, Joaquin F. Chaffardet Ramos, testified that Posada would be tortured if handed off to the Venezuelan government because of his status as a terrorist there. Formal request for extradition have been delayed. While Castro and Panamanian President Martin Torrijos mended their relationship in August 2005, claiming they were "inspired by the spirit of fraternity that has always linked these two countries," Posada's fate – along with the future of U.S.-Cuban-Venezuelan relations – has yet to be determined. However, it is worth noting that Chavez did arrive in Cuba to visit the ailing Fidel Castro for his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday this August.

### *Miami Cuban Community*

Miami Cubans have played a significant role in U.S. relations with Cuba since the Bay of Pigs invasion. Representing a powerful lobbying group, they have ensured the loyalty of a Republican administration and the maintenance of the embargo. Putting aside their objections to sending Elian Gonzalez back to his father in Cuba, their points of protest have focused on two recent issues: first, closer ties between Cuba and Venezuela and second, a trial of Cubans convicted in 2001 for espionage conspiracy and other crimes. However, a panel of the 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Atlanta ordered new trial in mid-August 2005, stimulated excitement in Havana around Castro's birthday. The ruling stated that because of "prejudicial publicity," the alleged spies cannot be tried in Miami, where a large number of Cuban exiles live and anti-Castro sentiment persists. A trial outside Miami would be more "fair and impartial" and would avoid "community prejudice and extensive media coverage." Additionally Miami has been a major site of celebrations since the announcement of

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Castro's failing health. What role can one expect the Miami Cuban community to play in the future of U.S.-Cuba relations? Will they always maintain their influence on U.S. policy toward Cuba?

### *The Cuban Government*

How will these various parties – all deeply interested in the future of Cuba – interact with the Cuban government after Castro dies? Celebrating the future of the Castro regime may be in vain: the elderly leader underwent surgery in July of 2006 and has since left his younger brother Raul in charge. However, Raul is a young 75 years old and no one suspects that his authority in Cuba will waver while he remains alive. While Raul remains as interim president, he is nowhere nearly as well liked as his brother. Remarkably, Cuba is “the last communist state in the Americas and one of only five in the world,” standing beside China, Vietnam, North Korea and Laos. The Castro brothers maintain faith in the statement he once made as a younger man: “They can hate us, but they also must admire us. We never bow down.” The pattern of succession after his death, however, remains unclear. Castro had always proclaimed his slightly younger brother, Defense Secretary Raul Castro, would be his successor (and he is now interim president), but whether Raul will

significantly outlive Fidel or whether he can muster the same popular support as his predecessor remains to be seen. Cubans today draw hope that Fidel will recover and return to power. Will Raul be able to exercise control over the government and manipulate public opinion to the same degree without his older brother?

### **Conclusion**

As a body committed to the maintenance of democracy in the Western Hemisphere, the Organization of American States must prepare a plan of action to handle a post-Castro Cuba. Each delegate must consider his or her country's stance on Cuba's future leadership, type of government, and relations with the rest of Latin America, as well as the U.S. embargo. In addition, each delegate must anticipate the nature of a change in leadership in Cuba. Will it be peaceful? How will dissident groups react? Will it warrant foreign intervention? Most relevant to the OAS, what role can this regional body play in Cuba's future? Do any treaties signed within the OAS give it special powers to deal with crises?