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Cuba's Perilous Political Transition to the Post-Castro Era

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Abstract. In the years since Raúl Castro took office as president following Fidel Castro's illness and retirement, Cuba has embarked on four major transitions almost simultaneously: a restructuring of elite decision-making; a transformation of Cuba's centrally-planned economy into a market socialist economy; a relaxation of tight social control, providing greater social autonomy for civil society and even a degree of political decompression; and, a transition from the founding generation of the political elite (*los históricos*) to a successor generation, when neither Castro will hold power. Each of these processes by itself entails political risk; unfolding together, they constitute the greatest political challenge the Cuban regime has faced since the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Keywords: leadership succession, economic reform, political reform, Raúl Castro, Cuba

Introduction

Most analyses of the future of political change in Cuba have focused either on what would happen at the moment Fidel Castro passed from the scene, or on what would happen in the aftermath of sudden regime collapse. The focus on Fidel was understandable; he has long been regarded as the quintessential example of charismatic leadership.[1] His immense personal authority at the dawn of the revolutionary government was rooted in his personal courage, political savvy and heroic achievements as the leader who made the Revolution.[2] Historically, the regime drew its legitimacy from Fidel Castro, not the other

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[1] See Edward Gonzalez, 'Political Succession in Cuba', *Studies in Comparative Communism*, 9: 1–2 (1976), pp. 80–107; and Jaime Suchlicki (ed.), *Problems of Succession in Cuba* (Miami, FL: University of Miami, 1985); Jorge I. Domínguez, 'Political Succession in Cuba', *Third World Quarterly*, 10: 1 (1988), pp. 229–36; Wayne S. Smith, 'Cuba's Long Reform', *Foreign Affairs*, 75: 2 (1996), pp. 99–112.

[2] Nelson Valdés, 'Fidel Castro's Charismatic Authority', in Philip Brenner, Marguerite Rose Jiménez, John M. Kirk and William M LeoGrande, *Reinventing the Revolution: A Contemporary Cuba Reader* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2008), pp. 27–40.

way around. Castro's heirs, by contrast, would need to anchor their right to govern on the performance and legitimacy of state institutions, not their personal virtues, which could only appear weak and pallid in comparison to Fidel's. As Raúl Castro himself put it in 2008 when he was first elected president by the National Assembly, 'There is only one Commander in Chief of the Cuban Revolution … Fidel is irreplaceable'.[3]

Yet when the moment came on 31 July 2006, the hand-off of power from Fidel to his brother Raúl and a leadership team of six others was smooth and uneventful. Cubans did not take to the streets in demonstrations or board rafts to head for Miami. The machinery of government continued functioning uninterrupted.[4]

Scholarly attention to the prospect of sudden regime collapse was stimulated by the fall of European communism and the terrible economic crisis precipitated in Cuba by the loss of Soviet aid. A vast literature of Cuban 'transitlogy' resulted.[5] Yet despite numerous prognostications of its imminent demise, the Cuban regime survived. Unlike the regimes of Eastern Europe, the Cuban state was bolstered by authentic nationalism and was still governed by the founding generation of revolutionaries, not a coterie of career-minded apparatchiks.[6]

Much less scholarly attention has been paid to the multifaceted evolutionary transition currently underway in Cuba, a transition substantially more complex and perilous than the transition from Fidel to Raúl. In the years since Raúl took the reins of power, Cuba has embarked on four major transitions almost simultaneously: (1) a restructuring of elite decision-making following Fidel's retirement; (2) a transformation of Cuba's centrally-planned

[3] 'Key address by Comrade Raúl Castro Ruz … at the closing session of the First Session of the Seventh Legislature of the National Assembly of People's Power', *Granma International*, 24 Feb. 2008.

[4] Hoffman offers an analysis of why the transition was so uneventful in Bert Hoffman, 'Charismatic Authority and Leadership Change: Lessons from Cuba's Post-Fidel Succession', *International Political Science Review*, 30: 3 (2009), pp. 229–48.

[5] See, for example, Rhoda Rabkin, 'Implications of the Gorbachev Era for Cuban Socialism', *Studies in Comparative Communism*, 23: 1 (1990), pp. 23–46; Andreas Pickel, 'Is Cuba Different? Regime Stability, Social Change, and the Problem of Reform Strategy', *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, 31: 1 (1998), pp. 75–90; Michael Radu, 'Cuba's Transition: Institutional Lessons from Eastern Europe', *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs*, 37: 2 (1995), pp. 83–111; Carmelo Mesa-Lago and Horst Fabian, 'Analogies Between East European Socialist Regimes and Cuba', in Carmen Mesa-Lago (ed.), *Cuba After the Cold War* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1993), pp. 353–80; Bert Hoffmann, 'Transformation and Continuity in Cuba', *Review of Radical Political Economics*, 33: 1 (2001), pp. 1–20.

[6] Explanations for regime stability include Jorge I. Domínguez, 'The Secret of Castro's Staying Power', *Foreign Affairs*, 72: 2 (1993), pp. 97–107; Marifeli Pérez-Stable, 'Caught in a Contradiction: Cuban Socialism between Mobilization and Normalization', *Comparative Politics*, 32: 1 (1999), pp. 63–82; Andreas Pickel, 'Is Cuba Different? Regime Stability, Social Change, and the Problem of Reform Strategy', *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, 31: 1 (1998), pp. 75–90; Hoffmann, 'Transformation and Continuity in Cuba'.

economy into a market socialist economy; (3) a relaxation of tight social control, providing greater social autonomy for civil society and even a degree of political decompression; and (4) a transition from the founding generation of the political elite (los históricos) to a successor generation. Each of these processes by itself entails political risk; unfolding together, they constitute the greatest political challenge the Cuban regime has faced since the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The Challenges of the Twenty-first Century

The timing of these changes has been forced on Cuban leaders by circumstances; they faced urgent problems at the turn of the century that could not be ignored. Although the regime survived the terrible depression following the Soviet collapse (the 'Special Period'), it emerged significantly weakened, both economically and politically. Production in many sectors and real wages were still below 1989 levels. For both individuals and enterprises, weak or perverse incentives crippled productivity. Attempts by other socialist countries to address these economic contradictions of central planning led to two distinct outcomes: the European path, in which the advent of market socialism weakened the political coherence of the party and state, leading to eventual regime demise; and the Asian path, in which the political effects of market expansion were contained and managed by existing institutions.[7]

On the political front, a decade of deep austerity had taken a toll on the regime's legitimacy. 'The crisis affected not only the general functioning of the economy and daily subsistence, but also ideology, values, social psychology, and political culture', wrote Cuban political scientist Rafael Hernández.

> The political culture of socialism, grounded in equality, meritocracy, a standard of living achieved through work, and certainty about the rules of the system would enter into daily tension with individualism, disillusionment, uncertainty, despair, and skepticism. … When the end of the crisis came into view, it was clear that the emerging society was one that had changed over the intervening decade'.[8]

Young people who came of age during the Special Period did not remember the hardships of pre-revolutionary Cuba or the relatively good years of the 1970s and early 1980s. To them, the Revolution meant privation. Deprived of so much during the 1990s, they were unusually intent on obtaining material

[7] Walder describes the causal mechanisms through which market reforms led to unintended political consequences, which proved fatal for European communism. Andrew G. Walder (ed.), *The Waning of the Communist State: Economic Origins of Political Decline in China and Hungary* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995).

[8] Rafael Hernández, 'Revolution, Reform, and Other Cuban Dilemmas', *Socialism and Democracy*, 24: 1 (2010), pp. 9–30.

things, and large numbers yearned to leave the island, seeing no hope for a prosperous future at home.[9]

Cubans of African descent, once core supporters of the Revolution because it did away with juridical discrimination and provided them with unprecedented upward mobility, suffered disproportionately during the Special Period. Few Afro-Cubans had family abroad to send them remittances. Because they lived in poor neighbourhoods, they had fewer opportunities to earn hard currency by opening *paladares* (private restaurants) or *casas particulares* (rented rooms) for tourists. And because of lingering racism, they were less likely to be employed in the tourist industry where workers received hard currency tips. To get by (*resolver*), some young Afro-Cubans turned to hustling and the 'informal economy', thereby reinforcing the worst stereotypes associating race with crime. The alienation of Afro-Cuban youth was apparent in the caustically critical lyrics of popular rap and hip-hop music.[10]

The regime's political infrastructure also suffered. Cubans spent hours getting to work because the public transportation system, never good, deteriorated for lack of fuel and spare parts. They spent hours more searching for food and other staples. People had no time for political meetings and little patience for revolutionary exhortations in the face of such material hardship. The Committees for the Defence of the Revolution (CDR), charged with 'revolutionary vigilance' against counter-revolution and crime, largely ceased to function. Otherwise law-abiding citizens had no alternative but to deal in the black market to make ends meet, and CDR block captains were no exception. 'The militants are too busy trying to keep themselves alive like everybody else to bother much with denouncing anyone', one Cuban explained.[11]

Although Communist Party membership grew to some 820,000, it faced similar problems. Leadership at the provincial level struggled, not always effectively, to cope with the political strains of the Special Period. In 1995 alone, six

[9] Katrin Hansing, 'Changes From Below: New Dynamics, Spaces, and Attitudes in Cuban Society', *NACLA Report on the Americas*, 44: 4 (2011), pp. 16–19, 42. See also Graziella Pogolotti, 'Para dialogar con los jóvenes', *Juventude Rebelde,* 13 Feb. 2010; '¿Qué piensan (y hacen) los jóvenes?', Panel 'Ultimo Jueves' de la *Revista Temas,* debate que hicimos el 26 de febrero de 2009, available at www.temas.cult.cu/debates/libro%204/128-145%20jovenes.pdf.

[10] Alejandro de las Fuentes, 'The Resurgence of Racism in Cuba', *NACLA Report on the Americas*, 34: 6 (2001), pp. 29–34; Esteban Morales Domínguez, *Race in Cuba: Essays on the Revolution and Racial Inequality* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2013); Morales Domínguez, *La problemática racial en Cuba: algunos de sus desafíos* (La Habana: Editorial José Martí, 2010); Ezekiel Dixon-Román and Wilfredo Gómez, 'Cuban Youth Culture and Receding Futures: Hip Hop, Reggaetón and Pedagogías Marginal', *Pedagogies: An International Journal*, 7: 4 (2012), pp. 364–79.

[11] Archibald R. M. Ritter, 'Economic Illegalities and the Underground Economy in Cuba', Focal, RFC-06-01, March 2006; Roberto Suro, 'With Cubans Desperate for Change, Castro Takes New Look at U.S.', *Washington Post*, 28 Aug. 1994.

of the 14 party first secretaries in the provinces were replaced.[12] With economic recovery key to regime stability, the party gave in to the temptation to usurp management responsibilities from provincial and local government – 'bossiness', Raúl Castro called it at the Party's First National Conference in 2012. In so doing, it neglected its political task of cultivating regime support at the grassroots.[13]

Another vulnerability that plagued the Communist Party was Fidel Castro's style of governance. From the earliest days of the Revolution, Castro harboured a deep distrust of institutions. During the Special Period, he came to rely more and more on his personal staff, the Equipo de Coordinación y Apoyo al Comandante en Jefe (also known as el Grupo de Apoyo), comprised by young acolytes Fidel had plucked from the ranks of the Union of Young Communists. The Grupo evolved into a kind of shadow cabinet, operating at Fidel's behest outside the normal lines of authority of party and state. The Grupo had a reputation for fanaticism – being more Fidelista than Fidel – and Cubans dubbed them 'los talibanes' for their rigid ideological orthodoxy.[14] Meanwhile, the formal party languished; although its statutes stipulated that a Congress be held every five years to set policy and renovate the leadership, the 2002 deadline came and went with no new Congress.

The erosion of the regime's capacity for social and political control contributed to the spread of corruption. Corruption was not a new problem, but it was exacerbated during the Special Period by economic hardship. To supplement inadequate state salaries, workers stole goods from work and sold them on the black market. A three-part investigative report by the Cuban newspaper *Juventude Rebelde*, entitled 'The Big Old Swindle', found that half the state-run retail enterprises visited by reporters were cheating customers by short-weighting purchases.[15] At the highest levels, some managers of import/export businesses and joint enterprises were corrupted by the easy availability of hard currency through expense accounts and bribes by foreigners seeking preferred access to the Cuban market.

The government launched a crackdown against crime and corruption in early 2003, when nationwide audits discovered irregularities in the accounts of 36 per cent of the 5,917 state enterprises examined. In 2004, Political

[12] 'Party First Secretaries Replaced in Three Provinces', Radio Rebelde (Havana), 4 July 1995, as reported in BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, 6 July 1995.

[13] 'Our Responsibility Is to Promote Greater Democracy in Our Society, Beginning by Providing an Example Within the Ranks of the Party', *Granma International*, 30 Jan. 2012.

[14] Armando F. Mastrapa, III, 'Equipo de Coordinación y Apoyo al Comandante en Jefe: Cuba's Parallel Government?', *Cuba in Transition 2001* (Miami: Association for the Study of the Cuban Economy, ACSE, 2001), pp. 476–80; Samuel Farber, 'Visiting Raúl Castro's Cuba', *New Politics*, 11: 3 (2007), pp. 80–93.

[15] Yailin Orta Rivera, Norge Martínez Montero y Roberto Suárez, 'La vieja gran estafa', *Juventude Rebelde*, 1, 15 and 22 Oct. 2006.

Bureau members visited local party organisations around the country to press the campaign. 'Raúl was adamant that the revolution is threatened not just by the United States, but by corruption and liberal attitudes that give space for it to grow', according to a mid-level party official.[16] On 1 April, control over hard currency accounts was taken away from individual enterprises and executive expense accounts were abolished.[17] In September, the armed forces took over management of the Port of Havana to halt pilferage by dock workers who were diverting resources from the ports by the ton-load.[18] On 15 October, thousands of young social workers occupied gas stations all over Havana in a campaign to combat the theft of gasoline, half of which was being diverted into the black market.[19]

A few weeks later, speaking at the University of Havana, Fidel Castro gave a four-hour speech that has come to be regarded as something of a political testament.[20] It was a cri de coeur, warning that the Revolution was in peril, not from the United States, but from its own internal weaknesses. 'This country can self-destruct; this Revolution can destroy itself', he said, 'We can destroy ourselves, and it would be our fault'. He began by praising the social workers for their contribution to the ongoing 'war against corruption'. He railed against theft in all its many forms, from pilfering on the shop floor to embezzlement in high office. 'Just how many ways of stealing do we have in this country?', he asked plaintively. But his fears reached well beyond corruption. He worried about the hand-off of power from the Revolution's founding generation to its successors. He worried about the inequality created during the Special Period, and he railed against the 'new rich', including not only small businessmen, but also recipients of remittances. Most of all, he worried that concessions to the market were corroding revolutionary values.

Castro's rhetoric harkened back to the Revolutionary Offensive of 1968, when the state nationalised all the small urban shops in the country (during which Fidel famously declared, 'We did not make a revolution to guarantee the right to trade'),[21] and to the Rectification campaign of the late 1980s. Now, Fidel seemed to be promising a new counter-offensive against creeping

[16] 'Irregularidades llevan a mayor control en empresas cubanas', EFE, 21 Feb. 2004; Marc Frank, 'Anti-corruption Drive Signals Change in Cuba', *Financial Times* (London), 6 July 2004.

[17] Marc Frank, 'Cuba's Businesses Feel Pinch as Dollar Is Squeezed from Economy', *Financial Times*, 14 April 2004.

[18] Fidel Castro, Speech at the University of Havana, 17 Nov. 2005; Marc Frank, 'Castro Vows to Go after the "New Rich"', *Financial Times*, 2 Dec. 2005.

[19] Marc Frank, 'Castro Enlists Cuba's Young in War on Corruption', *Financial Times*, 29 Nov. 2005.

[20] Fidel Castro, Speech at the University of Havana, 17 Nov. 2005.

[21] 'The Revolutionary Offensive: "We Did Not Make a Revolution to establish the Right to Trade"' (speech on 13 March 1968), in Martin Kenner and James Petras (eds.), *Fidel Castro Speaks* (New York, Grove Press, 1969), pp. 249–315.

capitalism, with 27,000 young social workers in the vanguard. Soon, social workers were monitoring refineries, riding along on tanker trucks, refurbishing schools and hospitals, going door-to-door handing out energy efficient light bulbs – taking on whatever task their commander-in-chief asked of them.

Historically, mobilisation campaigns like this were carried out by Cuba's mass organisations, foremost among them the CDRs. But their deterioration during the Special Period left them unequal to the task. As Marifeli Pérez-Stable has written, in the Cuba of the twenty-first century, the old style of mobilisational politics had lost its effectiveness.[22] Instead, Castro created the cadre of social workers as a new instrument of mobilisation. Some observers compared the youth army to Mao Zedong's Red Guards during the Cultural Revolution.[23] In truth, there were important parallels. In both cases, aging leaders, worried about the future of their revolutions, sought to mobilise a new generation to uphold revolutionary ideals. In both cases, leaders deeply committed to socialist ideology worried that their regimes' concessions to the market were fostering new class divisions and incipient capitalism. And in both cases, the leaders circumvented existing institutions to foster a new ideological fervour; in Cuba, because those institutions were so atrophied; in China, because Mao had lost control of them to his adversaries in the party leadership. But the differences were nevertheless profound. Because Cuba did not suffer from a deep split in the party's leadership, Cuba's social workers, unlike China's Red Guards, did not attack Cuban institutions and leaders. Their purpose was not to 'bombard the headquarters', but to protect the revolutionary regime from the corrosion of corruption.

The Transition in Elite Decision-making

Inevitably, the departure of a charismatic leader like Fidel Castro reverberates throughout the political system. At the highest echelons of the political elite, the charismatic leader's heirs have to settle on new rules of the game. The new leadership is usually more collective, not only because no one can fill the departed leader's boots, but because surviving elites generally prefer a process that is more rule-guided and hence less arbitrary than in the past. This, at least, has been the experience of communist successions from countries as diverse as the Soviet Union (Stalin), China (Mao Zedong) and Vietnam (Ho Chi Minh).[24]

[22] Marifeli Pérez-Stable, 'Caught in a Contradiction'.
[23] Frank, 'Castro Vows to Go after the 'New Rich'.
[24] On Stalin's succession, see Myron Rush, *Political Succession in the USSR* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965); on Mao's, see Frederick C. Teiwes, *Leadership, Legitimacy, and Conflict in China: From a Charismatic Mao to the Politics of Succession* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1984); on Ho Chi Minh's, see Robert F. Rogers, 'Policy

Raúl Castro himself anticipated as much. 'Many other comrades and I will have authority' he remarked in a 2001 interview, long before taking the reins of power. 'However, we want the party to have it, which is the only thing which can guarantee continuity, the unity of the nation. Within that unity we can have differences and everything we might want to air'. Moreover, according to one former Cuban official, Raúl was always more willing to entertain debate. 'Fidel is a god, and he [Raúl Castro] is a human being' the official said. 'You can't argue with Fidel, you can't contradict him. You can with Raúl.'[25]

Collective leadership typically means that intra-elite debates, at least within the Political Bureau of the party, become more meaningful. Leadership politics shifts from everyone lobbying the founding father to coalitions lobbying one another, and paying special attention to the undecided. Political resources like bureaucratic position take on new importance.

A succession's impact reverberates into lower party echelons as well. New leaders naturally seek to bring in their own team of advisers and upper-level managers. These personnel changes, especially when they involve some degree of generational turnover, are bound to have policy consequences. Studies of leadership succession in Eastern European communist regimes have found that succession almost always initiated significant changes in the operation of the regime.[26]

These sorts of changes in elite decision-making became apparent in Cuba almost as soon as Fidel Castro surrendered power. For two weeks after Fidel's 31 July *proclama*, Raúl Castro did not appear in public or issue any statement about his new role. On 4 August, however, the daily newspaper *Granma* ran a story about Raúl's bravery during the 1953 attack on Moncada barracks that began the Revolution – lest anyone doubt that his revolutionary heritage gave him the credentials to lead the country. The story ended, 'This is a story that should not be ignored in the context of today's events'.[27]

Finally, on 18 August, *Granma* published an interview with Cuba's new leader, who reassured everyone that the government was functioning smoothly.[28] From the outset, it was clear that Raúl's leadership style would

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Differences Within the Hanoi Leadership', *Studies in Comparative Communism*, 9: 1–2 (1976), pp. 108–28.

[25] Vanessa Bauzá, 'Looking at Cuba's Future: Who is Raúl Castro?', *South Florida Sun Sentinel*, 1 July 2001.

[26] Andrrzej Korbonski, 'Leadership Succession and Political Change in Eastern Europe', *Studies in Comparative Communism*, 9: 1–2 (1976), pp. 3–22.

[27] Marta Rojas, 'When Raúl Castro Assumed Responsibility for the Assault on the Moncada Garrison', *Granma International*, 4 Aug. 2006.

[28] Lazaro Barredo Medina, 'No Enemy Can Defeat Us', *Granma*, 18 Aug. 2006.

be very different. Asked why he had taken so long to make a public appearance, he replied, 'I am not used to making frequent appearances in public … that is my way, and I am thinking of continuing in that way.'[29] He had no intention of trying to imitate his brother, he explained a few months later: 'Those who imitate fail.' He would not be making all the speeches on major occasions, but instead would share the opportunities with other leaders, a signal of his commitment to collective leadership.[30] When Raúl did give speeches, most often to the semi-annual meetings of the National Assembly or major Communist Party conferences, they were short and to the point, not the long, rambling, didactic excursions for which his brother was famous.

During the first year or so, Raúl was careful to always quote Fidel, thereby emphasising the continuity of policy and invoking his brother's legitimacy. Even when Fidel formally bowed out of the presidency in 2008 and the National Assembly elected Raúl, in his inaugural speech, the younger Castro asked the Assembly's permission to consult Fidel on 'decisions of special transcendence for the future of our nation'. No one person could replace the maximum leader. 'The Communist Party, a sure guarantee of the unity of the Cuban nation, is the sole worthy heir to our people's confidence in its leader', Raúl affirmed.[31]

This emphasis on the importance of institutions would prove to be a hallmark of Raúl Castro's presidency. Within a year of taking office, he quietly ended the social worker campaign, sending the youngsters back to their communities. 'Institutionalization is … one of the pillars of the Revolution's invulnerability in the political field', Raúl said in his inaugural speech to the National Assembly in 2008. He went on, 'We should be aware that the functioning of the State and Government institutions is not yet as effective as our people rightfully demand.'[32] Two months later he repeated this message to the party's Central Committee, saying, 'It is vitally necessary to reinforce the country's institutions.' Strengthening the party in particular, he reminded them, was essential 'to ensure the continuity of the Revolution when its historic leaders are gone'.[33]

Unlike Fidel, who worried that institutions might constrain his freedom of action, Raúl was the quintessential organisation man, valuing careful management,

[29] Barredo Medina, 'No Enemy Can Defeat Us'.

[30] 'Fidel es insustituible, salvo que lo sustituyamos todos juntos', *Juventude Rebelde*, 21 Dec. 2006.

[31] 'Key address by Comrade Raúl Castro Ruz … at the closing session of the First Session of the Seventh Legislature of the National Assembly of People's Power', *Granma International*, 24 Feb. 2008.

[32] Ibid.

[33] 'Continuing to Perfect the Work of the Party and its Authority Before the Masses', *Granma International*, 29 April 2008.

sound administrative processes and institution-building.[34] Under his leadership, the Revolutionary Armed Forces became the most organised, efficient and respected institution in the country. Over the years, a great many senior officers were exported to the civilian sector to bring some semblance of order to the relative chaos of the government bureaucracy. It came as no surprise, then, that as president, Raúl sought to imbue the rest of the government with the same managerial principles that worked so well in the armed forces. 'Improvisation', he explained on more than one occasion, had led to 'expensive irrationalities'.[35]

Raúl Castro's faith in institutions was also reflected in his belief that people ought to work their way up through established career paths, gaining experience along the way. He was no fan of Fidel's practice of plucking promising youth from the Union of Young Communists (UJC) to serve on his personal staff, and then appointing them to top positions in the national government and provincial party apparatus. Many of these appointees fell into disgrace and obscurity as quickly as they rose. The first was 'Landy' – Luis Orlando Domínguez, a rising star in his forties whose power derived from his leadership of the Equipo de Coordinación y Apoyo. He was arrested in 1987 for embezzlement and sentenced to 20 years in prison. The next was Roberto Robaina, the charismatic pony-tailed head of the UJC. In 1993, Fidel appointed 'Robertico' foreign minister at the age of 36, then sacked him six years later for being too friendly with foreign businessmen and officials. In 2006, Juan Carlos Robinson, one of the Political Bureau's youngest members, was arrested for influence peddling and sentenced to 12 years in prison.[36]

All these early heirs owed their ascent to their personal relationships with Fidel. Before his illness, the elder Castro was a 'minimum winning coalition' all by himself. Although senior leaders would debate key policy issues, when Fidel decided on a direction, the rest of the leadership dutifully fell into line. Political influence was therefore closely correlated with proximity to Fidel, so it was no accident that the principal path to power for an aspiring young politician led through Castro's personal staff. But the meteoric rise of the protégés deprived them the political savvy only experience could provide and imbued them with the hubris of Icarus.

Not surprisingly, the role of the Grupo de Apoyo diminished dramatically under Raúl. Fidel's chief of staff, Carlos Valenciaga, was removed in 2008, and

[34] Hal Klepak, *Raúl Castro and Cuba: A Military History* (New York: Palgrave, 2012), pp. 91–138.

[35] 'The Greatest Obstacle that We Face in Fulfilling the Agreements of the Sixth Congress Is the Psychological Barrier Created by Inertia …', *Granma International*, 2 Aug. 2011.

[36] Foreign Broadcast Information Service, 'Castro Speaks on Domínguez, Del Pino Cases', *Latin America Daily Report,* 2 July 1987; Anita Snow, 'Reasons for Former Cuban Official's Fall from Grace Come to Light', Associated Press, 6 Aug. 2002; 'Información del Buró Político sobre Juan Carlos Robinson', *Granma*, 21 June 2006.

Cubans began referring to the Grupo as '*los huerfanitos*' – the little orphans.[37] In 2007, the UJC instituted a new policy requiring members to spend five years in their chosen profession before assuming positions of political leadership. Speaking to the UJC Plenary that adopted the new policy, Raúl pointedly singled out Political Bureau members Carlos Lage and Felipe Pérez-Roque as people who had jumped immediately into positions of leadership. While praising their work, Raúl noted that Lage, a paediatrician, had never practised medicine, and Pérez-Roque, an electrical engineer, had never worked as one. 'I would not send him to work in a thermoelectric plant', Raúl joked, 'because he could cause a meltdown'. Then Castro became serious: If someone's only experience was in student organisations, he asked, 'What do they know? How to give good speeches? It is our duty to open up room for new generations … but not for test tube leaders … rather, for those brought up on their own efforts'.[38]

When the National Assembly elected Raúl president in 2008, his choice for vice-president was not Carlos Lage as many people expected, but José Machado Ventura, a member of the old guard, whose chief responsibility since the 1970s had been building the organisational apparatus of the Communist Party.[39] Choosing him underscored Raúl's determination to strengthen Cuba's political institutions, the party first among them.

In March 2009, Raúl abruptly fired Lage and Pérez-Roque, both of whom were frequently mentioned as possible successors to the Castro brothers. Pérez-Roque had served as Fidel's personal assistant for a decade before being appointed, aged 34, to succeed Roberto Robaina at the Foreign Ministry. Lage, a former member of the Grupo de Apoyo, served as Fidel's economic adviser during the Special Period, becoming executive secretary to the Council of Ministers – the closest thing Cuba had to a prime minister. Both were removed for criticising los históricos behind their backs and being too eager to push the older generation off stage.[40] At the same time, Raúl announced a sweeping reorganisation of the government bureaucracy, and replaced nine veteran ministers.[41] By 2012, across 26 ministries, only three of Fidel's appointees were still in office. The new ministers tended to come from the ranks of experienced professionals, especially the armed forces.

Eight years after Fidel stepped down, Cuba appeared to have successfully navigated the leadership transition and the adoption of a new model of elite decision-making. That model is more pragmatic, more collective, more

[37] Farber, 'Visiting Raúl Castro's Cuba'.
[38] Julieta García Ríos, 'Dialoga Raúl con participantes en el Pleno del Comité Nacional de la UJC', *Juventude Rebelde*, 25 Feb. 2007.
[39] Nelson P. Valdés, 'Cuba After Fidel', *Counterpunch*, March, 2008.
[40] Eusebio Mujal-León, 'Survival, Adaptation, and Uncertainty: The Case of Cuba', *Journal of International Affairs*, 65: 1 (2011), pp. 149–68.
[41] 'Nota oficial del Consejo de Estado de Cuba', *Juventude Rebelde*, 2 March 2008.

routinised and more focused on delegation than micromanagement. Most importantly, it is far more respectful of and reliant upon institutions than ever before. Raúl's longstanding role as the regime's number two leader and designated successor, and his own revolutionary background, have given him predominant influence within the political elite, thereby avoiding the sorts of intra-elite conflicts that plagued the successions from Stalin and Mao Zedong. His consolidation of authority set the stage for a profound, difficult and potentially divisive economic transition.

Updating the Economic Model: The Transition from Central Planning to Market Socialism

When Raúl Castro became interim president, the Cuban economy had yet to fully recover from the Special Period. Although it had grown gradually since the mid-1990s, the gains were concentrated in tourism and medical services for export. The actual production of goods in the island still lagged behind 1989 levels, and many state enterprises operated at a loss. Agricultural production was so poor that this fertile island had to import 70 per cent of its food at a cost of US$2 billion per year.[42] The central problem, Raúl bluntly pointed out in 2010, was low productivity; 'We have to erase forever the notion that Cuba is the only country in the world in which people can live without working.'[43]

Raúl Castro was a communist before his brother, but he was always more pragmatic. Even before the collapse of European communism, Raúl pushed Cuba's defence industries to adopt Western management techniques to improve productivity. During the Special Period, he convinced a reluctant Fidel to utilise market mechanisms to restart the economy, opening free farmers markets and legalising small business. But with Fidel in charge, such reforms were strictly limited.

As soon as Raúl assumed the presidency, he unleashed a barrage of candid criticism, blaming the economy's failures on Cuba's own policies rather than the US embargo. In a speech to a closed session of the National Assembly in December 2006, just five months after taking office, he was blunt. Public transport was 'on the verge of total collapse' after years of neglect. The state was Cuban $550 million in arrears on its payments to small farmers, and Raúl found it 'inexplicable' that 'bureaucratic red tape' was holding up these

[42] Armando Nova González, 'Cuban Agriculture and the Current Economic Transformation Process', Cuban Study Group website, 2012, available at http://www.cubastudygroup.org/index.cfm/from-the-island-series.

[43] 'We Have Adopted Important Decisions That Constitute in Themselves a Structural and Conceptual Change in the Interest of Preserving and Developing Our Social System and Making it Sustainable in the Future', *Granma International*, 2 Aug. 2010.

payments when small farmers provided 65 per cent of the nation's domestic food production. 'We are tired of excuses in this Revolution' he declared.[44]

Seven months later, on 26 July 2007, Raúl extended his criticism, acknowledging that state sector salaries were not adequate to cover basic consumption, and that this shortfall was at the root of corruption. The only way to raise the standard of living was to raise productivity. 'No one, no individual or country, can afford to spend more than what they have', he reminded his audience. 'It seems elementary, but we do not always think and act in accordance with this inescapable reality.' Over the next several years Raúl introduced a sweeping programme of economic reform – or 'updating' of the economic model, as the Cubans preferred to call it – including a wider use of market mechanisms to boost Cuba's anaemic productivity.

To Fidel, corruption and low productivity resulted from the people's character defects, exacerbated by the material incentives of the market. The solution was to increase social control, decrease the scope of market activity, and exhort people to work harder for the social good. To Raúl, Cuba's problems originated with defects in the model of socialism they had been pursuing. The solution was to dispassionately re-examine that model, making 'the needed structural and conceptual changes'. He closed his 26 July speech by reiterating his earlier calls for more open debate. 'We are duty-bound to question everything we do as we strive to materialise our will more and more perfectly, to change concepts and methods which were appropriate at one point but have been surpassed by life itself.'[45]

Following Raúl's speech, the party organised nationwide grassroots discussions to identify obstacles to raising economic productivity and offer suggestions on how to overcome them. Some 5 million people participated in almost a quarter of a million meetings.[46] Raúl's frank criticism raised popular expectations that the state was finally prepared to address the nation's manifest economic problems. Aware of the political risks involved, Raúl tried to lower people's expectations for quick fixes. 'We would all like to move faster, but that is not always possible', he told the National Assembly in December 2007. 'Nobody here is a magician or can pull resources out of a hat.'[47]

[44] Gerardo Arreola, 'Reprocha Raúl Castro el burocratismo y el maquillaje de cifras en la agricultura cubana', *La Jornada* (México, DF), 24 Dec. 2006; María Julia Mayoral, 'Reclama Raúl más rigor y transparencia', *Granma*, 23 Dec. 2006.

[45] Raúl Castro, 'The Revolution's Most Important Weapon: The People', *Granma International*, 27 July 2007.

[46] 'Intervención del General de Ejército Raúl Castro Ruz …', *Juventude Rebelde*, 28 Dec. 2007.

[47] Ibid.

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In February 2008, Fidel Castro formally surrendered his position as president when he declined to stand for re-election. He would continue to serve, he said, as a 'soldier in the Battle of Ideas', commenting on current events through his occasional editorial 'Reflections'.[48] Fidel began writing his reflections in March 2007, immediately establishing himself as Cuba's pundit-it-chief. Every few days, a new reflection appeared on the front page of *Granma*. Cubans and foreigners alike eagerly plumbed the texts for any hint of disagreement between the Castro brothers. As Raúl's critique of Cuba's economic model intensified and he replaced top officials appointed by Fidel, speculation was rife that Fidel must be unhappy, and that the slow, deliberate pace of change must be a result of Fidel leaning on the brakes. The elder Castro's presence hung 'like a Sword of Damocles' over his successors, according to the BBC. That brought forth a scathing reply from Fidel, who insisted that Raúl was fully in charge.[49] If there were disagreements, the two brothers kept them to themselves. But in the face of the obvious problems facing the Cuban economy, in 2010 even Fidel was moved to admit, 'The Cuban model doesn't even work for us anymore.'[50]

Raúl's grand strategy for the economy was unveiled in conjunction with the Sixth Congress of the Communist Party in April 2011, 14 years after the Fifth Congress and nine years behind schedule. The Congress would 'concentrate on the solution of problems in the economy and on the fundamental decisions for updating the Cuban economic model', Raúl declared in November 2010. Other issues would be taken up later at a National Conference of the Party.[51] In the months preceding the Congress, local party branches convened more than 163,000 meetings of members and non-members alike, with almost 9 million participants, to discuss the leadership's strategy for economic renovation, embodied in the 'Guidelines of the Economic and Social Policy of the Party and the Revolution'. Of the 291 proposals for 'updating' the economy, the most frequently discussed – and most controversial – dealt with things affecting people's everyday life – the proposals to phase out the ration book, to eliminate the dual currency and to improve basic

[48] 'Message from the Commander in Chief', 18 Feb. 2008, Discursos e intervenciones del Comandante en Jefe Fidel Castro Ruz, available at www.cuba.cu/gobierno/discursos/.

[49] James C. McKinley Jr., 'Cuba's Revolution Lurches Forward Under Two Masters', *New York Times*, 27 July 2007; 'Reflections by Comrade Fidel: I Hope I Never Have a Reason to Be Ashamed', Reflexiones del Comandante en Jefe, available at www.cuba.cu/gobierno/reflexiones/reflexiones.html.

[50] Jeffrey Goldberg, 'Fidel: "Cuban Model Doesn't Even Work For Us Anymore"', *The Atlantic*, 8 Sept. 2010.

[51] 'Discurso pronunciado … en el Acto Conmemorativo del Décimo Aniversario del Convenio Integral de Cooperación Cuba-Venezuela, … el 8 de noviembre de 2010', Discursos e intervenciones del Presidente … Raúl Castro Ruz, available at www.cuba.cu/gobierno/Raúldiscursos/index2.html.

services like transportation, healthcare and education.[52] A revised version of the guidelines was approved at the April 2011 Communist Party Congress.[53]

The guidelines presented the basic framework of an economic model in which the state plays a much less dominant role. This new model was less centralised, more reliant on market mechanisms to boost productivity, and envisioned a greater role for both foreign direct investment and the domestic private enterprise. The 'non-state sector'– private enterprises and cooperatives – were treated as a permanent and dynamic part of the economy, not just a barely tolerated appendage. Before the reform process began, only 15 per cent of the labour force was employed in the non-state sector, almost exclusively by private farms; by the end of 2012, that had risen to 23 per cent, and Cuban economists predict that by 2016, it will be as much as 40 per cent.[54] In preparing its political strategy to sell the guidelines, the party emphasised, 'leaving behind prejudices against non-state sectors of the economy'– an imperative aimed as much at its own cadre as at the general population.[55]

In addition, the state would no longer serve as the paternalistic provider of all forms of consumption. 'People cannot expect that "Papa State" is going to solve their problems for them', declared Comandante Ramiro Valdés, Minister of Information and Communication.[56] The ration card, which since 1962 had subsidised basic goods for everyone, whether they needed it or not, would be replaced by income support for the poor. Cuba could no longer afford to provide goods at what Raúl called 'ridiculous prices'. Rationing had become 'an intolerable burden on the economy and discouraged work', not to mention fuelling the black market.[57] The state also would eliminate a broad range of other 'unwarranted handouts and excessive subsidies', of which there were so many that in 2008 Raúl complained he could not even get a complete inventory.[58] Although health care and education would remain free, even these crown jewels of the Revolution would have to be subject to the state's ability to pay.

In short, the new model aimed to reconnect people's standard of living to their productivity. 'Socialism means social justice and equality but equality of

[52] 'Central Report to the Sixth Congress of the Communist Party of Cuba', *Granma International*, 16 April 2011.
[53] Partido Comunista de Cuba, *Lineamientos de la Política Económica y Social del Partido y la Revolución*, 18 April 2011.
[54] Marc Frank, 'Cuba Makes More Reforms to Retail Sector', Reuters, 26 Dec. 2011.
[55] 'National Conference Convocation', *Granma International*, 21 April 2011.
[56] Agence France Presse, 'Gobierno pide a cubanos no esperar que "papá Estado" les resuelva todo', 27 Sept. 2009. Author's translation.
[57] 'Central Report to the Sixth Congress of the Communist Party of Cuba', *Granma International*, 16 April 2011.
[58] 'Socialism Signifies Social Justice and Equality, but Equality Is Not Egalitarianism', *Granma International*, 15 July 2008.

rights and opportunities, not salaries', Raúl told the National Assembly in July 2008. 'Equality does not mean egalitarianism'.[59] At the same time, Raúl repeatedly reassured people that no one would be left behind. 'In Cuba, under socialism, there will never be space for 'shock therapies' that go against the neediest, who have traditionally been the staunchest supporters of the Revolution … The Revolution will not leave any Cuban helpless.' Instead, help would be provided 'to those who really need it'.[60]

As a package, these reforms look very much like the early stages of Vietnam's Doi Moi ('renovation') reforms, begun in 1986, aimed at creating a 'socialist-oriented market economy', and Deng Xiaoping's 1978 reforms aimed at building 'socialism with Chinese characteristics'.[61] With a smile, a retired Cuban official described the Cuban model as 'socialism with Cuban characteristics'. Indeed, the parallels to China's path to market socialism are substantial. Agriculture has undergone de facto privatisation, with state farms turned into cooperatives and most cooperatives divided into family plots. Small businesses are expanding rapidly in the retail and services sector. A new foreign direct investment law and special free trade zones offer competitive terms in hopes of attracting up to US$2 billion annually. Most importantly, state enterprises are facing the stark choice of becoming efficient (i.e. profitable) or closing their doors. As in China, many of the new initiatives have been preceded by pilot projects to test their viability, both economic and political.[62]

However, the Cubans intend to maintain state ownership of the largest enterprises and continue to direct national development by allocating investment through the economic plan. And unlike China, they are determined to maintain the achievements of the Revolution – free health care, education and social security – and to limit the extent to which economic restructuring produces extreme inequality. 'I was not elected president to restore capitalism in Cuba nor to surrender the Revolution', Raúl reminded the National Assembly

[59] Ibid.

[60] 'Central Report to the Sixth Congress'.

[61] Richard Newfarmer and Dana M. Liu, 'Adapting to Globalization: Lessons from China', in Claes Brundenius and John Weeks (eds.), *Globalization and Third-World Socialism: Cuba and Vietnam* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), pp. 41–60; John Weeks, 'A Tale of Two Transitions: Cuba and Vietnam', in Brundenius and Weeks (eds.), *Globalization and Third-World Socialism*, pp. 18–40.

[62] The literature assessing Raúl's economic reforms is vast and growing. See Omar Everleny Pérez Villanueva (ed.), *Cincuenta años de la economía cubana* (La Habana: Editorial Ciencias Sociales, 2010); Jorge I. Domínguez, Omar Everleny Pérez Villanueva, Mayra Espina Prieto (eds.), *Cuban Economic and Social Development: Policy Reforms and Challenges in the 21st Century* (Cambridge: David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies, 2012); Carmelo Mesa-Lago and Jorge Pérez-López, *Cuba Under Raúl Castro: Assessing the Reforms* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2013); Rafael Hernández y Jorge I. Domínguez (eds.), *Cuba, la actualización del modelo: balance y perspectiva de la transición socialista* (La Habana-Washington, DC: Ediciones Temas y David Rockefeller Center For Latin American Studies, 2013).

in 2010, rather, 'I was elected to defend, maintain and continue improving socialism, not to destroy it.'[63]

The Political Challenge of Economic Transformation

Raúl's ambitious economic policy generated new hope among many Cubans, as well as some anxiety. If it stalls or fails, popular disillusionment will be enormous, dealing a severe blow to the regime's legitimacy just as new, untested leaders are taking over. The greatest threat to the economic reforms comes from within the regime itself. The economic guidelines face significant opposition from entrenched bureaucrats in the government and party whose privileges are at risk.[64] Some are resisting out of an ideological commitment and a fear that reliance on the market is a step down the slippery slope toward restoring capitalism.[65] As Fidel said in his speech at the University of Havana, the idea 'that socialism could be constructed with capitalist methods … is one of the great historical errors'. Bureaucrats, however, are defending their self-interest; along with administrative power over the economy comes access to various privileges, both legal and illegal.[66]

The ability of bureaucrats to resist change by slow-walking reforms is nothing new. A programme to rationalise state enterprises introduced in 1998 had reached fewer than one-third by the time Raúl became president in 2006. In the countryside, bureaucrats in charge of the state's agricultural procurement system sabotaged the market-oriented reforms Raúl introduced after he became acting president. '[They] think that if they apply these reforms, they will lose their position and power, and the advantages and privileges they now enjoy', a member of an agricultural co-op told journalist Marc Frank.[67] In 2011, Raúl warned recalcitrant bureaucrats that he would

[63] Speech delivered by Army General Raúl Castro Ruz … during the closing ceremony of the Sixth Session of the Seventh Legislature of the National People's Power Assembly, 18 Dec. 2010, available at www.cuba.cu/gobierno/rauldiscursos/index2.html.

[64] Rafael Hernández, 'Revolution,/Reform, and Other Cuban Dilemmas', *Socialism and Democracy*, 24: 1 (2010), pp. 9–30; Jorge Mario Sánchez, 'Challenges of Economic Restructuring in Cuba', *Socialism and Democracy*, 26: 3 (2012).

[65] Camila Piñeiro Harnecker, 'Cuba's New Socialism: Different Visions Shaping Current Changes', *Latin American Perspectives*, 40: 3 (2013), pp. 107–25.

[66] This problem crippled similar economic reforms in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. See, for example, Wlodzimierz Brus, 'The East European Reforms: What Happened to Them?', *Soviet Studies*, 31: 2 (1979), pp. 257–67; Andrzej Korbonski, 'The Politics of Economic Reforms in Eastern Europe: The Last Thirty Years', *Soviet Studies*, 41: 1 (1989), pp. 1–19; Ed A. Hewitt, 'Economic Reform in the USSR, Eastern Europe, and China: The Politics of Economics', *American Economic Review*, 79: 2 (1989), pp. 16–20.

[67] Marc Frank, *Cuban Revelations: Behind the Scenes in Havana* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2013), p. 262.

not tolerate inaction: 'We shall be patient but also persevering in the face of resistance to change, whether conscious or unconscious. I warn that any bureaucratic resistance to the strict fulfillment of the [economic guidelines], massively supported by the people, is useless.'[68]

To assure that the new policies would not become a dead letter like so many earlier ones, Raúl created the Council of State's standing commission on implementation of the guidelines (Comisión Permanente para la Implementación y Desarrollo), headed by Vice-President Marino Murillo. At every semi-annual session, the National Assembly reviewed implementation progress, and the party's Central Committee did the same at its semi-annual plenaries. Even the party's Political Bureau established a commission that met weekly to track progress on the guidelines.[69] Raúl did not hesitate to demonstrate that he was serious about accountability. In September 2014, with the economic reform process lagging and economic growth falling below targets, Raúl demoted the Minister of Economy and Planning, and gave Vice-President Murillo that portfolio as well, a move widely seen as an attempt to overcome bureaucratic resistance.[70] As noted by Rafael Hernández, 'The bureaucracy opposes reforms … in its slowness to implement the measures already adopted. This inertia … in which the bureaucracy drags its feet … is perhaps the most difficult thing to change.'[71]

Failure of the new economic policy to raise productivity and incomes could deal a serious blow to regime legitimacy. But even the success will bring new political challenges. In an economy driven as much by the market's demand for efficiency as by the ideals of the Revolution's founders, can Cuba maintain the values of social justice that motivated the Revolution in 1959 and have been at its ideological core ever since – values that have been a key component of regime legitimacy? A number of the proposed economic reforms put vulnerable populations at risk. Despite Raúl's promise not to subject Cuba to 'shock therapy', if market forces are given freer rein, Cuba's income disparities are

[68] 'The Greatest Obstacle that We Face in Fulfilling the Agreements of the Sixth Congress Is the Psychological Barrier Created by Inertia …', *Granma International*, 2 Aug. 2011.

[69] Leticia Martínez Hernández and Yaima Puig Meneses, 'Los dirigentes partidistas tienen que ver los problemas y avizorar el futuro', *Granma*, 3 July 2013.

[70] 'Marino Murillo, nuevo Ministro de Economía y Planificación', *Granma*, 25 Sept. 2014; Daniel Trotta, 'Cuban Cabinet Change Aims to Boost Flagging Economy', Reuters, 26 Sept. 2014.

[71] Rafael Hernández, 'The Collapse of Socialism Is Beyond the Present Horizon', in Philip Brenner, Marguerite Rose Jiménez, John M. Kirk and William M. LeoGrande (eds.), *A Contemporary Cuba Reader: The Revolution under Raúl* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2014), pp. 83–8. For a debate on the need for bureaucracy (i.e. institutional rather than personalistic governance) versus its dangers, see Rafael Hernández, Ovidio D'Angelo, Ivette Gálvez y Andry Matilla, 'La burocracia como fenómeno social', *Último Jueves*, espacio de debate de la *Revista Temas*, marzo de 2009, available at www.temas.cult.cu/debates/libro%204/029-049%20burocracia.pdf.

sure to increase, as they noticeably have already.[72] There are winners and losers. Those who are well-educated, live in cities where economic development is more dynamic, and have access to hard currency are well-positioned to thrive in a freer economic environment. Those who are low-skilled or elderly, have no relatives abroad to send remittances, or suffer from racial discrimination are all at risk. The government has pledged to maintain the collective welfare system of which the Revolution was most proud, including free health care, free education and social security. But other state subsidies for consumers have begun to be phased out.

Demanding efficiency of state enterprises meant that as many as a million state sector workers – 20 per cent of the labour force – will be laid off. Few of them had the skills or capital to launch a small business. Implementation of a plan in 2010 to lay off 500,000 in just six months was slowed because there was no place for them to go. Concern about the social dislocation that will inevitably accompany such a radical economic shift is clearly on the minds of Cuba's leaders. The pace of change will be slow and steady, 'in order not to err' Raúl explained in 2013. 'To those [who] are encouraging us to move faster, we say that we will continue without haste, but in a measured way, with our feet planted firmly on the ground.'[73]

The 'evolutionary strategy' Cuba's leaders have adopted means that the economic transformation will take years to complete.[74] Thus far, the political system seems to have managed the political fallout among the population effectively. There have been no street protests and no noticeable increase is support for dissident organisations. People's hope that the changes will improve their living standard still outweighs their fears.[75] Going forward, the government needs to deliver on that promise, lest raised expectations turn into disappointment and resentment.

[72] On increasing inequality, see Mayra Espina Prieto, *Políticas de atención a la pobreza y la desigualdad: examinando el rol del estado en la experiencia cubana* (Buenos Aires: CLACSO, 2008); Espina Prieto, 'Desigualdad y política social en Cuba hoy', paper presented at a conference 'The Future of Social Justice in Cuba', Bellagio Conference Center May 27–29, 2008, available at http://focal.ca/pdf/cuba_Espina%20Prieto_desigualdad%20politica%20social%20Cuba%20hoy_May%2026-29%202008_Bellagio.pdf; María del Carmen Zabala Argüelles, 'Poverty and Vulnerability in Cuba Today', *Socialism and Democracy*, 24: 1 (2010), pp. 109–26,181; Zabala Argüelles, 'Análisis de la dimensión racial en los procesos de reproducción de la pobreza', in Zablada (ed.), *Pobreza, exclusión social y discriminación étnico-racial en América Latina y el Caribe* (Bogotá: CLACSO, 2008), pp. 397–422.

[73] 'Our Greatest Satisfaction Is the Tranquility and Calm Confidence We Feel Handing over the Responsibility of Continuing to Build Socialism to New Generations', *Granma International*, 26 Feb. 2013.

[74] On the evolutionary approach to economic reform in centrally-planned economies as contrasted to the more rapid approach known as 'shock therapy', see M. March-Poquet, 'What Type of Transition is Cuba Undergoing?' *Post-Communist Economies*, 12: 1, 91–117.

[75] Frank, *Cuban Revelations*, pp. 274–8.

Social and Political Decompression

In Eastern European communist regimes, the successors to regime founders sought to meet the challenge of sustaining regime legitimacy by appealing to culturally resonant themes, especially nationalism, and allowing modest political and cultural liberalisation.[76] A similar trend toward social and political decompression is already visible in Cuba.

A number of the early reforms instituted by Raúl Castro involved simply repealing unnecessary regulations that ordinary Cubans found especially exasperating. In 2008, the government legalised the sale of computers and cell phones, and eliminated rules against Cubans staying in tourist hotels or renting cars. In 2011, it legalised private real estate and automobile markets, allowing Cubans to buy and sell directly to one another. In 2013, it eliminated the *carta blanca,* the exit permit required for travel abroad, allowing Cubans with a valid passport to travel whenever and wherever they liked. The government was getting out of the business of trying to manage every social interaction between its citizens.

In one of his first speeches as acting president, in December 2006, Raúl argued for more open, democratic debate. 'Argue, analyse, disagree', he urged, 'because the more you argue, the more you disagree … out of these disagreements will always come the best solutions'.[77] He made the same point two years later to the National Assembly. Disagreement was far better than 'false unanimity based on pretence and opportunism' he said, adding that the right to disagree was 'a right nobody should be deprived of'.[78]

Cuba's intelligentsia took full advantage of the new openness. Fidel had famously defined revolution as, 'changing everything that needs to be changed' – a phrase frequently invoked by Raúl and others to justify the sweeping changes implied in the Economic and Social guidelines.[79] Writers, artists, academics and an incipient community of bloggers launched a freewheeling debate about just exactly what needed to be changed.[80] Periodicals like *Témas* and *Espacio Laical*, along with dozens of blogs, provided the venues, sometimes even publishing the views of Cuban-American exiles.

[76] Korbonski, 'Leadership Succession and Political Change in Eastern Europe'.

[77] 'Fidel es insustituible, salvo que lo sustituyamos todos juntos', *Juventude Rebelde*, 21 Dec. 2006. Author's translation.

[78] Speech delivered by Army General Raúl Castro Ruz …, during the closing ceremony of the Sixth Session of the Seventh Legislature of the National People's Power Assembly, 18 Dec. 2010.

[79] 'Speech by Dr. Fidel Castro Ruz … [on] International Labor Day, May 1, 2000', Discursos e intervenciones del Comandante en Jefe Fidel Castro Ruz, available at http://www.cuba.cu/gobierno/discursos/.

[80] See, for example, the description of the 2008 Congress of Artists and Writers in Frank, *Cuban Revelations*, pp. 111–12.

In 2007, the government got an inkling of how hard it would be to put this genie back in the bottle. Cuban television featured interviews with three cultural officials who were notorious for enforcing ideological orthodoxy during the 'Grey Years' of 1971–6, a time when a number of leading artists and writers were censored and persecuted. Fearing that the reappearance of these apparatchiks foreshadowed a new crackdown, Cuban intellectuals launched an 'email war' of protest.[81] Their response was so intense that Minister of Culture Abel Prieto (generally regarded as responsible for expanding the space for cultural criticism over the preceding decade) met with many of them privately to provide reassurance. In public he called the television interviews 'a mistake' and reaffirmed that the leadership still regarded the Grey Years 'with great disapproval'.[82]

Improved relations with the Catholic Church also signalled the regime's greater tolerance for civil society institutions outside its control. Although the government's rapprochement with the Church began in the 1980s, it reached a high point in 2010 when Raúl Castro and Cardinal Jaime Ortega entered into discussions about the treatment of the dissident group, Ladies in White, and about the release of political prisoners. On 7 July, the Cardinal's office announced that the government would release 52 political prisoners, including all those who were still imprisoned as a result of the 2003 crackdown on dissidents.[83] Over the course of the next few weeks, the government agreed to release even more prisoners, with the total eventually reaching 127. The Cuban government's willingness to treat the Catholic Church as a legitimate counter-party in a dialogue on human rights was unprecedented. As Ortega said, the government had 'recognized the role of the Church as an interlocutor' with civil society in a way that it had never done previously.[84]

'We did it in the framework of a dialogue based on mutual respect, loyalty and transparency with the senior leadership of the Catholic Church', Raúl said, explaining this dialogue to the 2011 Party Congress. 'With this action, we have favoured the consolidation of the most precious legacy of our history and the revolutionary process: the unity of our nation.'[85] The theme

[81] Exchanges in the email war are posted on http://www.desdecuba.com/polemica/index.shtml.
[82] Arturo García Hernández, 'La política cultural de Cuba, sin dogmas ni sectarismos', *La Jornada* (México), 26 Feb. 2007. See Adam Simpson, 'Civil Society in the Digital Age: How the Internet Changes State-Society Relations in Authoritarian Regimes: The Case of Cuba', in *Civil Society Activism Under Authoritarian Rule: A Comparative Perspective*, in Francesco Cavatorta (ed.) (New York: Routledge, 2013), pp. 231–4.
[83] Marc Lacey, 'Cuban Government Vows to Release 52 Prisoners', *New York Times*, 8 July 2010; Will Weissert, 'Cuba Agrees to Free 52 Political Prisoners', Associated Press, 8 July 2010.
[84] Marc Frank, 'Castro in First Church Overtures', *Financial Times*, 24 May 2010.
[85] 'Central Report to the Sixth Congress'.

of national unity appeared frequently in Raúl's public statements, indicating a recognition that the economic changes upon which they were embarking held the potential to generate division and opposition. To reinforce regime legitimacy, Raúl focused first and foremost on improving economic performance, but at the same time he appealed to culturally resonant themes, especially nationalism. As Raúl told the National Party Conference in 2012, the political requisite for economic success was 'to strengthen national unity around the Party and the Revolution … and to consolidate the conviction of preserving the Cuban nation and socioeconomic achievements, on the basis of the idea that homeland, revolution and socialism are indissolubly fused'.[86]

The state's reaction to the emergence of Cuba's online community of bloggers and their intense – not always civil – debates, was more ambivalent than its attitude toward the Church. With a highly educated labour force, Cuba has regarded information technology as an area of potential economic growth and international competitiveness. In 2002, it opened the University of Information Sciences, enrolling some 10,000 students and over 1 million young people participate in over 600 Computer Youth Clubs.[87] From this investment, a robust and growing community of bloggers has emerged, including, most famously, Yoani Sánchez. Her 'Generación Y' blog offers an acerbic look at daily life in Cuba, winning Sánchez international acclaim – and the hostility of Cuban officialdom (which she regularly lampoons). But the cyber-terrain of Cuban politics covers the gamut from adamant supporters of the regime to adamant opponents.[88]

Cuban authorities recognised the power of the Internet. In 2006, Raúl Castro named Ramiro Valdés, former Minister of the Interior, as Cuba's new Minister of Communications and Information. While acknowledging that digital technology was essential for Cuba to 'continue to advance down the path of development', Valdés warned that it also provided the United States with powerful new tools to 'bring the destabilizing power of the empire to threatening new levels'. Cyberspace, he argued, had to be understood as a 'battlefield' in the struggle against imperialism; the Internet, 'the wild colt of new technologies, can and must be controlled'.[89] The government blocked certain sites and cut off Internet access to certain bloggers when

[86] Raúl Castro, 'Our Responsibility Is to Promote Greater Democracy in Our Society, Beginning by Providing an Example Within the Ranks of the Party', *Granma International*, 30 Jan. 2012.

[87] John Rice, 'Cuba Joins Other Latin Nations in Shift Toward Open-source Software', Associated Press, 17 Feb. 2007; Dalia Acosta, 'High Tech: Cuba Turns to Venezuela to Solve Internet Woes', Inter Press Service, 14 Feb. 2007.

[88] Ted A. Henken, Sjamme van de Voort and Ellery Biddle, 'From Cyberspace to Public Space? The Emergent Blogosphere and Cuban Civil Society', in Brenner et al., *A Contemporary Cuba Reader: The Revolution under Raúl*, pp. 99–110.

[89] John Rice, 'Cuban Official Defends Internet Controls Associated Press Online', Associated Press, 13 Feb. 2007.

their commentary ran afoul of the authorities' sense of propriety. But the parameters of what was acceptable were unclear and shifting.[90]

In 2013, amidst a controversy about the censorship of an independent yet generally pro-government blog, *La Joven Cuba*, at the University of Matanzas, Cuba's new First Vice-President, Miguel Díaz-Canel, weighed in on the side of allowing open debate online, for the simple reason that in the long run, the state could not control it anyway.[91] 'Today, with the development of information technology, social networking, computing, and the Internet, banning something is almost an impossible illusion. It makes no sense', he explained. 'Today, the news from all sides, good and bad, manipulated and true, and half-true, circulates on the networks, reaches people, people are aware of it.'[92]

No one should mistake this limited social and political decompression for democratisation. There is no prospect in the near future for a move away from a one party system. As Raúl told the Communist Party 2012 National Conference, 'Renouncing the principle of one sole party would simply be the equivalent of legalizing the party or parties of imperialism in our homeland'.[93] Yet the flood-gates of criticism opened by Raúl's own critique of the government's past practices, combined with the leadership's desire for national consensus around the economic reform process, has already produced more political space 'within the revolution' than ever before.[94]

Generational Transition

How would the Cuban regime fare when the founding revolutionary generation (los históricos) finally left the political stage? The puzzle of generational succession was a common one in communist systems – one that China finally solved and the Soviet Union did not.[95] Cuba's leaders had been talking about

[90] Dalia Acosta, 'Cuba: More Bloggers Are Firing off Thoughts from the Island IPS – Inter Press Service', 6 Oct. 2008; David Adams, 'Cuban Dissent Finds Voice on Internet,' *St. Petersburg Times* (Florida), 7 Feb. 2008.

[91] Henken, van de Voort and Biddle, 'From Cyberspace to Public Space?'

[92] 'La prensa cubana silencia la "crítica al silencio" de Miguel Díaz-Canel', 7 May 2013, La Chiringa de Cuba, available at www.chiringadecuba.com/la-prensa-cubana-silencia-la-critica-al-silencio-de-miguel-diaz-canel-vide/. Author's translation.

[93] Quoted in Frank, *Cuban Revelations*, p. 251.

[94] Setting the ground rules for legitimate debate, Fidel Castro famously declared in 1961, 'Within the revolution, everything; against the revolution, nothing'. Over the years, however, what was considered 'within' the revolution has varied considerably, and not always predictably. Fidel Castro, 'Words to the Intellectuals', *in Fidel Castro Reader* (Melbourne, Australia: Ocean Press, 2008), pp. 213–40.

[95] Gang Lin, 'Leadership Transition, Intra-party Democracy, and Institution Building in China', *Asian Survey*, 44: 2 (2004), pp. 255–75; Valerie Bunce and Philip G. Roeder, 'The Effects of Leadership Succession in the Soviet Union', *American Political Science Review*, 80: 1 (1986), pp. 215–24.

the need to plan for this succession for a long time. As early as 1986, Fidel Castro highlighted the issue in his closing speech to the Third Congress of the Communist Party.[96] Yet little was done to effectively prepare a new generation of leaders. Fidel's strategy of elevating his favourite young cadres to positions of national authority without giving them the experience they needed repeatedly ended in failure.

In January 2012, nine months after the Sixth Party Congress adjourned, 811 of the Congress delegates reconvened for the First National Party Conference. Their purpose was, first and foremost, to develop a plan of political work to support implementation of the new economic guidelines. Additionally, the leadership sought to revitalise the party by repairing the weaknesses that had developed over the preceding decade in order to prepare for the inevitable generational succession.

The basic document informing the conference's work laid out a number of these shortcomings: the party had been drawn into the administration of state agencies, thereby neglecting its political work. Its endless meetings had degenerated into 'formalism', in which no real criticism was ever voiced and little was accomplished, thereby 'spreading dissatisfaction and apathy' among the membership. Its cadres too often lacked creativity, failed to take the initiative in problem-solving, took a lax attitude toward 'violations and indiscipline' and sometimes fell prey to corruption themselves. The party's 'rapid promotion of immature and inexperienced cadres' had produced serious policy errors and failures.[97] Finally, the party had 'lacked the political will' to promote women, Afro-Cubans and youth into leadership positions based on their merits. 'It's really embarrassing that we have not solved this problem in more than half a century', Raúl reported to the Sixth Party Congress.[98]

For all the talk about the need to replace los históricos with a new generation of leaders, the new Political Bureau elected at the Sixth Congress was not very different. Among its 15 members were only one woman, two Afro-Cubans and only two people under the age of 60. Clearly the veterans were not quite ready to leave the barricades. Speaking for his generation, Raúl said, 'We strongly believe that we have the elemental duty to correct the mistakes that we have made all along these five decades during which we have [been] building socialism in Cuba.'[99]

[96] Jorge Domínguez, 'Political Succession in Cuba', *Third World Quarterly*, 10: 1, (1988), pp. 229–36.

[97] Partido Comunista de Cuba, *Objectivos de Trabajo del Partido Comunista de Cuba Aprobados por la Primera Conferencia*, 29 Jan. 2012.

[98] 'Central Report to the Sixth Congress'.

[99] Speech delivered by Army General Raúl Castro Ruz … during the closing ceremony of the Sixth Session of the Seventh Legislature of the National People's Power Assembly, 18 Dec. 2010.

The new Central Committee, however, was significantly more diverse. Among its 115 members, 48 were women (42 per cent, up from 13 per cent previously) and 36 were of African descendant (31 per cent, up from 10 per cent). Although no data on the Committee's average age was released, Castro noted that a large number of young professionals had been added to its ranks.[100] The National Assembly and Council of State elected in 2013 saw similar changes. Women members comprised 49 per cent of the Assembly, up from 43 per cent, and Afro-Cubans comprised 38 per cent, up from 35 per cent. The average age of delegates was 48. Of the Council of State's 31 members, 42 per cent were women, 39 Afro-Cuban and 61 were born after the triumph of the Revolution.[101]

To hasten the transition to a new generation of leaders, the party adopted term limits reminiscent of those in China: senior leaders could serve no more than two consecutive five-year terms. In his speech to the National Assembly on 24 February 2013, Raúl Castro formally announced that he would retire in 2018 at the end of his second presidential term. He also announced the retirement of several elderly comrades-in-arms, including First Vice-President José Machado Ventura. In his place, the Assembly elected 52-year-old Miguel Díaz-Canel, putting a leader born after the Revolution in the direct line of political succession for the first time.[102]

As Cuba's revolutionary generation passes from the scene, the idealists who fought against Fulgencio Batista's dictatorship are being replaced by bureaucrats whose claim on the heroic past is tenuous. Fewer and fewer people even remember the hardships of pre-revolutionary society. As managers replace visionaries, ideological ardour cools and the young take the Revolution's accomplishments for granted, seeing only its failures. In this, Cuba's Revolution is no different from those in Russia, China and Vietnam.

The political risk inherent in generational succession and its linkage to the regime's economic performance was summed up by Francisco Soberón, the president of Cuba's National Bank, in 2005. Noting that the 'poor functioning of the economy' was a major cause of the collapse of European communism, he warned of the need to reform the economy sooner rather than later.

> We have a colossal safeguard of Socialism that is our faith in our people, in Fidel and Raúl. But if we do not manage to continue to increase the standard of living of the population and guarantee a programme of sustainable development we are running the risk that these great personalities will become the only pillar that maintains the system.[103]

[100] Dalia Acosta, 'Raúl Castro Proposes Change from Within Socialist System', Inter Press Service, 19 April 2011.

[101] 'Our Greatest Satisfaction Is the Tranquility and Calm Confidence We Feel Handing over the Responsibility of Continuing to Build Socialism to New Generations', *Granma International*, 26 Feb. 2013.

[102] Ibid.

[103] Frank, *Cuban Reveleations*, 40.

Conclusion

Scholars who have looked beyond the technical details of Cuba's economic restructuring to assess its political implications have tended to focus exclusively on whether the new economic policy is likely to succeed or fail. Thus Carmelo Mesa-Lago and Jorge Pérez-López, who are sceptical of the reforms' economic viability, see political trouble ahead unless the reforms are deepened. Emily Morris, on the other hand, concludes that Cuban economic policy since the collapse of the Soviet Union has been rational and largely successful, so she sees little reason to expect political crisis. Haroldo Dilla criticises the reforms from the left, predicting failure for lack of democratic participation.[104] But none of these analyses addresses the interplay of the economic transition's political implications with the ongoing decompression of civil society and the impending generational transition. The coincidence of these processes will magnify the political ramifications of the economic changes, especially if the reform process is unsuccessful.

Economic change is already reshaping Cuba's political terrain. As market reforms weaken the scope of state and party control over the economy, the regime's political monopoly becomes frayed as well, leading to what Jorge Domínguez has identified as 'post-totalitarian' Cuba.[105] This creates what an observer of Eastern Europe called 'islands of autonomy' in civil society which serve as 'safe spaces' within which people forge new social relationships and networks of communication, acquire consciousness of their common interests and develop the capacity for politics outside the regime.[106] Emergent entrepreneurs, both farmers and small businessmen, depend less and less on the state for their well-being. As they accumulate wealth and grow increasingly indispensable to the health of the economy, their desire for less government interference is certain to take a more explicitly political direction. Concomitantly, as income disparities grow, disadvantaged Cubans are unlikely to remain silent, as the surge in Afro-Cuban cultural and political complaints about lingering racism demonstrates. In Eastern Europe, Communist governments relied on a 'social pact' to maintain social peace: the state provided cradle-to-grave social

[104] Mesa-Lago and Pérez-López, *Cuba Under Raúl Castro*; Emily Morris, 'Unexpected Cuba', *New Left Review*, 88 (2014), pp. 5–45; Haroldo Dilla Alfonso, 'La dirección y los límites de los cambios', *Nueva Sociedad*, 216 (2008), pp. 36–48.

[105] Jorge I. Domínguez, 'Comienza una transición hacia el autoritarismo en Cuba', *Encuentro* 6/7 (1997), p. 9.

[106] The concept of 'islands of autonomy' is from Valerie Bunce, *Subversive Institutions: The Design and Destruction of Socialism and the State* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999). On how economic reforms in a centrally planned economy can lead to social pluralism, setting the stage for political change, see David Stark, 'Entrepreneurs on the Road to Post-Communism', *Contemporary Sociology*, 18: 5 (1989), pp. 671–4. An application to the Cuban case is Jorge I. Domínguez, 'Comienza una transición hacia el autoritarismo en Cuba', *Encuentro* 6–7, (1997), pp. 7–23.

welfare benefits and the population tolerated the state's authoritarianism. But when the state defaulted on its end of the bargain, those highly educated populations rose up.[107]

Thus there is an urgency to Cuba's economic reform programme, not only because of external exigencies (like the tenuous state of the Venezuelan government and Cuba's balance of payments problems), but also because of the impending generational change in 2018 when Raúl and, presumably, other long-serving históricos are slated to retire. Without Raúl at helm, it will be easier for bureaucrats to stall reforms that threaten their power, and it will be harder to sustain elite consensus on tough issues. Key elements of the reforms are more likely to fail if they have not already been implemented and proved their economic and political benefit.

If elite stalemate stalls the reform process, the public is unlikely to remain as passive as it has through past policy failures and disappointments. As Cubans interact with populations abroad, through tourism, family visits, professional cooperation, the danger of 'ideological contamination' increases. Intellectuals are already pushing the bounds of legitimate debate, demanding a more inclusive definition of what counts as 'within the revolution' and pushing back at any hint of retrogression. NGOs have proliferated, creating new social networks independent of state supervision and control. The vital social and spiritual role played by the Catholic Church – the only significant social institution outside the government's control – has given the Church a major social presence, with political implications that the government has only recently come to recognise. The spread of the Internet is putting a new generation of Cubans in touch with each other and the wider world in ways the government cannot control.

The government can try to quell these stirrings, but it cannot eliminate them because they are the unavoidable by-product of the economic changes now underway. This complex political panorama will not be easy for Cuba's leaders to manage, and they have fewer levers of power than ever before. The future of the revolutionary regime Fidel and Raúl Castro founded in 1959 will depend on whether it can adapt to these emergent social and political forces, updating Cuba's political as well as its economic model.

Cuba avoided the fate of the European communist regimes in 1989–1991 because Cuban nationalism was directed against its capitalist enemy, the United States, not against its socialist ally, the Soviet Union. Cuba's Revolution was authentically indigenous, not a product of occupation by the Soviet Red Army.

[107] Gail Stokes, *The Walls Came Tumbling Down: The Collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993). For a discussion of the social pact in Cuba, see 'Cuba: ¿hacia un nuevo pacto social?', *Espacio Laical* suplemento digital, abril 2011, available at http://espaciolaical.org/contens/esp/sd_125.pdf.

In 1989, the Cuban Revolution's ideological commitment to social justice was still real in practice and widely supported. And the founding revolutionary generation still held power, embodying the original legitimacy that the Revolution enjoyed.

But while the prognosticators of the regime's imminent demise were wrong in 1989, Cuba's socialist system is by no means out of the woods. It still suffers from deficits in economic organisation and management that proved fatal for European communism, with the resultant problems of low productivity, stagnant standards of living and a heavy burden of international debt. To solve these problems, it will not be enough to replicate the partial, timid economic reforms of 'goulash communism' with which Eastern Europe experimented – for the most part unsuccessfully – in the 1970s and 1980s.

Moreover, the advantages that Cuba enjoyed in 1989 are wasting assets. Cubans remain deeply nationalistic and proud of their independence, but as the level of conflict with the United States diminishes, fear of the external enemy will become a less potent glue binding the population's loyalty to the regime. Rising social inequality – an inevitable consequence of the increasing reliance on market mechanisms – weakens the regime's claim to social justice as a legitimising ideological principle. Finally, the founders of the revolutionary government will soon pass from the scene – in 2018, if not before – leaving their successors with the task of re-creating regime legitimacy on the basis of performance. If Cuba has not gone far toward solving its contemporary economic problems, those successors will be politically vulnerable.

Cuba under Raúl Castro is intent on making progress slowly, carefully calibrating the economic and political ramifications of every new reform measure. Yet there is, at the same time, an urgency to their task and a deadline for completion. The pace of reform will need to quicken if, by 2018, Cuba is too look more like China than like Eastern Europe.

Spanish and Portuguese abstracts

Spanish abstract. En los años desde que Raúl Castro tomó el poder como presidente luego de la enfermedad y retiro de Fidel Castro, Cuba se ha embarcado en cuatro transiciones mayores casi de manera simultánea: una reestructuración de la toma de decisiones de las élites; una transformación de la economía centralizada cubana hacia una economía socialista de mercado; un relajamiento del fuerte control social, lo que ha proveído una mayor autonomía social a la sociedad civil e incluso un cierto grado de descompresión política; y, una transición de la generación de la élite política fundadora (*los históricos*) a una generación sucesora, en donde ningún Castro tendrá el poder. Cada uno de esos procesos contiene en sí mismo riesgos políticos. Desarrollándose juntos, tales procesos constituyen el reto político más grande que el régimen cubano ha enfrentado desde el colapso de la Unión Soviética.

Spanish keywords: sucesión de liderazgo, reforma económica, reforma política, Raúl Castro, Cuba

Portuguese abstract. Nos anos que se seguiram à posse de Raúl Castro como presidente, após a enfermidade e a aposentadoria de Fidel Castro, Cuba deu início, quase que simultaneamente, a quatro importantes transições: a reestruturação do processo decisório das elites; a transformação de uma economia centralmente planejada para uma economia socialista de mercado; um relaxamento do rígido controle social, possibilitando uma autonomia maior da sociedade civil e até mesmo um relaxamento político; e uma transição da geração fundadora da elite política (*los históricos*) para uma geração sucessora, em um momento no qual nenhum dos irmãos Castro se manterá no poder. Cada um desses processos implica em riscos políticos. Ao desdobrarem-se conjuntamente, constituem o maior desafio político enfrentado pelo regime cubano desde o colapso da União Soviética.

Portuguese keywords: sucessão de liderança, reforma econômica, reforma política, Raúl Castro, Cuba