

CUBA: HIS BROTHER'S KEEPER

By Jorge I. Domínguez

A specter haunts Cuba. It is the specter of the nation's past. The politics of violence and revenge marked Cuba's two dictatorship-ending transitions in the past century. Violence reigned in 1933 following dictator Gerardo Machado's fall. And after Fulgencio Batista's overthrow in 1959, mob rule gave way to trials without due process, leading to gross human rights abuses.

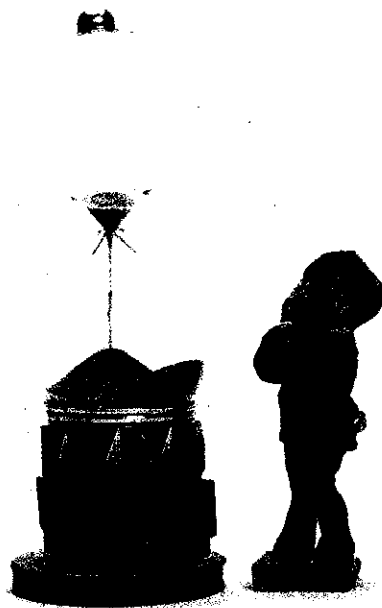
Such violence feeds off the hyperbole prevalent in Cuban politics. This style is as evident of many top officials in Havana as among some elected and self-appointed Cuban-American leaders in Miami. In the histrionics of Cuban politics, there are not just adversaries—there are traitors. This mindset connects politics with the vengeance, retribution, and restitution that many opposing Fidel Castro's government expect. It also explains why Cuba's incumbents rely on ruthless repression to prevent such outcomes. Intransigence, fear, and stalemate flow from the expectation that Cuba's future could mirror its past.

Is there a "morning-after pill" for Cuba's Day After Fidel? For Cuban officials, the answer is yes. Gen. Raúl Castro will abort such a cataclysm. Raúl Castro, Fidel's younger brother, is the government's First Vice President, the Communist Party's Second Secretary, and the Armed Forces Minister. He was the master organizer behind Cuba's victories in three wars fought in the 1970s and 1980s in Angola and the Horn of Africa. Cuba's leading military officers credit Fidel, of course, but also Raúl for helping them accomplish what the United States could not do in Vietnam and the Soviet Union could not do in Afghanistan: Cuban soldiers won the wars they fought. Raúl Castro is also respected within the Communist Party leadership for

paying more attention than his brother to party organization and development and the party's role in society. Officials hope Raúl Castro will choreograph the succession from his brother without actually transforming the political regime.

At the same time, a deepening commitment to nonviolence within Cuba's growing domestic opposition could protect the nation's future from the specter of its past. Leaders care about creating effective organizations, employing information as an instrument of power, and fostering political mobilization within what the laws permit. For example, in 2002, the so-called Varela Project gathered some 11,000 signatures to petition Cuba's National Assembly to amend the constitution and other fundamental laws—the first time in more than four decades that the opposition had peacefully mobilized so many people within the established rules. Opposition groups have also become more adept at establishing domestic and international alliances. Human rights organizations have built a record of credibility. Cuba's civil society has gained autonomy. The leaders of the largest and best organized of its entities, the Roman Catholic bishops, have grown more experienced when addressing the broad issues that confront Cubans.

However, conflict would deepen in Cuba between government and opposition if, the Day After Fidel, Cubans face mere succession without a true transition toward a new regime. But that conflict could be more peaceful and better managed—albeit slower moving—compared with Cuba's past regime changes. A tacit agreement between a Raúl Castro-led government and the opposition could produce a deeper economic opening. As an innovative Armed Forces Minister, Raúl Castro authorized "best business practices" in enterprises managed by the military. He has orchestrated a successful retirement scheme for military officers who run and staff many autonomous quasi-private successful enterprises (still wholly state owned), especially in the tourism sector. In so doing, he has shrunk the armed forces, cut military spending, sus-



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tained military loyalty to established authority, and facilitated a wider future regime transition. In 1993–94, he helped persuade his brother to authorize freer agricultural markets. For its part, the Cuban opposition has long advocated greater freedoms, including market economic openings, hoping that such changes would lead to wider freedoms. Cuba's civil society, after all, needs non-state funding more reliable than just remittances from Cuban-Americans.

This immediate post-transition outcome (familiar in market-opening, communist regimes in China and Vietnam) would nonetheless be unstable in Cuba for three reasons. First, Raúl Castro, though politically talented, lacks his brother's ability to obtain broad public support; he is also already in his 70s. Second, the domestic opposition and forces in civil society will demand a more complete transition. Mere "market economism" does not lift their hearts. And third, the international community will become more active in seeking to facilitate deeper, wider changes.

The U.S. Helms-Burton Act of 1996 commanded the U.S. government to intrude in Cuban domestic affairs in defense of property rights. Some Cuban-Americans, too, strongly assert their own property claims. The U.S. government and Cuban-American elites will face a trade-off between asserting these objectives and the consolidation of a peaceful democratic transition with broad popular support on the island. If they do not behave with restraint, they may provoke an allergic reaction among Cubans who are as averse to foreign bullies as they are to homegrown ones.

Ultimately, the Day After will be defined more by developments in Cuba than influences from abroad. If Raúl Castro becomes president of Cuba, even for a short time, key questions would emerge. Would a Raúl Castro government lift state constraints on semi-private peasant cooperatives to free production and marketing decisions? Would it permit the

CUBA

Leader: **President Fidel Castro, 77**

Years in Power: **44**

Experience with Democracy: **1940–52**

Population: **11.3 million (and another 872,716 U.S. residents, according to 2000 U.S. Census)**

GDP per capita: **\$2,300**

Asylum Applications**: **37,757**

Political Prisoners: **320**

Population Under Poverty Line: **N/A**

Military Expenditures: **4 percent of GDP**

*GDP per capita estimates in purchasing power parity

**Asylum applications submitted in 37 countries, 1980–2001

For a list of sources, go to www.foreignpolicy.com.

development of small- and medium-sized Cuban-owned business firms? Would it allow foreign firms operating in Cuba to hire their own work forces and authorize labor unions? Would it fully privatize some state enterprises, selling them to foreigners, or would it preside over "insider" privatization? Would it adopt mild political reforms possible under existing laws? For instance, would such a government allow municipal candidates to campaign and permit multi-candidate elections for the National Assembly?

The answers could either facilitate a sluggish yet accelerating regime transition, perhaps to coincide with Raúl Castro's passing, or they could unleash the specter of Cuba's past. Cuba's century-old national anthem instructs Cubans that "to die for the homeland is to live." The future of Cuba can be as murderous as its past, still in the name of the nation, freedom, and justice. May the memory of such a brutish history foster better prospects for tolerance and compromise. **FP**

BELARUS: FREEDOM TO SUBMIT

By **Jan Maksymiuk**

Like prisoners, we strongly object to our transfer from one cell to another, identical one, particularly since the break between the interrogations proved so brief."

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Thus did the late Belarussian writer Vasil Bykau compare his nation's experience under Soviet rule to its ongoing trauma under the autocratic regime of President Aleksandr Lukashenko. Since Lukashenko assumed power in 1994, Belarus has dropped out of the wider political and economic transformations underway in post-communist Eastern Europe. With-