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“Complicated and Far-Reaching”

The Historical Foundations of Canadian Policy toward Cuba

ASA MCKERCHER

Over several weeks in early 1962 Canada and the United States argued publicly over Cuba. Speaking to reporters in Vancouver, Arthur Schlesinger Jr., an aide to U.S. president John Kennedy, charged Canada with aiding and abetting Cuban revolutionary activity throughout Latin America. A few days later, while addressing an Organization of American States (OAS) summit, U.S. Secretary of State Dean Rusk raised Canada-Cuba trade as a source of concern. Firing back in the House of Commons, Canadian Prime Minister John Diefenbaker declared that Canada would not be pressured into adopting policies with which it did not agree. In private the issue of Cuba was just as divisive. When Rusk followed up his public rebuke of Ottawa by pressing the Canadian ambassador in Washington to urge his government to support the U.S. embargo, the two men argued bitterly for several hours. Alarmed by this sniping, Howard Green, the Canadian foreign minister, ordered a review of Canada's Cuba policy.¹

The resulting report began by observing, “The implications of our relations with Cuba, particularly in terms of U.S.-Canada relations, are complicated and far-reaching. Our policy has frequently been misunderstood and occasionally distorted both at home and abroad.” Even though Ottawa and Havana had different political and economic ideologies, and despite Canadian officials' doubts about the direction of Cuban domestic and foreign policy, Canada found little reason to abandon its normal relationship with the Caribbean nation. A complicating factor was the United States, a power that had long tried to dominate Cuba. Given both Washington's strong desire to overturn the Cuban revolution and the economic and military importance of the United States to Canada, Ottawa's independent stance toward Cuba was remarkable. By following its own course and avoiding “knuckling under' to U.S. pressure,” the Canadian government made it “clear that our policy was not calculated essentially as a mere demonstration of independence for its own sake regardless of the merits of the case.” Rather, Canadian policy toward Cuba was based on the principle that

Ottawa should maintain normal relations with any other country, regardless of ideology, differences in political outlook, or the wishes of Canada's chief ally.²

Doubtless a paper tracing a similar view of policy toward Cuba could be produced in Canadian government circles today. As scholars of Canada-Cuba relations observe, Diefenbaker laid the "foundation" of the "special relationship" between the two countries, and "the pattern first established by Diefenbaker—to treat Cuba as a 'normal' state"—has held for more than fifty years.³ While it may beggar belief to label Diefenbaker—the archetype of a fusty, conservative politician—a trendsetter, he did indeed lay a basis for Canadian relations with revolutionary Cuba. Over the at times vociferous objections of Washington, Diefenbaker maintained economic and diplomatic ties with Havana. At the same time he and other Canadian officials looked on with evident concern at Cuba's new system of government and its actions in foreign affairs. As a comparison of Canadian policy toward Cuba in the Diefenbaker era and in more contemporary periods makes clear, the contours of the normal relationship between Canada and Cuba have changed little over time.

After the Revolution

Following the victory of Fidel Castro's 26th of July Movement in January 1959, Canada was quick to recognize the new government in Havana. It did so eight days after the dictator Fulgencio Batista fled the country. Although Canadian diplomats in Cuba held reservations about some of Castro's actions during his first months in power, generally Ottawa looked favorably upon the revolution.⁴ In autumn 1959, after revolutionary reforms had begun to be implemented, a new Canadian ambassador arrived in the Cuban capital with instructions that read "We have no outstanding political problems with Cuba" and "as the [representative] in Cuba of a friendly country you . . . will, therefore, display as much patience and understanding as are compatible with your functions and seek ways to reconcile Canadian political and economic interests with a revolution which cannot be stabilized until the deep grievances that produced it have been redressed." For Ottawa the legitimacy of the revolution was clearly not in doubt. What worried officials in the Canadian foreign ministry was that "the inexperienced revolutionary government of Dr. Fidel Castro is undertaking very ambitious new social and economic programmes which have already begun to produce serious reactions at home and abroad." Thus, at this early date, although Canada had concerns about instability in Cuba and the Western Hemisphere, no major upsets in Canadian-Cuban relations were being predicted.⁵

Nonetheless, over time additional concerns developed among Canadian gov-

ernment observers. An embassy cable from early 1960 pointed out, “We do not know whether Castro is a Communist or not. That is to say, we do not know whether . . . he follows the orthodox Marxist ideology.” Still, the Cuban leader appeared to be “closely entangled with Communists, here and abroad. If we are right, the precise label on Castro as a person makes no difference. Castro as an executive of the State acts like a full Communist.”⁶ The issue of categorizing Cuba’s government continued to vex the Canadian Embassy in Havana. A report from spring 1961 declared, “The ideological label that should be affixed to Castro’s Cuba may still be somewhat obscure but the nature of his regime is not difficult to discern: it is [a] ruthless dictatorship,” one that “is establishing a highly nationalized and planned economy on the basis of the experiences of the Sino-Soviet bloc nations.” In addition to these telltale domestic actions, Cuba was clearly moving closer toward Canada’s Cold War enemies. “By whatever name they may be called,” the report concluded, “these are unmistakably the characteristics common to communist countries.”⁷

Yet the exact label to be applied to the Cuban system of government ultimately mattered little. In 1962 Canada’s undersecretary of state offered an overview of Ottawa’s position on Cuba to Canadian delegates at a joint Canada-U.S. economic summit. Expecting, correctly, that the Cuban issue would emerge as a point of debate with the U.S. delegates, he stated that his government “acknowledges the Communist commitments of the present Cuban regime in both its domestic and external policies,” but that this “ideological orientation” did not provide sufficient grounds for breaking diplomatic or economic relations. Crucially, when Cuba’s government moved to nationalize foreign-owned firms, Canadian economic interests were protected and dealt with in a nonconfrontational manner.⁸ Therefore the Canadian government watched the implementation of Castro’s nationalist program and other socialist reforms with interested dispassion rather than anger. For Canadian policymakers, Cuba was just another state, even if communist. Although Canada and Cuba were ultimately on opposite sides of the Cold War divide—indeed, at the height of Cold War tension in the early 1960s—officials in Ottawa did not see any reason why either ideology or Cuba’s own domestic policies should prevent the maintenance of good bilateral relations.

With the end of the Cold War in 1989–91, affixing a label to the Cuban government as a guide for policy completely lost relevance. André Ouellet, Canada’s foreign minister in the mid-1990s, stated plainly, “It is time to turn the page on Cuba. The Cold War is over.”⁹ The recent reforms implemented by Cuban prime minister Raúl Castro have been welcomed in Canada. Before departing for Cuba in early 2012, the Canadian minister responsible for the Americas noted that she saw “a very significant process of economic reform

and liberalization in Cuba,” although she lamented that “political change is not what the Cuban leadership had in mind.”¹⁰ Cuba’s domestic policies are important to Canada, but they are not a defining factor of Canadian policy.

Still, during the Cold War Cuba’s alignment with the Soviet Union and other communist states did trouble the Canadian government. Although Diefenbaker reacted to the failed U.S.-backed invasion of Cuba at Playa Girón in April 1961 by warning the U.S. ambassador in Canada that he disagreed sharply with the intervention, he nevertheless warned the Cuban ambassador, “There was one Cuban export with which the world and particularly Latin America could do without and that was the effort to export the Cuban Revolution in the form which it has now taken.”¹¹ In public he chided Cuba’s government for showing “manifestations of a dictatorship which are abhorrent to free men everywhere,” but he saved his full opprobrium for Moscow. The Soviet Union’s support for Havana “revealed beyond doubt the extent to which international communism is prepared to go in consolidating its foothold in Cuba, a bridgehead from which the penetration of the whole of Latin America could be launched.”¹² Diefenbaker’s view of Cuba was seen through a Cold War lens but, again, even Cuban alignment with the USSR provided little reason to curtail normal relations. Indeed, at a NATO summit held a month after the Playa Girón invasion, Diefenbaker’s foreign minister informed his colleagues that Ottawa shared Washington’s concern “about the evidence of Castro’s increasing orientation toward the Soviet bloc.” But, he thought, there seemed to be little “conclusive proof” of Cuba’s “complete adherence” to the Soviet side.¹³

Although Canadian officialdom was content to let the Cuban government go its own way on domestic politics, the Cold War atmosphere meant that Canada did become an increasing critic of Cuba’s foreign policy. Summing up elements of foreign policymaking “behind the Sugarcane Curtain” in an October 1962 memorandum, Undersecretary of State Norman Robertson cast a woeful eye toward the increasing Cuban ties to the Soviet Union, the People’s Republic of China, and the countries of Eastern Europe. Looking in particular to the expanding Soviet military presence on the island as a cause of apprehension, Robertson nevertheless expressed the belief that “there seems to be no substantial reason for terminating our present normal diplomatic relations with Cuba.”¹⁴ Canada deplored Cuban foreign policy but, again, this aversion did not provide grounds for cutting ties to the island.

Only two weeks after Robertson finished his report the Cuban Missile Crisis brought the world to the brink of nuclear war. Famously, or infamously, Diefenbaker initially refused to back Kennedy’s brinksmanship. As one scholar argued, “Underlying Canadian-American interaction during the missile crisis were profoundly different perceptions of Fidel Castro’s Cuba.”¹⁵

Diefenbaker's actions, however, were the result of issues within Canadian-U.S. relations—sovereignty and the question of consultation during a military emergency being chief among them—and his refusal to alert Canada's military forces stemmed from a distaste for Kennedy and not from any *bonhomie* for Castro. Throughout the crisis, Canadian diplomats were unstintingly critical of Cuba. At several points the Cuban ambassador was called into Canada's Department of External Affairs to be harangued for his government's actions, which posed a "grave threat to the security of the Americas, including Canada." In Havana the Canadian ambassador lodged several protests with the Cuban foreign minister. Unlike their response to the Bay of Pigs, Canadian officials, except for the prime minister, viewed Washington's response to the crisis as "a necessary response to clear provocation."¹⁶ So, just as Cuba had very little to do with either U.S. or Soviet decision making during those thirteen days of October, so too was Diefenbaker's initial decision not to back the United States based upon his grievances with Washington and not upon any appreciation for Havana's position.¹⁷ But even this grave crisis was not enough to prompt Canada to abandon its ties with Cuba.

Nor were Cuba's ties to the Soviet Union the only aspect of Cuban foreign policy that troubled Canada. Canadian diplomatic posts throughout Latin America often issued warnings about the appeal of the words "Viva Castro" or cautioned that the "Cubans are both activists and a symbol making them a grave danger to Latin American political stability."¹⁸ Concerns were also raised in the mid-1970s about Cuba's activism in Angola, where Cuban armed forces intervened in support of a leftist liberation movement. This intervention came midway into the "golden age" of relations between Canada and Cuba, a period that coincided with the premiership of Pierre Elliott Trudeau, who expanded bilateral contacts between the two countries and, in 1976, became the first Western leader to travel to Havana. Yet that visit took place under a cloud, and despite the friendly rapport between Trudeau and Castro, their meetings with one another, at least when the issue of Angola was broached, became, as the prime minister reported to the House of Commons, "brutal and frank."¹⁹ Shortly after returning from his trip, Trudeau wrote Castro to complain about the presence of Cuban troops in Angola. "The resolution of the basic political problems of that country," he argued, "and the achievement of permanent stability, will be hastened by the removal of all elements of foreign involvement." As in the Diefenbaker era, there was worry over Cuban efforts to export its revolution. Despite Trudeau's sunny disposition, then, "after Angola nothing was ever the same in Canadian-Cuban relations." Indeed, a similar pattern played out in the early 1980s, when Cuban support for left-wing movements in Nicaragua and El Salvador led to an exchange of sharp letters between Trudeau and Castro.²⁰

Frostiness with Cuba as a result of that country's foreign policy was, then, a constant. In the wake of the spat between Ottawa and Havana over Angola, James Hyndman, Canada's envoy in the Cuban capital, argued for a rapprochement. Encouraging improved bilateral contacts, high-level visits, and increased aid, he opined, would serve "not only our direct commercial and political interests, but also our wider interest in moderating Soviet influence in Cuba" and fostering Cuba's "reintegration within the Latin American community and normalisation with the USA."²¹ Little came of Hyndman's efforts. Instead, the prevailing attitude in Ottawa reflected the sentiment of a paper produced in 1981. Citing "Cuba's orthodox Communist government, its close economic and political dependence on the Soviet Union, its activities in Africa and its interference in Central America and the Caribbean," the paper concluded that "the naturally hostile relationship between the United States and Cuba places severe restraints on the development of closer relations."²²

This attitude carried over when Progressive Conservative Party leader Brian Mulroney became prime minister in 1984 and moved Canada closer to the United States. Even so, at no point were Cuban actions abroad or Cuba's relations with other countries seen to provide sufficient grounds for Ottawa to sever bilateral relations. The pattern in place since 1959 held: Canada treated Cuba as a normal country. Its disapproval of Cuban foreign policy over the years was no different, say, from equally dim assessments of U.S. policy in Southeast Asia or U.S. relations with odious right-wing regimes.

With the end of the Cold War, the anxiety shown over Cuban foreign policy declined, although one can imagine the Canadian government being at least somewhat concerned with Cuba's promotion of ALBA, the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of the Americas, a grouping of nations committed to economic policies that are in stark contrast to Canada's support of neoliberalism. Since the late 1980s, beyond championing international organizations such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, successive Canadian governments across the political spectrum have vigorously pursued free trade. Economic imperatives have long driven Canada's engagement with Latin America and the Caribbean and, as of late 2013, Canada has more free trade agreements in the Americas than with the rest of the world combined. "Canada promotes open doors to trade and responsible investment," affirmed Diane Ablonczy, Canadian minister of state for the Americas, in late 2011, adding "open markets with our neighbours are a priority for us."²³ Whereas Ottawa champions private-market-based economic globalization—the capstone being the now-stalled effort to negotiate a Free Trade Area of the Americas—Havana, with its partners in ALBA, stands diametrically opposed to such neoliberal notions. Further, in an effort to protect its sovereignty, the Cuban government

places controls on the actions of foreign investors. As in the Cold War, Canada and Cuba still find themselves on different sides of an ideological divide.

Humanitarian Concerns and “Constructive Engagement”

Differences over foreign and economic policy aside, one area in which Cuban actions have deeply upset Canada—more so, it seems, than on any other issue—has been human rights. While bilateral disputes on this question have been prominent in contemporary Canada-Cuba relations, even here the roots can be traced back to Diefenbaker. Like many Western observers, Canadian officials deplored the “revolutionary trials” and resulting executions of members of the Batista government that took place within the first few months of the revolution.²⁴ Hackles also rose in early 1962, when the Cuban government put on trial those members of the invading force from the Playa Girón attack who had been taken prisoner. A vocal champion of human rights, Diefenbaker ordered Canada’s foreign office to raise humanitarian concerns through both the Cuban ambassador in Ottawa and the Canadian ambassador in Havana. When an aide pointed out that, with one exception, those on trial were not Canadians, Diefenbaker responded that he still held an interest in seeing fair trials as well as the avoidance of death sentences for any of those found guilty. “If Castro took exception to this,” he said, “we could break off trade with Cuba.”²⁵ Perhaps only an off-the-cuff remark, this comment nevertheless showed the depth of feeling that Diefenbaker, and successive prime ministers, have had with regard to Havana’s respect for Western-defined human rights.

Since the end of the Cold War, humanitarian concerns have only increased as an issue on the bilateral agenda. Jean Chrétien, the Liberal Party prime minister from 1993 to 2003, was very much a successor to Trudeau, both in his outlook on many political issues and in his desire to seek increased ties with Cuba. Like that of Trudeau, his premiership was divided between a good and then a tense period of relations. Under considerable pressure from U.S. critics to curtail Canada’s trade to Cuba, Chrétien courageously refused, instead advocating for treating Cuba as a normal country. One proviso was that Canadian officials would urge Havana to implement reforms. The collapse of the Soviet Union and of Soviet-backed regimes in Eastern Europe showed that the communist world was not static. Canada’s diplomats and politicians began to do what they had never done before: insist that Cuba change. Addressing the OAS General Assembly in 1994, Christine Stewart, Chrétien’s secretary of state for Latin America, averred, “It is in all our interests, individually and as an organization, as well as in the interests of the people of Cuba, that we support a process of change in Cuba that is positive and orderly.”²⁶

To bring about this change, Ottawa pursued a policy known as “constructive engagement,” which became the watchword of Canada-Cuba relations during the late 1990s, although, in truth, since 1959 the Canadian approach has favored engagement. Through increased bilateral contacts, Ottawa has hoped, in the words of Lloyd Axworthy, Chrétien’s second foreign minister, to “provide Cuba with the assistance and support that will be needed if a peaceful transition is to occur with full respect for human rights, genuinely representative government institutions, and an open economy.”²⁷ The human rights issue proved especially thorny, though, particularly given that it served as a lightning rod for critics of constructive engagement. Ultimately Canada’s advocacy of human rights led to a chill in relations between Havana and Ottawa.

Famously calling for putting some “northern ice” into the Canada-Cuba relationship in 1998 after a raucous meeting with Fidel Castro, Chrétien ordered a review of his country’s Cuban policy, delayed official visits to the island, and condemned Cuba in annual UN votes on human rights. Commenting on the jailing of several political dissidents, he complained, “Cuba sends an unfortunate signal to her friends in the international community when people are jailed for peaceful protest.”²⁸ Signs of a thaw in the relationship were evident in 2002, when a Canadian trade mission led by a government minister traveled to Havana, but the jailing of dissidents the following year prompted the foreign minister to reprimand the Cuban ambassador. Ottawa also gave its support to a resolution calling for the OAS to take noneconomic moves to pressure Cuba over its human rights record.²⁹

This chill, and its connection to humanitarian concerns, did not dissipate and indeed showed little sign of fading under the Conservative prime minister Stephen Harper. Peter Kent, Canada’s secretary of state for Latin America and Africa from 2008 to 2011, put it bluntly: Cuba “is a dictatorship, any way you package it.”³⁰ Despite such heated rhetoric Harper’s government did not alter the shape of the bilateral relationship. As with Cuba’s communist orientation during the Cold War, the Cuban government’s position on human rights had not been a *sine qua non* for normal relations with Canada. In sharp contrast to Kent’s comments, in January 2012 Diane Ablonczy, who took over his ministerial portfolio, promised not to “take a lecturing approach” with her Cuban counterparts on human rights. “There’s a lot of debate around these things,” she continued, “and there’s a lot of caution too. But Canada, as an investor in Cuba, with lots of people-to-people contact, wants to play as positive and constructive a role as possible.”³¹ The Harper government’s approach bears a notable resemblance to that of its Liberal Party predecessors. Speaking at the Canadian Foundation of the Americas in 1996, for instance, Christine Stewart noted that Canada desired “a peaceful transition to a genuinely representative govern-

ment,” one that “fully respected internationally agreed human rights standards. And we look forward to Cuba becoming an open economy. However, we differ from the United States on how to reach these objectives. We have chosen the path of engagement and dialogue; the United States has picked isolation.”³²

Trade Relations: Isolation, Engagement, Dialogue

Comparisons between U.S. and Canadian policy toward Cuba are striking because they differ so markedly in terms of the divide between isolation and engagement. They are also conspicuous given that the U.S. factor in Canadian-Cuban relations has been ubiquitous. Canada’s close ally and closest trading partner, the United States is also Cuba’s sworn enemy. Much of Canada’s Cuban policy has been determined by the United States, and scholars have referred to the existence of a “Canada-Cuba-U.S. triangle.”³³ Again, Diefenbaker set the Canadian course, one that reflected fundamentally different views of international relations. As the Canadian ambassador to the United States in the early 1960s reminded U.S. diplomats, Ottawa and Washington held divergent beliefs on trade and diplomatic representation “with governments of whose systems we totally disapproved.”³⁴

This position was made clear to U.S. officials early on in their growing dispute with Castro. In July 1960, with their program of economic warfare beginning to take shape, several U.S. cabinet members approached their Canadian counterparts to inquire as to whether Ottawa would join Washington in an embargo. After listening to the Americans plead their case, Canadian foreign minister Howard Green responded that he was “very doubtful of the wisdom of attempting to deal with the Cuban situation by external economic pressure.” Once the embargo was put in place that October, Green reported to the Canadian cabinet that he and the prime minister saw Canada-Cuba relations as “normal.” Some two months later, after remaining silent on the issue in public, Diefenbaker outlined Canadian policy toward Cuba to the House of Commons. There was, he said, “no valid objection to trade with Cuba” nor was there reason to abandon “the kind of relations with Cuba which are usual with the recognized government of another country.”³⁵

Still, two areas of cooperation on the embargo did emerge. Soon after the revolution Canada moved to stop arms sales to the Caribbean, and hence to Cuba, later expanding this ban to specifically target Cuba and prevent sales of items with even minimal strategic and military value, such as dynamite. The latter restrictions were so potent that one State Department official tasked with coordinating the embargo praised the Canadian controls as a model for other countries to follow.³⁶

Then, with the embargo about to go into effect in October 1960, the Americans asked that the Canadian government prevent the transshipment, or re-export, of goods of U.S. origin to Cuba via Canada. Commenting on this appeal, Diefenbaker remarked to an aide that he did not rule out “some degree of cooperation” with the United States. On the following day he added that “he was not inclined in favour of more than a minimum compliance” with the U.S. request. As Diefenbaker told Parliament, minimum compliance meant that Canada would not “exploit the situation arising from the United States embargo, and we have no intention of encouraging what would in fact be bootlegging of goods of United States origin.”³⁷ While Canadian firms certainly took advantage of the absence of U.S. competitors in the Cuban market, Ottawa’s policies of preventing the re-export of U.S. goods into Cuba and circumscribing the sale of strategic items remained in full force over the following decades, into the present.

Cooperating with Washington, however, did not mean approving of U.S. policy. Meeting with Kennedy in February 1961, Diefenbaker made clear that it was Canadian policy to trade with all nations. He added, though, that his government had restricted trade in strategic items, had forbidden the re-export of U.S. goods through Canada to Cuba, and was not pushing to expand Canadian-Cuban trade. Still, he cautioned that it was “perfectly true” that “when Canada disagreed with the United States on policy it would not follow the United States’ lead.” Diefenbaker’s unflinching position came under attack from the White House, the State Department, the U.S. Congress, and the American public, but he held firm, as did successive Canadian prime ministers who faced down similar attacks from critics within the United States.³⁸

Perhaps at no time was U.S. criticism of Canada-Cuba trade worse than in the 1990s. Energized by the end of the Cold War and by the strains that the collapse of the Soviet Union placed upon Cuba, the U.S. Congress passed a series of bills targeting foreign trade with Cuba: the Mack Amendment in 1990, the Cuban Democracy (or Torricelli) Act in 1992, and the Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity (or Helms-Burton) Act in 1996. Against this legislation, all of which strengthened the embargo and impugned Canadian sovereignty by threatening the principle of territoriality, Canada launched angry protests and raised the specter of using the Foreign Extraterritorial Measures Act, blocking legislation that could target businessmen and businesswomen who attempted to comply with extraterritorial measures. Summing up the Canadian position, one that Diefenbaker would have defended, Axworthy explained, “The whole embargo and the Helms-Burton bill is totally counterproductive. . . . It just doesn’t work.”³⁹ Thankfully for Canada, successive U.S. presidents were unwilling to apply the extraterritorial provisions of this legislation, but the ongoing

embargo, despite some loosening, would continue to underscore the differences between Ottawa and Washington over Cuba.

Apprehensive about the direction of U.S. policy, Canada has intermittently sought to mediate the Cuban-U.S. dispute, or at least Canadian officials have toyed with this idea. The mid-1960s saw a joint effort by the Brazilians, Mexicans, and Canadians to offer their “good offices” to begin a rapprochement between Cuba and the United States.⁴⁰ This trilateral overture proved futile, but failure did not dissuade Howard Green from trying again. In the wake of the failed Playa Girón invasion, a move that brought the U.S.-Cuban dispute to a new low, Green remarked to a NATO foreign ministers conference that he hoped “that the possibility of negotiation [between Washington and Havana] would not be ruled out.” He then voiced this message publicly, telling several reporters that Canada would be more than willing to act as a mediator. The remark drew a sharp rebuke from Washington.⁴¹

Green’s hope to bring about an end to the Cuban-U.S. quarrel did not die. Speaking in 1990, Mulroney’s foreign minister, Joe Clark, pointed out that the Canadian government was “trying to go in and see what we can do.” As he explained, “Canada can’t solve the contest between Cuba and the United States, but we may well be able to create some conditions . . . to create some room where the principal actors might move.”⁴² Almost two decades later Michael Wilson, the Canadian ambassador in Washington, echoed this sentiment: “We have a dialogue, and that is different from the United States because they have nothing like this type of dialogue.” Due to this channel of communication, Wilson said, “We have an understanding of how Cuba thinks. We also have an understanding of how Washington thinks. Cuba sees us as a North American country with which they can have some sort of dialogue. We can build a greater understanding between the two countries.”⁴³ Hope springs eternal, and the normal relationship between Ottawa and Havana may pay dividends to any U.S. administration that intends to alter a policy of isolation that has failed for more than fifty years.

Whether or not Canada can play a role in bringing about a rapprochement in Cuban-U.S. relations, the Canadian position on Cuba has proved advantageous for both Cuba and Canada. Both countries benefited from economic, educational, and cultural ties, and although the policy of constructive engagement as pursued by Chrétien failed, “*engagement* has not.”⁴⁴ Canadian engagement with Cuba, which has always been constructive, owes much to Diefenbaker. While other Canadian prime ministers could have taken the step of abrogating ties with Havana, Diefenbaker, at the height of Cold War tension and revolutionary fervor in the Western Hemisphere, had the greatest justification for choosing to isolate Cuba. But he chose not to do so. His policy, still

in effect today, was to construct “a normal relationship . . . one in which both sides politely agree to disagree on certain policy questions.”⁴⁵ Such disagreements—whether on Angola, human rights, or free trade—have not led to a breach between Ottawa and Havana. Travel, trade, and diplomatic links have remained intact through years of bilateral and international friction and show no signs of ending. Indeed, although Canada’s current government, that of Conservative Party prime minister Stephen Harper, initially signaled that it would adopt a new strategy toward Cuba, like its predecessors it has instead chosen engagement over isolation. Whether or not this approach will result in the constructive changes that have long been championed by Canadian policy-makers remains to be seen, but since 1959 Canada’s approach to Cuba has been remarkably consistent.

Notes

1. Ottawa Embassy to State, no. 708, January 29, 1962, John F. Kennedy Library (hereafter JFKL), Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. Collection, White House Files, box 3a, file Canada; “Rusk Hopeful Canada Will Join Boycott of Cuba,” *Globe and Mail*, February 2, 1962; Canada, House of Commons, *Debates*, February 2, 1962, 479–80; Campbell to Robertson, memo, “Cuba—Trade Policy,” March 8, 1962, Library and Archives Canada (hereafter LAC), Basil Robinson fonds, MG 31 E83, vol. 5, file 18.

2. Memorandum for the Minister, “Relations with Cuba,” March 8, 1962, LAC, MG 31 E83, vol. 5, file 19.

3. John Kirk and Peter McKenna, *Canada-Cuba Relations: The Other Good Neighbor Policy* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1997), 34; and Lana Wylie, *Perceptions of Cuba: Canadian and American Policies in Comparative Perspective* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 16.

4. For an excellent examination of the views emanating from the Canadian Embassy in the Cuban capital, see Don Munton and David Vogt, “Inside Castro’s Cuba: The Revolution and Canada’s Embassy in Havana,” in Robert Wright and Lana Wylie, eds., *Our Place in the Sun: Canada and Cuba in the Castro Era* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 51–55.

5. Secretary of State for External Affairs to Ambassador in Cuba, September 25, 1959, in Janice Cavell, Michael D. Stevenson, and Kevin Spooner, *Documents on Canadian External Relations 1959* (Ottawa: Public Works and Government Services Canada, 2006), 961–65.

6. Havana to External, numbered letter L-68, January 29, 1960, LAC, Department of External Affairs fonds, RG 25, vol. 7258, file 10224-40 pt. 7.

7. Havana to External, numbered letter L-304, April 11, 1961, LAC, RG 25, vol. 5352, file 10224-40 pt. 11.

8. Memorandum for the Minister, “The Cuban Question,” January 11, 1962, LAC, Howard Green fonds, MG 32 B13, vol. 7, file 10. The Royal Bank of Canada and the Bank of Nova Scotia both had a “preeminent role in prerevolutionary society,” and Canadian insurance companies dominated the Cuban market; see Kirk and McKenna, *Canada-Cuba Relations*, 16.

9. Mimi Whitefield, "Saying 'the Cold War Is Over,' Canada Restores Aid to Cuba," *Miami Herald*, June 21, 1994.

10. Mike Blanchford, "Canada Welcomes Cuban Reforms on Eve of Tour by Harper's Latin America Minister," *Canadian Press*, January 8, 2012.

11. Embtel G-252, April 25, 1961, U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, Foreign Service Post files, RG 84, Box 224, file Cuba Limited Distribution, 1959–1961.

12. Canada, House of Commons, *Debates*, April 19, 1961, 3795.

13. Geneva to External, tel. 529, May 11, 1961, LAC, RG 25, vol. 5050, file 2444-A-40 pt. 1.

14. Memorandum for the Minister, "Policy on Cuba," October 5, 1962, LAC, RG 25, vol. 5077, file 4568-40 pt. 10.

15. Jocelyn Maynard Ghent, "Canada, the United States, and the Cuban Missile Crisis," *Pacific Historical Review* 48 (1979), 160.

16. Robertson to Green, memo, "Cuba at the United Nations," October 26, 1962; External to Permanent Mission, New York and Washington, outgoing message XL-106, October 25, 1962, LAC, RG 25, vol. 4184, file 2444-40 pt. 10; Campbell to Robertson, memo, "Cuba," October 30, 1962; Havana to External, tel. 218, October 31, 1962; Havana to External, tel. 217, October 30, 1962, LAC, RG 25, vol. 4181, file 2444-40 pt. 11; Kidd to Roa, letter, November 2, 1962; Havana to External, tel. 222, November 1, 1962, LAC, RG 25, vol. 4184, file 2444-40 pt. 12; and Robinson to Ritchie, memo, "Cuba," November 1, 1962, LAC, MG31 E83, vol. 6, file 13.

17. See Jorge I. Domínguez, "The @#\$%& Missile Crisis: (Or What Was 'Cuban' about U.S. Decisions during the Cuban Missile Crisis?)," *Diplomatic History* 24 (2000), 305–15; and Asa McKercher, "A 'Half-hearted Response'?: Canada and the Cuban Missile Crisis, 1962," *International History Review* 33 (June 2011), 335–52.

18. Montevideo to External, tel. 24, March 2, 1962; Quito to External, tel. 15, March 2, 1962, LAC, RG 25, vol. 5030, file 1415-40 pt. 10.

19. Kirk and McKenna, *Canada-Cuba Relations*, 120. Trudeau's visit to Cuba and the issues surrounding it are ably described in Robert Wright, *Three Nights in Havana: Pierre Trudeau, Fidel Castro and the Cold War World* (Toronto: HarperCollins, 2007); Canada, House of Commons, *Debates*, February 3, 1976, 10571.

20. Head to Robinson, September 15, 1976 and, attached, Trudeau to Castro, August 10, 1976, LAC, RG 25, vol. 11431, file 20-Cuba-1-3 pt. 12; Kirk and McKenna, *Canada-Cuba Relations*, 113; Trudeau to Castro, letter, April 3, 1981, LAC, RG 25, vol. 8639, file 20-1-2-Cuba pt. 32. When Trudeau died in 2000, Castro traveled to Montreal to attend his funeral and pay his respects.

21. Havana to External, tel. 2807, December 6, 1976, and Havana to External, tel. 2, January 4, 1977, LAC, RG 25, vol. 11431, file 20-Cuba-1-3 pt. 12.

22. Memorandum for the Minister, "Cuban Request for a Courtesy Call," June 25, 1981, LAC, RG 25, vol. 8639, file 20-1-2-Cuba pt. 32.

23. "Address by Minister of State Ablonczy to the Canadian Hispanic Business Association, Ottawa," Canada, Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, Speech no. 2011/39, November 15, 2011; Larry Catá Backer, "From Colonies to Collective: ALBA, Latin American Integration, and the Construction of Regional Political Power," in B.J.C. McKercher, ed., *Routledge Handbook of Diplomacy and Statecraft* (London: Routledge, 2012), 325–37.

24. Havana to External, D-151, April 1, 1959, LAC, RG 25, vol. 7257, file 10224-40 pt. 6.
25. Diefenbaker to file, memo, "Telegram Received from Confederation of Cuban Professionals, Washington," March 24, 1962; and Robinson to Robertson, note, March 24, 1962, LAC, RG 25, vol. 5076, file 4568-40 pt. 9.
26. Government of Canada, "Notes for an Address by the Hon. Christine Stewart to the General Assembly of the Organization of American States," June 7, 1994. Canada's position of urging reforms in Cuba was similar to policies adopted by other countries, including the United States, a point made in Peter McKenna, "Comparative Foreign Policies toward Cuba," *International Journal* 59 (2009), 281-302; and Robert Wright, "'Northern Ice': Jean Chrétien and the Failure of Constructive Engagement in Cuba," in Wright and Wylie, *Our Place in the Sun*, 195-96.
27. Quoted in *The Soft Touch: Canada & the World Background* [Ottawa] 65, no. 1 (September 1999), 1.
28. Canada, Office of the Prime Minister, "Statement by the Prime Minister," March 15, 1999; and see Peter McKenna, John Kirk, and Christine Climenhage, "Canada-Cuba Relations: 'Northern Ice' or 'Nada Nuevo'?" in Sahadeo Basdeo and Heather Nicol, eds., *Canada, the United States, and Cuba: An Evolving Relationship* (Coral Gables, FL: North-South Press Center, 2002), 57-72.
29. Jeff Sallot, "Canada's Trade Mission to Cuba Signals Thaw," *Globe and Mail*, November 2, 2002; Paul Knox, "Graham Protests against Cuban Trials," *Globe and Mail*, April 8, 2003; and Paul Knox, "Canada to Seek OAS Action against Cuba," *Globe and Mail*, June 7, 2003.
30. Mike Blanchford, "New Minister Sees a Future for Canada in Cuba," *Financial Post*, January 6, 2009.
31. Blanchford, "Canada welcomes Cuban Reforms."
32. Christine Stewart, "Keynote Address," in Wendy Druker, ed., *Helms Burton and International Business: Legal and Commercial Implications* (Ottawa: FOCAL, 1996), 4-5.
33. Peter McKenna and John Kirk, "'Sleeping with an Elephant': The Impact of the United States on Canada-Cuba Relations," in Morris Morley and Chris McGillion, eds., *Cuba, the United States, and the Post-Cold War World: The International Dimensions of the Washington-Havana Relationship* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005), 149.
34. Washington to External, tel. 515, February 19, 1962, LAC, RG 25, vol. 5030, file 1415-40 pt. 10.
35. Robertson, memo, "The Cuban Situation," July 13, 1960, LAC, Norman Robertson fonds, MG 30 E163, vol. 18, file Personal Correspondence 1960 pt. 2; Cabinet Conclusions, October 20, 1960, LAC, Privy Council Office fonds, RG 2, series A-5-a, vol. 2747; Canada, House of Commons, *Debates*, December 12, 1960, 700-1.
36. "Telegram from the Department of State to the Embassy in the United Kingdom, 30 August 1962," in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963*, vol. 10 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1994), document 396.
37. Robinson to Robertson, memo, "Cuba," October 19, 1960; Memo for file, "Cuba," October 20, 1960, LAC, MG 31 E83, vol. 3, file 10; Canada, House of Commons, *Debates*, December 12, 1960, 701.
38. The theme is ever present in Kirk and McKenna, *Canada-Cuba Relations*. For Diefen-

baker, see Memorandum of Conversation, "Visit of Canadian Prime Minister Diefenbaker," February 20, 1961, JFKL, National Security Files, series 1, box 18, file Canada, General 1/61-3/61.

39. "Bush Expected to Veto U.S. Export Bill," *Globe and Mail*, November 30, 1990; Paul Koring, "Axworthy, Helms Aide Slug It Out on Cuba," *Globe and Mail*, March 7, 1998. See Heather Nicol, ed., *Canada, the U.S., and Cuba: Helms-Burton and Its Aftermath* (Kingston, Ont.: Centre for International Relations, Queen's University, 1999).

40. Mexico City to External, tel. 144, July 30, 1960, LAC, RG 25, vol. 5050, file 2444-A-40 pt. 1; and Diefenbaker to López Mateos, letter, July 17, 1960, LAC, Albert Ritchie fonds, MG 31 E44, vol. 1, file 4.

41. Geneva to External, tel. 529, May 11, 1961, LAC, RG 25, vol. 5050, file 2444-A-40 pt. 1; Washington to External, tel. 1551, May 13, 1961, LAC, MG 31 E83, vol. 5, file 5.

42. Quoted in "Canada Seeks to Thaw Frost in U.S.-Cuban Relationship," *Globe and Mail*, April 14, 1990.

43. Tim Harper, "Wilson Pushes Cuba Connection," *Toronto Star*, February 17, 2007.

44. Wright, "Northern Ice," 217.

45. McKenna and Kirk, "Sleeping with an Elephant," 157.

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