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The Road Not Taken

Keynote Address By
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How Should Cuba Fit In
US Strategy Formulation?

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Allow me to begin with a very genuine word of congratulation to all those involved in the establishment of the Cuba Policy Foundation. There has long been need here in the United States for a facility dedicated in an open way to a review of US policy in relation to Cuba. I stress in ‘an open way’ because I know that there have been many enlightened Americans long dedicated to such a review and revision. But too much of that enlightenment has failed to illumine policy - in part at least, because it has been nurtured in silence. The Cuba Policy Foundation offers a timely opportunity for ideas about US policy to Cuba to be canvassed in discussion and debate at a high level of informed analysis. I wish the Foundation under the guidance of its founder Ambassador Sally Grooms Cowal - who we have known in the Caribbean as a former US Ambassador to Trinidad and Tobago – a productive life.

And both the Stanley Foundation and the Atlantic Council of the United States who have for long been involved in the promotion of dialogue on public affairs issues also deserve our gratitude for making this occasion possible. It will not surprise you then that I consider it a privilege to have been invited to make these Opening Remarks at this Foreign Policy Workshop on ‘How Should Cuba fit in US Strategy Formulation?’. My thanks for the invitation.

The title of the Workshop is carefully phrased, and I have no doubt discussion in the Workshop will touch on its nuances. Let me say, therefore, that my interpretation of it is: ‘What should be US policy to Cuba now, within the framework of US foreign policy as a whole?’. And let me add that in approaching that question, I do so as a citizen of the Caribbean; indeed, as one whose life has been much involved in advancing the interests of the countries of the Caribbean Sea through the integration of our scattered archipelago, including Cuba, into a coherent region of the Hemisphere.

I come, of course, from the English-speaking Caribbean, although it is typical of the paradoxes of our inscrutable history that it is from Guyana on the South American mainland that I come. This is not the occasion for a journey down the routes through the Caribbean Sea that European colonialism has sailed. But it is, I think, appropriate for me to say a word in the beginning about our Region, which regards Cuba as an integral part of, and a valued partner in, our evolving community of Caribbean peoples.

In the post-colonial beginning - which for most Caribbean countries was the 1960s, with the beginnings of the ‘end of empire’ starting with Jamaica - in that beginning, such Caribbean coherence as there was was within the family of English-speaking countries. The West Indian Federation should have united us in the 50s through its constitutional forms even before independence. But the Federation foundered on our fascination with ‘Westphalian’ notions of sovereignty and the nation state. Yet coherence of a kind was achieved through processes of economic integration, to the point where a fledgling Caribbean Community emerged among the newly independent English-speaking territories. It was a struggle to secure even this progress; and it is a struggle still to sustain and enhance it.

But for many of us, that post-colonial ‘English’ club was never enough. For us to ignore the larger socio-geographic realities of Caribbean oneness was to genuflect to the very imperialism that had

made the Caribbean a dividing, not a uniting, Sea. In 1992, the West Indian Commission, which I had the privilege to Chair, gave voice to this ambition in advancing the case for the Caribbean Community, for CARICOM, to both deepen the integration process and to widen it. The Commission called specifically for the establishment in a formal way of the ‘Association of Caribbean States’ which would bring together in incipient integration all the island countries of the Caribbean Sea and all the countries of the Central and South America mainland whose literal coasts were washed by Caribbean waters. That is today our vision of the larger Caribbean. The coastal states are, of course, less exclusively Caribbean than others. But among those others is Cuba. Hence my description of Cuba as an integral member of the Caribbean family.

There was a time when the Caribbean Sea was essentially ‘a Spanish lake’, and another when the flag that held sway in the region - both national and piratical - was English. The Caribbean was a diadem in the crowns of Europe for three centuries, and many were the European wars for paramountcy fought in the Caribbean Sea. The United States was a latecomer, and its instincts were more interventionist than imperialist; but it was present, too, in our chequered history. Today, the wider Caribbean is a multi-lingual, multi-cultural, pluralistic region with a steadily enlarging sense of identity - and with windows open to the world in a unique foreign relations architecture: to America, of course, including Latin America, to Europe, to Africa, to Asia and even to the Pacific.

Cuba was long within the outreach of Jamaica - its close Caribbean neighbour - and the bonds between the two islands were forged through the most lasting of processes - the interchange of peoples. Not surprisingly, Caribbean countries - themselves in the final stage of their own struggle against colonialism - took satisfaction in the Cuban Revolution when it occurred in 1959 - pleased that a corrupt, racist and dictatorial regime had been toppled from within. Not surprising, too, that despite the ideological differences, hardened by Cold War considerations, that later kept our communities apart, it was Caribbean countries in 1972 - through the simultaneous establishment of diplomatic relations with Cuba by Barbados, Guyana, Jamaica and Trinidad & Tobago - that effectively broke the Hemispheric diplomatic embargo.

We never, as a Community shared Cuban faith in the Marxist prescription. For the most part the Caribbean was searching for what today we would call ‘the third way’ between free market capitalism and command economies - a way that would free us as well from the allegiance to left or right that Cold War protagonists demanded of us. Yet our bonds with Cuba as a part of our Region were strong enough to ensure that we could agree to disagree on such matters and cooperate as Caribbean developing countries. We are cooperating in this way.

Recently, the Caribbean Community signed a partial scope Free Trade Agreement with Cuba as part of the strategic alliances the Community is establishing within the wider Caribbean. And, of course, there is much that has been happening by way of functional cooperation in many fields. Cuba was from the beginning a part of CARIFESTA - the Caribbean Festival of Arts; Cuban doctors and nurses helped, and still help, to administer to the health needs of our communities; young West Indians trained without cost in Cuban Universities achieving competences in a variety of fields

crucial to national development that they and the Caribbean would otherwise have been denied. And on the international scene, Cuba has been with us in the Non-Aligned Movement and in the Group of 77 for some forty years in advancing causes important to our progress in global economic arrangements.

Quite recently, these ever closer relations with Cuba took a practical form in the Caribbean's role in nurturing an improvement of relations between Cuba and Europe, between Cuba and the European Union more specifically. The African, Caribbean and Pacific (the ACP) countries had pioneered in the Lome Convention, that goes back to the 1970s an economic partnership arrangement with Europe fashioned to its times. In the late 1990s, we embarked on refashioning that relationship closer to the realities of a new time - including a recognition that some of the fundamentals of the old arrangement from which the Caribbean benefited, like trade preferences for commodities (like sugar and bananas), were now under pressure in the era of trade liberalisation. As Europe and ACP did so, Caribbean countries took a lead in advancing the claims of Cuba as part of the 'C' in the ACP. We sponsored Cuba as a member of the post-Lome negotiations with the European Union. Today, Cuba is a full member of the ACP and will be, I hope, a prominent player in the evolving negotiations with Europe for successor economic partnership arrangements. Cuba in the 21st Century is part of the wider Caribbean as together we develop new economic relations with European States many of whom had played roles in the shared historical evolution of this region.

I have said all this to try to convey several things. First of all, why it is that I must speak about US-Cuba relations from a Caribbean perspective. Next, why for Caribbean persons today, and for Caribbean policy makers more particularly, Cuba is part of our Caribbean family in an increasingly intimate way. Why we cannot be dispassionate about Cuba. Why we cannot but look askance at any development which would distance us from Cuba or drive wedges that would inhibit the evolution of still closer relations. Why Cuba deserves to be seen by the US with 21 Century eyes.

But an elaboration of this background to my speaking with you tonight must include as well Caribbean relations with the United States. The English-speaking countries of the Caribbean have a long record of good relations with America. In the beginning (we like to believe), we gave you Alexander Hamilton; you have given us much over the years, including much trouble too. Recently, there are many matters that US strategy formulation has advanced in the Caribbean in the name of US security or threats to its social structure that give us trouble. They relate, for example, to drug trafficking, to money laundering to undesirable criminal elements from the Caribbean - most of whom (I must tell you) grew up in the US. These are all matters the Caribbean regards as ones of valid US concerns; but the manner in which they have been advanced has been invariably troubling. Often the process has been unilateral and arbitrary; more intrusive than cooperative; more prescriptive than one of partnership.

But the bonds between the Caribbean and the United States go deeper than these periodic aberrations. Caribbean people, West Indians from the English-speaking countries, but many many others as well, have migrated to the United States and formed substantial communities in this

country. Their remittances are significant to many Caribbean economies. Many thousands of our young people are educated at American Universities and West Indians now shop in this country not only through trips to Miami but also on the Internet. US tourists to the Caribbean represent the region's single largest market and contribute significantly to Caribbean well-being. Our future is entwined with yours. Caribbean leaders are in constant dialogue with the US Administration at all levels, but with the President and the Secretary of State more particularly.

This is the Caribbean of which US policy to Cuba must be mindful. President Bush(George W.) talked early in office of the Caribbean as America's 'third border'; and so it is; and Cuba is the beachhead of that maritime border. My proposition is that in considering 'how Cuba should fit in US strategy formulation' you must take account of this 'Caribbean' reality of the new Cuba. The 'third border' cannot wish away the 'Cuban' reality of the new Caribbean.

But let me cast my net somewhat wider. Today, America stands against the world in the matter of its economic embargo of Cuba. At the United Nations, in New York and in Geneva, the world has consistently made that clear. It is the US whom the embargo now isolates. You are strong enough, you believe, to ignore the world on this as on other matters. But you are learning, too, as we all are, that the era of globalization is not just a technical manifestation of global economic liberalisation, but the reality that global interdependencies and the information revolution have made our world 'a global neighbourhood' - a world community of States and peoples.

In this new world, the American embargo against Cuba is now just plain old fashioned. It speaks of another time; it is out of place in our time. So, it has lost meaning; it has a capacity to impose hardship on the Government and the people of Cuba, but not unendurable hardship. It will not bring Cuba to its knees; it helps it to stand tall. Meanwhile, it leaves the largest economy in the non-US Caribbean a playground for European trade and investment. Visit Varadero on the north coast of Cuba to witness America's 'allies' dominating the tourist industry of this largest tourist destination in the Caribbean.

And what is the US quarrel today with Cuba? Not that the regime is undemocratic in terms of Western-style democracy; not that, surely; for some of America's closest allies are among the world's most autocratic regimes. I personally believe that it is time for Cuba to advance towards 'post-revolutionary democracy'. That is a view that is held throughout the Caribbean, and it is a view that I have personally expressed publicly in Havana, as have others from the Region. But this does not lead us to supporting the ostracism of Cuba from our Caribbean family; nor should it lead the US to sustaining the vain pursuit of Cuba's ostracism from the family of the Hemisphere, or wider still, from the global society of nations. Far from it, it should be part of US strategy formulation to bring Cuba 'within the tent' if it expects to exercise a friendly influence on Cuban affairs.

Furthermore, US policy formulation does itself an injustice if when understandably calling for political change in Cuba it fails to acknowledge Cuba's quite outstanding achievements in the social sector. In the years since 1959, the mass of the Cuban people have steadily benefited from health care

and education of a quality wholly denied them by previous regimes and that today is superior to that in many countries of Latin America, Africa and Asia – and, indeed, some parts of Europe itself. As successive UN Human Development Reports have attested, Cuba's achievements in these sectors are immense – all the more so that they were attained in the face of the US embargo

In fact, it is my belief, and a proposition I hope the Workshop will debate, that US policy to Cuba, including the embargo, has played a specifically negative role in relation to its movement towards democracy. It has inexorably created a siege environment in Cuba; sustained the country in a permanent state of emergency; retarded rather than nurtured conditions in which that 'post revolutionary democracy' of which I spoke could sprout spontaneously from the revolutionary soil. Remember, the Revolution was about 'freedom'; from the beginning, US policy to Cuba was antithetical to the fulfilment of the Revolution's goals. 'Cold War' considerations came later in justification of the hostility that was endemic to American attitudes. Indeed, was Cuba's embrace of 'communism' a self-fulfilling prophecy of the McCarthyism of the 50s and the spurning by the US of Fidel Castro's overtures of friendship here in Washington within the first months of the Revolution (April 1959).

The 'Cold War' has ended; yet the embargo remains as the outward form of that enduring hostility. The non-realisation of the ambition for 'freedom' in its civil and political connotations might have been the post revolutionary reality anyway; other revolutions before have lost their way; the point is that US policy to Cuba never gave it a chance to be otherwise. But, to a degree, that was yesterday's story. The Workshop must mainly look ahead.

At the start of the 21st Century, US Strategy formulation must have among its aims the fostering of a Hemisphere at peace with itself and in a state of healthy cooperation throughout its entirety. An ostracised Cuba does not fit in that strategy. In one sense, the embargo is a self-denying ordinance; it does not change the reality of Cuba in the Caribbean, in the Hemisphere, in the world. What it does is to make a statement - more a confession - about the US itself. But its maintenance freezes policy in a time warp and prompts strategy to be formulated as if Cuba in other respects does not exist.

Today, for example, US strategy in the Hemisphere promotes the development of the Free Trade Area of the Americas. But, if the FTAA was to be realised tomorrow it would really be an FTAPA - a free trade area of part of the Americas. The exclusion of Cuba at the behest of the United States denies the enterprise its true fulfilment; but the US encourages the Hemisphere to share its pretence that the FTAA without Cuba will be a notable achievement. Not everyone in the Hemisphere shares this illusion. At the Summit of the Americas in Santiago in 1999, which affirmed the decision to proceed, the Caribbean countries as well as Canada spoke specifically of their concerns that without Cuba the FTAA would not be true to its proclaimed ambition. Those concerns remain. If Cuba continues to be excluded, it would be because US strategy formulation has continued to be regressive. A Cuba in FTA relations with Europe, but denied any part in the FTAA, would be the bizarre by-product of that flawed US policy to Cuba.

But there is a wider consideration still. Our global neighbourhood needs to be infused with a culture of neighbourhood values. The United States attests to this need in some areas of foreign policy, but seems to reserve the right to abandon them when they get in the way of short term national interest considerations as perceived from time to time through domestic political lenses: Helms-Burton legislation, the abandonment of the Kyoto Protocol, the scrapping of the IBM treaties, opting out of the International Criminal Court - and now, it seems, out of the humanitarian norms of the Vienna Convention. All, in different spheres, testify to strategy formulation accommodating to double standards and indifferent to global values. The world beyond these shores shares the dismay and disappointment of dissenting Americans; many friends complain, some more vocally than others; but the world is largely powerless to prevail against the global superpower. However incapacity must not be mistaken for acquiescence, much less for approbation. And there is a downside globally to what in a domestic context we would describe as anti-social behaviour. Perceptions in the global neighbourhood are no different.

For every country there is a linkage between domestic and foreign policy. In every democracy that is inevitable. But in an enlightened democracy, where the body politic has a constructive appreciation of the impact of foreign policy on the national good, what is at work is not an across the board subordination of foreign policy to domestic considerations, particularly party political ones, so much as an interaction between domestic and foreign policy considerations in the formulation of the larger national strategy. This is true for all states, large and small alike; but the necessity for sustaining that interaction at an appropriate level of global enlightenment becomes almost primordial where the country is the world's dominant power whose foreign policy has an impact on the lives of human beings everywhere - at the very least those of many hundreds of millions beyond its shores. The responsibilities of power require, I suggest, this constructive interaction - a balance between these national and international interests in a context

in which the latter are recognised to be a part of the former and not extraneous to it. Down through the ages, when the foreign policy of powerful countries becomes yoked to the aggressive advancement of national interests, the result has often been calamitous for the world. The era of *Pax Americana* is not in this respect unique.

It is a sad reality that US policy to Cuba has today become a victim of this dubious culture. If this Workshop is to answer the question which its title poses it cannot, I suggest, avoid the conclusion that US strategy formulation in relation to Cuba must free itself of these cramping considerations. This is a great country, it deserves to give itself a better chance to get its Cuba policy right. It is palpable to me - and hugely ironic - that the greatest impact US strategy formulation could have on the Cuban regime, and those domestic policies which the US claims it wishes to see changed, will derive not from American hostility, but from an American embrace. Yet even the most benign normalisation of relations with Cuba seems beyond the capacity of US policy. One is bound to ask what interests then does current US policy to Cuba serve?

One final word. Does the 11th September change any of this? I believe the very contrary - that, on balance, it reinforces it; for a world united in an enduring way in a war against international terrorism must live by the highest standards of internationalism. This is not only a moral, but also a political imperative. It is a compelling strategy. For US strategy formulation to proceed on the basis that Cuba is an 'enemy' in this war is to miss the wood for the trees; and to obscure both these imperatives. I do not believe that US strategy formulation will follow this path. But that is not the only point; Does 11th September not argue more positively that this is precisely a moment of major strategic change in US external relations which offers an opportunity to normalise relations with Cuba in the context of these changes - and in furtherance of both US and Cuban national interests. I trust the opportunity will not be missed.

My hope, of course, is that this Workshop, which has assembled so much talent and experience, can address all these questions with candour: for I am sure that within the answers lies pointers to the right policy in US-Cuba relations which the Workshop seeks to find.

For me, I should be surprised if the truth is other than that revealed in Robert Frost's immortal poem 'The Road Not Taken' :

*Two roads diverged in a wood, and I –
I took the one less travelled by,
And that has made all the difference.*

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