



At Sea on Foreign Policy

by John Corry

In the end, one side made as much sense as the other. Just after Secretary of State Warren Christopher told White House reporters with a straight face that “we achieved the goals of our policy,” CNN broadcast a speech by Emile Jonassaint, the president of Haiti, who was giving Haitians his own fix on what happened. “More than 61 planes were ready to bombard Haiti,” he told them, while “two carriers were ready to wipe us out.” He and General Raoul Cédras just “couldn’t let the annihilation of Haiti happen,” and so they had agreed to terms. “You may go to sleep,” Jonassaint concluded, “knowing no planes will bombard us.”

Thus the Haitian crisis was resolved, even if nothing had been quite what it seemed. All week long Bill Clinton and his people had pronounced anathema on General Cédras and his people, and talked about the “modality” of their leaving. “Your time is up,” Clinton had said to them in a White House speech. Then he accused them of “rape, torture and mutilation,” “raping women,” and “raping the wives and daughters of suspected political dissidents.” Madeleine Albright, also hyperventilating on television, said the Haitian leaders “shoot orphans for sport.” Curly-headed Joe Kennedy, Jr. contributed, too. He said in the *Boston Globe* that the Haitian leaders made up “one of the most brutal regimes in history.”

But then, of course, the Haitian leaders were granted amnesty, and merely told they should sin no more. If they wanted to, they could even remain in Haiti. The invasion was off, although the

occupation was still on, and the media seemed nonplused. No network interrupted its regular programming to do a special on the night the agreement was announced. Columnist Mark Shields mumbled something in an interview about Clinton’s determination and resolve, but by then even the *Times*’s Anna Quindlen was disenchanted. She already had written that the only place to look for reasons to invade Haiti was “inside Bill Clinton’s head.”

How should the story be covered? Actually, no one knew. Tom Brokaw would turn up in Port-au-Prince—Dan Rather was already there—although only to report on American troops leaping from helicopters and hitting the ground in defensive positions while Haitians stood around and gawked. It was a peculiar operation for



a superpower, but Washington did not want to offend anyone’s sensibilities by having the troops look threatening, and the networks all made sure to interview Jimmy Carter. When foreign policy is so ambiguous, the media are uncertain about what makes news. On the day the United States announced an agreement with Cuba on refugees, CBS, NBC, and ABC all devoted the first third of their evening news programs to the USAir jetliner that had crashed the night before. Then CBS report-

ed on Cuba, while NBC and ABC went on to cover the baseball strike. There was nothing new to say about the crash except that no one knew why it had happened, and nothing at all to say about the strike except that it was still going on. In the world of network news, though, that was more important than an accord with Fidel Castro—or what the accord meant. Not long ago, an American president asked a Communist dictator to tear a wall down and let people out. Now a president had asked another dictator to raise one and keep people in.

Before that the Cuban rafters had provoked a crisis, and reporters and correspondents had converged on Havana. We may not know much more about Cuba, however, than we did before they arrived. The Cuban economy is a disaster, and discontent is rising, but we knew that before the crisis. The principal point of which we now must be aware is that Cuba wants the United States to lift its embargo.

Ricardo Alarcon, the chief Cuban negotiator, made that clear. On the night the talks with the United States began, he told Ted Koppel on “Nightline” that the “fundamental issue” was the embargo. He said it had wrecked the Cuban economy, and that it was in the United States’ own interest to lift it. Koppel was skeptical, but Alarcon was indefatigable, and repeated himself in interviews all week. In fact, the Cuban economy collapsed when Soviet subsidies ended, and ending the embargo may not be in the interest of anyone except the Havana nomenklatura.

Conservatives may disagree here. The *Wall Street Journal* editorial page says the best way to weaken Communist regimes is to open them to the outside world, and that the United States should lift the em-

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bargo. Nonetheless, a respectable argument may also be made that as Cuban misery grows, the chance to overthrow Castro rises. *Newsweek* reported that a recent Rand Corporation study found that Havana was "drifting toward increased repression and even uncontrolled violence," and that "Washington should prepare for a major crisis and possible U.S. military action." Moreover, the Rand study said, "America can force change only by maintaining the trade ban."

More or less, the White House says it agrees. Ricardo Alarcon and Peter Tarnoff, who represented the State Department in the negotiations with the Cubans, both insisted there had been no discussion or private agreement about normalizing relations or lifting the embargo. The press took them at their word. Still, it was permissible to wonder if Cuba had been given a wink or a nod, or a suggestion that if Castro lightened up the White House would do something nice. When Tarnoff worked in the Carter administration, he had taken part in secret talks in Havana aimed at normalizing relations with Cuba. And, as it happens, eight days after the U.S. and Cuba reached the agreement on refugees, Havana moved away slightly from a centralized economy. It announced that it would allow farmers to sell part of their produce in an open market. Will we do something now for Castro?

Meanwhile, most of the television reporting out of Havana during the crisis suggested that we might just as well lift the embargo. Television—print is a different ball game—said that Cubans blamed the embargo and not Castro for their troubles. The night after Alarcon talked to Koppel, Giselle Fernandez of CBS reported that the rafters thought the embargo was the "root cause of the problems." The next night she declared that Cuba once had been "a beacon of success for much of Latin America and the Third World," and that "Cuba's health care and education systems were touted as great achievements of the revolution." In a way, she was right. Cuba was a beacon, although its beams shined mostly on terrorist camps and African battlefields, while its achievements, although never actually proven, certainly were touted. Fernandez concluded her report breathy with deep meaning: "Some say the trade embargo has never given Cuba a chance to see whether or not Castro's socialism might work."

Fernandez did not identify any of the "some" who say that, although Ed Rabel apparently found one of them that same night for NBC. She was wearing a military uniform with what appeared to be an officer's star on the collar, and when Rabel interviewed her she was driving a car. The people, she said, all blame the embargo. On television, at least, no one wants to flee Cuba to get away from Fidel Castro.

Television has reported this way before, although probably it wants to forget it. When Nicaraguans declined to tell pollsters and correspondents how much they disliked their Marxist-Leninist government, Rabel and his colleagues on the Central American beat reported that the Sandinistas were sure to win Nicaragua's first free elections.

News stories from El Salvador, not to mention PBS documentaries, once suggested that leftist rebels there enjoyed considerable popular support. When the rebels laid down their arms and took part in elections, however, they won only a quarter of the seats in the legislature. Halfway around the world a few years before that, Russians registered their discontent with Mikhail Gorbachev in unmistakable ways, but *Time* magazine in its wisdom chose him "Man of the Decade."

The whimsy is always with us. The night before the recent Mexican elections, "60 Minutes" re-ran "Subcomandante Marcos," an interview with the leader of the Chiapas rebellion that Ed Bradley had conducted earlier this year. It was not very good the first time around, and it got no better with age. Bradley was still the bemused sophisticate, and not a reporter. Marcos, who wore a ski mask and smoked a pipe, beguiled him. He denied he had guns, ammunition, or communications equipment except for inexpensive CBs, while speaking in terse sound bites. Sometimes Bradley helped him.

"What you're asking for," Bradley said, "are basic individual rights."

"Yes," Marcos replied.

"What we call in the United States life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness," Bradley continued.

"Yes," Marcos said again, presumably realizing he had no need to amplify his case if "60 Minutes" would do it for him.

The encounter upheld a theatrical tradition, this time staged for television. When

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Herbert Matthews, the *New York Times* reporter, went searching for Castro in the Sierra Maestra in 1957, Castro turned up at night, a picturesque figure with his campesinos. Matthews was smitten, and wrote that Castro was "the rebel leader of Cuba's youth" and "a flaming symbol." Castro supporters mailed thousands of reprints of Matthews's articles all over Cuba. When Bradley searched for Marcos, his men also turned up unexpectedly at night, waving their AKs for the "60 Minutes" cameras. Bradley, like Matthews, was swept away. "Impoverished Mexicans are turning to a new hero: Subcomandante Marcos," he reported, and confused his own feelings with those of the Mexicans. Tape cassettes presumably were mailed all over Mexico.

Marcos's next move is unknown, although recently he issued a statement: "If the war"—meaning the rebellion—"is started again, this time it won't stop. Days, months, years, entire decades will pass and the dying will continue." Bradley's portrait of a romantic, impoverished revolutionary was defaced. Marcos has been unhappy over the results of the recent election. Outside observers insisted it was the fairest ever held in Mexico, but it still left a member of the entrenched party as governor of Chiapas. Marcos, who apparently is an old Sandinista, is threatening to do more killing.

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Shafts of light do come through, although you must pay close attention to spot them. In August, or about the time the Cuban rafters were beginning to arrive, the columnist Georgie Anne Geyer wrote in the *Washington Times* that George Bush's people once told her that "early on they had informed Mr. Castro that another Mariel exodus, orchestrated by Cuba, would be considered an act of war." Consequently, Geyer wrote, "Castro made no threats the whole four years."

On CNN's "Crossfire" a few weeks later, Lawrence Eagleburger, deputy secretary of state, and then secretary of state in the Bush administration, had a testy exchange with Michael Kinsley. Eagleburger said that if we wanted to we could "slap Castro around." He used the word "bombing." Kinsley had a nit then, and said Eagleburger wanted to mount an "invasion." Eagleburger had not said that, of course, but he had made an interesting point.



The Jimmy Lai Story

by William McGurn

Aboard his spacious junk—the *Free China*—Jimmy Lai might be mistaken for any other taipan out on a Saturday morning cruise. Up on the rooftop deck, with the sea wind in their hair, Jimmy and his guests exchange Hong Kong talk over cups of coffee: Chris Patten, 1997, China, democracy, MFN, etc. In the main cabin just below, wife Teresa, seven months pregnant but lithe and graceful, oversees a breakfast spread that ranges from smoked salmon and sweet buns to caviar and Dom Perignon. I half expect Robin Leach and his camera crew to haul alongside any moment.

But this is no leisured mandarin. Only a few weeks earlier, in retaliation for an exposé about Chinese organized crime that appeared in *Next*, the magazine he founded, triad goons smashed windows, jammed locks, and threw red paint at more than two dozen of Jimmy's Giordano clothing outlets; this on top of the Molotov cocktail hurled over the front gate of his house and smashing up of *Next* magazine offices last year. Local mobsters aren't the only ones with a beef. As we sailed out of Victoria Harbour, a Jimmy Lai column calling premier Li Peng a "turtle egg" (a grievous insult in Chinese, having to do with a turtle's apparently uncertain parentage) that had just hit the streets was about to explode into the headlines. Within days China's Foreign Trade Ministry informed Jimmy that his

brand-new Giordano shop in Peking would be closed until it straightened out "licensing difficulties."

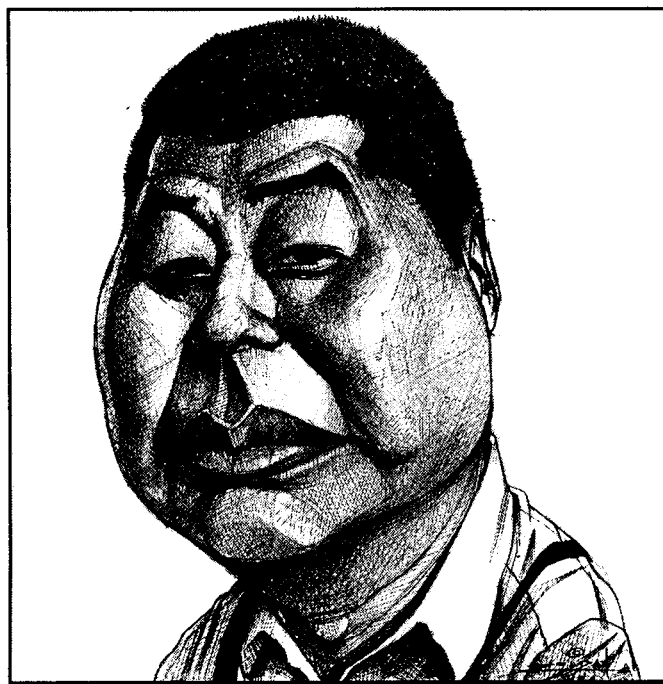
Almost overnight Jimmy found himself a media sensation, especially in the Western press. Not all, however, admired his pluck—he has not retracted a word of his column—and in business circles (including his own Giordano's board) many could not understand why a man whose company was aiming to sell in China could not keep his big mouth shut. What admirers and detractors alike have missed is that in Jimmy's mind there is no contradiction between the two operations. Both are cut from the same cloth: the rise of an Asian middle class.

"It used to be that there were only two kinds of people in Asia," says Jimmy, "the very rich and the very poor. But information and global trade have brought about a middle class, which is a

revolutionary thing in this part of the world."

"These are people who want things now, are impatient for information." Sometimes they are too much even for him. "My God," he adds, shaking his head, "some of these guys are the type who will ask the girl to go to bed with them even before they have bought her dinner!"

In a place where rags-to-riches stories are common coin, Jimmy Chee-Ying Lai's rise from a penniless, grade-school dropout who started out sleeping on the cutting tables of a local glove factory to become a retail and publishing magnate worth an estimated \$250 million wouldn't merit a second glance. But even by the individualistic standards of entrepreneurs, Jimmy is different. Many are the self-made men who have cornered markets but few claim to have read all of Hayek, introduced to him by a Jewish lawyer during a stint in New York's garment district. Nor does he fit into any neat political category: while he supported Gov. Chris Patten's controversial push for more democracy ("the *only* area where I agreed with him"), Jimmy's espousal of truly free markets puts him at odds with both Big Government democrats and an old-boy network of fat cats who together control the Hong Kong political landscape. At 6 foot-plus and a burly 200 pounds or so, Jimmy even *looks* different, usually found, as I find him today, in Giordano jeans, a casual white shirt, navy suspenders, and cotton shoes. →



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