

= Fidel Castro =

Fidel Alejandro Castro Ruz (American Spanish : [fiˈðel aleˈxandɾo ˈkastɾo ˈrus] audio ; born August 13 , 1926) , commonly known as Fidel Castro , is a Cuban politician and revolutionary who governed the Republic of Cuba as Prime Minister from 1959 to 1976 and then as President from 1976 to 2008 . Politically a Marxist ? Leninist and Cuban nationalist , he also served as the First Secretary of the Communist Party of Cuba from 1961 until 2011 . Under his administration Cuba became a one @-@ party communist state ; industry and business were nationalized , and state socialist reforms implemented throughout society .

Born in Birán as the son of a wealthy farmer , Castro adopted leftist anti @-@ imperialist politics while studying law at the University of Havana . After participating in rebellions against right @-@ wing governments in the Dominican Republic and Colombia , he planned the overthrow of Cuban President Fulgencio Batista , launching a failed attack on the Moncada Barracks in 1953 . After a year 's imprisonment , he traveled to Mexico where he formed a revolutionary group , the 26th of July Movement , with his brother Raúl Castro and Che Guevara . Returning to Cuba , Castro took a key role in the Cuban Revolution by leading the Movement in a guerrilla war against Batista 's forces from the Sierra Maestra . After Batista 's overthrow in 1959 , Castro assumed military and political power as Cuba 's Prime Minister . The United States was alarmed by Castro 's friendly relations with the Soviet Union , and unsuccessfully attempted to remove him by assassination , economic blockade , and counter @-@ revolution , including the Bay of Pigs invasion of 1961 . Countering these threats , Castro formed an alliance with the Soviets and allowed them to place nuclear weapons on the island , sparking the Cuban Missile Crisis ? a defining incident of the Cold War ? in 1962 .

Adopting a Marxist @-@ Leninist model of development , Castro converted Cuba into a one @-@ party socialist state under Communist Party rule , the first in the Western hemisphere . Reforms introducing central economic planning and expanding healthcare and education were accompanied by state control of the press and the suppression of internal dissent . Abroad , Castro supported anti @-@ imperialist revolutionary groups , backing the establishment of Marxist governments in Chile , Nicaragua , and Grenada , and sending troops to aid allies in the Yom Kippur War , Ethio @-@ Somali War , and Angolan Civil War . These actions , coupled with Castro 's leadership of the Non @-@ Aligned Movement from 1979 ? 83 and Cuba 's medical internationalism , increased Cuba 's profile on the world stage and earned its leader great respect in the developing world . Following the Soviet Union 's dissolution in 1991 , Castro led Cuba into its " Special Period " and embraced environmentalist and anti @-@ globalization ideas . In the 2000s he forged alliances in the Latin American Pink Tide ? namely with Hugo Chávez 's Venezuela ? and signed Cuba to the Bolivarian Alliance for the Americas . In 2006 he transferred his responsibilities to Vice @-@ President Raúl Castro , who formally assumed the presidency in 2008 .

Castro is a controversial and divisive world figure . He is decorated with various international awards , and his supporters laud him as a champion of socialism , anti @-@ imperialism , and humanitarianism , whose revolutionary regime secured Cuba 's independence from American imperialism . Conversely , critics view him as a totalitarian dictator whose administration oversaw multiple human @-@ rights abuses , an exodus of more than one million Cubans , and the impoverishment of the country 's economy . Through his actions and his writings he has significantly influenced the politics of various individuals and groups across the world .

= = Early life = =

= = = Youth : 1926 ? 47 = = =

Castro was born out of wedlock at his father 's farm on August 13 , 1926 . His father , Ángel Castro y Argiz , was a migrant to Cuba from Galicia , Northwest Spain . He had become financially successful by growing sugar cane at Las Manacas farm in Birán , Oriente Province , and after the

collapse of his first marriage , he took his household servant , Lina Ruz González - also of Spanish origin , as his mistress and later on second wife ; together they had seven children , among them Fidel . Aged six , Castro was sent to live with his teacher in Santiago de Cuba , before being baptized into the Roman Catholic Church aged eight . Being baptized enabled Castro to attend the La Salle boarding school in Santiago , where he regularly misbehaved , and so was sent to the privately funded , Jesuit @-@ run Dolores School in Santiago . In 1945 he transferred to the more prestigious Jesuit @-@ run El Colegio de Belén in Havana . Although Castro took an interest in history , geography and debating at Belén , he did not excel academically , instead devoting much of his time to playing sport .

In 1945 , Castro began studying law at the University of Havana . Admitting he was " politically illiterate " , he became embroiled in student activism , and the violent gangsterismo culture within the university . Passionate about anti @-@ imperialism and opposing U.S. intervention in the Caribbean , he unsuccessfully campaigned for the presidency of the Federation of University Students on a platform of " honesty , decency and justice " . Castro became critical of the corruption and violence of President Ramón Grau 's government , delivering a public speech on the subject in November 1946 that received coverage on the front page of several newspapers .

In 1947 , Castro joined the Party of the Cuban People (Partido Ortodoxo) , founded by veteran politician Eduardo Chibás . A charismatic figure , Chibás advocated social justice , honest government , and political freedom , while his party exposed corruption and demanded reform . Though Chibás lost the election , Castro remained committed to working on his behalf . Student violence escalated after Grau employed gang leaders as police officers , and Castro soon received a death threat urging him to leave the university ; refusing , he began carrying a gun and surrounding himself with armed friends . In later years anti @-@ Castro dissidents accused him of committing gang @-@ related assassinations at the time , but these remain unproven .

= = = Rebellion and Marxism : 1947 ? 50 = = =

In June 1947 , Castro learned of a planned expedition to invade the Dominican Republic and overthrow the right @-@ wing military junta of Rafael Trujillo , a U.S. ally . Being President of the University Committee for Democracy in the Dominican Republic , Castro joined the expedition . The invasion force consisted of around 1 @, @ 200 troops , mostly Cubans and exiled Dominicans , and they intended to sail from Cuba in July 1947 . However , under U.S. pressure , Grau 's government stopped the invasion , although Castro and many of his comrades evaded arrest . Returning to Havana , Castro took a leading role in student protests against the killing of a high school pupil by government bodyguards . The protests , accompanied by a crackdown on those considered communists , led to violent clashes between activists and police in February 1948 , in which Castro was badly beaten . At this point his public speeches took on a distinctly leftist slant by condemning social and economic inequality in Cuba . In contrast , his former public criticisms had centered on condemning corruption and U.S. imperialism .

In April 1948 , Castro traveled to Bogotá , Colombia , with a Cuban student group sponsored by President Juan Perón 's Argentine government . There , the assassination of popular leftist leader Jorge Eliécer Gaitán Ayala led to widespread rioting and clashes between the governing Conservatives ? backed by the army ? and leftist Liberals . Castro joined the Liberal cause by stealing guns from a police station , but subsequent police investigations concluded that he had not been involved in any killings . Returning to Cuba , Castro became a prominent figure in protests against government attempts to raise bus fares . That year , he married Mirta Díaz Balart , a student from a wealthy family through whom he was exposed to the lifestyle of the Cuban elite . The relationship was a love match , disapproved of by both families , but Mirta 's father gave them tens of thousands of dollars to spend on a three @-@ month New York City honeymoon .

That same year , Grau decided not to stand for re @-@ election , which was instead won by his Partido Auténtico 's new candidate , Carlos Prío Socarrás . Prío faced widespread protests when members of the MSR , now allied to the police force , assassinated Justo Fuentes , a socialist friend of Castro 's . In response , Prío agreed to quell the gangs , but found them too powerful to control .

Castro had moved further to the left , influenced by the Marxist writings of Karl Marx , Friedrich Engels , and Vladimir Lenin . He came to interpret Cuba 's problems as an integral part of capitalist society , or the " dictatorship of the bourgeoisie " , rather than the failings of corrupt politicians , and adopted the Marxist view that meaningful political change could only be brought about by proletariat revolution . Visiting Havana 's poorest neighborhoods , he became active in the student anti @-@ racist campaign .

In September 1949 , Mirta gave birth to a son , Fidelito , so the couple moved to a larger Havana flat . Castro continued to put himself at risk , staying active in the city 's politics and joining the September 30 Movement , which contained within it both communists and members of the Partido Ortodoxo . The group 's purpose was to oppose the influence of the violent gangs within the university ; despite his promises , Prío had failed to control the situation , instead offering many of their senior members jobs in government ministries . Castro volunteered to deliver a speech for the Movement on November 13 , exposing the government 's secret deals with the gangs and identifying key members . Attracting the attention of the national press , the speech angered the gangs , and Castro fled into hiding , first in the countryside and then in the U.S. Returning to Havana several weeks later , Castro lay low and focused on his university studies , graduating as a Doctor of Law in September 1950 .

= = Career in law and politics : 1950 ? 52 = = =

Castro co @-@ founded a legal partnership that primarily catered for poor Cubans , although it proved a financial failure . Caring little for money or material goods , Castro failed to pay his bills ; his furniture was repossessed and electricity cut off , distressing his wife . He took part in a high @-@ school protest in Cienfuegos in November 1950 , fighting with police in protest at the Education Ministry 's ban on student associations ; arrested and charged for violent conduct , the magistrate dismissed the charges . His hopes for Cuba still centered on Chibás and the Partido Ortodoxo , and he was present at Chibás ' politically motivated suicide in 1951 . Seeing himself as Chibás ' heir , Castro wanted to run for Congress in the June 1952 elections , though senior Ortodoxo members feared his radical reputation and refused to nominate him . Instead he was nominated as a candidate for the House of Representatives by party members in Havana 's poorest districts , and began campaigning . The Ortodoxo had considerable support and was predicted to do well in the election .

During his campaign , Castro met with General Fulgencio Batista , the former president who had returned to politics with the Unitary Action Party ; although both opposing Prío 's administration , their meeting never got beyond polite generalities . In March 1952 , Batista seized power in a military coup , with Prío fleeing to Mexico . Declaring himself president , Batista cancelled the planned presidential elections , describing his new system as " disciplined democracy " : Castro , like many others , considered it a one @-@ man dictatorship . Batista moved to the right , solidifying ties with both the wealthy elite and the United States , severing diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union , suppressing trade unions and persecuting Cuban socialist groups . Intent on opposing Batista , Castro brought several legal cases against the government , but these came to nothing , and Castro began thinking of alternate ways to oust the regime .

= = Cuban Revolution = =

= = The Movement and the Moncada Barracks attack : 1952 ? 53 = = =

Castro formed a group called " The Movement " which operated along a clandestine cell system , publishing underground newspaper El Acusador (The Accuser) , while arming and training anti @-@ Batista recruits . From July 1952 they went on a recruitment drive , gaining around 1 @, @ 200 members in a year , the majority from Havana 's poorer districts . Although a revolutionary socialist , Castro avoided an alliance with the communist PSP , fearing it would frighten away political

moderates , but kept in contact with PSP members like his brother Raúl . Castro stockpiled weapons for a planned attack on the Moncada Barracks , a military garrison outside Santiago de Cuba , Oriente . Castro 's militants intended to dress in army uniforms and arrive at the base on July 25 , seizing control and raiding the armory before reinforcements arrived . Supplied with new weaponry , Castro intended to spark a revolution among Oriente 's impoverished cane cutters and promote further uprisings . Castro 's plan emulated those of the 19th century Cuban independence fighters who had raided Spanish barracks ; Castro saw himself as the heir to independence leader José Martí .

Castro gathered 165 revolutionaries for the mission , ordering his troops not to cause bloodshed unless they met armed resistance . The attack took place on July 26 , 1953 , but ran into trouble ; 3 of the 16 cars that had set out from Santiago failed to get there . Reaching the barracks , the alarm was raised , with most of the rebels pinned down by machine gun fire . 4 were killed before Castro ordered a retreat . The rebels suffered 6 fatalities and 15 other casualties , whilst the army suffered 19 dead and 27 wounded . Meanwhile , some rebels took over a civilian hospital ; subsequently stormed by government soldiers , the rebels were rounded up , tortured and 22 were executed without trial . Accompanied by 19 comrades , Castro set out for Gran Piedra in the rugged Sierra Maestra mountains several miles to the north , where they could establish a guerrilla base . Responding to the attack , Batista 's government proclaimed martial law , ordering a violent crackdown on dissent , and imposing strict media censorship . The government broadcast misinformation about the event , claiming that the rebels were communists who had killed hospital patients , although news and photographs of the army 's use of torture and summary executions in Oriente soon spread , causing widespread public and some governmental disapproval .

Over the following days , the rebels were rounded up ; some were executed and others ? including Castro ? transported to a prison north of Santiago . Believing Castro incapable of planning the attack alone , the government accused Ortodoxo and PSP politicians of involvement , putting 122 defendants on trial on September 21 at the Palace of Justice , Santiago . Acting as his own defense counsel , Castro cited Martí as the intellectual author of the attack and convinced the 3 judges to overrule the army 's decision to keep all defendants handcuffed in court , proceeding to argue that the charge with which they were accused ? of " organizing an uprising of armed persons against the Constitutional Powers of the State " ? was incorrect , for they had risen up against Batista , who had seized power in an unconstitutional manner . The trial embarrassed the army by revealing that they had tortured suspects , after which they tried unsuccessfully to prevent Castro from testifying any further , claiming he was too ill . The trial ended on October 5 , with the acquittal of most defendants ; 55 were sentenced to prison terms of between 7 months and 13 years . Castro was sentenced on October 16 , during which he delivered a speech that would be printed under the title of History Will Absolve Me . Castro was sentenced to 15 years imprisonment in the hospital wing of the Model Prison (Presidio Modelo) , a relatively comfortable and modern institution on the Isla de Pinos .

= = = Imprisonment and the 26th of July Movement : 1953 ? 55 = = =

Imprisoned with 25 comrades , Castro renamed his group the " 26th of July Movement " (MR @-@ 26 @-@ 7) in memory of the Moncada attack 's date , and formed a school for prisoners . He read widely , enjoying the works of Marx , Lenin , and Martí but also reading books by Freud , Kant , Shakespeare , Munthe , Maugham and Dostoyevsky , analyzing them within a Marxist framework . Corresponding with supporters , he maintained control over the Movement and organized the publication of History Will Absolve Me . Initially permitted a relative amount of freedom within the prison , he was locked up in solitary confinement after inmates sang anti @-@ Batista songs on a visit by the President in February 1954 . Meanwhile , Castro 's wife Mirta gained employment in the Ministry of the Interior , something he discovered through a radio announcement . Appalled , he raged that he would rather die " a thousand times " than " suffer impotently from such an insult " . Both Fidel and Mirta initiated divorce proceedings , with Mirta taking custody of their son Fidelito ; this angered Castro , who did not want his son growing up in a bourgeois environment .

In 1954 , Batista 's government held presidential elections , but no politician stood against him ; the

election was widely considered fraudulent . It had allowed some political opposition to be voiced , and Castro 's supporters had agitated for an amnesty for the Moncada incident 's perpetrators . Some politicians suggested an amnesty would be good publicity , and the Congress and Batista agreed . Backed by the U.S. and major corporations , Batista believed Castro to be no threat , and on May 15 , 1955 , the prisoners were released . Returning to Havana , Castro gave radio interviews and press conferences ; the government closely monitored him , curtailing his activities . Now divorced , Castro had sexual affairs with two female supporters , Natty Revuelta and Maria Laborde , each conceiving him a child . Setting about strengthening the MR @-@ 26 @-@ 7 , he established an 11 @-@ person National Directorate but retained autocratic control , with some dissenters labeling him a caudillo (dictator) ; he argued that a successful revolution could not be run by committee and required a strong leader .

In 1955 , bombings and violent demonstrations led to a crackdown on dissent , with Castro and Raúl fleeing the country to evade arrest . Castro sent a letter to the press , declaring that he was " leaving Cuba because all doors of peaceful struggle have been closed to me ... As a follower of Martí , I believe the hour has come to take our rights and not beg for them , to fight instead of pleading for them . " The Castros and several comrades traveled to Mexico , where Raúl befriended an Argentine doctor and Marxist @-@ Leninist named Ernesto " Che " Guevara . Fidel liked him , later describing him as " a more advanced revolutionary than I was . " Castro also associated with the Spaniard Alberto Bayo , who agreed to teach Castro 's rebels the necessary skills in guerrilla warfare . Requiring funding , Castro toured the U.S. in search of wealthy sympathizers , there being monitored by Batista 's agents , who allegedly orchestrated a failed assassination attempt against him . Castro kept in contact with the MR @-@ 26 @-@ 7 in Cuba , where they had gained a large support base in Oriente . Other militant anti @-@ Batista groups had sprung up , primarily from the student movement ; most notable was the Directorio Revolucionario Estudiantil (DRE) , founded by José Antonio Echevarría . Antonio met with Castro in Mexico City , but Castro opposed the student 's support for indiscriminate assassination .

After purchasing the decrepit yacht Granma , on November 25 , 1956 Castro set sail from Tuxpan , Veracruz , with 81 armed revolutionaries . The 1 @,@ 200 mile crossing to Cuba was harsh , with food running low and many suffering seasickness . At some points , they had to bail water caused by a leak , and at another , a man fell overboard , delaying their journey . The plan had been for the crossing to take 5 days , and on the Granma 's scheduled day of arrival , November 30 , MR @-@ 26 @-@ 7 members under Frank Pais led an armed uprising in Santiago and Manzanillo . However , the Granma 's journey ultimately lasted 7 days , and with Castro and his men unable to provide reinforcements , Pais and his militants dispersed after two days of intermittent attacks .

= = = Guerrilla war : 1956 ? 59 = = =

The Granma ran aground in a mangrove swamp at Playa Las Coloradas , close to Los Cayuelos , on December 2 , 1956 . Fleeing inland , its crew headed for the forested mountain range of Oriente 's Sierra Maestra , being repeatedly attacked by Batista 's troops . Upon arrival , Castro discovered that only 19 rebels had made it to their destination , the rest having been killed or captured . Setting up an encampment , the survivors included the Castros , Che Guevara , and Camilo Cienfuegos . They began launching raids on small army posts to obtain weaponry , and in January 1957 they overran the outpost at La Plata , treating any soldiers that they wounded but executing Chicho Osorio , the local mayoral (land company overseer) , who was despised by the local peasants and who boasted of killing one of Castro 's rebels . Osorio 's execution aided the rebels in gaining the trust of locals , although they largely remained unenthusiastic and suspicious of the revolutionaries . As trust grew , some locals joined the rebels , although most new recruits came from urban areas . With volunteers boosting the rebel forces to over 200 , in July 1957 Castro divided his army into three columns , commanded by himself , his brother , and Guevara . The MR @-@ 26 @-@ 7 members operating in urban areas continued agitation , sending supplies to Castro , and on February 16 , 1957 he met with other senior members to discuss tactics ; here he met Celia Sánchez , who would become a close friend .

Across Cuba , anti @-@ Batista groups carried out bombings and sabotage ; police responded with mass arrests , torture , and extrajudicial executions . In March 1957 , the DR launched a failed attack on the presidential palace , during which Antonio was shot dead . Frank País was also killed , leaving Castro the MR @-@ 26 @-@ 7 's unchallenged leader . Although Guevara and Raúl were well known for their Marxist @-@ Leninist views , Castro hid his , hoping to gain the support of less radical revolutionaries . In 1957 he met with leading members of the Partido Ortodoxo , Raúl Chibás and Felipe Pazos , authoring the Sierra Maestra Manifesto , in which they demanded that a provisional civilian government be set up to implement moderate agrarian reform , industrialization , and a literacy campaign before holding multiparty elections . As Cuba 's press was censored , Castro contacted foreign media to spread his message ; he became a celebrity after being interviewed by Herbert Matthews , a journalist from the New York Times . Reporters from CBS and Paris Match soon followed .

Castro 's guerrillas increased their attacks on military outposts , forcing the government to withdraw from the Sierra Maestra region , and by spring 1958 , the rebels controlled a hospital , schools , a printing press , slaughterhouse , land @-@ mine factory and a cigar @-@ making factory . By 1958 , Batista was under increasing pressure , a result of his military failures coupled with increasing domestic and foreign criticism surrounding his administration 's press censorship , torture , and extrajudicial executions . Influenced by anti @-@ Batista sentiment among their citizens , the U.S. government ceased supplying him with weaponry . The opposition called a general strike , accompanied by armed attacks from the MR @-@ 26 @-@ 7 . Beginning on April 9 , it received strong support in central and eastern Cuba , but little elsewhere .

Batista responded with an all @-@ out @-@ attack , Operation Verano , in which the army aerially bombarded forested areas and villages suspected of aiding the militants , while 10 @,@ 000 soldiers commanded by General Eulogio Cantillo surrounded the Sierra Maestra , driving north to the rebel encampments . Despite their numerical and technological superiority , the army had no experience with guerrilla warfare , and Castro halted their offensive using land mines and ambushes . Many of Batista 's soldiers defected to Castro 's rebels , who also benefited from local popular support . In the summer , the MR @-@ 26 @-@ 7 went on the offensive , pushing the army out of the mountains , with Castro using his columns in a pincer movement to surround the main army concentration in Santiago . By November , Castro 's forces controlled most of Oriente and Las Villas , and divided Cuba in two by closing major roads and rail lines , severely disadvantaging Batista .

Fearing Castro was a socialist , the U.S. instructed Cantillo to oust Batista . Cantillo secretly agreed to a ceasefire with Castro , promising that Batista would be tried as a war criminal , however Batista was warned , and fled into exile with over US \$ 300 @,@ 000 @,@ 000 on December 31 , 1958 . Cantillo entered Havana 's Presidential Palace , proclaimed the Supreme Court judge Carlos Piedra to be President , and began appointing the new government . Furious , Castro ended the ceasefire , and ordered Cantillo 's arrest by sympathetic figures in the army . Accompanying celebrations at news of Batista 's downfall on January 1 , 1959 , Castro ordered the MR @-@ 26 @-@ 7 to prevent widespread looting and vandalism . Cienfuegos and Guevara led their columns into Havana on January 2 , while Castro entered Santiago and gave a speech invoking the wars of independence . Heading toward Havana , he greeted cheering crowds at every town , giving press conferences and interviews .

= = = Provisional government : 1959 = = =

At Castro 's command , the politically moderate lawyer Manuel Urrutia Lleó was proclaimed provisional president , with Castro erroneously announcing he had been selected by " popular election " ; most of Urrutia 's cabinet were MR @-@ 26 @-@ 7 members . Entering Havana , Castro proclaimed himself Representative of the Rebel Armed Forces of the Presidency , setting up home and office in the penthouse of the Havana Hilton Hotel . Castro exercised a great deal of influence over Urrutia 's regime , which was now ruling by decree . He ensured that the government implemented policies to cut corruption and fight illiteracy and that it attempted to remove Batistianos from positions of power by dismissing Congress and barring all those elected in the rigged elections

of 1954 and 1958 from future office . He then pushed Urrutia to issue a temporary ban on political parties ; he repeatedly said that they would eventually hold multiparty elections . Although repeatedly denying that he was a communist to the press , he began clandestinely meeting members of the Popular Socialist Party to discuss the creation of a socialist state .

In suppressing the revolution , Batista 's government had killed thousands of Cubans ; at the time , Castro and influential sectors of the press put the death toll at 20 @,@ 000 , although more recent estimates place it between 1000 and 4000 . In response to popular uproar , which demanded that those responsible be brought to justice , Castro helped set up many trials , resulting in hundreds of executions . Although widely popular domestically , critics ? in particular the U.S. press ? argued that many were not fair trials . Castro responded that " revolutionary justice is not based on legal precepts , but on moral conviction " . Acclaimed by many across Latin America , he traveled to Venezuela where he met with President @-@ elect Rómulo Betancourt , unsuccessfully requesting a loan and a new deal for Venezuelan oil . Returning home , an argument between Castro and senior government figures broke out . He was infuriated that the government had left thousands unemployed by closing down casinos and brothels . As a result , Prime Minister José Miró Cardona resigned , going into exile in the U.S. and joining the anti @-@ Castro movement .

= = Premiership = =

= = = Consolidating leadership : 1959 ? 60 = = =

On February 16 , 1959 , Castro was sworn in as Prime Minister of Cuba . In April he visited the U.S. on a charm offensive where he met Vice President Richard Nixon , whom he instantly disliked . Proceeding to Canada , Trinidad , Brazil , Uruguay and Argentina , Castro attended an economic conference in Buenos Aires , unsuccessfully proposing a \$ 30 billion U.S.-funded " Marshall Plan " for Latin America . In May 1959 Castro signed into law the First Agrarian Reform , setting a cap for landholdings to 993 acres (402 ha) per owner and prohibiting foreigners from obtaining Cuban land ownership . Around 200 @,@ 000 peasants received title deeds as large land holdings were broken up ; popular among the working class , it alienated the richer landowners . Castro appointed himself president of the National Tourist Industry , introducing unsuccessful measures to encourage African @-@ American tourists to visit , advertising Cuba as a tropical paradise free of racial discrimination . Judges and politicians had their pay reduced while low @-@ level civil servants saw theirs raised , and in March 1959 , Castro declared rents for those who paid less than \$ 100 a month halved .

Although refusing to categorize his regime as socialist and repeatedly denying being a communist , Castro appointed Marxists to senior government and military positions . Most notably , Che Guevara became Governor of the Central Bank and then Minister of Industries . Appalled , Air Force commander Pedro Luis Díaz Lanz defected to the U.S. Although President Urrutia denounced the defection , he expressed concern with the rising influence of Marxism . Angered , Castro in turn announced his resignation as Prime Minister , blaming Urrutia for complicating government with his " fevered anti @-@ Communism " . Over 500 @,@ 000 Castro @-@ supporters surrounded the Presidential Palace demanding Urrutia 's resignation , which he submitted . On July 23 , Castro resumed his Premiership and appointed Marxist Osvaldo Dorticós as President .

Castro 's government emphasised social projects to improve Cuba 's standard of living , often to the detriment of economic development . Major emphasis was placed on education , and during the first 30 months of Castro 's government , more classrooms were opened than in the previous 30 years . The Cuban primary education system offered a work @-@ study program , with half of the time spent in the classroom , and the other half in a productive activity . Health care was nationalized and expanded , with rural health centers and urban polyclinics opening up across the island to offer free medical aid . Universal vaccination against childhood diseases was implemented , and infant mortality rates were reduced dramatically . A third part of this social program was the improvement of infrastructure . Within the first six months of Castro 's government , 600 miles of roads were built across the island , while \$ 300 million was spent on water and sanitation projects . Over 800 houses

were constructed every month in the early years of the administration in an effort to cut homelessness , while nurseries and day @-@ care centers were opened for children and other centers opened for the disabled and elderly .

Castro used radio and television to develop a " dialogue with the people " , posing questions and making provocative statements . His regime remained popular with workers , peasants , and students , who constituted the majority of the country 's population , while opposition came primarily from the middle class ; thousands of doctors , engineers and other professionals emigrated to Florida in the U.S. , causing an economic brain drain . Productivity decreased and the country 's financial reserves were drained within two years . After conservative press expressed hostility towards the government , the pro @-@ Castro printers ' trade union disrupted editorial staff , and in January 1960 the government ordered them to publish a " clarification " written by the printers ' union at the end of articles critical of the government . Castro 's government arrested hundreds of counter @-@ revolutionaries , many of whom were subjected to solitary confinement , rough treatment , and threatening behavior . Militant anti @-@ Castro groups , funded by exiles , the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) , and the Dominican government , undertook armed attacks and set up guerrilla bases in Cuba 's mountains , leading to the six @-@ year War against the Bandits .

By 1960 , the Cold War raged between two superpowers : the United States , a capitalist liberal democracy , and the Soviet Union (USSR) , a Marxist @-@ Leninist socialist state ruled by the Communist Party . Expressing contempt for the U.S. , Castro shared the ideological views of the USSR , establishing relations with several Marxist @-@ Leninist states . Meeting with Soviet First Deputy Premier Anastas Mikoyan , Castro agreed to provide the USSR with sugar , fruit , fibers , and hides , in return for crude oil , fertilizers , industrial goods , and a \$ 100 million loan . Cuba 's government ordered the country 's refineries ? then controlled by the U.S. corporations Shell , Esso and Standard Oil ? to process Soviet oil , but under U.S. pressure , they refused . Castro responded by expropriating and nationalizing the refineries . Retaliating , the U.S. cancelled its import of Cuban sugar , provoking Castro to nationalize most U.S.-owned assets on the island , including banks and sugar mills .

Relations between Cuba and the U.S. were further strained following the explosion of a French vessel , the Le Coubre , in Havana harbor in March 1960 . The ship carried weapons purchased from Belgium , the cause of the explosion was never determined , but Castro publicly insinuated that the U.S. government were guilty of sabotage . He ended this speech with " ¡ Patria o Muerte ! " (" Fatherland or Death ") , a proclamation that he made much use of in ensuing years . Inspired by their earlier success with the 1954 Guatemalan coup d 'état , in March 1960 , U.S. President Eisenhower authorized the CIA to overthrow Castro 's government . He provided them with a budget of \$ 13 million and permitted them to ally with the Mafia , who were aggrieved that Castro 's government closed down their brothel and casino businesses in Cuba . On October 13 , 1960 , the U.S. prohibited the majority of exports to Cuba , initiating an economic embargo . In retaliation , the National Institute for Agrarian Reform INRA took control of 383 private @-@ run businesses on October 14 , and on October 25 a further 166 U.S. companies operating in Cuba had their premises seized and nationalized . On December 16 , the U.S. ended its import quota of Cuban sugar , the country 's primary export .

In September 1960 , Castro flew to New York City for the General Assembly of the United Nations . Staying at the Hotel Theresa in Harlem , he met with journalists and anti @-@ establishment figures like Malcolm X. He also met Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev , with the two publicly condemning the poverty and racism faced by Americans in areas like Harlem . Relations between Castro and Khrushchev were warm ; they led the applause to one another 's speeches at the General Assembly . Subsequently visited by Polish First Secretary Władysław Gomułka , Bulgarian Chairman Todor Zhivkov , Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser and Indian Premier Jawaharlal Nehru , Castro also received an evening 's reception from the Fair Play for Cuba Committee .

Back in Cuba , Castro feared a U.S.-backed coup ; in 1959 his regime spent \$ 120 million on Soviet , French , and Belgian weaponry and by early 1960 had doubled the size of Cuba 's armed forces . Fearing counter @-@ revolutionary elements in the army , the government created a People 's Militia to arm citizens favorable to the revolution , training at least 50 @, @ 000 civilians in combat

techniques . In September 1960 , they created the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (CDR) , a nationwide civilian organization which implemented neighborhood spying to detect counter @-@ revolutionary activities as well as organizing health and education campaigns , becoming a conduit for public complaints . By 1970 , a third of the population would be involved in the CDR , and this would come to rise to 80 % . Castro proclaimed the new administration a direct democracy , in which Cubans could assemble at demonstrations to express their democratic will . As a result , he rejected the need for elections , claiming that representative democratic systems served the interests of socio @-@ economic elites . U.S. Secretary of State Christian Herter announced that Cuba was adopting the Soviet model of rule , with a one @-@ party state , government control of trade unions , suppression of civil liberties , and the absence of freedom of speech and press .

= = = Bay of Pigs Invasion and " Socialist Cuba " : 1961 ? 62 = = =

In January 1961 , Castro ordered Havana 's U.S. Embassy to reduce its 300 staff , suspecting many to be spies . The U.S. responded by ending diplomatic relations , and increasing CIA funding for exiled dissidents ; these militants began attacking ships trading with Cuba , and bombed factories , shops , and sugar mills . Both Eisenhower and his successor John F. Kennedy supported a CIA plan to aid a dissident militia , the Democratic Revolutionary Front , to invade Cuba and overthrow Castro ; the plan resulted in the Bay of Pigs Invasion in April 1961 . On April 15 , CIA @-@ supplied B @-@ 26 's bombed 3 Cuban military airfields ; the U.S. announced that the perpetrators were defecting Cuban air force pilots , but Castro exposed these claims as false flag misinformation . Fearing invasion , he ordered the arrest of between 20 @,@ 000 and 100 @,@ 000 suspected counter @-@ revolutionaries , publicly proclaiming that " What the imperialists cannot forgive us , is that we have made a Socialist revolution under their noses " , his first announcement that the government was socialist .

The CIA and Democratic Revolutionary Front had based a 1 @,@ 400 @-@ strong army , Brigade 2506 , in Nicaragua . In the night from April 16 to 17 , Brigade 2506 landed along Cuba 's Bay of Pigs , and engaged in a firefight with a local revolutionary militia . Castro ordered Captain José Ramón Fernández to launch the counter @-@ offensive , before taking personal control himself . After bombing the invaders ' ships and bringing in reinforcements , Castro forced the Brigade 's surrender on April 20 . He ordered the 1189 captured rebels to be interrogated by a panel of journalists on live television , personally taking over questioning on April 25 . 14 were put on trial for crimes allegedly committed before the revolution , while the others were returned to the U.S. in exchange for medicine and food valued at U.S. \$ 25 million . Castro 's victory was a powerful symbol across Latin America , but it also increased internal opposition primarily among the middle @-@ class Cubans who had been detained in the run @-@ up to the invasion . Although most were freed within a few days , many fled to the U.S. , establishing themselves in Florida .

Consolidating " Socialist Cuba " , Castro united the MR @-@ 26 @-@ 7 , Popular Socialist Party and Revolutionary Directorate into a governing party based on the Leninist principle of democratic centralism : the Integrated Revolutionary Organizations (Organizaciones Revolucionarias Integradas - ORI) , renamed the United Party of the Cuban Socialist Revolution (PURSC) in 1962 . Although the USSR was hesitant regarding Castro 's embrace of socialism , relations with the Soviets deepened . Castro sent Fidelito for a Moscow schooling , Soviet technicians arrived on the island , and Castro was awarded the Lenin Peace Prize . In December 1961 , Castro admitted that he had been a Marxist @-@ Leninist for years , and in his Second Declaration of Havana he called on Latin America to rise up in revolution . In response , the U.S. successfully pushed the Organization of American States to expel Cuba ; the Soviets privately reprimanded Castro for recklessness , although he received praise from China . Despite their ideological affinity with China , in the Sino @-@ Soviet Split , Cuba allied with the wealthier Soviets , who offered economic and military aid .

The ORI began shaping Cuba using the Soviet model , persecuting political opponents and perceived social deviants such as prostitutes and homosexuals ; Castro considered same @-@ sex sexual activity a bourgeois trait . Gay men were forced into the Military Units to Aid Production (

Unidades Militares de Ayuda a la Producción - UMAP) ; after many revolutionary intellectuals decried this move , the UMAP camps were closed in 1967 , although gay men continued to be imprisoned . In 2010 , Castro took responsibility for this persecution , regretting it as a " great injustice " . By 1962 , Cuba 's economy was in steep decline , a result of poor economic management and low productivity coupled with the U.S. trade embargo . Food shortages led to rationing , resulting in protests in Cárdenas . Security reports indicated that many Cubans associated austerity with the " Old Communists " of the PSP , while Castro considered a number of them ? namely Aníbal Escalante and Blas Roca ? unduly loyal to Moscow . In March 1962 Castro removed the most prominent " Old Communists " from office , labelling them " sectarian " . On a personal level , Castro was increasingly lonely , and his relations with Guevara became strained as the latter became increasingly anti @-@ Soviet and pro @-@ Chinese .

= = = Cuban Missile Crisis and furthering socialism : 1962 ? 68 = = =

Militarily weaker than NATO , Khrushchev wanted to install Soviet R @-@ 12 MRBM nuclear missiles on Cuba to even the power balance . Although conflicted , Castro agreed , believing it would guarantee Cuba 's safety and enhance the cause of socialism . Undertaken in secrecy , only the Castro brothers , Guevara , Dorticós and security chief Ramiro Valdés knew the full plan . Upon discovering it through aerial reconnaissance , in October the U.S. implemented an island @-@ wide quarantine to search vessels headed to Cuba , sparking the Cuban Missile Crisis . The U.S. saw the missiles as offensive ; Castro insisted they were for defense only . Castro urged Khrushchev to threaten a nuclear strike on the U.S. should Cuba be attacked , but Khrushchev was desperate to avoid nuclear war . Castro was left out of the negotiations , in which Khrushchev agreed to remove the missiles in exchange for a U.S. commitment not to invade Cuba and an understanding that the U.S. would remove their MRBMs from Turkey and Italy . Feeling betrayed by Khrushchev , Castro was furious and soon fell ill . Proposing a five @-@ point plan , Castro demanded that the U.S. end its embargo , withdraw from Guantanamo Bay Naval Base , cease supporting dissidents , and stop violating Cuban air space and territorial waters . Presenting these demands to U Thant , visiting Secretary @-@ General of the United Nations , the U.S. ignored them , and in turn Castro refused to allow the U.N. ' s inspection team into Cuba .

In May 1963 , Castro visited the USSR at Khrushchev 's personal invitation , touring 14 cities , addressing a Red Square rally , and being awarded both the Order of Lenin and an honorary doctorate from Moscow State University . While there Castro was permitted to sign a Soviet R @-@ 16 intercontinental ballistic missile . Castro returned to Cuba with new ideas ; inspired by Soviet newspaper Pravda , he amalgamated Hoy and Revolución into a new daily , Granma , and oversaw large investment into Cuban sport that resulted in an increased international sporting reputation . Seeking to further consolidate control , in 1963 the government cracked down on Protestant sects in Cuba , with Castro labeling them counter @-@ revolutionary " instruments of imperialism " ; many preachers were found guilty of illegal U.S.-links and imprisoned . Measures were implemented to force perceived idle and delinquent youths to work , primarily through the introduction of mandatory military service , while in September the government temporarily permitted emigration for anyone other than males aged between 15 and 26 , thereby ridding the government of thousands of critics , most of whom were from upper and middle @-@ class backgrounds . In 1963 Castro 's mother died . This was the last time his private life was reported in Cuba 's press . In January 1964 , Castro returned to Moscow , officially to sign a new five @-@ year sugar trade agreement , but also to discuss the ramifications of the assassination of John F. Kennedy ; Castro had been deeply concerned by the assassination , believing that a far right conspiracy was behind it but that the Cubans would be blamed . In October 1965 , the Integrated Revolutionary Organizations was officially renamed the " Cuban Communist Party " and published the membership of its Central Committee .

Despite Soviet misgivings , Castro continued calling for global revolution , funding militant leftists and those engaged in national liberation struggles . Cuba 's foreign policy was staunchly anti @-@ imperialist , believing that every nation should control its own natural resources . He supported Che

Guevara's "Andean project", an unsuccessful plan to set up a guerrilla movement in the highlands of Bolivia, Peru and Argentina, and allowed revolutionary groups from across the world, from the Viet Cong to the Black Panthers, to train in Cuba. He considered Western-dominated Africa ripe for revolution, and sent troops and medics to aid Ahmed Ben Bella's socialist regime in Algeria during the Sand war. He also allied with Alphonse Massemba-Débat's socialist government in Congo-Brazzaville, and in 1965 Castro authorized Guevara to travel to Congo-Kinshasa to train revolutionaries against the Western-backed government. Castro was personally devastated when Guevara was subsequently killed by CIA-backed troops in Bolivia in October 1967 and publicly attributed it to Che's disregard for his own safety. In 1966 Castro staged a Tri-Continental Conference of Africa, Asia and Latin America in Havana, further establishing himself as a significant player on the world stage. From this conference, Castro created the Latin American Solidarity Organization (OLAS), which adopted the slogan of "The duty of a revolution is to make revolution", signifying Havana's leadership of Latin America's revolutionary movement.

Castro's increasing role on the world stage strained his relationship with the USSR, now under the leadership of Leonid Brezhnev. Asserting Cuba's independence, Castro refused to sign the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, declaring it a Soviet-U.S. attempt to dominate the Third World. Diverting from Soviet Marxist doctrine, he suggested that Cuban society could evolve straight to pure communism rather than progressing through various stages of socialism. In turn, Soviet loyalist Aníbal Escalante began organizing a government network of opposition to Castro, though in January 1968, he and his supporters were arrested for allegedly passing state secrets to Moscow. However, recognising Cuba's economic dependence on the Soviets, Castro relented to Brezhnev's pressure to be obedient, and in August 1968 denounced the leaders of the Prague Spring and praised the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia. Influenced by China's Great Leap Forward, in 1968 Castro proclaimed a Great Revolutionary Offensive, closing all remaining privately owned shops and businesses and denouncing their owners as capitalist counter-revolutionaries. The severe lack of consumer goods for purchase led productivity to decline, as large sectors of the population felt little incentive to work hard. This was exacerbated by the perception that a revolutionary elite had emerged consisting of those connected to the administration; they had access to better housing, private transportation, servants, and the ability to purchase luxury goods abroad.

=== Economic stagnation and Third World politics : 1969 ? 74 ===

Castro publicly celebrated his administration's 10th anniversary in January 1969; in his celebratory speech he warned of sugar rations, reflecting the nation's economic problems. The 1969 crop was heavily damaged by a hurricane, and to meet its export quota, the government drafted in the army, implemented a seven-day working week, and postponed public holidays to lengthen the harvest. When that year's production quota was not met, Castro offered to resign during a public speech, but assembled crowds insisted he remain. Despite the economic issues, many of Castro's social reforms were popular, with the population largely supportive of the "Achievements of the Revolution" in education, medical care, housing, and road construction, as well as the policies of "direct democratic" public consultation. Seeking Soviet help, from 1970 to 1972 Soviet economists re-organized Cuba's economy, founding the Cuban-Soviet Commission of Economic, Scientific and Technical Collaboration, while Soviet Premier Alexei Kosygin visited in 1971. In July 1972, Cuba joined the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (Comecon), an economic organization of socialist states, although this further limited Cuba's economy to agricultural production.

In May 1970, the crews of two Cuban fishing boats were kidnapped by Florida-based dissident group Alpha 66, who demanded that Cuba release imprisoned militants. Under U.S. pressure, the hostages were released, and Castro welcomed them back as heroes. In April 1971, Castro was internationally condemned for ordering the arrest of dissident poet Heberto Padilla; Padilla was freed, but the government established the National Cultural Council to ensure that

intellectuals and artists supported the administration .

In 1971 , he visited Chile , where Marxist President Salvador Allende had been elected as the head of a left @-@ wing coalition . Castro supported Allende 's socialist reforms , but warned him of right @-@ wing elements in Chile 's military . In 1973 , the military led a coup d'état and established a military junta led by Augusto Pinochet . Castro proceeded to Guinea to meet socialist President Sékou Touré , praising him as Africa 's greatest leader , and there received the Order of Fidelity to the People . He then went on a seven @-@ week tour visiting leftist allies : Algeria , Bulgaria , Hungary , Poland , East Germany , Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union , where he was given further awards . On each trip , he was eager to visit factory and farm workers , publicly praising their governments ; privately , he urged the regimes to aid revolutionary movements elsewhere , particularly those fighting the Vietnam War .

In September 1973 , he returned to Algiers to attend the Fourth Summit of the Non @-@ Aligned Movement (NAM) . Various NAM members were critical of Castro 's attendance , claiming that Cuba was aligned to the Warsaw Pact and therefore should not be at the conference . At the conference he publicly broke off relations with Israel , citing its government 's close relationship with the U.S. and its treatment of Palestinians during the Israel @-@ Palestine conflict . This earned Castro respect throughout the Arab world , in particular from the Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi , who became his friend and ally . As the Yom Kippur War broke out in October 1973 between Israel and an Arab coalition led by Egypt and Syria , Cuba sent 4 @,@ 000 troops to defend Syrian territory from Israeli incursions . Leaving Algiers , Castro visited Iraq and North Vietnam .

Cuba 's economy grew in 1974 as a result of high international sugar prices and new credits with Argentina , Canada , and parts of Western Europe . A number of Latin American states called for Cuba 's re @-@ admittance into the Organization of American States (OAS) , with the U.S. finally conceding in 1975 on Henry Kissinger 's advice . Cuba 's government underwent a restructuring along Soviet lines , claiming that this would further democratization and decentralize power away from Castro . Officially announcing Cuba 's identity as a socialist state , the first National Congress of the Cuban Communist Party was held , and a new constitution adopted that abolished the position of President and Prime Minister . Castro remained the dominant figure in governance , taking the presidency of the newly created Council of State and Council of Ministers , making him both head of state and head of government .

= = Presidency = =

= = = Foreign wars and NAM Presidency : 1975 ? 79 = = =

Castro considered Africa to be " the weakest link in the imperialist chain " , and at the request of Angolan President Agostinho Neto he ordered 230 military advisers into Southern Africa in November 1975 to aid Neto 's Marxist MPLA in the Angolan Civil War . When the U.S. and South Africa stepped up their support of the opposition FLNA and UNITA , Castro ordered a further 18 @,@ 000 troops to Angola , which played a major role in forcing a South African retreat . Traveling to Angola , Castro celebrated with Neto , Sékou Touré and Guinea @-@ Bissau President Luís Cabral , where they agreed to support Mozambique 's Marxist @-@ Leninist government against RENAMO in the Mozambique Civil War . In February , Castro visited Algeria and then Libya , where he spent ten days with Gaddafi and oversaw the establishment of the Jamahiriya system of governance , before attending talks with the Marxist government of South Yemen . From there he proceeded to Somalia , Tanzania , Mozambique and Angola where he was greeted by crowds as a hero for Cuba 's role in opposing apartheid South Africa . Throughout much of Africa he was hailed as a friend to national liberation from foreign dominance . This was followed with visits to Berlin and Moscow .

In 1977 the Ethio @-@ Somali War broke out over the disputed Ogaden region as Somalia invaded Ethiopia ; although a former ally of Somali President Siad Barre , Castro had warned him against such action , and Cuba sided with Mengistu Haile Mariam 's Marxist government of Ethiopia . He

sent troops under the command of General Arnaldo Ochoa to aid the overwhelmed Ethiopian army . After forcing back the Somalis , Mengistu then ordered the Ethiopians to suppress the Eritrean People 's Liberation Front , a measure Castro refused to support . Castro extended support to Latin American revolutionary movements , namely the Sandinista National Liberation Front in its overthrow of the Nicaraguan rightist government of Anastasio Somoza Debayle in July 1979 . Castro 's critics accused the government of wasting Cuban lives in these military endeavors ; the anti @-@ Castro Center for a Free Cuba has claimed that an estimated 14 @,@ 000 Cubans were killed in foreign Cuban military actions . When U.S. state critics claimed that Castro had no right to interfere in these nations , he highlighted that Cuba had been invited into them , pointing out the U.S. ' own involvement in various foreign nations .

In 1979 , the Conference of the Non @-@ Aligned Movement (NAM) was held in Havana , where Castro was selected as NAM president , a position he held till 1982 . In his capacity as both President of the NAM and of Cuba he appeared at the United Nations General Assembly in October 1979 and gave a speech on the disparity between the world 's rich and poor . His speech was greeted with much applause from other world leaders , though his standing in NAM was damaged by Cuba 's abstinence from the U.N. ' s General Assembly condemnation of the Soviet war in Afghanistan . Cuba 's relations across North America improved under Mexican President Luis Echeverría , Canadian Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau , and U.S. President Jimmy Carter . Carter continued criticizing Cuba 's human rights abuses , but adopted a respectful approach which gained Castro 's attention . Considering Carter well @-@ meaning and sincere , Castro freed certain political prisoners and allowed some Cuban exiles to visit relatives on the island , hoping that in turn Carter would abolish the economic embargo and stop CIA support for militant dissidents . Conversely , his relationship with China declined , as he accused Deng Xiaoping 's Chinese government of betraying their revolutionary principles by initiating trade links with the U.S. and attacking Vietnam .

= = = Reagan and Gorbachev : 1980 ? 89 = = =

By the 1980s , Cuba 's economy was again in trouble , following a decline in the market price of sugar and 1979 's decimated harvest . For the first time , unemployment became a serious problem in Castro 's Cuba , with the government sending unemployed youth to other countries , primarily East Germany , to work there . Desperate for money , Cuba 's government secretly sold off paintings from national collections and illicitly traded for U.S. electronic goods through Panama . Increasing numbers of Cubans fled to Florida , but were labelled " scum " and " lumpen " by Castro and his CDR supporters . In one incident , 10 @,@ 000 Cubans stormed the Peruvian Embassy requesting asylum , and so the U.S. agreed that it would accept 3 @,@ 500 refugees . Castro conceded that those who wanted to leave could do so from Mariel port . Hundreds of boats arrived from the U.S. , leading to a mass exodus of 120 @,@ 000 ; Castro 's government took advantage of the situation by loading criminals , the mentally ill , and suspected homosexuals onto the boats destined for Florida . The event destabilized Carter 's administration and in 1981 the right @-@ wing Ronald Reagan was elected U.S. President . Reagan 's administration adopted a hard @-@ line approach against Castro , making its desire to overthrow his regime clear . In late 1981 , Castro publicly accused the U.S. of biological warfare against Cuba by orchestrating a dengue fever epidemic .

Although despising Argentina 's right wing military junta , Castro supported them in the 1982 Falklands War against Britain and offered military aid to the Argentinians . Castro supported the leftist New Jewel Movement that seized power in Grenada in 1979 , befriending Grenadine President Maurice Bishop and sending doctors , teachers , and technicians to aid the country 's development . When Bishop was executed in a Soviet @-@ backed coup by hard @-@ line Marxist Bernard Coard in October 1983 , Castro condemned the killing but cautiously retained support for Grenada 's government . However , the U.S. used the coup as a basis for invading the island . Cuban soldiers died in the conflict , with Castro denouncing the invasion and comparing the U.S. to Nazi Germany . In a July 1983 speech marking the 30th anniversary of the Cuban Revolution ,

Castro condemned Reagan 's administration as a " reactionary , extremist clique " who were waging an " openly warmongering and fascist foreign policy " . Castro feared a U.S. invasion of Nicaragua and sent Ochoa to train the governing Sandinistas in guerrilla warfare , but received little support from the USSR .

In 1985 , Mikhail Gorbachev became Secretary @-@ General of the Soviet Communist Party . A reformer , he implemented measures to increase freedom of the press (glasnost) and economic decentralization (perestroika) in an attempt to strengthen socialism . Like many orthodox Marxist critics , Castro feared that the reforms would weaken the socialist state and allow capitalist elements to regain control . Gorbachev conceded to U.S. demands to reduce support for Cuba , with Soviet @-@ Cuban relations deteriorating . When Gorbachev visited Cuba in April 1989 , he informed Castro that perestroika meant an end to subsidies for Cuba . Ignoring calls for liberalization in accordance with the Soviet example , Castro continued to clamp down on internal dissidents and in particular kept tabs on the military , the primary threat to the government . A number of senior military officers , including Ochoa and Tony de la Guardia , were investigated for corruption and complicity in cocaine smuggling , tried , and executed in 1989 , despite calls for leniency . On medical advice given him in October 1985 , Castro gave up regularly smoking Cuban cigars , helping to set an example for the rest of the populace . Castro became passionate in his denunciation of the Third World debt problem , arguing that the Third World would never escape the debt that First World banks and governments imposed upon it . In 1985 , Havana hosted five international conferences on the world debt problem .

By November 1987 , Castro began spending more time on the Angolan Civil War , in which the Marxists had fallen into retreat . Angolan President José Eduardo dos Santos successfully appealed for more Cuban troops , with Castro later admitting that he devoted more time to Angola than to the domestic situation , believing that a victory would lead to the collapse of apartheid . Gorbachev called for a negotiated end to the conflict and in 1988 organized a quadripartite talks between the USSR , U.S. , Cuba and South Africa ; they agreed that all foreign troops would pull out of Angola . Castro was angered by Gorbachev 's approach , believing that he was abandoning the plight of the world 's poor in favor of détente .

In Eastern Europe , socialist governments fell to capitalist reformers between 1989 and 1991 and many Western observers expected the same in Cuba . Increasingly isolated , Cuba improved relations with Manuel Noriega 's right @-@ wing government in Panama ? despite Castro 's personal hatred of Noriega ? but it was overthrown in a U.S. invasion in December 1989 . In February 1990 , Castro 's allies in Nicaragua , President Daniel Ortega and the Sandinistas , were defeated by the U.S.-funded National Opposition Union in an election . With the collapse of the Soviet bloc , the U.S. secured a majority vote for a resolution condemning Cuba 's human rights violations at the United Nations Human Rights Commission in Geneva , Switzerland . Cuba asserted that this was a manifestation of U.S. hegemony , and refused to allow an investigative delegation to enter the country .

= = = Special Period : 1990 ? 2000 = = =

With favourable trade from the Soviet bloc ended , Castro publicly declared that Cuba was entering a " Special Period in Time of Peace . " Petrol rations were dramatically reduced , Chinese bicycles were imported to replace cars , and factories performing non @-@ essential tasks were shut down . Oxen began to replace tractors , firewood began being used for cooking and electricity cuts were introduced that lasted 16 hours a day . Castro admitted that Cuba faced the worst situation short of open war , and that the country might have to resort to subsistence farming . By 1992 , Cuba 's economy had declined by over 40 % in under two years , with major food shortages , widespread malnutrition and a lack of basic goods . Castro hoped for a restoration of Marxism @-@ Leninism in the USSR , but refrained from backing the 1991 coup in that country . When Gorbachev regained control , Cuba @-@ Soviet relations deteriorated further and Soviet troops were withdrawn in September 1991 . In December , the Soviet Union was officially dismantled as Boris Yeltsin abolished the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and introducing a capitalist multiparty

democracy . Yeltsin despised Castro and developed links with the Miami @-@ based Cuban American National Foundation . Castro tried improving relations with the capitalist nations . He welcomed Western politicians and investors to Cuba , befriended Manuel Fraga and took a particular interest in Margaret Thatcher 's policies in the UK , believing that Cuban socialism could learn from her emphasis on low taxation and personal initiative . He ceased support for foreign militants , refrained from praising FARC on a 1994 visit to Colombia and called for a negotiated settlement between the Zapatistas and Mexican government in 1995 . Publicly , he presented himself as a moderate on the world stage .

In 1991 , Havana hosted the Pan @-@ American Games , which involved construction of a stadium and accommodation for the athletes ; Castro admitted that it was an expensive error , but it was a success for Cuba 's government . Crowds regularly shouted " Fidel ! Fidel ! " in front of foreign journalists , while Cuba became the first Latin American nation to beat the U.S. to the top of the gold @-@ medal table . Support for Castro remained strong , and although there were small anti @-@ government demonstrations , the Cuban opposition rejected the exile community 's calls for an armed uprising . In August 1994 , Havana witnessed the largest anti @-@ Castro demonstration in Cuban history , as 200 to 300 young men threw stones at police , demanding that they be allowed to emigrate to Miami . A larger pro @-@ Castro crowd confronted them , who were joined by Castro ; he informed media that the men were anti @-@ socials misled by the U.S. The protests dispersed with no recorded injuries . Fearing that dissident groups would invade , the government organised the " War of All the People " defense strategy , planning a widespread guerrilla warfare campaign , and the unemployed were given jobs building a network of bunkers and tunnels across the country .

Castro believed in the need for reform if Cuban socialism was to survive in a world now dominated by capitalist free markets . In October 1991 , the Fourth Congress of the Cuban Communist Party was held in Santiago , at which a number of important changes to the government were announced . Castro would step down as head of government , to be replaced by the much younger Carlos Lage , although Castro would remain the head of the Communist Party and Commander @-@ in @-@ Chief of the armed forces . Many older members of government were to be retired and replaced by their younger counterparts . A number of economic changes were proposed , and subsequently put to a national referendum . Free farmers ' markets and small @-@ scale private enterprises would be legalized in an attempt to stimulate economic growth , while U.S. dollars were also made legal tender . Certain restrictions on emigration were eased , allowing more discontented Cuban citizens to move to the United States . Further democratization was to be brought in by having the National Assembly 's members elected directly by the people , rather than through municipal and provincial assemblies . Castro welcomed debate between proponents and opponents of the reforms , although over time he began to increasingly sympathise with the opponent 's positions , arguing that such reforms must be delayed .

Castro 's government diversified its economy into biotechnology and tourism , the latter outstripping Cuba 's sugar industry as its primary source of revenue in 1995 . The arrival of thousands of Mexican and Spanish tourists led to increasing numbers of Cubans turning to prostitution ; officially illegal , Castro refrained from cracking down on prostitution , fearing a political backlash . Economic hardship led many Cubans toward religion , both in the form of Roman Catholicism and Santeria . Although long thinking religious belief to be backward , Castro softened his approach to religious institutions and religious people were permitted for the first time to join the Communist Party . Although he viewed the Roman Catholic Church as a reactionary , pro @-@ capitalist institution , Castro organized a visit to Cuba by Pope John Paul II for January 1998 ; it strengthened the position of both the Cuban Church and Castro 's government .

In the early 1990s Castro embraced environmentalism , campaigning against global warming and the waste of natural resources , and accusing the U.S. of being the world 's primary polluter . In 1994 a ministry dedicated to the environment was established , and new laws established in 1997 that promoted awareness of environmental issues throughout Cuba and stressed the sustainable use of natural resources . By 2006 , Cuba was the world 's only nation which met the United Nations Development Programme 's definition of sustainable development , with an ecological footprint of less than 1 @.@ 8 hectares per capita and a Human Development Index of over 0 @.@ 8 . Castro

also became a proponent of the anti @-@ globalization movement , criticizing U.S. global hegemony and the control exerted by multinationals . Castro maintained his devout anti @-@ apartheid beliefs , and at the July 26 celebrations in 1991 , he was joined onstage by the South African political activist Nelson Mandela , recently released from prison . Mandela praised Cuba 's involvement in battling South Africa in Angola and thanked Castro personally . He later attended Mandela 's inauguration as President of South Africa in 1994 . In 2001 he attended the Conference Against Racism in South Africa at which he lectured on the global spread of racial stereotypes through U.S. film .

= = = Pink tide : 2000 ? 06 = = =

Mired in economic problems , Cuba would be aided by the election of socialist and anti @-@ imperialist Hugo Chávez to the Venezuelan Presidency in 1999 . Castro and Chávez developed a close friendship , with the former acting as a mentor and father @-@ figure to the latter , and together they built an alliance that had repercussions throughout Latin America . In 2000 , they signed an agreement through which Cuba would send 20 @,@ 000 medics to Venezuela , in return receiving 53 @,@ 000 barrels of oil per day at preferential rates ; in 2004 , this trade was stepped up , with Cuba sending 40 @,@ 000 medics and Venezuela providing 90 @,@ 000 barrels a day . That same year , Castro initiated Misión Milagro , a joint medical project which aimed to provide free eye operations on 300 @,@ 000 individuals from each nation . The alliance boosted the Cuban economy , and in May 2005 Castro doubled the minimum wage for 1 @.@ 6 million workers , raised pensions , and delivered new kitchen appliances to Cuba 's poorest residents . Some economic problems remained ; in 2004 , Castro shut down 118 factories , including steel plants , sugar mills and paper processors to compensate for the crisis of fuel shortages .

Cuba and Venezuela were the founding members of the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA) . ALBA sought to redistribute wealth evenly throughout member countries , to protect the region 's agriculture , and to oppose economic liberalization and privatization . ALBA 's origins lay in a December 2004 agreement signed between the two countries , and was formalized through a People 's Trade Agreement also signed by Evo Morales ' Bolivia in April 2006 . Castro had also been calling for greater Caribbean integration since the late 1990s , saying that only strengthened cooperation between Caribbean countries would prevent their domination by rich nations in a global economy . Cuba has opened four additional embassies in the Caribbean Community including : Antigua and Barbuda , Dominica , Suriname , Saint Vincent and the Grenadines . This development makes Cuba the only country to have embassies in all independent countries of the Caribbean Community .

In contrast to the improved relations between Cuba and a number of leftist Latin American states , in 2004 it broke off diplomatic ties with Panama after centrist President Mireya Moscoso pardoned four Cuban exiles accused of attempting to assassinate Castro in 2000 . Diplomatic ties were reinstalled in 2005 following the election of leftist President Martín Torrijos . Castro 's improving relations across Latin America were accompanied by continuing animosity towards the U.S. However , after massive damage caused by Hurricane Michelle in 2001 , Castro successfully proposed a one @-@ time cash purchase of food from the U.S. while declining its government 's offer of humanitarian aid . Castro expressed solidarity with the U.S. following the 2001 September 11 attacks , condemning Al Qaeda and offering Cuban airports for the emergency diversion of any U.S. planes . He recognized that the attacks would make U.S. foreign policy more aggressive , which he believed was counter @-@ productive .

In 1998 , Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chrétien arrived in Cuba to meet Castro and highlight their close ties . He is the first Canadian government leader to visit the island since Pierre Trudeau was in Havana in 1976 . In 2002 , former U.S. President Jimmy Carter visited Cuba , where he highlighted the lack of civil liberties in the country and urged the government to pay attention to the Varela Project of Oswaldo Payá .

= = = Stepping down : 2006 ? 08 = = =

Castro underwent surgery for intestinal bleeding , and on July 31 , 2006 delegated his presidential duties to Raúl Castro . In February 2007 , Raúl announced that Fidel 's health was improving and that he was taking part in important issues of government . Later that month , Fidel called into Hugo Chávez 's radio show *Aló Presidente* . On April 21 , Castro met Wu Guanzheng of the Chinese Communist Party 's Politburo , with Chávez visiting in August , and Morales in September . That month , the Non-Aligned Movement held its 14th Summit in Havana , there agreeing to appoint Castro as the organisation 's president for a year 's term .

Commenting on Castro 's recovery , U.S. President George W. Bush said : " One day the good Lord will take Fidel Castro away " . Hearing about this , the atheist Castro ironically replied : " Now I understand why I survived Bush 's plans and the plans of other presidents who ordered my assassination : the good Lord protected me . " The quote would subsequently be picked up on by the world 's media . In a February 2008 letter , Castro announced that he would not accept the positions of President of the Council of State and Commander in Chief at that month 's National Assembly meetings , remarking that " It would betray my conscience to take up a responsibility that requires mobility and total devotion , that I am not in a physical condition to offer " . On February 24 , 2008 , the National Assembly of People 's Power unanimously voted Raúl as president . Describing his brother as " not substitutable " , Raúl proposed that Fidel continue to be consulted on matters of great importance , a motion unanimously approved by the 597 National Assembly members .

= = Later years = =

= = Retirement : 2008 ? present = = =

Following his retirement , Castro 's health deteriorated ; international press speculated that he had diverticulitis , but Cuba 's government refused to corroborate this . He continued to interact with the Cuban people , published an opinion column titled " Reflections " in *Granma* , used a Twitter account , and gave occasional public lectures . In January 2009 Castro asked Cubans not to worry about his lack of recent news columns and failing health , and not to be disturbed by his future death . He continued meeting foreign leaders and dignitaries , and that month photographs were released of Castro 's meeting with Argentine President Cristina Fernández .

In July 2010 , he made his first public appearance since falling ill , greeting science center workers and giving a television interview to *Mesa Redonda* in which he discussed U.S. tensions with Iran and North Korea . On August 7 , 2010 , Castro gave his first speech to the National Assembly in four years , urging the U.S. not to take military actions against those nations and warning of a nuclear holocaust . When asked whether Castro may be re-entering government , culture minister Abel Prieto told the BBC , " I think that he has always been in Cuba 's political life but he is not in the government ... He has been very careful about that . His big battle is international affairs . "

On April 19 , 2011 , Castro resigned from the Communist Party central committee , thus stepping down as party leader . Raúl was selected as his successor . Now without any official role in the country 's government , he took on the role of an elder statesman . In March 2012 , Pope Benedict XVI visited Cuba for three days , during which time he briefly met with Castro despite the Pope 's vocal opposition to Cuba 's government . Later that year it was revealed that along with Hugo Chávez , Castro had played a significant behind-the-scenes role in orchestrating peace talks between the Colombian government and the far left FARC guerrilla movement to end the conflict which had raged since 1964 . During the North Korea crisis of 2013 , he urged both the North Korean and U.S. governments to show restraint . Calling the situation " incredible and absurd , " he maintained that war would not benefit either side , and that it represented " one of the gravest risks of nuclear war " since the Cuban missile crisis .

In December 2014 , Castro was awarded the Chinese Confucius Peace Prize for seeking peaceful solutions to his nation 's conflict with the U.S. and for his post-retirement efforts to prevent nuclear war . In January 2015 , he publicly commented on the " Cuban Thaw " , an increased

normalization between Cuba @-@ U.S. relations , by stating that while it was a positive move for establishing peace in the region , he mistrusted the U.S. government .

= = Political ideology = =

Castro proclaimed himself to be " a Socialist , a Marxist , and a Leninist " , and has publicly identified as a Marxist @-@ Leninist since December 1961 . As a Marxist , Castro sought to move Cuba from a capitalist state in which it was dominated by foreign imperialism to a socialist society and ultimately a communist society . Influenced by Guevara , he suggested that Cuba could evade most stages of socialism and progress straight to communism . Castro 's government was also nationalistic , with Castro declaring that " We are not only Marxist @-@ Leninists , but also nationalists and patriots " . Historian Richard Gott remarked that one of the keys to Castro 's success was in his ability to utilize the " twin themes of socialism and nationalism " and keep them " endlessly in play . " Castro describes Karl Marx and Cuban nationalist José Martí as his main political influences , although Gott believed that ultimately Martí remained more important than Marx in Castro 's politics . Castro described Martí 's political ideas as " a philosophy of independence and an exceptional humanistic philosophy " , and his supporters and apologists have repeatedly claimed great similarity between the two figures .

Biographer Volka Skierka described Castro 's government as a " highly individual , socialist @-@ nationalist " fidelista " system " , with Theodore Draper terming his approach " Castroism " , viewing it as a blend of European socialism with the Latin American revolutionary tradition . Political scientist Paul C. Sondrol has described Castro 's approach to politics as " totalitarian utopianism " , with a style of leadership that drew upon the wider Latin American phenomenon of the caudillo . Castro took a relatively socially conservative stance on many issues , opposing drug use , gambling , and prostitution , which he viewed as moral evils . Instead he advocated hard work , family values , integrity , and self @-@ discipline .

= = Personal and public life = =

Biographer Leycester Coltman described Castro as " fiercely hard @-@ working , dedicated [,] loyal ... generous and magnanimous " but noted that he could be " vindictive and unforgiving " . He asserted that Castro " always had a keen sense of humor and could laugh at himself " but could equally be " a bad loser " who would act with " ferocious rage if he thought that he was being humiliated . " Castro was well known for throwing tantrums , and could make " snap judgements " which he refused to back down from . Biographer Peter Bourne noted that Castro " suffers fools poorly " and that in his younger years he was intolerant of those who did not share his views . He claimed that Castro liked to meet with ordinary citizens , both in Cuba and abroad , but took a particularly paternal attitude toward Cubans , treating them as if " they were a part of his own giant family . " British historian Alex Von Tunzelmann commented that " though ruthless , [Castro] was a patriot , a man with a profound sense that it was his mission to save the Cuban people " .

Castro was known for his busy working hours , often only going to bed at 3 or 4 a.m. He preferred to meet foreign diplomats in these early hours , believing that they would be tired and he could gain the upper hand in negotiations . He described Ernest Hemingway as his favorite writer , and enjoyed reading but was uninterested in music . A sports fan , he also spent much of his time trying to keep fit , undertaking regular exercise . He took a great interest in gastronomy , as well as wine and whisky , and as Cuban leader was known to wander into his kitchen to discuss cookery with his chefs . Castro had a lifelong love of guns , and a preference for life in the countryside over the city . While various sources state that Castro has not enriched himself , instead living a life more modest than most Latin American presidents , his former bodyguard Juan Reinaldo Sánchez alleged that Castro lived in great luxury , with several houses and yachts which he has hidden from the Cuban populace .

Fidel Castro 's religious beliefs have been a matter of some debate ; he was baptized and raised a Roman Catholic but has commented that he is an atheist . He criticized use of the Bible to justify the

oppression of women and Africans , but commented that Christianity exhibited " a group of very humane precepts " which gave the world " ethical values " and a " sense of social justice " , relating that " If people call me Christian , not from the standpoint of religion but from the standpoint of social vision , I declare that I am a Christian . " He has espoused the idea that Jesus Christ was a communist , citing the feeding of the 5000 and the story of Jesus and the rich young man as evidence .

= = = Public image = = =

Political scientist Paul C. Sondrol characterized Castro as " quintessentially totalitarian in his charismatic appeal , utopian functional role and public , transformative utilisation of power . " Unlike a number of other Soviet @-@ era communist leaders , Castro 's government did not intentionally construct a cult of personality around him , although his popularity among segments of the Cuban populace nevertheless led to one developing in the early years of his administration . By 2006 , the BBC reported that Castro 's image could frequently be found in Cuban stores , classrooms , taxicabs , and on national television . Throughout his administration , large throngs of supporters gathered to cheer at Castro 's fiery speeches , which typically lasted for hours and which were delivered without the use of written notes . During speeches Castro regularly cited reports and books he had read on a wide variety of subjects , including military matters , plant cultivation , filmmaking , and chess strategies .

For 37 years , Castro publicly wore nothing but olive @-@ green military fatigues , emphasizing his role as the perpetual revolutionary , but in the mid @-@ 1990s began wearing dark civilian suits and guayabera publicly as well . Within Cuba , Castro is often nicknamed " El Caballo " (" The Horse ") , a label attributed to Cuban entertainer Benny Moré which alludes to Castro 's well known womanizing during the 1950s and early 1960s , and during this period Castro himself was widely recognized as a sex symbol in Cuba .

= = = Family and friends = = =

Many details of Castro 's private life , particularly involving his family members , are scarce as such information is censored by state media . Castro 's biographer Robert E. Quirk noted that throughout his life , the Cuban leader had been " unable to form a lasting sexual relationship with any female . " Castro 's first wife was Mirta Díaz @-@ Balart , whom he married in October 1948 , and together they have a son , Fidel Ángel " Fidelito " Castro Díaz @-@ Balart , born in September 1949 . Díaz @-@ Balart and Castro divorced in 1955 , and she moved to Spain , although allegedly returned to Cuba in 2002 to live with Fidelito . Fidelito grew up in Cuba ; for a time , he ran Cuba 's atomic @-@ energy commission before being removed from the post by his father .

Fidel has five other sons by his second wife , Dalia Soto del Valle : Antonio , Alejandro , Alexis , Alexander " Alex " , and Ángel Castro Soto del Valle . While Fidel was married to Mirta , he had an affair with Natalia " Naty " Revuelta Clews , who gave birth to his daughter , Alina Fernández Revuelta . Alina left Cuba in 1993 , disguised as a Spanish tourist , and sought asylum in the U.S. , from where she has criticized her father 's policies . By an unnamed woman he had another son , Jorge Ángel Castro . Fidel has another daughter , Francisca Pupo (born 1953) the result of a one night affair . Pupo and her husband now live in Miami . Castro often engaged in one night stands with women , some of whom were specially selected for him while visiting foreign allies . His sister Juanita Castro has been living in the United States since the early 1960s , and is an opponent of her brother 's regime .

While in power , Castro 's two closest male friends were the former Mayor of Havana Pepin Naranjo and his own personal physician , René Vallejo . From 1980 until his death in 1995 , Naranjo headed Castro 's team of advisers . Castro also had a deep friendship with fellow revolutionary Celia Sanchez , who accompanied him almost everywhere during the 1960s , and controlled almost all access to the leader . Castro was also a good friend of the Colombian novelist Gabriel García Márquez .

= = Reception and legacy = =

Historian and journalist Richard Gott considered Castro to be " one of the most extraordinary political figures of the twentieth century " , noting that he had become a " world hero in the mould of Garibaldi " to people throughout the developing world for his anti @-@ imperialist efforts . Bourne described Castro as " an influential world leader " who commanded " great respect " from individuals of all political ideologies across the developing world . Wayne S. Smith , former Chief of the US Interests Section in Havana , noted that in the early 21st century , Castro was met with " warm applause " throughout the Western Hemisphere due to his opposition to U.S. socio @-@ political dominance and for transforming Cuba from a " banana republic " into a nation with significant international influence . He has been awarded a wide variety of awards and honors from foreign governments , and has been cited as an inspiration for foreign leaders like Ahmed Ben Bella , and Nelson Mandela , who subsequently awarded him South Africa 's highest civilian award for foreigners , the Order of Good Hope . Bolivian President Evo Morales described him as " the grandfather of all Latin American revolutionaries " , while biographer Volka Skierka stated that " he will go down in history as one of the few revolutionaries who remained true to his principles . "

Castro has been heavily criticized by governments and human rights organizations in the Western world , and was widely despised throughout the U.S. He has been widely described as a " dictator " , although Castro has publicly refuted this label , stating that he constitutionally held less power than most heads of state and insisting that his regime allowed for greater democratic involvement in policy making than Western liberal democracies . Nevertheless , critics claim that Castro wielded significant unofficial influence aside from his official duties . Quirk stated that Castro wielded " absolute power " in Cuba , albeit not in a legal or constitutional manner , while Bourne claimed that power in Cuba was " completely invested " in Castro , adding that it was very rare for " a country and a people " to have been so completely dominated by " the personality of one man " . Sondrol suggested that in leading " a political system largely [of] his own creation and bearing his indelible stamp " Castro 's leadership style warranted comparisons with other totalitarian leaders like Mao Zedong , Joseph Stalin , Adolf Hitler , and Benito Mussolini .

Human rights advocacy groups have criticized Castro 's administration for committing human rights abuses . Human Rights Watch stated that his government constructed a " repressive machinery " which deprived Cubans of their " basic rights " . Castro has defended his government 's record on human rights , stating that the state must limit the freedoms of individuals and imprison those involved in counter @-@ revolutionary activity in order to protect the rights of the collective populace , such as the right to employment , education , and health care .