CUBA

THE **CAPITAL** OF 21ST CENTURY **COMMUNISM**

PREPARED BY
THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE

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I. THE REVOLUTIONARY STATE

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I. The Revolutionary State

For nearly seven decades, the Cuban regime has waged a sustained campaign of subversion against the United States. It is a campaign that has infiltrated the highest reaches of the U.S. government, recruited and cultivated generations of American activists, backed an unprecedented wave of left-wing terrorism on American soil, and carried out one of the most durable and damaging foreign intelligence penetrations in American history.

The Cuban campaign against America is unique. It is irregular and covert – even at the peak of its military power, Havana never possessed the capacity to defeat the United States in a conventional armed conflict. Instead, the Cubans perfected a new model for a long war of attrition, organized around espionage, infiltration, sabotage, proxy networks, and a revolutionary infrastructure designed to turn America against itself.

In contrast to every other aspect of Cuba's failed state, this model has yielded remarkable success. For over half a century, this small island nation with a chronically failing economy has operated at the center of a vast hemispheric network. The Cubans trained and armed tens of thousands of left-wing guerillas, oversaw violent insurgencies that plunged multiple continents into chaos, and backed deadly extremist attacks across the United States. The island itself became the premier safe harbor for fugitive American terrorists – fleeing justice for bombings, armed robberies, and murders – as well as a forward operating base for a rotating cast of hostile foreign powers. Cuban agents infiltrated the top levels of the State Department, the National Security Council, and the Pentagon, operating undercover for decades without detection.

But the most successful and enduring sphere of Cuba's campaign against America has taken place on the ideological battlefront. Since the 1960s, the regime has served as the beating heart of a new and distinct kind of Marxism, forged around an overriding resentment and fundamental hatred of the United States and the broader West. The Cubans devoted themselves to recruiting, cultivating and mobilizing a global coalition of activists, intellectuals, and political groups around this cause, building a sprawling revolutionary network that shaped a disproportionate share of America's most famous and influential extremist movements, from the Black Panthers and the Weather Underground through to Antifa. Today, that network continues to maintain ties to powerful leftist nonprofits, anti-ICE collectives, socialist groups, and Marxist militant organizations across the United States.

From its earliest years in power, the Cuban regime has believed that its own survival and strategic interests were inextricably linked to the advance of the revolutionary left inside the United States. This conviction has been one of the animating principles of Cuban foreign policy through to the present day. But unlike most other hostile states, Cuba's efforts to shape American politics are not solely driven by material geopolitical interests. The Cubans have always seen

revolution in America as an end unto itself. It is impossible to understand modern Cuba without first understanding this unique and distinctive character. Since its founding in 1959, the *raison d'être* of the regime in Havana has been the violent export of communism abroad. But its true target – above any other momentary enemy – has always been the United States.

The specific and peculiar form of Marxism that the Cuban government helped to develop and seed was uniquely fitted for this purpose. While Soviet communism was frequently driven by more practical great-power concerns – the preservation of the Soviet empire and the defense of its material interests around the globe – its Cuban successor was built around a near-singular obsession with the "liberation" of the Global South from its Western colonial oppressors. In the minds of the Cubans, there was only one path to this goal: the destruction of the Yankee imperialist regime.

The common depiction of Cuba as a former client state of the Soviet Union is at best incomplete. While Havana maintained a close partnership with Moscow throughout the Cold War and relied on Russian patronage for essential material needs, the Cubans were never just a Soviet proxy. In fact, over the course of the latter half of the twentieth century, Cuba and the Soviet Union came to represent substantially different poles in the global Marxist movement. Cuban communism helped shape a distinct and uniquely dangerous form of revolutionary leftism – built around racial, social and even civilizational grievances rather than economic class conflict – which would go on to instantiate itself as the dominant genre of left-wing radicalism around the globe.

While the collapse of the Soviet Union and the profound economic and political changes in China largely rendered the Soviet model of communism extinct, the Cuban Marxist project not only survived, but thrived. The institutional power of Leninism, Stalinism, and even Maoism – at least in their original orthodox forms – has been severely diminished. But Castro's ideological project now enjoys something approaching ideological hegemony in leftist circles both within and beyond the West. By the turn of the twenty-first century, Havana had solidified its place as the ideological capital of the modern radical left.

II. BIRTH OF A NEW LEFT

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II. Birth of a New Left

"I swore to myself that the Americans were going to pay dearly for what they were doing. When this war is over, a much wider and bigger war will begin for me: the war that I'm going to launch against them. I am saying to myself that this is my true destiny."

– Fidel Castro in a letter to his aide and confidante Celia Sánchez in 1958.[1]

By the late 1950s, many on the Western left had become disillusioned with Soviet communism – both the institution and the ideology itself. The Soviet system looked increasingly exhausted; less the vanguard of a global revolution than a stagnant industrial bureaucracy ruled by aging party bosses. That perception was only heightened by Nikita Khrushchev's foreign policy of "peaceful coexistence" with the United States, which seemed to forfeit the dream of world communism for a stable balance of power between the capitalist and socialist spheres. For many young radicals – especially in the West – it felt like surrender.

The left's alienation from the Soviets was accelerated by a series of scandals. In early 1956, Khrushchev delivered a now-famous speech at the Twentieth Congress of the Soviet Communist Party denouncing Stalin's crimes: the purges, show trials, mass executions and brutal repression of alleged internal "enemies." For communists around the world who had spent decades insisting that the reports of Soviet terror were capitalist slander, the speech was both a political and a psychological catastrophe. Their shock and horror only grew later that year, when Khrushchev sent in Soviet tanks to crush the Hungarian Revolution, violently suppressing the popular uprising in full view of the world under the banner of the same flag that leftists had celebrated as a symbol of liberation.

In America, specifically, the left's growing disillusionment with the Soviet project was simultaneously accompanied by harsh government crackdowns against its domestic institutional organs – blacklists, McCarthy-era investigations and prosecutions, and a slate of anti-communist laws at both the state and federal levels. In 1947, the Communist Party USA reportedly boasted well over 75,000 members. By 1959, by one estimate, that number had fallen to below 5,000.

[1] Herbert L. Matthews, *Fidel Castro* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1969), 121.

That same year, a victorious Fidel Castro marched into Havana, greeted by the jubilant cheers of massive crowds.

For the Western left – particularly in the United States – Cuba was the harbinger of a new kind of revolution. It was animated by a missionary zeal that Moscow had long since forgotten, and offered a novel theory of struggle and liberation. Whereas classical Marxism argued that revolution was only possible under specific material conditions, which would develop over time in determinate stages – feudalism to capitalism, capitalism to socialism, and so on – Castro and his comrades were entirely uninterested in deferring to the abstract forces of History. In lieu of the academic theorizing of Marx and Engels, the Cubans spoke of struggle, will, *action.* Castro's famous exhortation in his Second Declaration of Havana (1962) would become a rallying cry for radicals across the world: "The duty of every revolutionary is to make the revolution."

But the differences between Havana and Moscow ran far deeper than strategic disagreements. Marxism, at least in its orthodox form, was not the original battle cry of the Cuban Revolution; Castro described himself as a radical, a revolutionary, a freedom fighter, but repeatedly denied being a communist. (At the time – in 1959 – even the CIA had internally arrived at the same conclusion, although its assessment quickly evolved in the ensuing years).[2] It wasn't until the end of 1961, nearly three years after taking power – and only after the consolidation of the Cuban-Soviet alliance – that Castro declared himself "a Marxist-Leninist."

Even then, Castro's Marxism was radically different from its Soviet counterpart. It was permeated by something new: The doctrine of *tercermundismo* ("Third Worldism"). The concept of the "Third World" had initially emerged in the context of the Cold War, referring to the bloc of nations in Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East that belonged neither to the American capitalist "First World" nor the Soviet socialist "Second World" spheres. But in Castro's Cuba, the concept would harden into both a self-conscious ideology and a revolutionary identity.

Cuba's Tricontinental Conference in 1966 was a foundational event in the inauguration of Third Worldism as a global revolutionary project. The conference assembled more than 500 revolutionary delegates representing "anti-imperialist" movements from across 82 countries: African, Arab, Asian, and Latin American revolutionaries came together in Havana under the banner of a new identity, a new doctrine, and a new enemy. It was followed by a long line of conferences, commissions, and congresses that would shape the Third World revolution in Cuba over the following decade.

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[2] Soon after Fidel Castro's rise to power in 1959, Director of Central Intelligence Allen W. Dulles told a secret Senate briefing that Castro did not have "any Communist leanings." Juan de Onís, "Castro a Non-Communist, C.I.A. Said in 1959," *New York Times*, March 28, 1982.

Participating Organizations in the Tricontinental Conference (1966)

South-West Africa	African National Congress of South Africa; South-West Africa National Union (SWANU)
Angola	Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA)
Algeria	Algerian Committee of Afro-Asian Solidarity (FLN)
Argentina	National Committee for the Conference of The People of Africa, Asia and Latin America
Basutoland	Basutoland Congress Party
Bechuanaland	Bechuanaland People's Party
Bolivia	National Committee for the Solidarity Conference of the Peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America
Brazil	National Committee for the Solidarity Conference of the Peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America
Burundi	Federation of Workers of Burundi
Cambodia	Cambodian Afro-Asian Solidarity
Colombia	National Committee for the Solidarity Conference of the Peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America
Congo (B)	National Revolutionary Committee of the Congo
Congo (L)	National Council for the Liberation of the Congo
Korea	Korean Committee for Afro-Asian Solidarity
Costa Rica	National Committee for the Solidarity Conference of the Peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America
Cuba	Cuban Communist Party (PCC)
Chile	Front of Popular Action (FRAP)
China	Chinese Committee for Afro-Asian Solidarity
Cyprus	Solidarity Committee of Cyprus
Ecuador	National Committee for the Solidarity Conference of the Peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America
El Salvador	National Committee for the Solidarity Conference of the Peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America
Ghana	Convention People's Party
Guadeloupe	National Committee for the Solidarity Conference of the Peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America
Guatemala	Rebel Armed Forces (FAR)
Guiana	Progressive Popular Party (PPP)
Guiana-Cayenne	Guianese Solidarity Committee for the First Tricontinental Conference
Guinea	Guinea Democratic Party
Guinea (Portuguese)	African Independence Party of Portuguese Guinea
Haiti	Unified Democratic Front of National Liberation
Honduras	National Comμittee for the Solidarity Conference of the Peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America
India	Indian Association for Afro-Asian Solidarity
Indonesia	Association of Afro-Asian People's Solidarity
Iran	Iranian Committee for Afro-Asian Solidarity
Iraq	Iraqi Committee of Afro-Asian Solidarity
Mauritius Island	Progressive Party of the Mauritius People
St. Thomas & Prince	Committee for the Liberation of St. Thomas and Prince
Jamaica	National Solidarity Committee for the Conference of the Peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America
Japan	Japanese Committee of Afro-Asian Solidarity
Jordania	Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee of Jordania
North Kalimantan	North Kalimantan Organisation for Afro-Asian People's Solidarity, Indonesia.
Kenya	Kenya African National Union (KANU)

Laos	Neo-Lao Haksat
Lebanon	Progressive Socialist Party
Malaya	Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee of the Malayan People
Martinique	National Committee for the Solidarity Conference of the Peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America
Morocco	National Union of Popular Forces
Mexico	National Liberation Movement (MLN)
Mongolia	Mongolian Committee of Afro-Asian Solidarity
Mozambique	Liberation Front of Mozambique (FRELIMO)
Nepal	Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee
Nicaragua	National Committee for the Solidarity Conference of the Peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America
Niger	Sawaba Party
Nigeria	Nigeria Youth Congress, Peasant and Workers' Socialist Party
Oman	Oman Office
Pakistan	Pakistani Committee of Afro-Asian People's Solidarity
Palestine	Organisation for the Liberation of Palestine
Panama	National Committee for the Solidarity Conference of the Peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America
Paraguay	National Committee for the Solidarity Conference of the Peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America
Arabian Peninsula	Socialist Front for the Liberation of the Arabian Peninsula
Peru	National Committee for the Solidarity Conference of the Peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America
Puerto Rico	Pro-Independence Movement
United Arab Republic	Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee (Arab Socialist Union)
Dominican Republic	National Committee for the Solidarity Conference of the Peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America
D.R. of Vietnam	Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee Democratic Republic of Vietnam
Rwanda	Rwandese Burundi National Union
Senegal	African Independence Party
Syria	Committee for Afro-Asian Solidarity
Somaliland	Popular Movement Party
Swaziland	Swaziland Progressive Party
Sudan	Peoples' Democratic Party
Thailand	Thailand Patriotic Front
Tanzania	Tanganyka African National Union
Trinidad Tobago	National Committee for the Solidarity Conference of the Peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America
Uganda	Uganda People's Congress
U.S.S.R.	Soviet Committee for Afro-Asian Solidarity
Uruguay	Left Front of Liberation (FIDEL)
Venezuela	Front of National Liberation (FLN)
South Vietnam	Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee
Yemen	Yemen Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee
South Yemen	National Liberation Front of Occupied South Yemen
Zimbabwe	Zimbabwe African People's Union

What emerged from this milieu was a new theory of revolutionary politics. The struggle had expanded from a class war to a much larger civilizational conflict, demanding not just economic equality, but social, cultural, and even spiritual transformation. Its advocates spoke the language of a single planetary struggle – stretching from the battlefield to the classroom – between the West and the Third World. In their telling, the revolutionary agent was no longer the industrial proletariat, but the colonized nations and peoples of the Global South. The principal antagonist of world history was no longer "capital," but Western civilization itself.

As the socialist magazine *Jacobin* approvingly recounted earlier this year, it was Cuba that "was seen by many in the Third World as the ideal site for radically rethinking anti-colonialism, anti-imperialism, and decolonization." What Cuba was proposing, *Jacobin* writes, "was essentially a decolonization of Marxist thought."

History, in the classical Old Left view, was the story of class struggle. The proletariat was a universal class – raceless and nationless, at least in principle. The Cuban regime, in contrast, claimed to be speaking for the colonized peoples of Asia, Africa, and Latin America – and, crucially, their supposed domestic counterparts inside Western countries. Castro, Che Guevara, and the other evangelists of Havana declared that the Third World was united by a single struggle for liberation, and that this struggle extended into the imperial metropoles themselves, to the racially oppressed peoples living *within* the Western powers. The black American in Detroit, in this telling, was not a "worker," first and foremost; he was a colonized subject, a revolutionary brother of the Vietnamese peasant and the Congolese rebel, a member of a distinctive Third World colony embedded in the heart of the empire.

Havana was telling a new story – one that was both more romantic and more radical than its Soviet predecessor. It was a story in which the Black Panther, the Puerto Rican militant, and the anti-war student radical were part of the same global drama as the Cuban revolutionary, the Algerian insurgent, and the Colombian guerilla.

In Cuba's telling, the oppressed peoples of the world – from Harlem to Hanoi – all shared one enemy. The same racist Yankee imperialism victimizing Africa, Asia, and Latin America was victimizing blacks and other minorities inside the United States. Che Guevara's famous call for "two, three, or many Vietnams" in his 1967 "Message to the Tricontinental" – urging his fellow revolutionaries to open up a hundred fronts of war against the American empire – was not merely addressed to the Global South, but to American radicals in the belly of the beast.

Fidel Castro gives a speech in Havana, Cuba in January 1959 shortly after seizing power. (Getty Images)

And the American radicals were listening. The ensuing years would witness an unprecedented explosion of left-wing violence and terror across the United States. In one 18-month period between 1971 and 1972, the FBI counted some 2,500 bombings on American soil – a rate of nearly five a day.

The wave of far-left terror that swept America in the second half of the twentieth century was not just inspired, but actively facilitated by Cuba. The infamous Weather Underground was shaped by its leadership's direct contact with Cuban officials, and Cuban spies provided covert operational support to the far-left terrorist group during its bombings across the United States in the ensuing years. Delegations of American radicals traveled to Cuba to learn the tactics of urban terrorism and guerilla warfare. Cuban intelligence agents helped to found, train, and arm Puerto Rican communist groups that would prove to be among the most active and deadly terrorist groups in American history. And when Black Panther leaders sought to escape justice for their own crimes on American soil, it was Cuba where they found safe harbor.

It was Havana, not Moscow, that emerged as the capital of the new ideology of revolution. The Soviets would, in time, support many of the Third Worldist insurgencies and revolutionary movements across the Global South, seeing the obvious strategic value in gaining new client states and weakening the global influence of the American capitalist bloc. But the Kremlin's

embrace of Third Worldism was always a marriage of convenience, conducted with an awkward ideological unease; the Soviets could never quite figure out how to square its wild-eyed doctrines with their orthodox Marxist party line. They were speaking Third Worldism as a second language. The Cubans spoke it as their native tongue.

Whereas the old Soviet left had been built around the party, labor unions, and Marxist theories of economic class struggle, the New Left was animated by Black Power, radical feminism, Third World liberation, and – above all else – the radical rejection of Western culture, history and identity in all its forms. As this report will show, it is nearly impossible to overstate the influence that the Cuban Revolution had on this shift, both in the United States and across the world. As the New Left student activist Allen Young was quoted as remarking in 1970: "Fidel, Che Guevara, and Regis Debray[3] are really THE influence on our movements…the thing that was exciting about the Cuban Revolution was that it first made the break with the Old Left. Castro was one of the fathers of the New Left."

Many of the specific New Left organizations of the 1960s-70s have disappeared. But Cuba's influence went on to burrow much further into American institutions. Through its cultivation of American activists, its infiltration of American universities, its sprawling influence and espionage networks, and its position as the spiritual hub of the Third World revolution – becoming a pilgrimage destination for generations of New Left activists and intellectuals – Cuba has played an instrumental role in shaping America's radical left from the 1960s through to today.

[3] The French revolutionary theorist and close associate of Guevara and Castro, whose book *Revolution in the Revolution?* popularized Cuba's doctrine of guerilla warfare and armed Third World revolution – solidifying the Cuban struggle as the revolutionary model for the Western New Left and inspiring many left-wing radicals in the United States to seek to replicate the Cuban *foquismo* strategy (waging war via dedicated guerilla cells) on the home front.

III. EXPORTING REVOLUTION

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III. Exporting Revolution

"Almost every Latin American Republic has felt [Cuba's] interference at least once…As soon as Castro assumed power in Cuba in January 1959, Havana became the center for subversive operations against other Latin American countries."

– U.S. intelligence memorandum, September 1971[4]

From the beginning, Castro's foreign policy was organized around his singular ambition to export his revolution across the hemisphere. And no enemy ranked higher on his list than the United States.

[4] "Cuban Subversive Activities in Latin America," Intelligence Memorandum OCI No. 1730/71, September 1, 1971.

Castro launched his evangelization campaign in America almost immediately after seizing power. The Fair Play for Cuba Committee (FPCC), founded in April 1960 in New York City and funded by the new Castro regime, was the first of many groups dedicated to building a revolutionary Cuban column within the United States. The group placed full-page ads in *The New York Times*, organized American delegations to Havana, hosted pro-Castro protests and strikes, and built local chapters across the country to advance the revolutionary vision of the "New Cuba."

In 1966, Castro convened the Tricontinental Conference. Among the organizations represented in the audience were the Palestine Liberation Organization, the Viet Cong, Puerto Rico's leftist Pro-Independence Movement, South Africa's African National Congress, and the Zimbabwe African People's Union, whose guerillas – including cadres trained in Cuba – would join forces with ANC militants to carry the African revolution into Rhodesia the following year. The *Tricontinental* magazine that was born from the conference became a major global influence in its own right, publishing quarterly issues brimming with radical essays, poetry and art, which circulated to tens of thousands of readers across nearly 90 countries. For decades, *Tricontinental* was the most influential vehicle for the global iconography of "anti-imperialism": its fold-out posters of Che, Ho, Lumumba and other Third World revolutionaries and its colorful "Yankee Out!" flyers passed through every New Left publisher, student group, bookstore, and organizing committee in the West.

Three years later, the Venceremos Brigade was born. Over the next half-century, the Brigade would transport thousands of American radicals to the island to network with regime officials and receive "political education" in the principles of the Cuban Revolution. U.S. officials would soon learn that the program was dominated by Cuban spies, designed and run as a vehicle for Havana's operatives to infiltrate and shape the American radical milieu.

In the decade that followed the Cuban Revolution, a sprawling ecosystem of American groups – many of them closely linked to Cuban intelligence – emerged to tout the cause of the new regime. In 1962, the *New York Times* reported that a group calling itself the "North American Friends of Cuba" had formed a "highly vocal American exile colony in Cuba." Among these American expats was Robert F. Williams, who had fled his perch as a NAACP leader in North Carolina and relocated to Cuba. On the island, the *Times* wrote, Williams had quickly become the Castro regime's "prize exile"; despite not speaking a word of Spanish, he was an in-demand speaker at Havana rallies and on Cuban television and radio.

Today, Williams is regarded as one of the intellectual godfathers of America's militant "Black Power" movement. But many of his ideas did not originate on American soil; they were projected into the country from Cuba, with the new communist government's eager support. Reports indicate that Castro personally intervened to ensure Williams was given access to a

powerful 50,000-watt transmitter, providing his weekly "Radio Free Dixie" program with the reach to penetrate deep into the United States. From Havana, Williams' weekly calls to racial revolution were heard on airwaves across America, urging American blacks to take up armed struggle against their country. His broadcasts and writings inspired the birth of what would come to be known as the Black Panther Party.

Third Worldism was not just a formal pillar of Cuban state ideology; it was a deliberate foreign policy strategy. Cuban operatives sought to aggressively recruit American minority groups as internal revolutionary agents. Former senior Cuban intelligence officers later testified that one of their directives was to exacerbate "the racial problem in the United States," exploiting racial conflict to recruit American sympathizers and weaken the Yankee imperialists. In a July 1980 meeting with Central American revolutionaries, one Senate testimonial later recounted, Castro himself reportedly "boasted that his agents in the United States were so industrious and well-placed that they had the capacity to create race riots at a moment of his choosing – race riots on a scale that he said would make the Miami troubles look like a sunshower."[5] There was reason to believe it wasn't all bluster: Two years later, Florida law enforcement testified to catching Cuban intelligence affiliates teaching black youth in Miami to firebomb schools.

But Cuba's plans for the United States were far more ambitious than periodic bouts of urban unrest. Over the next two decades, violent guerilla insurgencies and deadly terrorist campaigns would sweep across the Western Hemisphere. Almost all of them were connected, in some way, to a small island nation 90 miles south of the Florida coast.

"Two, Three, Many Vietnams"

Cuba's political project has always been inseparable from its concrete interests: the regime's formal commitment to Marxism and Third Worldism also serve as vehicles for the more practical concerns of Havana's ruling elites. Guevara's doctrine of "two, three, many Vietnams" – violently overthrowing pro-American governments and replacing them with a bloc of revolutionary states – was both an ideological and a strategic imperative. Castroite uprisings in the Western Hemisphere do not only advance the global vision of the Cuban Revolution; they also expand Havana's sphere of influence, obtain new allies and proxies, and strengthen the regime's position both abroad and at home.

[5] Castro was likely referring to a particularly infamous three-day race riot that had taken place in Miami just two months earlier, after a jury acquitted four Miami police officers who had fatally beaten a black motorcyclist. It was one of the most violent urban uprisings in over a decade, and was marked by targeted mob attacks and several murders of white motorists who were accosted, dragged from their cars, and beaten to death at random while driving through black neighborhoods. In another instance, a 66-year-old was burned to death in his car. All told, the riot caused at least 18 deaths, hundreds of injuries, 1100 arrests, and $100 million in property damage.

As a result, the Cuban regime is inextricably tied to a much larger radical network that it has constructed across the Western Hemisphere. For more than six decades, communist Cuba has been the foremost sponsor of revolutionary leftism in the Americas. Nearly all of the notable Marxist guerilla movements in our hemisphere since 1959 have received some form of support from Havana.

Cuba established itself as the nexus of Latin America's revolutionary left in the immediate wake of the Tricontinental Conference, when the conference's 27 Latin American delegations formed the Latin American Solidarity Organization (OLAS). The organization was headquartered and run from Havana "to coordinate the struggle against U.S. imperialism." At the inaugural OLAS conference the following year, Castro flatly announced: "We are absolutely convinced that, in the long run, there is only one solution, as expressed in the Resolution: guerrilla warfare in Latin America."

Cuban-backed groups were already beginning to put that "solution" into practice. Almost immediately after taking Havana in January 1959, Castro began plotting armed assaults against neighboring governments – launching expeditions against Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Nicaragua and Panama in just that year alone. Throughout the 1960s, his regime backed guerilla groups in Venezuela, Colombia, Peru, Brazil, Paraguay, Argentina, and the Caribbean.

In Uruguay, Cuba trained and armed the Tupamaros – a Marxist guerilla group that carried out deadly attacks against domestic and foreign officials, including the kidnapping and execution of an American security adviser. In Argentina, Castro advised, backed and funded the Montoneros, which launched a campaign of political kidnappings, robberies, and assassinations while allegedly funneling tens of millions of dollars in ransom money to the Cuba – and later serving as Havana's revolutionary shock troops in Nicaragua. (A CIA report also noted that the Montoneros were "among the Latin American guerrillas trained in guerrilla warfare over the past year" in the Middle East "as part of a cooperative effort between Palestinian groups and Cuba"). The Cuban regime smuggled huge quantities of weapons to Chile's radical left. The founders of Colombia's Marxist National Liberation Army (ELN) were trained in Cuban guerilla camps, and received heavy support from the Castro regime. The regime's ardent support for Colombian guerillas later caused a severing of relations between the Cuban and Colombian governments, after revolutionaries from the Cuban-trained M-19 group seized the Dominican embassy in Bogota and captured several diplomats, including a U.S. ambassador. The ensuing 61-day standoff became an international hostage crisis that ended with the guerillas receiving safe passage to Havana.

The fingerprints of this era of Cuban-backed terror are still imprinted on Latin American politics today. Colombia's outgoing president, Gustavo Petro, was a member of M-19 himself.

The Sandinistas

The Sandinista Revolution was one of Havana's great victories in the hemisphere. In 1979, the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) – named for Augusto Sandino, a Nicaraguan folk hero who led a guerilla war against U.S. occupation in the early twentieth century – overthrew Nicaragua's Somoza regime and established a revolutionary junta. Cuba was the patron of the insurgency, supplying what one 1979 NSC memo described as "an unbelievable amount of arms" to the leftist militants. It also served as a training site, safe haven, and operating base, including hosting a FSLN liaison in Havana "to direct Sandinista propaganda over Radio Havana, and to keep in touch with representatives of other radical organizations" across Cuba's continental networks.

Motto of the People's Militia of Nicaragua, Sandinista Popular Army in 1980. (Getty Images)

The Nicaraguan struggle became a major proxy battleground in the broader Cold War. The Sandinista victory in that struggle demonstrated the striking power of Cuba's revolutionary structure. Havana didn't just arm the FSLN; it had spent years cultivating the group as part of a continental network, training cadres on the island, hosting Sandinista representatives in Havana, and establishing itself as the operational node of the revolution, organizing a fractious cohort of

radicals – which had previously been divided into squabbling rival factions – into a disciplined and unified movement.

That movement also benefited from its integration into Cuba's broader proxy network. That network spanned the hemisphere, working through third countries, sympathetic governments, guerilla cells, clandestine networks, and transnational leftist organizations that could move soldiers, weapons, money, and messages across Latin America. (And beyond – via the Cubans, the Sandinistas were introduced to militants from the PLO, and reportedly traveled to the Middle East to receive training in PLO camps there).[6] In the final phase of the Nicaraguan struggle, the Sandinistas were not simply a local insurgency. They were the beneficiary of a hemispheric revolutionary supply chain, drawing on an expansive cast of Latin American allies, militants, and fellow travelers, all operating inside the political and logistical space that Havana had spent two decades building. By 1979, Cuba was reportedly sending trained guerrillas back into Nicaragua, supplying heavy weapons, and possibly even inserting its own Cuban specialists, as well as organizing, arming, and transporting an "internationalist brigade" of militants from several Central and South American extremist groups to fight alongside the FSLN.

[6] As one 1987 report explained: "The origins of PLO-Sandinista ties can be traced back to 1966, when Cuban leader Fidel Castro sponsored the Tri-Continental Conference." One of the many Third Worldist partnerships to emerge from the Tricontinental "was the pact reportedly signed in the late 1960s between the PLO and the Sandinista guerillas…which called for the training of Sandinista troops at Palestinian bases in Lebanon…after the PLO was expelled from Jordan, Sandinista cadres continued to receive training at the PLO's relocated camps and operations bases in Lebanon." in Havana and argues that one consequence of the conference was a late-1960s agreement between the PLO and the Sandinistas providing for the training of Sandinista guerrillas at Palestinian bases in Lebanon. David C. Wills, *The PLO and Israel in Central America: The Geopolitical Dimension*, RAND Note N-2685 (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 1987)

Sandinista rebel forces celebrate victory after ousting General Somoza in 1979. (Getty Images)

The result was a proof of concept for Cuba's revolutionary strategy, demonstrating that the small island nation's guerilla networks and intelligence infrastructure could project power and shape events across an entire region, turning local insurgencies into a coordinated continental offensive against American-aligned governments. Nicaragua became the forward base for further Cuban expansion, creating a revolutionary state that would serve as a sanctuary, training base, arms conduit, and political model for the next generation of Castroite insurgencies in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and beyond.

Puerto Rico

Puerto Rican revolutionaries were a source of particular interest for Castro's regime. So much so, in fact, that large shares of the entire movement were effectively built by Cuban intelligence services – "created," as one 1999 *Los Angeles Times* report put it, "in consultation with Cuban intelligence agents." Filiberto Ojeda Ríos, one of the most infamous Puerto Rican terrorists in modern history, was recruited as a DI agent and trained in explosives and urban guerilla tactics while living in Cuba. Ríos reportedly passed his Cuban training on to other Puerto Rican militants and co-founded the Marxist-Leninist *Armadas de Liberación Nacional Puertorriqueña* (FALN) terrorist organization. The guerilla group proved to be the most active and deadly domestic terrorist organization of its day, carrying out as many as 130 bombings between 1974

and 1983.

In the mid-1970s, Ríos also reportedly helped to organize the Macheteros, a parallel guerilla cadre that launched its own wave of bombings, robberies, assassinations and other attacks across both Puerto Rico and the United States. In 1979, a cell of AK-47-wielding Macheteros militants staged an armed ambush of a U.S. Navy bus, killing two sailors and wounding nine others. Less than three years later, a Macheteros ambush on four sailors from the U.S.S. Pensacola claimed another American life. FBI files later described extensive contacts between Macheteros leaders and Cuban intelligence personnel, including meetings and communications through Mexico City, a major hub for Cuban diplomatic and intelligence activity. U.S. intelligence reporting described the group as effectively a Cuban front, supported and directed by the Cubans "at a firsthand level."

Puerto Rican extremists' links to Cuba were visible in the infrastructure of their attacks. When the Macheteros fired an anti-tank rocket at the building housing the FBI San Juan headquarters in 1983, they used U.S. military hardware that had been captured in Vietnam and subsequently shipped to Cuba. The same Havana-supplied weaponry was used two years later in the Macheteros rocket attack on a U.S. courthouse in San Juan that housed the U.S. Marshals Service and other federal agencies. In another instance, the Macheteros militant Víctor Manuel Gerena – who holds the record for the longest-ever stint on the FBI's Top Ten Wanted Fugitives list – led the armed robbery of more than $7 million from a Wells Fargo depot in 1983, hog-tying and drugging a bank worker by jabbing a needle in his neck.

According to later accounts from former Cuban intelligence officers, millions of dollars from the Wells Fargo haul were promptly smuggled to Cuba, before Gerena fled to take refuge on the island himself. Cuban officials allegedly provided Gerena with forged identity documents to help him slip out of the country. They provided the same sanctuary for the notorious FALN bomb-maker William Morales, who fled to Cuba and lived beyond the reach of U.S. justice for decades.

By 1973, the FBI estimated that some 135 Puerto Rican militants had received "extensive instruction in guerrilla war tactics, preparation of explosive artifacts and sophisticated methods of sabotage" within Cuba itself.

Venezuela

Cuba's revolutionary network did not disappear after the end of the Cold War. In fact, one of its most enduring victories did not come to fruition until nearly a decade *after* the fall of the Berlin Wall.

In the 1960s, Havana mounted several failed campaigns to export revolution to Venezuela through guerrilla warfare, arms shipments, and insurgency attempts like the 1967 Machurucuto landing, in which cadres of Cuban-trained guerillas and Cuban military personnel – directed by Castro himself – tried to launch a coastal raid of Venezuela in a quixotic effort to spark a communist uprising. Venezuela was among Castro's most coveted targets, and his regime devoted considerable resources to its revolutionary ambitions there. In 1963, for example, authorities on the Venezuelan coast unearthed a massive cache of several tons of weapons and ammunition, which they traced back to Havana after restoring partially obliterated imprints of the Cuban Army's coat of arms.

None of these insurgent campaigns yielded the results Castro had hoped for. It wasn't until Hugo Chávez came to power in 1999 that Cuba's efforts bore fruit. By then, the regime's operatives had perfected a far more sophisticated – and successful – method than open guerilla warfare. They no longer had to smuggle arms and weapons to Guevaraist *foco* cells in the mountains; in Chávez, they found a zealously radical Venezuelan officer who could win power electorally (at least initially), refound the state constitutionally, and establish a pro-Cuban dictatorship that opened up the institutions of a major oil power to Havana. In short order, the Chávez regime handed Cuba the keys to the resources, capital, and power of one of the richest countries in Latin America.

In the ensuing years, Cuba solidified an influential position in the Venezuelan state through a series of successive compacts and agreements. Cubans supplied the personnel, expertise, and intelligence capabilities that helped Chávez build his new regime, exchanging Cuban doctors, trainers, technicians, and political operators for huge quantities of Venezuelan oil. This arrangement was a historic win-win for Havana: Not only was Venezuela's energy a critical lifeline for averting post-Soviet collapse; it also opened up new pathways for expanding Cuba's foothold in the nation. Tens of thousands of Cuban personnel poured into Venezuelan barrios, ministries, and social programs, forging patronage systems that tied poor communities to the new Bolivarian regime while giving Cuba an enormous human infrastructure on the ground. Cuban doctors, teachers and social workers became the human capital for a socialist state-building project, overseen and operated by Havana.

As Chávez sought to consolidate control and beat back threats to his power, Cuban advisers built him an internal security regime using mechanisms that the Castro regime had spent the past few decades perfecting: launching purges and loyalty vetting, expanding internal surveillance, and transforming the military into the regime's inward-facing police force. A confidential arrangement between Havana and Caracas authorized Cuban officials to train Venezuelan troops and agents, overhaul the nation's intelligence services, and build a vast new infrastructure for internal surveillance and repression, giving Havana control of everything from Venezuela's security services to key sectors of its economy – with Cuban spies strategically leveraged

throughout each sphere. This arrangement continued to persist after Chávez's death: Famously, dozens of Cuban military and intelligence officers serving in Nicolas Maduro's personal detail were killed during the U.S. law enforcement operation to arrest the Venezuelan dictator earlier this year.

The result was a new model for the post-Soviet Cuban network – one that had perfected the art of cultivating ideological allies, embedding personnel inside state institutions, converting social organizations into revolutionary infrastructure, hollowing out both state and non-state organizations from within, and transforming democratic institutions into regime beachheads. Venezuela became a second revolutionary capital – larger and richer than Cuba itself – while Cuba retained operational control. Together, Havana and Caracas built a regional bloc that could subsidize allies, contest American influence and power, and shape multilateral institutions on behalf of their anti-imperialist coalition.

Global Fingerprints

By the mid-1980s, Latin America was the site of more acts of international terrorism against U.S. targets than any other region in the world, largely driven by at least two dozen Cuban-backed Marxist groups. Late-1980s estimates reported that Cuba had "worked quietly to train, build up, and unify" some 27 leftist guerilla groups across the region, totaling about "25,000 armed and trained members" in total. In 1986, Latin America accounted for about 55 percent of all incidents of terrorism involving U.S. targets. By 1989, it accounted for an estimated 64 percent.

Cuba's revolutionary ambitions were not confined to the Western Hemisphere. Starting in the early 1960s, the regime set up a network of training facilities around Havana that taught tens of thousands of militants from Latin America, Africa, the Middle East, and eventually North America how to handle weapons, prepare explosives, and carry out urban guerrilla tactics. In the first three decades of the Castro regime, at least 20,000 guerillas from "virtually every Latin American nation" had attended terrorist training camps in Cuba. From the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s, another 20,000 people from around the world traveled to the island to undergo revolutionary "education" at Cuba's Isle of Youth complex.[7] (One former Cuban intelligence agent recounted running training camps that instructed as many as 1,500 men a year in

[7] The extraordinary number of leftist guerillas traveling to Cuba for training and instruction was noted by a wide range of reports at the time. A 1985 State Department analysis found that "Cuban military facilities have been available for the training of terrorists since the first years of the Castro regime" and estimated that "at least 20,000 persons, including some from virtually every Latin American nation," had received such training on the island. The practice had only expanded since the Cuban network's victory in the Sandinista coup: "Since the Sandinista takeover in Nicaragua, potential guerrillas from all over Central America have found it easier to receive Cuban training. The Cubans now transport them via unscheduled flights to and from Nicaragua." *Soviet Activities in Latin America and the Caribbean*, Current Policy No. 669 (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of State, February 28, 1985), 5.

paramilitary tactics). Outside of Cuba itself, Cuban advisers and intelligence agents ran terrorist camps across the globe, from the Middle East to southern Africa.

Despite being a small island state, Cuba's outsized and remarkably effective security apparatus dispatched instructors, advisors, intelligence officers, and conventional soldiers and weapons across Africa and the Middle East. Declassified CIA reporting from 1966 had already identified Havana as playing a "substantial role" in "training and advising a number of African extremist organizations" and assisting "radical African governments." Within a decade, that infrastructure had metastasized into a continent-wide revolutionary supply chain, with Cuban cadres running guerilla camps and often fighting alongside Marxist and Third Worldist movements across the continent.

In the 1980s, CIA estimates placed some 49,000 Cuban personnel in sub-Saharan Africa, 80 percent of whom were combat troops or military advisers, operating across a dozen countries in the region. In total, by Cuban state media's own official count, some "385,908 Cuban combatants" took part in "internationalist" Third World struggles in Africa.

IV. AN ESPIONAGE EMPIRE

CUBA THE CAPITAL OF
21ST CENTURY COMMUNISM

IV. An Espionage Empire

"I would rank them as probably the most aggravating intelligence service I've ever worked against. That's not just because they're so devious and ruthless, but because they're so good."

– James Olson, former Chief of Counterintelligence at the CIA[8]

"The Cuban intelligence service has always been against the United States…Exclusively. All the other countries where they work, they do it to direct the activity against the United States."

– Gerardo Peraza, former senior Cuban intelligence official[9]

On June 6, 1987, Major Florentino Aspillaga Lombard drove a government-issued Mazda across the Czechoslovak border and presented himself at the U.S. Embassy in Vienna. He had served with distinction in the highest ranks of Cuban intelligence, receiving a personal commendation from Fidel Castro himself. While stationed in Bratislava, running a Cuban front company, Aspillaga had decided – after years of growing disillusionment with Castro's regime – to defect to the United States. As he informed the awestruck U.S. officials in Vienna, he was prepared to give the Americans everything he knew.

Aspillaga was "the most important Cuban agent ever to cross over to the CIA," as one *Washington Post* report put it the next year. But the even larger bombshell came next: after being flown to a U.S. Army base in Germany for debriefing, Aspillaga disclosed – and the CIA later independently confirmed – that virtually every spy the CIA had recruited inside Cuba since the

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[8] Will Grant, "The Cuban Spying Case That Has Shocked the US Government," *BBC News*, January 9, 2024.
[9] Gerardo Peraza, testimony before the Subcommittee on Security and Terrorism of the Senate Committee on the Judiciary, *The Role of Cuba in International Terrorism and Subversion: Intelligence Activities of the DGI*, 97th Cong., 2nd sess., February 26, 1982.

Bay of Pigs in 1961 had actually been a double agent working for Havana. For more than 20 years, the CIA had been utilizing what it believed was intelligence from dozens of U.S. spies in Cuba; what it had actually received was a curated stream of disinformation crafted by the Cuban regime.

The Dirección de Inteligencia (DI), known until 1989 as the Dirección General de Inteligencia (DGI), is Cuba's main foreign intelligence agency. To this day, it remains one of the most effective human-intelligence operations in the world. Over the past six decades, the agency has played a central role in a dazzling array of operations, from infiltrating universities and organizing revolutionary movements in the United States to training Palestinian terrorists in South Yemen.

Several high-ranking American intelligence professionals who worked against DI have been outspoken about the threat that the agency continues to pose to the United States. Christopher Simmons, a retired U.S. counterintelligence official who helped unmask many of the most notorious Cuban spies in the United States since the end of the Cold War, has publicly estimated that the DI has scores of still-unidentified agents operating inside the United States, including numerous senior agents within the U.S. government. Discussing the issue on a 2020 podcast, former CIA Chief of Counterintelligence James Olson delivered a similar assessment:

> *"They are a very formidable adversary. They were very professional. They were very disciplined and they had a vendetta against the United States. Castro focused all of his efforts on national security to bringing down his Yankee neighbor, to attacking us. They were impenetrable. They were tough. We had very little success against them. We underestimated them. And we paid a real price for that…The Cubans have [still] penetrated our government…I guarantee you, we only know the tip of the iceberg. They're much better than the KGB ever was."*

The DI was established in late 1961, two years after Castro's forces entered Havana. It was built from the ground up with the heavy support of the Soviets, and functioned as the KGB's Latin American extension for much of the latter half of the twentieth century. Several prominent Cuban defectors later recounted that DI was effectively controlled by Moscow beginning in the early 1970s, operating under the direct supervision of a Soviet colonel.

Cuba quickly came to occupy a prized place in Moscow's global anti-American infrastructure. Cuba's unique position made it an invaluable intelligence partner for America's adversaries – not just due to its physical proximity, but also its deep, intuitive familiarity with U.S. politics, culture and society. DI officers operating in the United States could move through Cuban exile

communities, university campuses, and activist circles with ease, something Soviet officers were often too conspicuous to do. As one retired U.S. official put it bluntly in 2002: "The Cubans were much more successful at bringing people aboard and gathering information" because "they were Latin and they were kind of glamorous. We're much more open to Latins than we are to people with steel teeth and a Slavic accent."

Today's DI continues to enjoy many of the same competitive advantages. Cuba's access to the United States remains a unique value proposition for anti-American states and actors. Like every other aspect of Cuba's subversion network, the threat posed by DI today is compounded by its alliance with America's most prominent adversaries across the world. Rather than spying on America on behalf of the Soviet bloc, modern Cuba funnels the information and intelligence its agents collect in the United States to adversarial states such as China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea. The Soviet Union's collapse in 1991 imposed resource constraints on Havana but did not dismantle the agency's capabilities. It retained its tradecraft, files, and agent networks, particularly within the United States. Intelligence-sharing relationships were rebuilt: what was once shared with the KGB was now shared with a new constellation of hostile states and groups. Cuba's intelligence access to the United States remained its most valuable asset.

Characteristics of Cuban Spycraft

DI is not a conventional spy agency. It is intimately linked to every node of Cuba's global network. As is frequently the case in totalitarian regimes, every Cuban organization answers to the Cuban state. Given Havana's long-standing emphasis on espionage, DI agents and affiliates maintain a ubiquitous presence across Cuban institutions, regardless of whether those institutions are "formally" associated with the agency.

In the United States, the Cuban Interests Section in Washington, D.C. and the large Cuban mission to the United Nations in New York City have both long been known to serve as operating bases for covert Cuban intelligence operations. U.S. counterintelligence officials have asserted that every single accredited diplomat at Cuba's U.N. mission is an intelligence agent; one official jokingly remarked that many of the mission's personnel "frankly don't even know where the U.N. is." In 2003, the U.S. government expelled 14 Cuban diplomats from the Washington and New York posts for engaging "in activities deemed to be harmful to the United States outside their official capacity" – diplomatic shorthand for espionage.

There are several key characteristics of Cuban intelligence operations that distinguish it as a unique threat.

True Believers

Cuba's intelligence strategy differs from the standard Russian, Chinese, or Iranian model in at least one major respect: rather than paid mercenaries, Cuba recruits diehard ideologues.

Whereas other intelligence services often buy their assets or – particularly in the case of China – exploit the national loyalties of their ethnic diaspora, Cuba's most consequential and damaging American spies were what one might describe as "true believers." Most were never paid significant sums of money, beyond occasional reimbursement for operational expenses. Under the perpetual resource constraints of a small, embargoed economy, Cuban intelligence perfected an alternative recruitment model around exploiting ideological loyalty. In many cases, that model has outperformed anything money could buy. Not only does it mean that Cuba's American spies tend to be fiercely loyal to Havana; it also often renders them uniquely inconspicuous. In contrast to paid agents, they have no obvious "paper trail" – unexplained deposits, sudden luxury purchases, or paid-off debts.

This is one reason why U.S. universities are one of the premier targets of Cuba's subversive activities, serving as fertile ground for recruiting ideologically sympathetic young Americans who will ascend to positions of influence, power, and access. U.S. intelligence analysis and DI defector testimony have both established that Cuban intelligence treats infiltrating American universities as a top priority – as one former Cuban agent recounted, the regime's intelligence operation seeks to identify politically-engaged leftist students at elite U.S. universities who will go on to "occupy positions of importance in the private sector and in the government." DI does this through both overt partnerships and covert intelligence operations, exploiting ideological affinity among left-wing students and faculty to both expand its "fellow travelers" nexus and recruit active agents. DI's founder himself, Manuel Piñeiro – also known as Commander Barbarroja ("Red Beard") – attended Columbia University in the 1950s.

Cuban organizations and academic institutions maintain scholarships, exchange programs and other partnerships with a striking number of elite universities in the United States. As of 2023, the University of Havana – a key node in the Cuban intelligence network – purportedly held educational exchange agreements with nearly 80 U.S. universities.[10] As recently as 2017, representatives from Harvard University traveled to Havana themselves to sign an agreement with Cuba's Ministry of Higher Education expanding "opportunities for potential collaborative research and cooperation between Harvard and Cuban universities, such as short courses, internships, research visits, publication of research articles, and academic workshops and conferences."

[10] *STATE Magazine*, Spring/Summer 2023 (Terre Haute, IN: Indiana State University Alumni Association, 2023). In announcing its own partnership with the University of Havana, an Indiana State University magazine touted that "with this agreement, ISU joins nearly eighty other U.S. universities, including Harvard and the University of Alabama, who have agreements with Cuba's oldest university."

Long-Term Target Development

The DI tends to prioritize long-term placement over short-term collection. It targets candidates at their moment of maximum impressionability and ideological openness – frequently as undergraduate or graduate students in elite universities – and begins a development process that may span years before the asset is in a position to yield "results." Cuba has cultivated spies who operated for decades before being caught by U.S. counterintelligence officials; in that time, they climbed to the highest ranks of the U.S. government and obtained access to the America's most sensitive top-secret materials. The information they passed on to the Cubans – which were then routinely passed on to Cuban proxies and allies around the world – did an unquantifiable amount of damage to U.S. interests. It was also likely directly responsible for the deaths of several American soldiers, agents, and citizens.

Influence-Espionage Integration

DI treats espionage, propaganda, and general ideological or political influence operations as part of one integrated project, utilizing the same network and infrastructure to recruit assets to spy on its behalf and to advance its interests in more general terms. Cuban intelligence works to both collect information and conduct influence activity, and may develop people who do not have secret access but whose political tendencies or public position can still support Cuban interests. According to DI defectors, Cuban intelligence doctrine operates according to several asset "categories": A "useful link" who may lack access to secrets but can help active measures, influence, public opinion, or political objectives because of their position and/or ideology; hybrid influence-espionage actors who knowingly work with Cuban intelligence/government, possibly with access to sensitive information, but not necessarily under full clandestine tradecraft; and a full intelligence agent with access, motivation, clandestine communications, training, and discipline.

Victor Manuel Rocha (1973 – 2023)

In December 2023, the Department of Justice charged Victor Manuel Rocha, then 73 years old, with "secretly acting for decades as an agent" of the Cuban government. In April 2024, he was sentenced to 15 years in federal prison after pleading guilty to conspiring to act as an agent of a foreign government. Then-Attorney General Merrick Garland called Victor Rocha's case "one of the highest-reaching and longest-lasting infiltrations of the United States government by a foreign agent."

Rocha, a Colombian-born naturalized U.S. citizen who grew up in Harlem, serves as a perfect representation of the DI asset-recruitment strategy. He was educated at Yale (1973), Harvard's Kennedy School (1976), and Georgetown's School of Foreign Service (1978), before joining the State Department as a Foreign Service Officer in 1981. He would go on to serve in diplomatic posts across Latin America and a series of increasingly influential roles in the U.S. government: Director of Inter-American Affairs on the White House National Security Council under President Clinton (1994–95), Deputy Principal Officer at the U.S. Interests Section in Havana (1995–1997), and then U.S. Ambassador to Bolivia from 2000 to 2002. Rocha subsequently served as an advisor to the Commander of U.S. Southern Command – which oversees all U.S. military activities in Latin America.

Victor Manuel Rocha (Getty Images)

For roughly 50 years – from 1973 until his arrest in December 2023 – Rocha was a Cuban spy. He was first recruited in 1973 while in Chile, five years before he was naturalized as a U.S. citizen. He would later admit to an undercover U.S. officer posing as a Cuban DI handler that he had constructed "the legend of a right-wing person" to camouflage his loyalty. In that conversation, Rocha described the United States as "the enemy," boasted that "what we" – e.g., Cuban intelligence – "have done is enormous and more than a grand slam," and said his "number one priority" was undermining "any action on the part of Washington that would endanger the life of the leadership, or the revolution itself." He had visited Havana to meet with his handlers as recently as 2017, traveling via a circuitous route through several other countries before boarding his final flight to Cuba.

The federal government's damage assessment of Rocha's espionage is ongoing and expected to take years. Federal prosecutors have publicly stated that the full damage of Rocha's covert activities may never be known. In 2026, the Department of Justice filed a civil denaturalization complaint to strip Rocha of his U.S. citizenship.

Ana Belén Montes (1984 – 2001)

Ana Montes was born on a U.S. Army base in Nuremberg in 1957. Her father was an Army psychiatrist. Both her sister (Lucy) and her brother (Tito) would go on to work for the FBI – the latter as a special agent, and the former as a Spanish-language analyst who won awards for taking down Cuban spy rings. Montes' former boyfriend was a Pentagon intelligence officer specializing in Cuba. None of these individuals were aware that Montes was a Cuban spy.

Montes was recruited by DI in 1984 as a graduate student at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS), and was subsequently instructed by her handlers to apply for U.S. government positions that would grant her access to classified intelligence. She accepted a job at the Pentagon's Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), and quickly rose through the ranks to become the DIA's senior Cuba analyst — nicknamed the "Queen of Cuba" by her DIA co-workers due to her stellar reputation at the agency. She was responsible for briefing the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the National Security Council about Cuban military capabilities, and helped to draft a 1998 Pentagon report to Congress concluding that Cuba "does not pose a significant military threat to the United States or to other countries in the region." In 2012, Former National Counterintelligence Executive Michelle Van Cleave testified to Congress that Montes "compromised everything — virtually everything — that we knew about Cuba and how we operated in Cuba and against Cuba," and it "is also likely that the information she passed contributed to the death and injury of American and pro-American forces in Latin America."

Indeed, Montes would later admit to having revealed the identities of at least four undercover officers working in Cuba. (In one interchange, a Cuban intelligence officer thanked Montes for revealing a U.S. agent's identity, noting: "We were waiting here for him with open arms"). She

allegedly fed Cuban intelligence the location of a secret U.S. military base in El Salvador, which may have led to the death of an American Green Beret commando when pro-Cuban leftist guerillas attacked the base weeks visited and was briefed on it in her capacity as a U.S. intelligence analyst; she also revealed the existence of a secret multi-billion dollar U.S. satellite program used to gather intelligence on Russia, China and Iran. In spite of this, Montes passed a DIA polygraph in 1994 after a decade of active espionage (part of her espionage training from Cuban agents included techniques for successfully lying without detection during a polygraph test).

Ana Montes accepts a certificate from then-CIA Director George Tenet in 1997. (Defense Intelligence Agency)

Montes was arrested in September 2001, ten days after the September 11 attacks. Investigators were originally inclined to keep monitoring her to identify her Cuban handler or catch her in a face-to-face meeting, but 9/11 accelerated their timeline: Montes had been selected as a team leader to process target lists for the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan that would launch the following month. Officials feared the Cubans would pass U.S. war plans they obtained from Montes on to the Taliban.

When the Department of Defense's Inspector General completed a review of the case in 2005, it found no credible evidence that Montes accepted any significant financial compensation from the Cubans. Her motives were purely political: The review found that "her ideological disposition fostered a negative view of U.S. foreign policy, and that fixation coupled with a sense of moral

righteousness sealed her commitment to a cause from which there was no alternative, at least in her mind."

Montes was released in January 2023 and is believed to have moved to Puerto Rico. She has not shown any public remorse.

Walter Kendall Myers and Gwendolyn Myers (1979 – 2009)

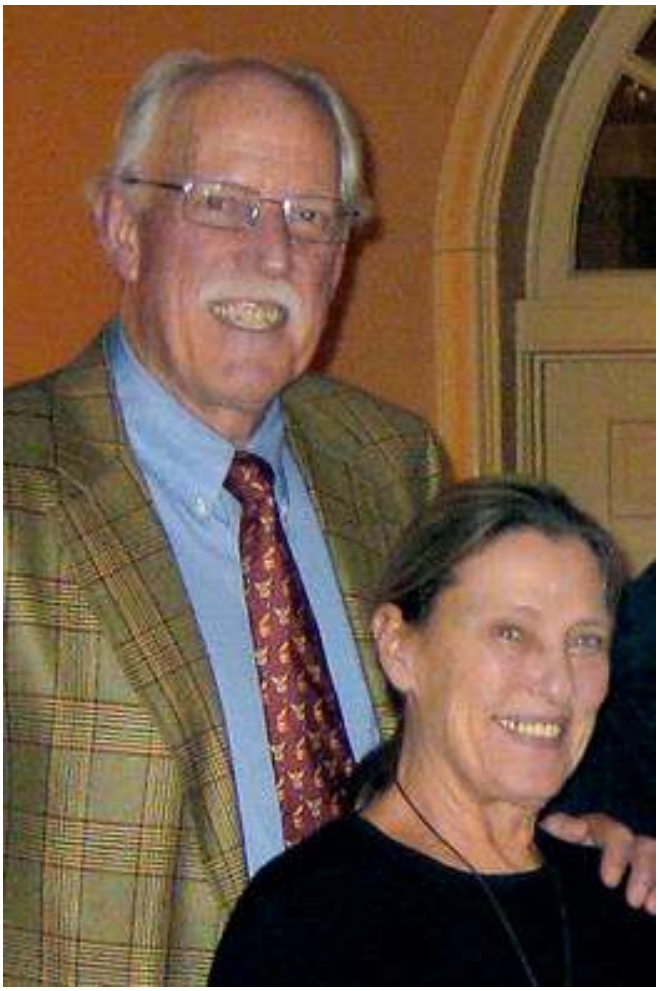
Walter Kendall Myers was the great-grandson of Alexander Graham Bell. Raised in privilege, he was educated at Brown University and Johns Hopkins, where he earned a Ph.D. He taught as a professor at SAIS and worked his way up through the ranks in the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research – providing him with access to some of the most highly sensitive intelligence in the U.S. government. He was 72 years old when the FBI arrested him. He had been a Cuban intelligence agent for thirty years.

Myers was recruited by Cuban intelligence after his trip to Cuba in 1978, which he made at the invitation of a Cuban official at the Cuban Mission in New York. On the island, Cuban intelligence had made contact with Myers and assessed his viability as an asset. Roughly six months later, a Cuban official traveled to South Dakota, where Walter and Gwendolyn were living together, and recruited them both as a pair to serve as clandestine agents of the Cuban government. The couple married in 1982.

Cuban intelligence subsequently directed Myers to pursue a job at either the State Department or the CIA. Over the next thirty years, he and his wife passed classified information through shortwave radios, dropped packages in supermarket shopping carts, and met with handlers while traveling to Cuba under false identities. In 1995, they were secretly flown to Cuba and spent four hours in a private meeting with Fidel Castro himself.

When the FBI launched an undercover sting in 2009, Myers was recorded telling an agent he believed to be a DI handler that he wanted to resume his work for Cuba, saying: "I was actually thinking it would be fun to get back into it." He pleaded guilty in November 2009 to conspiracy to commit espionage and two counts of wire fraud. On July 16, 2010, he was sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole. Gwendolyn received 81 months.

Gwendolyn died in 2015. Walter Myers died of cancer in March 2026, at the age of 88, in the Federal Medical Center in Springfield, Missouri. He was unrepentant to the end. At sentencing, Myers told the court that their "only objective was to help the Cuban people defend their revolution."



Walter Kendall Myers and wife Gwendolyn (Reuters)

The Wasp Network / Red Avispa (Dismantled 1998)

La Red Avispa, also known as the "Wasp Network," was one of the largest Cuban spy rings ever uncovered on American soil at the time of its collapse in 1998. For most of the 1990s, the Cuban government ran a clandestine network of undercover agents and intelligence officers in South Florida. Its mission was twofold: Infiltrate and gather intelligence on U.S. military installations, and embed in Cuban diaspora networks, where agents were tasked with "infiltrating, monitoring, and disrupting" the Cuban exile organizations that Havana regarded as the most dangerous enemies of the Castro regime.

In September 1998, the FBI arrested ten members of the network. Fourteen defendants were ultimately charges, four of whom remained fugitives, while the U.S. government expelled three Cuban diplomats at the UN mission for their alleged involvement with the network. Subsequent estimates have suggested the number of spies in the Wasp Network extended well beyond the fourteen people formally charged, although the full number has never been publicly established.

The network was led by Gerardo Hernández, a Cuban intelligence officer who posed as a Puerto Rican civilian using the "Manuel Viramontes." From that cover position, Hernández supervised agents who reported on exile groups including Brothers to the Rescue, Alpha 66, the F-4 Commandos, and the Cuban American National Foundation.

Brothers to the Rescue was the network's most consequential target. Founded in Miami, the group initially became known for flying small civilian aircraft over the Florida Straits to search for – and provide aid to – Cuban rafters fleeing the island. Over time, it also became a direct irritant to Havana, especially after its pilots began flying near Cuba and dropping anti-Castro leaflets over Havana.

Cuban intelligence penetrated the group deeply. Two Wasp Network agents, René González and Juan Pablo Roque, embedded within Brothers to the Rescue as volunteer pilots. They joined flights, built relationships inside the organization, and reported information back through the network to Havana.

Roque's cover went even further. After arriving in the United States as a supposed Cuban Air Force defector, he courted Ana Margarita Martínez, a Cuban-American woman in Miami, and married her in 1995. Less than a year later, on February 23, 1996, he vanished back to Cuba, leaving Martínez to discover – via public news reports – that the man she had married was not an exile dissident but a Cuban operative.

The next day, three Brothers to the Rescue aircraft departed South Florida. Two of them — unarmed civilian Cessna 337 Skymasters — were intercepted by Cuban fighter jets over international waters north of Cuba and destroyed. All four men aboard – three of them U.S. citizens, the other a U.S. permanent resident – were killed. Decoded Cuban intelligence communications showed that Havana had prepared a mission called Operation Scorpion, designed to "perfect" a confrontation with Brothers to the Rescue. The messages directed Hernández to collect detailed information about future Brothers flights and to make sure Cuban agents were not aboard Brothers aircraft on the key dates surrounding February 24.

Hernández was convicted not only of espionage-related offenses and acting as an unregistered Cuban agent, but also of conspiracy to commit murder. He was sentenced to life in prison.

The trial also exposed other Wasp Network operations. Operation Picada was a sabotage and disinformation campaign against Brothers to the Rescue, with decoded messages showing discussions of burning the group's hangar or damaging its aircraft in a way that would look like an accident, negligence, or even self-sabotage, and then spreading rumors that Brothers leader José Basulto had staged the incident for insurance money and donations. Another operation, known as Operation Parallel, involved a plan to kill a Miami man whom Cuban intelligence had

identified as a CIA officer with a mail bomb disguised as a book and packed with plastic explosive. The plot was uncovered before it was carried out.

The Wasp Network's targets were not limited to Cuban exile organizations. Antonio Guerrero, another member of the network, obtained work as a sheet-metal worker at Naval Air Station Key West's Boca Chica Field. From that position, he reported on aircraft movements, personnel activity, and the layout and operations of the base. Other members were assigned to collect information on U.S. Southern Command. The evidence presented at trial included more than a thousand pages of decoded communications recovered from nearly a thousand encrypted computer disks seized from network members' apartments in South Florida.

The five men tried and convicted in Miami – Gerardo Hernández, René González, Antonio Guerrero, Ramón Labañino, and Fernando González Llort – became known as the "Cuban Five." Havana and its allies in the international left turned them into political martyrs, building a global "Free the Five" campaign that lasted for years. In December 2014, in concurrence with the Obama administration's broader opening to Cuba, the remaining three imprisoned members – Hernández, Labañino, and Guerrero – were released in a diplomatic package that simultaneously secured the release of a U.S. intelligence asset who had been imprisoned in Cuba for nearly two decades. (At the same time, Cuba also freed USAID contractor Alan Gross). Hernández, having served roughly sixteen years for – among other crimes – conspiracy to murder American citizens, returned to Havana to a "hero's welcome."

Fernando González Llort, one of the convicted Wasp Network officers, returned to Cuba after serving his sentence and was later made president of the Cuban Institute of Friendship with the Peoples, or "ICAP" — the regime's main organization for fostering relationships and contacts with American activists. (ICAP and its affiliated travel agency were formally designated for sanctions by Secretary Rubio in June 2026). In 2019, González personally welcomed the Venceremos Brigade's 50th anniversary delegation in Havana.

V. REVOLUTIONARY TOURISM

CUBA THE CAPITAL OF
21ST CENTURY COMMUNISM

V. Revolutionary Tourism

"Name any disturbance in the United States – on campus, in the streets, anywhere – and I'll name you the leaders of it who have been to Cuba."

– Unnamed State Department official, 1970[11]

Venceremos Brigade

The Venceremos Brigade – described in one Senate report as among "the most extensive and dangerous infiltration operations ever undertaken by a foreign power against the United States" – has brought some 10,000 American activists to Cuba since its first contingent in 1969. Its participants have included well-known elected officials, labor leaders, academics, activists, and a long list of other influential U.S. progressives. Since its creation, the Brigade has served as a tool for the Cuban regime to sponsor a wide range of subversive activities against the United States – ranging from influence campaigns to espionage and guerilla violence. It has been linked to the formation of some of the most infamous far-left terrorist movements in U.S. history.

The first Venceremos Brigade – born out of a 1969 meeting between Cuban officials and radical American students – came at a moment when America's emerging New Left was undergoing a shift away from campus activism and toward revolutionary violence. Many members of the first 216-person contingent that traveled to Cuba that year hailed from the faction of America's radical left that would lead that transition.

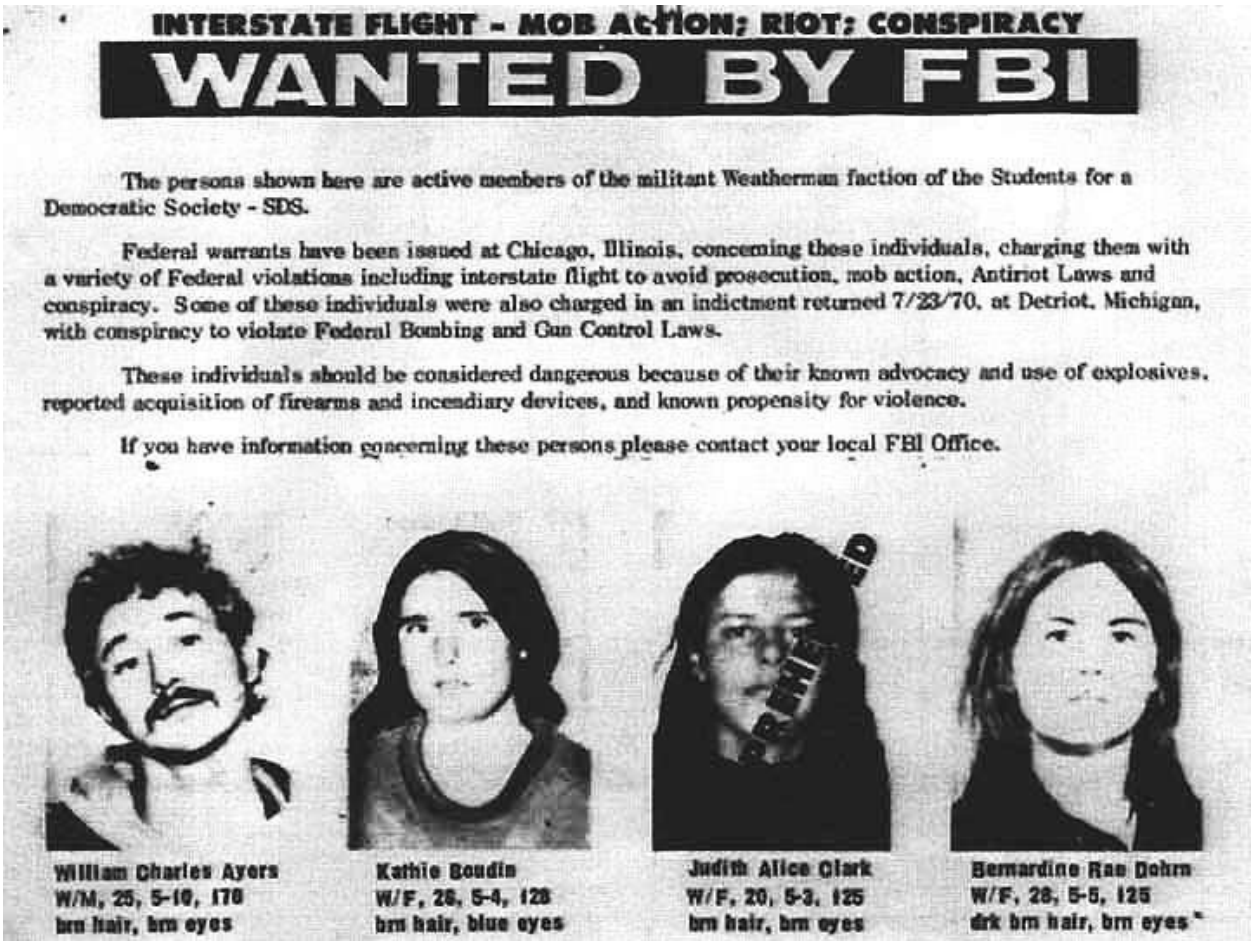
Several of the young American organizers of the first Brigade were also in the midst of forming what would come to be known as the Weather Underground. The revolutionary leftist group was born in 1969 – the same year as the Brigade – when the radical "Weatherman" faction split off from the collapsing Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) at the national SDS convention. From the outset, they maintained a close relationship with the Cubans. FBI reporting relayed that the Weather Underground had "initiated, planned and organized the Venceremos Brigade (VB) trips" with the direct "encouragement and instructions of the Cuban government."

[11] Greyer and Beech, "Cuba, School for U.S. Radicals," *Chicago Sun Times,* October 15, 1970.

The next year, the Weathermen issued a "Declaration of War" against the U.S. government, and launched an unprecedented campaign of terrorist attacks across the United States, bombing targets such as the U.S. Senate, the State Department, and the Pentagon. Some of the organization's members would carry that revolutionary war into the 1980s, allying with militant communist and black extremist groups to bomb U.S. military bases, execute prison breaks, and assassinate police officers.

The Brigade served as an early institutionalization of the emerging partnership between Cuba and America's revolutionary left. Both U.S. intelligence reporting and the statements of several Weathermen themselves linked the American radicals' growing obsession with revolutionary violence to Cuban influence. In a 1968 interview with a Cuban state newspaper, soon-to-be Weather Underground leader Mark Rudd declared: "We consider that the Cuban criterion on the struggle in America is perhaps the correct way in which the revolution will take place…as is known, we have taken from Che his slogan: 'Create two, three, many Vietnams.'"

This was evident in July of 1969, when several top Weathermen traveled to Havana to meet with both the Cuban and communist North Vietnam regimes. There, the Vietnamese delegation – composed of hand-picked Viet Cong cadres experienced in mass organization and guerilla warfare – reportedly insisted that the Americans intensify their anti-imperialist efforts. Those meetings, according to a top-secret FBI report from the time, "intensified the revolutionary commitment of the Weathermen to 'Bring the War Home,'" marking "a definitive line of demarcation on the question of armed struggle" for the group: "Hereinafter they were not simply theoretical revolutionaries, but in adopting the Cuban experience as their guide placed armed struggle in the forefront." Upon returning home, the Weathermen set about planning the infamous October "Days of Rage" riot, which they staged to coincide with the second anniversary of Che Guevara's death, leading to the arrests of roughly 300 Weathermen and the permanent paralysis of a Chicago policeman. (The FBI report noted that the Viet Cong's chief representative in Havana had "told the Weathermen to look for the person who fights hardest against the cops when recruiting").



An FBI wanted poster for four leaders of the Weather Underground

Just six months after the meeting in Havana, the Weathermen went underground and launched their armed struggle against the United States. Reporting would later reveal that Cuban intelligence networks in North America were in "regular contact with the American revolutionaries" during the group's period of active terrorism, and that Cuban officials helped several Weather Underground fugitives flee to Soviet Bloc countries to escape the FBI – and then later, to secretly reenter the United States. After dividing themselves into covert, clandestine terror cells – mirrored after the Cuban *foco* guerilla strategy – the Weathermen communicated through operatives working out of Cuban embassies in the United States and Canada in an effort "to blunt official surveillance," utilizing the "Cuban diplomatic channels as a private communications network" to stay in touch with other cells.

Fomenting a revolution within the United States has always been an explicit ambition of Cuban programs like the Venceremos Brigade. Cuban intelligence agents in the United States reportedly used the Brigade to arrange for some young Americans to receive on-island weapons training from Cuban military officers, training select groups in "guerrilla warfare techniques, including the use of arms and explosives." Caucus documents distributed to Brigade committees across the

United States outlined efforts to recruit U.S. military veterans – or even active-duty soldiers – to travel to Cuba to convert their "training into a positive force for the creation of a people's militia in the U.S."[12] Reports on Brigade activities from the Cuban state propaganda outlets casually relayed accounts of *brigadistas* receiving instruction on the finer points of urban guerilla warfare and terrorism:

> *"They attend lectures…and they ask constantly, with great eagerness: Susan wants to clear up some confused points of Marighela's 'Mini-manual of urban guerrilla';[13] Bob would like to know how the Tupamaros function and organize themselves because 'we could do the same in many cities of the United States'; a blond long-haired young man worries about 'What actions could we carry out to cooperate with Latin American revolutionaries in their struggle against Yankee imperialism?'"[14]*

This was – and to an extent, still is – the Brigade's fundamental purpose: supporting "the revolution" in America. Dwight Crews, a Louisiana deputy sheriff who was tasked with going undercover to infiltrate the New Left milieu in New Orleans, traveled to Cuba with the Brigade's fifth contingent. There, he said, the Cubans informed his delegation "that we were the vanguard of the revolution in the United States, that when we returned to the United States it was our job to see that this revolution did take place, and when the time came we were to use our discretion depending on the circumstances as to whether it would be violent or peaceful; but the Cubans felt that no government empire would give up their power peacefully."[15]

The Cuban state took a keen interest in the advance of revolutionary leftism in the United States, and it used the Brigade to track its progress. Before departure, activists were required to compile detailed reports on "all movement activity within their area," which Brigade leaders then turned over to Cuban officials, who would pore over the materials. At the same time, Crews reported, the Brigade built regional "propaganda committees" tasked with "supporting the Cuban revolution and furthering the cause of communism in the United States" upon their return home.[16]

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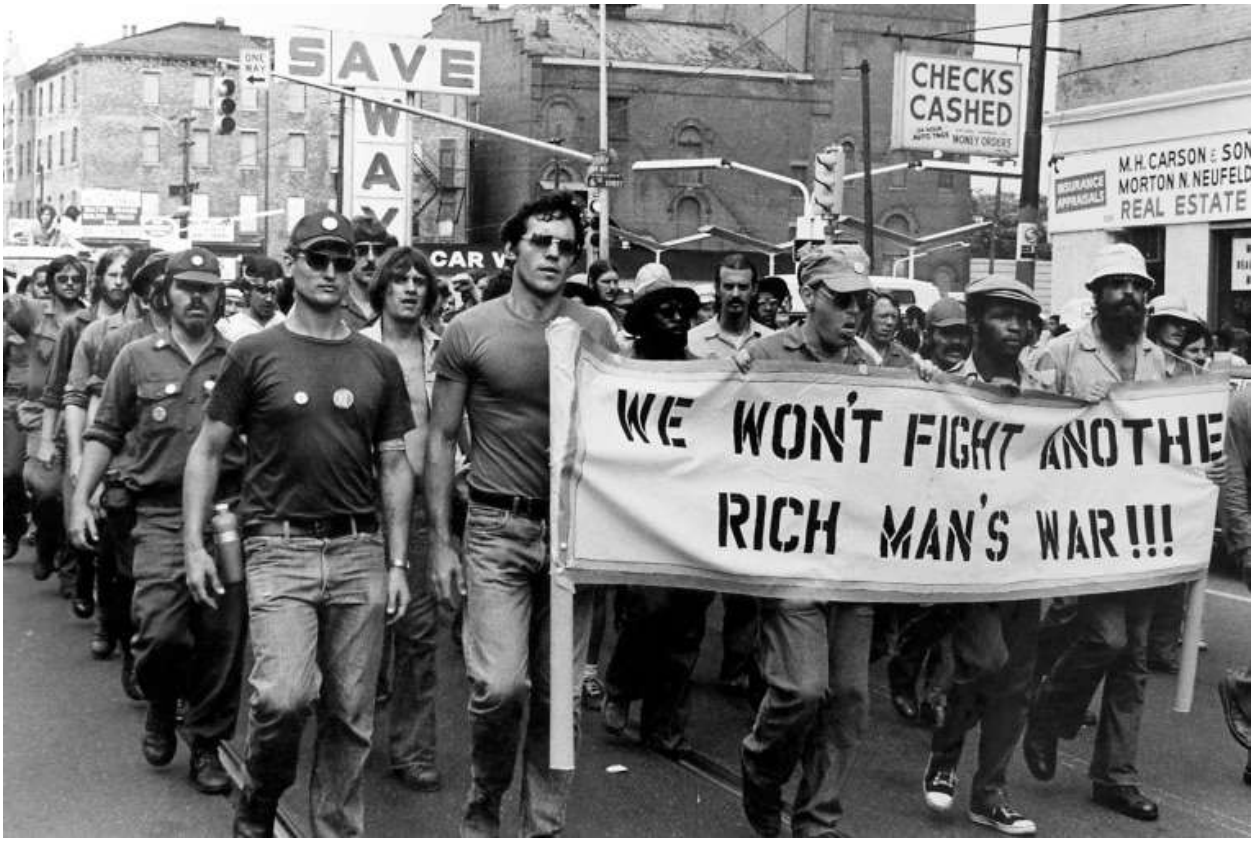
[12] See: U.S. Congress, House Committee on Internal Security, *The Theory and Practice of Communism in 1972: Venceremos Brigade*, 92nd Cong., 2nd sess., pt. 2 (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1973), 8090.
[13] Carlos Marighella was the founder of a communist militant group that carried out a string of high-profile terrorist attacks, assassinations, executions, and kidnappings across Brazil – including the kidnapping of both the West German and U.S. ambassadors in 1969 and 1970, respectively. Marighella's *Minimanual* had a major influence over several Marxist-Leninist terrorist groups, and advocated a maximally violent approach to revolution – extolling "every urban guerrilla to always keep in mind that he can only maintain his existence if he is able to kill the police and those dedicated to repression," and "to concentrate his efforts on the physical extermination of the agents of repression."
[14] U.S. House Committee on Internal Security*, Theory and Practice of Communism in 1972, pt. 2,* 8125.
[15] *Ibid*, 7947.
[16] *Ibid*, 7853, 8100-8101, 7861-7863.



Going Mainstream

All of these activities take place under the watchful eye of the Cuban state. Senior Cuban intelligence defectors later recounted that active DGI agents were tasked with recruiting members of the Venceremos Brigade, and were strategically placed alongside the young Americans in the Brigade camps in Cuba. A 1975 U.S. Senate report detailed how the Brigade was "created for the purpose of acting as a screen and tool of the Cuban intelligence apparatus." In fact, the Brigade's activities were of "such great importance to the DGI that they are controlled by a special section" of the Cuban spy agency, under the direct supervision of DGI's deputy director, who "personally supervised the creation and subsequent activities of the Brigade." The report continued:

> *He assigned such priority to the project that all other DGI operations were held to be subordinate to the collection of intelligence from the members of the Venceremos Brigade. Practically every Cuban national attached to the Brigade camp, right down to the food service and maintenance personnel, is a member or a co-opted member of the DGI. These DGI operatives are so skilled in their impersonations that few Brigade members are aware of their true identities. In fact, so many DGI personnel are needed to staff these camps that nearly all other operations must be suspended when the camps are*

> *active. Even maintenance and clerical personnel of the Directorate are pressed into service.*

Over the past half century, programs like the Brigade have helped Cuba infiltrate and establish a foothold in a series of radical American political movements. Increasingly, its reach has also extended to mainstream liberal institutions – elite academia, major nonprofits and NGOs, and even the Democratic Party itself.

This has been driven, in part, by the rehabilitation and "mainstreaming" of many of the ideas and figures of the revolutionary 1960s-era left. Bernardine Dohrn, for example, was one of the Weather Underground co-founders who traveled to Havana to meet with Cuban and Viet Cong officials in July 1969, and subsequently helped to orchestrate a string of terror attacks on American soil. (Dohrn was the author of the Weather Underground's first "Communiqué" declaring "war" against the U.S. government in 1970). Despite having once been one of the FBI's Ten Most Wanted fugitives, Dohrn went on to work at the elite white-shoe law firm Sidley & Austin, and was later hired as a professor at Northwestern Law School, where she taught for over 20 years.

In 1995, Barack Obama launched his first-ever run for political office in the living room of Dohrn and her husband, Bill Ayers – another co-founder of the Weather Underground who would go on to become Professor of Education at University of Illinois at Chicago.

Dohrn was hardly the only former Venceremos radical to transition into mainstream power. Susan Rosenberg is a Brigade alumna who later joined the May 19th Communist Organization, a particularly violent terrorist offshoot of the Weather Underground that was responsible for the murder of two police officers and a security guard in 1981. She later became the vice-chair of the board of Thousand Currents, a powerful progressive nonprofit that served as fiscal sponsor of the Black Lives Matter Global Network Foundation.

The Brigade's alumni rolls also include not one but *two* mayors of Los Angeles. The first, Antonio Villaraigosa, served as mayor from 2005 to 2013; prior to that, he had served as Speaker of the California Assembly. The second, Karen Bass, is the current Los Angeles mayor. Bass was a leading Venceremos organizer in southern California and visited Cuba as frequently as every six months, according to an interview she gave in 1996. She would go on to serve in Congress, where she chaired the Congressional Black Caucus, and was widely considered to be one of the finalists for then-candidate Joe Biden's vice-presidential pick in the 2020 election.

Bass' friendliness towards the communist regime has not dissipated with age. In 2016, she traveled to Cuba with President Obama as part of a congressional delegation seeking to normalize relations with Havana; when Castro died that same year, she released a statement

mourning "the passing of the Comandante en Jefe" as "a great loss to the people of Cuba," and extending her "condolences to the Cuban people."

Karen Bass, 1970.

Karen Bass, 2025.

Other Brigade alumni include senior Department of Labor officials, presidents of the National Lawyers Guild, members of presidential transition teams, the founder of *Mother Jones* and several other notable magazine editors, leaders of powerful labor unions and advocacy groups, think tank executives, and a suite of professors at top U.S. universities.

Solidarity Delegations

Today, the "travel and exchange" model pioneered by the early Venceremos Brigades has become something of a cottage industry. On top of the still-running Venceremos Brigades, other recurring U.S. delegations to Cuba now include the International May Day Brigade, Witness for Peace Solidarity Collective Delegations, and "Friendshipment Caravans," which have been run since 1992 by IFCO/Pastors for Peace to "demonstrate to the Cuban people…that they have allies even in the 'belly of the beast' in the US." (A common turn of phrase among members of the Cuba network – celebrity leftist streamer Hasan Piker worked with a Ketchum, Idaho-based media organization called Belly of the Beast LLC to produce a pro-Cuba documentary during his recent trip to the island).

Delegations led by leftists from outside the United States include seasonal "solidarity brigades" from the British Cuba Solidarity Campaign; corresponding trips organized by the "Germany-Cuba Friendship Association" in Germany and local leftist groups and communist parties across mainland Europe; and the Che Guevara Volunteer Work Brigade organized by the Canadian Network on Cuba.

This constant stream of Western left-wing activists, influencers and organizers is coordinated by a network of Cuba-backed nonprofits, foundations, academic and cultural partnerships, and even dedicated U.S.-based travel agencies.

Brazilian activist Thiago Avila waves a Cuban flag on board the vessel Maguro as it arrives from Mexico as part of the Nuestra America convoy. (Getty Images)

The recurring Cuba delegations are further bolstered by major one-off events drawing activists, intellectuals and politicians from across the West. The March 2026 "Nuestra América Convoy" was a major flashpoint for the international left, "mobilizing by air, land, and sea" (as organizers put it) to transport goods to Cuba in defiance of U.S. sanctions. 120 organizations from across 33 countries joined the caravan. Participants included a suite of influential progressives from the United States and across the world, including Hasan Piker; Amazon Labor Union founder Christian Smalls; a delegation from the Democratic Socialists of America; former UK Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn, former Spanish deputy prime minister Pablo Iglesias; several other current and former members of European Parliament; and Isra Hirsi, campus activist and daughter of Representative Ilhan Omar (D., Minn.).

The propaganda success of this system – sometimes referred to as "revolutionary tourism" – was immediately visible in the way prominent Nuestra América participants framed the trip to their audiences after returning home to the United States. Hirsi, who was suspended from Barnard

College in 2024 for her role in organizing anti-Israel encampments at Columbia University, later recounted on social media that her trip to Cuba "truly changed me," writing: "I have never felt such optimism and revolutionary spirit before. The misinformation and lies spread by US propaganda are immediately dismissed when visiting Havana." Piker, too, denounced U.S. foreign policy towards Cuba as "60 years of economic terrorism," and released a short-form documentary on his trip, titled "The American War Against Cuba."

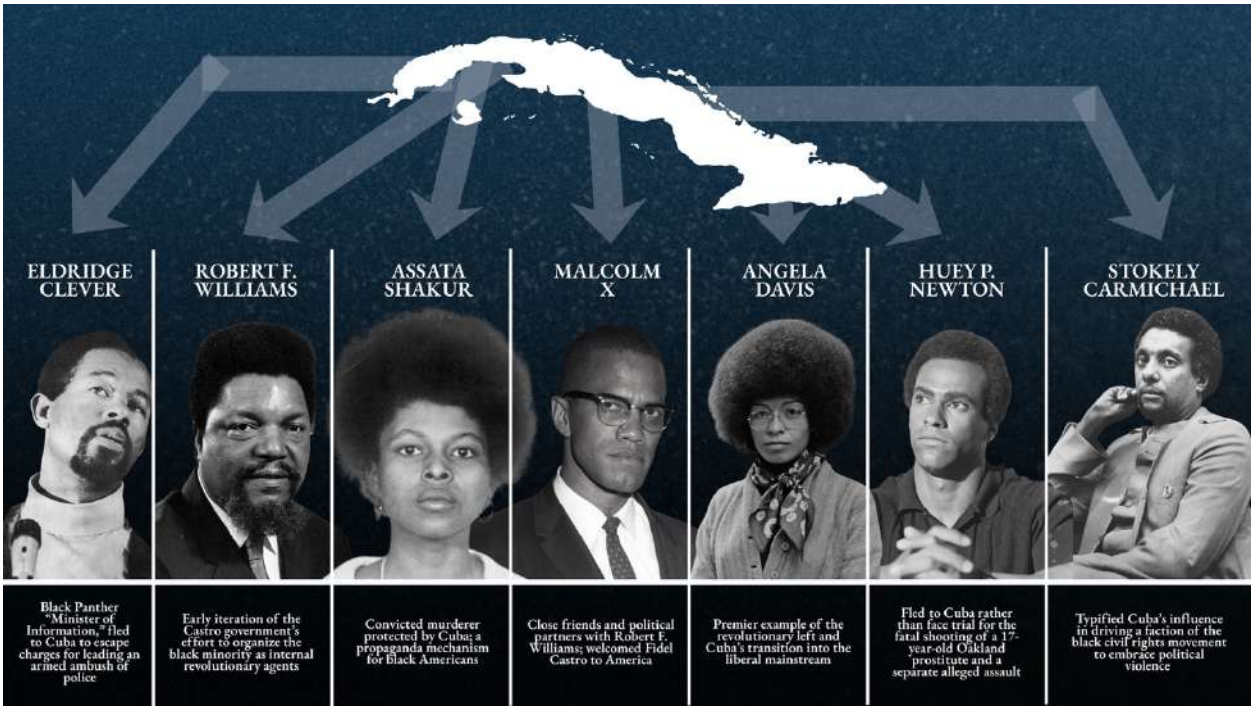
VI. RACIAL REVOLUTION

CUBA THE CAPITAL OF
21ST CENTURY COMMUNISM

VI. Racial Revolution

"We look upon Cuba as a shining example of hope in our hemisphere. We do not view our struggle as being contained within the boundaries of the United States as they are defined by present-day maps…black power means that we see ourselves as part of the Third World; that we see our struggle as closely related to liberation struggles around the world."

– Stokely Carmichael in Havana, August 1967[17]



Angela Davis is one of the premier examples of the revolutionary left's – and Cuba's – transition into the liberal mainstream. Numbered among the most famous American radicals of the late twentieth century, Davis once graced the FBI's Ten Most Wanted list, accused of supplying

[17] Stokely Carmichael, "Black Power and the Third World," address to the First Conference of the Organization of Latin American Solidarity (OLAS), Havana, Cuba, August 1967.

black extremists with the firearms they used to kidnap and murder a California judge in 1970. (Davis fled, was captured months later, and was later acquitted). Two years later, Davis was received in Havana with a hero's welcome from throngs of enthusiastic supporters. It was neither the first nor the last time she would go to Cuba: in 1969, she had been welcomed by Castro as part of a Communist Party delegation; in 1974, she returned again to attend the Second Congress of the Federation of Cuban Women.

Davis never moderated or backed away from her devotion to revolutionary communism, let alone expressing regret for her association with Castro. (She went on to run – twice – as the Communist Party USA's vice-presidential nominee, in 1980 and 1984). But today, she is one of the nation's most decorated academic celebrities, and has been canonized as a revered icon on the American left. Now a Distinguished Professor Emerita at UC Santa Cruz, Davis has been inducted into the National Women's Hall of Fame and retroactively named *TIME*'s "Woman of the Year" for 1971. (In 2020, the magazine also listed Davis as one of the 100 most influential people in the world). She was honorary co-chair of the 2017 Women's March.

Cuba has not only welcomed activists and intellectuals. It has long been the premier safe harbor for America's fugitive radicals, fleeing justice after carrying out bombings, murders and other terrorist attacks. By 1998, the FBI estimated some 77 felony fugitives had found protection from the Cuban state. This is not an ad-hoc humanitarian asylum policy, but a deliberate prong of Cuban foreign policy, executed and overseen by the Cuban state as part of its broader effort to maintain Havana's place at the center of the revolutionary left.

A substantial share of the American fugitives who have fled to Cuba are black extremists of one genre or another. Eldridge Cleaver, a violent convicted felon and the Black Panther Party's "Minister of Information," fled to Cuba in 1968 to escape attempted-murder charges for leading an armed ambush of police in Oakland, California. The next year, William Lee Brent – Cleaver's former Black Panther bodyguard – hijacked a passenger jet, putting a gun to the pilot's head and ordering him to reroute to Havana, in an effort to avoid trial for a shootout that critically wounded a police officer in San Francisco. (Brent was placed in jail for 22 months in Cuba, suspected of being a U.S. spy; he later married, earned a degree from the University of Havana, and lived in Cuba for 37 years until his death). Black Panther Party co-founder Huey P. Newton fled to Cuba rather than face trial for the fatal shooting of a 17-year-old Oakland prostitute and a separate alleged assault. (Two trials over the shooting ended in hung juries, and prosecutors ultimately dropped the murder charge). He lived there with his wife and two children as an "honored guest" before returning to the United States three years later.

This, too, was an intentional strategy of Cuban foreign policy towards America: Since the 1960s, Havana has served as a revolutionary capital for black nationalists, separatists, and militants. No

radical movement in the United States has been more intimately linked to – or aided by – the Cuban regime.

Black Nationalism in Havana

Cuba played a foundational role in the formation of Black Power ideology. Throughout both the twentieth and twenty-first century, the regime has sought to cultivate a fifth column of American black extremists through appeals to international racial solidarity – framing both Cubans and African-Americans as oppressed Third World peoples arrayed against the common enemy of white America.

This strategy was apparent from the very first years of the Castro regime. In 1959 and 1960, a long procession of black musicians, athletes, celebrities and activists were invited to visit Havana, where they were greeted with a red-carpet welcome – and returned to the United States singing the praises of the "New Cuba." In 1960, Castro signed a $287,000-a-year contract (the equivalent of more than $3.2 million today) with an all-black PR firm in Manhattan to promote Cuba as a tourist destination for American blacks. But Cuba did not merely try to cultivate favorable feelings among American blacks. It actively sought to transform their racial grievance into revolutionary consciousness. Castro made no secret of this. A June 1960 *TIME* article notes:

> *Of the numerous shortcomings of the U.S. that rouse the concern of Fidel Castro, one of the most worrisome is the plight of the U.S. Negro. As he sees it, the best way to end discrimination would be for Negroes to rise in arms against the imperialists in Washington, taking their cue from Castro's own revolt. "What would happen," he asks, his eyes alight at the possibility, "if the Negroes in the Southern U.S., so often lynched, were each given a rifle?"*

Robert F. Williams was an early iteration of the Castro government's protracted effort to organize the black minority as internal revolutionary agents. Williams first visited the island as part of a delegation of radical black activists in 1960, where he and several other founding ideologues of what would later become the Black Power movement – Harold Cruse, John Henrik Clarke, LeRoi Jones (Amiri Baraka), and Julian Mayfield – were welcomed by Castro and shared a stage with him in Cuba.

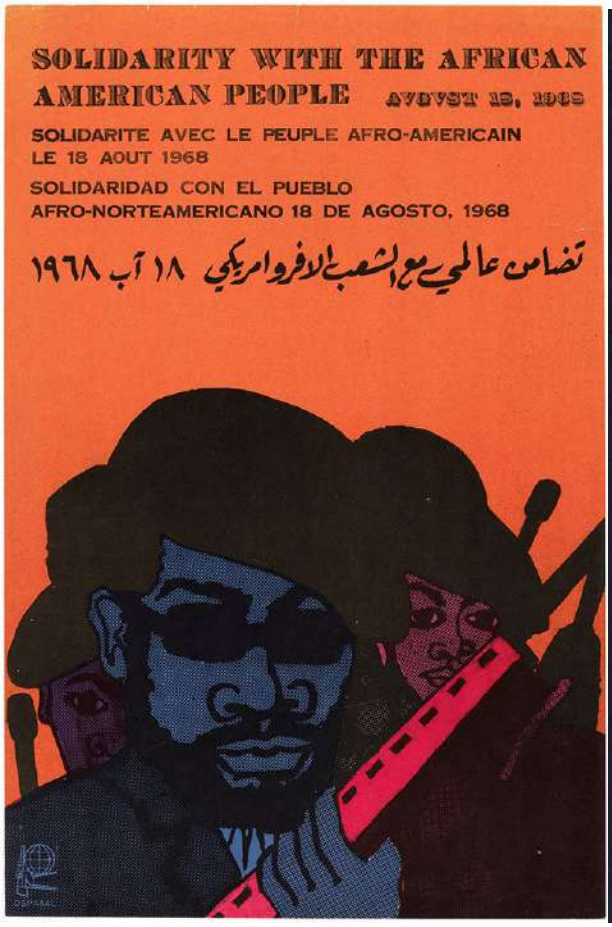
Robert F. Williams at a press conference in Detroit, Michigan, December 10th, 1975. (Getty Images)

Williams' Cuban state-backed broadcasts and writings played a key role in the formation of the budding Black Power movement. Williams' newsletter, *The Crusader,* accumulated tens of thousands of subscribers, and was circulated and distributed by the famous Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC); Williams was cited by SNCC members as inspiration for the group's subsequent embrace of armed militancy. While in Cuba, Williams authored *Negroes with Guns* (1962) – the book Huey Newton would later describe as one of the key intellectual influences for the Black Panthers.[18] Williams was also close friends and political partners with Malcolm X, who praised the former as "just a couple of years ahead of his time."[19] The Nation of Islam spokesman invited Williams to speak several times at his mosque, and even sought "to raise money to buy military carbines, machine guns, and dynamite" for Williams' militant cadre in North Carolina.[20]

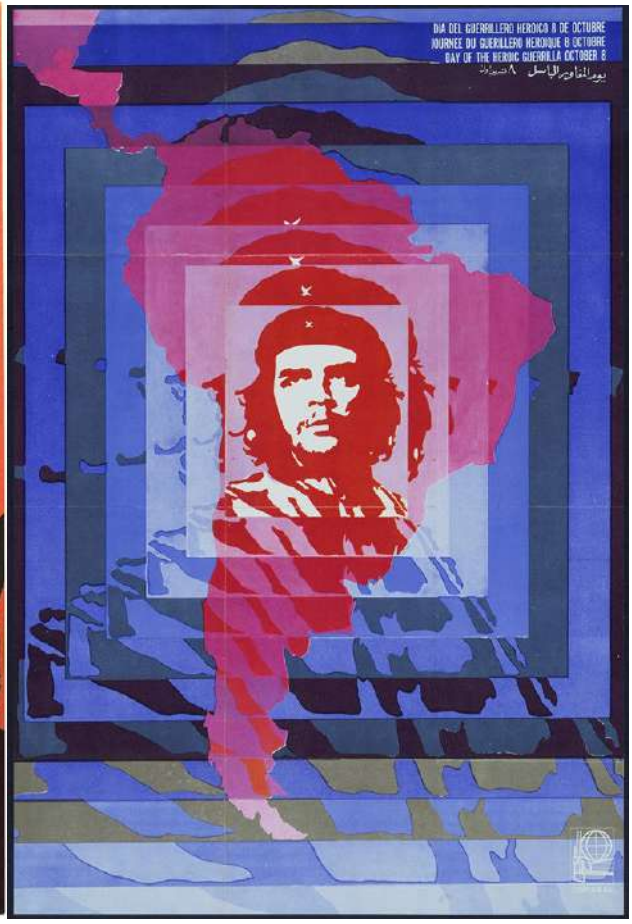
The relationship between American black radicals and Cuba sources back to the founding ideology of the Cuban regime itself. From the first years of the revolution, Castro sought to identify his internationalist struggle against American power from abroad with the black struggle against American power from within. Havana's official doctrine treated American blacks as an

[18] In his book *Revolutionary Suicide,* Newton, wrote: "*Negroes with Guns* by Robert Williams had a great influence on the kind of party we developed."
[19] Timothy B. Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie: Robert F. Williams and the Roots of Black Power* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 205.
[20] *Ibid,* 145.

oppressed people inside the imperial core, linked by racial kinship and political destiny to the colonized peoples of Latin America, Africa, and Asia. Castro's 1962 "Second Declaration of Havana" speech declared an irrepressible solidarity between Latin America's "disinherited racial groups" and "their brothers in the North" who could not "ride in the same vehicles as their white compatriots, nor attend the same schools, nor even die in the same hospitals." Cuban propaganda organs like *Tricontinental* cheered that "the radical Negro vanguard is becoming aware that their fight is a part of the independence movement of the colonized peoples and that their enemy is Yankee imperialism."



"Solidarity with the African American People" (1968)



"Day of the Heroic Guerilla" (1968)

In the United States, many black radicals enthusiastically agreed. In 1961, a cohort of leading black intellectuals and activists – sponsored by the Fair Play for Cuba Committee – published an open letter condemning the U.S. government-backed invasion of the Bay of Pigs. The authors (which included Robert Williams, LeRoi Jones, and W.E.B. Du Bois) framed the U.S.-Cuba conflict in explicitly racial terms, condemning the "gang of ousted white Cuban politicians" who had led the Bay of Pigs invasion in an effort "to crush a free people linked to us by bonds of blood and a common heritage." (The letter made a point of noting that "one-third of Cuba's people are Afro-Cubans, of the same African descent as we"). The authors framed the struggle

for black civil rights in the United States and Cuba's fight against American imperialism as linked, exhorting their fellow American blacks: "Afro-Americans, don't be fooled – the enemies of the Cubans are our enemies, the Jim Crow bosses of this land where we are still denied our rights. The Cubans are our friends, the enemies of our enemies."

The budding Black Power movement in the United States saw the Cuban Revolution as the model for armed resistance, and explicitly identified with the militant Third World solidarity that Castro and his counterparts sought to appeal to. When the Cuban leader arrived in New York with his delegation for the United Nations assembly in 1960, they relocated from their upscale Manhattan hotel to a location in Harlem at the invitation of Malcolm X. There, he was received by a cheering crowd of thousands of American black supporters. A black newspaper at the time gleefully characterized the move as Castro having "told white America to go to hell."

Fidel Castro meets with Malcolm X in 1960. (Getty Images)

Third World Alliance

The vision that the Cuban revolutionary project began to articulate in the 1960s became the model for Black Power militants: Cuba's distinctive brand of Third World internationalism, and its explicit appeals to the oppressed "Negroes" of the United States as a constituent element in its coalition, helped create the ideological infrastructure in which black militants could reinterpret

themselves not as a minority within the United States, but as a key agent of the Third World revolution. Black Power, in this framework, was not merely a domestic demand for rights, but a front of the global anti-colonial war being waged inside the imperial core.

Indeed, Stokely Carmichael's 1967 speech at the Organization of Latin American Solidarity (OLAS), titled "Black Power and the Third World," described blacks as "internal colonies" within the United States: In both "practical economic and political terms," Carmichael told the audience in Havana, "black communities in America are the victims of white imperialism and colonial exploitation." Thus, "black power means that we see ourselves as part of the Third World; that we see our struggle as closely related to liberation struggles around the world…there is only one place for black Americans in these struggles, and that is on the side of the Third World."

Cuba's role in forming this militant Third Worldist consciousness among black radicals was not just ideological but institutional. The regime worked doggedly to build close political relationships with many of the leaders of the Black Power movement as it solidified its place as the world revolutionary capital. (According to some sources, Robert Williams himself was present at the Tricontinental Conference in 1966). Carmichael attended OLAS as an honorary delegate, and received a personal tour of the island by Castro behind the wheel of a jeep. The Cuban leader heaped praise on Carmichael, reportedly introducing him to a 400,000-person crowd in Havana as "one of the most distinguished pro-civil rights leaders in the United States." The next month, he hailed Carmichael's visit as "the strengthening of relations between the revolutionary movement of Latin America and the revolutionary movement inside the United States," predicting that the revolution in America would come from its "Negro sector." Carmichael, for his part, praised the *Tricontinental* magazine as "a bible in revolutionary circles."

Figures like Carmichael typified Cuba's influence in driving a faction of the black civil rights movement to embrace political violence, shifting from a desire to integrate into American society to a determination to wage revolution against it. Carmichael – who later changed his name to "Kwame Ture" – entered U.S. politics through the mainstream channels of the civil rights movement, leading SNCC nonviolent organizing efforts in the South. But by the mid-1960s, as chairman of the SNCC, Carmichael emerged as one of the most radical and extreme early proponents of "Black Power" – a term that he himself was credited with popularizing.

Stokely Carmichael in Washington in 1970. (Getty Images)

Black Power was more than a slogan. It was a declaration of a fundamental break from the dominant integrationist theory of change associated with Martin Luther King, Jr. and the mainstream civil rights movement. In lieu of largely nonviolent activism, interracial coalition-building, and moral appeals to middle-class American norms, Carmichael's SNCC – which had pointedly dropped the word "nonviolent" from its name by 1969 – and its ideological counterparts counseled armed self-defense and revolutionary confrontation.

In mainstream academic circles today, the term "black radicalism" frequently encompasses various different sub-genres – black nationalism, Pan-Africanism, Black Marxism, and broader Third Worldist movements – but each of these strains can be traced back to the same ideological innovations pioneered by Carmichael and his counterparts: a militant and separatist racial identity that rejected the whole of the existing American order, and advocated a struggle for black "self-determination" by any means necessary. Organizations like the SNCC served as early and foundational proponents of this political current – which continues to shape and influence American politics and culture to this day.

Carmichael and the SNCC delegation were purportedly surprised at the 1967 OLAS conference's keen awareness of the black struggle in the United States. But they shouldn't have been. Cuba's

revolutionary ideology rested on the claim that U.S. power was illegitimate at home and abroad – that the same empire which dominated Latin America, Vietnam, and Africa also ruled over an exploited black population inside its own borders. In Havana, American black activists encountered delegations from African anti-colonial movements and revolutionary governments across the Third World. Their direct contact with revolutionaries from South Africa, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Angola, Guinea, Algeria, and elsewhere accelerated their conviction that the black struggle belonged to a much larger battle against American racism and imperialism being waged across the world – from guerrilla wars in Latin America to Marxist insurgencies against Western colonial governments in Africa.

In this way, black radicalism was absorbed into the Cuban regime's larger project: turning the anti-American grievances of "Third World peoples" – at home and abroad – into one front of a single revolutionary war.

The legacy of this particular ideology did not end with the collapse of SNCC, Carmichael's departure from the United States, or even his death in Africa in 1998. Quite the opposite, in fact: The central ideas he popularized — Black Power, the reimagining of blacks as a colonized people inside the United States, and the now-widespread concept of "institutional racism," which Carmichael is widely credited with inventing — became the operating grammar of black radical (and later, mainstream liberal) politics for the next half-century. What began in the mid-1960s as the language of a militant vanguard has since migrated into the nation's premier activist organizations, university departments, nonprofit networks, government agencies, public-health bureaucracies, and mainstream political culture.

Cuba's Celebrity Fugitive

A disproportionate share of the activists, intellectuals, and other radicals who would come to shape leftist racial politics in America were linked, at some point, to Cuba. That much is clearly evident in the composition of Cuba's American fugitive population. Among the remaining fugitives who may still be alive on the island is Charles "Charlie" Hill, one of three militants from the "Republic of New Afrika" – a black separatist movement that sought to claim Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, and South Carolina as an independent black nation – who murdered a New Mexico police officer and then hijacked an airliner to Havana in 1971. The Republic of New Afrika's first president was none other than Robert Williams.

The most famous of these names was Assata Shakur. A former Black Panther, Shakur joined the Black Liberation Army (BLA) in the early 1970s – described by federal law enforcement as one of the most violent militant organizations of the period. The BLA was openly and explicitly committed to what it described as the "revolutionary executions" (e.g., targeted murder) of police officers and the "expropriation" (e.g., robbery) of money from the white supremacist capitalist system. The group carried out dozens of violent attacks in the 1970s, including assassinations,

armed robberies, prison breaks, bombings, and the murder of – according to some estimates – more than 12 police officers. (In at least one case, it was accused of being responsible for bombing the funeral of a slain police officer as well).

In 1973, Shakur (born JoAnne Deborah Byron) and two other armed BLA militants were pulled over for a broken taillight by two state troopers on the New Jersey Turnpike. The three extremists proceeded to engage the police in a shootout, wounded one trooper and executing his partner, Trooper Werner Foerster, at point-blank range – shooting Foerster multiple times in the head with his own service revolver. Shakur was convicted of murder and several other charges and sentenced to life in prison. Two years into her sentence, an armed group of BLA associates and Weather Underground alumni took two corrections guards hostage and broke Shakur out of prison. She fled to Cuba, where Castro granted her asylum, government-paid living expenses, and a position of honor as a resident political celebrity. She lived under the protection of the Cuban regime – despite frequent extradition requests from the U.S. government – until her death in 2025.

Mugshot of Assata Shakur after killing Trooper Foerster (Getty Images)

Shakur was later joined in Cuba by her comrade Cheri Dalton, one of the other BLA militants charged with helping Shakur escape prison. Dalton (later known as Nehanda Isoke Abiodun) was also indicted in connection with one of the most infamous BLA-led "expropriations": A 1981 armed robbery in New York in which BLA and former Weather Underground members – including Kathy Boudin, whose son Chesa would go on to serve as one of the high-profile George Soros-backed District Attorney of San Francisco – ambushed a Brink's truck and stole

$1.6 million, shooting and killing a Brink's guard and two police officers and seriously wounding several others in the process.

Figures like Shakur – and with them, Cuban influence – remain extraordinarily influential over left-wing politics in the United States today. With the eager patronage of Havana, Shakur leveraged her position as a Cuban state-backed political celebrity to become one of the most significant revolutionary icons and influences for American black activists and progressives writ large – attaining what the *Washington Post* obituary dubbed "a near-mythical status" on the U.S. activist left.

The Cuban state aggressively leveraged Shakur as a propaganda mechanism, and to great effect. Shakur became the globally recognized face of the themes Havana had sought to push for decades – U.S. racism, black internationalism, anti-imperialism, and Cuba as the spiritual center of the Third World struggle. The U.S. government's frequent and unsuccessful efforts to return Shakur to America to face justice only served to reinforce this dynamic: To the FBI, she was a domestic terrorist fugitive. To Cuba, she became a "political exile," a "civil rights fighter," and a victim of U.S. racism and repression. In 2005, when U.S. officials placed Shakur on a terrorism watch list and New Jersey announced a $1 million reward for her capture, Castro seized the opportunity to deliver a major televised address to personally defend Shakur, declaring her "a true political prisoner" and a victim of "the fierce repression against the Black movement in the United States."

In the same way that Castro's support for Williams' "Radio Free Dixie" helped to shape the Black Power movement in the United States, Cuban support for Shakur's continued English-language writings and cultural influence helped to fashion her into a saint for the Black Lives Matter era of U.S. radical activism. (Shakur was reportedly given a job as the English-language editor for Radio Habana). Shakur herself enthusiastically fed this perception, declaring herself a "20th century escaped slave" – living in "Cuba, one of the largest, most resistant and most courageous 'palenques' (Maroon camps) that has ever existed on the face of this planet" – in a high-profile 1998 open letter. *Assata: An Autobiography,* published from exile in 1987, was one of the most widely-touted texts of the Black Lives Matter movement, and continues to grace the reading lists of the National Book Foundation and official syllabi of universities across the United States.

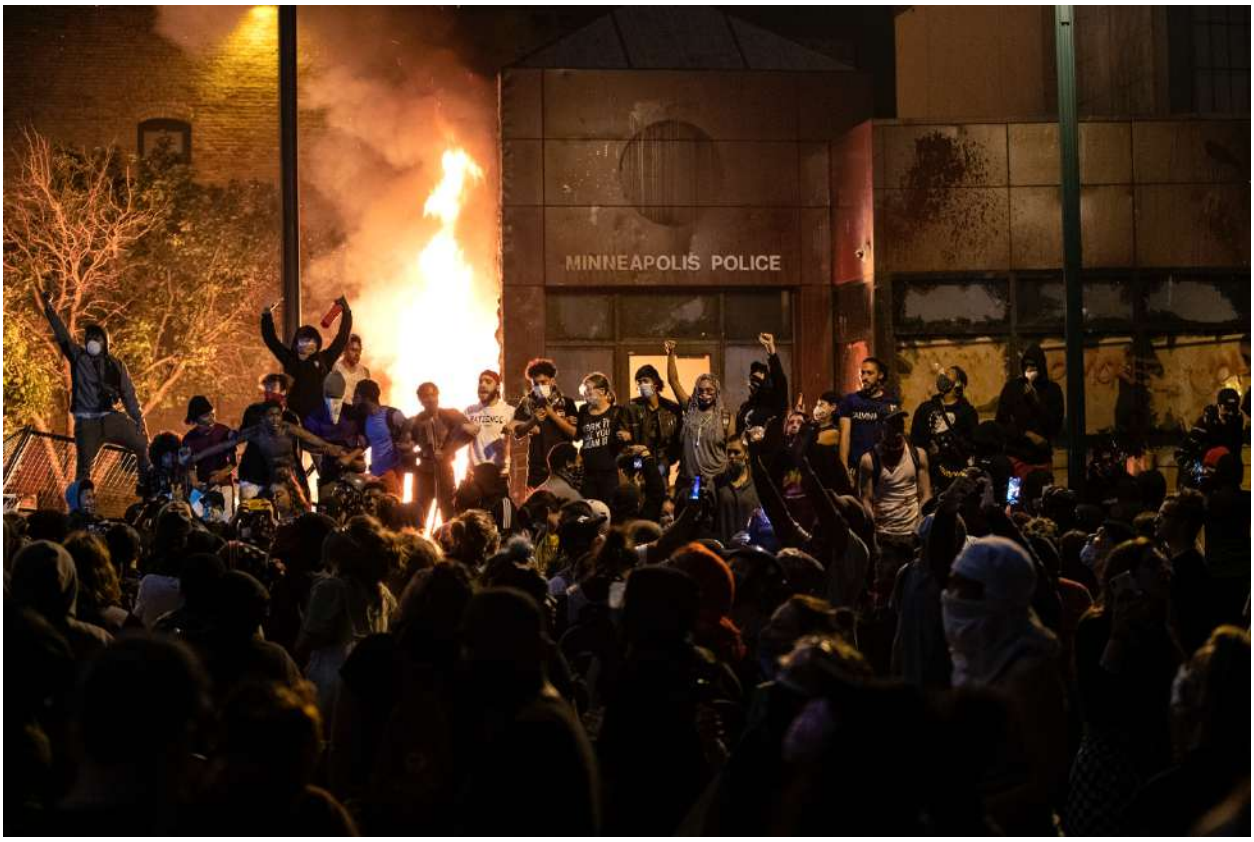
As her fame and martyr status grew, Shakur also became a major draw for the "socio-political tourism" Cuba sought to promote, with generations of reverent American activists, writers, journalists, academics and musicians making the pilgrimage to the island to glimpse the revolutionary-in-exile. Shakur was made available to the world via a carefully-curated stream of festivals, conferences and brigades, delivering lectures to visiting student delegations, and reportedly appearing in the VIP section of the annual May Day parade in Havana. "Eyes of the

Rainbow," a Cuban-made documentary built primarily around personal interviews with Shakur in Havana – and narrated, in part, by Cheri Dalton – debuted to much fanfare in Havana, and was heavily promoted by Cuban state cultural institutions. The film is still routinely screened by Cuban solidarity organizations (in both the United States and Cuba) today.

BLM: The New Front

Nowhere has Cuba's "Shakur strategy" been more pronounced than the modern Black Lives Matter movement. Shakur's death in 2025 was met with effusive eulogies across the activist network: Black Lives Matter at School hailed Shakur as "the blueprint of what the power of a Black woman looks like" and celebrated that she "was able to die a free woman in Havana." The National Conference of Black Lawyers issued a statement saying it had provided "lifetime legal support" for "Sister Assata" over 52 years and praising Cuba's defiance towards U.S. efforts to return her. The Black Alliance for Peace called Shakur's legacy a "blueprint for internationalist solidarity." Black Lives Matter Grassroots published a statement honoring "Mama Assata" – "our beloved comrade, mother, warrior, truest revolutionary, and lover of the people" – and claiming the U.S. government "cornered her, framed her, caged her, made her a fugitive, then named her a terrorist." The group's statement praised the Black Liberation Army and Castro for having "rescued" Shakur and provided her with "protection and sanctuary."

Shakur's influence has always been infused into BLM's public language. A quote from Shakur's autobiography – "it is our duty to fight for freedom" – is emblazoned in large text on the front page of BLM's website, and was credited by BLM co-founder Alicia Garza in 2014 as a key influence in her "organizing work." Assata's Daughters, a Chicago-based BLM offshoot, is a police-abolitionist activist group that claims to "develop and train" young black activists "in the spirit of Assata." (Its youth program introduces children ages 6-13 "to Assata Shakur and her revolutionary politic," while its multi-year "Assata's University" trains black activists ages 14 and up).



George Floyd protest, Minneapolis Police Third Precinct, May 28, 2020. (Getty Images)

In a particular twist of irony, amid massive anti-government demonstrations on the island in 2021 – among the largest ever seen in the history of the Cuban communist regime – BLM leaders firmly sided with the Cuban government over the protestors in the streets.

Even as legacy human rights groups raised alarm about the systematic abuses being committed in the government crackdown – and observers noted that Afro-Cubans, specifically, were often the ones driving the uprisings – the official BLM organization released a statement blaming U.S. government policies, while declaring that "Cuba has historically demonstrated solidarity with oppressed peoples of African descent," such as its protection of "Black revolutionaries like Assata Shakur" and its support for "Black liberation struggles" in Africa.

In the face of ensuing criticism for the glaring double standard, the organization doubled down, defiantly reasserting its "unequivocal support for Cuba."

All of this came on the heels of the Cuban regime's gleeful support of the George Floyd uprisings. As protests and riots swept American cities in the summer of 2020, Cuban state media and officials issued daily commentary portraying the United States as a systemically racist country morally unfit to criticize Cuba's human-rights record. Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel denounced America's "practically uncontrolled expressions of hatred, racism, police

brutality" in a September 2020 speech at the UN General Assembly. At the same time, the Cuban regime was violently repressing and imprisoning Afro-Cuban dissident artists and others who had criticized police killings of Afro-Cubans, and protested for artistic freedom inside Cuba.

It is difficult to overstate the success of Cuba's Shakur strategy. Shakur's celebrity status serves as yet another example of how Cuba's distinctive genre of Third World leftism has graduated from the fringes of the 1960s into the mainstream. Her death was not just mourned by BLM activists; it was met with a flood of glowing obituaries in legacy American media. The NAACP praised the convicted murderer as "a revolutionary who never wavered in her fight for Black liberation and a symbol of resistance against oppression." Democratic congresswoman Ayanna Pressley tweeted "Rest in Power," and shared a video of herself leading a crowd in call-and-response recitation of one of Shakur's slogans. On the campaign trail in 2025, New York Mayor Zohran Mamdani refused to denounce a Democratic Socialists of America tribute to Shakur.

In 1998, Democratic congresswoman Maxine Waters – who describes herself as "a friend of Cuba," and has visited the island several times herself – wrote to Castro urging him not to extradite Shakur to the United States, referring to Shakur as a "freedom fighter" who had "fled the United States from political persecution and received political asylum in Cuba."

VII. FRONT GROUPS & FELLOW TRAVELERS

CUBA THE CAPITAL OF 21ST CENTURY COMMUNISM

VII. Front Groups and Fellow Travelers

"There is overwhelming evidence that the machinery of the Cuban Government has been progressively organized over the years, to carry out its number one task – the export of Communist subversion…Cuba moved rapidly along the road to the fulfillment of its role in the international Communist conspiracy from the moment Fidel Castro's hatred of the United States became manifest upon his taking power in 1959."

– U.S. Senate report, 1966[21]

While ordinary Cubans suffer the full brunt of their nation's failed state – frequently facing severe shortages for the most essential necessities, from food and energy to basic medical needs – the Cuban regime has continued to pour resources into sustaining and expanding a wide range of ideological and intelligence front groups targeting the United States. These groups have played a key role in building, training and backing generations of American left-wing activists, assets, and even domestic terrorists.

As is frequently the case, this network serves both an ideological and material interest for Cuban elites: It not only functions as a tool for the communist regime to influence and undermine American institutions, gain actionable intelligence, and build valuable political support for its revolutionary cause, but also as a source of financial support for the failing Cuban state and its decrepit economy. In this sense, the Cuban regime functions less as a vehicle for the interests of ordinary Cubans – who are subject to brutal repression and often unable to freely work, assemble, speak, travel, or provide for their families – than a one-stop shop political service for the rotating cast of foreign left-wing activists and groups that inhabit the regime's global ideological apparatus.

[21] U.S. Senate Committee on the Judiciary, Subcommittee to Investigate the Administration of the Internal Security Act and Other Internal Security Laws, *The Tricontinental Conference of African, Asian, and Latin American Peoples: A Staff Study*, 89th Cong., 2nd sess.

ICAP

The central nexus of the entire Cuban intelligence and influence network is the *Instituto Cubano de Amistad con los Pueblos* (English: The Cuban Institute of Friendship with Peoples) – or "ICAP."

Founded in 1960 by Fidel Castro, ICAP ostensibly exists to promote goodwill toward Cuba through a global infrastructure of "friendship" and "solidarity" organizations and deep, longstanding ties to U.S. universities, student groups and activist movements. ICAP, which claims to have more than 2,000 solidarity organizations across over 150 countries, serves as the main organizing hub of Cuba's ideological network. It coordinates research, educational, and cultural exchanges between American and Cuban institutions, builds relationships between American political movements and Cuban officials, and harnesses its global reach to draw left-wing activists, intellectuals, students, influencers and politicians to Cuba from across the world. The result is a constant stream of Americans flowing to Cuba, with ICAP organizing logistics and playing on-island host for practically all of the delegations and tours (including the Venceremos Brigade) that have crossed the Florida Straits since the early 1960s.

Fidel Castro at the United Nations General Assembly. (Getty Images)

Both U.S. intelligence assessments and direct defector testimonies have indicated that ICAP often operates in lockstep with Cuban intelligence. Former DI officers have claimed that roughly

90 percent of ICAP staff are affiliated with the Cuban spy agency, and that two officers from a specialized Cuban unit are "assigned to ICAP to help screen and assess members of the Venceremos Brigade and other sympathetic organizations."

ICAP's leadership class illustrates the group's open relationship with Cuban intelligence. Perez Mendez, a former DI captain, served as chief of ICAP's Overseas Community Department himself. And today, ICAP is currently run by a convicted Cuban spy, Fernando González Llort, who was arrested in Miami as part of the Wasp Network in 1998. González served 15 years in a U.S. prison before returning to Cuba where he was showered in state awards and eventually given his prestigious position at the head of Cuba's premier global influence group. One of ICAP's vice presidents, Victor Fidel Gaute Lopez, joined the organization directly from his prior post at the Communist Party of Cuba's Committee Secretariat, where he served as head of the Party's ideological department.

The Cuban regime leverages ICAP's "solidarity" networks to drive policy, shape activist movements, and maintain a stable of advocates and agents in the United States. That was visible in practice in late May when clips leaked of a Cuban Embassy diplomat greeting a room of U.S. labor union officials, nonprofit workers, and activists by their first names via video call in a California union building. The meeting appeared to be a strategy session, with the Cuban official briefing the American activists on upcoming congressional votes, lobbying plans, and nationwide organizing campaigns – including "action days on the Hill every week" – on behalf of Cuba's interests.

ICAP and its affiliates also organize Cuba-U.S. "sister city" partnerships – another venture that has been exploited by Cuban intelligence. According to Simmons, DI officers were involved in six of the initial eight U.S.-Cuba sister city arrangements.

These partnerships provide Cuba with access to city councils, universities, trade delegations, churches, hospitals, and local activists, collectively feeding a nationwide pro-Cuban constituency that can then lobby the U.S. government on Havana's behalf. In cities with Cuban sister city partnerships, local governments have frequently passed resolutions advocating for Cuban regime interests. The ICAP-affiliated National Network on Cuba boasts of 117 resolutions representing 60 million people in the United States – across U.S. state legislatures, city councils, county and school boards, labor unions, and other organizations – advocating for reforms such as lifting the U.S. embargo and removing Cuba from the State Sponsor of Terrorism (SSOT) list.

The sister cities program also bolsters Cuba's "people-to-people" influence operations by recruiting American mayors, congressmen, and business elites to the island. DI's domination of ICAP and other Cuban civil associations, its presence in the formation of early sister-city programs, and Cuba's established record of targeting U.S. officials raise serious concerns about the counterintelligence risks posed by travel of American leaders to the island under the current

regime. Cuban intelligence defectors have recounted being tasked with bugging "visiting Americans' hotel rooms…with both cameras and listening devices," noting that "famous Americans" were "the priority objectives" for Cuban intelligence.

ICAP ultimately serves as the organizational node for the wide range of civil society groups, left-wing activist organizations, and NGOs that collectively comprise a major arm of the Cuban network in the United States. The size and scale of these organizations serve as a force multiplier for Cuba, providing it with far more power, influence and reach than it could ever leverage on its own – and serving as a mechanism by which a sprawling, seemingly decentralized network can be mobilized in service of the Cuban revolutionary state.

After decades of operating freely under the innocuous and euphemistic pretenses of "friendship" and "solidarity," ICAP and its network have begun to garner serious scrutiny from the U.S. government. In June 2026, the State Department designated ICAP for sanctions under President Trump's Executive Order 14404, identifying it as an instrumentality of the Cuban government that "supports Cuban intelligence and counterintelligence activities." The same action sanctioned Amistur Cuba SA – the "socio-political tourism" travel agency that operates on ICAP's behalf – along with several other regime-linked institutions and actors. The following month, federal agents apprehended and deported a Cuban national and his family after Secretary Rubio terminated his legal status due to his long-standing association with ICAP.

National Network on Cuba

One of ICAP's major U.S. counterparts is the National Network on Cuba (NNOC), a coalition of more than 60 American groups – including the Democratic Socialists of America, National Lawyers Guild, CodePink, and Communist Party USA – which is formally committed to lobbying for an end to the U.S. embargo and other "imperialist" policies against Cuba. NNOC functions as another key node for coordination between the Cuban regime and the American far left, partnering with ICAP every year to coordinate U.S. delegations to Cuba and conduct "solidarity" conferences in which American activists meet with Cuban officials to devise strategies for expanding and exploiting Cuban influence networks in the United States.

NNOC's conferences, rallies and organized travel delegations to Cuba are a striking illustration of the depth of Cuban penetration in even the mainstream institutional organs of the American left, garnering support from representatives of major labor unions, elite universities, and powerful progressive foundations and NGOs. ICAP has described NNOC and its affiliates as "the voice of Cuba in the United States."

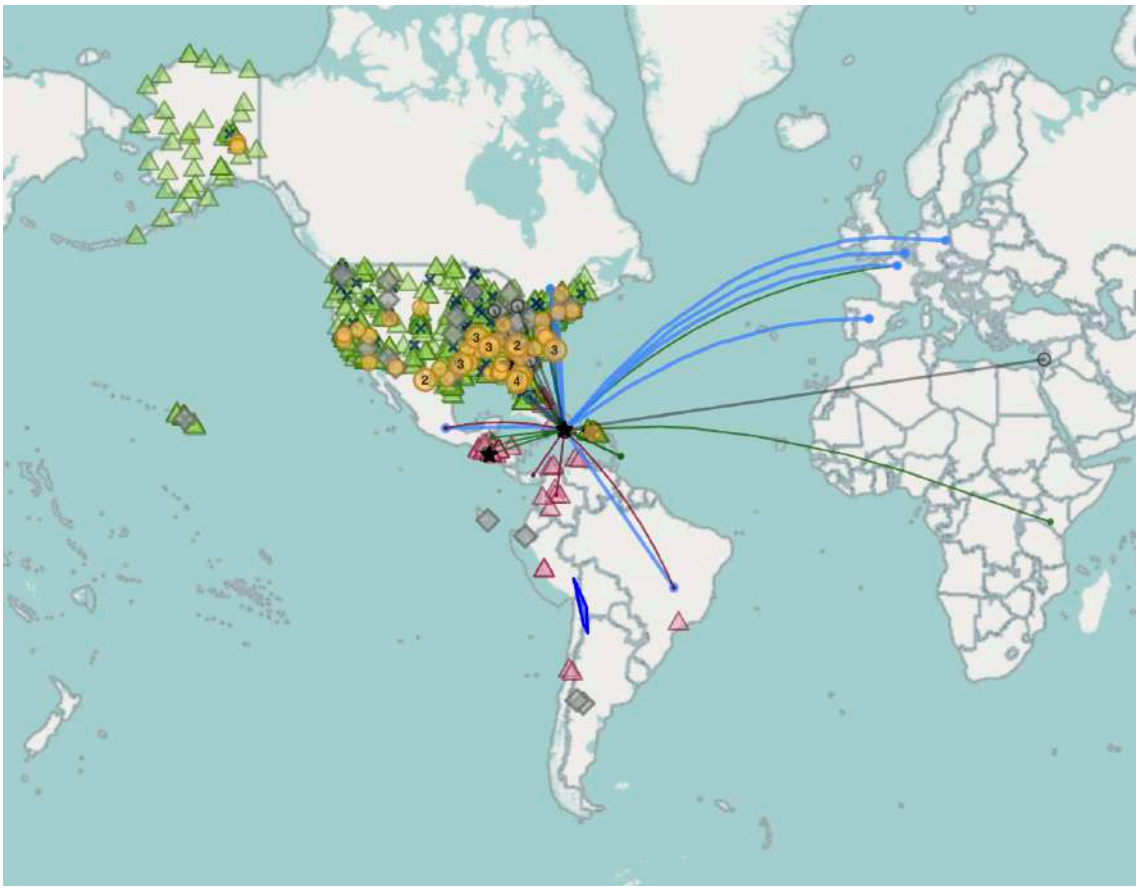
Recent events have testified to the persistent power of this network, the extent to which it is prepared to utilize its organized infrastructure in American civil society to act as a fifth column

for the Cuban regime, and its inextricable linkage to the broader suite of organizations, movements, and causes on the American radical left.

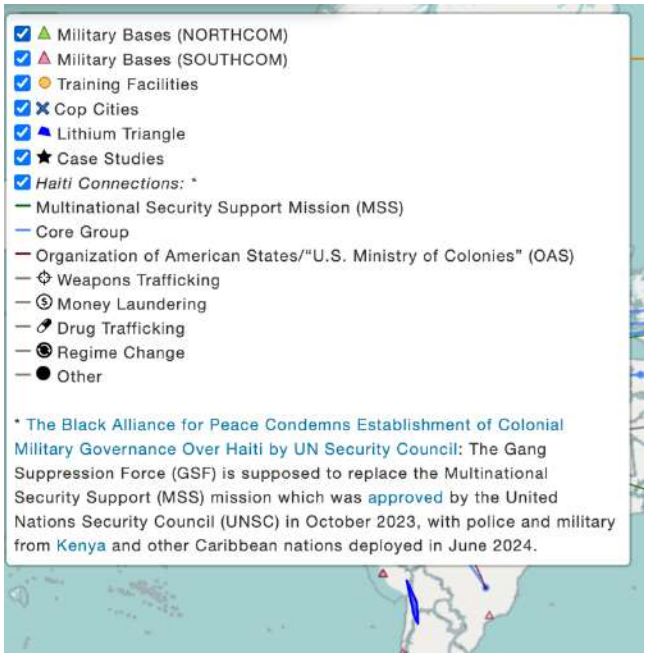
In June 2026, NNOC began distributing a "National Rapid Response Plan" outlining a detailed strategy for activating and launching "coordinated nationwide actions" against federal institutions, U.S. military bases, and ICE detention centers and field offices in the United States within 24 hours of U.S. military action (or the imminent threat of it) against Cuba. The plan, which purports to be a blueprint to "make it politically and materially costly for the U.S. government to wage war on Cuba," meticulously details specific activation triggers, target categories and priorities, tiered action strategies – with guidance tailored to geography and population density – and operational timeline for coordinating actions across its nationwide network, establishing different action timetables depending on when the trigger occurs so as to achieve "rapid mobilization…across timezones."

The document is explicit about the Cuban network's kinship with domestic left-wing causes, instructing activists to target ICE detention centers and field offices in a strategic effort to link "Cuba solidarity to anti-ICE/immigrant defense work happening nationwide." (In addition to the three priority target categories – federal buildings, U.S. military bases and recruitment offices, and ICE facilities – "sports arenas during high-visibility events" are offered as a fourth "optional target").

NNOC's materials reveal the continuing reach, coordination and sophistication of Cuba's subversive capabilities on American territory. The June 2026 rapid response plan directs its members to "power mapping" resources to identify and coordinate with key network affiliates and groups in their area, synchronizing action across a sprawling nationwide network. It also directs activists to a "resource to locate local militarization sites" built by an allied group, Black Alliance for Peace, which exhaustively chronicles potential targets across the United States and the broader Western Hemisphere. The target guide pinpoints the exact size and geographic location of some 1,335 U.S. military commands, bases, and training facilities across the Americas, as well as so-called "Cop Cities" (domestic law enforcement training and recruitment hubs) on American soil – a practical application of the Third Worldist doctrine that U.S. government repression of "black and brown communities" in the United States is part of the same phenomenon as U.S. imperialist oppression abroad.



The Black Alliance for Peace map chronicling potential targets across the United States and the Western Hemisphere.



Map key pinpointing the size and geographic location of U.S. military commands, bases, and training facilities.

Black Alliance for Peace – a frequent NNOC collaborator – describes the project as a "map of U.S. militarization" in the Americas, which should be used as "a basis" for revolutionary activists to "collectively strategize how and where to organize and agitate." It remains pointedly light on public details regarding what that "agitation" might entail, noting that "for security purposes," it does not share in-depth information on the nature of what it describes as "active and mobilized resistance" taking place across the hemisphere.

IFCO/Pastors for Peace

The Interreligious Foundation for Community Organization (IFCO), founded by the United Presbyterian Church in 1967, is a veteran organization in the ICAP-NNOC nexus. Created as an ecumenical organization for the hard-left wing of American religious life, it was "embroiled in controversy over its funding of community groups involved in militant and protest activities" from the very beginning – including black militants in the United States and revolutionary Marxist movements in Africa. Its founder, Rev. Lucius Walker, maintained "a friendship" with Castro "that lasted forever," according to Walker's daughter.

In its early years, IFCO's work was not primarily centered on Cuba. Its activism instead focused on a suite of black radical movements in the United States, as well as several other groups advocating various genres of racial revolution. In 1969, it organized and jointly led the National Black Economic Development Conference, in which black extremists demanded $500 million from America's white churches and synagogues "for their complicity in racism" in what was purportedly the first major call for reparations in the twentieth century.[22] IFCO quickly began backing "liberation" movements in Africa as well, including providing both funding and political support to the militant communist Zimbabwe African People's Union.

IFCO's signature program, Pastors for Peace, was created in 1988, designed specifically to organize aid caravans to leftist governments and movements across Central and South America. The organization's first convoy to Cuba came in 1992, in an effort to revitalize the communist government after the fall of the Soviet Union. Over the next 25 years, IFCO/Pastors for Peace would transport more than 4,000 tons of supplies to Cuba via dozens of "friendshipment caravans." In 1999, IFCO began organizing delegations of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) to visit Cuba.

IFCO provides another example of how the Cuba-ICAP solidarity network facilitates radical agitation within the United States. The foundation serves as "fiscal sponsor" for a suite of far-left domestic activist groups, facilitating tax-exempt donations – and handling grant management, tax compliance, financial reporting, and other administrative activities – to a network of radical organizations and collectives. IFCO's current fiscal sponsorship relationships include:

[22] As recounted by IFCO's own history page.

- **The Jericho Movement:** A revolutionary organization emerging from the violent black nationalist "Republic of New Afrika" and "New Afrikan Liberation Front" groups, which purports to work to free "political prisoners and prisoners of war" jailed by the U.S. government. The political prisoners in question hail from a suite of far-left terrorist groups, including the Black Panther Party, Los Macheteros, the May 19th Communist Organization, American Indian Movement, the Black Liberation Army, and the Earth Liberation Front.

- **Equality for Flatbush:** A Black Lives Matter "abolitionist" group advocating for "the abolition of the police, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), and prisons," with a focus on fighting "gentrification" and "police violence" in Brooklyn. Conducts "cop watch" patrols to confront police in the area. Coordinated "24-hour jail support" for arrested rioters during the George Floyd uprisings.

- **Claudia Jones School:** Named for a black nationalist and Communist Party activist, the Claudia Jones School is a Washington, D.C.-based is an activist organizing collective claiming to perform "popular education for the masses of working and oppressed people within the U.S. empire." It is heavily involved in pro-Cuba lobbying – organizing several recent Cuba "solidarity" protests and events in D.C. – and linked to the broader Cuba network. Also participates in various other left-wing protests, including several recent anti-ICE direct actions.

- **Haitian Women for Haitian Refugees:** An activist group "led by Black women" organizing "to defend Black migrants, stop anti-Black deportation, and end the surveillance and detention of migrants in the United States."

- **changingFrequencies:** A self-described "Black Queer Feminist led, abolitionist organizing project" that works "to disrupt harms and violence from the Medical Industrial Complex (MIC)." Claims to be "rooted in Black, Indigenous, and Global South Feminism movements that are reimagining and rebuilding our own systems towards liberation."

IFCO's previous fiscal sponsorships have included groups like Viva Palestina US, the American branch of an international network that carried out a series of convoys to Gaza. The Viva Palestina convoys invited international scrutiny for collaborating with the terrorist group Hamas, distributing "aid" in the form of vehicles and bags of cash directly to Hamas leaders and working closely with organizations and individuals previously designated or investigated for Hamas financing. (In 2009, Viva Palestina's leader, the British MP George Galloway, handed a bag of cash directly to Hamas Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh, boasting on film: "I, personally, am about to break the sanctions on the elected government of Palestine. By Allah, we carried a lot of cash here…We are giving you now 100 vehicles and all of the contents. And we make no apology for what I am about to say: We are giving them to the elected government of Palestine;

to the Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh"). The arrangement served as a protective shroud for the network: while Viva Palestina lacked formal corporate or non-profit status, IFCO collected millions of dollars in donations on its behalf.

IFCO is also the sole U.S. administrator of the scholarship program at the Latin American School of Medicine (ELAM) in Havana, offering full-ride scholarships to low-income American students and affiliates of Cuban-aligned solidarity networks at U.S. universities. ELAM graduates are immersed in Cuban revolutionary ideology and introduced to a broader network of U.S.-based activists as well as members of foreign terror networks such as the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. The "one condition" of the IFCO scholarship is that graduates return to the United States. Today, ELAM graduates are reportedly working in over 30 U.S. states. The idea for the scholarship was first proposed – and actively lobbied for – by Fidel Castro himself.

IFCO's past board members have included Manolo De Los Santos, co-founder and current head of the People's Forum, a major activist group in Cuba's U.S. ideological network. Claudia de la Cruz, who co-founded the People's Forum with Santos – and served as its co-executive director – is currently IFCO's executive director. In 2024, de la Cruz was the presidential candidate for the Party for Socialism and Liberation, another Cuba-linked leftist group that has played a key role in driving recent U.S. protests and street unrest.

National Lawyers Guild

The National Lawyers Guild (NLG) is one of the most persistently relevant – and insidious – organizations in Cuba's U.S. network. The association of extreme-left lawyers and radical street activists has played a key role in a disproportionate share of the far-left terror and violence that has plagued the United States from the 1960s up to today. Throughout its history, it has maintained intimate ties to Cuba and other communist regimes and has explicitly sought to advance the causes of the international far left, including by working to defend and facilitate terrorism and extremist violence – from the Weather Underground of the 1970s to the violent BLM militants and Antifa terror cells of today.

From its very first years of existence, the NLG operated as a de facto communist front group, designed to organize and agitate for revolution in the United States. Even before the emergence of the New Left in the 1960s, a long line of reports, investigations, and first-person accounts attested to the organization's purpose. In a sworn congressional testimony in 1939, the general secretary of the Communist Party USA boasted that the NLG was one of several "transmission belts" for communist penetration of American institutions. Nine years later, a former member of the National Committee of the Communist Party testified that the organization was "a complete duplicate of the Communist Party's hopes and aspirations," noting that even the non-Communist lawyers in the group "play the Communist game either wittingly or unwittingly."

It was in the 1960s, however, that the Guild became what it is today. The organization limped into that decade on the verge of collapse, having lost most of its members and institutional credibility amid the investigations and attacks of the anti-communist McCarthy era. Just a few years later, however, its membership had exploded, with an influx of young radicals from the New Left. Under the guidance of its new constituents, NLG quickly solidified itself as a key player in the emerging revolutionary milieu, and grew increasingly integrated with groups like the Black Panthers, SDS, and Weather Underground. At its 1968 convention, the Guild adopted a resolution officially declaring itself "the legal arm of the movement." It was an accurate characterization; indeed, NLG would soon exercise an effective monopoly over the far left of the U.S. legal world. As one historian recently noted, "most of the radical lawyers of the 1960s and 1970s were members of the NLG or had some ties with it. According to many testimonies, 'radical lawyer' and 'Guild lawyer' were practically synonyms at that time."[23]

Since then, the NLG has been tied to many of the most radical and violent extreme-left groups operating in the United States. Its activists have defended thousands of radicals and militants – a function that is central to the group's understanding of itself. As William Kunstler, one of Guild's prominent leftist attorneys, stated: "The thing I'm most interested in is keeping people on the street who will forever alter the character of this society: the revolutionaries. Whether it's the American Indian Movement, or the Black Liberation Army, or H. Rap Brown – a person or an organization – I'm really interested only in spending my talents, and any assets I have, to keep the revolutionaries functioning."

Several affiliates of the Guild have participated in far-left terrorism and other forms of political violence themselves. This included Bernardine Dohrn, the key Weather Underground leader and former FBI "Ten Most Wanted" fugitive, who served as the NLG's first student organizer after graduating from the University of Chicago Law School. Weather Underground member Russell Neufeld was also an editor of a NLG militant prison newspaper, as was Judith Alice Clark, who served 37 years in prison for her role in the deadly 1981 Brink's armored car robbery perpetrated by members of the Black Liberation Army and Weather Underground alumni.

NLG members often act as more than mere legal-defense shields for left-wing extremist groups. As the journalist Bryan Burrough reported in *Days of Rage* (2015), a book-length account of far-left terrorism in the 1960s and 1970s written from original interviews with former Weathermen and other New Left militants:

> *Among Weatherman's financiers, by far the most important single source of money was a group of radical attorneys in Chicago, New York, San Francisco, and Los Angeles. Almost all belonged to the National Lawyers Guild, a network of left-wing lawyers*

[23] Luca Falciola, *Up Against the Law: Radical Lawyers and Social Movements, 1960s–1970s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2022), 9.

> *founded in 1937 as an alternative to the American Bar Association. "Money? It was the lawyers, all of it," says Ron Fliegelman, a sentiment echoed by several other Weather alumni. Of the dozen or so attorneys mentioned as key supporters, only a handful will admit helping out. One is Dennis Cunningham, then a Chicago attorney who represented Black Panthers. "I gave them money, sure, and I raised even more," he says. "Without the lawyers, I'm telling you, they couldn't have survived."*[24]

Burrough describes Michael Kennedy, a member of the NLG's San Francisco and New York City chapters, as "by far the most important attorney in Weatherman's support network." Kennedy was close friends with both Dohrn and Leonard Boudin, another NLG attorney who happened to be the father of Weather Underground member Kathy Boudin and grandfather of future far-left San Francisco District Attorney Chesa Boudin. As one NLG attorney recounted to Burrough: "You gotta understand, honey, we were lawyers, but we were revolutionaries in our hearts…we would've done anything for these people. Money, strategy, passports, whatever it was we could do, you just did it. This was the revolution, baby, and they were the fighters."[25]

Today, the NLG continues to pursue the same core mission Kunstler described in 1975: manipulating and undermining the law to keep far-left terrorists and other violent "revolutionaries" on the streets. Through its Mass Defense and Legal Observer programs, the NLG trains and deploys so-called "legal observers" – easily recognizable in their distinctive neon-green hats or helmets at many of today's notable left-wing demonstrations – to radical protests and "direct actions." In this capacity, Guild lawyers serve as an on-demand jailbreak force, capable of providing immediate support for arrested rioters and militants, mobilizing a network of bail funds and allied NGOs to secure their quick release. In 2020 alone, the NLG claims to have "coordinated legal support" for more than 20,000 arrested protestors during the George Floyd riots. (At its convention that year, the organization passed a resolution calling for "the defunding, dismantling and abolition of all forms of policing," which it denounced as the handmaiden of "the white supremacist, capitalist, settler colonial state"). Today, the NLG is actively involved in radical anti-ICE street actions.

The Guild has played a similar function at many of the most significant far-left uprisings of the past decade, from Standing Rock (where Guild lawyers traveled to North Dakota to provide on-the-ground "legal support" in over 800 criminal defense cases) to the Antifa-led "Stop Cop City" riots in Atlanta (in which NLG "legal observers" were reported to be among the militants who were charged under a Georgia state domestic terrorism law – although a Fulton County judge later dismissed the charges).

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[24] Bryan Burrough, *Days of Rage: America's Radical Underground, the FBI, and the Forgotten Age of Revolutionary Violence* (New York: Penguin Press, 2015), 139.
[25] *Ibid.*

Today's NLG is also notorious for working in coordination with Antifa networks. Guild members have openly admitted to directly coordinating with self-described Antifa groups, meeting before street confrontations to preemptively "discuss tactics." The organization's support for Antifa is often open and public: In 2017, the president and two officers of the NLG's San Francisco chapter published an op-ed titled "We are all antifa." That same year, the NLG's research and education director published a "Legal Support for Anti-Fascist Action" communique declaring that "militant and confrontational direct action" was "a crucial part of the fight against fascism," and promising that "the NLG will continue to support anti-fascists and anti-racists in the street and in the courts, and will not be swayed by the argument that hateful, dangerous speech should be tolerated at any cost."

In March, a group of militants became the first Antifa members to be convicted of federal terrorism charges for a coordinated ambush on an ICE facility in Alvarado, Texas. The prior summer, the Texas Antifa cell had arrived at the ICE facility with AR-15-style rifles, handguns, body armor, and explosives, which they detonated to lure officers out into the open before opening fire. One officer was struck in the neck and seriously wounded. A month later, the NLG announced its unflinching support for the defendants, describing the attack as "a typical pro-immigrant protest" conducted by "community members" who were merely there to "express solidarity with those imprisoned inside the detention center." The Guild condemned the criminal charges as "expansive and unchecked state repression."

Cuba Nexus

Like many of the groups and movements shaped by the post-1960s New Left, the NLG has maintained deep and enduring ties to Cuba and its communist network. The Guild's pivot towards the New Left in the late 1960s led it to adopt a broader alignment with Third Worldist Marxist internationalism, positioning the Cuban revolutionary project at the very center of its worldview and activism – a position that Cuba continues to enjoy in the NLG's work today.

The NLG's relationship to Havana stretches back to the first years of the Cuban Revolution. The Guild's own historical account boasts that NLG "prominently promoted friendship with the people of Cuba" since the first days of the U.S. embargo, working to defend Cuba's budding "U.S. solidarity movement from government repression." NLG founder Victor Rabinowitz served as president of the Fair Play for Cuba Committee before his law firm (co-founded with NLG attorney Leonard Boudin) was retained by Cuba as the regime's official lawyer in the United States in 1960 – a relationship personally arranged by Che Guevara during a chess game with Rabinowitz and Boudin, according to the Guild. The law firm has served as "Cuba's only U.S. counsel" ever since, continuing to represent "the Cuban Government and its ministries, as well as Cuban agencies and enterprises, in all matters pertaining to the United States" through to today.

NLG members have played a major role in the Venceremos Brigade dating back to the very first delegation; participants in the second Brigade included the Guild's former president and former NLG International Committee chair, respectively. In 1972, the Guild launched its first official national NLG delegation to Cuba, which was hosted by ICAP. The NLG delegations that followed in the ensuing decades were described by the Guild as "formative leadership experiences for NLG leaders and national office staff."

The NLG has also dispatched similar delegations to other anti-Western regimes, including communist Vietnam – praised by a Guild delegation as "a model for the progressive peoples of the world who have yet to overthrow their oppressors" – the People's Republic of China, Iran, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip).

Through a suite of Havana-focused initiates – including a designated Cuba Subcommittee, and an annual Cuba program run through the Labor & Employment Committee – the NLG has continued to work to regularly facilitate the travel of U.S. citizens to Cuba, provide legal assistance to U.S. travelers that may breach travel prohibitions and sanctions, and directly run delegations to Cuba in coordination with the regime-affiliated National Network on Cuba. In April of 2026, the NLG adopted an "emergency resolution" announcing its intent to "work with the broader Cuba solidarity movement including the National Network on Cuba" to undermine America's "coercive measures" toward the country.

The NLG has, unsurprisingly, been a vocal and aggressive proponent of the Cuban regime's interests in the United States. As it declared in one 2007 resolution, NLG has "supported the Cuban Revolution since its triumph on January 1, 1959." The Guild has frequently advocated and lobbied for an end to the U.S. blockade and full normalization of relations with Cuba, the return of the U.S. military base at Guantanamo Bay to the Cuban government, and other pro-Cuban policies. It has regularly provided legal support to other Cuban solidarity groups, and campaigned on behalf of convicted Cuban spies such as the "Cuban Five" and terrorist fugitives like Assata Shakur.

At the same time, the Guild has also sought to exploit its institutional power and influence to legitimize Cuba's broader leftist network in the hemisphere. For more than a decade, the NLG deployed delegations to socialist Venezuela to "observe" elections. In 2024, a five-member NLG delegation declared Venezuela's fraudulent July elections as "transparent" and "fair," with "scrupulous attention to legitimacy, access to the polls, and pluralism" – and condemned the "U.S.-backed opposition's refusal" to accept dictator Nicolas Maduro's claimed victory – in contrast to the overwhelming consensus of other international observers. NLG president Suzanne Adely – one of the members of the on-the-ground delegation – described the elections as "a triumph for the Venezuelan people" in the face of "U.S. interference and attempted sabotage of

the democratic process," and called for rejecting "U.S. imperialist intervention" and ending "U.S. sanctions and blockades" aimed at Venezuela.

Such propaganda work is to be expected from NLG, in light of its self-identified role as the legal arm of the international radical left. As NLG's vice president himself said in 1978, the Guild's "aim is not to ferret out human rights violations wherever they exist. As an anti-imperialist organization, its aim is to aid national liberation struggles."

The NLG was one of six official partners of the "Nuestra America Convoy" that brought U.S. leftist influencers to the country in March of 2026. Suzanne Adely personally participated in the convoy and was later bestowed with a "Venceremos Award" for her service to Cuban interests.

The People's Forum

In recent years, the People's Forum has emerged as one of the most significant left-wing protest groups in the United States, serving as a centralized hub for anti-Trump, anti-ICE, and pro-Cuban agitation. The group's rapid rise to prominence tracks with skyrocketing financial backing: At the end of fiscal year 2021, the People's Forum reported $486,926 in revenue. By the end of fiscal year 2022, that number was $4,428,869 – a more than *800 percent* increase in a single year.

The overwhelming bulk of that funding has come from the political network of Neville Roy Singham – the Shanghai-based American technology magnate who has emerged in recent years as one of the most influential living sponsors of far-left groups and causes, with a reach that now rivals even that of George Soros. From its founding in 2018 through 2025, the People's Forum – which describes itself as "a movement incubator" – has received roughly $28 million, according to an analysis of nonprofit filings. $22.4 million of that has come from Singham-affiliated organizations, according to open-source analyses.

Singham, a former Marxist militant organizer with the League of Revolutionary Black Workers, is reportedly a long-time admirer of Maoism who maintains close links with the Chinese Communist Party. After selling ThoughtWorks – a software consulting company he founded in 1993 – to a private equity firm for approximately $785 million in 2017, he began funneling eye-popping sums of money into a sprawling, interconnected network of radical activist groups, frequently routing funding through a serpentine ecosystem of maximally opaque donor-advised funds and shell entities. Earlier this year, a lengthy multi-part Fox News investigation alleged that Singham and his wife have "activated a global network" of roughly 2,000 far-left groups, which often operates in lockstep with adversarial anti-American regimes (e.g., Cuba, China, Russia, Iran, North Korea, Venezuela, and Gaza). The investigation analyzed a total of $591 million across hundreds of transactions in five continents from 2017-2025, the substantial bulk of

which (roughly $401 million) went to a select cadre of leftist organizations based in the United States.

Singham network groups have been involved in a disproportionate share of the total left-wing political activity in the United States over the past decade, organizing hundreds of protests and street actions, from anti-ICE clashes in Minnesota to the "No Kings" demonstrations across the nation. (The network's professional, mass-produced protest signs have become a ubiquitous presence at left-wing demonstrations across the country). At the same time, many of the network's nodes have become fused with the Cuban influence infrastructure.

The People's Forum is a premier example. The organization is intimately linked to the Cuban regime. Since 2024, the Forum has served as the fiscal sponsor for the Venceremos Brigade, accepting tax-deductible donations on the Brigade's behalf while skirting donor-disclosure requirements. It was also a core organizer of the March 2026 Nuestra America Convoy, and frequently supports other delegations to the island. In May 2023, for example, the Forum was an organizer for a 10-day delegation of a reported 150-300 activists – what Cuban state media touted as "one of the largest delegations to visit the country in decades" – to meet with Cuban President Diaz-Canel; later that year, the Forum hosted Diaz-Canel at their headquarters in New York, and helped organize an anti-embargo rally for the Cuban dictator in the city.

The Forum's founding director, Manolo De Los Santos, is one of the most prominent American faces in today's Cuban influence network. Born in the Dominican Republic and raised in the Bronx, Santos first traveled to Cuba in 2006 through IFCO/Pastors for Peace. (As noted earlier, his Forum co-founder and former co-director Claudia de la Cruz is currently IFCO's executive director). He was subsequently "based out of Cuba for many years" (in his own biography's words), where he developed relationships at the most senior levels of the Cuban regime.

Santos has since led a string of high-profile delegations and convoys back to the island, meeting with Diaz-Canel himself in numerous publicly-documented instances since 2022, and maintaining close public links with several other key regime elites. He is a frequent voice on Cuban regime media, and co-edited the anthology *Comrade of the Revolution: Selected Speeches of Fidel Castro*.

Santos himself is an exemplary illustration of the nexus between the Cuban ideological operation and more general left-wing activism in the United States. On October 8, 2023, just one day after the Hamas attack on Israel, the group played a key role in organizing a now-infamous mass demonstration in Times Square, attended by thousands touting the Hamas attacks as "an unprecedented liberation struggle." Throughout 2026, the People's Forum has devoted much of its considerable war chest to actively coordinating and organizing confrontational anti-ICE demonstrations via a sophisticated mass-mobilization network. In January 2026, the Forum

partnered with the New York chapter of Democratic Socialists for America to recruit up to 4,000 "rapid response" activists to counter ICE enforcement operations in the city. The operation, which sought to build a similar model to the combative anti-ICE resistance networks in cities like Minneapolis, was organized in the Forum's Midtown headquarters, which hosted the DSA's "Immigrant Justice Working Group Training" meetings.

The Forum was also an architect of the nationwide anti-ICE school and business shutdown at the end of that month, which mobilized thousands of protestors in the streets – as well as business closures, school walkouts, and other disruptions – across the country. The website serving as the central hub for the January 30 "National Shutdown" was found to be registered to the People's Forum's communications director, and listed the organization's Manhattan address.

Code Pink

Code Pink: Women for Peace was co-founded in November 2002 by Medea Benjamin (born Susan Benjamin, 1952), Jodie Evans, Diane Wilson, and others as a protest arm of the organized opposition to the looming Iraq War. From its inception, Code Pink occupied a position on the Cuban-aligned left: members traveled regularly to Havana, and the group endorsed the "Free the Cuban Five" campaign to release the key Wasp Network spies throughout the 2000s.

Medea Benjamin had lived in Cuba from 1979 to 1983 under the regime's auspices (she was deported after writing an article internally critical of certain Cuban policies but remained a sympathetic supporter of the regime). She previously co-founded the group Global Exchange in San Francisco in 1988, along with her then-husband and another activist. Global Exchange's "Reality Tours" took American travelers to Cuba, Venezuela, Iran, Nicaragua, Bolivia, and other "alternative" destinations in what amounted to state-arranged ideological junkets.

Medea Benjamin (right) and Code Pink protestors interrupt a Senate Judiciary oversight hearing in 2017. (Reuters)

The pivotal event in Code Pink's relationship to foreign regimes, however, was Jodie Evans' 2017 marriage to Neville Roy Singham himself. The wedding, which featured a "revolutionary love"-themed brunch and custom museum, demonstrated how central the activist power couple had already become on the American far left: The event's guest list, as the *New York Times* wrote, "was a 'Who's Who' of progressivism. Photos from the event show Amy Goodman, host of 'Democracy Now!'; Ben Cohen, co-founder of Ben & Jerry's ice cream; and V, the playwright formerly known as Eve Ensler, who wrote 'The Vagina Monologues.'"

Code Pink co-founder Jodie Evans with husband Neville Roy Singham in 2018. (Getty Images)

In the years following the marriage – and a massive infusion of Singham cash – Code Pink rapidly shifted from a more conventional leftist anti-war group to a comprehensive, party-line advocate for the PRC and other anti-American foreign states. Evans, once a critic of Chinese human rights abuses, now describes Uyghurs as terrorists and defends their mass detention, while saying she "can't, for the life of me, think of anything" when asked if she had any criticisms of China. Prior to 2017, Evans publicly challenged what she described as China's "brutal repression of their women's human rights defenders"; more recently, she has praised China as "a defender of the oppressed and a model for economic growth without slavery or war."

Since 2017, roughly 25 percent of Code Pink's funding has come from groups connected to Singham.

While Code Pink's foreign links are not confined to Cuba, the group's brazen and overt propagandizing on behalf of several hostile regimes illustrates the extent to which domestic American "anti-imperialist" and Third Worldist organizations serve as natural (and often willing) vectors for subversive foreign influence.

Havana frequently sits at the center of that influence nexus. Code Pink has been a consistent participant in major Cuba solidarity efforts since the July 2021 mass protests on the island. (Within days of the protests, Medea Benjamin and Leonardo Flores published a Code Pink piece framing the unrest as driven by the "hidden hand" of the U.S. blockade and arguing that the scale of the protests had been exaggerated by Western media). For the March 2026 Nuestra America

Convoy, the organization chartered dedicated aircraft for more than 100 participants, holding 6,300 pounds of medical supplies valued at $433,000.

The Singham network has reportedly provided funding for around 100 overseas trips facilitated by Code Pink over the years, including 65 trips to hostile nations such as Venezuela, Iran, Gaza, China, and Cuba.

Several U.S. senators have formally called for investigations under the Foreign Agents Registration Act related to Code Pink, raising concerns about its funding sources, anti-ICE organizing, and alleged support for foreign terrorist organizations.

Democratic Socialists of America

The Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) serves as a particularly potent illustration of the ideological victory of Cuba's effort to position itself as the spiritual capital of Third Worldist radicalism. The DSA was not founded as a Cuban intelligence or influence front; it was born in 1982 as a fusion of socialist organizations and movements from both the Old Left and New Left factions, including veterans of CPUSA and SDS. Today, it maintains a fierce, almost religious commitment to the cause of the Cuban regime – not because the group is controlled by Cuban agents, per se, but because that commitment is now simply the de facto policy orthodoxy on the American far left.

DEMOCRATIC LEFT

EDITED BY MICHAEL HARRINGTON

March 1982 Vol. X, No. 3 $1

Toward a New Beginning

By Michael Harrington

DETROIT SYMBOLIZES WHAT'S wrong with the rightwing Reagan economic program: 20 percent unemployment; elimination of job training programs; cuts in education spending; reduction in such vital city services as road repair and police protection; cutbacks in

in the programs that affect the entirety of their lives. We live within a system that has done more than impoverish us materially. It impoverishes the human spirit and human interaction. We are committed to a society in which people are free to develop to their fullest potential, assured of individual liberties that safeguard against the dangers of an intrusive state.

We new socialists—opposed to *all* dictatorships, no matter what name they choose to give themselves—thus see democracy, not simply as a critical political value, but as a means of restructuring the American society.

We Are the New Socialists . . .

. . . because, like democratic socialists all over the world, we have learned that socialism is not simply economic planning but democratic, bottom-up planning—new forms of social ownership.

We are not a religion, even if deeply religious people are a part of our movement. But all of us see a moral dimension in our politics . . . the search for a society and a world that will encourage people to rediscover their own spiritual and cultural values.

We Are the New Socialists . . .

. . . starting out with a combined membership of 6,500, which makes us the largest democratic socialist organization in this country since the 1950s. But we can be more. We believe that the merger of DSOC and NAM presents a historic opening for the American left. At last there is an organization in which thousands of unaffiliated socialists can find rest. Not because we have *the* solution to the problems facing our society. But because this combination of people offers hope that solutions can be found. Because we are ready to start anew.

JOIN US!

Photo credits: Scott Cagan, Gretchen Donner, Marshall Mayer, Winter Dick Photography, Scott Von Oheim

____ Yes, I want to join the new socialists. Enclosed are my dues (includes subscription to DEMOCRATIC LEFT) of:
____ $50 sustaining ____ $30 regular ____ $15 limited income ____ $500 life

____ I also want to subscribe to *Socialist Forum*, the DSA Discussion Bulletin:
____ $10 regular ____ $5 limited income

____ Please send me more information about DSA and democratic socialism.

____ I want to subscribe to the DSA monthly, DEMOCRATIC LEFT. Enclosed find:
____ $15 sustaining/institutional subscription ____ $8 regular (10 issues per year)

____ I would like to be active in the local in my area. Please send information.

____ My special interest area is _____

Name_____

Address_____

City_____ State_____ Zip_____

Organization/union/school/affiliation_____

Mail to: Democratic Socialists of America, Suite 801, 853 Broadway, NYC 10003

In 1982, the Democratic Socialists of America was created from the merger of the Democrat Socialist Organizing Committee and The New American Movement. (DSA Instagram)

This represents a significant advance for the Cuban influence operation: Havana no longer needs to rely solely on intelligence penetration or asset cultivation to exert influence over the United States. Whereas the early Cuba solidarity networks were often confined to the militant fringe, DSA represents a newer and far more politically consequential development: a mass-membership organization operating openly in American electoral politics, with chapters across the country, a growing bench of elected officials, and real influence inside the Democratic Party coalition. The DSA has built a national infrastructure dedicated to moving extreme-left politics from the margins into the mainstream – and with it, a deep and abiding devotion to the Cuban regime.

The DSA testifies to the extent to which the native and organic ideological commitments of the American far left now mirror the interests of the Cuban regime. In contrast to organizations like the Venceremos Brigade or the National Lawyers Guild, the DSA was not shaped by the direct and tangible influence of the Cuban government itself. Instead, as the ideological inheritor of the Cuban-influenced radicalism of the post-1960s left, it freely embraced the policy agenda and worldview of its own accord.

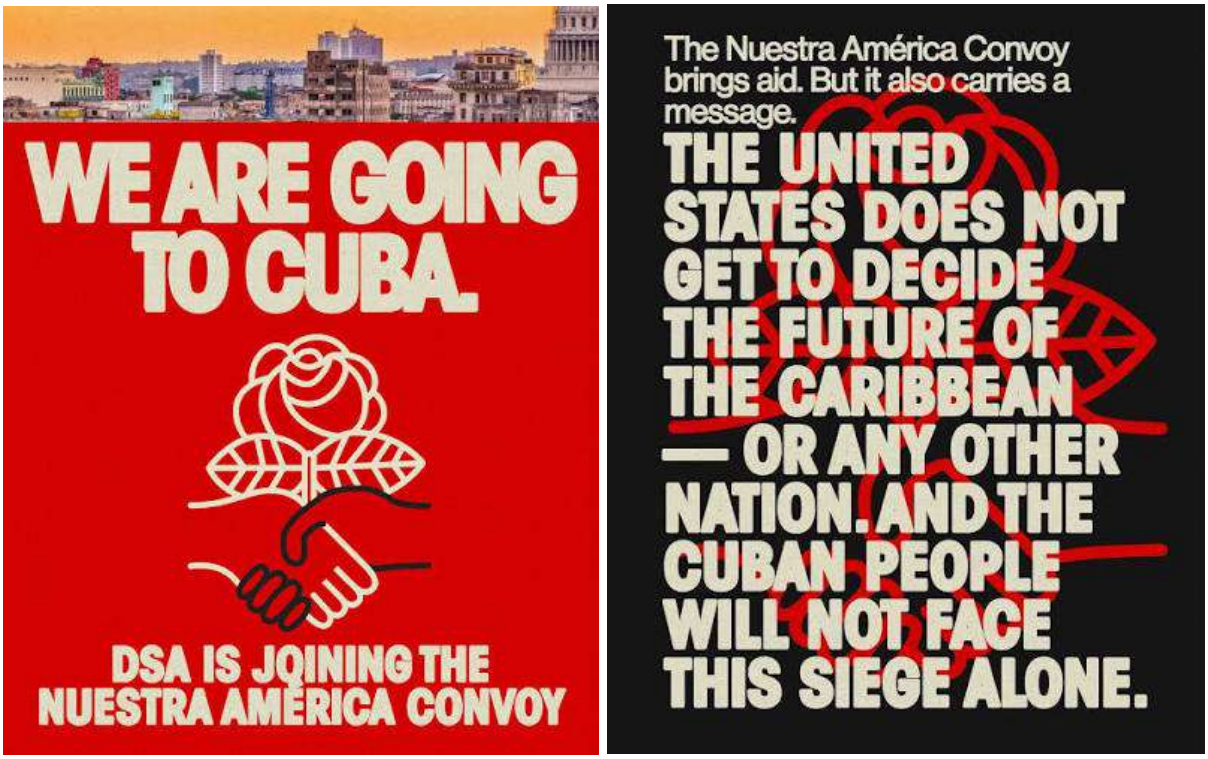
None of that is to say that the group has no ties to the Cuban regime and its influence network. In fact, as its size and influence in U.S. politics has metastasized, the DSA has significantly expanded its relationship with – and support for – the Cuban communist project. At its 2019 convention, DSA announced its intention to formally join the National Network on Cuba (NNOC). In the ensuing years, Cuba emerged as a major priority of the group's foreign policy: DSA established its own Cuba Solidarity Working Group, built a designated lobbying and campaign infrastructure around Cuba-specific advocacy, launched its first official DSA delegations to the island, and issued increasingly fierce and frequent condemnations of U.S. foreign policy towards Cuba. In November 2020, DSA broadcast a "call to action" to its more than 85,000 members to mobilize "against the illegal embargo of Cuba" in partnership with other NNOC groups.

The DSA's official delegations to Cuba began in 2022. (Beyond the group's "official" delegations, substantial contingents of DSA members have also traveled as part of other larger convoys, such Nuestra America in 2026). As always, these undertakings were directly overseen by the Cuban state, and facilitated direct contact between the American leftists and Cuban officials. A 2023 DSA cadre trip – reportedly hosted by the Communist Party of Cuba itself – traveled to the island with the explicitly stated objective of "establish[ing] formal channels of communication between various Cuban organizations, ministries and the DSA," as well as normaliz[ing] relations with representatives of the Cuban government." Participants in the trip recounted a two-hour private meeting with Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel, on top of a suite of meetings with other senior military and intelligence officials and several convicted Cuban spies from the erstwhile Wasp Network. Delegates were hosted for five days at a five-star hotel, the Grand Aston Havana, which has since been added to the State Department's Cuba Prohibited Accommodations List. Services for the tour were arranged and provided for through Amistur and ICAP.

In October 2025, the DSA sent another delegation of some 40 members, including both co-chairs and nine other elected members of its National Political Committee, hosted by the same state-sponsored ICAP and Amistur system. Once again, the delegation met with high-level Cuban officials, ate in fine-dining restaurants, and stayed in luxury hotels.

The DSA operates a "Venceremos Fund" that solicits donations to "support the struggle to dismantle U.S. empire," directing funding to Cuba. In this and other Cuba-related endeavors, DSA activists are open about their political ambitions. DSA's Cuba Solidarity Working Group has reportedly expressed its intent to include more "endorsed electeds" in the delegations as a vehicle to "cultivate Cuba's solidarity in up-and-coming politicians" and build a "pro-Cuba block basically of elected officials… especially at the federal level."

In the wake of the 2025 delegation, DSA chapters co-hosted debrief events with the Cuban Embassy in Washington, D.C.



DSA expands its presence in Cuba amid its 2026 Stop The Siege campaign. (DSA Instagram)

VII. ANTI-AMERICAN INTERNATIONALE

CUBA THE CAPITAL OF
21ST CENTURY COMMUNISM

VIII. Anti-American Internationale

During the Cold War, Cuba's U.S.-facing influence and subversion operations were traditionally underwritten by the wealth and power of the Soviet Union. The Soviets financed and trained the DGI, and provided Havana with the resources to operate its extensive network of front groups, contacts, and operational beachheads in the United States. Cuban agents, assets and proxies moved through global Soviet networks; when Latin American revolutionaries traveled to Havana for political and military training, they returned home through Prague with the help of Czechoslovak and Soviet intelligence. Cuban officials routed several Weather Underground leaders through the same network, arranging for them to travel to Prague and Czechoslovakia – before helping them "reenter the United States surreptitiously" – to evade arrest.

After the disintegration of the Soviet bloc, Cuba faced new and severe constraints, reducing the reach and scale of its paramilitary networks and forcing it to pare back its armed revolutionary expeditions around the world. In the late 1980s, Cuba boasted the largest per-capita military in Latin America – and by many estimates, the most powerful, pound-for-pound. Less than a decade later, its military size and budget had shrunk to a fraction of their former size. This did not, however, reduce Cuba's U.S.-targeted intelligence capabilities; in several key ways, it rendered them even more central to the modus operandi of the Cuban regime.

As Havana's reach contracted, its focus narrowed. Whereas Cuban military and intelligence officers were once training and backing guerilla fighters across the world, in the post-Cold War order the United States became the near-singular target of the regime's subversive and covert activities. Cuban spy networks in America adapted to more agile and clandestine cell structure, fluidly moving and morphing to remain ahead of U.S. counterintelligence efforts. By Simmons' estimate, it took less than 18 months after the FBI's major Wasp Network bust for Cuba to fully restore its intelligence footprint in Florida.

Over the past few decades, however, Havana has leveraged those capabilities to build alliances with a new coalition of anti-American regimes, movements, and actors. Even as it expands and revitalizes its network within the next generation of American left-wing activists, it has also forged new partnerships – or deepened and repurposed old ones – with other foreign governments and movements around the world. China and Russia have both reportedly tripled their intelligence agents on the island over the past three years.

The threats posed by Cuba's network *within* America is therefore compounded by its network *outside* of it. The regime continues to act as a force multiplier for a much broader anti-American coalition, positioning itself as a staging ground for a wide range of foreign adversaries to conduct operations against the United States. At the same time, Cuba operates as a kind of concierge service for anti-American actors, providing them with access to domestic influence and

intelligence within the United States and facilitating contacts with American groups and movements. Cuba's hemispheric networks offer a similar value proposition – serving as a vector for Iran, Russia, and numerous other regimes to project influence across the region.

Russia

The Cuban-Russian alliance dates back to the early 1960s, when Cuba emerged as a key Soviet ally and a bastion of resistance to American hegemony in the Western Hemisphere. Thirty-four years after the fall of the Soviet Union, Cuba and Russia still maintain strong economic and political ties, which have only deepened amid rising U.S.-Cuba tensions. Today, the relationship is better described as a strategic partnership – one that not only poses a direct threat to the American homeland, but challenges U.S. power and security interests across Latin America. For modern Russia, the Cuban network serves as a key vector for destabilizing and subverting U.S. interests within America's immediate sphere of influence, allowing it to project power into the region without needing to build military bases or maintain a significant troop presence.

Cuba and Russia enjoy a highly active and continually expanding intelligence partnership defined by both parties' respective comparative advantages. In exchange for Russian credit, energy, military hardware, and technical capabilities, Cuba offers Russia prime real estate just 90 miles off the Florida coast, access to a constellation of anti-American "solidarity" networks, and collaboration with DI. As Cuba increasingly relies on Russian energy and assistance, Russia is seeking to leverage the deepening relationship to revitalize its old intelligence networks in the Western Hemisphere.

The architecture of those networks remains in place. Cuba continues to host Russia's largest overseas signals intelligence (SIGINT) facility, and the renewed partnership between the new regimes benefits from its ability to build on Moscow's massive Cold War-era intelligence infrastructure on the island. There are currently eighteen known SIGINT facilities in Cuba, two of which belong to Russia; along with GRU officers, these sites are also staffed by Russian engineers and technical experts.

In recent years, Russian technology companies have rapidly expanded in Cuba, while using the island as a launchpad for penetrating other Latin American countries. Due in no small part to this partnership, Russian technology companies are now responsible for providing advanced surveillance capabilities to several Latin American countries, bolstering Moscow's military and intelligence relationships with anti-American regimes in Nicaragua and Venezuela and expanding its presence across the region. (The presence of senior Russian spies in Mexico – posing as diplomats to gather intelligence on the United States – has been a source of diplomatic tension between the United States and Mexico in recent years). Russian intelligence officials typically run these technology transfers, overseeing implementation and ensuring Russia maintains backdoor access to vital data.

In addition to sustaining repressive state surveillance, these technology transfers likely support Russian malign influence operations, including malicious cyber-attacks, disinformation, and anti-American propaganda.

Since 2023, Cuban mercenaries have also fought on Moscow's behalf in the war in Ukraine. Reports from 2025 allege that thousands of Cubans may have been recruited to fight for Russia on the frontlines in Ukraine.

China

China, too, has a lengthy history with Cuba – a nation it often refers to as a "good brother, good comrade, good friend." Like its ties to Moscow, Havana's relationship with Beijing has matured into a major strategic partnership.

China maintains a persistent intelligence-gathering presence in Cuba, benefiting from its proximity to – and penetration of – the United States. Correspondingly, Cuba benefits from its relationship with China via foreign assistance, canceled debts, and tens of billions of dollars in investments. In 2023, the *Wall Street Journal* reported that China and Cuba had entered into a secret agreement regarding the construction of a new Chinese SIGINT facility in Cuba in exchange for several billion dollars, providing Beijing's intelligence services with the capacity "to scoop up electronic communications throughout the southeastern U.S., where many military bases are located, and monitor U.S. ship traffic."

As noted above, China and Russia have reportedly tripled their intelligence personnel at Cuba-based SIGINT sites since 2023, with a growing Chinese intelligence presence at SIGINT facilities. China actively runs three of Cuba's eighteen known SIGINT facilities; per the *Wall Street Journal,* some "Chinese and Russian bases are assessed to be jointly operated with Cuba." According one senior U.S. official, "China and Russia regard their Cuba-based sites among their most critical foreign listening posts."

In 2024, the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) "Hidden Reach" team published *Secret Signals: Decoding China's Intelligence Activities in Cuba*, an analysis of Cuban SIGINT facilities based on commercial satellite imagery, which identified four active or under-construction Cuban SIGINT facilities: Wajay, Calabazar, El Salao, and Bejucal — the Soviet nuclear-warhead storage site ten miles from Havana that was made famous during the Cuban Missile Crisis. The following year, CSIS published an addendum to *Secret Signals*, reporting major upgrades to several sites, including the facility at Bejucal, which appeared to have a new Circular Disposed Antenna Array (CDAA) – a massive Cold War-era circular antenna capable of monitoring signals from 3,000 to 8,000 miles away.

The Chinese intelligence presence in Cuba poses an acute risk to U.S. military operational security. Military installations, Combatant Commands, space launch centers, and other sensitive sites located in the southeastern United States are especially vulnerable to technical surveillance in Cuba – not to mention U.S. air, space, and maritime activity in the region.

China's present relationship with Cuba has broader implications for the rest of Latin America. Between 2002 and 2019, Chinese officials conducted over 200 high-level engagements across Latin America, including Cuba, with trade between China and Latin America surging from $12 billion to nearly $315 billion in the same period. Like Russia, China provides repressive regimes in the region with surveillance technologies designed to stifle dissent and marginalize pro-U.S. opposition parties. China has also expanded its military footprint in the region; the Office of the Director of National Intelligence's 2024 Annual Threat Assessment noted that Cuba was among the locations that the People's Liberation Army was considering for the construction of new military facilities. Recent Chinese wargames have involved combat scenarios in Latin America and the Caribbean, reflecting Beijing's view that the region could be a viable theater in a future conflict with the United States.

Iran

Cuba and the Islamic Republic of Iran – both designated State Sponsors of Terrorism – are longstanding allies with deep economic and diplomatic ties, a mutual hostility towards the United States, and a longstanding intelligence partnership spanning decades.

Iran also has sought to expand its formal strategic partnerships with Cuba in recent years, including a series of agreements surrounding trade, telecommunications, information technology, port services, and the use of Cuban naval infrastructure.

Like Russia and China, Iran has forgiven debts and extended generous lines of credit to Cuba amid efforts to deepen political, commercial, security and intelligence cooperation.

In keeping with its "anti-imperialist" posture, Cuba has long supported the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and Iranian-backed terrorist groups like Hamas, Hezbollah, and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) – offering them not just the support of the regime itself, but also a waypoint for expanding their foothold in Latin America.

New recruits undergo training in a Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) camp. (Getty Images)

Iran features prominently in the so-called "Cubazuela" period, when Venezuela's post-Chavez dictatorship effectively operated as a Cuban client state whose government, military, and civil society were thoroughly infiltrated by Cuban intelligence. The arrangement between Havana and Caracas – which became the modern institutional and ideological focal point for anti-Americanism in the Western Hemisphere – provided Iran and its proxies with connections to criminal and political networks in the region, as well as a permissive environment in which to advance Tehran's objectives and undermine adversaries like the United States. Pentagon reports reportedly found that IRGC Quds Force officers were working under diplomatic cover at Iran's embassy in Caracas, providing intelligence and other assistance to the Maduro regime.

Iran and its proxies proved to be a key node in this alliance. By 2003, Hezbollah had already established cells in Venezuela; by 2019, analysts estimated that thousands of suspected Hezbollah, Hamas and other Iranian-backed militants had traveled to Venezuela and to other parts of Latin America, including Bolivia and Nicaragua.

Iran has also used Cuba's geographic position to conduct electronic warfare against U.S. targets. In 2003, Tehran jammed international television broadcasts from several Los Angeles-based stations by means of a device located in Havana. And more recently, intelligence reports suggest

that Cuba has acquired attack drones from Iran, and that Cuban military officials have consulted with Iranian advisors on asymmetrical drone warfare for a potential conflict with the United States.

Other Nonstate Actors

Havana has also used its relationship with Tehran to extend and integrate its overseas solidarity networks into Iran's so-called "Axis of Resistance" – itself a cause célèbre for many American activists. This has proven to be a mutually reinforcing arrangement, allowing Iran to access broader leftist networks in the Western Hemisphere (e.g., Cuban network states like Maduro's Venezuela, Morales' Bolivia, and Ortega's Nicaragua) while simultaneously strengthening the Cuban network's connections with the Islamist militant axis.

A particular affinity for the cause of "Palestinian liberation" was embedded in the founding anti-imperialist and anti-Western creed of the Cuban Revolution itself. In 1966, Castro welcomed Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) militants to the Tricontinental Congress; two years later, Cuba sent DGI officers to training camps in Jordan to train Palestinian *fedayeen* in guerilla warfare.

Palestine Liberation Organization commandos train in Jordan, January 1971. (Getty Images)

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, DGI and the Cuban military provided hundreds of Palestinian guerillas with training in Cuba and in camps across the Middle East. In 1974, the PLO created a permanent office in Havana, and through the Cuban intelligence apparatus, began providing other Latin American militants with military training, bombmaking, and ideological indoctrination.

Just two months after the Yom Kippur War, forty Cuban terrorist experts – accompanied by an East German specialist who had himself been living in Cuba – secretly traveled to the revolutionary Marxist-Leninist state of South Yemen to train Palestinian guerillas at camps run by Nayef Hawatmeh, a founding member of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) and the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP). Both popular fronts would later participate in the October 7, 2023, attacks on Israel, with the latter under Hawatmeh's leadership.

Cuban-backed Marxist-Leninist groups like the PFLP have a long history of atrocities and terrorist attacks. Despite this bloody history, ties between Cuban solidarity networks and militant Arab groups persist to the present. In 2017, Cuba organized a major celebration for the PFLP in a government-owned community center in Havana to celebrate the party's 50th anniversary. The PFLP has maintained an active, official presence in Havana ever since, operating openly alongside the Palestinian ambassador to Cuba.

Western governments should not underestimate the convergence of Cuba's revolutionary solidarity networks and Islamist radicals. Over the years, Cuban ambassadors have frequently met with delegations from Hamas and other Palestinian terrorist groups, including a highly visible meeting between Hamas officials and the Cuban ambassador to Lebanon just eight months before the October 7th attacks.

This partnership also illustrates the way in which Cuba serves as a nexus for facilitating contact and coordination between foreign anti-American solidarity networks and U.S.-based activists. For example, pro-Iranian Al-Tajammu – a "Resistance Axis" umbrella coalition that includes Hezballah, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, PFLP, the Houthis, and various Iranian-backed Iraqi militias – is headquartered in Lebanon and effectively functions as the Iranian counterpart to Cuba's ICAP. With branches in more than 86 countries, including in the United States, Al-Tajammu represents the convergence of radical left-wing activism and violent terrorism. Independent analysts have mapped a minimum of at least 39 established nodes across Africa, Australia, Canada, Europe, India, Latin America, and the United States.

In 2022, ICAP invited Al-Tajammu to Cuba to formalize a cooperation and integration partnership between the Iranian and Cuban international influence networks. Al-Tajammu's North American branch coordinator, Paul Larudee, is an Iranian-born U.S. citizen who regularly

appears on Iranian state media and has claimed 9/11 was a "false flag attack" by "extreme Zionists." Larudee, based in San Francisco, is also treasurer of the California-based Association for Investment in Popular Action Committees – ironically utilizing the acronym "AIPAC" – a shadowy Axis-aligned "umbrella nonprofit for other nonprofit organizations" that serves as a fiscal sponsor for Latin American leftist media and funds "volunteer delegations to Cuba and Venezuela." AIPAC's total revenue more than tripled from 2023 ($284,359) to 2025 ($946,870).

IX. CONCLUSION

CUBA THE CAPITAL OF
21ST CENTURY COMMUNISM

Conclusion

This report began with the words Fidel Castro penned in 1958, before his revolution had even taken power. When the war in Cuba was over, he promised, a "much wider and bigger war" against the United States would begin.

Castro kept his promise.

For 67 years, the Cuban regime has waged that campaign on every front. It has armed guerrillas, trained terrorists, sheltered fugitives, infiltrated the U.S. government, cultivated generations of American elites, built influence networks inside our institutions, and opened the Western Hemisphere to a succession of hostile foreign powers. It has sought to undermine, degrade and destabilize America with spies and soldiers, but also with students and intellectuals; with terrorist cells, but also with solidarity committees and nonprofit networks. with intelligence officers operating under diplomatic cover, but also with ostensibly private exchanges, nonprofits, political organizations, and activist networks.

This is what makes Cuba unique.

Other hostile regimes have stolen American secrets, financed terrorism, armed proxies, spread propaganda, or sought to cultivate political influence inside the United States. Cuba did – and does – all these things and more; but the Cuban regime has never recognized the neat distinctions that so often structure the American government's understanding of foreign threats. To Havana, there is no hard line separating these functions. It has integrated all of them into a single revolutionary project, around which every single facet and function of the Cuban state is organized.

Even as its economy teeters on the brink of collapse in the wake of decades of corrupt communist rule, the Cuban regime's fundamental objective remains the same as it was when Castro first marched into Havana in 1959: a hemispheric Marxist revolution that erases the United States from the earth. This objective continues to serve as both the founding myth and the central principle of the Cuban state.

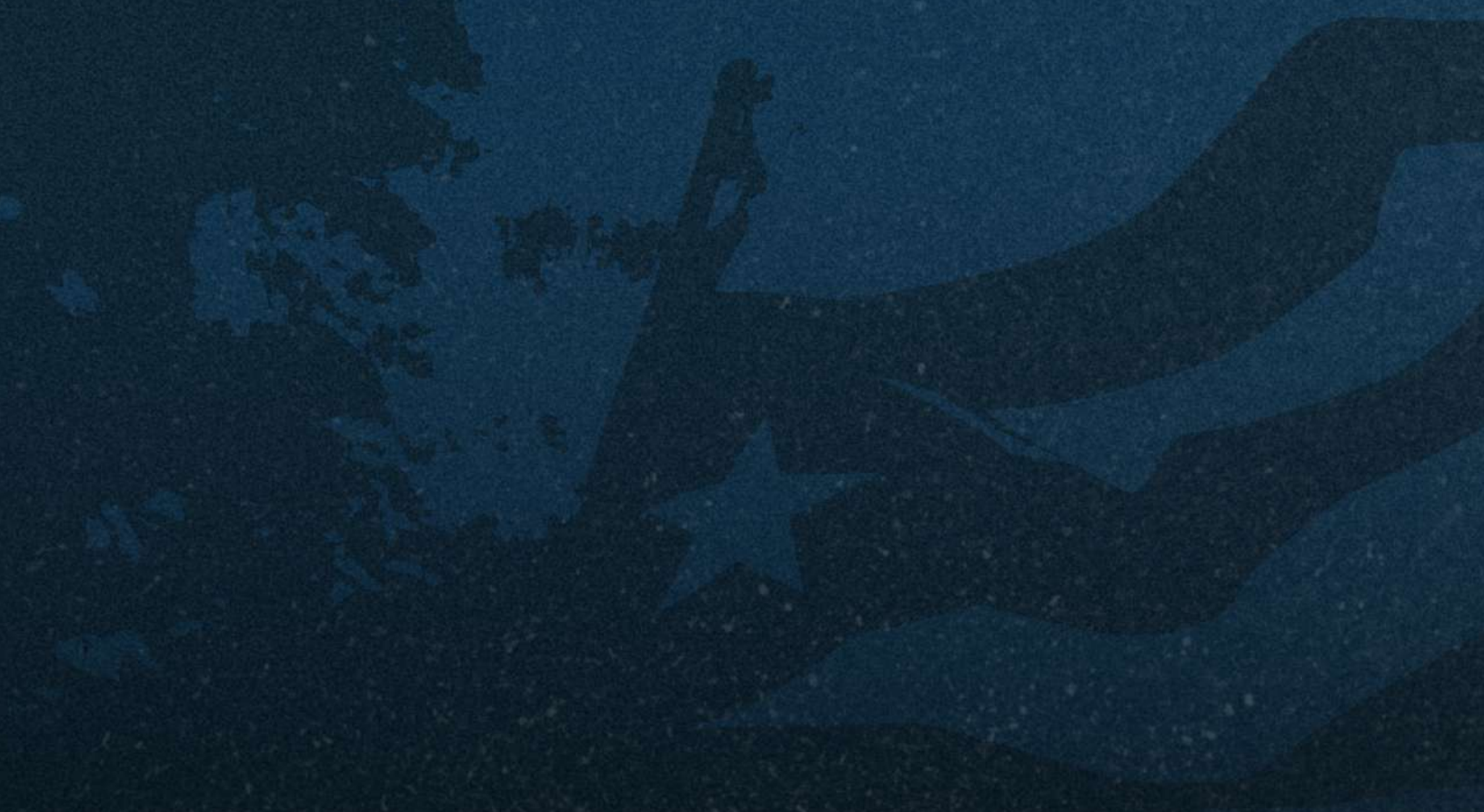
Today, Cuban agents and operatives maintain a foothold in hundreds of front groups, activist organizations, solidarity centers, and ideological NGO and nonprofit networks. These groups collectively represent one of the single largest, most sophisticated and dangerous vectors for hostile foreign influence in modern American history. Many of the most significant upheavals in recent American political history – from the George Floyd riots to the rise of Antifa to the explosion of pro-terrorist activism on American college campuses – can be linked, in some way, shape, or form, to Cuban influence.

From its perch off the coast of Florida, modern Cuba plays a key role in supporting major foreign terror networks. At the same time, the regime continues to operate an extensive hard intelligence network in the United States, with significant penetration into sensitive civilian and military institutions on American territory. The danger of this intelligence penetration is only compounded by Cuba's new alliances, as the island hosts a growing number of foreign military, intelligence, and terrorist installations on its own soil – posing a unique threat to American homeland security.

These various threads can only be understood through the prism of the Cuban regime's ideological foundation, imbued by its founder with the singular goal of conquering the neighboring United States. Since 1959, Cuba has been – and without fundamental, radical reforms, will always be – less a nation-state than an all-encompassing intelligence and subversion operation, focused around its existential revolution against the United States. Amid all this, the Cuban people themselves continue to suffer in hunger and darkness, forced to live in something akin to modern slavery under the occupying regime, held hostage by their own state.

Cuba's assault on the United States was never, at root, a quarrel over economic policy or sovereignty or even ownership of a particular territory. It was a revolution against Western civilization itself – waged, in part, via the novel and insidious method of persuading the children of the West to turn against their own inheritance. That is the campaign Castro launched in 1959, and it is the campaign his heirs are waging still. And in the institutions of the modern American left – in its universities and its nonprofits, its street movements and its media – that campaign has enjoyed a success its founders could scarcely have imagined. The regime's method was never primarily premised on kinetic warfare, although it was not above utilizing violence and terror when it suited its interests. It was subtler, and far more dangerous: to attack the United States not from without but from within — to turn Americans into instruments of their own nation's undoing.

To mistake Cuba's poverty for harmlessness is to misunderstand the threat entirely. Its material weakness was never the measure of its danger. Its power was always ideological, subversive, and parasitic – and it has proven remarkably durable, outlasting the Soviet empire that helped build it and grafting itself onto every new enemy of the United States that has arisen since. Today it serves as the connective tissue of a broader anti-American coalition, a staging ground where the ambitions of Moscow, Beijing, and Tehran converge with the radical movements operating inside our own borders.



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