



## Summary of New Bush Policy toward Cuba May 2004

*By Rachel Farley and Geoff Thale*

On May 6<sup>th</sup>, the Bush Administration announced that it was adopting as policy the recommendations presented by the “Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba,” an advisory body that the President named in December of 2003. The Commission’s report has four chapters on assistance the U.S. might provide to a post-Castro Cuba to support a “free market economy” and “representative democracy.” Its key chapter, however, discusses measures to “hasten the end of the Cuban dictatorship.” These measures are summarized below.

The Administration’s measures can be grouped in four broad areas. These are measures to:

- 1) Work with Cuban dissidents and other sectors in Cuba
- 2) Distribute information and U.S.-funded media in Cuba
- 3) Cut off financial resources to the Cuban government, primarily through restricting Cuban-American travel
- 4) Internationalize the embargo by carrying out international public education campaigns on the U.S. view of Castro’s Cuba to encourage other governments and multilateral agencies to criticize Cuba and support dissidents and others in Cuba

### **1. Measures to work with Cuban dissidents and other sectors in Cuba**

The Commission calls for \$29 million in additional funding, on top of the U.S. Agency for International Development’s (USAID)

current \$7 million, to “empower Cuban civil society.” The report does not specify which budgets this money will come from, nor by which agencies it will be managed. But it calls for:

**\$5 million** for programs that will support “democratic and human rights groups on the island, and to fund an increased flow of information to the island.” This implies increased funding for the kinds of work USAID currently carries out in its Cuba program.

**\$5 million** for programs focused on women’s organizations and issues in Cuba, including “bringing third-country NGOs with expertise on this issue into Cuba.”

**\$4 million** for programs focused on the Afro-Cuban community. “Programs could involve NGO leaders from the African-American community and African countries traveling to Cuba for training and outreach, and forming national working groups on Cuba in their own countries.”

**\$4 million** for programs to reach out to Cuban youth.

**\$3 million** for programs to train Cuban NGOs in democracy building, civil society, etc.

**\$3 million** to purchase and deliver computers, fax machines, etc to Cuban groups and independent journalists.

**\$2 million** to provide books and other materials for Cuban independent libraries, and to work with library associations in Latin

America and Europe to support Cuban independent libraries.

**\$3 million** for programs to promote “independent labor unions” in Cuba, and to “facilitate international contacts” for these unions.

In addition, the Commission proposes several other activities to work with civil society in Cuba. These include:

- **Work focused on religious organizations and faith-based initiatives in Cuba.** The Commission urges the United States to “encourage a wider array of religious organizations” to work with counterparts in Cuba.
- **Efforts to distribute medicines through Cuban civil society groups, as a way of assisting their “outreach efforts.”**
- **Work with third countries to create an “international fund for Cuban civil society.”**

All of these measures, taken together, represent a significant escalation in U.S. support for dissidents and others in Cuba, as well as an increase in support for anti-Castro NGOs in the United States and other countries.

## **2. Measures to distribute information and U.S.-funded media in Cuba**

The principal U.S. information measures directed specifically toward Cuba have been Radio and TV Marti. (Voice of America is not specifically directed toward Cuba; interestingly, the Cuban government has never blocked the VOA and it can be heard in Cuba, despite its carrying points of view hostile to the Cuban government.) Radio Marti, begun in 1985, is frequently jammed by the Cuban government. Though its signal

can often be heard in Cuba despite the jamming, the station’s listenership in Cuba has declined in recent years. (One survey suggested that less than 5% of Cuban radio listeners listened to Radio Marti.) The Cubans have jammed TV Marti since it began, and almost no one in the country sees the programming.

The Commission recommends that the United States take more active measures to overcome Cuban jamming and ensure that the Marti signals reach Cuba. Specifically, they recommend that, in the short term, the U.S. military deploy a specially equipped C-130 aircraft, which is normally used to carry out psychological operations and to broadcast to civilian populations in wartime situations, to fly off the Cuban coast, broadcasting the Radio and TV Marti signals. In the medium term, the Commission recommends that the Administration commit **\$18 million** to acquire and refit an aircraft for the Office of Cuban Broadcasting to broadcast to Cuba and overcome the jamming. The recommendations note that all this should be done “consistent with the United States international telecommunications obligations,” a recognition that broadcasting into Cuba over already functioning Cuban radio and television frequencies is a violation of international agreements and invites the Cuban government to broadcast into and disrupt the Miami media market. In addition, the Commission recommends that the Administration purchase airtime on radio and TV stations in the Caribbean Basin to broadcast into Cuba.

## **3. Measures to cut off resources to the Cuban government**

The Commission notes, accurately, that over the last decade Cuba has shifted towards tourism as a major revenue generator, and source of foreign exchange. (This follows a strategy that most Caribbean countries have adopted.) Tourism currently generates about

\$2 billion in gross revenues for Cuba. About 10% of Cuba's foreign visitors come from the United States. Many of them are Cuban-Americans, returning to visit their families.

The Commission recommends that the United States take a series of measures to reduce travel by U.S. citizens, and travel-related income, from the United States, in order to hurt the Cuban economy. These measures include:

**Tightening enforcement of the current travel restrictions**, by increasing inspections of those returning from Cuba, and seeking to identify travelers returning from Cuba through third-countries. This measure, which requires customs and immigration agents to devote extra resources to identifying potentially unlicensed Cuba visitors, is designed to reduce widespread unlicensed travel.

**Restricting educational travel even further.** Over the last year, the Bush Administration has narrowed the category of legal educational travel, restricting it to degree granting institutions. Now it proposes to further restrict educational travel, limiting it to institutions that conduct semester-long programs for students. The practical effect of these measures is to substantially reduce licensed educational travel to Cuba.

**Eliminating the category of "fully hosted travel"** under which U. S. visitors can go to Cuba and have their expenses paid by their Cuban hosts, rather than spending money themselves. This eliminates a category used by many business groups for exploratory visits to Cuba.

**Tightening a series of minor provisions, whose cumulative effect is to make licensed travel more difficult.** These include eliminating the \$100 worth of Cuban goods one can bring back to the U.S., eliminating the general licensing category that permits

athletes to participate in sporting events in Cuba, and making it more difficult for private boats to visit Cuba.

**Funneling money to groups in third countries to run campaigns to discourage tourism to Cuba.**

More importantly, the Administration proposes a series of measures designed to cut down on travel by Cuban-Americans to the island, and to limit the resources Cuban-Americans bring back to Cuba. The new policy would:

**Limit travel by Cuban-Americans to once every three years.** Currently, Cuban-Americans can visit once each year.

**End the general license for periodic Cuban-American travel.** Instead require Cuban-Americans to obtain specific licenses for each visit. This would require the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control to issue an estimated 40,000 individual licenses each year.

**Narrow the definition of family, and issue visas only for visits to immediate family members.**

**Limit Cuban-American donations to relatives in Cuba**, by putting a weight limit on luggage travelers take to Cuba (this applies to Cuban-American and non-Cuban-American travelers), and by limiting what they can send in gift parcels.

**Limit the length of stay of family visits to 14 days and the amount that Cuban-Americans can spend per day in Cuba to \$50, down from \$164.**

On remittances, the Commission recommends only minor modifications. It does not propose further restrictions on the amount of remittances that Cuban-Americans can send their families in Cuba (currently

\$300 a quarter.) It does prohibit sending money to anyone who is a member of the Cuban Communist Party (previously only “senior Party officials” were banned from receiving funds) and to certain Cuban government official. It also prohibits sending money to anyone who is not an immediate relative in Cuba, thus preventing most non-Cuban-Americans from sending money to friends or others in Cuba. The Commission also proposes to tighten enforcement of the current restrictions, cracking down on the practice of sending money through third countries or paying someone to take remittances to Cuba.

All these measures are designed to deny revenue to the regime.

#### **4. Measures to internationalize the embargo**

The Commission proposes a variety of measures to persuade third countries to adopt more strongly anti-Castro positions. These include new “public diplomacy efforts” to

persuade audiences in third countries to adopt the U.S. Administration’s views of Cuba. The Administration would commit **\$5 million** to this effort, including supporting work by U.S. embassies, giving grants to groups in other countries that oppose the Cuban regime, and funding conferences in third countries about Cuba.

In addition, the Administration would encourage the International Labor Organization (ILO), and the unions and other bodies that work with the ILO, to take up the issue of labor rights in Cuba. It would also support international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and others in bringing human rights claims about Cuba before the Inter-American Human Rights Commission of the OAS.

As noted above, a number of the efforts to support dissidents and civil society groups in Cuba might be funneled through efforts, governmental or non-governmental, in third countries.

