

# Cuba: The Unforeseen Transition From Communism to a Mafia State

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## **SUMMARY**

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Mafia State is a category coined by some political scientists to analyze a recent phenomenon in international relations. It is not another pejorative expression to refer to autocratic or totalitarian States.

*A new Mafia State may emerge wherever an autocratic political elite that ends up dominating State institutions and controlling national policies, use them to run criminal operations for their own benefit while keeping their activities beyond the reach of any national institutional check and balances or international monitoring.*

After the fall of the USSR and having lost the geopolitical ecosystem that sustained it for more than three decades, the emergence of the alliance with Hugo Chavez and his kleptocratic power elite in an oil rich country as Venezuela opened the door to what then was an unforeseen transition possibility for Cuba. Instead of moving towards a liberal open society with a market economy, the collusion of the ruling elites of both countries made possible a Cuban a different kind of transition: from communism into a Mafia State. Cubazuela was born.

A transition and transformation from a repressive communist society into a Mafia State structurally alters, among other factors, the composition of the ruling elite, the allocation of power, the sources and mechanisms for the appropriation of wealth and privilege, and the culture of domination used by the ruling group. It also implies a dramatic changes in the selection and roles of external allies and in the methods to wage asymmetric, hybrid conflict with enemies.

These new species cannot be approached as if they were Westphalian behaved states. A new vision of the problem is needed — a renewed Weltanschauung in international relations — to understand the true meaning of the emergence of the first transnational Mafia State in Latin America. It is time to change eyeglasses.

## **From Great Scam to Great Mutation**

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*La Gran Estafa* (Mexico 1952)<sup>1</sup> is a mandatory book. In this volume, the outstanding Latin American communist leader Eudocio Ravines denounced for the first time Moscow's true intentions while it justified its policies of interference under a mantle of humanism.

In the Foreword to that first edition, Ravines affirms the following: "It is a scam not to those who believe in the bliss of capitalism: it is a scam to us, who do believe in the redemption of man, who have fought for the liberation of the oppressed, who have endured hunger, persecution, torture, prison (...) for pushing socialism ahead".

Ravines wanted to forewarn about the fact that the humanist doctrine to which he had devoted his life was nothing but a totalitarian, inhuman and imperial project in disguise.

Many Cubans who fought against dictator Fulgencio Batista in order to establish a democracy made similar warnings when that process took a definite turn towards communism. But still the Cuban communist dictatorship that was installed after its fall managed to appear before the world, especially in Latin America, as the expression of a revolutionary, left-wing, progressive, and even humanist movement.

In 1989, the fall of the Berlin Wall coincided with the protests and subsequent massacre in Tiananmen Square, and with the drug trafficking scandal in Cuba. On that occasion, Fidel Castro called to "wash off the offense with blood". Thus, he covered his intention of burying, along with the bodies of those shot by firing squad, the evidence of a mutation that had begun long before.<sup>2</sup> After the earthquake-like commotion of that year, only the genuinely naive or the worse opportunists continued to extend their unconditional support to Havana in the wake of the hasty executions of senior Cuban officers, including General Arnaldo Ochoa.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Eudocio Ravines, *La Gran Estafa*, Libros y Revistas S.A: Mexico, 1952

<sup>2</sup> José A. Friedl Zapata, *El Gran Engaño*, Santiago Apóstol: Buenos Aires, 2005.

<sup>3</sup> Arnaldo Ochoa. The Cuban general who received most decorations from his own country and from others he served. He was declared a "Hero of the Republic of Cuba" and was a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party. On August 26, 1958 he joined the guerrilla fight against dictator Fulgencio Batista. In April 1961 he fought at Bay of Pigs. In October 1962 he had a remarkable participation in the Caribbean Missile Crisis. In the 1960's he trained with Venezuelans in Cuba. In July 1966 he landed in Venezuela on Falcon state. In that country he participated in an ambush on Cerro Atascadero on September 16th, 1966 between Yumare and Duaca (Yaracuy State), where they killed an officer, a noncommissioned officer and wounded two soldiers. On February 25th, 1967 he commanded the column that participated in El Mortero ambush, between Sanare and El Blanquito (Lara state), against members of the Venezuelan Army, where they killed three troops and wounded eight. After his return from Venezuela, he was

But these followers of the Cuban process were shaken not only by fear of the consequences of countering the official version, but also by the sense of loss caused when the facts clash against all the beliefs and loyalties of a lifetime. It was what psychologists would call a crisis of cognitive dissonance.<sup>4</sup>

From time to time the communist movement has gone through crises in which it has lost sheep that got tired of being such — as was the case with the repudiation of Stalin's crimes — but it has almost always been able to keep most of the flock appeased. **This was the case in Cuba when in 1989 Fidel Castro shot without mercy and in great haste those who could expose his personal complicity with the Cuban drug trafficking operations.** He was aware by then that this was known by the CIA, the FBI, the DEA and the federal courts of the United States. After General Ochoa and another three high officers were executed, Washington assumed that Castro had finally learned the dangers associated with these activities and would subsequently modify his behavior. Time proved this assessment wrong.

It is true that Chavez's rise to power allowed Castro to acquire a new source of subsidies and oil. But it also provided him with an alternative to reduce the risks from a reprisal by the United States, by transferring to the territory of another State, his dangerous drug trafficking covert activities and his cooperation with terrorist forces, such as ETA, FARC, ELN and Hezbollah.

The oil that Chávez contributed to consolidate that alliance was obtained by Castro in exchange for assets of strategic value for the now rising new power elite in Venezuela: a model of totalitarian repression along with its expert operators, a vast international network of criminals and terrorists, and agents of influence planted in social movements, media outlets, academic, and political institutions in many countries, not excluding the United States.

But to ensure that Venezuelan employees of this novel criminal outsourcing did not eventually intend to appropriate the logistic networks and contacts provided by the Cubans, Castro undertook the colonization of Venezuela under the banner of revolutionary internationalism. A strategy that has generated a substantive change in the nature of both nations.

## **Mafia States and their international alliances**

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While in the 1970s and 80s the Castroist State developed a punctual link with drug trafficking and other illegal operations, after the fall of the USSR and the rise of Chávez to power, the Cuban State suffered an essential mutation in its DNA. **The merging of the dictatorial oligarchies in Cuba and Venezuela gave rise to Cubazuela,<sup>5</sup> the first transnational Mafia State in the Americas.**

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appointed deputy chief of the General Staff. Later he was appointed head of the Military Constructions and the Western Army of Cuba. In 1977, Arnaldo Ochoa was the head of the multinational operation against the Somali incursion in the so-called Ogaden War. In the 1980's, he headed the Cuban Military Mission in Angola.

<sup>4</sup> To think one thing and do the opposite, to say something and act differently: The tension many Cubans experienced could be described as *cognitive dissonance*.

<sup>5</sup> Juan Antonio Blanco, Rolando Cartaya, Luis Domínguez, Casto Ocando. *Cubazuela, chronicle of a Cuban intervention*. FHRC, Foundation for Human Rights in Cuba: Miami, 2019. Available at:

Why is it so important for Cuba to maintain its control over Venezuela?

Cuba's colonialist control over Venezuela allows the Cuban government:

- a) To implant an extractive parasitic economy on the natural resources of that country in order to ensure its own energy security, while paying back by exporting Cuban professionals as slave labor (whose salaries are appropriated by up to 80%) as well as police and military advisors and systems for repression and control of the population.
- b) To use the Venezuelan territory as a platform to launch from afar covert criminal activities (drug trafficking, training of terrorist groups, money laundering and others) that would compromise Cuba's national security if carried out continuously and massively from its own territory.
- c) To use Venezuela as an outer defense perimeter of the Cuban power elite, by making use of its porous borders with several South American and Caribbean countries, in order to implement a model of asymmetric warfare far from its national territory.

This time, it was not about the resurgence of communism, but the birth of an unknown species, not registered until then by the taxonomists of political science: the Mafia State.<sup>6</sup> This new species is not comparable to those States in which significant groups of politicians associate with criminal organizations and favor them with various privileges.

***Mafia States may emerge when an autocratic political elite dominating State institutions and controlling national policies, use them to run criminal operations for their own benefit while keeping their activities beyond the reach of any national institutional check and balances or international monitoring.***

We are no longer dealing with governments in which some corrupt officials collaborate with criminal elements, but a situation in which the entire government, the State itself, is now controlled by criminal minded elites who transform it into an institution at their service.<sup>7</sup>

The Sao Paulo Forum and ALBA were not thought of by Castro as a new leftist, communist or revolutionary international. Those were the necessary appearances to catch well-intentioned, unsuspecting, individuals behind whom to hide the criminal intentions of a group of statesmen and politicians and provide a politically respectful umbrella to integrate irregular non-state players

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<https://www.fhrcuba.org/2019/04/cubazuela-chronicle-of-a-cuban-intervention/>

<sup>6</sup> For an analysis of Mafia States see:

Moisés Naím, "Mafia States. Organized Crime Takes Office". *Foreign Affairs*, May / June 2012. Available at:

<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2012-04-20/mafia-states>

Maria Snegovaya, "The Implications of Russia's Mafia State". *American Interest*. *The American Interest*. December 23rd, 2015. Available at:

<https://www.the-american-interest.com/2015/12/23/the-implications-of-russias-mafia-state/>

Bálint Magyar, *The Post- Communist Mafia State, The Case of Hungary*, Central European University & Noran Libro Kiadó: Hungary, 2016

<sup>7</sup> According to Moisés Naím, (the mafia States) are not just countries where corruption prevails or where organized crime controls important economic activities and even entire regions. See "Estados mafiosos", *El País*, May 5, 2012. Available at:

[https://elpais.com/internacional/2012/05/05/actualidad/1336245036\\_975620.html](https://elpais.com/internacional/2012/05/05/actualidad/1336245036_975620.html)

such as the narcoterrorists of FARC. Actually, with this this coalition Castro and Chavez were actually aiming at subtlety establishing an international cover up for regional narcoterrorism.<sup>8</sup> According to the new mafia dialectics, solidarity is carried out — with briefcases full of petrodollars — by killing inopportune prosecutors, destroying the rule of law, and creating alliances with international drug trafficking and terrorist forces.

**The main concern of these mafia States nowadays is not as much the infiltration and intelligence gathering activities carried out by the CIA, as those that they may come from the DEA,** whose representatives in Latin America were quickly rejected and expelled by Chavez, Evo Morales and Rafael Correa, supported in turn by social movements and media outlets infiltrated by Havana's agents of influence. The so-called people's war acquired a modality of total asymmetric, hybrid warfare in which social networks, civil society organizations and other actors become targets to be infiltrated and manipulated, in order to stabilize allied regimes, discredit unfriendly politicians or destabilize hostile governments.

**Key state institutions in Cuba and Venezuela were expropriated and used for criminal endeavors by what gradually became a transnational mafia power elite.** Such institutions are now part of a multinational criminal enterprise that uses them for the benefit of a transnational oligarchy, which pursues, above all, its own purposes, does not submit to any independent or electoral power and does not even attempt to justify its legitimacy with Marxist theories or popular benefits. That merger produced a modern colony whose metropolis is in Havana.

The initial strategy followed by Cuba of partially interfering in Venezuela became an interventionist policy of a neo-colonial nature. The initial political alliance between two radical and anti-American governments to secure Havana's parasitic economy after the fall of the USSR, suffered a genetic mutation.

**At the beginning of the new millennium, the power elites of Cuba and Venezuela merged into a transnational criminal enterprise. Its system of alliances and cooperation with other governments, criminal groups and terrorist forces — regional and extra-regional — can be considered the first transnational Narco State anchored in the Western Hemisphere.**

Since then we were no longer dealing with an independent and sovereign State that controls its national territory, protects the welfare and security of its citizens, and lives in peace with its neighbors. Key economic and military state institutions in both countries colluded to enable the emergence of a criminal transnational enterprise.

The Venezuelan power elite has handed over national independence to Cuba, which has established there a modern model of colonial domination. It has also ceded territories to foreign criminal groups (FARC, ELN, and Hezbollah) in which laboratories for drug production have been installed.

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<sup>8</sup> Douglas Farah, *Cuba's role in the Bolivarian populist and radical movement's dismantling of democracy*. Miami: Interamerican Institute for Democracy, 2018

It's healthy to remind the Marxists, so adept at looking for regularities and even "laws" that dictate the historical evolution, that the emergence of the Mafia State in some post-communist States is not the result of chance. There are historical circumstances to explain it.

Let us return to Ravines and his 1952 Foreword: "I know well that the scam is not a product of the perfidy of an evil leader, or the ambitious cruelty of a clan that owns power. It is the inexorable consequence of systems and methods; of inhuman dogmas that cannot be abandoned; of economic, political and social conditions which the Soviet leaders cannot modify or soften, since that would lead to their fall".

We should have paid more attention to Ravines when he wrote those lines. A certain set of historical circumstances are required for enabling the birth of a Mafia State.

Countries under military conflicts, with failed States, dysfunctional political and justice systems, without a development perspective and with impoverished societies, are breeding grounds conducive to the emergence of criminal activities. Post-communist countries offer that potential because of the DNA of the totalitarian regimes of governance they come from.

In societies without the rule of law, the emergence of various forms of cooperation and even alliances between some criminal politicians and common criminals was a historical necessity. That reality could be made effective in dysfunctional States such as Mexico, some Central America countries, in certain regions such as Sicily, or in entire countries that underwent a regime change from a totalitarian society like the USSR.<sup>9</sup>

**The Leninist doctrine and the communist States had all the necessary ingredients to facilitate over time the change in the DNA of some totalitarian societies into mafia states.** While not all totalitarian countries inevitably had to go through that evolution, their nature favored it.

The Great Mutation is facilitated in closed societies, with neither democratic institutions, nor separate powers, rule of law, and political and civil liberties; without market economies, with brutal intelligence and police systems, with the military submitted to a political oligarchy, and where a cult of obedience is installed in favor of a supposed "vanguard", infallible and untouchable, with absolute control of the reins of the country.

In a society where it is openly established that the end justifies the means, it is easier to get rid of any moralistic disgust and decide that the enemy of my enemy — the world of common crime in

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<sup>9</sup> The critical reaction by Peter Andrea (Carnegie Endowment for Peace), regarding an essay by Moisés Naím (Council for Foreign Relations NY) on the mafia State contains some flaws. It is not valid to equate the phenomena of punctual infiltration of State institutions by the mafia (such as those in Italy) to the full occupation of the State apparatus by a mafia, as is the case today in Venezuela. That is the difference between the criminal penetration of the Colombian State by organized crime at the time of Pablo Escobar and the Venezuelan criminal state in the Chávez era. Andreas, as a historian, remembers rightly that there always throughout history criminal activities that transcended State borders. But that does not grant an intellectual license to confuse that trans territoriality with the dangerous global dimension of the current processes in motion. See: Peter Andreas "Measuring the Mafia-State Menace Are Government-Backed Gangs a Grave New Threat?" *Foreign Affairs*, July-August 2012. Available at:

<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2012-07-01/measuring-mafia-state-menace>

this case — could be my friend. In fact, it may even become my ally. A convenient code of conduct for Mafia States.

## **Unforeseen Transition: from Communism to Mafia State**

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The transition we are witnessing today in Cuba and other post-communist societies is not from totalitarian to liberal States as Francis Fukuyama and transitologists foresaw in the 1990's, but from so-called “Real Socialism” to mafia states. If Eudocio Ravines warned about the Great Scam of communism, today we are facing its Great Mutation.<sup>10</sup>

In order to sell the Great Scam to their own populations and to the world, the communist oligarchies needed to comply with certain requirements of the social pact promised to their citizenry: the bartering of eternal social and economic security in exchange for the abdication of every individual political and civil right. That was the currency of the so-called “real socialism.”

This was the case until the fall of the USSR, when the communist oligarchies of some of those countries launched the Great Mutation, which was nothing other than their own strategy of mutating from totalitarian inept bureaucracies into klepto-autocratic oligarchies. But in some countries of real socialism the entrepreneurial incapacity of these elites caused them to go further.

From the initial goal, after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the USSR, of becoming an autocratic class with market economies under their hegemony, they began to resume the practice of their worst criminal abilities and skills — who doubts that the KGB and the G-2 are two of their few efficient institutions? — to reign over mafia States. In a globalized world, that new State modality multiplied their privileges and made them valid in any corner of the planet, which contributed billions in convertible currencies to their personal chests.

**The Great Mutation no longer required inefficient bureaucrats and ideologues, but experts in covert operations, intelligence, police, and underworld, unscrupulous, financiers to invest in running it.** The new criminal class that emerged from that mutation of the communist DNA was no longer interested in sustaining the economic costs of co-opting the population. Coercion was cheaper.

## **The Cuban Mafia State**

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**The necessary preconditions that favored the transition from the communist scam to the Mafia State were created by Fidel Castro.** His *caudillo* leadership style and his gangster habits and logic, acquired during his time at the University of Havana, imposed a peculiar stamp on Cuban communism. The arbitrary confiscation of private properties started by the Castroist process of 1959, and reproduced ever since then in cyclical fashion throughout the years, established the premises to justify the revolutionary right of kleptomaniac tendencies of those controlling the political power. On the other hand, Cuban communism was not only totalitarian but also

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<sup>10</sup> Venezuela's Investigative Unit, “Venezuela: A Mafia State?”, *In Sight Crime*, May 16th, 2018. Available at: <https://www.insightcrime.org/investigations/venezuela-mafia-state/>

*caudillista*. Castro emptied of real power the institutions of the Communist Party and the government, disposed of public funds at will, destroyed the accounting system and its transparency in the management of the national economy, established an opaque bottomless “*Comandante's Reserve*” that he managed as his private bank account. Last but not least, he ordered covert operations aimed at the creation of shell companies posing as foreign private corporations - even banking entities - through front men based abroad. He had no scruples since his time in Sierra Maestra in allying with drug producers such as Crescencio Pérez, whom he made a commander, or with drug lords of the 1970's such as Roberto Suarez and Pablo Escobar. or with American criminal elements such as Robert Vesco. He considered drug trafficking another "revolutionary task" that was necessary to undertake.

However, there are differences between a criminal leader that involves some institutions and operational groups in punctual illegal activities and the integral transformation of a communist society into a Mafia State. Such changes were implemented mostly after Chavez survived a coup d'état at the turn of the century and from then on fully surrendered to Havana

Among them, the following could be highlighted:

1. **The consolidation of an oligarchy parallel to the formal institutions for the exercise of power.** It is *that* center of power — not the formal structures and institutions — where strategic guidelines arise from. The associates to that elite, especially the military, in many cases hold important positions in the government and the Communist Party, but that is secondary.

Being a member of the Politburo is less relevant than belonging to the nucleus of the new military oligarchy around Raúl Castro and his family. This elite of power — made up by less than 0.01% of the population — and their surroundings, are the ones who really decide and rule; the government institutions barely execute and manage what those decide. In this new architecture of real power, who is more powerful today, the dictator's daughter, Mariela Castro, or President Miguel Díaz-Canel?

What escapes most Cuba analysts is that the genuine power structure in Cuba is similar to that of a corporation and shaped as concentric circles. At the very center of power is the Castro family together with its most reliable and closest allies, most of them are military figures. They represent no more than a hundred families in a country of more than 11 million citizens. That is the true power elite that leads this transition from communism into a mafia state. Their unstated ambition is to become part of a global elite with unrestricted wealth and privileges similar to those in Russia or China. The rest of the individuals located in the other concentric circles enjoy different levels of privileges similar to those of the bureaucratic class in communist states. They include about a thousand of military and civilian high officials and their families. Individuals such as the recently appointed —no free elections decided his designation- president Miguel Diaz Canel are nothing more than a CEO for the management of the traditional economy and services. The illicit economy is directly run by the Castro Clan and no one out of that tiny and close power elite is even

aware of its dimension and activities. Raul Castro son in law, General Lopez Callejas, is probably the only person even within that restricted circle to really know what is going on.

2. **The privileges enjoyed by the new power elite in the Mafia State are connected to incomes that are not accounted for and allow the enjoyment of privileges at global scale.** If under communism the political hierarchy of the bureaucrat ensured — with no need for holding property rights — the unrestricted enjoyment of all national state owned resources under the Mafia State is the access to large amounts of convertible currencies what differentiate their social status from the common person. We are not referring to the emergence of the new privileged social class that today already earns incomes well above the national average in certain new self-employment sectors. The current transition to a Mafia State facilitates the surge of a new power elite based as before on loyalty and proximity to the Castro family but that now also looks forward to amassing private accumulation of capital, real estate and privileges of global reach.

The new power elite of the Mafia State wishes to enjoy access to luxury goods and services throughout the world, not to be limited as before to the unrestricted usufruct of the national resorts. They manage private resources to rent luxury yachts and spend vacations in the Mediterranean if they so wish. **They want to transform from the national ruling class to a global privileged elite.** Achieving this aspiration presumes that the basis of the new power would not any longer require the vertical promotion in bureaucratic positions that are match with local privileges, but the accumulation of freely convertible currency. It is also significant that the members of the new power elite no longer intend to hide to enjoy their privileged lives. They now enjoy and allow being photographed with celebrities in exclusive places. Let alone they feel oblige to excuse or justify themselves to an increasingly impoverished population.

3. **Military Capitalism<sup>11</sup> is the regime of governance of the new Cuban Mafia State.** This oligarchy appropriates profitable and dollarized institutions while the traditional bureaucratic nomenclature continues to manage over the disaster of the socialist economy. The population has to choose between working for the State and be paid a pittance; being hired by a joint venture company linked to the military, in which they pay a little more and expropriate 90% of the salary contributed by foreign investors; or undertake some work on

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<sup>11</sup> State Military Capitalism, a concept coined by the Cuban writer, intellectual and political analyst Carlos Alberto Montaner, to name the transition from Cuban communism to another regime of oligarchic domination. In the words of Montaner:

*Roughly speaking, military State capitalism is based on the idea that Cuba's main sources of wealth are in the country's 2,500 medium and large companies, all protected by the State and mostly run by the military; while the minor service establishments, (restaurants, small pensions, private party clowns and endless minutiae) would provide jobs to the bulk of a population carefully guarded, so that they do not accumulate capital, and thus deprive them of their potential political power.*

their own account, burdened by abusive taxation and without their business having legal recognition.

The privileges enjoyed by the holding GAESA, formally adhered to the Cuban Armed Forces but run in opaque and authoritarian fashion by a son in law of Raul Castro, General Luis Alberto Rodríguez López-Callejas marks the difference between the formal and the illicit economy. GAESA is not audited by any independent institution such as Controlaria General de la Republica, Ministerio de Economía y Hacienda or the National Assembly. Whenever the feel it suits their purpose General Rodríguez López-Callejas is entitled to rip the away from any other institutions without even bothering with excuses. The General was in charged on constructing the Port of Mariel and after declining a contract to that end for around 300 million dollars he broke the deal and signed a new one with the Government of Lula da Silva for almost a billion that was financed by the central bank of Brazil (BANDES). Strange rational that could only be explained if the Port construction was used as a money laundering scheme. Perhaps the General's last name should be changed from Lopez to Lansky.<sup>12</sup>

- 4. Two parallel economies are established, one dollarized and pseudo capitalist in the hands of the Castro Clan, and another, unproductive, left to the traditional bureaucracy.** Thus, the power elite gradually moves from controlling and managing the entire economy to control only the most profitable part; the one that provides the logistics for their criminal operations. The rest of the inefficient State economy is left in the hands of the traditional institutions to be managed by bureaucrats. The members of the former nomenclature — without control over the most productive investments such as tourism, and no longer having a function other than managing over the socialist disaster—are every time less capable to respond to an increasingly impoverished population. The existence of these two parallel state structures contribute to disguise the emergence of the new Mafia State and to provide a misleading sense of “socialist continuity” to the uninformed.

How has this gradual, undeclared transition from the Great Scam to the Great Mutation been reflected on Cuba?

Under the motto of pursuing efficiency and suppressing gratuities, Cuban communism gradually got rid of the expectations associated to the Great Scam.

Without granting any political and civil liberties, nor authorizing private property and a free market, the Cuban communist State announced that it would no longer pursue full employment policies; allowed a highly restricted version of self-employment to tackle with increasing unemployment (“take responsibility for yourself, do not expect the state to feed you”); planned the contraction of the health system — whose doctors, trafficked as slaves,<sup>13</sup> now became a source of income for the elites of the new mafia State; reduced social investment in housing construction, repair and maintenance of the health infrastructure and got rid of any other social oriented

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<sup>12</sup> Carlos Cabrera Pérez, “Luis Alberto Rodríguez López-Calleja: El General más peligroso para Cuba”, *Cibercuba*. October 23, 2019. Available at: <https://www.cibercuba.com/noticias/2019-10-23-u191143-e42839-s27061-luis-alberto-rodriguez-lopez-calleja-general-peligroso>

<sup>13</sup> Carlos Sánchez Berzaín, *Castrochavismo*, Interamerican Institute for Democracy: Miami, 2019. pp. 113-115

investment that, unlike those connected to tourism, did not report a benefit to the pockets of the new power elite in the short or medium term.

**In sum, the socialist expectations of enjoying assured employment, housing and food, as well as free health care and education, gradually vanish with the advancement of the Mafia State. The suppression of civil and political rights, nevertheless, remains.**

As an example, consider the following data:

In the last seven years, 64 hospitals have been closed in Cuba. The country rapidly loses hospitalization capacity (32% since 2010). And the number of polyclinics has been reduced by 9%. Data from economist Carmelo Mesa-Lago show that the total health personnel dropped by 22% from 2008 to 2016. The number of technicians fell by 54% and nurses by 16%. In 2010 alone, 47,000 employees in that sector were laid off.<sup>14</sup>

The curious feature with public health care is that the export of medical services in conditions of modern slavery — in which 80 to 90% of doctors' salaries are confiscated by the Cuban State — turned over \$ 6.4 billion in 2018 (more than 50% of the national income in freely convertible currency) according to public statistics of the Oficina nacional de Informacion y Estadísticas (ONEI), but far from investing those resources to improve the national health system and infrastructure, only the accelerated deterioration of health services is for all to see.

After 2006, housing construction steadily declined to 22,100 units in 2016. Plans for 2017 and 2018 also fell short. The housing deficit is close to one million units.<sup>15</sup>

What about foodstuff? Cuba still needs to import 80% of its national consumption at a cost of about two billion dollars a year. But while investments in new hotel capacities are a priority for a tourism demand in free fall, the necessary investments to ensure food for the population are postponed.<sup>16</sup>

Those sectors of the population in various countries, to which they continue to sell the Great Scam of a non-existent Cuban revolution, should take note of this historical cycle that began with the fall of the USSR. A non-ideological look at Havana or Caracas should return their false expectations to the harsh realities of Cubazuela, where the promises of the Great Scam of Castro-Chavismo yield way to a reality of famine with repression.

Democracy is a defective system that, nevertheless, allows for improvement and constant change. Communism and mafia states are societies born with the intention of becoming eternal.

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<sup>14</sup> Roberto Álvarez Quiñones, “Prepotencia Médica”. January 31st, 2018. *Diario de Cuba*. Available at: [http://www.diariodecuba.com/cuba/1517403326\\_37036.html](http://www.diariodecuba.com/cuba/1517403326_37036.html)

<sup>15</sup> Carmelo Mesa Lago, “La Vivienda en Cuba Socialista y las Reformas Estructurales”, December 20th, 2017, *Cuba Posible*. Available at: <https://cubaposible.com/vivienda-cuba-socialismo-reformas/>

<sup>16</sup> Pedro Monreal, “La inversión en el agro cubano: entre el “hambre de inversiones” y el desperdicio de estas”, El Estado como tal: El Blog de Pedro Monreal sobre Cuba. July 19th, 2019. Available at: <https://elestadocomotal.com/2019/07/19/la-inversion-en-el-agro-cubano-entre-el-hambre-de-inversiones-y-el-desperdicio-de-estas/>

## **The threat to international peace and security**

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Former US ambassador to the United Nations, Nikki Haley, aptly put it at a meeting of the Security Council of that international organization devoted to the relationship between human rights and international security: “In case after case, human rights violations and abuses are not merely the incidental byproduct of conflict. They are the trigger for conflict.”

Coexisting with totalitarian, brutally repressive regimes have encouraged their rulers, in more than one occasion, to proactively undermine democratic societies in other countries. Since its emergence in Russia in 1917, most communist states have committed to an aggressive — sometimes overt, most times covert — foreign policy.

Since 1959 Cuba followed suit. Its leaders’ vision is that it is impossible to trust, much less peacefully coexist, with their adversaries. The degree of Cuba’s confrontational policies varies from country to country. But for a small island with a limited population, Cuba has directly engaged in extraordinarily numerous military conflicts in Central and South America, the Caribbean, Middle East, Africa and Asia. It has also conducted terrorist actions within Europe and the United States.<sup>17</sup>

From Panama to Angola, from Bolivia to Vietnam, Cuban regular or irregular forces, varying from contingents of a few dozens to tens of thousands of combatants, intervened in conflicts developing far away from its shores. They did so either armed with light infantry weapons or with heavy gadgetry that included missiles, bombers, tanks and other assets. Since the early sixties, Castro’s vision was that the best defense for Cuba was to stir conflicts in distant places or create havoc in other countries to distract the powerful US war machinery. Guevara’s motto (“Create two, three, many Vietnams”), is a vision that was not abandoned but readjusted, to open the door to the adoption of asymmetric, hybrid war strategies and tactics.

Cuba, a country that since 1959 never had a self-sustained economy, was able with Soviet support, to develop what in the 1980’s was a powerful, first class army in the region. But most important, they also built a first-class intelligence machinery that the CIA had considered third or fourth among the best in the planet. After the fall of the USSR, their new ecosystem of support is to be found in the international networks that integrate state and non-state actors for the pursuit of benefits that result from criminal activities.

The Cuban intelligence apparatus has operated for six decades in various continents, building covert infrastructures and logistic systems, and recruiting local agents among foreign military, academia, teachers, journalists, students, politicians, leaders of social movements, NGO’s and unions. Many of their current leaders were trained politically or professionally in Cuban schools. Cuba also developed cooperation, based on mutual benefit, with criminal networks in several continents. They allowed the Cuban power elite to exercise significant influence in those countries

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<sup>17</sup> An interesting documented review of some early terrorist attempts of Castro within the United States can be found in the book by William B. Brewer *Vendetta*. John Wiley & Sons:USA, 1997.

but also to build and operate shell companies, traffic with weapons to support their plans and allies, as well as to implement money laundering operations.

Cubans are familiar, and generally successful, with the implementation of interfering and outright intervention activities in different societies and cultural contexts. While Havana demands respect from others, the Castro regime had never thought twice when an opportunity arose to exploit the internal problems of other countries included in its hit list.

## **Conclusion**

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1. **The Mafia State is a relatively new category coined and use by some political scientists to analyze recently emerged phenomena in international relations.** It is not a propaganda spin or pejorative expression to refer to old autocratic or totalitarian States. Stalin murdered millions while Putin is a selective serial killer but no less dangerous. The Cold War between blocks with opposing systems was not replaced by peace in international relations. What we experience today is the confrontation between a group of democratic states based on the rule of law, and a coalition of authoritarian and Mafia States allied with criminal irregular forces engaged in drug, arms, human trafficking, and terrorism that provides the necessary income to finance repression in their dictatorial societies.
2. **Some — not all — of the communist regimes evolved into mafia states.** That may happen when their bureaucratic oligarchies become criminal power groups exclusively seeking their own enrichment and abandoning their previous commitments to foster the general welfare of the population while they retained their commitment to exercise unrestricted, unchecked, and eternal political power.
3. **Criminals respond to a different logic than traditional governments.** No one should rule out the possibility of exploring the potential for dialogue or negotiation with some members of the power elites of Cubazuela, but whoever tries that approach should be fully aware of who they intend to negotiate with and what their reasoning logic is. Their paradigm is the use of force and absolute power, not to seek consensus. For them, dialogues and negotiation processes are not opportunities to seek solutions of the type “we all win”; but a window to gain time, study the divisions among their adversaries and exploit whatever differences they may find there. There is a difference between the methodology use by a SWAT negotiator dealing with a terrorist group with hostages, and the politicians and diplomats parleying with their peers, even if they are adversaries. SWAT obtains the concessions from their interlocutors by speaking to them in the only codes that they understand: the ability to use force in a resolute and overwhelming way if they refuse to come to terms.

No one enters a negotiation willing to compromise something without first being convinced that it does not have a Best Alternative to a Negotiated Agreement (BATNA). And for those following a criminal logic to reach that conclusion, it is first essential to make them feel *credible fear* that *their very existence, not just their fortune and property*, is in danger. Financial and economic sanctions may yield some limited results. Whoever decides to

announce in advance that it renounces the use of any form of force in order to bring to reason that peculiar type of counterparts would have lost all negotiating leverage beforehand.

4. **The parallel economy of the new criminal oligarchy feeds off the illegal operations carried out with its global partners: trafficking drugs, weapons and people, and money laundering.** The international sanctions targeting the traditional economy of those countries (oil, sugar, tobacco, tourism) do not affect them to the point of overthrowing those who control power. The clandestine illicit businesses continue to provide them with the essential resources from the underground economy to repress the population.
5. **The Cuban Mafia State is now a colonial power in Venezuela (Cubazuela).** The dictatorial oligarchies in both countries have merged into a **transnational criminal enterprise**, attracting the collaboration of other anti-Western governments (Russia, Iran, China) as well as some terrorist and drug trafficking organizations (ELN, FARC, Hezbollah). Castro and Maduro also have accomplices in the rulers in Bolivia and Nicaragua (Evo Morales, and Daniel Ortega). The downfall of Morales was a terrible blow to this regional network of production and distribution of drugs.
6. **The head of the regional destabilizing hydra is in Havana.** Changing the regime of governance in Venezuela is indispensable, but insufficient to guarantee long-term regional democratic stability. The Mafia State will continue to make use of its asymmetric, hybrid, total war strategy to replace unfriendly governments with unconditional allies that intend to be eternally in power. While it is obvious that the socio-economic problems of those countries are not fabricated by Havana or Caracas, -as was the case in Ecuador, Chile, and Colombia-, some of the professional agitators that generate the destabilizing violence were previously recruited and trained by Cubazuela. That is not new. It repeats the same pattern of past times when guerrilla groups went to Cuba for training and to practice military actions that were to be later implemented in their countries, professional agitators are now recruited and operational plans to destabilize democratic governments — including the means for their logistical and financial coverage — are also designed in advance and put on hold to be implemented at the right moment. The goal is to build the capability of taking advantage of any local justified grievance and quickly turn it into a destructive generalized chaos that potentially may bring down or wear out unfriendly governments and even their democratic constitutional regimes of governance.

Without a doubt, the challenge posed by Mafia States is immense, but inaction would be a greater risk. Without putting a curb on Cubazuela and its subversive strategy for the region, there will be no security, democracy, or stability in this Hemisphere.

Mafia regimes never respect the human rights of the citizenry nor live at peace with the democracies of the international community.