



**Cuba Transition
Project**

A decorative banner with a dark green background on the right and a lighter green background on the left. The left side features a stylized, semi-transparent image of the Cuban flag, showing the three stars and the wavy stripes.

**THE CUBAN TRANSITION:
LESSONS FROM THE
ROMANIAN EXPERIENCE**

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Cuba Transition Project – CTP

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The Cuban Transition: Lessons from the Romanian Experience

Executive Summary

This essay examines the experience of post-communist, post-Ceausescu Romania as it might apply to any post-Castro transition scenarios for Cuba.¹ Aside from sharing the same official ideology and history of economic and military dependence on the Soviet Union, President Fidel Castro's Cuba has little in common with the former Warsaw Pact countries. The Warsaw Pact regimes were put in power by Soviet tanks in the 1940s; Castro came to power on his own. The Eastern Europe countries, with one late exception (Romania), were led by faceless Moscow-issue bureaucrats; Castro is very charismatic. The Eastern European regimes collapsed when Moscow refused to protect them against their own peoples in 1989; by contrast, Castro survived not only the end of Soviet and East European economic subsidies and strategic cover, but the end of the Soviet Union itself.

The permanent exception is Romania, led by President Nicolae Ceausescu from 1965 to 1989. While the communist regime in Bucharest had the same origins — Soviet military force — as the other East European regimes, its later evolution was distinct in a way that made it less dependent on or obedient to Moscow. Indeed, by loudly denouncing the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, Bucharest demonstrated greater independence from the Soviets than even Havana did.

From the late 1950s through the fall of the Soviet Union, no Soviet troops occupied Romania. For at least that long, the Bucharest regime, like President Castro's in Cuba, sought to combine nationalism with Marxism-Leninism. In Romania's case, this nationalism was anti-Russian and anti-Hungarian. Romania generally avoided openly opposing Soviet or Russian foreign policy dictates, pursuing an autonomous — albeit neither wholly independent nor, more important, anti-Marxist or even anti-Soviet — policy of its own.

It is difficult to quantify the significance of the fact that Romania

is the only Romance-language nation among the former Soviet satellites. This distinction clearly led to a high sense of cultural difference from its neighbors. Romania's political and cultural tradition also plays an important role in explaining the highly personalistic and dynastic nature of the Ceausescu regime, and attractive though arbitrary analogies with Latin *caudillos* come to mind.

Romania's distinctive traits endured long after the rest of Eastern Europe's communist states had renounced Stalinist personality cults. The analogy to Castro's *caudillismo*, if limited, is obvious. Indeed, Romania's entire modern political culture has been dominated by strong personalities, and President Ceausescu was in many respects the heir to that tradition.

A detailed analysis of Romanian institutions and political culture both before and since 1989 suggests that of all the Eastern European regimes, Romania offers the best analogy to Cuba. Of course, numerous caveats apply. The following are among the most important distinguishing features:

- **COMECON.** Both countries were members of the Soviet-led “common market,” the Council of Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON). Although Romania, unlike Cuba, shared a border with the Soviet Union, it was less dependent on COMECON, inasmuch as it diversified its foreign trade, especially toward the Third World.²
- **Cultural influence.** Romania's cultural influences are European, which in its case mean those of Western Europe, with its traditions of democracy and freedom, and now more specifically the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). These are quite different from the Latin American cultural and political influences on Cuba's history and geopolitics.
- **Military.** The relationship between the national leader and the military leadership is close in Cuba but, as the events of 1989 demonstrated, was practically absent in Romania.
- **Diaspora.** Romania's diaspora was virtually nonexistent at the time of transition: the Romanian émigrés in France, Canada and the United States were unorganized, divided and included totalitarian supporters of the fascist Iron Guard, monarchists, and

democrats. All of them lacked resources, credibility, or even support in Romania. On the contrary, the huge Cuban diaspora in the United States has resources, political clout, and (although increasingly diminishing) organization and unity of purpose. While the Cuban diaspora may not play a major political role in post-Castro Cuba, it will, unlike its Romanian counterpart, have a major economic and social influence.

All that said, there are strong similarities between the Castro and Ceausescu regimes. The most important of these include:

- **The extraordinary role of the leader** and the regime's total dependence on him over any institutions, including the formally dominant Communist Party.
- **The related weakening of the regime's ability to mobilize support and sustain itself** independent of the leader translated into the sclerosis of both the Communist Party and its related organisms, the "transmission belts" of women, youth, and trade union organizations.
- **Sociologically**, there was a clear sense in Romania that the regime's ability to perpetuate itself was unsuccessful, as demonstrated by high-level defections such as that of Ceausescu's personal security adviser General Ion Pacepa and the fact that prominent scions of the communist cadre were turning to dissidence and defection to the West. General Rafael del Pino Díaz was, in more than one sense, the Cuban equivalent of Lt. General. Ion Mihai Pacepa, the head of Romania's intelligence, when he defected in 1978. The defections of Jorge Masetti, Alcibiades Hidalgo (former assistant to Fidel Castro's younger brother, Raúl), and members of Castro's immediate family suggest that the same process is going on in Havana. More important are the purges inside the regimes themselves. The parallel between the purge by Ceausescu's regime in 1971 of Ion Iliescu, then a former Communist Youth leader and later youth minister, and the purge from Castro's regime in 2002 of Roberto Robaina, also a former Communist Youth leader and then foreign minister, case in point.

For the ordinary or mid-level Cuban Communist Party (Partido Comunista de Cuba — PCC) member, there is probably a feeling of uncertainty, considering that the number of Cuban elite members who have been eliminated is already larger than that of Ceausescu’s victims. Less violent purges are continuing, suggesting or at least giving the public at large the impression that there is instability at the top. That perception, within the elite circles and outside, also existed in Romania in 1989 and in part explains the absence of commitment of most Party members to the ruling couple in December of that year.

- **The persistent attempts of the two regimes to square the ideological circle** of Marxism-Leninism by combining its “proletarian internationalism” with an increasingly rabid nationalism. As noted above, both regimes attempted to replace the fictional legitimacy of communism with the more concrete one of nationalism. Indeed, the more insecure the regime was in either country, the more nationalist its rhetoric became. In Romania, that approach was highly successful between the late 1950s (prior to Ceausescu’s assumption of power) and 1971, after which it became merely a transparent attempt to prop up the ruling clan. In Cuba, the approach worked well until Castro’s capitulation to Moscow in 1968. It has since been in decline but is still effective to a degree.

In this regard, Castro’s recent initiative of declaring “socialism” a perpetual goal of the Cuban state has an eerie resemblance to Ceausescu’s push for life leadership and the formal promotion of his wife to second-in-command of the Communist Party in November 1989, just weeks before his execution. Both Castro and Ceausescu attempted to establish some ideological basis for regime survival after their inevitable passing.

- **Civil society is weak** in both countries, compared to its relative strength in most European communist states. While it is certainly true that Cuban dissidents are more numerous and better known (outside the country) than their few Romanian counterparts prior to 1989, and that they have some support from the still influential Catholic Church — in contrast to the largely collaborationist Orthodox hierarchy in Romania — they are not in a

position to offer an alternative leadership. While Poland in particular, but also Lithuania, Hungary, and East Germany, witnessed the presence of a strong civil society and at least some alternative political and economic competence prior to collapse, none of that is applicable to Romania in 1989 or to Cuba today.

The end of the Ceausescu regime had much to do with its very nature — weak institutions in general and weak military commitment to its leader — as distinct from its nationalistic claims, which the generals (and even more so the colonels and majors) took seriously. On the other hand, and contrary to conventional wisdom and media coverage, the end came more by coup d'état than by mass revolt, let alone revolution.

Introduction: The End of the Regime, Collapse, and Nature of Transition

On Christmas Day 1989, President Nicolae Ceausescu and his wife Elena, who had together been in power in Romania since 1965, were shot by a summary military court, accused of genocide and associated crimes. It was a unique case of “justice” in post-communist Eastern Europe and one that may have had a significant impact upon the remaining communist regimes. For that reason, the events in Romania have received intense attention in China, Cuba, and North Korea.

By 1971, President Ceausescu had established what could be described as an almost perfect totalitarian system: everything not formally forbidden was indeed compulsory. It was only “almost” perfect because, first, Romania was not a truly independent state; second, Ceausescu’s dynastic notions were limited to a few isolated cases like his or North Korea’s; and third, Ceausescu and his family made a clear and convenient target to opposition within the system and, most important, to disdain in Moscow.

Attempts during the period between 1968 and 1970 to allow some small business operations, mostly restaurants in a few cities and peasant markets elsewhere, had been cut short by 1971. That year, the regime decided to copy the Chinese “cultural revolution” patterns and close those businesses, much as Castro did with the peasant markets during the 1980s and still does at present by taxing the *paladares* almost out of existence. In both cases, the official — and, from a Marxist view point, correct — explanation at the time was that a private sector of any size exacerbates class struggle and social inequality.

Throughout the Ceausescu regime, the system’s internal stability was based upon an artificial balance between the various internal security agencies including the omnipresent secret police (Securitate), the regular police, and local Romanian Communist Party (Partidul Comunist Roman — PCR) cells. The 1950s system of local, house-by-house committees of surveillance had decayed and was dismantled by the early 1960s. This pattern contrasts with the Cuban regime, wherein the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (CDR), although now in an advanced state of decay, are still officially in place.

The Romanian regime was a nepotistic, dynastic system whereby

every important political and ideological position was occupied by a member of the ruling couple's family. Ceausescu, as Castro is now, was president (chief of state), the equivalent of prime minister (chief of government), and supreme commander of the armed forces. Ceausescu also served as the First Secretary of the sole and ruling legal political party, PCR, and was the focus of a widespread personality cult. His wife, Elena was in charge of PCR cadres, but her reach extended beyond the PCR into economic policy decisions, scientific research, and even the choice of top military posts. Indeed, her office was widely known as Biroul 2, or Bureau 2 (her husband's office was Bureau 1) and was directly involved in promotions of both the military and Internal Affairs Ministry (Ministerul Afacerilor de Interne — MAI). Thus, her refusal after 1985 to promote any senior officers in the armed forces except as temporary appointments was typical — and fatal for the regime.

The Ceausescus and Elena's family, the Petrescus, personally controlled numerous aspects of the regime. Nicolae's brother Ilie was a general of the army, in charge of personnel. Another brother, also named Nicolae, was important in Securitate, and a cohort of Petrescus held important positions in national and local administrations in their native region of Oltenia, a poor area in the southwest.

Since 1971, the Ceausescus had been influenced by the North Korean system, and they clearly intended to prepare their younger son, Nicu, as their successor. Nicu's older siblings were not interested in politics, much like Castro's son Fidelito. The ruling couple made their intentions clear by their promoting Nicu to leadership of the PCR's youth branch and then to party chairman, and hence local boss, of Sibiu County. In Havana, the Castro brothers aside, dynastic links are less important than the institutionalization of Castro's revolutionary legacy.

The economic policy was largely left to Elena, who pursued a nationalist and Stalinist approach, seeking to establish a national industry of major proportions in chemicals, petrochemicals, mining, and steel, largely at the expense of agriculture. The new industries were intended to provide jobs and thus attract peasant labor to the cities, thus increasing the size of the working class. Elena also intended to make Romania independent of imports, regardless of resources, traditions, and even cost. Instead of fostering such independence, however, her economic policies made the country dependent on external capital in the form of Western

loans and on imported raw materials from Africa and the Middle East.

In world markets, Romania became a member of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank during the 1970s, a decade ahead of any other member of COMECON. Meanwhile, the proportion of Romania's trade with the Third World also increased dramatically, especially since most of it was not conducted in hard currency. By the late 1970s, Ceausescu imposed a drastic course of energy conservation, claiming that Romania needed to repay its external debt completely. The policy led to cold winters even in Bucharest, unusable gas-powered public transportation vehicles, and, ultimately, a dramatic system of denying access to health care to senior citizens. In addition, the ensuing refusal to register infants before they survived to the age of one year meant that infant mortality rates could go unnoticed. The immediate post-1989 regime did, however, inherit a debt-free treasury.

To the contrary, the Cuban regime now has to face the reality that its largest and most labor-intensive industry, sugar, is for all intents and purposes dead. As a result, the regime has to deal with hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of unemployed and underemployed, this in a regime whose claim to legitimacy depends on the "right to work." Just as in the case of Romania's workers — miners in 1974 and Brasov factory workers in 1987, whose anti-regime demonstrations shook the elites' confidence — it is this mass, disorganized though it may be, that presents the most immediate threat to the stability, if not the safety of the Cuban regime. Just how threatening are those masses of former sugar industry employees and their families?

A case has been made that Cuba's sugar industry's "leftovers" are not organized. However, the Romanian Timisoara protesters of 1989, who provided the spark that led to regime change, included both Orthodox and Protestant Romanians, Serbs, and Hungarians, all unorganized groups usually suspicious of each other. Thus an event such as displaced sugar workers and their families rioting in some obscure location and being shot at by the Revolutionary Armed Forces (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias — FAR) or police or beaten up by the Blas Roca Brigades has a better chance of becoming known or even seen by the rest of Cuba than the protesters of Timisoara were in December 1989. True, Timisoara's population was better informed than the rest of Romania due to that city's location on the border of the then liberal, almost "free"

Yugoslavia and access to Italian TV. Timisoara also had better contacts with the outside world; thus the events in Timisoara became known to the rest of the country via Western and Hungarian media. A similar scenario is likely to occur in Cuba, with Radio Martí and Miami radio stations already well informed and informing the Cubans of protest events.

Both Romania and Cuba have made efforts to prop up their economies and to replace outmoded industries with tourism. Tourism is an most ideologically sensitive industry in a totalitarian society, however, because there are limits to the controls that the government can impose on visitors' contacts with local citizens, and to the degree of insulation of the latter from the former. Not surprisingly to those familiar with pre – 1989 Romania, present Cuban complaints of “tourism apartheid” and discrimination in favor of the foreigners sound eerily familiar. In addition, tourism in Romania, and even more so in Cuba, is the largest single corrupting factor for police and even secret police cadres.

Further complications arise due to the present global environment, dominated as it is by the fear of terrorism. These complications clearly pose a negative factor for Havana's attempts to replace the dying sugar industry with tourism. The U.S. -declared War on Terrorism has had an impact on tourism throughout the world, including Cuba, and even if tourism recovers, it would not be easy to control masses of panicked tourists in the event of a crisis. Indeed, in 1968, when the Soviets invaded Czechoslovakia, tens of thousands of panicked Czechs vacationing on Romania's Black Sea beaches overwhelmed Hungarian border controls, and hundreds of Romanians managed to escape Ceausescu's realm in the ensuing chaos.

Historically, Ceausescu was often received in Paris, London, and Bonn, as well as in Washington. President Jimmy Carter once claimed that he and Ceausescu supported the same “values.” President Carter's comment referred to Ceausescu's foreign policy at the time, which was predicated upon magnifying but not exacerbating Bucharest's differences with Moscow and Romania's problematic relationship with the Soviet-controlled Warsaw Pact and, COMECON. Bucharest's foreign policy was increasingly defined by its close political and ideological relations with the Non-Alignment Group, recently led by Castro.

While some Westerners were wary at the time, the general perception during the 1970's was that Romania's “independence” from Moscow was

genuine, important, and to be encouraged. Today, many in Europe and Canada and some in the United States also claim that “bringing Cuba into the fold,” which could entail membership into the World Trade Organization (WTO), the Organization of American States (OAS), and/or the lifting of the U.S. embargo to permit free trade with Havana, would make the Castro regime “milder.” The debate over the political impact of sanctions continues in the United States and pretends to be solved in Canada and Europe, but it disregards the similar Romanian case. If indeed trade and tourism openings to Cuba (or Romania in the past) are instruments of democratization, why have Bucharest prior to 1989 and present-day Havana favored such policies? Are they suicidal or, ignorant, or do they believe that they could separate foreign trade and even a massive influx of foreign tourists from ideological and political influences? Although a debate over this issue may be useful, it remains outside the scope of this paper.

The Ceausescu experience suggests that the second last scenario applies; so does the Cuban case. The Bucharest regime engaged in a massive campaign of industrialization with loans and financing from the IMF and International Bank of Reconstruction and Development (IBRD). The resulting debt, however, led to *increased* internal repression, since any evident dissent could be exploited by the West as violation of human rights and thus influence loan conditions. Indeed, the mid-1970s admission of Romania into the IMF and IBRD coincided exactly with its regime’s most repressive phase. Cuba’s growing European and Canadian economic ties and financing certainly have not led to a more open political system on the island, which raises the logical question of why a similar opening to American economic interests should lead to different results. So far, the proponents have not made their case with regard to Cuba now or Romania then. Should Cuba be allowed to do what Ceausescu’s Romania did in the 1970s, the similar internal dynamics of the regime would most likely force a more drastic crackdown on dissidents, since Cuba would want to represent itself as secure to foreign investors.

The Nature of the End and the Protagonists

The decisive factors leading to the 1989 collapse of the Romanian regime were the military, internal security forces, and the ruling Communist Party, in this order. In Cuba the second of these actors is currently far less significant than its Romanian counterpart was, but the other two factors (the military and the ruling Communist Party) remain similarly decisive.

The security of the Romanian system was based upon the assumption that the numerous, well-armed internal security services were loyal to the ruling clan. This proved to be a dubious assumption in times of crisis. Indeed, in December 1989, barely a month after Ceausescu was unanimously reelected as PCR president at the party's Congress, the popular revolt in Timisoara, soon followed by similar unrest in the capital and the industrial region of Transylvania, began the chain of events that in a matter of days would lead to the collapse of the regime and the Ceausescus' execution.

It is essential for the understanding of the immediate events of 1989 to remember that after the initial outburst of riots, Ceausescu departed the country for a brief trip to Iran and left Elena in charge. That brief absence was decisive, because it created a vacuum at the center of power. It also demonstrated the ruling couple's lack of understanding of the gravity of the situation, which could only be explained by the failure of the secret police to inform them.

As the regime was ending amid revolt, all top Romanian military leaders — first the Minister of Defense, Vasile Milea, then his deputies General Stefan Gusa and Victor Stanculescu — refused or avoided executing orders to fire on demonstrators. Minister Milea was subsequently killed (or committed suicide) in suspicious circumstances. Equally important, the entire officer corps followed the behavior of their leaders. No one disobeyed the order to join the rather disorganized anti-regime groups, some simple mobs; to transfer loyalty to the still mysterious "National Salvation Front;" or to start disarming and/or taking operational control of Securitate units throughout the country.

The heavily armed and presumably more loyal Securitate network, composed of border and presidential guard forces (to which there is no parallel in Cuba, where the FAR have the absolute physical and legal

monopoly of force, the Blas Roca Brigades notwithstanding), were left in a quandary. The network had the choice to fight the army units, join them, or pretend to stay neutral. Not one of the Securitate units defended the collapsing regime.³ The reasons appear to have included the conviction that they could not win against the army and populace, the fact that their morale was already badly shaken by the collapse of communist regimes throughout the region, the notion that their leaders were either incompetent or divided, and the fact that that many were captured by the military in the first hours of the revolt in Bucharest.

The Ceausescu regime collapsed when the military and internal security force leaders first refused to support it and then joined the opposition. Is this relevant for Cuba's transition? The answer has to be somewhat ambiguous, since the two sets of forces have had different roles in the two countries. Cuba's internal security forces were destroyed as an autonomous entity in the Ochoa/Abrantes affairs in 1989, leaving the FAR with the monopoly of legal force. Ironically, since even Ceausescu's own Securitate forces proved to be less than dependable, that may make no difference in the post-Castro transition.

The FAR, however, are quite different in their political and economic status from the unpaid, humiliated, and badly equipped Romanian military of 1989. They now have a decisive economic stake in a mixed economy through their extensive participation in tourism and other industries. More often than not, they work as partners of European and Canadian investors. They thus may have less to lose in a transition to free market, provided their institutional interests and their leaders' personal interests are protected. Economic interests, institutional or personal, are not the only factors influencing the behavior of the FAR now or of the Romanian military in 1989. Ideology, specifically nationalism, has to be taken into consideration.

If pushed into ruthlessly suppressing popular riots, no matter how disorganized, the risks may be increased for those officers' future careers, welfare, and perhaps freedom, not to mention their own and their institution's social prestige. A legitimate question thus would be why should FAR officers' corps take that risk? It depends on their alternatives. Doing nothing or supporting the collapse of the regime, as their Romanian counterparts did, would strengthen both.

What about the PCR, the "leading force in society" as the

Constitution proclaimed it to be? The simple answer is that it had absolutely no role in the events of December 1989. Furthermore, despite Havana's occasional claims to the contrary, the PCC is no more an effective dominant institution in Cuba than the PCR turned out to be in Romania. The PCC should be expected to play only a limited — perhaps larger than the PCR, but limited still — role in the transition from Castroism.

In retrospect, even before its demise, Ceausescu's PCR exhibited certain pathologies strikingly similar to those of Castro's regime. These included the defections, ideological or physical, and purges mentioned above. Many of these started in the 1970s and included defections to the West of sons of prominent regime leaders. More important, after being removed as the PCR's ideologue in 1971, Ion Iliescu began to establish relations with others who had fallen from grace, such as General Nicolae Militaru, a former chief of staff, and former politicians such as former Foreign Minister Corneliu Manescu, former Prime Minister Ion Maurer, and ideologue Silviu Brucan, all of whom published in the West a letter critical of Ceausescu in March 1989. It appears that the fact that house arrest was their only punishment was interpreted as an expression of regime weakness and may have encouraged others to at least avoid involvement in December 1989. What was amazing then, is that Western observers disregarded such examples of intra-elite dissent as irrelevant until, in Romania's case, they had reached a critical mass explaining the paralysis of the PCR during the events of December 1989. The risk that a similar misperception is going on in Cuba's case is serious and should be reconsidered.

Thus, Castro's removal of Robaina, and even more so the murders ("legal" or not) of Ochoa and Abrantes must have led to the alienation of many in the internal security service and the military, people who now form a pool of highly trained, well-educated, and possibly dissatisfied elements who are out of influence now but inevitably retain contacts inside. As the defection of Alcibiades Hidalgo, former secretary to Raúl Castro and United Nations ambassador, and some other recent defections may suggest, there are serious breaches in the regime's security and control.

Whether the removals of Iliescu in 1971, or of his retired elders and former high regime officials by 1989, or those of the likes of Ochoa, De la Guardia, Abrantes, Robaina, and Hidalgo in Cuba were a matter of nor-

mal elite rotation or proofs of elite divisions remains to be determined. For policy makers, however, such cases demonstrate that elite divisions within totalitarian regimes inevitably lead to weakening of the regimes' will to survive and fight, as proven by the circumstances leading to the end of the Soviet Union. More specifically, in the case of Romania, all of the evidence suggests that — even if Iliescu's personal role is put aside — after such high level purges, those purged retain both some influence in certain elite circles and, at the very least, use those contacts to remove the ruling group in a crisis situation.

In both Romania and Cuba, the decay of the Party's role through the impact of time and especially through its obvious subordination to the charismatic or self-defined unique leader has been paralleled by the even more obvious decline of its "transmission belts," the youth and women's organizations and the trade unions. That decline further distanced the ruling party from the population at large, especially from a youth more interested in pop culture — manifested as rock music in Romania and rap in Cuba — than in any ideology. As a result, one's membership in the PCC (and the PCR before it) has no necessary ideological or even political implications; one joins to avoid further social and economic disadvantages, not to gain any additional advantage. Thus, after December 1989, the PCR membership went from 3.4 million to practically zero in less than two weeks because there were no more advantages to be gained from membership and many liabilities to be associated with it in the new circumstances. If PCC members would behave differently in a post-Castro environment, the case has yet to be made.

The external regional environment also played an important role in the demise of the Ceausescu regime. Romania's collapse followed the fall of Communism in Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, East Germany, and Bulgaria and was decisively influenced by the hands-off attitude of Gorbachev's Moscow. By contrast, when the end of Castroism comes, it will take place in a Latin American rather than an Eastern European regional context. The Latin American region is increasingly defined on one hand by capitalist globalization but also by a still strong, albeit declining, support for democracy among Cuba's neighbors and by the revival of the Left in Latin America during the past few years on the other. Recent elections in Venezuela, Brazil, and Ecuador confirm this Leftist leaning. Those countries' leaders are likely to delay a democratic transi-

tion in Cuba, with Castro's economic problems mitigated by Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez' oil subsidies and Brazil under President Lula providing political support to Havana.

The Transition and its Implications

Regardless of the interpretation of its nature, the post-1989 Romanian transition remains relevant to the case of Cuba. Whether what happened in 1989 signaled a "revolution" or, as many now prefer, "events," the post-Ceausescu regime *had* to deal with specific results. If the 1989 events in Romania were primarily a plot by regime survivors associated with elements in the army and Securitate, as is the most plausible scenario, that would best explain the nature of the transition regimes. Since most archives on the 1989 events remain sealed if not destroyed or protected by successive regimes in Bucharest, we may never know the full story. Considering the nature of Ceausescu's collapse, however, one has to view the post-Ceausescu regimes, especially the Iliescu governments of the 1990–96 period, as the direct, logical extensions of the Ceausescu regime and its aftermath. Such an assumption is demonstrably true in the case of Romania, and a similar chain of events seems most likely in Havana. A brief examination of the institutions, political culture, and electoral behavior since 1989 is relevant.

Institutions

Regardless of its still unclear motivation for playing the key role in the collapse of the Ceausescu regime, the military was essential in the anti-communist liberation. The slogan "The Army Is with Us!" was popular in 1989 and is still accepted today. Similarly, it is obvious that in Cuba, any form of transition will be dependent on the FAR's behavior, creating a double-edged sword. The FAR's performance in Angola made many Cubans proud but disappointed others with its lack of positive results at home. During the heyday of Cuban adventures abroad, the FAR enjoyed a high social status. Since then, its dramatic reduction in size, decaying equipment, and poor pay for all but the top leaders have brought

it closer to the position of Romania's military in 1989: low social status and resentment for the privileges of a handful of apparently immovable old political generals in the ranks.

The issue of military indoctrination is also relevant in both cases. In pre-1989 Romania, political education in military academies was centered on anti-Russian and, to a lesser extent, anti-Western sentiments and nationalism. In Cuba, political education centers on anti-Americanism and nationalism. The key issue is how fast these patterns could be changed at the time of and during the early transition.

While anti-Russian sentiments remained, more than a few post-1989 Romanian military leaders, especially those in Transylvania, were reluctant to accept a radical turn to the West. Some openly criticized the idea of joining the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and even let themselves be associated with anti-Hungarian, anti-gypsy, and anti-Russian xenophobic ideologies. It took Iliescu's regime many months to remove such officers, sometimes against Iliescu's own instincts. Once the prospect of Romania's actually becoming a NATO member (a reality after the 2002 formal invitation to join) became plausible around 1994, military officers who could not "become" pro-Western could have no career. That became even more evident during the centrist governments of the 1996-2000 period. Ambitious officers now have to learn English and undergo training abroad. On the other hand, defense spending has barely increased, and the armed forces, now much reduced in numbers, remain badly equipped. On the positive side, however, the armed forces now have the complete monopoly of organized force, with the entire former Securitate armed element dismantled and brought under formal and actual military control.

What is to be expected in the case of Cuba? Anti-Americanism will probably be more difficult to contain and eventually eliminate than anti-Russian sentiments were in Romania, but a post-Castro regime will have a different kind of leverage over the FAR. Its leaders are too closely associated with the PCC leadership and Castro's government to survive a change, but their removal could become the younger officers' opportunity, as was the case in Romania, if appropriate incentives are provided by the successor regime. Institutionally, the long-standing and profitable arrangements with foreign tourism operators via Gaviota could and should continue in some form, albeit temporarily. Most former FAR and

MININT officials should not be prevented from pursuing wealth, which, considering their talents and connections, they will achieve. In Romania, Victor Stanculescu, the general key in removing Ceausescu, became a very successful businessman, a fact that helped reduce his influence with other officers. Whatever one's opinion of the Securitate's institutional role in 1989, the fact remains that since that year, not only its former leaders but its former members as well have been the main economic and financial beneficiaries of the transition. Why? They were well-connected, well-educated, and well-organized. Of course, conspiracy theories abound in the post-Ceausescu media, so any attempt to quantify that phenomenon is doomed to failure.

While the Romanian army retained its coherence between December 1989 and March 1990, as Cuba's is expected to do during its own transition, there were nonetheless three Defense Ministers in Bucharest during that brief period. More significantly, Iliescu brought with him people like the retired General Nicolae Militaru, who was, ideologically discredited by his past work for the Soviets, hated, and ultimately forced out by members of the officer corps. The corps replaced Militaru with the favored Stanculescu, who himself was later removed. The Romanian military still sees General Ion Pacepa — Ceausescu's personal security adviser, the head of Romania's intelligence, and the highest military or intelligence defector ever from a communist country — as a traitor, no matter that he betrayed Ceausescu rather than Romania. Thus the notion that people like General Rafael del Pino Diaz could be reinstated in post-Castro Havana should be treated skeptically lest it risks a dangerous backlash from a FAR that will still perceive him as a traitor.

As an institution, the Securitate has disappeared. It has lost its military arm as well as the capacity and right to oversee the officer corps. Its post-1989 successors, the Romanian Information Service (SRI) and the External Intelligence Service (SIE), were separated and largely controlled by the presidency, and despite some dubious and unconstitutional actions lost the ability to intimidate the population and to engage in arbitrary midnight arrests and unlimited interrogations. These agencies could still serve as databases for blackmailing government opponents, but that is why they retain far less than their pre-1989 power. The first post-1989 leaders of the SRI and SIE were former Securitate types, and both agencies, with presidential encouragement, resisted parliamentary control, only

coming under limited public scrutiny during the 1996-2000 government. Considering the institutional weakness of Cuba's MININT, its role in a post-Castro regime is unlikely to be comparable to that of the Securitate veterans.

Police

All of Romania's governments since 1990 have complained about the behavior and level of corruption of the police and the *gendarmerie* established after 1989. It was not until 2002 that the Romanian Parliament recognized those abuses and decided to take action. Still poorly trained and equipped and plagued by corruption and low levels of education, the police are unable to cope with increased levels of crime and, especially, with international traffic in drugs and persons and a terrorist presence, problems they never faced before.

There is little reason to believe that a post-Castro police, under whatever name, is going to need less time to become a "normal" and professional force. The same social pathologies experienced by post-1989 Romania are more than likely to appear in Cuba as well. One has to keep in mind also the general pattern demonstrated in Spain, Portugal, Greece, and South Africa that all transitions from authoritarianism to democracy are associated with a dramatic increase in criminality.

Political Parties

Whether the post-communist Front of National Salvation (FSN) was democratic or simply opportunistic in rapidly organizing the first free elections in over a half century in May 1990, the successors of the Romanian communists managed simultaneously to enjoy a natural advantage in the elections and to look good by appearing democratic in the eyes of the West. The same can clearly be expected for the PCC or its successor. The sooner "free elections" take place in Cuba, the more likely the PCC will win, considering its intrinsic financial and institutional advantages.

As the implicit, albeit officially opposed successor of the Communist

Party, the FSN won the May 1990 elections naturally and more or less fairly. The PCR was banned and disappeared after the Ceausescu regime's collapsed in December 1989. When the FSN first purged its anti-communist members and then decided to become a political party by early Spring 1990, it also inherited the PCR's assets as well as many of its personalities. It had the organization and tradition of half a century in power, while the opposition had at best five months to organize, no financial base, and no credible or well known leadership. A similar situation is to be expected in a post-Castro Cuba and indeed could well be the trap into which the advocates of early elections may fall. The difficulty in dealing with this problem is that there is no democratic or legal reason a post-Castro PCC could be denied access to such assets and organization, nor could it be prevented from organizing early elections, taking advantage of a likely behavior of the electorate that could well lead to results similar to those in Romania in 1990.

Electoral Behavior

In May 1990, this author was an observer to the first post-Ceausescu elections. The ruling FSN was ahead in most minds because it was "there." That is, it was the reformed but familiar face of the legally defunct Communist Party. The result was that Iliescu won easily against two returned émigré politicians in the vote for president, and the FSN obtained a huge majority against the disorganized remnants of the pre-1945 Liberal and National Peasant parties.

Whatever the abstract analyses of the post-communist Romanian (and Eastern European) elections, the sociological facts remain the same, as demonstrated in the Romanian elections of May 1990, 1992, 1996, and 2002:

- The less-developed regions — including the traditionally poor areas of Moldova, the southeast Danube Delta, and the south, dependent on the huge industrial complexes of the communist era —, and the industrial proletariat, were strongly pro-Iliescu. These two groups hoped to avoid privatization, a pattern that continued for the subsequent decade in election after election.
- A relatively backward rural population often rejected promises

by the anti-communist opposition to privatize land, especially in the poorer regions.

- Retirees, hoping to retain their pensions and state health insurance, have consistently voted for Iliescu since 1990.
- Romania and post-1989 Eastern Europe in general share similar experiences in terms of participation. Youth participation in post-communist elections is low, while participation by older and rural inhabitants and the industrial working class is higher and leans toward former communists, reformed or not. The anti-communist vote is highest in large cities and more developed regions.

How much of this pattern could be expected in Cuba is, naturally, a matter of speculation, but we do know that that opposition parties exist mostly on paper, that they are divided, and that there are too many of them. All of these factors suggest the likelihood of a repetition of the Romanian pattern. Just as Romania's attempt to revive the pre-communist parties failed, a similar attempt in a post-Castro Cuba is unlikely to fare better. The best analogy, perhaps, is with the former King Mihai; though he was personally popular, the idea of his restoration never received more than 10 percent support in the polls.

The Church

In terms of formal membership, the Orthodox Church of Romania is and has historically been somewhat comparable to its Roman Catholic counterpart in Cuba: both constitute a large theoretical majority of the population. However, the similarities end there. The Cuban Catholic Church has retained its position as an autonomous actor in Cuban society, and since the Pope's visit to Havana this position has been gaining strength. In contrast, the Romanian Orthodox Church has been a center of nationalism since pre-World War II and turned out to be a close collaborator of the communist regime after 1945, officially offering its support to the very end. Patriarch Teoctist, a well-known collaborator of the Ceausescu regime, went so far as to sign medieval manuscripts dedicated to Ceausescu's daughter, a crime in and by itself. He was briefly dismissed in early 1990 for his blatant subservience to the Ceausescu clan, but was ultimately reinstated and is now present at most state functions.

Monasteries have been reopened, and the number of monks, nuns, and seminarists has increased significantly, as has the Church's wealth. Freedom of religion is recognized and protected, although property of the non-Orthodox denominations has not been completely restituted, and local persecution of neo-Protestants still occurs. The Orthodox Church has reverted to its traditional role, a *de facto* beneficiary of state support, manipulated and ultimately controlled by the state and legitimizing the ruling government. In Cuba, however, one could expect a repetition of the post-1989 Polish scenario in the form of a dramatic but brief increase in the popularity and influence of the Church after Castro. That issue, however, lies beyond the scope of this paper.

Judiciary and Law

The institution of an independent judiciary has remained a goal rather than a reality in Romania since the transition began in December 1989. Similar to other reform efforts, judiciary reform has lagged because judges, prosecutors, and other members of the judicial system could only be "reformed" by replacement, which took the transitional regimes some time. Judging by the experience of the non-communist regime (1996–2000), such a task is difficult at best. Simply put, truly independent judges are still a rare phenomenon more than a decade after the end of the Ceausescu regime. However, the explosion in the number of law schools since 1990, a free press that publicizes judicial abuses, and a population made aware of its rights by the growing number of NGOs all suggest progress.

In the aftermath of Ceausescu's collapse, Romanian justice simply did not work in the most symbolic issue facing the society. Even the dictators' opponents largely saw the Ceausescu couple's "trial" and execution as a travesty and an excuse to avoid the embarrassment of a public trial. Furthermore, the few trials of high officials of the former regime, including Party leaders, Securitate top generals, and Nicu Ceausescu, were correctly perceived as lacking in seriousness. Few of those tried received long sentences, and most were released early for reasons such as age and health. The Iliescu clique blocked attempts to ban former regime collaborators from politics, as had been done in Czechoslovakia. A law

passed during the centrist government that was intended to open secret police files to its victims, as had been done in Germany, has remained largely without effect.

Almost as discouraging is the scant progress made in changing the legal framework. Parliaments since 1990 have been slow, unwilling, or both to tackle major issues including the status of private property. Indeed, it took until 2002 for a “definitive” set of laws to be approved to deal with private housing confiscated by the communists since 1945.

Nor has the issue of privatization of major state enterprises been handled well. In this respect, Romania is still the least advanced among Eastern European states, behind even Albania. The major reason has been political. Strong resistance to privatization lingers among key constituencies of Iliescu and his now renamed Romanian Democratic Socialist Party (PDSR), including miners and steel workers. Neither the process nor respect for law was made easier by Iliescu’s personal appeals to coal miners in 1990 and 1991 to come to Bucharest to repress his political adversaries. His appeals included calls to force his own prime minister out of office amidst acts of vandalism and violence for which no one has ever been punished.

Privatization and Social Instability

In the former Soviet Union and its successor states, in Angola, Nicaragua, and elsewhere, one of the main problems of transition was the disposal of confiscated (“nationalized”) pre-communist property, including émigré property. The elites’ image, personnel, and public behavior changed during the transition. In most cases, the old security apparatus became the “new” business class through training, mafia-type methods, official connections, or all of the above. Romania’s post-1989 experience is the paradigm, and it is highly relevant to a post-Castro Cuba.

As in the case of Cuba after 1959, the Romanian communist regime after 1945 “nationalized” most privately held real estate. A large diaspora presence of the dispossessed opponents of the communist regime caused the post-1989 Romanian regime much grief. The émigrés will likely be a, if not *the*, major problem for any post-Castro regime in Havana, given the size and power of the Cuban diaspora.

In the first stage, the initial Iliescu regime decided to sell all state-owned and built apartments to their tenants, at what was in 1990 a ridiculously low price. This strategy did not address the issue of confiscated properties, however. The much larger number of tenants of such housing as compared to dispossessed owners made it politically impossible to fully return those properties, and the government's budget simply did not permit financial compensation. Ultimately, few such properties were returned at all. In some cases, the owners received a small compensation, in others they gave up their claims, and in a few they went to the European Court of Justice, where some cases are still pending.

Dealing with nationalized land is also going to be an immediate issue any post-Castro regime will need to address. In Romania, some nationalized land and forest was indeed returned, for instance to the former royal family and churches, a situation better than that of housing but never *in toto* and many times in the form of "equivalent" land in a different location.

A more important and politically sensitive issue is the disposition of land confiscated by the state from private owners or companies and later used as collective or state farms. In Romania, that accounted for 90 percent of the total agricultural land area. Many Romanian peasants were not interested in reclaiming their land after decades of losing the work ethic and interest as well as skills in managing their own property. The first Iliescu regime (1990 – 96) took advantage of that fact and limited the area to be returned to any person to ten hectares and denied the right to sell the returned property. The main beneficiaries of that policy were, and still are, former industrial workers who lost their jobs, returned to their old villages, and obtained enough land to live somewhat better than as unemployed in the cities.

Since the end of the first Iliescu regime, the selling restriction has been lifted and with it the obstacle for some peasants to borrow and establish medium-sized, profitable farms. This has mostly taken place in Transylvania and Banat, areas where a pre-communist tradition of efficient agriculture had lingered, suggesting that regional traditions and values play a significant role.

Privatization as such has been a political and ideological problem in Eastern Europe and indeed in Latin America for over a decade. Is Cuba, or was Romania, different? The answer is yes, if we look at the details.

In post-Ceausescu Romania, the transitional regime and its leader Iliescu did not try to depoliticize privatization as most Eastern European elected leaders have done since 1989. Instead, by actually calling miners to Bucharest for political reasons in 1990 and 1991, the regime used them as an instrument to oppose social reforms, a tactic unique in Eastern Europe. Once again, while it is impossible to establish a direct pattern of transition between Cuba and Eastern Europe as such, it is more probable that a post-Castro PCC incarnation will repeat the peculiar Romanian pattern.

Ultimately, given the present ideological combination of socialism and nationalism, the attraction of a “Third Way,” and the inevitably negative short-term social results of mass privatization — as demonstrated in most of Latin America today, let alone Eastern Europe or the post-communist world — any post- or neo-communist regime in Havana, would have plausible political arguments to delay, postpone, and manipulate free market reforms such as privatization.

Value System and History

Internal and external sociological reality and political realism both suggest that corruption is not only inevitable but, within limits and at the early stages at least, a prudentially acceptable and stabilizing factor for a post-communist transition in countries like Cuba and Romania.

The temporary collapse of law and order, inevitable in post-communist or post-dictatorial transitions, encouraged an explosion of crime and associated corruption in Romania, from the political elites to bureaucrats down to small-time crooks. This should be a natural expectation in a post-Castro regime in Havana. Havana will also likely have to deal with another level of corruption, which Bucharest faced and still has not dealt with: the rise, mentioned above, of a “new class” of “businessmen” rooted in the former intelligence and military, party bureaucracy, and associated elites. Bucharest decided to tolerate that phenomenon during both Iliescu governments (1990-1996 and 2000-present) and indeed encouraged it, legally or not so legally. It is unlikely that a post-Castro Havana is going to do the opposite and risk internal subversion and instability by fighting such corruption — even assuming that it could.

The corruption of the FSN in Romania was known and understood by all as a natural result of the collapse of the Ceausescu regime. It also seeped down to the smallest elements of society, from gypsy “kings” and “emperors” building illegal palaces, to newly rich former nobodies establishing commercial empires in oil distribution and construction, often through bribes. After the 1996 opposition victory in the general elections, it appeared that corruption would be dealt with, but it was not. The corruption and incompetence of the new government became obvious very soon, as did their cause: there was no alternative elite to replace the neo- or post-communists. One of the reasons was that many Romanians, including well- educated computer experts, rejected the fundamentals of free enterprise, such as the idea that they should be paid less than their boss. The resistance to free enterprise is changing now, though the shift took a decade, but the change is still a middle-class phenomenon, rather than a general one. For instance, 12 years after the fall of Communism, the majority of Brasov’s giant truck and tractors factory workers still believe that they could blackmail the government into continuing to subsidize their unprofitable enterprise and their jobs. The same mentality is shared by the unproductive miners in the Jiu Valley, who have repeatedly engaged in politically motivated assaults against elected politicians, including at least two attempts to overthrow the government.

All of this is to be not only expected but also prepared for in any post-Castro transitional regime. Privatization, needed though it may be if Cuba is to become a democratic and free state, is also to be seen in the light of anti-privatization regimes, campaigns, and mentalities in Latin America.

Ultimately decisive in any post-communist transition is the speed with which changes in political culture, social behavior, and elite reinterpretations of national history and values, as well as the popular acceptance of such changes, occur. Those elements include media behavior, educational curriculum, the role and acceptance of NGOs, the review of national history, and ethnic relations — in other words, a new manner of seeing and behaving as a people.

The post-1989 Romanian print media (political and pornographic, literary and economic, in this order) literally exploded in numbers and promptly helped create both popular confusion and a healthy skepticism that continues to this day.

Education changed dramatically only during the centrist regime of

the 1996-2000 period and resulted in a temporary explosion of often low-quality, opportunistic private institutions of higher education. Most of these are by now bankrupt, banned, or losing their credentials. All of this is also to be expected in a post-Castro Cuba, which is not to say that it has to be encouraged. In Romania, despite the many opportunists, crooks, and corrupt judges for entrance examinations, many of the private universities have by now disappeared or become discredited, while public ones have improved — a demonstration of the fact that competition works.

At the secondary level in the still dominant public education system, the curriculum was changed with a view of copying the French and American models, and it subsequently became more demanding and diversified. The old problem of highly arbitrary and selective university admission standards under the communist regime was largely solved by the creation of expensive but available private institutions. The hated system of compulsory state distribution of university graduates was also eliminated.

The rewriting of national history is an ongoing process. The initial temptation of rejecting everything thought by the communist regime is giving way to traditional interpretations of the past: Romania as victim of the Russians and the Slavs in general and communism as an “import” imposed by Soviet tanks. A similar cycle is natural, probable, and indeed acceptable for those in a post-Castro Cuba trying to reinterpret José Martí as less of a predecessor of socialism and rabid anti-Americanism and more as a spokesman for Cuban identity.

As a European country, Romania has a relatively old population, and it also had 44 years of communist rule. Cuba, as a Third World country, has a much younger population, but it already has 43 years of Castroism. It is impossible to overstate communism’s negative impact on popular behavior, work ethic, and political options. In Romania, anti-Semitism reemerged after 1989, which seems an odd phenomenon considering that there are no more than 20,000 Jews in a population of 22 million. That the first post-1989 Prime Minister, Petru Roman, was partly Jewish did not help. On the other hand, as more and more Romanian workers found jobs in Israel, the sentiment tended to abate, to be replaced (again, and encouragingly in smaller and smaller circles) by anti-Hungarian attitudes, especially in the Transylvania region.

The profound anti-Russian, not just anti-Soviet, sentiments of most

Romanians, however, persist as strongly as ever. Similarly, in Cuba's case, no matter what the U.S. role in a post-Castro transition may be, direct or implicit anti-Americanism and distrust for the Cuban-American diaspora will remain a potent political tool, especially for the post-Castro PCC.

Romania has a significant ethnic problem that neither the post-1989 government nor all its predecessors have been able to resolve. That problem, contrary to most expectations in Romania and elsewhere, is not the historic conflict with Hungary and the 1.7 million Hungarians living in Romania. Instead, it is the gypsy population, which is perhaps as large as the Hungarian. Romanians and Hungarians share a common distaste for gypsies, who are associated with the increase in criminality and accused of damaging the country's image abroad.

By contrast, Cuba has no ethnic problem. Its racial divisions are relatively superficial and ultimately solvable in any fairly democratic post-Castro regime, except for one element that does indeed offer some analogy with the "gypsy" case in Romania: the ambiguous role of international human rights NGOs. Despite their good intentions, such NGOs' accusations of racism against Romanians, utopian demands, and avoidance of the realities of gypsy anti-social activities, have more often than not inflamed rather than calmed emotions on both sides. Similarly, once the Castro regime is removed, the race issue may be inflamed from outside, largely as a "human rights" issue, although such a development is not inevitable.

All of this raises the general question of the role of NGOs and civil society." Post-1989 Romania saw an explosion of NGOs. Most were allegedly concerned with human rights and the environment, and the largest behaved in a manner that blurred and weakened their distinction from political parties. Considering the proximity and cultural influence of Miami and Washington to Havana, a similar and even more militant phenomenon is to be expected with both positive and negative results.

The results will be positive because NGOs will encourage social participation but negative because they will compete with incipient political parties. Overall, NGOs will possibly be seen as foreign (read gringo) forms of interference. The perception of NGOs as reflecting political or financial interests of parties, foreigners, or elite groups, rather than as independent actors is still prevalent in Romania and will be even more so in Cuba — with the usual suspects being American business, the CIA,

and Miami émigrés.

Also worth consideration is the role of dissidents from the educated class in post-communist societies. For ideological and social reasons, dissidents did not play a significant political role after the transition in any post-communist country, including Romania. The prevailing ideological inclination of dissidents in communist Europe was, at least vaguely, democratic socialism. Once faced with elections, the mostly intellectual dissidents were marginalized, facing either democratic anti-communist and anti-socialist forces on their right or well-organized neo-communist parties on their left. In addition, decades of communist anti-intellectual indoctrination of the working classes have repeatedly demonstrated their impact in post-communist elections. Add to this the general ineffectiveness of dissidents, especially in economic and social policies, and their declining influence in post-communist societies becomes easier to explain.

The problem of the diasporas is quite similar to the problem of dissidents. The size of the Cuban diaspora may pose a political problem the transition concurrent to aiding it. Throughout Eastern Europe, with a few exceptions in the Baltic States, in no post-communist regime have diaspora elements won any lasting significant political or economic power. To the contrary, their political appeal was almost universally limited and resulted in consistent rejection at the polls. Often this is because diasporas are widely perceived as influenced by foreign ideas and having foreign origins and programs. Whether such perceptions are accurate or not, they are politically powerful, as demonstrated in election after election in post-1989 Eastern Europe. In Romania's first post-1989 elections, the two émigré candidates for the presidency together obtained less than 10 percent of the vote. One of main reasons for their failure at the polls was the perception that émigrés did not share the suffering of those who had to live under communism and thus did not understand or have the legitimacy to represent those who had. There is no reason to believe that the situation in Cuba will be any different. This should be a warning to Cuban-Americans who still harbor excessive expectations about their political and even economic role in post-Castro Havana.

Foreign Relations

At the time of the 1989 events, Iliescu is said to have requested Soviet military help but to have been cut short by Army Chief of Staff and known staunch nationalist General Gusa. To what extent the possibility of a Soviet intervention against Ceausescu was real at the time we will never know. The threat of such intervention likely had a major role in the Romanian generals' decision to preempt it by supporting the anti-Ceausescu forces. No post-Castro regime in Havana could hope to be accepted popularly as legitimate if seen as a puppet of Washington. This is even more so in the case of the FAR. Whether internal instability and riots lead senior FAR officers, fearing U.S. intervention, to imitate their Romanian counterparts' preemptive approach has to remain a matter of speculation but is an issue worth serious exploration.

Post-1989 Romania had to adapt to the requirements — (legal, human rights, and military, among others — of the European Union, which it needs economically, and NATO, which it needs for security. With a traditionally pro-Western, indeed largely pro-U.S. populace, none of those outside pressures was politically dangerous. A post-Castro Cuba will face a different set of problems. The already evident economic need to seek membership in hemispheric and international financial organizations and accommodation to Washington in order to obtain access to the U.S. market will create tensions with two other competing realities. A significant section of the society, especially the middle-aged and elements of the military, are distrustful, to say the least, of most things related to the United States, and in most Cuban eyes it is hard to distinguish the role of the enormous diaspora from U.S. interests. Indeed, just as Cuban policy is also a U.S. domestic issue, relations with Washington are an internal issue in Havana and likely to remain so.

It is also true, however, that the regional environment during a transition has a direct impact on both internal and foreign policy decisions and indeed on political culture as such. To the surprise of many, the Romanian institution that first established a good cooperation with its Hungarian counterpart was the military. The hope of joining NATO was decisive for both sides. Despite territorial and minority rights disputes, Romania also signed treaties with the Ukraine and Russia — hopes for future NATO and European Union membership overcame historic and

popular hostility. In Cuba's case, the influence of Latin American states such as Mexico could help in a decision to seek closer ties with Washington. They could also help on issues such as the retraining of judges, new civil and penal codes, and the media, all matters in which the Europeans helped Romania's transition.

Conclusions

How much of the Romanian post-1989 experience should we expect to apply to Cuba? The answer is some, not all, and more in specific than in general terms. There are many valuable lessons to be drawn from comparing the experience of the two countries, but the applicability of such a comparison ultimately depends on the form of the transition in Havana. If the transition occurs by popular participation in riots, then the FAR would face the same dilemma of repression vs. popular solidarity as the Romanian military did in December 1989. The analogies would then be stronger and would raise related questions, such as:

- What, if any, is the likely role of internal security forces, demoralized as they are in Cuba (in terms of information, rather than force), in a potential popular riot in Havana or some other major city? Of the FAR?
- How much of its legitimacy will the regime lose when Castro is dead? What will the reaction of the PCC be to his passing? A “collective” leadership including the likes of Raúl Castro, Lage and Alarcon, each claiming to be either the most Castroist or, alternatively, the most reformist? A post-Stalin type of three scorpions in a bottle? An ultimate FAR “pronunciamento” of the old-fashioned Latin American style, preempting a real or imaginary U.S. intervention? Or a new challenge by a purged former young Castroite like Robaina?
- What, if any, is the future of the PCC in a post-Castro scenario? A rapid change of name, public rhetoric, and leadership and the inevitable victory in early democratic elections? And then what?

None of this can be known, of course, but developments similar to those that occurred in Bucharest in and after December 1989 are highly plausible in Havana and should be taken seriously in the assessment of both the transition itself and its later manifestations.

Ultimately, the point of this essay is not to advise the U.S. government as to what it should do in a post-Castro Cuba but, in light of the Romanian experience, what to avoid doing, and who it should or should not support.

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NOTES

¹ Many of the issues discussed in this paper have been covered in the author's previous work, *Collapse or Decay? Cuba and the East European Transitions from Communism*. Miami: Endowment for Cuban American Studies, 1997.

² Michael Radu, "Romania and the Third World," in *Eastern Europe and the Third World*, Radu, Michael, ed. Praeger, New York, 1981, pp. 235 – 273.

³ Nor did the many foreign (mostly Arab) trainees in Romania come to the regime's assistance, claims of "Arab terrorists" doing all the shooting against civilians in Bucharest, Timisoara, and Brasov notwithstanding: none have ever been identified. The similarly disorganized Latin American revolutionary veterans in Cuba may offer just such a disjointed opposition. Such an opposition would have no better results than the still mysterious Romanian "terrorists" of December 1989 but enough to increase the human cost and confusion during the transition process.

By contrast, as an aside, there are still many thousands of Cuban-trained and indoctrinated Latin American (and generally "Third World") revolutionaries in Cuba, most of whom are older and married to Cubans. All are threatened by the likelihood of any post-Castro discovery of their dossiers in other countries. Unlike the Third World trainees of Ceausescu's Romania and their largely fictitious "terrorist" contribution to the 1989 events, the Latin Americans have personal, as well as ideological, reasons to fight for Castro's revolution. Are the many Argentine, Chilean, Uruguayan, Brazilian, and other superannuated ex-revolutionaries in Havana with potentially criminal pasts prepared to submit, or will they fight for Castro and all that he represents? Such a question offers one more difference between Romania and Cuba.

About the Author

Michael Radu is Director of the Center on Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism and a Senior Fellow at the Foreign Policy Research Institute in Philadelphia and a Contributing Editor of ORBIS. He is the author or editor of nine books on revolutionary groups and organizations in Africa and Latin America, Third World politics and international relations. He has taught at the University of Pennsylvania, Rutgers University and the University of the Witwatersrand. Dr. Radu is the author of numerous scholarly articles on world politics

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