



**Cuba Transition
Project**

**Transition from Communism: Lessons
Learned, Challenges Ahead for Cuba**

Conference Proceedings

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importante que la participación o la discusión: es la responsabilidad. Si nosotros asumimos posiciones de responsables con relación a la tragedia cubana y a la vez nos orientamos al servicio de lo que pedía Martí, el triunfo está allí, porque el sistema colapsa, y esto no puede esperar, hay urgencia total para lograr ese cambio. Los cubanos tienen sed de libertad, no son palabritas, tienen sed de libertad y ahora con la disidencia trabajan con eso ocho hermanos con mi padre. Y darán un diagnóstico de la situación de Cuba tal como ha vivido el cubano de aquí. Esto es el momento, si no consensuamos de un estratégico inteligente con el apoyo de los Estados Unidos, y con el apoyo de otros países tratando de lograr un efecto multilateral, la tragedia puede durar unos cuantos años. Todo depende de nosotros, así que animemos, que los cubanos esperan para que ese día pronto llegue. Gracias.]

Fredo Arias King: Where there is a formula for a transition, I think everyone involved in transitions will tell you that when the communist regime collapses, there is a certain formula that you have to follow: step one, step two, step three. But for liberation, and this panel is about how to liberate your country from a communist dictatorship, there really is no easy, cookie-cutter formula approach. But I will cite a couple of Tyrannosaurus Rexes and a Velociraptor of transition, and that would be Mart Laar, the former Prime Minister of Estonia, which, as you know, was a most successful post-communist transition, but he was also involved in the liberation of Estonia. Mr. Philip Dimitrov, former Prime Minister of Bulgaria, also was involved in the liberation of Bulgaria. And Marek Kapusta, who was responsible for the overthrow of three dictators, is from Slovakia. He organized a campaign against Vladimir Meciar in 1998, and he trained the Yugoslavs that overthrew Slobodan Milosevic, and they, in turn, trained the Georgians that overthrew Eduard Shevardnadze. So these three have basically given us a formula, which they call the “shotgun approach,” because, as they say, you never know from which side the glass will break, and the dictatorship will shatter into a million pieces. So their formula is basically to just keep trying a little bit of everything, and maybe the thing you least expect will be the one that shatters the regime.

So, how did these people do it? Basically, the first out of six points that we will mention today is to make fun of the regime. A lot of times we take these dictators very seriously when they are in power, and when they fall, we realize that they were just a bunch of buffoons. Look at Nicolae Ceausescu and how powerful he looked just a few hours before he was overthrown, and then he was shot like a dog by his own people and repudiated by everybody after that. Make fun of the dictator while he’s still in power. *Otpor*. *Otpor* means “resistance” in Serbo-Croatian, and it was the name of the organization that overthrew Milosevic, headed by a very good group of people, and they were experts at making fun of Milosevic. It’s very hard for the dictator and his regime to counteract humor and parodies. It’s very easy to repress *samizdat* and put people in prison, but humor is very hard to repress.

Two, organize people around nonpolitical things, such as an environmental or historical preservation campaign, for example. This is what Mart Laar suggested when he was here in Miami, as long as you organize people outside of the official channels. Because once they put their signature on a piece of paper to preserve a monument or a piece of history or for an environmental cause that doesn’t directly challenge the regime per se and, therefore, has a chance to survive, then they are going to put their signature on something more political later on. You embolden them. Once they put their signature on an environmental issue, you better believe

that later they are going to put their signature on the Varela Project and add to those 30,000 brave souls in Cuba.

Three, find a symbol that's catchy, cool, sexy, and everybody knows what it means. It's also very hard for the regime to counter, once it spreads, a sort of fashion statement. In Yugoslavia, they had the fist [and the slogan], "He's gone." In Mexico, we in our campaign for Vicente Fox had the "*¡ya!*" which as you know in Spanish means both "enough" and "It's time." It is very hard for the regime to counter that. In Slovakia, they had a hand, which means either "Stop it," or "I want to participate." And how can the regime say "no" to a hand or a symbol like that? It's very hard for them. In Mexico, we also used a red card, like in soccer when you want a player to go, and the referee says that a player has committed a fault, so people would pull out a red card whenever the regime candidate would show up. In Prague, as you know, in 1989, the 17th of November, they would take out their keys and start shaking them, because in Czech, the shaking of keys means that it is time to go. But it is very hard to stop that. You can't arrest someone for shaking keys.

So, fourth, a proposal of what will come after. Formulate a proposal of what will come after so that people will not be so afraid of making that jump, because sometimes people will not jump out of faith. And don't forget that words like "freedom" and "democracy," unfortunately, outside of this room and outside of a few other groups are really empty words for a lot of people who are just trying to survive, but people are more receptive to the idea of change. You don't have to tell people exactly how that change will look; it's just change. *Alianza por el Cambio* [Alliance for Change] we used to call it in Mexico, and all the opinion polls showed that the reason why the PAN [National Action Party] won in Mexico was because it changed its name to *Alianza por el Cambio*. We didn't have to explain what that change would be, and I personally have been very disappointed with it, but everybody bought into it. The proposal of what will come after should include the destruction of that myth that social conquests will be eradicated, that there will be some tradeoff between freedom and health and education. I think Chile and Costa Rica have proved that completely. Estonia, the Czech Republic, and Poland have the best health care systems in the post-communist world and have proved that wrong, but the proposal should include these things.

Fifth, of course, take advantage of cleavages in the nomenklatura and the ruling elite. You never know when somebody will be just itching to shoot Mr. Castro just so they can take power, and we would like to encourage those people within the regime. A lot of times that is the only chance you have.

Sixth, international presence, as some people here have mentioned. Recently, I've been trying to help the little country of Moldova in Eastern Europe, which is the most forgotten country in the world, and they had zero friends in Washington, zero friends in the European Union, but we've been cultivating those friends, and finally little Moldova is receiving some attention in Washington outside of the State Department. But you don't have that problem because you have Frank Calzón in Washington, you have Directorio [*Directorio Democrático Cubano*] in Latin America, and you have Carlos Alberto Montaner in Europe, so you have friends all over the world. Our hearts go out to you, best of luck and thank you very much.

Andy S. Gómez: I'm going to give the panel one last chance to add anything, and I'm going to start with Kevin Whitaker.

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