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DIPLOMACY

**Blasting Reagan's
Cuba Policies**

A former top State Department employee has publicly criticized the Reagan administration for its "intellectual sclerosis" and "hackneyed" policies toward Cuba. In an article to be published this week in Foreign Policy magazine, Wayne Smith, chief of the U.S. interests section in Havana from 1979 to August 1982, says the policies are based on the outdated fantasy that Fidel Castro can be easily gotten rid of. Smith describes how Reagan's attempts to intimidate Castro over the issue of arms shipments to El Salvador only provoked the Cuban leader to seek new weapons from the Soviets and to launch a massive mobilization of the People's Militia. The episode, Smith believes, illustrates a fundamental lesson for U.S. policy: "The Castro regime is there to stay . . . To reduce it by fire and sword would cost far more in blood, treasure and world opprobrium than the problem warrants."

Smith excoriates the administration for ignoring Castro's calls for U.S.-Cuban negotiation. Both former Secretary of State Alexander Haig and special envoy Vernon Walters did contact the Cubans about El Salvador. But afterward, Smith charges, the administration deliberately misrepresented Castro as "uncompromising." In fact, he writes, the Cubans reacted positively with statements that they had ceased shipping arms first to El Salvador and then to Nicaragua.

Petty: Smith did not recommend that the Cuban pronouncements be accepted at face value. But he did believe that they were worth discussing. Instead of sitting down with the Cubans, however, the administration responded with what Smith charges were phony statistics and petty measures designed to scuttle any further talk. The administration insisted that the Cubans had not reduced their shipments of arms to Central America; but "if the guerrillas had received all the arms reported by U.S. intelligence," he writes, "the Salvadoran army would be outgunned 20 to 1." Reagan also allowed a 1977 U.S.-Cuban fishing agreement to lapse and prohibited any U.S. financial transactions related to Cuban tourism. In Smith's view, those moves sent a clear signal to Cuba: "The United States had no further interest in better relations."

In response, the State Department denies Smith's major charge: "We never closed the door to dialogue," insists one official, who nonetheless defends the administration's hard line. "[But] we do not believe there is any evidence to support the thesis that negotiating with Castro, under current circumstances, would advance [relations]. A change in Cuban behavior, not just a change in rhetoric, is what is required." Reagan's men doubt Smith's view that the Cubans are now ready for such a change.