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The Morning After: Confronting Castro's Legacy. Mark Falcoff.
Washington, D.C.: The AEI Press. 2003. 304 pp.

Forecasting Cuba's future is easy in the long run. Within a generation or so, barring a global cataclysm of one sort or another, that country will be back on the path of economic (and, increasingly, cultural) integration with the United States, on which it was before Castro seized it and, against history and logic, hitched it to the now defunct USSR. Politically, it will catch up with the democratic wave that swept dictatorships of every stripe off the Spanish-speaking world.

The short-run, however, is cloudy. What will happen right after Fidel Castro dies? Will the regime undergo an orderly succession to his brother Raul and, after him, a collective military kleptocracy not unlike those that once ruled Guatemala? Will it transition and transform itself in short order into something like a democracy, as almost all Latin American countries and several post-Soviet republics have managed to do? Or will it collapse into chaos or civil war, spawning another seaborne exodus from the island and possibly prompting a U.S. invasion to restore order?

Surveying Cuba's past and present in the domestic and international realms, particularly in its relations with the United States, and using Mexico, Nicaragua, and Haiti

as benchmarks, Mark Falcoff peers beyond the death of the *tyrannus maximus* to see what will follow in his wake.

The book is divided into eight chapters. In Chapter One: The Shadow of the Past, Falcoff shows what anybody who would care to review the record can confirm: that against the propaganda of the regime, parroted ad nauseam by its apologists, pre-Castro Cuba was one of the top three or four Latin American countries in terms of economic and social development. On some indicators, in fact, it was on par or ahead of some European countries. True, this was largely due to Cuba's special relationship with the United States—but this gives the lie to the charge of American exploitation.

In Chapter 2: Sugar and Chapter 5: Tourism and the Environment, Falcoff goes over the historic role which these two industries played in the island's economy and details the destruction of the former, the neglect of the latter (only recently reversed), and the environmental degradation perpetrated by the regime. Havana Bay, it turns out, ranks "as one of the ten most polluted bodies of water in the world."

The property question is the subject of Chapter 3. In one sense, the so-called revolution is reduced to theft on a gigantic scale, proportionately even greater than what took place in the Soviet Union itself. The Castro brothers enriched themselves even as the country was impoverished, as invariably happens in cases of large-scale expropriations. The capital accumulated over generations was squandered in foreign adventures and pet projects that yielded negative returns. Today, Cubans consume fewer calories than they did before Castro. As to the future, Falcoff foresees that any attempt to restore a market economy after the Castros are no longer in charge, is likely to be derailed into a swamp of

disputes over ownership, restitution, and compensation pitting former owners, American and Cuban alike, against present-day occupants or beneficiaries.

In Chapter 4: Security and in Chapter 6: Immigration, the Cuban “threat” is alleged to be reduced to the possibility that Fidel Castro will unleash yet another massive exodus equal or larger than the 1980 Mariel boatlift, or that after his death Cuba will fall into such disorder that one will happen spontaneously. It is this possibility, apparently, which leads Washington to prefer stability and continuity in Cuba, even under Castro, to the uncertainties associated with his sudden or violent removal.

The desertification of civil society is discussed in Chapter 7. A once thriving network of voluntary associations was replaced by the sterility of party-controlled transmission belts. Only the Catholic Church survived the onslaught of the totalitarian regime as an independent, if intimidated institution. Cuba has been so thoroughly militarized that not only the higher reaches of the party-state, but economic enterprises of all kinds are under the control of active or retired military men. This is the opposite of what happened in Franco’s Spain.

Finally, in Chapter 8: The Prospect, Falcoff essays an answer to the question, what will happen the morning after? His answer is ambiguous. He begins by examining the “U.S. Constituencies for Post-Castro Cuba.” These are, first, the useful idiots and political pilgrims who populate Hollywood, the academy, and the halls of congress (notably the Black Caucus). They have been the most loyal Castro fans in America, turning a blind eye to a record of political repression, exploitation of labor, exclusion of blacks from the top rungs of power, promotion of prostitution, corruption and criminality, and many other lesser sins. Ironically, they may be the first to turn critical the moment a post-Castro

government in Havana decides to make peace with Washington, suddenly discovering squalor, inequality, and injustice where they had seen none before.

The business sector comes next. Anxious not to be left out of what they expect to be a thriving market, this constituency has turned against the embargo and favors normalization of relations, on Castro's terms if necessary. Falcoff, however, thinks that the prospect of making money in Cuba is a mirage. The country is a basket case, unable to support itself. Long ago, it lost its pre-eminence as a sugar exporter and it is decades behind other Caribbean countries when it comes to the tourist industry. No other source of wealth looms on the horizon, as far as he can see.

Falcoff then takes up the Pentagon. Convinced that the Cuba threat is gone, and worried that instability in Cuba will pressure an American president to send troops to the island, the American military establishment, speaking through retired admirals and generals who have visited the country, conferred with Castro, and come away impressed with the "professionalism" of their Cuban counterparts, argues that mutual interests in curbing immigration and interdicting drug runners require a change of policy toward the regime.

Lastly, Falcoff takes up Cuban-Americans. While those who left the island in the first and second wave of emigration remain steadfast in their hard-line opposition to Castro, their born-in America offspring, as well as later arrivals from Cuba, take a far softer stance. They are less likely to support continuation of the embargo and, instead, increasingly favor normalization of relations with the regime. In fact, Cuban-Americans constitute the largest single category of visitors to the island. Their remittances constitute

one of the top three most important sources of dollars for the regime, and some of them even do business with it through third parties.

Given the perspectives of these constituencies, Falcoff subtly suggests (as I said, his answer is ambiguous) that the most likely post-Castro scenario is a succession to Raul or a military regime which, in either case, will seek an understanding with the U.S. The American business community, the Pentagon, and a large segment of the Cuban-American community will settle for relatively minor concessions and cosmetic changes on the part of the post-Castro regime and lobby hard for a quick normalization of relations. Washington will yield to self-interest, and the dreams of a democratic Cuba will have to be postponed yet again.

Falcoff's vision for the "morning after" is plausible. As I said at the outset, in the short-run the future is foggy. Yet I find this scenario less than convincing. When every other Latin American country once ruled dictatorially has embarked on a path of democratization, it is hard to believe that Cuba will remain the hold-out. With Castro gone, the myth of revolution will no longer be sustainable. Besides, those looking to invest in Cuba will demand guarantees that their investments will not be confiscated. Property rights will have to be settled and secured. This in itself will require more than cosmetic changes from the regime. Also, Castro's successors will need loans, and to secure Washington's consent for American financing it will have to show evidence of real openings in the party system, the media, and the educational and cultural establishments. If Washington demanded political liberalization from Mexico in order to legislate NAFTA, will it settle for less in Cuba?

I don't predict an immediate democratization the morning after, only openings in that direction which will succeed one another at an increasing tempo, bearing the first fruits, even if not of the best quality, in a matter of years, not decades. Only the future will tell, however, whether it is Falcoff or I the one who has the clearest crystal ball. As for now, his book is worth a read.

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