Castro, Cuba, and the World

Executive Summary

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PREFACE

This executive summary presents the main findings of a forthcoming Rand report, *Castro, Cuba, and the World*, R-3420, by Edward Gonzalez and David Ronfeldt. The report provides a new profile of Fidel Castro’s mindset and behavior as a political actor, though it is not intended as a psychobiographic study of the Cuban leader. The report combines this profile with assessments of Cuba’s current domestic and international situations, in order to analyze Castro’s future foreign policy options.

Because recent international developments and the Cuban and Soviet Party Congresses in February 1986 have important implications for Castro’s ambitious foreign policy, this summary is being issued in advance of the full report to specialists and policy analysts concerned with Cuba, as well as to other members of the broader U.S. policy community.
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I. THE IMPORTANCE OF ANALYZING CASTRO

To understand Cuban foreign policy, one must first understand Fidel Castro. Even though Cuba has a more institutionalized and complex political order than before, Castro remains the architect of foreign policy, the final arbiter of policy disputes, and the ultimate authority whose backing must be secured by all political subordinates. As he was more than two and half decades ago, he remains Cuba’s undisputed Socialist caudillo and líder máximo.¹

There are special reasons for analyzing Castro at this particular time. First, even though his behavior has always lent itself to sensational descriptions, no in-depth study of his personal nature has been done that is relevant to policy analysis. New questions need to be addressed concerning the constancy or change in his extraordinary personality and leadership traits. Some analysts have suggested that age, frustration, and other personal burdens may soon take their toll, and may even lead to significant alterations in his behavior toward the United States. At the same time, there are good reasons to emphasize continuities in his charisma, his revolutionary idealism and nationalism, his drive for power and attention, his penchant for defiance and confrontation, and his ingrained hatred of the United States.

Second, Cuba’s domestic and international situations are at a critical juncture, and Castro’s mindset and worldview will have a decisive effect on Cuba’s responses. Some elements of his worldview may be undergoing significant modifications, especially as a result of the U.S. military intervention in Grenada and other events affecting the Soviet Union and the Third World. It is thus important to inquire anew whether Castro’s policy direction will change and whether it may even exceed the boundaries of his previous behavior patterns. For example, some observers argue that Castro may finally be ready to consider a genuine rapprochement with the United States, while others contend that he could desperately target places involving vital U.S. interests that he has so far treated with caution (e.g., Mexico, Puerto Rico).

Against this background, and building on earlier Rand work on Cuba, this study takes a new look at Castro’s personal nature, his

¹Castro’s dominance is confirmed by a former insider, Manuel Sánchez Pérez, the Cuban Vice-Minister on the State Committee for Material and Technical Supply who defected in Spain in December 1985. According to Sánchez, “Fidel Castro continues to be the sole leader, the absolute architect of the system, and there is no important decision which has not been decided by him.” (Radio interview with Manuel Sánchez Pérez, conducted by Carlos Alberto Montaner, Madrid, December 1985.)
outward views, and the interactions between them.\textsuperscript{2} In seeking to enhance our ability to understand and predict Castro's (and thus Cuba's) future international behavior, the study offers two new constructs:

- A generic concept for analyzing Castro's mindset, which we term the "hubris-nemesis complex."
- An idiosyncratic set of behavior patterns that have emerged as Castro's \textit{modus operandi} for dealing with adversaries, starting with his childhood and extending through his later political career.\textsuperscript{3}

The analysis then focuses on Castro's worldview. Based on his statements and actions, and related developments inside and outside of Cuba, the analysis pieces together his likely assessments concerning:

- Cuba's current domestic situation through the Third Party Congress.
- The international correlation of forces affecting Cuba and the world today.

In light of these analyses of Castro's mindset, behavioral traits, and worldview, the study concludes by discussing how he may see his future foreign policy options under different possible scenarios.


\textsuperscript{3}These twin constructs may appear to highlight personality traits found in different psychoanalytic approaches. However, they are not intended to plumb Fidel's psyche as an individual, but to identify his mindset and behavior as a political actor.
II. CASTRO'S MINDSET AND MODUS OPERANDI

After 27 years in power, has Fidel Castro become an aging, mellowed revolutionary? Reinstalled recently as First Secretary of Cuba's Communist party (PCC), bound closely to the Soviet Union, and now approaching 60 years of age, he appears to many to no longer fit the rebellious, radical image of his past. At times he has even displayed signs of moderation, as when he signed the immigration agreement with the United States in December 1984, conversed with visiting U.S. bishops the following January, and gave a series of extensive interviews to U.S. and foreign newspapers, magazines, and television news programs. He has, of course, shown flashes of his earlier self, as when he angrily suspended the immigration agreement after Radio Martí started broadcasting in May 1985, and when he aggressively campaigned against repayment of the Latin American debt. Still, it was an older rather than the young Fidel who recently discoursed extensively on religion.

Has Castro in fact become less revolutionary, less confrontational, and less militantly anti-U.S.? Has he become more constrained, reasonable, and pragmatic as a result of domestic economic problems, Soviet pressures, and new international realities, as some observers suggest? Has a "new Fidel" emerged on the international scene? A leader with whom the United States can readily reach an accommodation?

This study concludes that the answer to all these questions is No. Castro continues to be driven by the same ambitions and to exhibit the same behavioral patterns that have characterized his rule for more than a quarter of a century. He occasionally adopts a more pragmatic posture for tactical reasons, then returns to militant confrontation when the opportunity arises. Even when playing the statesman, he usually adopts the most radical position, as in his call for a "general strike" of Latin American debtor countries. The reasons for such constancy lie in his extraordinary mindset and a pathology of behavior that has served him well since early childhood.
CASTRO'S MINDSET: A HUBRIS-NEMESIS COMPLEX

What makes Fidel Castro tick? Some observers hold that despite Castro's great abilities, he remains quite irrational, ever capable of wild and dangerous behavior. Others hold that he is generally quite pragmatic, at bottom an opportunist who observes rational limits. There is, of course, some truth to both explanations; as with other leaders of similar stature, complexity, and mystery, there will always be varied ways of interpreting him. Better answers are needed about Castro, however, because the assumptions that policymakers form about his nature may have a significant effect on the priority and choice of U.S. options for dealing with Cuba.

To help develop a synthetic way of analyzing Castro, this study turns to two concepts from Greek mythology, hubris and Nemesis, that seem to illuminate the core of his nature. In combination, they lead to the definition of a new concept, the "hubris-nemesis complex," that may apply not only to Castro but also other extraordinary leaders to whom he is sometimes compared.¹ This concept reflects two of Castro's most basic drives: his unrelenting ambition for power and his continuing animosity toward the United States. It explains how his diverse traits, some of which compete and conflict with others, have combined in a coherent and even logical way.² And it may have useful implications for forecasting Castro's behavior, including his responses to U.S. policy.

The Traditional Dynamic: Hubris Versus Nemesis

Hubris is the capital sin of personal pride, a pretension to act like a god while failing to observe the established balance of man and nature. It is expressed through overweening pride, self-exaltation, arrogance,

¹The hubris-nemesis complex was first proposed in David Ronfeldt, *The Modern Mexican Military: Implications for Mexico's Stability and Security*, The Rand Corporation, N-2288-FF/RC, February 1985, pp. 42-44. Other leaders to whom the complex may apply include Muammar Khaddaf, the Ayatollah Khomeini, and Adolf Hitler.

²The concept of the hubris-nemesis complex is not derived from existing psychological, psychiatric, or psychoanalytic concepts; nor is it offered as such. Yet it may be linked to established sociological and psychological concepts including those concerning the authoritarian, charismatic, messianic, narcissistic, and Icarian personality types. In particular, there may be some overlap with concepts of the narcissistic and the Icarian personalities, for both derive from the psychoanalytic implications of two basic myths in which different forms of hubris lead to self-destruction. Yet the concept introduced here is substantially different because it treats the Nemesis dimension as an essential part of the mindset or personality, something the other two concepts do not assume. For background literature sources, see the citations in the full text of the report summarized here. One useful example is Jerrold M. Post, "Dreams of Glory and the Life Cycle," *Journal of Political and Military Sociology*, Spring 1984, pp. 49-60.
defiance, and an extreme overconfidence in one's ability and right to get away with whatever one wishes, to the point of overstepping established boundaries and disdaining the cardinal virtues of life. In ancient literature, hubris afflicted kings and conquerors who, though they were endowed with great leadership abilities, ultimately abused their power and authority and challenged the divine order of nature to gratify their own vanity. Thus hubris is no ordinary evil: It inflates a person to exceed the fate and fortune ordained by the gods, thereby arousing their envy and angering them to restore justice and equilibrium. Nemesis was the obscure goddess of divine retribution, righteous anger, and Olympian vengeance. Initially conceived as the personification of moral reverence for law, she evolved into a fatal deity who intervened in human affairs to restore equilibrium when it had been disturbed, usually by persons who had attained excessive power and wealth. Hubris in particular attracted Nemesis, who then humiliated and destroyed those who manifested it, often by means of terror and devastation. Thus Nemesis was essentially a destructive force, wreaking perennial vengeance: The battle won, she did not turn to constructive tasks of renewal; that was for others to do.

A New Dynamic: Hubris and Nemesis Fused

Fidel Castro, like many other powerful, charismatic leaders, has often shown himself to be filled with hubris. He arrogates to himself virtually all power in Cuba, pursues grandiose ambitions as a global and regional actor, and seeks immortality by combating a far more powerful adversary. He may thus seem ripe for doing something that will lead to his downfall.

Notwithstanding the possibility that this may yet happen, this way of looking at Castro (and others like him) ignores the fact that in addition to having hubris, he has also internalized a self-appointed role as Nemesis: He long ago committed himself to being the Nemesis of the world's greatest power, the United States (which he thus attacks as the epitome of hubris in Latin America). For example, while fighting in the Sierra Maestra in June 1958, he confided to Celia Sánchez, one of his closest, most loyal followers, that:

When I saw rockets firing . . . I swore to myself that the North Americans were going to pay dearly for what they were doing. When this war is over a much wider and bigger war will commence for me:
the war I am going to wage against them. I am aware that this is my true destiny.  

Thus Castro's hubris is no ordinary hubris, for a crucial part of it is to play the role of Nemesis.

The point of all this is to identify the existence of the extraordinary mindset we term the "hubris-nemesis complex." In it, the two forces no longer stand apart, contradicting each other. They have coalesced at the core of Castro's nature, becoming compatible contradictions that, far from destroying him, impart incredible energy, ambition, and dynamism. To be as powerful as his hubris requires, he must fulfill a role as the Nemesis of the United States; and to fulfill this role, he must possess absolute power at home and relentlessly seek to expand it abroad. Thus the complex helps to illuminate the fact that Castro (like other radical Third World leaders) constantly exhibits the distinctive traits described below.

A constructive-destructive messianism. Castro sees himself fulfilling, if not exceeding, the historical legacies of Simón Bolívar and José Martí. And he sets goals that are often unattainable or unreasonable, like the 1970 superharvest of 10 million tons, the construction of 100,000 housing units annually between 1971 and 1975, and the order to Cuban contingents on Grenada not to surrender to U.S. forces.

High ideals that moralize violence. Even as he offers something great to love (the revolution), Castro offers something even greater to hate (the United States). His overall vision and high-minded rhetoric ultimately require wreaking a great deal of destructive violence abroad. And that is the passion that consumes him.

A sense of struggle that may become self-sacrificial. Castro relishes the challenge of terrible odds and threats that confirm his sense of pride and invincibility. Thus he thrives on defying the United States; for example, he took extraordinary delight in the prospect of acquiring nuclear-armed missiles and provoking a superpower confrontation in 1962.  

Despite the resolution of that crisis, he continues to

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4Unfortunately for the United States, the Third World appears to have more leaders exhibiting this complex today than at any other time in recent memory.

5As Soviet medium- and intermediate-range missiles were arriving in Cuba in early September, Castro declared, "Cuba is now ready to wage the decisive battle against the United States." (Bohemia (Havana), September 7, 1962, pp. 58-59.) When the crisis began to unfold, according to an eyewitness, "He felt like one of the powerful, as if he were involved in world-changing events. In any case, he didn't think that there would be a real conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union. And if there were an invasion, it wouldn't be his fault. Don't forget, Fidel gets his kicks from war and high
regard accommodation and compromise with “imperialism” as weakness. Though not suicidal, he might prefer martyrdom to surrender or humiliation.

**Absolute power, loyalty, and attention.** As an all-consuming, self-centric leader, he is intolerant of opposition and insists on total fealty that bars any form of abandonment (including suicide) by his subordinates. He cannot tolerate being ignored or upstaged, at home or abroad. And he is dedicated to using an ambitious “internationalist” foreign policy to play a global role that includes sending combat troops to Africa and military advisers to Nicaragua, and actively assisting guerrilla movements in Central America.

No matter what Castro’s tack may be at any particular time, his hubris-nemesis complex is ingrained and ever-present. He may never relinquish his desire to be godlike and harm the United States. The complex does not permit any compromise or accommodation with the United States on core issues. This helps to explain why he embarked upon his military adventurism in Angola and Ethiopia precisely at a time when the Ford and especially the Carter administrations were actively seeking a more normalized relationship with Cuba. It also means that he is unlikely to accept a Cuban-U.S. accommodation, even if that were the only way to ensure the survival of his regime or his troops in Nicaragua or Angola, as was the case in Grenada.

Thus it would be an error to view Castro as just another perhaps quixotic but essentially rational, pragmatic actor who ultimately will respond to economic inducements or military threats, or a combination of them. Committed from the outset to fulfilling his anti-American destiny, he remains ready to put Cuba at risk; he has recently even scorched the U.S. nuclear arsenal in a way that suggests his complex may include a latent *Gotterdammerung* tendency. In the short term, however, he is capable of calculated pragmatic behavior that feigns moderation and preserves his power as he prepares to return to advancing his grand long-term ambitions.

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6Castro has revealed as much in reflecting on his early training in Jesuit schools where “the main argument they use is reward or punishment.” “[I]n my opinion, that which is done through fear of punishment or in hopes of reward is not entirely generous, not totally worthy, and does not deserve praise, admiration, or respect.” (Translated from *Fidel e a Religião:* *Conversas con Frei Betto*, São Paulo, 1985.)

7Castro has not hesitated to defy the fantasy of nuclear annihilation by the United States, as suggested by his boast last June: “What can they do, drop three nuclear bombs here? No, they can’t do that. Besides, they know we aren’t afraid of their three nuclear bombs, which is even more important. Three nuclear bombs or 100, 1,000 or 10,000 nuclear bombs amount to something if you are afraid of them, but if you aren’t they’re chicken excrement, that’s all.” (*Granma Weekly Review* (Havana), June 16, 1985, p. 6.)
CASTRO'S MODUS OPERANDI AGAINST ADVERSARIES

As a manifestation of his mindset as well as his natural leadership abilities, Castro has developed a unique modus operandi that he has used in dealing with his adversaries, and sometimes also with his allies. The recurrent behavioral traits making up this pattern have exhibited remarkable constancy from early in his childhood to the present day.\(^8\)

Castro as a Child and Youth: El Niño Malcriado

As the niño malcriado, or misbehaving child, and later as a student politician and revolutionary leader, Castro developed and exploited certain patterns of conflictive, duplicitous behavior that enabled him to get his way with parents, guardians, schoolteachers, and fellow students, and subsequently to gain power and assert himself on the world stage. In assuming the role of the niño malcriado, Castro has repeatedly engaged in:

- **Violence-prone rebelliousness, which, even when risky, has often yielded much higher returns than conformity**—as evidenced in his repeated fistfights to gain supremacy over his schoolmates, his revolutionary career against Batista, and still later, his efforts to promote revolution elsewhere.

- **Manipulative confrontation, which often forced concessions from allies as well as adversaries**—e.g., he thwarted the authority of his guardians when he was seven years old in order to be sent to boarding school; this trait was also evident later in his dealings with both the Soviets and the United States.

- **Extortion to deter or intimidate an opponent**—he threatened to set fire to his parents' home unless he was allowed to return to school, and he later supported revolutionary subversion against Latin American governments that opposed him.

- **Vengeful punishment against those who have thwarted him**—he threatened to shoot a schoolmate who had beaten him up, and he has likewise threatened his internal enemies and those who

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\(^8\)The behavioral traits this study distills from a review of Castro's childhood, youth, and early adult history come primarily from his own reminiscences in interviews, the most recent in 1985, as well as from numerous published accounts, including one by a family member (his sister, Juanita), a range of childhood and student acquaintances, and colleagues from his times as a guerrilla fighter and government leader. Although methodologically different, this analysis takes its inspiration from a pathfinding study by Nathan Leites, *A Study of Bolshevism*, Glencoe, Illinois: Free Press, 1963, which analyzed the "operational codes" of Lenin and other Soviet leaders. Another relevant approach is Vamik D. Volkan and Norman Itzkowitz, *The Immortal Ataturk—A Psychobiography*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984.
have opposed him on the international front, including the Venezuelan government in the 1960s and the Colombian government after 1979.

- **Claiming high principles to mask his own self-interest**—he justified his rebellious childhood behavior on the basis of unfair parental authority, and he now actively supports violent movements on the basis of righting social injustices, extending revolutionary solidarity, and engaging in self-defense.

- **Deceitfulness to conceal his intentions**—he falsified his grades and parents' signatures in grade school, disguised his Marxism-Leninism upon coming to power, and presently masks his involvements in Central America and Cuba's domestic problems and human rights abuses.

**Later Revolutionary Traits: The Fidelista Mentality**

Castro's experiences during the revolutionary struggle of the 1950s congealed a *fidelista* mentality that, beginning with the attack on the Moncada barracks in 1953, has included a penchant for:

- **Revolutionary maximalism, in which he seeks major strategic breakthroughs**—as with his initial realignment with the Soviets in 1959–60, his 1970 sugar harvest goal of 10 million tons, and his plunge into Africa a decade ago.

- **High risk-taking in ventures that he believes can potentially yield high payoffs**—as evidenced most recently by his involvements in Grenada, Nicaragua, and El Salvador.

The guerrilla struggle in the Sierra Maestra strengthened Castro's radical propensities but added a prudential component:

- **Primacy of subjective forces, whereby he remains convinced that human volition can overcome structural constraints**—as evidenced by the Rebel Army's victory over Batista, Cuba's ascendancy in world politics, and Castro's success in coping with the "Colossus of the North."

- **Opportunism, as in his belief that historical shifts and openings must be seized**—e.g., Cuba's exploitation of developments in Africa and Central America, and the Soviet Union's expansionist surge of the 1970s.

- **Tactical pragmatism to avoid a head-on collision or strategic loss**—as occurred when he maneuvered to limit Cuba's intervention in the Grenadian crisis to the Cuban forces on the island.
Constancy in Strategic Goals and Behavior

Ever since achieving power in Cuba, Castro has continually held onto a set of "maximalist" objectives that have imparted an offensive quality to his international behavior. These objectives have included leading the Third World struggle against the United States and its imperialism, extending his global influence through Cuba's political and military presence, promoting the rise of new revolutionary-left regimes allied with him, increasing Cuba's military capabilities as a regional and global actor, and gaining a wider latitude of action through leverage over Moscow.

These power-maximizing goals cannot be realized through pragmatic or prudential behavior. Yet at times Castro does resort to such behavior. A review of specific incidents thus indicates that his modus operandi fits the following syllogism:

- Under certain conditions, pragmatism may be required to buy time, conserve power, and protect realized gains.
- Rebelliousness, radicalism, and opportunism, however, are the only means by which long-term maximum objectives can be attained.
- Pragmatism is thus a short-term tactic that must not stand in the way of his resuming the revolutionary offensive when the opportunity reemerges.9

Castro is currently constrained from pursuing his maximum goals. He has thus been following a less venturesome foreign policy course. Whether he resumes the offensive soon will depend in large part on his reading of Cuba's internal situation and the international correlation of forces.

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9Manuel Sánchez Pérez arrives at essentially the same conclusions. He says that Castro is committed to "military adventures" abroad because that is the only means he has of effectively projecting his own and Cuba's image onto the international stage. Havana's off-and-on overtures toward the United States, Sánchez says, enable Castro to manipulate the U.S.-Cuban relationship to his own domestic political advantage when he chooses to blame Washington for "aggression" or an "unjustified act" toward Cuba. "I think," Sánchez adds, "that there is no serious intention [by Castro] to reconcile himself with the United States." (Radio interview with Manuel Sánchez Pérez, Madrid, December 1986.)
III. CASTRO AND CUBA

As he surveys the domestic scene following the Third Party Congress held in February 1986, Castro may find that he has had to make concessions to Moscow and elites within his regime, but that his own personal power remains relatively secure. His regime rests on a powerful state apparatus for assuring national defense, internal security, and extensive political control over the populace. Still, he faces new political and especially economic challenges, as well as continuing pressures from the Soviets, that are taxing his leadership abilities and forcing him to delegate more power and authority to his brother Raúl.

MANAGING AND RECONSTITUTING ELITE COALITIONS

Castro cannot rule alone. Within the top echelons of Cuba’s elite, he must maintain a balance among the older generation of guerrilla veterans and loyalists and the younger generation of civilian and military elites whose expertise is needed to run the government and carry out Cuba’s “internationalist” missions. Because generational tensions have been building, he has had to make way for the relative ascendance of the “children of the revolution” as evidenced by the younger composition of the new Central Committee of the PCC. And although the black-mulatto composition of the Political Bureau remains unchanged (still greatly underrepresenting the large Afro-Cuban population), Castro has increased the percentage of blacks and mulattos in the new Central Committee to counter domestic and foreign criticisms of his regime’s racial makeup.²

¹According to one Havana-based report, “Fidel Castro can no longer carry out his will, but nothing can happen against his will.” (Die Zeit, February 21, 1986, p. 6.)

²Because of the regime’s essentially white, middle-class Hispanic origins, the racial issue has remained a highly sensitive one. Official census figures on race have either been unavailable or unreliable according to ethnologists and demographers. Given the largely white exodus from the island after 1960 and the rapid growth of the black population since then, it is estimated that Afro-Cubans presently account for 50 and perhaps even as much as 66 percent of the population.

Blacks and mulattos were represented by only one black, Juan Almeida, in the Political Bureau between 1965 and 1975. Almeida was joined by Blas Roca in the 1975 and 1980 Political Bureau, while Miguel José Cano Blanco was added as an alternate (non-voting) member in 1980, but was dropped in 1986. In 1986, the aging Blas Roca was also dropped and replaced by Esteban Lazo Hernández as full member, which left the number of Afro-Cubans (2) unchanged in the 14-member Political Bureau. However, preliminary analysis indicates that black-mulatto representation rose from 12 percent of the 1980 Central Committee’s full and alternate membership to an estimated 20 percent of the
More significantly still, Castro was obliged to retire three *fidelista* guerrilla veterans—the so-called *historicos*—including the former Minister of Interior, Ramiro Valdés, from the 1986 Political Bureau because of their incompetence. At the same time, Raúl Castro’s position was strengthened with the elevation of two prominent *raulistas*, Vilma Espín and Division General Abelardo Colomé, to full membership in the ruling party organ.4

The reshuffling of high government and party officials that started in early 1985 and ended with the Third Party Congress stems partly from Soviet pressures for administrative reforms, the appointment of more competent leaders, and more efficient management of the economy. Because these Soviet pressures found resonance among Cuban technocrats and other elites, they threatened to jeopardize Castro’s *caudilloism* and policymaking prerogatives. Reacting in July 1985, he dismissed Humberto Pérez, a Moscow-trained technocrat who had tried to implement a Soviet-based system of economic management and planning.5

These various balancing acts have enabled Castro to defuse Soviet pressures by appointing *raulistas*, who are generally presumed to be more competent and more pro-Soviet than their *fidelista* colleagues. Yet this also means the Castro dynasty has become even more entrenched. Fidel remains very much in command because he can count on the loyalty of his brother, whereas the *fidelistas* (6) and *raulistas* (5) now dominate the 14-member Political Bureau to an even greater extent than before.

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1986 full membership. Although still modest, this increase suggests that the Castro regime recognizes that it can no longer ignore the racial problem, particularly as Afro-Cubans reportedly have accounted for the major share of Cuban combat forces in Angola.

3Also retired were Guillermo García, the former Minister of Transportation, and Sergio del Valle, the former Minister of Public Health. As prominent members of Castro’s guerrilla elite, Valdés, García, and del Valle had been members of the Political Bureau since its formation in 1965.

4Vilma Espín is Raúl’s former guerrilla companion and wife, and head of the Cuban Federation of Women. Abelardo Colomé also fought with Raúl, headed Cuba’s victorious forces in Angola in 1975–76, and is a First Vice Minister in the Ministry of the Revolutionary Armed Forces.

5Humberto Pérez was Vice-President in the Council of Ministers, head of the central planning board (JUCEPLAN), and alternate member in the Political Bureau. He initially was viewed as the regime’s “golden boy,” according to Sánchez Pérez, but he “failed because he was not permitted to continue with the [Soviet-style] policy changes which might have represented a relatively greater increase in efficiency within the Cuban economy.” (Radio interview with Manuel Sánchez Pérez, Madrid, December 1985.)
CONTROLLING THE MILITARY AND SOCIETY

Castro cannot ignore the military, the Revolutionary Armed Forces (FAR). The FAR may still be the strongest institution within Cuba, having links to the Soviet military. There are signs that its younger, battle-tested, more professional officer class is becoming restless over Castro’s doctrine of “people’s war,” promotional issues, and Cuba’s overseas military commitments. In particular, the ten-year old civil war in Angola has become a far cry from the glory days of the mid- to late 1970s when the victorious Cuban army was seen as the scourge of Africa. Castro may have thus elevated Division General Abelardo Colome, a First Vice Minister in the Ministry of the Revolutionary Armed Forces, to full membership in the new Political Bureau to assure the military’s institutional interests—or to further assure the party’s control over the FAR.6

Apparently to counterbalance the FAR, Castro has continued the buildup of the Territorial Troop Militia (MTT) to 1.5 million members. Unlike the FAR, the MTT is unencumbered by institutional or professional links to the Soviet military and is led directly by the party.7 Providing the mass base for the new “people’s war” doctrine, the MTT additionally can be used not only to defend the island in the event of U.S. aggression, but also (and perhaps more likely) to release FAR units for future military missions abroad. Meanwhile, the MTT has enabled Castro to militarize society in order to heighten social control and revive the revolutionary commitment of the popular masses.

NEW ECONOMIC PRIORITIES

Pressed by Moscow, the new “economic war of the whole people” that Castro launched at the end of 1984 signaled a recognition that his regime must give highest priority to making efficient use of Soviet economic assistance, increasing production, and fulfilling trade obligations. But his regime faces serious obstacles in trying to achieve its economic priorities: drought, Hurricane Kate, and now collapsing oil prices in 1986 promise lower foreign exchange earnings on the international market for Cuban sugar and (Soviet-supplied) petroleum exports.

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6Division Generals Senén Casas Regueiro and Ulises Rosales del Toro are Political Bureau alternate members as well. Abelardo Colome’s ascendency over the more senior Senén Casas may be laying the groundwork for him to replace Raúl as Minister of the Revolutionary Armed Forces at some future date.

7The MTT is separate from the FAR and has access to its own light weapons and ammunition. Although FAR officers may serve as advisers, MTT units are controlled by the party’s First Secretaries at the provincial and municipal levels, who in turn are responsible to Castro as PCC First Secretary.
If sugar prices continue to rise, Cuba might not be able to expand its sugar exports to the West appreciably because of its trade commitments to the Soviet bloc. And despite its 1982 investment law, the Castro regime has thus far been unable to attract wary Western investors to Cuba.

At the Third Party Congress, Castro read off a litany of ills that plague Cuba's mismanaged and malfunctioning economy. But he, along with his followers, as well as elements of the bureaucracy, are fundamentally opposed to decentralization and other liberalizing reforms that might revitalize the economy. Instead, they continue to emphasize political solutions to economic problems. Unless the Soviet Union itself adopts Hungarian-type reforms, which appears remote, there is little likelihood that the new generation of technocrats can do so on their own in Cuba.

IMPLICATIONS: THE NEED TO BUY TIME AND TRIUMPH ANEW

In sum, the current Cuban situation cannot be to Castro's liking: He is having to make adjustments in his own power base; he is in for a long spell of internal regime jockeying; he must balance increasingly complex domestic forces and priorities; and he must fend off Soviet influence. He can no longer expect dramatic domestic achievements, and he will be frustrated by seemingly intractable economic problems. He sees that Cuba's internal situation is increasingly a matter of administration rather than leadership.

Castro is thus likely to turn the day-to-day administration of the government and economy over to Raúl. His brother's authority has been strengthened by the removal of old-guard fidelistas from high-level posts in both the government and the party. From Castro's vantage point, this arrangement should enable him to preserve his power, including ultimate veto power over major policy decisions, while meeting Soviet demands for more efficient administration. It also will enable him to concentrate on international matters, which is his primary interest and an area in which he needs to triumph anew in order to revitalize his stature at home and abroad.
IV. CASTRO AND THE WORLD

Just as domestic problems are pressing in on him, Castro faces an international environment that is virtually the reverse of what it was ten years ago when he was riding high. By now, Grenada is gone, Nicaragua is under siege, the Non-Aligned Movement is in decline, and the international correlation of forces is shifting in ways that have created uncertainties as to which superpower is becoming stronger and which will ultimately win. For the moment, the international situation seems to be constraining him from pursuing a maximalist course in world affairs.

SUPERPOWER CONSTRAINTS

A Stronger, More Assertive United States

In watching and weighing U.S. foreign policy behavior across almost three decades, Castro has repeatedly focused on three aspects that are fairly indicative of his overall assessment:

- The divisions and lack of consensus in U.S. Congressional and public opinion about U.S. roles abroad.
- The domestic and international constraints on the application of U.S. military power abroad.
- Castro’s ability to engage each administration in a disarming dialogue about potential accommodation.

Events during the Reagan administration have diminished his prior optimism in each respect.

Castro seems aware of the resurgence of U.S. military might and political resolve. He has had great difficulty in trying to manipulate the current U.S. administration and political process. Lacking security guarantees from Moscow, he must be concerned that Cuba remains the most exposed salient in the Soviet Union’s extended empire. In case of an East-West crisis, for example, Cuba could become a likely U.S. target because of its Soviet military alliance and its potential threat to critical U.S. sea lanes of communication in the Caribbean. Castro surely knows Cuba would become vulnerable to a U.S. attack in the context of a U.S.-Nicaraguan crisis. In the meantime, he must be disturbed that the United States has recently taken military action against the Khaddafi regime.
A Tougher But More Cautious Soviet Union

With regard to the Soviet Union, Castro's history of behavior over the past decade or two indicates that he pays close attention to the following:

- Soviet-bloc support for the Cuban economy.
- Soviet military expansionism and/or support for revolution in the Third World, with allowances for Cuba to play a strong allied role.
- The presence of Soviet political leaders supportive of Castro's views.

In each respect, Castro faces new uncertainties.

The Gorbachev regime is shifting priorities to domestic economic issues and demanding better economic performance from its clients. It appears intent on stabilizing superpower relations and less inclined to launch a new expansionist drive into the Third World—although it will surely work to consolidate its gains in Afghanistan, Angola, and Nicaragua. Gorbachev's keynote address at the Twenty-Seventh Party Congress in February 1986 was notable for the absence of traditional Kremlin pledges to support "wars of national liberation" and "national liberation struggles," the first such omission at a Party Congress in thirty years. This apparent Soviet deemphasis on the Third World must be profoundly disquieting to Castro because it is precisely in Third World arenas where he has been able to fulfill his maximalist ambitions, particularly when he has had Soviet backing. Overall, Castro faces a tougher and less familiar Soviet leadership under Gorbachev that could shift the foundations of the Soviet-Cuban relationship from its past ideological, political, and strategic underpinnings to new administrative and economic priorities—hardly Castro's strengths.

RISKS, SCHISMS, AND FEW OPPORTUNITIES IN THE THIRD WORLD

Castro is proud of the revolutionary advances in Angola and Nicaragua; if they are consolidated, he will have helped change the geopolitical map of the world in his favor. Meanwhile, he retains hopes for new breakthroughs elsewhere. But as a whole, current trends in the Third World and the North-South struggle are not to his liking:

- While potential opportunities loom in southern Africa, Soviet policy and a continuation of adverse military trends could further drag Cuba into a costly war in Angola.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Prospects for violent revolutions are receding in Central America, while the defense of Nicaragua may jeopardize Cuba's own security.

- The U.S.-led intervention in Grenada and the recent ouster of the Duvalier regime from Haiti have strengthened U.S. influence in the Caribbean.

- Opportunities for exploiting the Latin American debt crisis are offset by the renewal of democratic tendencies and the rise of moderate civilian governments interested in good economic relations with the United States and the West.

- The Non-Aligned Movement and the militant campaign for a "new international economic order" have declined in importance as anti-U.S. and anti-imperialist vehicles.

- The newly industrializing countries of Southeast Asia, relying on market- and export-oriented capitalist economies, provide successful performance models that stand in contrast to Cuba and other struggling Socialist economies.

- Other militantly anti-American countries, notably Libya and Iran, have taken to playing on the world stage in recent years; but far from being willing allies of Cuba, they have acted partly as competitors.

For Castro, these trends must be all the more disturbing because they are taking place precisely in the theaters where he has traditionally had great influence and success.

This is not to say that Castro does not have opportunities. He does, especially in southern Africa and parts of the Caribbean Basin. But taking advantage of them will entail far higher risks than was the case in the mid- to late 1970s. Cuba may not have the requisite Soviet backing for new military adventures; the United States may not be neutralized; the local military situation may not be winnable for Cuban forces; and Cuban military intervention may not be so easily legitimized as it was when Cuba dispatched combat troops to Angola and Ethiopia.  

1 The Soviet Union appears to be more committed to consolidating its gains in Angola than in Nicaragua, if only because the latter's location is militarily so risky. Castro knows from the Grenadian experience that Moscow will not commit Soviet power to ensure the survival of the Sandinista regime; as in Grenada, he thus may have to stand alone and maneuver carefully in the event of a U.S.-Nicaraguan conflict. In Angola, the Soviets may be willing support the regime of the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) to the extent of infusing Soviet heavy weapons, advisers, and Cuban combat forces. Although Castro may thus count on Soviet backing in Angola, he may still fear that his troops could become mired in an increasingly protracted and bloody war, particularly if Jonas Savimbi's National Union for the Total Independence of South Africa (UNITA) receives substantial U.S. as well as South African support.
Castro may still resort to revolutionary extortion, whereby he may threaten to support local radical movements or otherwise subvert governments that may thwart his ambitions (e.g., Honduras).

**IMPLICATIONS: BE PRUDENT WHILE AWAITING NEW OPPORTUNITIES**

These generally adverse developments have obliged Castro to alter course momentarily and pursue a more prudent posture. Yet it is out of character for him to submit to "objective" forces for long. On the contrary, his nature prevents him from moving toward a real accommodation with the United States, ceasing his "anti-imperialist" struggle, or openly abandoning his clients in Nicaragua and Angola. He needs to recover from his Grenadian debacle and to triumph anew—if not militarily, at least politically—by exploiting new targets of opportunity.

Playing more the statesman than the revolutionary during much of 1985, he presented himself as Latin America's champion on the debt issue, and thus campaigned to divide the "two Americas" in ways that would help him to overcome Cuba's political isolation in much of the region. Meanwhile, he quietly entered the field of religion, by cultivating U.S. Catholic bishops and radical priests from around the world, and by giving interviews incorporated into his new book about liberation theology. He evidently is aiming to split the Catholic Church, create a new united front among radical Catholics and Marxist revolutionaries, and indirectly help to shield Nicaragua and Cuba from aggressive U.S. moves.

Castro's recent moves on these fronts, however, are not leading to the kinds of breakthroughs that seem likely to revitalize his leadership image and gratify his maximalist ambitions. His debt campaign has evoked little official support in Latin America. If his religious and diplomatic offensives are to be credible, he will have to temper his conduct. Overall, this could be quite frustrating to him. As a former Cuban Vice Minister recently reported, Castro's remaining years are ebbing away, compelling him to search for new opportunities on the international front that will assure his immortality.\(^2\) Over the longer run, the deteriorating domestic and international situations in South Africa and Chile, or possibly renewed unrest in the Caribbean, could provide him with the possibility of new breakthroughs.

V. CASTRO AND HIS FUTURE OPTIONS

Castro’s basic patterns of thinking and acting are set. Depending on how he views the world at any particular time, his latitude of response tends to range from revolutionary maximalism (his preferred policy mode for the long term) to tactical pragmatism (his defensive policy mode when necessary for the short term). This analysis concludes with an examination of these two distinct ways of responding to events and taking initiatives on the international stage.

TWO POLICY MODES

As Castro maneuvers through the rest of the Reagan administration’s term of office, he will tend to opt for one of the two types of international strategies that have characterized his behavior in the past:

1. He may continue a defensive policy of tactical pragmatism, seeking to assure the security of his regime, preserve established gains, and disarm or confuse adversaries through diplomatic and political initiatives. This more prudent, minimalist posture in the late 1980s would reflect not only his concern for his nation’s security, but also a lack of opportunity to do anything truly ambitious. And once again, such a posture would not mean accommodation with the United States, or changes in Cuba’s commitments to the Soviet Union, Nicaragua, and Angola, or abandonment of revolutionary subversion. Castro’s more prudent stance must thus be understood as relative to his maximalist posture.

2. Alternatively, he may embark upon an offensive policy of revolutionary maximalism, once again pursuing his ambitious foreign policy objectives of:
   • Leading the Third World struggle against the United States.
   • Extending Cuba’s influence in Africa and Latin America.
   • Promoting the rise of Marxist regimes in the Caribbean Basin.
   • Extending Cuba’s capabilities as a regional and global actor.
   • Regaining leverage vis-à-vis the Soviet Union.

These goals would be predicated largely on the employment of conventional (military) and unconventional (guerrilla) forms of violence. Violence is an essential element of Castro’s modus operandi; it has led to his greatest triumphs at home and abroad, starting with the
overthrow of Batista and ending with Cuba's military victories in
Africa. Under this policy mode, he would thus be highly inclined to
send military and guerrilla advisers abroad (to Namibia or South
Africa) or to increase their present levels (in Angola, Nicaragua, or
Ethiopia).

KEY VARIABLES IN CASTRO'S FUTURE CALCULUS

The strategic option Castro chooses for the rest of the 1980s will
depend on his assessment of (1) Cuba's domestic situation, (2) the U.S.
foreign policy posture, (3) the Soviet foreign policy posture, (4) the
openings in the Third World, and (5) the situation facing Cuba's
clients. Of these five variables, the Soviet Union's international pos-
ture is most critical to Castro because, ultimately, Soviet policies set
the basic parameters for his behavior. Still, as a rule of thumb:

- The more favorable his assessments are regarding each of these
  five factors, especially on the international front and with
  respect to Soviet policy, the more Castro will be inclined to
  resume a maximalist revolutionary strategy.
- The less favorable his assessment, the more he will be obliged
to opt for tactical pragmatism and await more favorable
developments.

ALTERNATIVE SCENARIOS AND CASTRO'S OPTIONS

The following scenarios illustrate how these factors may play out in
Castro's future assessment of his policy options.¹

Risks and Constraints: Tactical Pragmatism

If all five factors remain essentially as they are today, Castro will
find that his possibilities for revolutionary maximalism are limited.
His domestic situation would not necessarily constrain his actions
abroad, but the international arena would: There would be major risks
(U.S. power and resolve to roll back Communism), constraints (a
Soviet emphasis on consolidating present gains rather than expanding
militarily), and few opportunities for new breakthroughs (the Third

¹These scenarios are meant to be illustrative rather than predictive. They are con-
structed to show the kinds of plausible situations that may incline Castro to pursue one
strategy mode over the other, consistent with his hubris-nemesis complex and modus
operandi.
World arena). Hence, as he has done since the Grenada debacle of 1983, Castro would continue to opt for a stratagem of tactical pragmatism.

Nicaragua and Angola might still present potential opportunities for Cuba to assume a greater role, however, partly because the Soviets also want to consolidate the Marxist-Leninist regimes there. For example, Cuban advisers would continue working with the Sandinista army to improve its combat proficiency against the Contras. Cuban military personnel would also operate and maintain advanced weapon systems to enable the MPLA forces to renew their offensive against UNITA. In both situations, however, Castro would seek to maintain a low profile by limiting the level of direct Cuban involvement in combat operations, thereby minimizing the military and political risks.

Similarly, Havana's policy of solidarity with and training of assorted Latin American revolutionaries would be maintained, but Castro would be selective in his active revolutionary subversion because of the absence of major targets of opportunity. In the meantime, he would move on the diplomatic, political, and religious fronts to attract favorable publicity and defuse potential international reaction to his policies.

New Opportunities: Revolutionary Maximalism

If, on the other hand, the domestic and U.S. factors remain the same, but the Soviet, Third World, and client-regime factors become more favorable, Castro would be more inclined to resume a revolutionary maximalist course, despite the risks involved. Such a situation could arise if the Soviets became bolder in the Third World, the South African situation deteriorated, and Nicaragua and Angola began winning their respective wars against the Contras and UNITA.

In this scenario, however, the prospect of direct U.S. intervention to oust the Sandinistas would also be likely to increase. Referring to such a contingency following the U.S.-East Caribbean action in Grenada, Castro acknowledged that Cuba's limited military capabilities would prevent it from defending Nicaragua. Thus, a prospective U.S. intervention in Nicaragua would again present him with a serious dilemma: He would risk losing an important ally in Central America if he did not defend Nicaragua, but he might risk a military showdown with the United States if he tried to assist Managua directly, either unilaterally or multilaterally through Cuban and Latin American "volunteers."

To escape such a dilemma, Castro might prefer to regain the revolutionary offensive in southern Africa, perhaps even trying to link a Cuban escalation in Angola with Nicaragua's security. Provided he secured Soviet permission and support, he could increase Cuba's mili-
tary presence on behalf of the MPLA, with Cuban forces assuming a
direct combat role in Angola, for example, by flying ground support
missions against UNITA, providing air cover for MPLA troops, and
perhaps even spearheading a new offensive as the Cuban expeditionary
force did in the Ogaden in 1977–78.2 An intensified Cuban role in
Angola could be expanded into Namibia and perhaps even into trou-
bled South Africa as well by actively backing SWAPO (South-West
African People’s Organization) and the ANC (African National
Congress), respectively. Castro could justify such a policy as a national
war of liberation against South Africa’s hated apartheid regime,
thereby rallying Black Africa’s support, and could at the same time
help legitimize the Soviet foothold in southern Africa.3

Such a gambit would be tantamount to a fidelista version of lateral
escalation, whereby Castro would seek to intensify crisis conditions
in southern Africa in order to distract and constrain the United States
from intervening in Nicaragua. Indeed, his past calls for the creation
of “new Sierra Maestras” and “many Vietnams” indicate that, as a glo-
bal strategist, he has long thought about how to divide U.S. attention
and military capabilities in just such a fashion. Were he to succeed in
this instance, he would triumph anew on both the African and Central
American fronts.

He would, of course, have to face many practical problems and
risks—among them, logistical difficulties in southern Africa, likely
clashes with superior South African forces, overextension of Cuba’s
military commitments, increased vulnerability to U.S. counterescal-
ation in Nicaragua, and likely resistance from the Cuban military. Yet,
his capacity to think globally and act as a player on the world stage
should not be underestimated as it was in the 1970s. Nor should it be
forgotten that his hubris-nemesis complex and audacious pattern of
behavior could lead him to try to deal the United States a strategic
defeat through renewed Cuban military (or guerrilla) involvement in
the Third World, particularly in southern Africa.

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2Because of the existence of the 1.5-million-strong MTT, Castro has boasted that
Cuba could dispatch 100,000 soldiers to Angola without weakening Cuban defenses. (See
Granma Weekly Review, June 9, 1985, p. 3.)

3Such a gambit is not farfetched. According to information supplied by “a senior
government official in Havana” to the London Observer last November, Havana
approached Moscow to obtain “Soviet clearance and support to issue a formal declaration
of war against South Africa to try to turn the struggle against the white regime into an
international crusade such as that fought against Hitler.” Allegedly, the Cubans pressed
the Soviets to support a full-scale war on grounds that it would “lift Cuban and Soviet
prestige in the Third World and with anti-apartheid campaigners,” and that with enough
Soviet weapons the Cubans “could win a war against South Africa.” Cuban operations
could also take the form of commando raids and guerrilla training. (The Observer,
November 24, 1985.)