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For years American political leaders and media were fond of labeling Cuba an "international pariah". We don't hear much of that any more. Perhaps one reason is the annual vote in the General Assembly on the resolution, which reads: "Necessity of ending the economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed by the United States of America against Cuba". This is how the vote has gone:

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How it began, from State Department documents: Within a few months of the Cuban revolution of January 1959, the Eisenhower administration decided "to adjust all our actions in such a way as to accelerate the development of an opposition in Cuba which would bring about a change in the Cuban Government, resulting in a new government favorable to U.S. interests."  

On April 6, 1960, Lester D. Mallory, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs, wrote in an internal memorandum: "The majority of Cubans support Castro ... The only foreseeable means of alienating internal support is through disenchantment and disaffection based on economic dissatisfaction and hardship. ... every possible means should be undertaken promptly to weaken the economic life of Cuba." Mallory proposed "a line of action which ... makes the greatest inroads in denying money and supplies to Cuba, to decrease monetary and real wages, to bring about hunger, desperation and overthrow of government." Later that year, the Eisenhower administration instituted the suffocating embargo.

IN HIROSHIMA’S SHADOW by Noam Chomsky

NationofChange, Friday 3 August 2012

This year’s Aug. 6 memorials have special significance. They take place shortly before the 50th anniversary of “the most dangerous moment in human history,” in the words of the historian and John F. Kennedy adviser Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., referring to the Cuban missile crisis.
Aug. 6, the anniversary of Hiroshima, should be a day of somber reflection, not only on the terrible events of that day in 1945, but also on what they revealed: that humans, in their dedicated quest to extend their capacities for destruction, had finally found a way to approach the ultimate limit.

This year’s Aug. 6 memorials have special significance. They take place shortly before the 50th anniversary of “the most dangerous moment in human history,” in the words of the historian and John F. Kennedy adviser Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., referring to the Cuban missile crisis.

Graham Allison writes in the current issue of Foreign Affairs that Kennedy “ordered actions that he knew would increase the risk not only of conventional war but also nuclear war,” with a likelihood of perhaps 50 percent, he believed, an estimate that Allison regards as realistic.

Kennedy declared a high-level nuclear alert that authorized “NATO aircraft with Turkish pilots ... (or others) ... to take off, fly to Moscow, and drop a bomb.”

None were more shocked by the discovery of missiles in Cuba than the men in charge of the similar missiles that the U.S. had secretly deployed in Okinawa six months earlier, surely aimed at China, at a moment of elevated regional tensions.

Kennedy took Chairman Nikita Khrushchev “right to the brink of nuclear war and he looked over the edge and had no stomach for it,” according to Gen. David Burchinal, then a high-ranking official in the Pentagon planning staff. One can hardly count on such sanity forever.

Khrushchev accepted a formula that Kennedy devised, ending the crisis just short of war. The formula’s boldest element, Allison writes, was “a secret sweetener that promised the withdrawal of U.S. missiles from Turkey within six months after the crisis was resolved.” These were obsolete missiles that were being replaced by far more lethal, and invulnerable, Polaris submarines.

In brief, even at high risk of war of unimaginable destruction, it was felt necessary to reinforce the principle that U.S. has the unilateral right to deploy nuclear missiles anywhere, some aimed at China or at the borders of Russia, which had previously placed no missiles outside the USSR. Justifications of course have been offered, but I do not think they withstand analysis.

An accompanying principle is that Cuba had no right to have missiles for defense against what appeared to be an imminent U.S. invasion. The plans for Kennedy’s terrorist programs, Operation Mongoose, called for “open revolt and overthrow of the Communist regime” in October 1962, the month of the missile crisis, recognizing that “final success will require decisive U.S. military intervention.”

The terrorist operations against Cuba are commonly dismissed by U.S. commentators as
insignificant CIA shenanigans. The victims, not surprisingly, see matters rather differently. We can at last hear their voices in Keith Bolender’s “Voices from the Other Side: An Oral History of Terrorism Against Cuba.”

The events of October 1962 are widely hailed as Kennedy’s finest hour. Allison offers them as “a guide for how to defuse conflicts, manage great-power relationships, and make sound decisions about foreign policy in general.” In particular, today’s conflicts with Iran and China.

Disaster was perilously close in 1962, and there has been no shortage of dangerous moments since. In 1973, in the last days of the Arab-Israeli war, Henry Kissinger called a high-level nuclear alert. India and Pakistan have come close to nuclear war. There have been innumerable cases when human intervention aborted nuclear attack only moments before launch after false reports by automated systems. There is much to think about on Aug. 6.

Allison joins many others in regarding Iran’s nuclear programs as the most severe current crisis, “an even more complex challenge for American policymakers than the Cuban missile crisis” because of the threat of Israeli bombing.

The war against Iran is already well underway, including assassination of scientists and economic pressures that have reached the level of “undeclared war,” in the judgment of the Iran specialist Gary Sick.

Great pride is taken in the sophisticated cyberwar directed against Iran. The Pentagon regards cyberwar as “an act of war” that authorizes the target “to respond using traditional military force,” The Wall Street Journal reports. With the usual exception: not when the U.S. or an ally is the perpetrator.

The Iran threat has recently been outlined by Gen. Giora Eiland, one of Israel’s top military planners, described as “one of the most ingenious and prolific thinkers the (Israeli military) has ever produced.”

Of the threats he outlines, the most credible is that “any confrontation on our borders will take place under an Iranian nuclear umbrella.” Israel might therefore be constrained in resorting to force. Eiland agrees with the Pentagon and U.S. intelligence, which also regard deterrence as the major threat that Iran poses.

The current escalation of the “undeclared war” against Iran increases the threat of accidental large-scale war. Some of the dangers were illustrated last month when a U.S. naval vessel, part of the huge deployment in the Gulf, fired on a small fishing boat, killing one Indian crew member and wounding at least three others. It would not take much to set off a major war.

One sensible way to avoid such dread consequences is to pursue “the goal of establishing in the Middle East a zone free from weapons of mass destruction and all missiles for their delivery and the objective of a global ban on chemical weapons” – the wording of Security
Council resolution 687 of April 1991, which the U.S. and U.K. invoked in their effort to provide a thin legal cover for their invasion of Iraq 12 years later.

The goal has been an Arab-Iranian objective since 1974, regularly re-endorsed, and by now it has near-unanimous global support, at least formally. An international conference to consider ways to implement such a treaty may take place in December.

Progress is unlikely unless there is mass public support in the West. Failure to grasp the opportunity will, once again, lengthen the grim shadow that has darkened the world since that fateful Aug. 6.

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Since 1960, successive US administrations have waged an aggressive illegal ...  
(Greg Grandin, Professor of History at Ne)
Since 1960, successive US administrations have waged an aggressive illegal war against Cuba, the human toll of which has long been ignored. Bolender's book corrects this ignorance, offering a true people's history of perseverance. Highly recommended.

(Greg Grandin, Professor of History at New York University and author of Empire's Workshop: Latin America, the United States, and the Rise of the New Imperialism (2006).)
Counter-narratives are always welcomed: a way to develop new perspectives ...

(Louis A. Pérez, Jr, University of N)
Counter-narratives are always welcomed: a way to develop new perspectives and challenge old perceptions. Voices From the Other Side is especially timely, for it turns the prevailing paradigm of terrorism on its head: in this instance, Cuba as object of a policy of sanctions, subversion, and sabotage as experienced in the daily lives of the Cuban people.

(Louis A. Pérez, Jr, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill)

Voices From the Other Side: An Oral History of Terrorism Against Cuba by Keith Bolender. 2010.

● Illustrations: 30 photos
Product Description
Since the early 1960s, few other countries have endured more acts of terrorism against civilian targets than Cuba, and the US has had its hand in much of it. This book gives a voice to the victims.

Keith Bolender brings to bear the enormous impact that terrorism has had on Cuba’s civilian population, with over 1,000 documented incidents resulting in more than 3,000 deaths and 2,000 injuries. Bolender allows the victims to articulate the atrocities the Cuban people have suffered - which largely originate from Cuban counter-revolutionaries based in the US, often with the active help of the CIA.

*Voices From The Other Side* includes *first-person interviews with more than 75 Cuban citizens who have been victims of these terrorist acts*, or have had family members or close friends die from the attacks. It is a unique resource for activists, journalists and students interested in Cuba's torrid relationship with the US.

About The Author
Keith Bolender is a freelance journalist who worked for more than 10 years with the Toronto Star. He has written extensively on Cuban matters for a variety of North American publications. He is a member of the Institute for Public Accuracy (IPA) on their Roster of Experts for Cuban Affairs. He currently lectures at the University of Toronto School of Continuing Studies on American Foreign Policy and the Cuba Revolution.

Noam Chomsky is a world renowned linguist and one of America's foremost social critics. He is Institute Professor in the Department of Linguistics and Philosophy at M.I.T. He is the author of numerous books for Pluto Press, including *Pirates and Emperors Old and New*, *Fateful Triangle*, *The New Military Humanism: Lessons from Kosovo* and *Rogue States: The Rule of Force in World*.
As the Cuban Five pointed out in their defense, they were on a mission in Miami, beginning in 1990, to monitor the actions of Miami-based terrorist groups, in order to prevent those groups from carrying out attacks on their country of Cuba. They never harmed anyone nor ever possessed nor used any weapons on their mission. Their objective was simply protecting people from terrorism.

**Background**

For more than 40 years, anti-Cuba terrorist organizations based in Miami have engaged in hundreds of terrorist activities against Cuba, and against anyone who advocates a normalization of relations between the U.S. and Cuba. A total of 3,478 Cubans have died as a result of terrorist violence, and 2,099 have been injured. Avowedly violent organizations like Comandos F-4, Brothers to the Rescue, Cuban American National Foundation’s armed wing, and individuals like Luis Posada Carriles, have operated with complete impunity from within the United States to attack Cuba— with the knowledge and support of the FBI and CIA.

The U.S. government refused to act to arrest or prosecute well-known, notorious terrorists in Miami, despite overwhelming evidence of their crimes. The Cuban Five infiltrated the terrorist organizations in Miami to inform Cuba of imminent attack and to thwart the terrorists’ plots.

The aim of such a clandestine operation by the Cuban Five—at great personal risk— was to prevent criminal acts, and thus protect the lives of Cubans and other people. But instead of arresting the terrorists, the FBI arrested the Cuban Five ANTI-terrorists on September 12, 1998. The Five were illegally held in solitary confinement for 17 months in Miami prison. The seven-month trial began in November 2000, and at the time of the trial was the longest trial in the United States.

With the trial based in Miami, a virtual witch-hunt atmosphere existed, in which defendants identified as supportive of Cuba could not hope to receive an impartial trial. Defense attorneys’ motions for a change of venue were denied several times by Judge Joan Lenard.

The Cuban Five were convicted June 8, 2001 and sentenced to four life terms and 75 years in December, 2001.

**A major victory in appeals, then a reversal**

On August 9, 2005, after seven years of unjust imprisonment, the Cuban Five won an unprecedented victory on appeal. In a unanimous 93-page decision, a three-judge panel of the 11th Circuit Court of Appeals overturned the convictions of the Cuban Five and ordered a new trial. The court called their prosecution “a perfect storm” of pervasive community prejudice, government misconduct and extensive negative publicity before and during the trial.

However, the Bush administration appealed, and exactly one year after the favorable ruling granting the Five a new trial, the full panel of the 11th Circuit Court ruled to reverse their victory. Their convictions were reinstated, although later court decisions reduced the sentences of three of the Five, Fernando González, Ramón Labañino and Antonio Guerrero, in October and December 2009.

* (René González was released on Oct. 7, 2011 after completing his sentence, but the court, in a punitive measure, is denying him the right to return to Cuba to his family, and instead requiring him to serve a 3-year probation sentence in the United States).

**Public support for their freedom is critical**
This case is a political case and the Cuban Five are political prisoners. Their freedom will depend not only on the arduous work of the defense team but just as importantly, on the public support that can be organized. Over 350 committees have been established in the United States and around the world, demanding immediate freedom for Gerardo, Ramón, Antonio, Fernando and René. Important declarations have been made by hundreds of parliamentarians in Britain, Italy, and the European and Latin American Parliaments. The UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detentions, composed of five judges, ruled in May 2005 that there were irregularities in the Five’s trial and arrest, effectively denying them a fair trial. The Working Group — in its only decision regarding a trial in the United States — calls on the U.S. government to remedy this injustice.

In the United States, the National Committee to Free the Cuban Five is working very hard to build broad support for these anti-terrorist heroes, with forums and video showings, media and publicity work, marches, petitions and other publicity. The year 2012 will be critical for the struggle to win freedom for the Cuban Five. Call or write us! Find out how you can do your part to win justice for five men who dedicated their lives to save others.

Learn more:
- Timeline
- Detailed analysis of their case
- Short biographies of the five, with addresses so you can write to them
- Allocutions (statements read at sentencing)
  Gerardo Hernández • Antonio Guerrero • René González • Fernando González • Ramón Labañino
- Legal documents in the case

South of the Border Wed Sep 19, 2012. Posted by: "FreetheCuban5 LibertadparalosCinco" freethec_5
Support this event for the Cuban 5 in NYC!
**FREE THE CUBAN 5 MONTH SEPT. 12TH-OCT. 12TH!**
**Free the Cuban 5 Film Series!**
Sat. Sept. 22nd, 2012 at 2pm
The Brecht Forum 451 West Street (Between. Bank and Bethune Sts.)

As part of our ongoing efforts to educate about Cuba, the Cuban 5, and the Cuban political system, The Popular Education Project to Free the Cuban 5 is hosting this film screening as part of Free the Cuban 5 Month.

Join us for **South of the Border**, a film by Oliver Stone.
Film Synopsis:
There’s a revolution underway in South America, but most of the world doesn’t know it. Oliver Stone sets out on a road trip across five countries to explore the social and political movements as well as the mainstream media’s misperception of South America while interviewing seven of its elected presidents. In casual conversations with Presidents Hugo
Chávez (Venezuela), Evo Morales (Bolivia), Lula da Silva (Brazil), Cristina Kirchner (Argentina), as well as her husband and ex-President Néstor Kirchner, Fernando Lugo (Paraguay), Rafael Correa (Ecuador), and Raúl Castro (Cuba), Stone gains unprecedented access and sheds new light upon the exciting transformations in the region.
The Popular Education Project to Free the Cuban 5:
For more information on the Cuban 5 please contact: freethecuban5@gmail.com or 718-601-4751
Visit our website: www.FreetheCuban5.com

SHEEHAN RAISES STRUGGLE TO FREE CUBAN 5
by CHERYL LABASH (11/27/11 SOAPBOX GUEST)
Holguín, Cuba
The 7th International Colloquium for the freedom of the Cuban Five concluded in this eastern Cuban city on Nov. 19. Representatives from international committees that have mobilized parliaments, unions, Nobel laureates and millions over the past 13 years of unjust U.S. incarceration of these five heroic Cuban men planned the next phase in a week of events.
Offering a moving pledge for renewed U.S. mobilization and confidence that such an effort will free them, noted U.S. anti-war and social justice activist, Cindy Sheehan, presented a treasured necklace given to her by her son Casey, who was slain in Iraq, to the mothers of the Cuban Five. The necklace will be returned to Sheehan when the Five return home to their mothers, families and the Cuban people, who steadfastly demand justice from the U.S. government and the Obama administration.
Simón Bolívar saw it coming. In 1829 the Great Liberator of Latin American colonies warned that the United States “appears destined by Providence to plague America with miseries in the name of Freedom.”

Now, in the 21st century, we witness the global spread of that plague as Washington, obsessed with being a unipolar power in a multipolar world, demands that each and every nation adhere to its dictate of “democracy” and “freedom.” Powerful words have become shibboleths in the service of imperialism.

In an alternate history, things could have been different after the terrorist attacks of 9/11 in 2001. But this is a history of imperialism, with its ineluctable imperatives.
As flames, smoke and ashes billowed from the wreckage of the Twin Towers and the Pentagon, the first country to express sympathy and offer aid was Cuba. President Fidel Castro expressed his government's profound “grief and sadness” about the “violent surprise attacks carried out this morning” and offered Cuba's medical aid.

On 9/11 the entire world seemed in sympathy with the United States. But the U.S. response was unilateral and imperial. On September 20, in a televised address before a joint session of Congress, President George W. Bush declared a “war on terror.” He simply announced war, without asking Congress, seated before him, to declare war as required by the U.S. Constitution. He called it “our” war because it already belonged to all U.S. citizens, like it or not: “Our war on terror begins with al Qaeda,” he said, “but it does not end there.”

Bush was looking beyond the war in Afghanistan, which would begin the following month: “Americans should not expect one battle but a lengthy campaign, unlike any other we have ever seen.” For his international audience, he warned, “Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make: Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists.” For his domestic audience, he announced the creation of the Office of Homeland Security, kicking off an era that would leave U.S. constitutional rights crumbling amid the destruction.

A few months later Bush’s commencement address to the graduating class of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point was an order to transform U.S. armed forces into a “military that must be ready to strike at a moment’s notice in any dark corner of the world.” “We must,” he commanded, “uncover terror cells in 60 or more countries.”

Bush’s “war on terror” created a new paradigm in which U.S. imperialism wages a forever war against “the bad guys” as if the world is a “Call of Duty” video game. Perhaps the first iconic manifestation of the war’s nature was the creation on occupied territory in Cuba at the Guantánamo Naval Base of a prison that quickly became notorious around the world for torture, serving as a 21st-century model for the infamous Abu Ghrabi in Iraq as well as prisons in other countries, including Afghanistan, Jordan, Poland, Romania, and Thailand.

The plan for this imperial crusade had appeared years before the 9/11 attacks as neoconservatives from the “Project for the New American Century,” like Paul Wolfowitz and Dick Cheney, developed their strategy for a “global Pax Americana.” In September 2000, just before the presidential election, PNAC published Rebuilding America's Defenses: Strategies, Forces and Resources for a New Century. The report outlined a slow transformation to total global hegemony unless there were “some catalyzing and catastrophic event -- like a new Pearl Harbor.”

ELECTIONS, U.S. STYLE
How did those neoconservatives place themselves into position to take advantage of their “new Pearl Harbor” on 9/11? They did it by systematically hijacking the first presidential election of the 21st century in the key battleground state of Florida. After the Civil War, Florida (like the other former slave states) passed laws designed to criminalize ex-slaves and then disenfranchise them because they were thus “criminals.” The Jeb Bush Administration actually used the 1868 Florida law that disenfranchised ex-slaves to disenfranchise former felons. At the time of that crucial 2000 election, disenfranchised former felons in Florida totaled 600,000. Of those, 256,392 were African-Americans. With a devious vote count, Texas Governor Bush defeated Vice-President Al Gore in Florida by only 537 votes. If those African-Americans had been allowed to vote, the president on 9/11 would have been Al Gore.

As it was, the vote was so close that it triggered an automatic recount. Legal battles between the Bush and Gore campaigns raged for weeks. When the Florida State Supreme Court ruled that recounts could continue, Miami’s Radio Mambí broadcast appeals by Republicans Ileana Ros-Lehtinen and Lincoln Díaz-Balart, both Cuban-American members of Congress, calling for Cuban-Americans to stop the vote count for Miami-Dade County taking place at the Government Center in Miami. Consequently, the rest of the country caught a glimpse of the kind of “democracy” these Cuban-Americans would like to impose in Cuba. According to The New York Times, “several people were trampled, punched or kicked when protesters tried to rush the doors outside the office of the Miami-Dade supervisor of elections.” Sheriffs restored order. When it was over, the shock troops had achieved what they wanted: the Canvassing Board shut down the Miami-Dade recount.

Meanwhile, the Republican Party was operating a machine driven by higher powers than Republican protesters in the street: Republicans in high places. Florida’s Republican Secretary of State certified the election results as a 537-vote victory. Florida’s Republican Governor Jeb Bush signed forms to declare that all 25 of Florida’s electors were pledged to his brother George, thus tipping the national electoral votes to Bush even though Gore won the popular vote. Then, when the Florida State Supreme Court ruled for a statewide partial recount, five U.S. Supreme Court judges overruled the State Court with a 5 to 4 vote to shut down all recounts. Those five “justices” -- nominated by Republican Presidents Nixon, Reagan, and H.W. Bush -- decided that Republican George W. Bush would be president of the United States.

The battle for Florida in 2000 showed how crucial Florida’s electoral votes have become. Since 1992, no president has been elected without winning Florida. This situation gives powerful leverage to about half a million Cuban-American voters in Florida. Every four years Democratic and Republican presidential candidates compete aggressively for their favor. This task, however, is more complicated than it used to be. A developing generational difference among Cuban-Americans finds many more concerned about domestic issues like employment and health care...
than about Cuba. And politicians have to pay attention to the rapidly increasing number of other Hispanic voters whose interests may not coincide with prioritizing overthrow of the Cuban government.

President Ronald Reagan had recognized the potential challenge of the changing demographic and established a hardline Cuban-American organization to serve as an arm of U.S. domestic and foreign policy, shoring up the goal of restoring U.S. control of Cuba. In 1981, his first year as president, Reagan created the Cuban American National Foundation. A major purpose of CANF was to drown out the voices of Cuban-Americans and other Americans who want to improve relations with Cuba. President Reagan and Vice-President George H. W. Bush anointed Jorge Mas Canosa as chairman of CANF, designating him the “liberator” who would “return democracy” to Cuba. CANF’s multimillionaire board of directors and trustees in Florida and New Jersey showered congressional campaigns with money and in return Congress established the National Endowment for Democracy that granted funds to CANF’s various projects, like Radio and TV Martí. CANF quickly became the most powerful of all the U.S. organizations aimed at overthrowing the Cuban Government.

Mas Canosa was a sophisticated politician who worked both sides of the political aisle, financing campaigns of Democrats as well as Republicans. Moreover CANF engineered victorious campaigns of Cuban-Americans at all levels of government in Florida and New Jersey, from town halls to State legislatures and on to the Capitol in Washington. In 1989, CANF’s choice for a special election in Florida was Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, whose campaign manager happened to be Jeb Bush, son of then-President H.W. Bush. Ros-Lehtinen became the first Cuban-American elected to the House of Representatives. Others followed her to both House and Senate, Democrats as well as Republicans, all dedicated to overthrowing the government of Cuba.

COVERT TERRORISM

Unlike Omega 7, Alpha 66, and other terrorists who boast of their armed infiltrations, sabotage, and even murders, CANF persisted in claiming it engaged only in nonviolent activities, giving an aura of respectability. Cuba warned that CANF had a covert military arm. Who was telling the truth? In fact, CANF’s plans for getting rid of Fidel Castro included “by any means necessary.” CANF’s multimillionaires, eager to make more millions in Cuba, expected immediate collapse in Havana after the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991. In 1992, frustrated by the delay, while one hand was engineering the lawful Torricelli Act to tighten the trade embargo, the other hand was secretly creating CANF’s unlawful paramilitary branch dedicated to assassinating President Fidel Castro. In 1997, some of CANF’s gang were arrested on their way to kill Castro at an Ibero-American Summit meeting on Margarita Island in Venezuela. They were acquitted in Puerto Rico in December 1999 despite the fact that one of them had bragged to the Coast Guard
that they were on their way to kill Castro. One of the two .50 caliber rifles onboard La Esperanza belonged to Francisco (Pépé) Hernández, who was then and continues to be the president of CANF. The FBI visited Hernández and obviously told him to "lay low" for a while – the message consistently delivered by the FBI to terrorists they harbor. Even as the five CANF terrorists returned to their mansions, five Cuban anti-terrorists were facing trial in Miami.

CANF was also clandestinely supporting the two most notorious terrorists in the Western Hemisphere, Orlando Bosch Avila (who died, unimprisoned, in Miami in 2011) and Luis Posada Carriles (who at this writing continues to walk free in Miami). Bosch and Posada are known worldwide as the masterminds of blowing up Cubana Airline’s Flight 455 in 1976, killing all 73 passengers and crew aboard. Flight 455 was the only passenger plane blown up by terrorists in the Western Hemisphere – until 9/11. In his autobiography, Los caminos del guerrero (The Paths of the Warrior), Posada named three major financial supporters: Jorge Mas Canosa (CANF chairman until his death in 1997), Pépé Hernández, and Feliciano Foyo (CANF board member until he left to join the even more extremist Cuban Liberty Council). Posada again named Mas Canosa as a financier during an astonishing interview by Ann Louise Bardach and Larry Rohter that was featured on the New York Times front pages for two days, July 12-13, 1998. Posada stated that U.S. intelligence agents look the other way as he carries out operations such as a series of bombings in Cuba in 1997 that killed an Italian businessman in a Havana hotel. Speaking of relations between terrorists and the CIA, Posada boasted, "`The CIA taught us everything--everything.'" He continued, "`They taught us explosives, how to kill, bomb, trained us in acts of sabotage.'" He called Jorge Kiszinski, an FBI agent who was supposedly investigating terrorist activities by Cuban-Americans, "`a very good friend.'"

Because the CIA and the FBI failed to apprehend terrorists who were plotting attacks against Cuba, Cuban agents were forced to take on the job. In June 1998, FBI agents were invited to Havana where Cuban officials gave them reams of information gathered by Cuban agents. But in September, instead of arresting the terrorists, the FBI arrested the agents who had gathered the evidence. Gerardo Hernández, Ramón Labañino, Antonio Guerrero, Fernando González, and René González, known as the Cuban Five, were tried in Miami, convicted in 2001, and incarcerated in different prisons across the United States.

Meanwhile, other Cuban agents uncovered the most potentially deadly assassination plot of all. As Fabián Escalante, former head of Cuba’s State Security Department (G-2), meticulously documented in his book, Executive Action: 634 Ways to Kill Fidel Castro, the CIA began these assassination attempts in 1959 while the FBI started even before that, in 1958 while Castro was still in the Sierras. Most have gone unnoticed, but President Castro made sure to call attention to this one. After arriving in Panama City in November 2000 to attend an Ibero-American Summit
meeting, Castro held a news conference to announce that Luis Posada Carriles and three Cuban-American co-conspirators were planning to assassinate him by bombing the auditorium at the University of Panama where he would be speaking. He even revealed where police could find the assassins. G-2 agents not only saved the life of Fidel Castro yet again but also the lives of hundreds of people, mainly students, who packed the University of Panama auditorium to hear Castro speak. This would not have been a single assassination. It would have been a massacre.

Less than a year after that terrorism was avoided came the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Fidel Castro, in his offer of sympathy and aid to the United States that day, urged that Washington put an end to the terrorism waged from within the United States against Cuba. However, the U.S. State Department keeps Cuba on its list of “State Sponsors of Terrorism” even though it no longer cites any evidence that Cuba is engaged in any terrorism anywhere in the world. By defining Cuba as a terrorist nation, the State Department gets away with defining terrorism aimed at Cuba as anti-terrorism. Thus, there is no chance that the terror cells in Florida and New Jersey would be targeted by the “war on terror.” In fact, when Posada and his co-conspirators arrived in Miami after they were pardoned in Panama (by outgoing President Mereya Moscoso who was on her way to live in Miami), they were welcomed as heroes in their capital city of terrorism.

And how are these terrorists treated by Washington? The Justice Department refuses Venezuela’s request for Posada’s extradition to continue facing charges for the 73 murders of the passengers and crew aboard Flight 455. In Congress, some Cuban-American members take pride in publicly representing the views of their terrorist constituents, including threats of assassination. For example, on March 22, 2004, Florida Republican Representative Lincoln Díaz-Balart promoted the assassination of Fidel Castro on Miami television, and in an interview for the 2006 British documentary “638 Ways to Kill Castro,” Representative Ros-Lehtinen stated, “I welcome the opportunity of having anyone assassinate Fidel Castro.”

Invasion is openly advocated. When Ros-Lehtinen was a guest on NBC’s “Today” program in 1996, Bryant Gumbel said that most Americans probably don’t see Cuba as a threat; Ros-Lehtinen replied: "What was the threat in the Panama invasion? Did we think that Manuel Noriega’s army was going to invade us? And what about the threat in the Persian Gulf War? Were they going to send their jets and invade us? There were no threats and yet we took forceful action." In the 2010 midterm elections, right-wingers with the Tea Party’s agenda shifted the majority of the House of Representatives to the Republican Party, meaning that all House committees would now be chaired by Republicans. This enabled Ros-Lehtinen to achieve her dream of becoming the chair of the House Foreign Relations Committee. With that powerful position, she continued to demand “forceful action” against Cuba. Although there has been no subsequent outright invasion like the
1961 Bay of Pigs invasion, Cuba has reported to the United Nations that 3,478 Cubans have died and 2,099 have been disabled by terrorist activities.

OVERT TERRORISM

As deadly as it is, covert terrorism has not been as devastating as the overt terrorism of the U.S. trade embargo which has been aimed at starving the Cuban people into submission ever since the Revolution. According to a June 24, 1959, State Department memorandum, Robert Kleberg, owner of the King Ranch in Texas with a three-million-dollar cattle investment in Cuba, told Secretary of State Christian Herter that depriving Cuba of its sugar quota privilege would cause "widespread further unemployment" and "large numbers of people thus forced out of work would begin to go hungry." Herter cautioned that such a policy would be "economic warfare" in peacetime.

Which was it to be? Warfare or peacetime? Within a year the Eisenhower Administration instituted economic warfare as permanent policy toward Cuba. In the United States people hear that it is Cuba's economic system, not the trade embargo, that hurts Cuban people. Yet the genesis of the trade embargo was explicitly to starve Cubans into submission. On April 6, 1960, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs Lester Mallory sent a decisive memo to Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs R. Richard Rubottom, Jr. It reads like a memo from the 21st century as it points out that the "majority of Cubans support [Fidel] Castro" and concludes that the "only foreseeable means of alienating internal support is through disenchantment and disaffection based on economic dissatisfaction and hardship." Therefore "it follows that every possible means should be undertaken promptly to weaken the economic life of Cuba....to bring about hunger, desperation and overthrow of government."

So Washington terminated Cuba's sugar quota in July, leaving Cuba holding 700,000 tons of unsold sugar (soon purchased by the Soviet Union). A total U.S. trade embargo took effect in February 1962 as part of the secret Operation Mongoose that led to the 1962 Missile Crisis. Although negotiations to end that crisis included an agreement with the Soviet Union by the Kennedy White House that the United States would not invade Cuba again, economic warfare along with armed infiltrations continued. At the UN General Assembly in 2011, Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodríguez Parilla reported that economic damages to Cuba from the trade embargo totaled $975 billion.

The principal ideological justification for banning trade was that Cuba had become a Soviet "proxy” spreading communism to the Western Hemisphere. The professed anti-colonialism of the 1901 Platt Amendment appeared in an updated form, with the Soviet Union rather than Spain cast
in the role of the threat to Cuban independence. But if the Soviet Union were the real cause, the embargo would have ended in 1991 when the USSR disintegrated. Instead, Washington intensified the trade embargo.

First came the Torricelli Act ("Cuban Democracy Act") signed by President H.W. Bush in 1992. Its express purpose, in the words of then-Representative Robert Torricelli, was to "wreak havoc on that island." Then in 1996 came the bizarre Helms-Burton law ("Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity Act") signed by President Bill Clinton.

With the Soviet Union out of the way, the Torricelli Act and the Helms-Burton Law make no pretence of trying to save Cuba from a foreign power. Under the mantra of "democracy" both claim to be saving Cuba from its own government. Although the texts ring with calls for "democracy," "freedom," and "human rights," these two omnibus laws are focused not on Cuba in reality but on Cuba in the imagination of CANF multimillionaires, fantasizing about their return to the Batista era, once again assuming ownership of Cuba in alliance with Washington.

In a frenzy to restore the past, Helms-Burton’s Title III concocted a unique method of acquiring the right to regain former property: property left behind by Cuban émigrés is magically converted into U.S. property because those Cubans later became U.S. citizens! In U.S. courts, Cuban-Americans could sue foreign investors who "traffic" in property Cubans owned when they were Cuban citizens. Even some of the closest U.S. allies objected vociferously to its extraterritoriality with the result that Title III, "Protection of Property Rights of United States Nationals," has never been enforced. The president suspends it every six months.

However, Title I, "Authorization of Support for Democratic and Human Rights Groups and International Observers,” has become the nexus of policy toward Cuba in the 21st century. It authorizes the president to give money and goods to individuals and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) for "democracy-building efforts.” This financial and material support of “dissidents” is of course a blatant attempt to create a Fifth Column to implement Washington’s agenda.

CUBAN LAW VERSUS U.S. LAW

In 1901 U.S. law became Cuban law. That year, in order to codify control of Cuba, the U.S. Congress passed the Platt Amendment as part of an Army Appropriations bill. The amendment provided a blueprint for turning Cuba into a neocolony. Since Washington made it clear that its military occupation would not end until the amendment became part of Cuban law, Cuba included the Platt Amendment in its 1901 Constitution.

Helms-Burton aspires to be the Platt Amendment of the 21st century. But there is a key difference
between Platt and Helms-Burton. Helms-Burton is U.S. law but Cuba is determined to keep it from becoming Cuban law. In 1999, Cuba passed its own "Law for the Protection of National Independence and the Economy of Cuba" (Law 88). It points out that Helms-Burton makes financing subversive activities part of economic warfare against Cuba. Law 88 makes it a violation of Cuban law to introduce into Cuba, accept, or distribute materials from the U.S. Government that would aid in implementing Helms-Burton. Thus, when a U.S. agent (such as Alan Gross, who was working for the State Department’s USAID when he was arrested in Cuba in 2009) introduces such materials and distributes them in Cuba, the agent is implementing Helms-Burton, thus violating Cuban law.

Helms-Burton also dictates precisely how Cuba must conduct “free” elections during the “transition” between the overthrow of its government and replacement with an approved government. Title II, “Assistance to a Free and Independent Cuba,” specifies that neither Fidel Castro nor Raúl Castro can be president of a “free” Cuba, whether or not elected.

But Cuba managed its own orderly transition, without Washington’s approval, in 2006 after Fidel Castro removed himself from the presidency because of illness. Raúl Castro became acting president and then was elected president in 2008. He took office as recession struck the global economy, including both Cuba and the United States. In addition, three major hurricanes hit Cuba in 2008 with devastating economic losses. Aiming to address its problems without giving up socialist principles, Cuba launched a campaign against corruption and inefficiency, including major changes in agriculture. In April 2011, the Cuban Communist Party held its first Party Congress since 1997 and approved about 300 economic, social, and political reforms, including private sales of houses and property, more self-employment, and increasing foreign investment.

The American people were also looking for change. During that 2008 to 2012 period, the key figure was Barack Obama who ran his 2008 winning presidential campaign with a promise of change as the U.S. economy was collapsing beneath the weight of the Bush Administration’s two major wars and reckless economic policies. As part of his strategy for winning the crucial electoral votes of Florida, Obama aligned himself with CANF, in favor of loosening travel restrictions for Cuban-Americans with family on the island. Four years earlier, President Bush had instituted draconian travel rules that restricted visits to relatives to once in every three years and allowed scant remittances. This mobilized 500 Cuban-Americans who attended a press conference in Miami, giving birth to a new movement for family rights. Reaching for that growing bloc of voters, Obama promised in a May 2008 Miami speech, “I will immediately allow unlimited family travel and remittances.” Obama won Florida. When he took office in 2009, he kept that promise.

But what about travel for other U.S. citizens? George Bush had also terminated people-to-people exchanges that allow a relatively small number of non-Cubans to visit Cuba by traveling with
groups who manage to obtain special licenses from the Treasury Department’s Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC). In 2011 President Obama restored those limited exchanges but in the election year of 2012 once again OFAC made licenses difficult or impossible to get. Moreover, even though he is a constitutional lawyer, Obama continued the travel ban for all other people, despite the fact that the Supreme Court in 1958 ruled that U.S. citizens have a constitutional right to travel.

But what do most Americans think about relations with Cuba? Some organizations – e.g., the Venceremos Brigade (since 1969) and the IFCO Caravans for Peace (since 1992) – have continued to organize large groups to visit the forbidden island without applying for licenses, taking humanitarian aid with them. Widespread support around the United States for these ventures has made it difficult for the U.S. government to crack down on their defiance of the bans on travel and trade. A CBS-New York Times poll taken in April 2009 showed that 60 percent favored freedom to travel to Cuba by all citizens and 67 percent favored re-establishing diplomatic and trade relations with Cuba.

Meanwhile, the political dynamic among Cuban-Americans was changing dramatically and hardline Cuban-Americans have been forced to decide how to deal with the changes. As the 21st century dawnd, the CANF was no longer the bulwark that Reagan had designed. Its charismatic chairman, Jorge Mas Canosa, had died; several high-ranking members were exposed in a bungled attempt to assassinate Fidel Castro; and one of CANF’s main protégés, Luis Posada, had bragged to The New York Times about CANF’s financing his terrorism. Then suddenly, as one century turned into another, Cuban-American attentions focused on the custody battle for Elián González, a motherless child being held by relatives in Miami’s Little Havana to prevent his return to his father, stepmother, brother, all four grandparents, and his classmates at school. Rescued from an inner tube in the Atlantic after his mother drowned in November 1999, Elián became major news in both Cuba and the United States as a great-uncle claimed custody.

The Cuban people mobilized to demand his return. It became a showdown. The issue divided Cuban-Americans, who demonstrated in Miami on both sides of the battle. The American people watched on television as Miami relatives tried to turn a six-year-old against his father by surrounding him with possessions, including gifts from Ileana Ros-Lehtinen and the promise of a life of luxury as CANF got involved in the battle. Here was a close-up look at hardline Cuban-Americans, and most people did not like what they saw, deciding that the Miami relatives were nothing more than kidnappers.

When the U.S. legal system ruled in favor of the father’s right to his son, Attorney General Janet Reno ordered federal agents to rescue Elián, who was reunited in April with his father, stepmother, and baby brother, who had come to Washington. But court battles continued while demonstrations
raged in Miami, for and against keeping Elián. Finally, just hours after the Supreme Court refused to hear a last-minute appeal by the distant Miami relatives, Elián and his family flew home to Cuba on June 28, 2000. W

What happened in Florida after that seven-month battle to keep a child from his father? As polls showed that a majority of people in the United States disagreed with CANF’s position about Elián, CANF began damage control. José Cárdenas, director of CANF’s Washington office, admitted in the June 15 Miami Herald, “There has been an assessment that, in the past few weeks, there has been damage to the image of Cuban Americans.”

Hardliners complained that CANF chairman Jorge Mas Santos, the son of Jorge Mas Canosa, had not shown the leadership that his father would have provided to keep Elián out of Cuba. They vowed to retaliate against the Democrats in the upcoming November 2000 elections, which they did, helping to win a dubious victory for Bush in Florida. CANF’s internal divide culminated in a split in 2001 when almost two dozen board members publicly resigned, stating that CANF had softened its line. They formed the Cuban Liberty Council (CLC), which continued the hard line of no contact at all with Cuba.

THE TRADE EMBARGO

Crucially, both CANF and CLC continued full support for Helms-Burton. When Obama made that promise in Miami in May 2008 to allow “unlimited family travel and remittances,” he also made a second promise: “I will maintain the embargo.” On this issue of trade, Obama could play to both CLC and CANF because this promise is stamped with the approval of all of those self-professed humanitarians who want to starve the Cuban people into submission.

But it does not have the stamp of approval from most American people. In fact, despite opposition by the usual suspects, in the year 2000 agribusinesses and pharmaceutical industries were able to persuade Congress and President Clinton to enact a major change to Helms-Burton that allows exports of food, agricultural and forestry products, and medicines to Cuba. The change has turned the United States into one of Cuba’s major trading partners. However, the trade is only in one direction. Cuba can import U.S. exports, but nobody in the United States can import Cuban exports. In addition, Cuba must pay cash in advance for those imports.

Why is Washington never persuaded to allow its citizens to trade freely with Cuba? The answer goes back through history all the way to Thomas Jefferson: the U.S. government wants Cuba as part of what Jefferson called an “empire for liberty.” Obama maintained an embargo that has been consecrated by his ten predecessors.

But the embargo has become a boomerang. According to Helms-Burton, the President should
instruct the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations to propose in the Security Council “a mandatory international embargo against the totalitarian Cuban Government.” Instead, it is Cuba who has brought the issue to a vote every year since 1992 in the General Assembly. That year, with 179 nations, the vote was 59 to 3 against the trade embargo, with 71 abstentions and 46 not voting. As the years went by, the number of votes against the embargo kept increasing. By 2011, with 193 nations, the vote was 186 to 2, with 3 abstentions and 2 not voting. Washington could find only one country -- Israel -- to vote for the trade embargo. Aiming to isolate Havana, Washington isolated itself.

What other nations refuse to trade with Cuba? Not one. Even Israel, despite its vote at the UN, trades with Cuba. Major trading partners -- including Venezuela, China, Canada, Spain, Brazil, Mexico, Vietnam, Russia, Algeria, and the European Union – are profiting from the flow of goods and services in and out of Cuba.

In the globalized and multipolar world of the 21st century, the U.S. embargo becomes ever more anachronistic and self-destructive. An historical development at the turn of the century created an opening for Cuba that continues to widen and deepen. After Hugo Chávez, a socialist, was elected Venezuela’s president in 1999, Cuba and Venezuela formed a trading alliance based on the barter system: Cuba, rich in health care, and Venezuela, rich in oil, traded medical personnel and oil for the benefit of each population. In 2004 Cuba and Venezuela launched the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA), an alternative to the proposed Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), which was promoted by the United States and would have included all countries in the Americas except Cuba. Foreign Minister Rodríguez has called FTAA “the United States’ plan to economically annex Latin America.” FTAA was sidelined in 2005. ALBA has continued to grow. A dramatic change in political and economic relationships is underway in the Western Hemisphere.

PARADIGM SHIFT

In 1962, as part of Operation Mongoose, a covert plan for overthrowing the Cuban Government, the Kennedy Administration launched a major campaign to isolate Cuba. A crucial component was to get Cuba suspended from the Organization of American States (OAS). Since the OAS is headquartered in and dominated by Washington, 14 of the 21 members went along with the White House, barely providing the necessary two-thirds vote for suspension. In 2009, the OAS, having grown in numbers as well as political power, rescinded Cuba’s suspension.

The paradigm shift was boldly manifest the following year in the creation of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), which aims to strengthen economic and political ties among its members, completely independent from Washington. When the 21st century
opened, OAS members included all 35 nations of the Western Hemisphere, with Cuba suspended. By the end of the first decade of the 21st century, CELAC members included all 33 Latin American and Caribbean nations of the Western Hemisphere, with the United States and Canada excluded.

As if oblivious to the consensus of Latin America and the Caribbean regarding the status of Cuba, President Obama declared in September 2011, “It’s clearly time for regime change in Cuba.”

When it seemed that President Raúl Castro would attend the OAS Sixth Summit in 2012, Cuban-Americans in Congress demanded that President Obama boycott the meeting if Castro attended. Obama promptly agreed. Ecuadorian President Rafael Correa, in a letter to the Summit’s host, Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos, explained that he would not be attending if Cuba were excluded. When the Summit met on April 14-15 in Cartagena, Cuba’s exclusion became a major agenda item. Disagreement led to no Final Statement. As an Associated Press headline put it, “U.S., Canada stand alone insisting on the exclusion of Cuba from summits.” Seeking to alienate Cuba, President Obama alienated the United States.

Yet in Washington and Miami there is no sign of recognition that the center has shifted both within the Hemisphere and within the United States. During the 2012 presidential campaign, the gravitational pull continued to move Republicans around CLC and Democrats around CANF, all upholding the trade embargo and disregarding the creation of Cuban-American groups like Cuban Americans For Engagement (C.A.F.E.) and the Foundation for Normalization of US-Cuba Relations (FORNORM), not to mention all the polls showing that a majority of all Americans want improved relations with Cuba.

Indeed, in the heat of the 2012 presidential campaign, the candidates of the two major political parties ignored voices of dissent and predictably engaged in outdoing each other in their fervor for empire. Just as President Obama called for regime change in Cuba, Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney promised hardliners that “we will hasten the day when the regime will come to an end.”

AMERICAN EXCEPTIONALISM

What ideology allows this policy toward Cuba to continue despite almost universal condemnation around the globe? American exceptionalism.

Describing his own book, No Apology: The Case for American Greatness, Romney stated, “I make no apology for my conviction that America’s economic and military leadership is not only good for American but also critical for freedom and peace across the world.” In a speech in May 2012, he explained, “We have two courses we can follow: One is to follow in the pathway of Europe, to
shrink our military smaller and smaller to pay for our social needs. The other is to commit to preserve America as the strongest military in the world, second to none, with no comparable power anywhere in the world.” At a campaign stop in March, he told supporters, “Our president doesn’t have the same feelings about American exceptionalism that we do.”

Speaking at the Air Force Academy Commencement in May, President Obama, not to be outdone as an exceptionalist, dutifully followed those neoconservatives from the “Project for the New American Century” with their strategy for a “global Pax Americana.” He told the graduating pilots of Forever War that “the United States has been, and will always be, the one indispensable nation in world affairs” because “America is exceptional” and “the 21st will be another great American Century.” Explaining these pilots’ duties in this New American Century, he invoked “American Century” seven times as he promised “military superiority in all areas – air, land, sea, space and cyber.” The goal is “an international order where the rights and responsibilities of all nations and peoples are upheld and where countries thrive by meeting their obligations and face consequences when they don’t.” In this Pax Americana, consequences will be decided by Washington. The United States with its alleged democratic ideals is free -- free to do anything it wants to do, from toppling governments with massive destruction to sending drones on assignments for the assassination of anybody anywhere.

The doctrine of American exceptionalism emerged dramatically alongside U.S. policy toward Cuba, from Jefferson’s vision of Cuba as part of an “empire for liberty,” to the Platt Amendment’s platform for domination, and on to Helms-Burton’s blueprint for starving Cuba into submission in the New American Century – all under the banner of democracy, freedom, and human rights. Bolívar called it “miseries in the name of freedom

END CUBA NEWSLETTER #2

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