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One of the frustrating things in life is the lack of information regarding things as they are. Oftentimes, even when we desire to let our dreams be tested through external means, we ponder in ignorance of very important things for ourselves and the lives of nations. And so it is with Cuba. Ever since the beginning of the exodus more than thirty years ago, seers have announced the hoped-for demise of Castrism. Today, such prognostications continue unabated, mostly based on the unprecedented economic debacle of the regime. And yet, there are problems with the implicit conception of the causes of political change structuring them. I would like to identify and sketch the nature of the problem and to suggest ways of minimizing the uncertainties.

The prevailing model used nowadays to predict political change in Cuba is an economic model. A very famous economist participating in these meetings said it succinctly; "whoever controls the economy controls the polity." Presumably, a profound crisis in one institution brings about a profound crisis in the other, and as human suffering and frustration mounts people get fed up and revolt. A little reflection on these matters, however, immediately gives us pause. It is both relatively easy and thus unnecessary to provide extensive criticisms of this model. Ever since at least Tocqueville's commentaries on the causes of the French Revolution, economic well-being is acknowledged as a factor in all theories of revolution, although only one among others such as the legitimacy of the regime and its use of repression. World history is replete with instances of economic bankrupt and genocidal governments intent in maintaining state power at all costs, executing with murderous efficiency tens of thousands of people too numb with hunger and fear to offer effective resistance.

We need a more holistic understanding regarding the likely turn of events in Cuba. Such understanding requires a different predictive model of political change in the island and the use of different information from the one that is typically available. Most of what we know today about Cuba come from Cuban institutions, the Cuban government, the monitoring of the Cuban mass media, and the reports of visitors to Cuba and other international observers. However, we need to know much more than we do today about the experiences and perceptions of Cubans from all walks of life in the island if we are to accurately predict the likely turn of events. There is a dire need for representative and unbiased information collected systematically and longitudinally from the Cuban people.

Since we cannot go to Cuba to conduct these studies, they must be conducted outside Cuba. There is ample precedent for this, for the problem of studying societies at a distance is not new, as the work of Ruth Benedict on wartime Japan, among others, make clear. Visitors and immigrants from Cuba, selected to represent the entire country, whites and nonwhites, and the different strata in the social stratification of the society, should be contacted wherever they go outside Cuba and requested to provide information. A series of topics on which to gather information, such as the military, the mass organizations, and education, should be established and rotated on a systematic time-basis, which over the course of months and years will establish trends in public opinion and lived experiences.

It will then be possible to understand much more clearly than we do today a host of issues for which we can now only guess, such as the likely impact of the economic crisis on the stability of the Castro regime. I want to close with two examples of the present-day uncertainties besieging the study of Cuban society. First, what is the impact of the economic crisis on the repressive ability of the government? Presumably, as the economic crisis deepens people's physical and social spheres of life shrink. Are they thus more easily controlled and suppressed? Is this part of the reason for the recent creation of the Unified Vigilance and Control System? Secondly, what will be the impact of the dollarization policy on race relations and political loyalty in Cuba? Would Blacks and Castro sympathizers be less likely to receive

dollars from kin and friends from abroad? If so, what will be the impact on their continued willingness to support the regime? We will never know such matters until we begin to ask the right questions to the right people.