

# The History and the Fate of Fidel Castro

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Cuba is a totalitarian state headed by Fidel Castro who serves as chief of state, President, head of government, first secretary of the Communist Party, commander in chief of the armed forces, and above all as dictator. But will he hold these titles forever? In March 2002, Fidel Castro declared his intention to remain in power for life, a position through which he, and the Communist Party, have been able to impose uniformity throughout Cuba and personally control all aspects of life and society.

The economy of Cuba, like its political system, is totally centralized. In theory the Cuban Government accepts petitions for reforms backed by 10,000 citizens or more. However, to test this Project Varela collected thousands of signatures calling for a national referendum. The Varela petitions were rejected and more than 75 human rights activists — including teachers and journalist — were arrested, convicted and given long sentences. They have been provided utterly inadequate legal counsel, an inadequate diet and clothing, and no exercise. In addition, the three men who hijacked a boat bound from Cuba to the U.S. mainland were intercepted, arrested, jailed and summarily executed. Many people expected that Cuba would grow less repressive after the transformation of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. Yet there have only been marginal changes.

In the years following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the government of Cuba sought to promote tourism and affluent Europeans have been especially attracted to Cuba. But between 1960 and 1989 tourism in Cuba grew very slowly. Facilities to accommodate visitors were relatively primitive: hotels were out of date, prostitution was widespread, and poverty was deeper than in any country in the Caribbean. Cuba has lost out in tourist development and U.S. laws have also discouraged the tourist trade.

The end of the Soviet Union and the socialist economic bloc meant the end of Soviet subsidies and military support for Cuba, but it did not diminish Castro's determination. He still believed, as he did in 1991, that "a revolutionary must be a man who even if he is left alone continues to fight for his ideas." There have been few significant changes in Cuba in the years in which the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe have made significant strides toward pluralism and democracy.

The transformation of Eastern Europe, the defeat of the Sandinista regime in Nicaragua and the FSLM in El Salvador left Cuba more isolated than it had been in decades. The trial and execution of Castro's principle military leaders, General Arnaldo Ochoa and Col. Antonio de la Guardia, further contributed to his isolation. Therefore, in the years since the transformation of the Soviet bloc Fidel Castro has found it necessary to look elsewhere for his allies. The sole requirement appears to be that the ally be governed by a dictator, that they seek a monopoly of power and practice comprehensive repression. Castro has increasingly associated himself with China, Iraq, North Korea, Iran, Syria, and for a time with Libya. In sum, Cuba is a rogue state which prefers the company of other rogue states.

In Castro's view, the U.S. remains its natural enemy — and more than one astute observer has reported a conviction that the Cuban government will end in a war with the U.S. Fidel Castro has not only sought to accumulate weapons, he has attempted to build a network of spies and potential terrorists.

Fidel Castro has been a persistent threat to international peace and security. He has trained and equipped terrorists. He has exported guns, drugs and violence to many countries in the hemisphere. He has recommended the use of nuclear bombs against the United States. He has denied Cubans civil and political liberties and a

decent standard of living. He has refused to cooperate with monitors assigned by the U.N. Commission on Human Rights. Above all, he has oppressed the Cuban people whilst no member of his government has shown signs of supporting reform, except for those who fled the island and sought refuge outside Cuba.

In his book 'Context for a Cuban Transition' (2004), Ernesto Betancourt reminds us that following his return from Vietnam and China in 2003, Fidel concluded he must stay in power until he dies. Mark Falcoff in 'Cuba: The Morning After' (2003) reminds us that soon after Fidel Castro achieved power, the revolutionary government sponsored efforts to overthrow the governments of the Dominican Republic, Nicaragua, Haiti, and Panama, recruiting and training men from Venezuela, Colombia, Peru, Argentina, Bolivia, Nicaragua and El Salvador. They were also intermittently involved in the Americas and Africa — Angola, Ethiopia, Somalia and the Congo. Furthermore Castro provided the Soviet Union with an important staging post in the Caribbean adequate to house 12,700 Soviet troops in Cuba and provided a Soviet submarine at Cienfuegos and another base at San Anloco. But Cuba remains a massively underdeveloped island whose people suffer all kinds of deprivation.

The achievements of Fidel Castro's Cuba can only be fully appreciated when compared with those of Cuban immigrants in the United States, Mexico, Venezuela, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic and elsewhere where Cuban refugees have arrived with nothing but who have nonetheless made good lives for themselves.