

I believe Cuba is at the tipping point: Are we in the U.S. ready to respond? | Opinion

BY TEO A. BABUN

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Last month, this screen shot from a Facebook video shows women protesting in Santiago de Cuba over the lack of milk for their children. Photo Source: Cubadebate.

In a now familiar scene, desperate families in Santiago and other towns in eastern Cuba took to the streets on March 17 [to protest inhumane living conditions](#) and the abject failures of the communist state.

Although the government quickly cut the internet, images emerged that are reminiscent of July 2021, when thousands of Cubans nationwide protested chronic shortages of food and electricity, inadequate health care, and severe government repression. On that occasion, the authoritarian government arrested and jailed hundreds of protesters – some for up to 20 years.

To Cuba's dismay, the international community – including some traditional allies - overwhelmingly condemned the 2021 crackdown. The criticism appears not to have changed the government's behavior. One source, Justicia 11J, says security forces arrested dozens following the March protests, but not visible to the world.

Like other Cuban Americans, I have painfully watched Cuba's slow-motion collapse for decades. It is apparent that Cuba has reached a tipping point.

The Castro's are gone, and the Communist Party will never deliver on its revolutionary promises. It has exhausted all means of economic survival and hungry Cubans reject leaders they never elected. [“Patria y Vida”](#) (Homeland and Life!)“ is the protesters' battle cry that unnerves Cuba's dictators as they contemplate their own exit plans.

Is the U.S. ready to respond to a sudden collapse of the Cuban government? Is it prepared for a humanitarian disaster that could dwarf Haiti's unfolding crisis? If there is a mass migration event, will we have the resources to respond? And, importantly, how will we ensure the transition best supports the Cuban people?

The bankrupt Cuban government has dug an immense hole. Early this year, it suspended a package of poorly conceived economic measures that had increased the cost of living for impoverished Cubans. Other reforms failed when revolution hardliners watered down measures to unshackle open markets and entrepreneurs. Cuba is also a chronic human rights abuser.

Despite claims its embargo undermines a Cuban economic recovery, the U.S. is actually one of Cuba's largest suppliers of food and its major source of remittances. The failure is not due to U.S. policy - the fault lies with the fatally flawed communist model that has created millions of victims worldwide.

The distaste for Cuba's government has spread. For decades, the government relied on diplomatic cover from a few partners, including some European countries. But after the 2021 crackdown, former allies, such as Spain, are now among Cuba's chief critics. Even Cuba's traditional comrade, Russia, having abandoned central planning and overstretched from its Ukraine campaign, appears unwilling to bail out Cuba's archaic Marxist system.

In late 2023, the UN released a damning report documenting Cuba's systematic violations of freedom of religion or belief, dispelling the government's weak attempts to portray Cubans as being free to worship as they please. And the UN has become one of Cuba's greatest critics for the human rights abuses suffered by thousands of Cuban doctors coercively sent to foreign countries as part of the Cuban government's desperate scheme to generate foreign exchange – those doctors lose all freedoms and are paid a pittance, earning the UN's label as “modern-day slavery.”

Forced migration to the U.S. is part of the playbook of Cuba and its partners, Venezuela and Nicaragua.

Today's world is challenged by countless complex emergencies, but this one will happen 100 miles south of Florida.

I encourage our political and military leadership, as well as our development community, to closely monitor the unraveling situation in Cuba, and to put plans in place to ensure the U.S. and our neighbors are not caught short.



Dr. Teo A. Babun is the President and Chief Executive officer of Outreach Aid to the Americas (OAA), a non-profit religious organization dedicated to serving vulnerable communities in the American continent through humanitarian aid, development, and the defense of human rights.

He is the author of numerous books, the most recent being “Faith and Freedom in Latin America”.

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