

# Castro's Sparta prepared to collapse

by Gretchen Small

Fidel Castro's annual July 26 speech celebrating the 38th anniversary of his assault on the Moncada barracks, this year vividly displayed the desperation gripping the Castro regime over its dim prospects of holding onto power. With Castro's hard-line East bloc allies no longer in existence, Moscow and Washington coordinating efforts to replace him with a "condominium government," and a collapsing economy, Castro told his loyalists in Havana that they must "fight, fight, fight, resist, resist, resist" for the cause of "socialism or death."

The Castro regime has little else but fanaticism left to it. For 31 years, the country has been run as a modern Sparta, educating its elite in Eastern Europe and sending its youth abroad to fight military adventures and run revolutions. That game has ended, as troops have been recalled from Nicaragua as well as Africa. On the domestic front, the regime provided advanced health care for its population, and told its people Cuba was a self-made paradise compared to the rest of the developing sector.

What Castro called "unexpected international events," and the "catastrophe in the socialist bloc," have buried that "self-made" myth forever. Castro has been left to wail, "Who would have imagined that the socialist bloc would collapse like a house of cards? Who would ever have imagined that the U.S.S.R. itself would have the difficulties and the problems it has now?"

Social programs will have to be cut, because Cuba no longer is certain of where it will be able to secure its resources, Castro stated. "Trade with a few countries of the former socialist community . . . has practically disappeared." The Soviet Union is already unable to meet its contracts, and deliveries of some products have been cut by 50%, he announced. "The situation with fuel is tense, very tense." Preparations are being made to declare "an exceptional peacetime period," if, as is quite possible, Cuba receives only half, or less, of the oil it uses today, he warned.

Austerity in Cuba has already become unbearable. The monthly ration of beans, a prime source of protein in a meat-poor diet, is only 10 ounces. Each Cuban is entitled to one pound of chicken every nine days, and a pound of beef every 27 days. Eggs, fish, and rice are not rationed, but few goods are available at Cuban grocery stores.

The country has no cushion left with which to face the crisis which looms ahead. As of now, Cuba is believed to have only \$40 million in foreign reserves, while Cuba's total export earnings hover around \$600 million annually. The

Soviet Union, Cuba's number-one trading partner, announced in July that beginning in January 1991, Cuba, like others, will have to pay hard currency (i.e., not non-convertible rubles) for its trade with the Soviets. Cuba's second-largest trading partner, East Germany, already adopted the same hard-cash policy, and has conditioned its aid on Havana adopting policy changes.

Cuban experts report the "exceptional measures" being drawn up by the Castro regime to survive in the face of the cuts in international aid, boil down to the "Cambodianization of Cuba." The economy will be put on a war footing, and large numbers of urban dwellers will be forced out of the cities into the countryside, to farm or gather wood.

## Will the superpowers crush Cuba?

With political upheaval in Cuba a given, Moscow and Washington have begun coordinating, if uneasily, their operations to channel that coming upheaval so as to ensure an orderly transition to a post-Castro regime amenable to both capitals of the would-be world condominium.

Thus the once professedly anti-communist leadership of the Cuban exile movement which answers to Washington, is sounding remarkably pro-Soviet. The head of the Cuban National Foundation, for example, Jorge Mas Canosa, reported in Madrid at the end of July that he and other Cuban exile leaders had met in Miami in May with "high Kremlin officials" to discuss the future of Cuba.

According to Madrid's *El País* newspaper, Mas Canosa and friends promised Moscow's men that if the Russians help towards a peaceful solution, "we, tomorrow, can guarantee their presence on Cuba. We want to have the best diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union, the greatest possible commercial ties, the only difference being that we will pay everything in dollars."

*El País* commented that the policy of the exile community is beginning to coincide with Soviet foreign policy interests. No wonder. Mas Canosa claimed the Cuban exile community has amassed a \$21 billion fund to restore the Cuban economy, more indeed than Castro has to offer.

This was no rump caucus. The chief of Latin American relations in the Soviet foreign ministry, Yuri Pavlov, participated in the May pow-wow with the Cuban exiles, along with top Soviet policymakers Georgi Arbatov and Fyodor Burlatski and "other Soviet deputies," all invited by the Jiri Valenta Institute for Soviet and Eastern European Research in Miami, *El País* reported.

Mas Canosa would never have held a strategy session with such a high-powered Soviet delegation on the eve of the Bush-Gorbachov summit, without the approval of Washington. Mas Canosa is a close friend of President Bush's son, John Ellis "Jeb" Bush, and the Cuban National Foundation which he heads is heavily funded by the National Endowment for Democracy, and works "closely" with the U.S. intelligence community.