

Philip Brenner

From _____

Confrontation
to **NEGOTIATION**
U.S. Relations with Cuba

A PACCA BOOK
Westview Press

FROM CONFRONTATION
TO NEGOTIATION
U.S. Relations with Cuba

Philip Brenner

A PACCA BOOK

WESTVIEW PRESS
BOULDER AND LONDON

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

Copyright © 1988 by Policy Alternatives for the Caribbean and Central America

Published in 1988 in the United States of America by Westview Press, Inc.; Frederick A. Praeger, Publisher; 5500 Central Avenue, Boulder, Colorado 80301

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Brenner, Philip.

From confrontation to negotiation: U.S. relations with Cuba/
Philip Brenner.

p. cm.

Bibliography: p.

Includes index.

ISBN 0-8133-7507-X. ISBN 0-8133-7509-6 (pbk.)

1. United States—Foreign relations—Cuba. 2. Cuba—Foreign
relations—United States. 3. United States—Foreign
relations—1981– 4. Cuba—Foreign relations—1959– I. Title.
E183.8.C9B74 1988
327.7307291—dc19

87-33985
CIP

Printed and bound in the United States of America



The paper used in this publication meets the requirements of the American National Standard for Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials Z39.48-1984.

FROM CONFRONTATION
TO NEGOTIATION
U.S. Relations with Cuba

About the Book and Author

Nearly thirty years have passed since the United States first attempted to overthrow the fledgling Castro government. Despite enormous changes in the hemisphere, significant developments in the nature of Cuba's international relations, and an end to the cold war consensus in the United States that quietly sanctioned interference in and obstruction of Third World politics, U.S. policy toward Cuba has changed very little: It still embodies the failed dream of isolating Cuba and destroying the Cuban revolution.

In *From Confrontation to Negotiation: U.S. Relations with Cuba*, Philip Brenner provides a thoughtful overview of U.S.-Cuban relations since 1898, with an emphasis on the past ten years. Assumptions, goals, and continuities in U.S. policy are highlighted. He then offers a clear picture of the issues that divide the two countries and around which any discussions for a normalization of relations would likely turn.

Could discussions occur? Is a call for a less hostile relationship between the United States and Cuba politically feasible? What are the chances that Cuba and the United States can actually work out an accommodation? Dr. Brenner analyzes the domestic political factors in each country that shape policy and that might present possibilities for serious discussion. He then proposes a workable alternative Cuban policy for the United States that takes into account the fundamental concerns of both countries. The policy proposal is related to the framework adopted by Policy Alternatives for the Caribbean and Central America (PACCA).

Philip Brenner is associate professor of international relations at The American University, where he teaches in the Washington Semester Program. He is a member of the board of the National Security Archive and is author of *The Limits and Possibilities of Congress* (1983).

Acknowledgments

THIS BOOK EVOLVED from a short paper prepared for a conference sponsored by Policy Alternatives for the Caribbean and Central America (PACCA), an association of scholars and policymakers. Its development owes much to the dedicated effort of the people associated with PACCA—as well as to those not affiliated with the organization—who gave much time helping me to refine the analysis and to elaborate essential portions of the book. In this sense the book was a group project, though its flaws remain mine.

A few people provided extensive comments on the entire manuscript (and in some instances on several drafts of the manuscript). Much appreciation goes to Sylvia Arrom, Carolee Bengelsdorf, Carmen Diana Deere, Saul Landau, and William LeoGrande. Several others gave me very useful suggestions at various stages in the project and no doubt will recognize their handiwork in the final product: Michael Conroy, Margaret Crahan, Xabier Gorostiaga, Richard Fagen, Peter Hakim, Rafael Hernandez, Stuart Lippe, Charles William Maynes, Marifeli Perez-Stable, Robert Pastor, Barry Sklar, Wayne Smith, and Raul Suarez.

Essential to the entire project have been the untiring efforts of the PACCA staff—Robert Stark, Colin Danby, and Alicia Torres. They helped to make this a group project by coordinating the disparate network of scholars who contributed to the creation of the book. Their concern about the book's audience, manifested through consultations with key people and through follow-up and study guides, will help make the book more useful to students, scholars, and policymakers.

My editors at Westview Press—Barbara Ellington, Beverly LeSuer, and Marian Safran—asked insightful questions that sharpened the

analysis and suggested changes that in every instance enhanced the quality of the book. It was a pleasure to work with professionals who pay such scrupulous attention to detail.

I received significant support from The American University, which provided a research grant that enabled me to compile data for the book and to write one draft. Additional assistance came from the National Security Archive, the National Council on United States–Cuban Relations, and PACCA for trips to Cuba during which I conducted interviews with Cuban leaders.

Some authors are lucky enough to have parents who take a small interest in their work. I had the great fortune that my mother, Lillian Brenner, also provided essential research for the book. With great love, devotion, and intelligence, she would scour newspapers and magazines for articles about Cuba and rush them to me.

My daughter, Sarah, was born during the course of writing this book. The unending joy she brings bolstered me on dreary days and added special purpose to the project. My hope is that the book can contribute to reduced tension between the United States and Cuba and thereby help to promote a more peaceful world for her.

Throughout the creation of this book, from its days as a brief essay to its development as papers presented at scholarly meetings to its unfolding through several drafts, my wife, Betsy Vieth, has given me wise counsel, enthusiastic support, and a home atmosphere conducive to inquiry and writing. Ultimately the book was a family project too.

Philip Brenner

Contents

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	ix
INTRODUCTION: REALISM ABOUT CUBA	1
1 U.S. POLICY TOWARD CUBA, 1898–1980	5
From Independence War to Revolution, 6	
From Conflict to Cold War: 1959–1970, 11	
The Roller Coaster Decade: 1971–1980, 17	
Notes, 25	
2 U.S. POLICY IN THE 1980s	31
Raising the Stakes, 31	
Growing Tension, 37	
Consequences of the Policy, 40	
Notes, 41	
3 ISSUES IN CONTENTION	45
U.S. Demands, 45	
Cuban Demands, 50	
Stark Contrast, 52	
Notes, 52	
4 FACTORS SHAPING CUBA'S POLICY	55
Setting of the Party Congress, 57	

	Increasing Ties to the Socialist Bloc, 60	
	Strengthening Internal Structures: Party and Military, 62	
	The Strength to Be Flexible, 65	
	Notes, 66	
5	DOMESTIC FACTORS SHAPING U.S. POLICY	71
	Interest Groups, 71	
	U.S. Congress, 75	
	Press and Public Opinion, 77	
	A Relatively Open Field, 78	
	Notes, 78	
6	A SENSIBLE POLICY	81
	A Failed Policy, 81	
	A New Policy, 85	
	The Ball Is in Our Court, 94	
	Notes, 95	
	<i>Chronology</i>	97
	<i>Suggested Readings</i>	109
	<i>Index</i>	113

Introduction: Realism About Cuba

AT A MEETING OF THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF a few months before the U.S.-sponsored Bay of Pigs invasion in April 1961, talk among the generals began to turn casually around the possibility of an invasion by U.S. troops. To the commandant of the Marine Corps, General David M. Shoup, it was clear that his colleagues envisioned Cuba as a small island, perhaps a hundred miles long. He realized that an invasion plan based on such a major misperception would lead to nothing less than catastrophe, and in horror he superimposed a map of Cuba over one of the United States. The “small island” stretched from New York to Chicago.¹

That was neither the first time, nor the last, that U.S. officials had tried to come up with an easy solution for dealing with Cuba, based on misperceptions about it. For 150 years, would-be U.S. statesmen have seen Cuba variously as a sleepy island that could be bought, annexed, or crushed; as a mindless, unsure neophyte waiting to be wooed; and today as a puppet of the Soviet Union that threatens fundamental U.S. security. Yet Cuba does not lend itself to such facile characterizations that provide ready policy prescriptions.

Instead U.S. policy should be developed on the basis of the Cuban reality, which is complex:

- Cuba is only ninety miles from the United States, and this proximity offers the potential for economic, political, and social interaction; but Cuba also has a special relationship with the

Soviet Union, which does pose a potential threat to the United States;

- Its relationship with the Soviet Union provides significant security for Cuba; but it also makes Cuba uncomfortably vulnerable as a strategic target of the United States;
- U.S. dominance over Cuba before 1959 has left many marks on Cuba's culture: Baseball is the national sport, and symbols of the United States, such as jeans and rock music, are popular today; but the earlier relationship of subservience makes Cuba wary of the United States;
- One important link between the two countries is the more than one million Cuban-Americans in the United States who have emigrated since the 1959 revolution that brought Fidel Castro to power; but most are hostile to the regime in Cuba;
- Cuba is smaller than most countries in Latin America, though its population of 10.1 million people and land area of 43,000 square miles is greater than any country in Central America or the Caribbean; but it has the kind of influence with many Third World countries that is more typical of a larger nation.

This complexity does not make a viable policy unattainable. It only means that the policy must be rooted in a clear picture of Cuba and be responsive to real U.S. interests. A stark, undifferentiated image of a Cuban threat distorts reality and leads the United States to take actions against its own interest.

Cuba is one of the few countries in the world with which the United States does not have normal relations. Yet the United States cannot ignore Cuba. Not only is Cuba too close geographically, but it is also an important country in the region and has significant influence in the Third World. The question for the United States is not *whether* it will relate to Cuba. The question is *how* it will relate to Cuba.

The choices are either confrontation or negotiation. Since 1960 the United States has opted for the former. There is little benefit in this approach, and confrontation with Cuba generates tension that ripples throughout the hemisphere and needlessly increases the danger of a major conflict between the superpowers. Negotiation, in contrast, holds out the potential for the United States to secure several interests. Indeed, both countries would benefit from a rapprochement.

To be sure, the road from confrontation to negotiation would be more like an obstacle course than a freeway. It is littered with U.S. fears about Cuban communism and with Cuba's concerns about its

own security and development. It is darkened by the history of U.S. domination over the island, by the Cuban missile crisis, and by the distrust built up between the two countries since 1959.

Thus, the process of rapprochement between the United States and Cuba will entail a sensitive reconciliation of U.S. interests and Cuban concerns. This book focuses on these interests and concerns. It examines the history of the relationship between the two countries during the twentieth century, highlights their difference today, and explores how the politics in each country might enable the United States and Cuba to pursue a reconciliation. The concluding chapter outlines an alternative U.S. policy toward Cuba that could enhance U.S. interests, alleviate Cuban concerns, and move the two countries from confrontation to negotiation.

Notes

1. David Halberstam, *The Best and the Brightest* (Greenwich, Conn.: Fawcett, 1973), pp. 84–85.

U.S. Policy Toward Cuba, 1898–1980

“THE UNITED STATES NEVER REMEMBERS and Latin America never forgets” is a well-known Latin American aphorism that succinctly explains the depth of Cuban distrust of the United States and the continuing surprise North Americans manifest about Cuban behavior. Cuban national pride is fierce, and for the better part of a hundred years the United States undermined, disparaged, and ignored Cuban sovereignty. To be sure, the United States acted toward much of Latin America with an arrogance that Abraham Lowenthal has characterized aptly as a “hegemonic presumption.”¹ Cuba experienced the full brunt of the treatment because in many ways it was the jewel in the U.S. imperial crown (the “pearl of the Antilles”) for the first half of the twentieth century.

Between 1898 and 1934, the United States robbed Cuba of the sovereignty it had fought hard to win from Spain. The United States controlled Cuba’s politics and dominated its economy. Then from 1934 to 1958 Cuba was a favored locale for U.S. investors and tourists, and the two countries maintained a special relationship that worked largely to the benefit of the United States. This relationship was destroyed by the 1959 revolution.

The greater part of this chapter will focus on the period after 1959. The sweep of events before 1959 will be subsumed in the first section, and the period between the revolution and the Ronald Reagan administration will be divided into two segments, 1959–1970 and 1971–1980. Current U.S. policy will be examined in Chapter 2.

From Independence War to Revolution

What North Americans commonly refer to as the 1898 Spanish-American War—when the United States fought against Spain for three months in Cuba and in the Philippines—is to the Cubans and Filipinos an episode in their respective wars of independence against Spain. The seemingly insignificant difference in name reflects a deeper tendency in the United States over the last century to see Cuba and Cuban events as an extension of the United States and U.S. interests. Cuba was a colony of Spain until 1898. But even before independence, the United States had begun to replace Spain as the dominant force in Cuban economic affairs.

By the time Cubans began a concerted struggle for independence from Spain in 1868, Spanish dominance over Cuban trade already had declined. In 1860, Cuba sent 62 percent of its exports to the United States and only 3 percent to Spain. Then, between 1868 and 1878, the war for independence wreaked havoc on the mid-sized sugar farms predominant in Cuban agriculture until then. With the surviving smaller farms becoming easy prey for investors, most were combined into large units linked to a central mill. One U.S. company, Havemeyer's American Sugar Refining Company, owned nineteen of these *centrales* (mills) and supplied more than 70 percent of the sugar consumed in the United States. Increasingly, American Sugar came to rely on Cuba as its source for cane.²

Beginning with the sugar connection, Cuban dependence on its wealthy neighbor grew rapidly by the turn of the century. Though U.S. investment in Cuba had reached no more than an estimated \$50 million in 1896, much of it was in key sectors. By 1902, U.S. corporations had invested \$100 million, and U.S. banks had begun to influence Cuba's finances by way of loans.³

At various times in the nineteenth century, the idea of annexing Cuba was raised in the United States. But this idea was dashed before the Civil War by opposition from northern states, which feared the admission of another slave state to the union, and after 1865 by those who objected to the preponderance of nonwhites on the island. In 1898, when the United States intervened in the independence war, economic interests were an important motivating force for the action.

The Cubans had nearly won the war by February, when the U.S. battleship *Maine*—in Havana harbor to protect U.S. property and to signal to the Cuban rebels that the United States was worried about the course the revolution would take—exploded. Fueled by sensational articles in Hearst's *New York Journal*, a war frenzy

developed in the United States. In April, the United States declared war against Spain, and in June, 17,000 U.S. troops joined in the Cuban struggle for independence. They fought against a weary and weakened Spanish force, which surrendered quickly at the end of July.⁴ The United States claimed credit for the victory over Spain and promptly installed a military government to oversee affairs. Historian Jules Benjamin has explained that U.S. military occupation contributed to the transformation of Cuba from the status of Spanish colony to that of a U.S. quasi-colony: "The Military Government under General Leonard Wood fostered the development of the island by U.S. capital. . . . General Wood, like most U.S. policymakers after him, saw stability in Cuba arising from her ability and willingness to obtain U.S. capital."⁵

Wood was a strong advocate of tariff reciprocity, which "he saw as a step toward the annexation" of Cuba.⁶ Tariff reciprocity, ultimately approved by the U.S. Congress in 1903, tied Cuba to U.S. corporations and undermined indigenous Cuban enterprises. Under the 1903 agreement, U.S. goods became less expensive in Cuba than those from any other country—cheaper even than those produced in Cuba. In addition, as economist Louis Perez explained: "Preferential access to U.S. markets for Cuban agricultural products at once encouraged Cuban dependency on sugar and tobacco and increased foreign control over these vital sectors of the economy. Reciprocity also discouraged economic diversification by promoting the consolidation of land from small units into the latifundia [large plantations] and concentration of ownership from local family to foreign corporation."⁷

If economic dependence on the United States firmly closed the lid over the coffin of Cuban independence, the lid's hinges were attached in 1901. That year, the United States forced Cuba to include the Platt Amendment in its new constitution, as a condition for the removal of the occupying U.S. force. Introduced by Senator Orville Platt and approved by the U.S. Congress as part of an army appropriations bill, the amendment limited Cuban sovereignty by stipulating that the United States could intervene in all Cuban affairs, domestic or foreign, solely at U.S. discretion. This meant that the United States was free to send in troops as if Cuba were a colony and in effect, to dictate to Cubans how they could organize their government and society.⁸ The Platt Amendment also required Cuba to sell or lease to the United States land for a naval base, which still exists today as Guantanamo Naval Base.

Under these broad terms, the United States did send troops to Cuba three times in the next thirty-two years to stabilize situations that threatened U.S. property. One of these interventions lasted for

a period of three years (1906–1909), during which time U.S. troops served again as an occupation force with a military governor. More importantly, the threat of intervention gave the United States *de facto* control over the internal affairs of the country. Cuban politicians understood that they had to seek U.S. approval to select a president. The State Department made clear that the Cuban government had to facilitate the penetration of the Cuban economy by U.S. corporations and had to avoid placing undue restrictions (such as taxes) on these enterprises.⁹ U.S. officials stated publicly that they sought to bring democracy and morality to Cuban affairs, and some of them may have been imbued with a Wilsonian idealism that sought to make the world safe for democracy. But under U.S. auspices, Cuban governments were corrupt and elections were generally rigged.

Circumstances also contributed to the loss of Cuba's sovereignty to the United States. As a result of the 1920–1921 depression in the sugar industry, U.S. banks and sugar companies gained an ever greater foothold on the economy through consolidation. Their investment in Cuba totaled over \$600 million—1,100 percent greater than it had been in 1898. U.S.-owned mills produced 60 percent of Cuba's sugar, and U.S. companies controlled 90 percent of Cuba's electrical generating capacity.¹⁰ Direct private U.S. investment in Cuba totaled \$1 billion in 1927.¹¹

Dependency meant that Cuba could not invest in potential farm land for food production. The result was that nearly one-third of Cuba's food had to be imported, including items such as vegetables that could have been grown domestically. Dependency also meant that Cuba could not provide for basic needs that were unrelated to the productive capacity for sugar and could not sustain independent development. Its needs were serviced by imports. This deepened its dependence on the United States, from which it purchased 80 percent of these foreign goods and services.¹² Louis Perez described how dependency robbed Cuba of nationhood and made it into a quasi-colony of the United States: Once U.S. corporations began to invest heavily in Cuba in the late 1800s, Cuban planters functioned "as agents of North American capital, instruments of U.S. economic penetration of Cuba, and advocates of U.S. intervention. . . . A new habit developed in Cuba, a practice to endure into the twentieth century, in which the local bourgeoisie [capitalists], able to petition the United States in its behalf in its disputes with local authority, looked to Washington for the defense of privilege and property."¹³

The Cuban government itself was tied closely to U.S. banks because the banks lent it large sums for public works projects. As the 1929 depression hit Cuba especially hard, there were few resources with