

# **U.S. TAKING STEPS TO BAR NEW WAVE OF CUBAN EMIGRES**

The New York Times

August 4, 1991, Sunday, Late Edition - Final

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**Distribution:** Foreign Desk

**Section:** Section 1;; Section 1; Part 1; Page 1; Column 1; Foreign Desk; Part 1;; Column 1;

**Length:** 1307 words

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By CLIFFORD KRAUSS, Special to The New York Times

**Dateline:** WASHINGTON, Aug. 3

## **Body**

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Concerned about a resurgence of migration from Cuba, the Administration is taking steps to curb the number of Cubans applying to come to the United States as tourists.

The Administration last week temporarily froze new applications for six-month tourist visas, which are running at a rate about triple that of last year. Not only are more Cubans applying for tourist visas, but more than a third are illegally overstaying the visas.

A senior State Department official said Washington would soon announce currency restrictions designed to cut visa fees that have provided the Cuban Government with desperately needed dollars as more Cubans leave.

### Illegal Entries Increase

The number of Cubans coming to the United States illegally on boats or rafts is also increasing, but it is far lower than of those coming legally as tourists. Nevertheless, the Defense Department has drawn up contingency plans for a naval blockade in the event that President Fidel Castro unleashes an exodus of the kind that flooded south Florida with 129,000 immigrants in a matter of weeks in 1980.

"There's s widespread acknowledgement that Castro could strike out in any number of ways, but we are committed to stopping another Mariel," a senior Pentagon official said, referring to the Cuban port from which the 1980 exodus took place.

Administration officials say the new policies come in response to the sudden surge of migration and are not a ploy to ratchet up pressure on a government they believe is doomed to topple in the next few years.

### Soviets Urged to Cut Aid

Senior state Department officials said President Bush's s recent public calls for free elections in Cuba, combined with his private urgings to President Mikhail S. Gorbachev at this week's s summit meeting in Moscow to cut Soviet support to Havana, represent the Administration's s major initiatives at isolating and squeezing the Castro Government.

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But some prominent Cuban-Americans and Congressional leaders who have the Administration's ear are urging officials to use immigration policy as a weapon against Havana. They say they are convinced that the moratorium on accepting new visa applications represents a testing period to gauge the political reaction of Cuban-American in Miami before the Administration moves to impose more drastic restrictions.

While Administration officials do not consider another Mariel imminent, they have become concerned by the growing numbers of Cubans who are remaining beyond their visas with no apparent intention of returning. Officials of the Immigration and Naturalization Service say they believe that about 13,000 of the 36,000 Cubans who have come to the United States since November have stayed illegally. If the current rate of applications were allowed to continue, they would total 100,000 this year, as against 35,000 in 1990.

State Department officials say the changes in immigration policy were initiated primarily because Florida officials have warned that such an increase would pose an intolerable strain on the state's schools, hospitals and other social services. But they say the Bush Administration would not be unhappy if the new policies put added strains on the Castro Government.

"Cuba is undergoing pressures that are more severe than at any time since Castro came to power," Bernard W. Aronson, Assistant Secretary of State for Interamerican Affairs, said in an interview. "One of the differences today is that the Cuban people don't believe the future is going to be better under Communism, and obviously that means many more are desperate to leave."

Representative Robert G. Torricelli, Democrat of New Jersey and chairman of the House subcommittee on Western Hemisphere affairs, said he had concluded from his discussions with Administration officials that the new immigration measures "are part of a wider review" of Cuba policy, an idea that Administration officials dispute.

"A pause in the issuance of visas," Mr. Torricelli said, "provides a chance to increase pressure on Castro and explore a change of policy that restricts his ability to export his dissenters and economic problems."

### The Cuban-American Factor

The Administration is moving quietly as it tightens immigration regulations because of fears it will put itself on a collision course with politically influential Cuban-Americans in Miami, which has traditionally objected to shutting the door on Cubans trying to flee the Communist Government. But many Cuban-Americans, viewing Mr. Castro as increasingly vulnerable to a possible internal revolt, are beginning to believe that a reduction of immigration might help build pressures on Havana.

Some officials note that Mr. Castro has lowered age restrictions for travel abroad, possibly to unload youthful dissidents on the United States, and they see this development as a "slow-motion Mariel."

While the more than 100,000 "boat people" whom Mr. Castro sent off to the shores of Florida in 1980 included a number of former political prisoners, many more were relatives of Cubans in the United States and included unemployed men, terminal cancer patients and common criminals.

To deprive the Castro Government of badly needed hard currency, the Administration plans to announce restrictions on the transfer of millions of dollars a year that Cuban-Americans send to relatives to help pay their visa fees. Cubans are required to pay up to \$1,000 in United States currency to the Cuban Government to process their tourist visa applications. The new controls would require dollars transferred to Cuba to pass through agents licensed by the Treasury Department.

Officials believe that Mr. Castro, while unhappy with the restrictions, will be forced to go along, and that his Government could lose about \$20 million a year once the moratorium on visas is lifted.

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Officials said the consular office at the United States Interests Section in Havana is buried under a backlog of 28,000 applications for tourist visas, and will not consider new applications until the current number awaiting processing is significantly reduced.

Officials said some Cubans apply for tourist visas because they seek to circumvent the stiffer requirements to receive immigrant visas, about 2,000 of which are granted annually to people with relatives living in the United States. A visitor on an immigrant visa is eligible to apply for citizenship after residing in the country for a year. Administration officials said there were no plans to tighten regulations on immigrant visas or on political asylums, dozens of which have been granted over the last few years.

In recent weeks, the State Department has rejected about a third of the travel visa applications it considered, a rate three times greater than last year's average.

The shifts in Administration policy on tourist visas accompany growing efforts to persuade the Soviet Union to cut economic and military support to the Castro Government and otherwise control Cuba's interference in the affairs of other Latin American countries. Senior State Department officials said Mr. Bush told Mr. Gorbachev at the summit meeting that he would strengthen his campaign for increased Western economic support if he quickened the pace of reductions in Moscow's \$4.5 billion in annual aid and subsidies to Cuba.

Mr. Gorbachev made no firm commitments. But Foreign Minister Aleksandr A. Bessmertnyk agreed to sign a joint statement with Secretary of State James A. Baker 3d that specifically called on Cuba to help attain a cease-fire and peace settlement in El Salvador, where a right-wing Government battles Communist insurgents. Administration officials said the statement appeared to indicate a growing Soviet willingness to cooperate with Washington in curbing continuing Cuban military aid shipments to the guerrillas in El Salvador.

## Classification

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**Language:** ENGLISH

**Subject:** PASSPORTS & VISAS (92%); IMMIGRATION (89%); HISPANIC AMERICANS (89%); PUBLIC POLICY (89%); IMMIGRATION LAW (89%); CITIZENSHIP (78%); US FEDERAL GOVERNMENT (78%); US PRESIDENTS (78%); DEFENSE DEPARTMENTS (76%); FOREIGN POLICY (76%); CURRENCIES (70%); TALKS & MEETINGS (68%)

**Company:** DEFENSE DEPARTMENT

**Organization:** DEFENSE DEPARTMENT

**Industry:** DEFENSE DEPARTMENTS (76%); CURRENCIES (70%)

**Person:** FIDEL CASTRO (78%); GEORGE W BUSH (54%)

**Geographic:** HAVANA, CUBA (90%); MIAMI, FL, USA (79%); MOSCOW, RUSSIAN FEDERATION (54%); FLORIDA, USA (92%); CUBA (99%); UNITED STATES (95%)

**Load-Date:** August 4, 1991

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