AMERICAN *HÝBRIS:*[1] US DEMOCRACY PROMOTION IN CUBA AFTER THE COLD WAR – PART 2

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Abstract

This second part of the article deals with the importance of democracy promotion towards Cuba as an internal political issue in the US, the so-called 'two-level game'. In the last decade, democracy promotion has been receiving criticisms from the academic community and policymakers. The backlash on democracy promotion, the unintended consequences of democratic assistance in developing countries and the difficulty of predicting outcomes of democracy promotion in 'transitional countries' posed several questions to US foreign democratic assistance. While at a theoretical level, these problems have helped to redefine US democratic efforts abroad, the Cuban case has been highly dominated by democracy promotion as the cornerstone of US Cuba policy. Apart from Obama's new course with Cuba, which has not dramatically changed US goals on the island, US vision and strategy for the Cuban democratic transition have survived: despite everything, the US has continued to promote democracy in Cuba, with little or no change. In fact, despite Obama not abandoning democratisation, it seems he is pursuing a more 'teleological approach' to the matter.

Keywords: Cuba, US, Obama, democratisation, Cuban-Americans

Promoting Democracy and the 'Two Level Game'

Another answer to our main question – Why is the US promoting democracy abroad? – is based on the bi-univocal relationship between US foreign policy and internal and electoral dynamics. After the Cold War, the collapse of a powerful external enemy (the Soviet Union) brought a redefinition of the policy-making process at an internal level: the mutated international scenario, public opinion, Congress and the groups of pressure could now influence US policy in the global arena (Maynes 1990). After 1989, the 'costs' promoting democracy ebbed: during the Cold War, it was hazardous to abandon US-friendly authoritarian

and military regimes in the name of human rights (with the risk of paying a high prime in geopolitical terms). However, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, those 'costs' could now be perceived as minimal. As Holsti (2000: 152) pointed out,

> not only were the potential costs associated with expanding democracy significantly reduced, but this goal also seemed to offer a unifying focus for American foreign policy ... In short, this has appeared to be a foreign policy goal that not only promised a very favourable risk-reward ratio abroad, but that also offered the promise of rich domestic political dividends.

Actually, American public opinion never looked at democracy promotion with interest and enthusiasm (Holsti 2000). In particular, after the invasion of Iraq, the American people started to associate democracy promotion with the high costs of the global war on terrorism and the 'Bush doctrine' in terms of economic resources and lives lost (Tures 2007).

In the post-Cold War world, ethnic lobbying has become a distinguishing feature in the construction of US foreign policy: ethnic or national groups could now influence the foreign policy-making process (Shain 1995). The existing literature about the condition of successful influence of ethnic groups presents several factors: the organisational strength of the group, and the political unification, and power of mobilisation (Ahrari 1987; Haney and Vanderbush 1999; Said 1981; Watanabe 1984); the numerical and electoral significance of the ethnic group (Ambrosio 2002; Haney and Vanderbush 1999); the cultural affinity with the broader US population (Said 1981; Uslaner 2004; Watanabe 1984) and the ideological and strategic compatibility and affinity with US geopolitical views (Arnson and Brenner 1993: 214; Dent 1995; Trice 1976; Watanabe 1984). The Cuban community in the US had the possibility and the capability to develop all the above-mentioned elements (Haney and Vanderbush 1999).

The results were a strong political influence over the process of foreign policy making. Since the 1980s, Cuban-American constituencies in Florida, and partly in New Jersey, became Cuban political citadels and 'no aspirant for local, state or national office could ignore the ethnic vote' (Morley and McGillion 2002: 11). In that decade, Cuban-Americans won important mayoral and representative offices in Miami and Florida (Pérez 1992: 102–103). As Portes (2005: 193) pointed out, 'many exiles ... seemingly believed that they had been elected in Cuba and not in the US, and that they could behave accordingly'. In the 1990s, the penetration into US institutions was successfully completed, and the Cuban hardliners directly entered Congress, defying Clinton's foreign policy over Cuba (Haney and Vanderbush 1999: 345; Vanderbush 2009: 299–300). The Cuban American National Foundation (CANF) expanded its lobby activities to

non-Cuban Congresspeople too (Calvo and Delercq 2000: 69–70). The 'Cuban question' came to represent a 'two-level game' (LeoGrande 1998), so that being too soft with Castro meant being 'punished' by Cuban-American voters: in this way, US–Cuba relations entered the national political competition (Eckstein 2009: 112–9; LeoGrande 1998).

The 'symbiotic relationship' and the 'convergence of interest and world view' (Fernández 1987: 116; Moore 2002: 86) between the White House and the Cuban ethnic group, which was formed during the Cold War and maintained in the 1990s, played a major role in the field of democracy promotion too. As Shain (1995: 84) pointed out, 'the more the diasporas are harnessed by the American government to promote democracy abroad, the more likely they are to improve their influence on US foreign policy'. In other words, the more the ethnic lobbies sustain US efforts to promote democracy worldwide, the more they could gain economic and political benefits, the more they could receive help for their cause and the more US politicians could receive votes from the ethnic constituencies.

For these reasons, the Cuban lobby could expand its influence over the White House by supporting the process of democratisation in Cuba and could benefit from US projects of democracy promotion. In fact, since the 1980s, the CANF has gained a relevant success in 'infiltrating' in the management of the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and 'Radio (and Television) Martí' (Haney and Vanderbush 1999: 350–3; Nichols 1988; Rothers 1992: A18). Moreover, Cuban-American public opinion largely sustained US efforts to spread democracy and the respect of human rights on the island (Table 1). In 1991, 69% of the Cuban-American community was favourable to US support for human rights activists on the island, while in 2007, the percentage grew to 86.3% (Florida International University (FIU), 2007).

Table 1 Position of the Cuban-Americans of Florida on US support for human rights activists on the island

	1991 Mar	1991 Oct	1993	1995	1997	2000	2004	2007
Strongly favour (%)	69	73.2	71.4	73.9	71.6	76.9	86.0	86.3
Mostly favour (%)	14.5	15.1	15	13.5	17.8	14.1	7.9	9.9
Mostly oppose (%)	2.2	2.0	2.3	2.2	3.1	1.8	1.8	1.2
Strongly oppose (%)	4.8	3.8	4.7	3.6	4.4	4.3	4.3	2.6

Source: Florida International University (2007).

The evolution 'from Cold warriors to human rights activists' (Guilhot 2005: 29) took place within the Cuban-American community too. While obtaining the bipartisan support for the efforts to 'export' democracy to Cuba, the Cuban-American leadership and its Congressional representation experienced a consistent evolution. For example, Jorge Mas Canosa, the prominent and controversial leader of the CANF until the late 1990s (he died in 1997), was a wealthy, anti-communist, anti-Castroist, first-wave Cuban who had taken part in the Bay of Pigs Invasion and had some important connections with anti-Castroist terrorist groups during the Cold War (FBI 1965a, 1965b, 1965c; Franklin 1993; Oppenheimer 1992: 328–30), with economic and political ambitions in Cuba (*Houston Chronicle* 1992: 30; Oppenheimer 1992: 328–35). His democratic convictions were questionable too: Canosa has been suspected of being involved in the killing of Cuban-American softliners and entrepreneurs between 1987 and 1990, and, in 1986, he challenged to a duel the Miami city commissioner who had accused him for the irregularity of a US$130 million contract (Landau 1999). Several studies also questioned Cuban hardliners' practices in silencing, using violence and intimidation, Cuban immigrants with different views over Cuba and political affiliation (Arboleya 2000: 232–5; Eckstein 2009: 57–9; Human Rights Watch 1994), or those who were not sharing the so called 'exile ideology', a mixture of ethnicity, political support for the Republican party, and vehement anti-Castroist and anti-communist rhetoric (Grenier 2006; Portes and Stepick 1993: 137–44). In its early years, the CANF was born to support Reagan's foreign policy in Central America and to lobby for brand-new funding for the Nicaraguan and Salvadorian *contras*, which were massively violating human rights in those countries (Haney and Vanderbush 1999: 346–50). Despite these premises, Canosa and other Cuban-American Congresspeople have been devoting themselves to the US 'democratic crusade' since the early 1990s: President Clinton (1997) remembered Mas Canosa as 'a forceful voice for freedom in Cuba and elsewhere'. In recent years, a prominent Cuban-American Congresswoman, Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (2009: 11), stressed this point again: her 'cause' is to 'defend freedom, human rights, democratic values and institutions, and free market principles. ... Whether in Latin America or elsewhere in the world, we cannot afford to be silent or accommodating when freedom is under siege, nor appease tyrants when they are on the march'.

The majority of the founders of the Cuban-American hard-line associations and of the pro-embargo Congressional faction received political socialisation during the Cold War and, in the new scenario, they succeeded in conjugating their anti-communism with the need for democracy promotion and for the democratisation of the island. As the chairman of the Center for Democracy, Allen Weinstein, declared to the *Washington Post* in 1991 that 'a lot of what we

do today was done covertly 25 years ago by the CIA' (Ignatius 1991: C01). For some hardliners, supporting regime change (even against democratically elected governments) was nothing but the prosecution of what they had believed in during the Cold War. This was evident even in recent times. In 2009, a military coup overthrew the Honduran President Manuel Zelaya, who was a close friend and political ally of the Venezuelan Hugo Chávez, and Ileana Ros-Lehtinen questioned the international efforts (led by the Organization of American States (OAS) and other Latin American countries) to reinstall Zalaya's democratically elected government (Gibson 2009a). Despite it being evident to several international organisations that the military government was violating human rights in Honduras (Amnesty International 2009; Inter-American Commission on Human Rights 2009), Rep. Ros-Lehtinen suggested halting US funding to the OAS as a form of 'blackmail' for the suspension of Honduras from the organisation (Gibson 2009b). Moreover, after the coup, some Congresspeople, such as Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, Mario and Lincoln Díaz-Balart and Connie Mack (a consistent part of the anti-Castro, pro-embargo and pro-democracy faction) visited Honduras and paid tribute to the military government, which was not recognised by the US, which was probably in violation of US laws (Cooney 2009).[2] The Honduran coup proved that some fervent democracy promoters viewed the military overthrown of a democratically elected government as a solution to restrain the *chavista* 'communist' front in the Americas.

In the 1990s, this 'double standard' had hit Nelson Mandela and Jean-Bertrand Aristide, who contributed significantly to the democratisation of South Africa and Haiti. Mandela, in the midst of his visit to Miami (1990), was criticised by local authorities and Cuban-American leaders for his friendship with Fidel Castro, and Mandela's visit exacerbated the ethnic conflicts between black people living in Miami (for whom Mandela was an anti-apartheid and equal rights hero) and Cuban-Americans (French 1990: A14; Hayes 1990: B6). Aristide became the first Haitian democratically elected president in 1990 (and was overthrown by a military coup one year later), and he had several critics within the US Senate: Sen. Jesse Helms, the proponent of the embargo codification of 1996 to 'export' democracy to Cuba, considered the legitimate Haitian president 'psychopathic' due to his leftist views (*New York Times* 1995: A30), while some Republican Congresspeople had economic and personal contacts with the Duvaliers (Girard 2004: 62–3; Shain 1999: 72; von Hippel 1995: 12).

Furthermore, while the Cuban-American Congresspeople would generally try to persuade the US government not to cooperate with Cuba as it represented a threat to US national security and was a state sponsor of international terrorism, they took a completely different stance over anti-Castroist terrorists wanted by the Cuban government. In fact, they helped Luis Posada Carriles, arrested in

Panama in 2000 for plotting an attack against Fidel Castro and linked to Miami terrorist groups and the CIA (Lettieri 2007), to reach the US illegally (Corral and Chardy 2005) after he was pardoned by the Panamanian authorities.

Another key element to shape this 'symbiotic relationship' has been the fact that the Cuban hardliners became the approved interlocutors and executors of US foreign policy towards Cuba (LeoGrande 2013; Morley and McGillion 2002: 11–24). According to some scholars, ethnic lobbies could generate a 'distortion' in US foreign policy: they could 'market' their cause within US public opinion and institutions, which could be permeable to such instances, without any teleological (or empirical) evaluation of the policy outcomes (Mearsheimer and Walt 2003: 151–98; T. Smith 2000: 2). Cuban-American 'success stories' in lobbying for the democratisation of Cuba have gone along with the need for hegemony inside and outside their ethnic group. According to Portes (2005: 197–203), the hardliners' factions generated a mechanism to perpetuate their hegemony: through ethnic social capital and ethnic rituals, the first-wave immigrants were able to gain control over the representation of their community. The economy of the Miami enclave facilitated this political control: in Miami, prominent Cuban-American businessmen could invest money in promoting political messages through the media (Pérez 1992: 100). For example, in 1987 *El Nuevo Herald* was founded, in opposition to the Spanish edition of the *Miami Herald*, and it was a chance to spread the hardliners' political views (Stepick *et al.* 2003: 43–5). In fact, Cubans largely preferred to receive news in Spanish (FIU 1991, 1993, 1997, 2000), and Cuban-American entrepreneurs could easily monopolise these activities.

Moreover, Mas Canosa's social and political status was derived primarily from his power to use the media to spread CANF messages to a broader public: CANF's main success was to convince US policymakers that the Cold War with Cuba was not over (Vanderbush 2009: 302). The image of Fidel Castro as a Caribbean Hitler or Stalin, which was a constant feature of 'Radio and Television Martí', entered the national debate. On several occasions, US officials compared Castro's Cuba to Hitler's Third Reich or Stalin's Soviet Union (Bongers 1996: A6; Finnegan 2002: 101; *Los Angeles Times* 1988: 1). More recently, the former candidate to the White House John McCain compared, once again, the handshake between Obama and Raúl Castro (at Mandela's funeral in December 2013) to the Chamberlain–Hitler meeting in the 1930s (Bzdek and Blake 2013). Castro, identified by the Cuban-American hardliners as 'our Hitler' (García 2012), became 'America's Hitler': in fact, as Schultz (1993: 97) wrote in the early 1990s that 'to much of the US public, Castro is not merely an adversary, but an enemy: a kind of Caribbean "Khomeini" who must be punished for his defiance of the United States'.

After the Cold War, democracy promotion has contributed to maintaining the bi-univocal and symbiotic relationship between the Cuban ethnic lobby and US policymakers. Applying a democratic conditionality to the future development of bilateral relations between the US and Cuba has meant defending (and implementing) the embargo and the isolation of Cuba (a strategy highly sustained by the Cuban-American hardliners), conjugating the punishment of Fidel Castro and the Cuban Revolution, 'subcontracting' Cuba's future to the Cuban-American community, while allocating more and more resources for the hardliners' political machine (the so-called 'Track II' contained in the Cuban Democracy Act (CDA) and the Helms-Burton Act, see CDA 1992: §6004.g; Cuban Liberty and Solidarity Act 1996: §§6062–6063). The 2004 Commission for the Assistance to a Free Cuba (CAFC) report suggested the funding of US$41 million for promoting transition in Cuba (CAFC 2004: 25), and in 2006, the Commission recommended for

> the Cuba Fund for a Democratic Future: $80 million over two years to increase support for Cuban civil society, expand international awareness, break the regime's information blockade, and continue developing assistance initiatives to help Cuban civil society realize a democratic transition. (CAFC 2006: 20)

In the last few years, according to the Congressional Research Service, the funding for democracy promotion in Cuba has not ebbed, as

> this included $45.3 million for FY2008 and $20 million in each fiscal year from FY2009 through FY2012. The Administration's FY2013 request was for $15 million, but an estimated $19.3 million was ultimately allocated after congressional action. The Administration's FY2014 request was again for $15 million, but Congress ultimately appropriated up to $17.5 million. (Sullivan 2014: 35)

The Cuban-American community would highly benefit from that funding as the US policymakers identified it as a key player in the Cuban democratic transition. According to a study prepared in 2003 for the Cuban Transition Project, the US Agency for International Development (USAID) funded the project at the University of Florida,

> the Cuban-American community is well-placed to be a positive factor in both Cuba's transition and in its economic development in the long run. ... Cuban-American firms have sufficient financial resources to support the emergence of small firms in Cuba by providing start-up as well as operating capital. ... The Cuban-American community can exert a positive influence on the island's transition by using its considerable familiarity with the U.S. political system and knowledge about the free-market to influence U.S. policies toward Cuba and economic development policies in a post-Castro regime. (Díaz-Briquets and Pérez-López 2003: i–iv)

In other words, the Cuban-American community was (and is) a reliable US partner in fostering and managing a transition to a liberal-democracy and market-based economy. The 2004 CAFC report (2004: 249) stressed this close partnership, as 'with U.S. Government funding, Cuban-American and other U.S. NGOs and consulting firms can provide training and technical assistance to any Cuban who wants to open a small business'. In this German-like transition, with the richer national community taking care of the socialist and failed Caribbean 'East Germany' (Mead 1995: 35), the Cuban-American community was believed to play a fundamental role.

Moreover, the very Title III of the Helms-Burton Act contained some provisions designed specifically for the Cuban-American community: the Act interpreted extensively the notion of American citizenship permitting the Cuban-Americans (who were not US citizens at the time of the confiscation after the revolution) to sue foreign companies in US courts (Cuban Liberty and Solidarity Act 1996: §6081). According to the Joint Corporate Committee on Cuban Claims, which represented US citizens and companies expropriated in Cuba, this provision would have created a precedent for further claims from non-US citizens expropriated in countries within the former Soviet bloc and would have determined a discrimination against US citizens in favour of the smaller Cuban-American community (*Congressional Record* 1995a: S15009–S15010). However, the 2004 CAFC report suggested that the president should not make any distinctions between Cuban-American and US citizens' property claims against the Cuban government (CAFC 2004: 226). Even if the Title III is not in force, due to the biannual suspension by the president, the compensation of the expropriated properties has remained 'an essential condition for the full resumption of economic and diplomatic relations between the United States and Cuba' (Cuban Liberty and Solidarity Act 1996: §6067.d). In other words, compensating the expropriated properties would be one of the steps that the future Cuban government *must* take in order to 'liberate' itself from the US unilateral embargo.

In the end, promoting democracy in Cuba and working for a democratic Cuba are nothing more than paying debts of gratitude to some sectors of the Cuban-American community.

Despite Everything ... Keep on Promoting It!

In the last 20 years, US democracy promotion has certainly not been immune to trauma or debate. First, Clinton's (1994) enthusiasm in promoting democracy as a way to promote US national security and national interest appeared to not be a realistic and always valid foreign policy approach. As Bermeo (2009:

72–92) pointed out, in the multi-polar international system, US foreign policy's need to confront transnational problems and maintain relations with diverse kinds of regimes in different regions of the world: promoting democracy is not always a win–win solution (or even the solution to all global evils). In fact, in the early 1990s, promoting democracy in China or Iraq would have menaced regional stability or US economic interests. In other cases, such as North Korea or Libya, promoting democracy was nothing more than a long and winding road to defending US national security from a direct threat: different responses would be more effective than the soft power of democracy promotion. Most of all, as with the Algerian case, promoting democracy and pushing democratic institutions would not preclude anti-American political parties or factions to win (democratically) the government. At the same time, the US never abandoned strategic, while non-democratic, allies in the Persian Gulf: promoting democracy in these states would represent a detriment for US geopolitical and economic interests (Carothers 1994; Diamond 1992). Even during George W. Bush's terms, when democracy promotion experienced a significant revival as a strategy to combat international terrorism, those problems in the relationship between US national interest and democracy promotion were never completely solved (Fukuyama and McFaul 2007–2008; Goldsmith 2008; Lynch 2013: 178–95), and despite this, 'double standard' could have menaced US credibility and damaged their efforts to promote democracy abroad (Ratner 2009). As Heins and Chandler (2007: 3–22) suggested, ethical US foreign policy – and democracy promotion is part of it – has never been completely immune to the criticisms of the 'realist' approach in foreign policy. In fact, as Mertus (2004: 192) lamented, 'what is wrong is that human rights remains only an option and has not achieved the status of an imperative'. However, US experience with the promotion of democracy and human rights has proven that not always leading a necessarily ethical foreign policy can still be advantageous to US strategic goals and interests in the long run.

The US experienced some limits in adhering to a Carterian approach of democracy promotion as 'auto-limitation' in foreign policy. President Carter, in his inaugural address (January 1977), introduced the promotion of democracy and the respect of human rights as part of the 'age of limits' (Carter 1977), in which, after the failed mission in Vietnam, the US (and the rest of the world) would have to face some limits to their power and their *realpolitik*. From this perspective, democracy promotion would have meant pursuing a more ethical foreign policy, while improving the American image and credibility abroad (Moynihan 1977). On the contrary, the 'Bush doctrine', which was highly based on defending freedom and 'exporting' democracy and human rights, contributed

to a consistent tightening of civil rights and showed a scant respect for human rights in the US and abroad (P. Hoffman 2004; Wilson 2005).

In the Cuban case, some elements of a 'double standard' are also present. First, since the end of the Missile Crisis in late 1962, the US has pushed forward some efforts to normalise relations with Cuba and foster bilateral interests (Kornbluh 1999, 2012: 92–9; López-Ocheguera 2012: 223–36; Pastor 2012: 237–60). As Domínguez (2012a: 279–301) pointed out, after the Cold War, the US and Cuba have become occasional cooperators, despite the bilateral relations never being resolved: the two countries have been developing a complex system of bilateral relations on international security issues (Alzugaray Treto 2012: 52–71; Klepak 2012: 72–91), anti-narcotic activities, and postal and meteorological cooperation (Kornbluh 2000; Sullivan 2014: 25–6; US Senate 2012: 25–6; Weeks 2009: 3). One of the most relevant issues of bilateral cooperation has been the combat of illegal immigration from Cuba. Since the early 1990s, US officials have become interested in engaging the Cuban authorities to cooperate in this field (Aja Díaz 2014: 291–8; Domínguez 1992: 31–88). After the '*balseros* crisis' in 1994, it became evident that the Cuban government could use a mass migration flow to blackmail the US (Greenhill 2002). Clinton agreed to hold biannual migration talks with Cuba: even if they were stopped during George W. Bush's second term and briefly during Obama's first term, they became a distinguishing feature in US–Cuba relations. Moreover, until recently, the US never agreed to solve diplomatically the case of the 'Cuban five' anti-terrorist agents held in 1998[3] (Weinglass 2008: 249–53) and the 'Alan Gross case' (*EFE* 2013). In other words, the Cold War-style relationship between the US and Cuba was a constant feature, but this did not mean a total isolation of the island and a preclusion of talks on sensitive issues. The US was well aware that a sudden collapse of the Cuban government would cause a rapid increase in migration from Cuba to Floridian shores. Ironically, the US would like to crush the Cuban government, but, meanwhile, they want the Cuban government to cooperate with them to stop illegal migration from the island: in the 2006 report, which was designed to put an end to the revolution, the CAFC (2006: 29) 'recommend[ed] a series of diplomatic efforts to notify the Castro regime of its failure to meet its obligations under the Migration Accords and protesting its efforts to interfere with and disrupt U.S. migration policy'.

However, these bilateral meetings remained just mid-level contacts within the frame of US policy to isolate Cuba diplomatically and economically. The suspension of the migration talks, during George W. Bush and Obama's presidencies, was conceived as a strategy to 'punish' the Cuban government for the so-called 'Black Spring' of 2003 and the detention of the American subcontractor Alan Gross: the US used them as 'stick' to denounce Cuban

misbehaviour. In other words, these contacts were not an effort to engage the Cuban government but an occasional self-interested cooperation.

Dealing with Cuba, the US never accomplished what Condoleezza Rice called 'transformational diplomacy' (US House 2005: 31). This was a new approach in promoting democracy based on diplomacy and contacts on issues of common interests: being friends, rather than foes, of non-democratic countries would have helped the US to push forward democratic changes; this was nothing more than what Carter and Reagan tried to do with some Latin American military dictatorships in the 1970s and the 1980s (Adesnik and McFaul 2006). Carothers (2009) described two main different strategies in democracy promotion: the 'political' and the 'developmental approach'. While the first one could be considered similar to Robinson's 'promotion of polyarchy' or the promotion of some procedural aspects of the democratic rule (such as the free political competition among elites), the 'developmental approach' suggests that the promotion of human, social and economic development should be functional to a (successive) development of the civil society and their request for a more inclusive and pluralist political participation. Obviously, this would mean engaging and dealing economically and politically with non-democratic governments. US strategy in Cuba concentrated on the economic embargo as leverage to obtain more political and economic reforms: as the Cuban economy and the Cuban people are continuing to be hit hard by the sanctions (Ludlam 2012), it is difficult to believe that the embargo could have served as a friendly gesture either to impulse a 'transformational diplomacy' or to help the development of civil society in the island.

Moreover, Burnell (2004: 102–103) focused on the trilateral relations between the democracy promoter state(s), the target state(s) and the target's civil societies: in recent decades, a successful democracy promotion would need to consider these relations. In other words, the US democracy promoters could work in a country in which the hosted government is hostile to any efforts to promote democracy and where even civil society might not be interested in supporting the democratisation process. On the contrary, since the early 1990s, US policymakers have been describing the Cuban people as having strong democratic desires (CAFC 2004: 2; 2006: 12, 14, 17), while 'the Congress has historically and consistently manifested its solidarity and the solidarity of the American people with the democratic aspirations of the Cuban people' (Cuban Liberty and Solidarity Act 1996: §6021). Even today, US programmes of external support to Cuban civil society are conceived as if the Cuban people are going to oust the Castro brothers and the revolution tomorrow. As Peters (2005: 393) observed,

> The political programs – radio broadcasts and aid to dissidents – increasingly seem to be an effort to ignite from the outside a movement that, in order to gain real political strength, requires indigenous sparks. There seems to be far more organized political opposition abroad than inside Cuba.

Moreover, even if the Cuban people would support a liberal-democratic change, the growth of civil society would not be necessarily associated with the great stability and quality of the future Cuban democracy (Fernández 2008: 92–100), and the same Cuban civil society, which was formed during the revolution, could not be interested in completely dismantling the socialist state structures (Fernández 2003: 225–40; López 2002: 162; Ludlam 2012: 120).

The nationalistic discourse matters too: the political and the national dimensions in Cuba's future are deeply connected (B. Hoffman 2007: 101–22). As Fish (2002: 72) noted,

> ... the general character of nationalism is one aspect of a culture's receptivity to external democracy promotion. A distinct, albeit related, issue is how receptive the nationalism of the target country is to the specific foreign actors engaged in democracy promotion. The national origins of the democracy-promoter are of crucial significance. If the foreign organization originates in a place that local nationalism regards with suspicion, the efforts of the promoters may be fruitless or even counterproductive. If the nationalism of the target country is generally friendly to the place from which the outsiders hail, the cultural milieu for democracy promotion will be less problematic.

With US–Cuba relations marked by the American initiative to control Cuban soil, government and society (LeoGrande 2010; Pérez 2008; Schoultz 2009: 553–67), or to exert its 'benevolent domination' (Schoultz 2002), as they are, it was not inconceivable that a law such as the Helms-Burton Act, which Roy (2003: 730) defined as a new version of the *Enmienda Platt* (or Platt Amendment), or the CAFC reports that amounted to being the textbooks of a future Cuba (CAFC 2004: 57, 70; 2006: 49, 79), would have stimulated a nationalistic response in Cuba. In fact, according to some scholars (Galtung 1967: 389; Hufbauer *et al.* 2008: 51–2; Kaplowitz 1998; Stein 1976; von Burgsdorff 2009), US strategy of democracy promotion, through economic embargo, contributed in generating a 'rally round the flag effect', which helped the Cuban government to survive US economic sanctions, while gaining support from the Cuban people. In fact, after George W. Bush had announced the 'Initiative for a Free Cuba' in 2002 calling for democratic elections in Cuba, the Cuban government was able to lead a huge mass demonstration rallying more than 9 million Cubans in the major cities of the island (Oramas León 2002: 4), while promoting a successful referendum (signed by more than 8 million Cubans) to declare the socialist system 'irrevocable' (Más

and Ricardo 2002: 1). Moreover, the CAFC reports contributed in jeopardising Cuban internal opposition, and some prominent and long-standing dissidents criticised US plans for the Cuban transition as the US showed scant respect for Cuban sovereignty (*New York Times* 2004: A6; Schoultz 2009: 550). In other words, the CAFC reports, which have been defined as a sort of revisited edition of US military dispatches from Havana after the Spanish-American War (Lexington Institute 2004), succeeded in uniting the Cuban government with the internal dissidence in criticising US government for its roadmap to democracy.

The US vision of Cuban civil society was accompanied by a constant de-legitimation of the Cuban government: as George W. Bush (2007) said, Cuba has remained a 'tropical *gulag*' governed by a fraudulent revolutionary government. Moreover, in the two codifications of the embargo, the terms 'Castro government' and 'Castro regime' were used to indicate the actual revolutionary government, which was identified with the person of Fidel or Raúl Castro, while 'Cuban government' was used to refer to a future liberal-democratic government on the island, suggesting that the US would only fully recognise a government without the Castro brothers. To US eyes, it was impossible that the Cuban people could support the revolution for its conquests in terms of social and economic equity and welfare state. From this perspective, US democracy promotion in Cuba has been confronting the difficult task of operating in the frame of mutual distrust and the absence of a state-to-state diplomacy: as the 'Black Spring' and the detention of Alan Gross showed, the US efforts to reach out to the Cuban people have been seen as an unwanted interference in the internal affairs of the island.

The international debate over democracy promotion has been influenced by criticisms to the studies on democratic transitions or 'transitology' (Carothers 1997, 2002). In fact, since the late 1990s, democratic transition as the ultimate political stage of evolution has been questioned: several scholars have pointed out that, in some cases, the democratic institution could not be sustained or the transition would not lead unequivocally to a liberal-democratic form of government, while data have been showing a worldwide decline and retreat of the so-called 'third wave of democratization' (Burnell and Schlumberger 2010; Carothers 2007a; Diamond 1996, 2008; Puddington 2008, 2009). In fact, the political analysts witnessed a rise of 'hybrid regimes' or 'illiberal democracies', which is not generally an intermediate stage before the final transition to a liberal-democracy (Collier and Levitsky 1997; Diamond 2002; Karr 1995; Zakaria 1997, 2003). Moreover, the twenty-first century has seen a backlash against democracy promotion from regimes, which aggressively reject any aid to internal political parties or to civil society, while new regional and global powers (such as Russia and China) have been less compromised with the promotion of democracy worldwide (Carothers 2006). Another thorny issue

regarded international responses to the 'Bush doctrine': several allies rejected the US 'invasive' form of democracy promotion, and today, as McFaul (2004: 152) underlined, 'being both pro-democracy and anti-American is no longer a contradiction'.[4]

These aspects contributed to the debate over democracy promotion. In fact, democracy promotion is not always the best option in the foreign policy of a democratic country, especially if the targeted country will not experience a transition towards a democratic regime (Carothers 2007b): if it is not successful at all, democracy promotion could be more harmful than positive for the targeted country. In other words, understanding and evaluating the 'direction' of a country's transition would be essential to successfully promote democracy (Brinks and Coppedge 2006: 464). Moreover, as some scholars have pointed out, democracy promotion in the twenty-first century would face different and highly unstable scenarios (Dauderstädt and Lerch 2005). In this context, it became evident that US democracy promotion was not a low-cost foreign policy, and in 2007, a report prepared for Congress suggested a case-by-case approach in evaluating the costs and the potential efficacy of democracy promotion efforts worldwide (Epstein *et al.* 2007: 23–25).

Despite this evidence, in some cases, the 'anyone can do it' (any country can replicate a democratic transition!) approach (Carothers 2002: 8) survived: Cuba is one of these. Dealing with Cuba, US policymakers never abandoned the deterministic approach of the transitional studies: in both the CAFC (2004) reports, the Cuban transition was predicted through the lens of the Eastern European or Latin American transitions, as 'the experience of other post-communist and post-dictatorial countries ... will provide valuable models and lessons' (184). Moreover, the whole Cuban reform of the constitutional structure, the depoliticisation and deideologisation of the civil society, and the construction of a democratic and independent judiciary system and of the press were based on the Eastern European experience (CAFC 2004: 67, 76, 95, 117, 184; CAFC 2006: 19, 86). The USAID (2000) stressed this point as 'some of the methods used by internal and external actors to encourage change within the Eastern Bloc in the 1980s and early 1990s are applicable in Cuba today'. Even some academic literature tried to analyse the Cuban transition process through the transitional paradigm (Betancourt 2002: 522–39; Domínguez and Erikson 2005: 229–37; González and Szayna 1998; López 2002). On the contrary, B. Hoffman and Whitehead (2007) recently tried to understand the future Cuban evolution (or transition) abandoning the comparisons with Eastern Europe or other post-communist states, while reaffirming Cuban 'exceptionalism'.

At first glance, it is quite easy to get a sense of the fact that US policymakers have been using the first approach. In fact, in the Cuban case, US foreign policy

and democracy promotion tried to recreate those conditions which contributed to the Eastern European transition towards a liberal-democratic model (López 2002). The Title II of the Helms-Burton Act represented once more the corollary of a linear path towards liberal-democracy. In fact, the CAFC reports and the embargo codifications never tried to understand *how* the Cuban political system would collapse. In fact, the recommendations contained in the CAFC reports were aimed at 'stimulating' a transition (by helping internal dissidence and tightening the embargo), but also at describing what the future Cuba *must* look like. Moreover, the reports did not include any evaluation of different scenarios or outcomes, while they presumed that the collapse of the Cuban regime would lead immediately and irrevocably to a liberal-democratic model of government. The US has been refusing any hypothesis of the Cuban transition to a 'grey zone' or 'twilight zone' (Diamond 1999: 22), a stage in which the transition process would be blocked and the state structure would collapse. In the early 1990s, some scholars hypothesised several scenarios for the post-Castro Cuba (Gunn 1993: 174–87; Mead 1995): the Cuban 'transition to somewhere' (Domínguez 1993: 5–51) has been difficult to predict and to constrict in the tight frame of the Helms-Burton Act. Moreover, the internal characteristics of the Cuban regime would probably imply a violent implosion of the revolutionary government with obvious consequences on the violation of human rights and the illegal migration to the US (López 1997). And this scenario would be in contradiction to the strategy to promote a 'peaceful democratic change'. In other words, if this happened, Cuba would probably become a failed and Haitian-like country: Would this be better for American interests or the Cuban people? Probably not.

The dynamics of the evolution of the Cuban political system raises doubts about the US strategy of democracy promotion too. In fact, the codification of the embargo was nothing more than a watch-and-wait strategy until the final day of Castroism. Meanwhile, the US wanted to exclude from Cuba's future some unwanted forms of government or patterns for democratisation. As shown by Whitehead (1996: 59–92), the US strategy to promote (or impose) democracy in the Caribbean has been pursued through occupation (Puerto Rico), military invasion (Panama and Grenada) or intimidation (Nicaragua). Looking at US democracy promotion, the Cuban case would resemble the Nicaraguan path towards democratisation: an external pressure would have to push the targeted government to hold free and democratic elections and to follow the country through to a democratic transition. However, in the Nicaraguan experience, even after the 1990 democratic elections, the Sandinista cadres maintained their posts in the armed forces and benefited from the privatisations of the state enterprises (Whitehead 1996: 82). However, according to the tight codification of the future democratic government of Cuba, that option has been systematically excluded

from US plans: according to US policymakers, Cuba's future *must* follow the example of Iraqi 'de-ba'athification' (Sweig 2007: 52). Accordingly, a Sino-Vietnamese opening to world capitalism (while maintaining the socialist system of government) would not meet the requirements fixed by the Helms-Burton Act.

At this point, we need to understand why the US has acted with\in Cuba using the same (transitional) paradigm, discarding some different approaches of democracy promotion, and why democracy promotion has remained a constant feature in US–Cuba relations. First, the most expected factor, Cuban non-transition. As Polity IV data reveal,[5] since the 1970s, Cuba has never experienced a consistent change in its political system, and it would be hard to define it as a 'country in transition'. Moreover, the Helms-Burton Act, as mentioned above, has been representing the Pillars of Hercules of US policy towards Cuba: any efforts to act 'creatively' in Cuban policy would face the limits created by such a law. As shown above, the Helms-Burton Act is not only the main source of US democracy promotion towards Cuba (and US visions of Cuba's future), but it is also the codification of the main tool to promote democracy: the embargo. The economic sanctions are intended to be a measure of economic coercion with political goals, as 'economic sanctions seek to lower the aggregate economic welfare of a target state by reducing international trade in order to coerce the target government to change its political behaviour' (Pape 1997: 93–4). However, the rationale beyond economic sanctions could be mostly punitive: despite the efficacy in modifying the target's behaviours, the Cuban embargo has shown the need to punish the Castro government and the revolution (Dashti-Gibson *et al.* 1997: 610; Galtung 1967: 380). Moreover, the economic sanctions could have a symbolic meaning: through them, the sender (the country which puts them into force) wants to show its disapproval for the target's behaviours (Daoudi and Dajani 1983: 161; Gordon 1983: 183–210; Morgan and Schwebach 1997: 28; Schreiber 1973: 405). In the Cuban case, the embargo has a highly symbolic meaning, as it has become the core tool to punish the regime, and support of the embargo (along with anti-communism and the vote for the Republican party) became essential to define the limits of the Cuban-American 'moral community' (De la Torre 2003: 30; Portes and Stepick 1993: 137–44). Moreover, as Lavin (1996: 153) brilliantly argued, '[economic] sanctions have become the lazy man's foreign policy', and they are increasingly used by governments to show their will to 'do something' about some international issues.

From this perspective, democracy promotion through economic sanctions could be interpreted as the 'punitive' exporting of democracy: while Cuba still has a socialist system, it is going to be punished by the US. In fact, the 2004 CAFC report not only 'shaped' the Cuban transition, but it also included some recommendations to cut travel and remittances to the island (CAFC 2004: xviii),

which were adopted by George W. Bush in 2004 (Schoultz 2009: 544). In the Cuban case, US 'laziness' has been evident: apart from few openings (such as the Trade Sanctions Reform and Export Enhancement Act (TSRA) of 2000, which permitted the sale of agricultural products to Cuba, and Clinton and Obama's relaxation on travel rules and remittances), the punitive approach has been highly predominant.

Another major factor in maintaining the US approach towards Cuba is found on the basis of democracy promotion itself. As democracy promotion has been highly based on the 'modernization theory' (Cammark 1994), we should take into account that such studies rejected the 'preconditions' of democracy of the structuralist school (Grugel 2002: 56–63). In other words,

> modernization is ahistorical in that it presumes that all societies can replicate a transition which actually occurred at a particular moment in space and time. It does not recognize the difficulties – indeed the impossibility – of one society copying what occurred in a different society at a different time, nor the changes which have taken place globally which mean that capitalism is now a global order rather than an economic system confined within the territorial boundaries of particular nation states. (Grugel 2002: 49)

Even in the twenty-first century, US liberal-democracy and capitalism promotion (in Cuba as elsewhere in the world) have never abandoned this approach: any country could replicate the linear path towards democracy and capitalism. As Offe (2007: xiii-xiv) pointed out,

> these strategies [of democracy promotion] have been experimented with since the start of the new century in the 'failed states' of Afghanistan, Iraq, and, on a smaller scale, in Bosnia and Kosovo. Instead of the maturity of appropriate social structures being seen as a 'prerequisite' for democratization, democracy is now something that is held to be possible if the right actors are in place and guide their decisions in the right way – and this is possible almost anywhere and at any time, regardless of the level of modernization attained by any given society. External actors, rather than the citizenry of the country to be democratized, are believed to have the capacity to impose democratic regimes.

In fact, according to US policymakers, Iraq and Cuba could follow the same liberal-democratic path and future (W.S. Smith 2004).

Moreover, US democracy promotion has confronted the debate on the model of democracy promoted worldwide. The US has been looking at the liberal-democratic model as the only form of democracy worthy to be 'exported' in the world, with little experimentation beyond that point (Hobson 2009; Kurki 2010, 2013). While, in the last few decades, a model of 'democracy with adjectives' has been flourishing (Bell 2006; Collier and Levitsky 1997; Humphrey 2007; Potomaki and Teivainen 2004; Sadiki 2004; Schmitter and

Karl 1996: 49–62; for a panoramic on the diverse models of democracy, see Held 2006), policymakers, both US and otherwise, have adopted a 'shumpeterian-dahlian' definition of democracy (as a procedural behaviour and a competitive and free process for selection of elites), but they 'discarded' models considered to be 'alien' or 'unwanted' at home (Burnell 2000: 4; Huntington 1991: 6–9; Whitehead 2002: 9). From this perspective, democracy promotion has become the 'export' of democracy abroad, and democracy itself has been conceived as a good for foreign consumers: as China exports rice and Italy wine, the US has been exporting the liberal-democratic model as they 'produce' this kind of democracy at home. In the Cuban case, the US approach never permitted a constructive debate on what form of democracy would be suitable for or more successfully 'exportable' to Cuba: the CAFC reports such as the Title II of the Helms-Burton Act are remarkably silent on this issue. As Mitchell (2011) argued, in the last decade, US democracy promotion has faced the backlash of the 'Bush doctrine' and needed a 'strategic reorientation'. Obama, using a less 'invasive' foreign policy, contributed to present a new paradigm in US democracy promotion, which has been less compromised with the liberal-democratic, and neo-liberal model, and more 'sustainable' (Bridoux and Kurki 2013; Patterson 2012). However, this has not represented a complete and consistent retreat from democracy promotion imperatives (especially if we look at the Cuban case) but rather a rethinking of strategies and tones in doing it (Carothers 2012, 2013).

Furthermore, as some studies point out (August 2013: 91–116; Hernández 2008: 74–8; Robinson 1995), within the frame of the revolution and the socialist system, the Cuban people are enjoying some democratic rights and forms of participation from below. As Guanche (2013: 19) noted, in the Cuban political system (especially after the constitutional reform of 1992), mass participation has been considered a 'justification of the presence of democracy', with a peculiar combination between political and socio-economic rights and liberties, and between 'direct\participative democracy' and 'representative democracy'. That is to say that US democracy promotion in Cuba has never confronted a 'virgin' environment in which the policymakers should 'export' a new 'brand' or 'product'. In US discourse on the promotion of fundamental rights in Cuba, the difficult relationship between civil and political rights, and social and economic rights (Gavison 2003: 23–54) has always been excluded. On the contrary, this clash between different types of rights should not be excluded in Cuba's future (Robinson 1995). International financial institutions' (IFIs) projects and programmes, widely supported by the US, have shown scant attention to the protection of the social and economic environment of the 'helped' country:

> ... the crux of the problem is that the World Bank and the IMF may adopt loan policies that make it more difficult, rather than less, for a state to consolidate liberal democracy and protect a wide range of socio-economic human rights. (Forsythe 2000: 32)

Even the above-mentioned ethnic lobby perspective could help in explaining the missing evolution on the debate over the instruments and the goals of US democracy promotion to Cuba. As Castro survived to the end of the Cold War, the anti-Castro lobby in the US maintained its stance over the Cuban president and the Cuban socialist system: as the cofounder of the CANF, José 'Pepe' Hernández, argued, the most impressive success of the Foundation was avoiding any appeasement with Castro (Calvo and Delercq 2000: 70), while gaining the almost exclusive management of the 'Cuba question'. This influence of US policy refrains from evaluating correctly the efficacy of the instruments to promote democracy in Cuba: projects such as 'Radio and Television Martí' were clearly inefficient and counterproductive, but Congress kept funding them to maintain the Washington-Little Havana connection (Davidson 2009: 78–80). Moreover, the two main codifications of the embargo, which limited (and are limiting) presidential power in US Cuba policy, originated from Congress (and not the Executive) and revealed the outstanding power of the Cuban-American hardliners (Haney and Vanderbush 2005). In the early 1990s, a US official confessed, 'Any time anyone starts to think creatively about Cuba we're told: What do you want to do, lose South Florida for us?' (Robbins 1992: 163).

President Clinton, in a book published in 2009, lamented the inefficacy and the limits of this approach on Cuba in harsh terms, as he

> confided on tape that the embargo was a foolish, pandering failure. It had allowed Castro to demonize the United States for decades, propping up his government with all-purpose excuses for one-party rule. The president said anybody 'with half a brain' could see the embargo was counterproductive. It defied wiser policies of engagement that we had pursued with some Communist countries even at the height of the Cold War. It helped no one, did nothing to open Cuba or prepare the nation for life after Castro ... (Branch 2009: 294)

Despite this post-facto frank condemnation of US strategy in Cuba, it was Clinton who signed the Helms-Burton Bill in March 1996 in order to 'punish' Castro for the Cessnas shoot-down and to obtain support from the Miami-based Cuban-American community. As the former president wrote in his autobiography, 'supporting the bill was good election-year politics in Florida, but it undermined whatever chance I might have if I won a second term to lift the embargo in return for positive changes within Cuba' (Clinton 2004: 701). The Helms-Burton Act not only refrained Clinton but also all his successors to

the White House and US policymakers. Obama, in 2007, expressed his will to meet Raúl Castro 'without preconditions' (Kristof 2007), while Hillary Clinton recently showed in her autobiography a fresh approach towards Cuba as she confessed she has suggested that Obama relax travel rules and remittances to the island (*EFE* 2014). Despite these creative approaches and only limited change in tones and posture over the 'Cuba issue', President Obama and Secretary Clinton did not go too far: the 'democratic conditionality' remained 'in the national interest of the United States' (White House 2009), an essential precondition to start any consistent relaxation of the embargo, and to reintegrate Cuba into the OAS, as Cuba would need to respect the Inter-American Democratic Charter of 2001 in order to rejoin the Organisation (Wylie 2012). This is nothing more than a 'Clinton plus' scenario (Domínguez 2012b: 45–6). Obama, as his predecessor since the 1980s, has been facing the internal and electoral dilemma regarding US policy towards Cuba: after George W. Bush's years, the Cuban-American community in Florida has been supporting US efforts to liberalise travel and remittances to the island (FIU 2008, 2011), while supporting the embargo until a complete democratisation of the island (McLaughlin & Associates 2009). As Obama won a consistent majority among Cuban-Americans in Florida, he would have walked on the usual path of expanding people-to-people's contacts, while pressuring Cuba for not adopting a liberal-democratic form of government.

Conclusion: A 'Teleological Revolution' – 'Abandonment of Democracy' or Strategic Reorientation?

How will US democracy promotion to Cuba change in the next few years? How should US democracy promotion change to be effective in Cuba? These are not easy questions to answer. In fact, those who tried to offer to US policymakers new approaches towards Cuba did so hoping that an appeasement in the relations with Cuba would contribute to advance US interests and foster a democratic transition on the island: US liberal and centrist American think tanks are generally suggesting this. However, the outcomes of these 'new approaches' are far from being determinable at first glance, as they would probably raise further questions: Would the removal of the embargo generate the conditions for the growth of the democratic forces in Cuba? Would normalisation of the bilateral relations create a positive environment in which to try to promote democracy? Would a 'transitional diplomacy' approach be more successful? According to some studies (Bueno de Mesquita and Downs 2005), some non-democratic countries, such as China and Russia, experienced great benefits from liberalising their economies, while maintaining a strict control over civil and political rights: opening up the country's economy is not *per se* functional to a democratisation.

On the contrary, this article has explored the foundations of US democracy promotion in Cuba and the rationale. We have seen how, since the end of the Cold War, democracy promotion has become the cornerstone of US policy towards the island. In Cuba, US democracy promotion has been considered a matter of national security and economic interest. Moreover, US democracy promotion became a distinguishing feature in preserving the Washinton–Little Havana connection. In the 1990s, the codifications of the embargo (which are still in place) established the intimate connection between the retention of the economic sanctions and Cuba's missing democratic transition. In fact, the main goal of the economic sanctions became the 'democratization' of the island and not simply a generic regime change. Moreover, the Title II of the Helms-Burton Act fixed what the future Cuba *must* look like to American eyes but also US immutable commitment in Cuba: after the Helms-Burton Act, the US *must* promote democracy, they *must* promote a well-defined model of democracy with definite steps and timing and they *must* do it through coercion and economic sanctions. The result was nothing more than a prolonged neo-con approach, which pointed out US unwillingness to 'talk' and relate to non-liberal-democratic regimes. In fact, from the neo-con perspective in democracy promotion,

> [in autocratic regimes] people want to be free; the United States should help them by every means possible, while doing nothing to provide support for their oppressor. Regime change may seem like a radical policy but it is actually the best way to prevent a … crisis that could lead to war. Endless negotiating with these governments … is likely to bring about the very crisis it is meant to avert. (Boot 2004: 24)

Moreover, US–Cuba relations have been based on the 'hegemonic discourse' of US foreign policy regarding the promotion of democracy and human rights. As noted, the 'hegemonic discourse' has been trying to raise the promotion of democracy and human rights as independent features in US foreign policy (Hancock 2007: 13–31). The 'Cuba question' has shown an enduring adaptation to this model: long before the 'Bush doctrine', it was founded on the hegemonic role of transition to democracy and democracy promotion. This posture contributed to the stalemate in bilateral relations with Cuba and in the goal of promoting democracy on the island. Wilkinson (2008) defined the Cuban embargo as a 'successful failure' (it has been a failure because it failed to reach its goals, but it has been successful too because the US has been maintaining and strengthening it as the cornerstone of US policy towards Cuba), and US democracy promotion is quite the same.

US democracy promotion strategy has been suffering from a constant form of *hýbris*. First, the strategy in promoting democracy in Cuba has been highly deterministic and conceived as a linear path (from the revolution to a liberal-

democratic and capitalistic state), with no reference to the potential backlashes of the demise of Castroism. The success in achieving the intermediate goal of the embargo (the demise of Castro through an economic crisis) would probably be the worst failure in achieving the main goal (the democratisation of the island). In fact, the economic crisis (through sanctions) could be useful to destabilise non-democratic leaders, but an economic wasteland is not generally an ideal environment in which a democratic institution could develop and sustain itself (Biox and Stokes 2003; Burnell 2004: 104; Huntington 1991: 35; Lipset 1959: 75; Londregan and Poole 1990; Przeworski and Limongi 1997). From this perspective, it should be considered the fact that democracy promotion has been founded on the 'modernization theory'. On the contrary, the strategy used in Cuba (coercion and economic sanctions) could hardly be effective in creating the basis for such a 'modernization'.

Second, it is highly presumptuous to believe that a law formed in Congress could have shaped the Cuban future: the laws should adapt to the reality and its evolution, and not the contrary. For example, the CAFC report of 2006, while 'designing' once more the Cuban future, was aimed to 'undermine the regime's succession strategy' (CAFC 2006: 29). The 'succession' (the transfer of power from Fidel to Raúl) took place on 31 July 2006 without any internal disorder or protest. Moreover, the Helms-Burton Act is almost 20 years old and, since 1996, it has been codifying almost everything about the US strategy and the expected outcomes in Cuba. Such a law is the manifesto of the fact that US jurisprudence is not sufficient to foster a transition in Cuba (such as elsewhere in the world): just writing in a law 'Dear Cuba, I want you to be the liberal-democratic regime I am' is clearly not enough, and it shows the American *hýbris* at its best.

Third, the tight codification of the embargo has not permitted the evolution (and redefinition) of the US strategy of democracy promotion to the island. The Helms-Burton Act fixed a first-best goal, maybe irrational and counterproductive,[6] which prevented US policymakers from concentrating on short-term aims. As Sen. C. Dodd recalled during the Congressional debate over the Helms-Burton Act,

> Assuming we had a change in that country, any kind of change at all, I think we would want to engage that new government. But no, under provisions in the … bill we have to wait until all these conditions – they go on for a page and a half here – are met. (*Congressional Record* 1995b: S15020)

In fact, in recent years, the US faced difficulties in reacting properly to Raúl's economic reforms: due to the legislative framework, US policymakers could not do anything relevant to expand the Cuban internal market and sustain the *cuentapropista* middle class. From this perspective, US democracy promotion

in Cuba has never been managed with a step-by-step approach, focusing on mid-term goals and steps: the Helms-Burton Act, such as the CAFC reports, fixed the final aim and the 'huge variety' of tools for reaching it: coercion and economic sanctions, or more coercion and more economic sanctions.

For these reasons, the general debate over US democracy promotion has never influenced the US strategy in Cuba. The 'transformational diplomacy' (engaging authoritarian regimes as a basis for democracy promotion), Carothers' (2009) 'developmental approach' (working on social and economic development as a basis for the construction of a democracy-friendly civil society), and criticism of the 'export' of liberal-democratic and neo-liberal models have never entered the debate on US policy towards Cuba. As stated above, democracy promotion has been marked by a 'try-fail-learn-retry' approach. On the contrary, US democracy promotion in Cuba has been following a 'try-fail' pattern, in which Carothers' (1999) 'learning curve' was never developed properly: it seems that the US has been learning nothing from its past failures in dealing with Cuba. For example, the US Government Accountability Office (GAO) lamented that the US keep funding democracy promotion projects in Cuba with no accountability, and the US political establishment has no control over the allocation and the efficacy of the funds managed by the US Interest Section in Havana (GAO 2006, 2013). Moreover, some aggressive projects to promote democracy on the island have never ceased: the 'Zunzuneo' Twitter-like platform (Hanson 2014) and the Alan Gross affair seemed to be a re-edition of George W. Bush's strategy to reach out to Cuban dissidence (through US Interest Section in Havana), which led to the crackdown of the 'Black Spring' (Carrasco Martín 2003: 4–5). Despite the evident failures in Cuba, US policymakers have been promoting democracy with the same strategies and basis. Sen. Michael B. Enzi, speaking about the US strategy in Cuba, perfectly described the current impasse in US democracy promotion:

> If you keep on doing what you've always been doing, then you're going to wind up with what you've already got … It's foolish to do the same thing over and over again and expect different results every time. (US Senate 2003: 5)

So, what is next? In my opinion, US democracy promotion in Cuba would need a 'teleological revolution'. This is not to say that the US goal is foolish or irrational a priori. A 'teleological approach' would imply a reorientation of US strategy focusing on the main goal (promoting a better future for the Cuban people), evaluating the current projects and their outcomes, discarding those that are clearly not working properly or are counterproductive, and changing them accordingly. A consistent part of the US strategy in Cuba has been based on what Max Weber called 'value-rational action', or

> ... a conscious belief in the absolute value of some ethical, aesthetic, religious, or other forms of behaviour, entirely for its own sake and independently from any other prospect of external success. (Weber 1947: 115)

The US embargo is a good example. It has been a non-evaluative policy (which shaped the US democracy promotion strategy): the ethic and symbolic rationale of the embargo has overwhelmed any teleological evaluation on the efficacy of the economic coercion against Cuba. Another good example has been the enduring inclusion of Cuba in the US Department of State sponsors of terrorism list. At the time of writing, Cuba was still present in that list even without any consistent proof that it is sponsoring international terrorism (US Department of State 2014: 19). In 2009, a cable from US Interest Section in Havana, revealed by *Wikileaks*, confirmed that 'the US Government does not have any direct evidence of money laundering or terrorist financing activities in Cuba' (*Wikileaks* 2009a). In other words, the teleological link is missing in this case. In fact, Cuba is still considered a 'bad guy', and 'bad guys' generally do wrong things – and Cuba could behave accordingly – while 'good guys', who have strong ethical and moral values, must denounce their misbehaviours. Cuba seems to be in that list not because it is sponsoring international terrorism but because accusing Cuba of financing terrorism is the ethical and symbolic stance of the 'good guys' against a 'bad guy'.

Moreover, US policymakers should understand that democracy promotion and regime change are not always a no-cost and no-risk (or low-cost and low-risk) foreign policy. In 2003, the US invaded Iraq, dismantling Hussein's political system and promoting (by force) a transition to a democratic form of government. Something went clearly wrong, and as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) offensive has been proving, Iraqi instability would be a dilemma for the entire region and for US crucial interests abroad. Meanwhile, what would happen to a failed Cuban state and to its Caribbean neighbours? What will happen if the collapse of Castroism would not spontaneously generate a liberal-democratic regime? What will happen if Cuba followed a Haitian-style transition? Moreover, dealing with Cuba, the US faced the backlash of promoting democracy their own way, which stirred clashes with third-country allies. As the negotiation with the European Union (EU) about the Title III of the Helms-Burton Act (Smis and van der Borght 1999) proved, the US strategy in Cuba needed to confront the dilemma between promoting democracy through economic sanctions and preserving worldwide economic interest and the partnership with their global allies. Ironically, even today, 'the promotion of democracy and human rights in Cuba is in the national interest of the United States' (White House 2009), and, according to the Helms-Burton Act, it *must* be conducted mainly through

economic sanctions, while US presidents continue to waive part of the legislation (the Title III of the Helms-Burton Act) because 'the suspension is necessary to the national interests of the US and will expedite a transition to democracy in Cuba' (Cuban Liberty and Solidarity Act 1996: §6085.b.1). So the question is 'Is the US strategy in Cuba necessary to their national interest?'

This new paradigm would contribute to revert the constant substitution between the final goal and the means to reach it, which has affected the US strategy for a long time. In recent decades, when American public opinion (generally the Cuban-American community and its hard-line representatives in Congress) asked to 'do more' on the Cuba issue, US presidents have been tightening\relaxing the economic sanctions against the island or launching plans and programmes to show their commitment to democratic transition on the island. The real dilemma of US presidents dealing with Cuba has become how to 'dose' the economic coercion and how to elaborate new plans for Cuba's future, forgetting the main goal. In the last 20 years and more, being supporters of the democratic transition in Cuba has meant being pro-embargo; on the contrary, being anti-embargo has meant being Castro's best friends. Meanwhile, it seemed that the US strategy in Cuba has focused mainly on promoting democracy just for the sake of promoting what they consider a right and ethical form of government, without regards to the efficacy of such a strategy itself. From this perspective, a teleological evaluation on the embargo (as leverage to the regime change) and on the efficacy of USAID projects in Cuba was completely abandoned. In other words, US democracy promotion should interrogate itself about how its strategy is working in Cuba and how to adapt it to the present (uncertain) reality. In April 2009, the Chief of US Mission in Cuba, Jonathan D. Farrar, wrote to Washington presenting some doubts about the current US strategy to open up the Cuban regime criticisms to the Cuban internal opposition: the dissidents were 'prone to dominance by individuals with strong egos', and the opposition groups affected from divergent views, incoherence, internal divisions and a distrustful relation with Miami Cuban-Americans. For these reasons, a US diplomat admitted that 'we will need to look elsewhere, including within the government itself, to spot the most likely successors to the Castro regime', as 'it is worth asking what the Cuban political opposition is doing and the role it may play in the future' (*Wikileaks* 2009b): this was nothing more than an admission that a new (teleological) approach was needed. In fact, in 2018, Raúl Castro will probably resign as president, as he announced in February 2013 (*Reuters* 2013), and Cuba will not have a Castro government. Maybe, for US policymakers, the time has come to evaluate a proper strategy to deal with that government.

Obviously, this 'teleological approach' would need a coherent framework to properly manage US democracy promotion. This is not the Cuban case. The

framework created through the Helms-Burton Act could do everything but sustain this approach. As shown above, the Title II of the Act created the basis for US democracy promotion on the island, and it generated its limits too. The Title II of the Helms-Burton Act could be considered the 'graveyard' of any creative approach towards the island and, while shaping the contours of the Cuban transition, it has been limiting the presidential authority in dealing constructively with Cuba or experimenting with new courses. Clearly, as the last 18 years have proven, it would not be easy to change the US strategy in Cuba without removing or substantially modifying such a law. Moreover, for a president persuading Congress to put hand to this text will be even harder: even if the Cuban-American community is changing its views on Cuba and the symbolism of the confrontation against Cuba is declining (Domínguez 2014: 299–306; Girard *et al.* 2010), the hardliners' Congressional lobby is still alive, and several Cuban-American Congresspeople (who contributed to the creation of the present stalemate) are still in office. Moreover, the US–Cuba Democracy political action committee (PAC), which has been profusely funding pro-embargo candidates (Federal Election Committee (FEC), 2014), is still compromised in maintaining the current sanctions (and, obviously the Helms-Burton Act) as the main strategy to promote democracy. In fact,

> USCD PAC will raise funds from individuals to contribute to candidates running for the United States Congress, who oppose any economic measures that directly or indirectly finance the repressive machinery of the Cuban dictatorship and, who are committed to supporting legislation seeking to strengthen support for Cuba's courageous pro-democracy movement.[7]

Obama, despite his openings to Cuba (mainly related to the removal of the limitations on travels and remittances for Cuban-Americans) needs to confront the hardliners' 'assault' over his policies: in 2011, trying to overwhelm the Republican filibustering in Congress, Obama menaced to veto any bill or proposal that would have defied his strategy over Cuba (White House 2011). For these reasons, redefining US policy and democracy promotion strategy is going to be an uphill race.

Finally, the 'teleological approach' would probably help US democracy promotion to refocus on the main question regarding Cuba's future: What will the Cuban people want for their own future? Would the Cuban people consider a better future for themselves differently from the future the US has been codifying and defining since the end of the Cold War? On the contrary, the US strategy in Cuba has been founded on the presumption that the Cuban people would deserve a better and democratic future (that has been decided in Washington and Miami and not in Havana) and would embrace with enthusiasm the 'American

way of life'. Ironically, US democracy promotion has been aimed at helping the Cuban people to decide for themselves, while imposing its own model, timing and conditions for the future (well-liked) Cuban government, society and economy: it seems that the only freedom for Cubans would be the right to validate (democratically?!) what a US law has already decided. The discourse on the Cuban democratic future should not preclude or limit the discourse on Cuba's sovereignty and self-determination, as the Cuban *Apostol* noted down more than 100 years ago in his diary: '*¿Cómo queréis que nosotros nos legislemos por las leyes con que ellos se legislan? Imitemos. ¡No! Copiemos. ¡No! Es bueno, nos dicen. Es americano, decimos*'[8] (Martí 1991, XXI: 15–6).

The necessity of a new approach over Cuba and a redefinition of US strategy on the island were distinguishing features in President Obama's openings in December 2014, which represented the biggest change in policy since Carter's presidency. Obama inaugurated a new era in US–Cuba relations, proposing the opening of an embassy in Havana, further relaxing the regulations on travel and remittances to Cuba and defying the Congress over the current legislation on the embargo, which could be considered the beginning of a long path towards 'normalization'. In his speech of 17th December, Obama (2014a) stressed the importance of working with Cuba on issues of common interest. In fact, Obama took this step in the framework of a prisoners swap with Havana.

Obama's 'new(est) approach' with Cuba is part of what I have called 'teleological revolution'. In fact, Obama is first fostering a more 'rational' approach on the evaluation of Cuba's connection with the international terrorism and its presence in the Department of State's blacklist: he proposed a review of Cuba's position, according to 'the facts and the law' (Obama 2014a). Furthermore, Obama is exploring alternative policies in order to advance US interest on the island, such as a new approach in state-to-state diplomacy (which would have a major boost with the establishment of formal diplomatic offices), rather than a policy of isolation and indifference. Obama, pushing for this new approach, simply admitted that the current policy towards Cuba has failed to serve American interest. Now, the main question is 'What is now the America interest in Cuba? Is Obama's move a change in US policy or a more articulated abandonment of regime change in Cuba?'

During his first years in office, some scholars accused President Obama of having abandoned democracy and democracy promotion worldwide (Muravchik 2009; Roth 2010). On the contrary, other scholars have shown the reorientation of US policy in the frame of the need for pushing a different approach from the past in a changing and unstable international system (Bouchet 2010, 2013; Carothers 2013). In the Cuban case, Obama's (and US) interest for the regime change has not been subverted: Obama's speech contained several references to

the 'empowerment' of the Cuban civil society to whom US openings are directed, and the will to support human rights on the island. Moreover, a fact sheet from the White House (2014) signalled US commitment to democracy promotion on the island.

However, Obama's policy introduced some relevant changes in the way the US could and would do it. First, Obama seems to abandon the 'transitology' approach on Cuba, which has characterised US democracy promotion on the island for almost 30 years. The paradigm 'crushing the Revolution would bring democracy in Cuba' has changed. According to Obama (2014a),

> ... it does not serve America's interests, or the Cuban people, to try to push Cuba toward collapse. Even if that worked – and it hasn't for 50 years – we know from hard-earned experience that countries are more likely to enjoy lasting transformation if their people are not subjected to chaos ... how societies change is country-specific, it's culturally specific. It could happen fast; it could happen slower than I'd like. (Obama 2014b)

What is relevant in Obama's approach is that he realised that there are important bilateral issues apart from (or beyond) democracy promotion and that a democratic 'evolution' could serve better US interests rather than a 'revolution', which would completely crush the Cuban revolutionary system and the Cuban state. However, despite this, from the American side, the very term 'normalization' is not completely free from the Cuban future democratic performances and steps.

Notes

1. The word *hýbris* is of Greek origin. Among ancient Greeks, it defined a sort of sin against the Gods, and it was related to a human behaviour when common people pretended to be 'like a God' or even considered themselves more important than divinity. Today, its meaning recalls arrogance, or extreme and unjustified self-confidence.
2. According to the Logan Act, US officials would need a special authorisation for the Department of State to have official relations with a government not recognised by the US. In that case, the delegation never requested such a formal permission.
3. René González and Fernando González, two of the 'Cuban five', were released in October 2013 and February 2014, respectively. The other three are still held in the US.
4. This last issue is particularly relevant in US–Cuba relations, and it became evident even before the 'Bush doctrine'. Global and regional players (which are US allies), such as Canada and the European Union (EU), were sufficiently compromised with the democratic transition in Cuba, while criticizing the US approach and embargo towards the island (Gratius 2005; McKenna 2004). In other words, dealing with Cuba, those players have become pro-democracy and anti-American external forces.

5. Polity IV Project: Political Regime Characteristics and Transitions, 1800–2013, The Center for Systemic Peace (CSP), http://www.systemicpeace.org/polity/polity4.htm.
6. Some scholars (Kaplowitz 1998: 201; Hufbauer *et al.* 2008: 162) argued that economic sanctions are less effective when the goal of sanctions is a 'major foreign policy goal', such as the democratic transition of the target country. In other words, a too far-reaching and ambitious scope would undermine sanctions' efficacy.
7. US–Cuba Democracy political action committee (PAC), http://www.uscubapac.com/purposeandagenda.html.
8. How do you wish for us to rule ourselves by laws that they pass for themselves? Imitate. 'No! Copy. No! It is good, they tell us. It is American we say.'

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