

# “Cuba’s Response to COVID-19 and the Consequences for Cuba of the Pandemic”



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# Context

## Most attention focused on great powers and great tragedies

- Viewed in the popular press and by certain states as a test for the legitimacy and strength of a political system

## The battles for policy supremacy between economics and health policy

- Policy shaped by need to preserve health of entire population
- Policy shaped by the need for a viable economic system to continue to function

## Much less attention paid to the developing world

- Exception—sensationalism in tragedy (Central and South America)
- Exception—where a government that is unpopular in the United States does “badly” in its response (Brazil)

# Cuba: A Unique Case Study

Has many of the characteristics of a developing states

But also shares some of the characteristics and sensibilities of a developed state

The conflict with the United States adds greater interest

The issue of medical internationalism exposes quite strong ideological rifts between Marxist Leninist and Western Liberal Democratic sensibilities

The tensions between seeking to help and protecting populations is substantially exposed

The interactions of economic and health policy and their tensions are highlighted

The specific effect of placement downstream in pathways of economic production produces dependencies that then affect health policy and capabilities

# Overview—History of Pandemic

## The infection vectors

- Tourism—European visitors right before the European flareup
- Diaspora—Cubans traveling back and forth from countries immediately before flare ups in host states
- Internationalism--Cuban doctors and other medical staff abroad
- Humanitarianism—the sage of the cruise ships allowed to dock in Cuba

## Consequences

- Closing borders
- Developing treatments
- Keeping the country running in the face of shortages
- Reducing incidence of mortality and disease severity
- Difficulties of maintaining disease reduction strategies

# Focus on Key Issues: Tourism

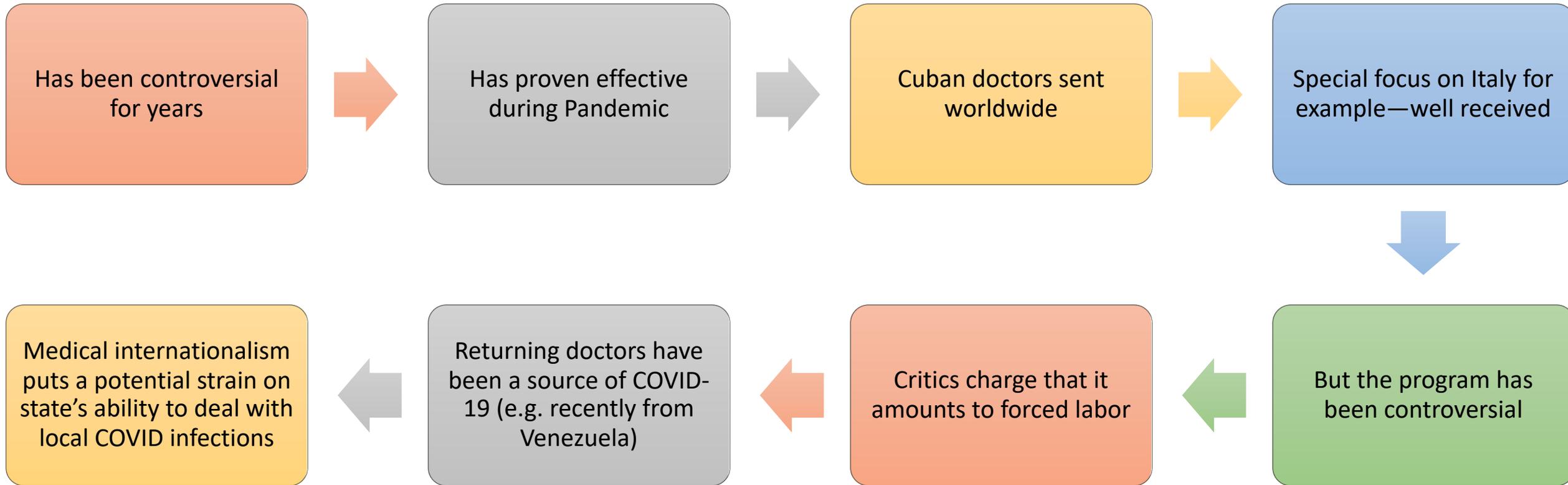
## Core challenge

- ***Tourism is a critical element of economy***
  - Economic development for 2030
  - Expansion of non-State sector
- ***Tourism was the key vector for the introduction of disease***
  - Pandemic dried up sources of tourist flows
  - Reduced investment by foreign companies

## Response

- Encouraging local tourism
- Difficult to make up the difference
- Diaspora Cubans effectively cut off
- Collateral effects (restaurants, tour operators, difficult to manage)
- From July 2020 effort to establish tourist safe zones, where tourists would be transported to 1 of 5 quarantined all inclusive resorts

# Cuban Medical Internationalism



# Medical Technologies

Advances in medical tech has also been a core area of development under 2030 Plan

COVID accelerated and redirected medical research

Deepened partnerships with China and European states

Recycling and repurposing drugs in development

Some success; but locked out of vaccine race?

Has been used strategically: in some cases less of an attempt to monetize drug treatment regimes than to use it for middle and long-term political advantage.

# Challenges

## Sanitation

- Hard to encourage hand washing where water scarcity is an issue
- State incapable of meeting that challenge in the short term
- Potential to increase susceptibility
- Impacts health care and productive economic capacity

## Food

- Condition of Cuban people waiting in long lines for food and other needs well publicized
- Highlights inefficiency of internal state planned distribution networks
- Highlights difficulties of Cuban access to goods where they are cash strapped
- [Food security](#) issues highlighted
- Potential to increase susceptibility

## Economic Reform

- The pressures of COVID response has induced state to return to some of the measures of the “Special Period”: Dollarization relaxation of central planning, expansion of areas let to private sector, etc.
- Hard to plan—might be revoked as soon as crisis passes
- Will the non-state sector expand with less oversight going forward? Non-state sector VERSUS informal sector poses its own problems

# The Current Outlook; Tourism

## Pressure on tourism

- Reporting from Miami Herald 30 December 2020; [Link HERE](#)):
  - Cut down on the number of travelers allowed into the island from the U.S. Mexico, Panama, Bahamas, Haiti and the Dominican Republic
  - Method: Cut down flights to Cuba
  - Lucrative European and Canadian connections left intact.
- The rise of COVID-19 travel insurance extended in some cases to Cuba (e.g., complementary insurance for [Iberostar guest](#) 15 December 2020)

## The American Factor:

- “President-elect Joe Biden’s team plans to bring the U.S. closer to normalized relations with Cuba, reversing many of the sanctions and regulations imposed during the Trump administration, according to people familiar with the matter. That strategy includes reducing restrictions on travel, investment and remittances.” ([Bloomberg Reporting](#) 15 December 2020)

# The Current Outlook; The (Mis) Use of Criminal Penalties to Meet COVID-19 Challenges

## Enforce Criminal Penalties

- Cuba's penal code says a citizen can be jailed for as long as a year and fined up to 300 pesos for the crime of "propagation of epidemics," although fines of up to 3,000 pesos have been reported during the coronavirus pandemic.

## Use of Criminal Law against political opponents

- "On November 26, 2020, Cuban security forces detained 14 government critics in Havana after alleging that one of them had violated Covid-19 rules by failing to re-take a test for the coronavirus. The detentions follow a series of cases in which security officers and prosecutors have targeted dissidents, arresting or charging them with "spreading an epidemic," and imposing fines for alleged violations of Covid-19-related restrictions." ([Human Rights Watch](#) 7 December 2020).

## X Factor:

- **San Isidro Movement (SIM)** artist's collective, hunger strike and protests
- Government arrests sparked larger protests; still unresolved
- Compare to George Floyd Protests in the US during pandemic

# The Current Outlook: Vaccine Politics

## Report from Brazilian sources 1 January 2021:

Cuba to get vaccines through Iran

Iran to purchase vaccines from 3<sup>rd</sup> party states (unidentified)

### Indigenous Vaccine Development

23 December 2020 [TeleSur Report](#): "Cuba's vaccine candidate Soberana 02 began Phase II of Clinical Trials this week, making it the first Latin American vaccine against Covid-19 to advance to this stage following positive preliminary results in the first phase." ( )

- The consequences of the Winter COVID-19 Surge
  - **Reported at the end of December 229 new cases;** almost 1500 active; 10 critical.
    - Mixed results of current approaches to COVID-19
      - Positive: prevention and intervention methods, close monitoring
      - Negative: lack of resources, difficulties of maintaining health protocols continues in light of food scarcity, hygiene etc.
  - **Other treatment options:**
    - “During a meeting with scientists, President Miguel Díaz-Canel learned about the positive impact of the use of Nasaferon (nasal version of Interferon alpha 2-b) in health personnel on the red line and in nursing homes, for which he indicated to extend its application to other vulnerable groups.” ([Prensa Latina](#) 23 December 2020)
  - **Joint Ventures:**
    - 14 December [Notice in Tass](#): “Russia and Cuba may carry out joint research and testing of drugs that can be used to treat COVID-19 patients, Russian First Deputy Health Minister Igor Kagramanyan said on Monday.”

# Conclusion

Cuba has been among the states better able to meet the challenges of the pandemic in terms of infection and mortality rates

But being an island has not proven to be a positive means of avoiding pandemic in an age of globalization; not clear there is planning for managing future similar crises.

Pandemic has substantially affected economic planning: internally opening the economy in ways rejected by the 7<sup>th</sup> PCC Congress in 2017; Externally mixed—bad for tourism, better for medical advances and medical internationalism

Has exposed the weaknesses of the state: sanitation, food security, and responsiveness.

# Thanks!

A close-up photograph of a hand holding a red marker. The marker has a white label with the word "Coronavirus" written in bold black letters. The background is a blurred red and white pattern.

**Coronavirus**

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