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Author(s): John L. Offner

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McKinley and the Spanish-American War

JOHN L. OFFNER
Shippensburg University

This article describes and analyzes President William McKinley's foreign and domestic policies that led to the Spanish-American War of 1898. On the domestic side it includes congressional partisan politics, economic and business concerns, religious and moral views, cultural biases, and unexpected events that inflamed American patriotism. In foreign affairs it covers U.S. interests in Cuba, McKinley's diplomatic efforts to get Spain to withdraw peacefully from Cuba, and the president's relations with Europe's Great Powers and the pope. The article concludes with an analysis of McKinley's successes and failures.

In April 1898 the United States went to war with Spain. President William McKinley asked Congress for authority to use force against both the Spanish and Cubans in order to end the strife on the island and to establish a stable Cuban government that would maintain order and observe international obligations. The president's determination to intervene in the Spanish-Cuban war came after three years of fighting on the island and a sporadic domestic debate as to what the United States should do. In making that decision McKinley considered many variables: at home it was congressional partisan politics, economic and business concerns, religious and moral views, deeply rooted cultural biases, and unexpected events that inflamed American patriotism; abroad it was U.S. interests in Cuba, failed diplomatic efforts to get Spain to withdraw from Cuba, and relations with Europe's Great Powers. This article will examine the major issues that McKinley considered as he led the nation into war.¹

The essential ingredient was the deplorable condition of Cuba. Cuban nationalists began a war for independence in 1868 that lasted for ten years. In 1878 Cuban nationalist insurgents were exhausted and Spain promised colonial reforms, most of which were never realized. Early in 1895 a larger and better-led rebellion began. The 1895-1898

1. For additional reading on the McKinley administration and the Spanish-American war, see Lewis L. Gould, *The Presidency of William McKinley* (Lawrence: Regents Press of Kansas, 1980); and David F. Trask, *The War with Spain in 1898* (New York: Macmillan, 1981).

John L. Offner is professor emeritus of Shippensburg University. He is the author of An Unwanted War: The Diplomacy of the United States and Spain over Cuba, 1895-1898, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992. He has published many other articles on the Spanish-American war and the U.S. acquisition of the Philippines.

war for Cuban independence devastated the island. Cuban rebels broke out of the mountainous eastern part of the island and carried the war to the rich agricultural central and western provinces. Poorly armed Cuban insurgents, rarely more than 25,000 and operating in small groups, attacked the island's economy rather than attempting pitched battles against larger formations of better-equipped Spanish soldiers. Insurgents burned sugar cane fields and mills and destroyed railroads, telegraph lines, and other property. They sought to turn Cuba into an economic desert, thereby making the island unprofitable and convincing Spain to leave.²

Spain fought back by sending over 200,000 troops to Cuba and enlisting and arming thousands of local volunteers. The Spanish initially attempted to hunt down the scattered bands of rebels and to destroy them in battle. Unable to win a quick victory, the Spanish adopted a long-term concentration strategy of separating the rebels from the general peasant population that was providing food, information, and new recruits. Spain forced hundreds of thousands of Cuban peasants (*reconcentrados*) to leave their village homes and go to cities and towns controlled by Spanish military garrisons. As the villagers abandoned their homes, Spanish forces burned the villages, razed the crops, and killed the cattle in an effort to cut off the rebel food supply. In effect, both the Cubans and Spanish engaged in economic warfare that devastated the island. Agricultural production and foreign trade plummeted.³

When the rural *reconcentrados* arrived in garrison towns, the Spanish had made few provisions for them. There was little housing, work, food, and medicine. Soon, many malnourished Cuban refugees began to sicken and die, and their plight increased with each passing month. After a year the results were horrific. In early 1895 Cuba had a population of about 1,600,000. During the war approximately 240,000 Cubans died from disease and starvation. By early 1897, the United States was becoming increasingly aware of the human disaster unfolding in Cuba. The exact condition of the Cuban civilian population throughout the island was never known, but many credible observers reported seeing terrible suffering. Firsthand reports tended to exaggerate the situation, and by April 1898 both Washington and Madrid believed that about 400,000 Cubans had already perished and many more were at risk. The growing misery and death toll in Cuba led the McKinley administration to employ tough diplomacy toward Spain and eventually to justify U.S. military intervention in the Spanish-Cuban war.

The destructive Spanish-Cuban war adversely affected the U.S. economy. In 1895, the United States was suffering a severe depression that cut industrial production and employment and depressed agricultural prices, resulting in domestic unrest seen in strikes, riots, and protest marches. The Cuban wartime economic devastation added to the slump in some important U.S. businesses. Prior to the Cuban revolution, trade between the United States and Cuba had reached an annual total of just over 100 million dollars. When this trade dropped by more than two thirds, import-export houses and shipping firms petitioned Washington to pressure Spain to restore peace and Cuban-

2. For a Cuban perspective on the war for independence, see Louis A. Pérez, Jr., *Cuba between Empires, 1878-1902* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1983).

3. For a Spanish perspective on the war, see Carlos Serrano, *Final del imperio: España, 1895-1898* (Madrid: Siglo Veintiuno de España Ediciones, 1984).

American trade. Countering this, however, were some U.S. investors in Cuban sugar cane plantations, mills, and other industries. Americans had invested between 30 and 50 million dollars in Cuba, and many investors feared and condemned the Cuban arsonists and looked to the Spanish army for protection. Thus, U.S. businessmen with direct interests in Cuba were divided: some wanted the United States to take a stronger hand against Spain to bring peace to the island, while others favored cooperation with Spain to end the rebellion.⁴

Beyond the economic interests directly affected by the Spanish-Cuban war, there was a general business interest in U.S.-Spanish relations. By March 1897, when McKinley became president, the U.S. economy was starting to come out of a prolonged depression, and many businessmen believed that domestic and foreign stability would encourage business recovery. These businessmen deplored the unsettling talk of war; they also feared that war would bring higher taxes and inflationary monetary expansion, particularly demands for silver coinage. Up to the last weeks before the United States declared war, many important businessmen and commercial journals cautioned against allowing the Cuban tragedy to lead the United States into an unsettling and costly war.

Besides the business community, the calamitous Cuban events affected the broader American public. Americans had long disparaged Spain. A common view in the United States was that a cruel, backward, and decadent monarchy ruled Spain, one that repressed its people and was identified with the inquisition. U.S. school textbooks depicted Spanish history in terms of religious bigotry and political intolerance. Protestant religious denominations were largely anti-Catholic. Thus, many Americans were quick to favor a Cuban rebellion against Spain and to relate the Cuban war to the earlier North American revolution against British tyranny. Many saw the Cuban revolt as part of a historical trend of the New World throwing off the tyrannical restraints of Old World political, economic, and religious domination. Many newspapers reflected these themes and reinforced a rapidly growing American perception that Spain should end its unjust and inhumane war and leave the New World.⁵

Although Cuban independence was popular in the United States, at the same time there were many Americans who opposed direct U.S. intervention in the Spanish-Cuban war. They believed that newspapers exaggerated the extent of Spanish atrocities and Cuban suffering. They thought that the United States had no international legal right to interfere in Spain's sovereign affairs and urged the McKinley administration to avoid a long and expensive war. Moreover, if the United States forced Spain off the island, many people believed that the Cuban insurgents were incapable of governing the island. Some anti-interventionists warned that four centuries of Spanish misrule had not prepared the Cuban people for self-government. The result could be an extended U.S. imperial control of Cuba or even annexation of an island where one third of the people were of African descent and nearly all were Catholic.

4. For a business view of the war, see David M. Pletcher, *The Diplomacy of Trade and Investment: American Economic Expansion in the Hemisphere, 1865-1900* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1998).

5. For American prejudice against Spain, see Richard L. Kagan, "Prescott's Paradigm: American Historical Scholarship and the Decline of Spain," *The American Historical Review* 101, no. 2 (April 1996): 423-46.

Politicians in both political parties were quick and eager to exploit the Cuban cause. Grover Cleveland's administration was the first to respond to the Spanish-Cuban war. Cleveland examined the possibility of providing diplomatic support for the Cubans, but then quickly turned against the Cuban insurgents who were burning and destroying American property and who refused to stop doing so. Moreover, Cleveland and Secretary of State Richard Olney did not believe the Cubans could bring peace to the island. They worried that if the Cuban insurgents, many of whom were impoverished black rural laborers, were militarily successful, they might initiate class and racial warfare when they entered the island's wealthy towns and cities, which were primarily white. Prolonged and calamitous civil war, as seen in an earlier Haitian revolution, might result. Therefore, the Cleveland administration supported an end to the war that would leave Spain in control of the island.⁶

The Cleveland administration's policies tended to favor Spain and that gave congressional Republicans a political opening that they exploited. Republican legislators became the champions of Cuban independence. Early in 1896, the Senate and House passed nonbinding resolutions that favored diplomatic recognition of the Cuban insurgent government. Although these resolutions had substantial Democratic support, the Republicans had led the Congress in introducing and shepherding the resolutions to a successful vote that was more heavily Republican than Democratic. When Cleveland ignored the congressional resolutions, Republicans became more identified than Democrats with Cuban independence. In the summer of 1896, both the Republican and Democratic presidential nomination conventions adopted platform planks favoring the Cuban cause, but the Republicans went further than the Democrats by calling for the United States to use its influence to bring about the independence of Cuba. During the fall political campaign, the issues separating McKinley and William Jennings Bryan were the coinage of silver and the high protective tariff, and these temporarily silenced the Cuban issue. The November election was a Republican Party victory that gave Republicans control of the executive and legislative branches of government. When Congress organized in 1897, the Republicans narrowly controlled the Senate, and all but one of the Foreign Relations Committee members favored Cuban independence. Republican House members also strongly supported the Cuban cause, but the Speaker of the House, Thomas B. Reed, opposed Cuban independence, and he used his influence repeatedly to squelch efforts to bring the Cuban issue to a floor vote. As the McKinley administration began in March 1897, Republican congressional leaders in both the Senate and House believed that the new president should have time to organize his administration and to attempt a diplomatic solution for Cuba, but they also expected McKinley to work to free Cuba from Spanish rule. Thus, McKinley had nearly a year for diplomacy before the popular Cuban independence war became the dominant political issue in Congress and the country.

Prior to assuming the presidency, McKinley had said little in public about Cuba. He never mentioned the island in his presidential campaign speeches. Close friends,

6. For the Cleveland administration and the Spanish-Cuban war, see Gerald F. Eggert, *Richard Olney: Evolution of a Statesman* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1974).

however, understood that McKinley was sympathetic to Cuban independence and inclined to side with the Cubans against Spain. The new president, responsive to business interests, did not want to do anything that might adversely affect the economic recovery, and he opposed war. In taking up the Cuban issue, McKinley first sought reliable facts about the Spanish-Cuban war. The “yellow” press carried many stories that exaggerated Spanish atrocities and Cuban suffering, and conservative politicians and newspapers often ridiculed such accounts. Consular reports from Cuba were also suspect. So McKinley sent a political friend, William J. Calhoun, to Cuba to ascertain the actual situation. In June 1897, Calhoun presented McKinley with a shocking and depressing report. The Cuban agricultural economy was devastated and large numbers of civilian Cubans, including women and children, were in misery and many near death. An end to Spanish-Cuban fighting was not in sight. Calhoun saw no political solution to the Spanish-Cuban war. A large majority of the Cubans opposed the continuation of Spanish rule, yet Calhoun did not believe the Cubans were capable of self-government. If Spain offered some form of autonomous self-government, the Cuban nationalists would not accept it. The United States might stand aside and let the Cubans and Spanish battle it out until one side or the other became exhausted, but Calhoun concluded that inaction would do nothing for the suffering reconcentrados.⁷

With Calhoun’s report in hand, McKinley prepared a Cuban policy. The president decided to confront Spain rather than allow the devastating war to continue. Nevertheless, he had no specific plan for ending the Spanish-Cuban war or for the future of Cuba. Diplomacy began with a stiff note from Washington to Madrid condemning the destructive war in Cuba and the terrible condition of the reconcentrados and demanding that Spain end its uncivilized warfare against the Cuban people and the island’s economy. McKinley appointed a new minister to Spain, Stewart L. Woodford, and the president instructed Woodford to give Spain three months to end the uncivilized warfare in Cuba and to reach a settlement satisfactory to the Cubans. If Spain failed to act, the United States would start to intervene. McKinley was considering recognizing Cuba’s belligerent status. Recognition would legalize the shipment of arms from the United States to the insurgent Cubans. If shipments of U.S. arms to the Cubans began, the McKinley administration anticipated that Spain would break diplomatic relations with the United States. Moreover, Spanish attempts to interrupt arms shipments on board American ships would probably lead to war. Thus, McKinley’s initial diplomatic effort sought to end Spain’s military campaign, a prelude to abandoning Cuba. McKinley did not expect Spain to comply, and therefore he anticipated deteriorating Spanish-American relations that likely would end in war.

At the same time that McKinley sent Woodford to Madrid, the State Department sounded out the major European powers, Great Britain, France, Germany, and Russia. None of these nations objected to the prospect of U.S. recognition of Cuban belligerency; Britain and Russia were particularly supportive, suggesting that they would not object to other U.S. steps favorable to the Cubans that might lead to Spain’s loss of the island.

7. For the remainder of this essay on McKinley’s diplomacy, see John L. Offner, *An Unwanted War: The Diplomacy of the United States and Spain over Cuba, 1895-1898* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992).

While Woodford was traveling to Spain, that nation underwent a profound political change. An anarchist assassinated the Spanish prime minister, the head of the Conservative Party and the most influential politician in Spain. Within a few weeks the Liberal Party, led by Práxedes Sagasta, assumed control of the government. For many months, Sagasta had been criticizing Spain's war in Cuba and proposing instead political and economic autonomy for Cuba. Committed to a reform program well before Woodford arrived in Madrid, Sagasta's new government was prepared to modify Spain's Cuban policies but needed time to implement its reforms. Sagasta quickly changed the military leadership and policies in Cuba, cut back sharply the additional soldiers being sent to Cuba, and promised to end reconcentration and to increase food and public works for those in need. Sagasta then promulgated Cuban autonomy that was to begin January 1, 1898. Welcoming all of Spain's reforms and promises, McKinley altered his diplomatic stance by stepping back from recognition of Cuban belligerency. He believed Sagasta's reforms were first steps that would eventually lead to complete Cuban independence. At the same time, the president pressured Spain to accept the involvement of the American Red Cross in distributing U.S. food and clothing to destitute Cubans. The two governments agreed to allow the Catholic Church to play a major role in distributing American relief supplies. McKinley initiated the American drive for Cuban relief by anonymously contributing 5,000 dollars. This was a large sum for him, as he was not a wealthy man.

The McKinley administration, however, remained wary of Spanish reforms and promises. It was unwilling to grant Spain much time to restore peace in Cuba, suspecting that Spanish autonomy would lack substance and that reforms were a means of gaining time for the Spanish army to regroup and to continue to seek to defeat the Cuban insurgents. Although the Spanish-Cuban war might decrease in destructiveness, no one could say when the war might finally end. Cuban nationalists, for their part, immediately rejected autonomy and continued to demand complete independence. McKinley also worried that food relief through Spanish and American agencies would be inadequate to end Cuban suffering. In addition, 1898 was an election year, and congressional Republicans feared that Democrats would use continuation of the Spanish-Cuban war and reconcentrado suffering to win votes in November. Many Republican legislators, particularly House members, urged McKinley to end the Cuban war quickly and to obtain Cuban independence.

McKinley's State of the Union address in December 1897 reflected the political situation. Americans strongly favored an end to reconcentration and Cuban independence, but the business community continued to oppose U.S. intervention in Cuba. Republican legislators were willing to follow the president's lead for a time, but they thought that prolonged inaction would benefit Democrats at the polls. Addressing the nation, McKinley sought to balance these conflicting views. He praised Spanish reforms and rejected recognition of Cuban belligerency, arguing that Spain should have a reasonable amount of time to make its reforms work. That set back Cuban hopes for early U.S. intervention. At the same time, he warned Spain that if it did not end reconcentration and inhumane warfare, the United States would intervene on humanitarian grounds. Democratic congressmen saw the message as leaning toward Spain, and they replied with a strong public pro-Cuban declaration.

The new year brought a series of unexpected events that heightened the unresolved issues and pushed both nations toward war. A Cuban autonomous government began functioning on January 1, 1898. Twelve days later, some Spanish military officers led riots in Havana directed against autonomy. The rioters were not overtly hostile to the United States. Loyal Spanish troops quickly put down the riots, but it was evident that Sagasta's reforms faced serious military opposition and that Madrid could not go too far too fast. The McKinley administration concluded from the riots that autonomy, already rejected by the Cuban insurgents, was not viable and unlikely to develop into Cuban independence. Moreover, there was fear that Spain was losing its grip on the island and that future riots might harm U.S. citizens. As a precaution, McKinley sent the *USS Maine* to Havana harbor, and the Navy Department repositioned a portion of the North Atlantic fleet from Hampton Roads to Key West and the Gulf of Mexico. Some U.S. naval ships also dropped anchor in Lisbon and others gathered in Hong Kong near the Philippines.

On February 9, the *New York Journal* published a private letter of the Spanish minister, Enrique Dupuy de Lôme, which disparaged McKinley and ridiculed Cuban autonomy and a proposal for Spanish-American trade talks. The letter convinced many Americans that Sagasta's Cuban reforms were insincere and were only a cover to provide Spain with additional time to achieve a military victory in Cuba. The Spanish minister quickly resigned his post, but distrust of Spain grew in the McKinley administration. As a result of the letter, McKinley took an important step toward war; he encouraged Republicans in Congress to prepare to take up the Cuban question by asking the State Department to release the consular reports on Cuba. These reports contained vivid descriptions of Cuban privation and suffering. Once made public, they could be expected to justify U.S. military intervention to end Spanish rule.

Before Congress acted, the *Maine* exploded on February 15 in Havana harbor, killing 266 sailors. Suddenly, the Spanish-Cuban war directly involved the American people. The McKinley administration asked the public to withhold judgment until the facts were established, and it sent a naval court of inquiry to Havana to investigate. Nevertheless, the public was inflamed; there were many nationalistic calls for retribution and justice, and most congressional legislators supported this view. McKinley opposed rushing into war while the naval investigation was underway, one that might reveal that the explosion was accidental. At the same time, the president readied the consular reports on Cuba and asked Congress to appropriate 50 million dollars for defense, which it did unanimously in one day. The congressional action was a stunning display of national unity and confidence in the president. Although the appropriation was supposedly for defense, it largely went to prepare the United States for an offensive war. The U.S. Navy purchased two new cruisers, ammunition, and coal, and it leased merchant ships to carry coal and other military supplies. Proponents of the 50 million dollar bill argued that strengthening the U.S. Navy would deter Spain and lead to a peaceful Cuban settlement.

Before the naval court completed its inquiry into the *Maine* explosion, Senator Redfield Proctor, Republican of Vermont, reported to the Senate on what he had seen in a recent trip to Cuba. Proctor, a former secretary of war and a wealthy businessman, had

decided to go to Cuba to ascertain for himself the facts and to look for potential business opportunities. There is no indication that Proctor undertook his trip at the urging of McKinley, but the president was aware of his journey and the administration provided military and diplomatic escorts. Cuba's horrendous condition shocked Proctor. After a two-week trip, he returned to Washington and told Senate colleagues privately of his appalling findings, and they urged him to report to the full Senate and the American people. Before making a Senate speech, Proctor met with McKinley who therefore knew in advance what Proctor would say, and the president made no effort to dissuade him from speaking. Proctor's dramatic speech was credible, authoritative, and convincing. He described in grim detail the horrible conditions of the reconcentrados, the devastated economy, and the stalemated war. He condemned Spanish misrule, declaring that it must end before there could be peace on the island. If Spain left, Proctor believed that the Cubans were capable of self-government. He offered no particular policy for the McKinley administration to follow. Proctor's electrifying speech generated a strong public reaction, especially in business and religious circles. For the first time, prominent conservative business voices favored U.S. military intervention in Cuba, and the religious press now overwhelmingly supported the use of force to achieve humanitarian ends. Proctor's speech also supported McKinley's view on military intervention. If war came, the president wanted to justify it in the cause of humanity, a theme much broader than revenge for the destruction of the *Maine*.

Two days after Proctor's Senate speech, a draft naval court report on the *Maine* reached McKinley. The naval investigation concluded that the ship sank because an external explosion beneath the ship set off the magazines within the ship. The investigating officers did not know who was responsible for the external explosion. With the final report due to reach Washington in a week, McKinley began extensive consultations with cabinet officers and legislators of both political parties. Legislators, already inflamed by Proctor's speech and now apprised of the naval findings, strongly urged McKinley to use military force to end Spanish rule. McKinley attempted to dampen congressional outrage over the *Maine* and to channel their anger into a policy of intervention in Cuba for humanitarian reasons, but public release of the *Maine* report on March 28 fired national indignation that supported congressional demands for immediate military intervention in Cuba.

With many in Congress and the nation demanding immediate action and willing to accept war, McKinley attempted to hold back the political storm long enough to find a peaceful diplomatic solution. McKinley mistakenly believed that Spain would give up Cuba rather than fight a disastrous war against the United States. He hoped that the prospect of an early Spanish withdrawal from Cuba would convince the Cuban insurgents to end their fighting, which would restore peace to the island. Prominent Republican legislators reluctantly agreed to allow the president a few days to try diplomacy, but many had little hope for a successful resolution. Angry and worried by McKinley's request for a delay, over 100 backbench House Republicans caucused to discuss joining with Democrats to declare war immediately whether the president wanted it or not. Many Republicans feared that McKinley's delay would allow the Democrats to seize the mantle of Cuban independence and use it to advance their prospects in the November

congressional elections. House Republican unrest pressured McKinley to act quickly to find a peaceful solution.

For over a month, McKinley had been searching for a means of settling the Cuban crisis. In private, he had spoken several times about the possibility of purchasing the island, but his tentative steps in Congress and Spain had been barren. Now McKinley asked Spain to end reconcentration immediately and to allow the United States to greatly expand its relief program on the island. At the same time, McKinley wanted Spain to end the fighting through an armistice, to negotiate with the Cuban insurgents, and to accept presidential mediation. If at the end of three months of an armistice and negotiations the Spanish and Cubans were unable to find a peaceful solution, the president would arbitrate a settlement. McKinley believed that if the fighting stopped on the island, it would never resume, and that presidential mediation and arbitration would result in Spain's relinquishing the island. McKinley gave Spain an ultimatum of 48 hours to respond positively to his proposals. If Spain rejected his offer, he would turn over the Cuban issue to Congress.

On March 31, Sagasta replied. He agreed to end reconcentration and to accept expanded U.S. aid for the sick and starving Cubans, but Spain would not authorize an armistice unless the Cubans first asked for it. The Cubans, in turn, told McKinley that they would not stop fighting because their army of volunteers would quickly melt away while Spain would use a ceasefire to strengthen its military position. By April 1, McKinley's attempt to achieve a diplomatic solution appeared to be at an end, and the president prepared to turn the Cuban problem over to Congress on April 6. Everyone understood that Congress would declare war.

With war between the United States and Spain imminent, the pope and Europe's Great Powers became involved at the last minute in attempting to maintain the peace. McKinley's policy toward the European powers was to keep them out of Cuban affairs while seeking to get them to influence Spain to end the fighting in Cuba. Spain, on the other hand, sought to get the Great Powers to restrain the United States. The pope acted first. He was committed to supporting the Catholic monarchy in Spain and did not want to see Spain enter a disastrous war that might end in a Spanish civil war directed against the monarchy. Therefore, the pope sent a special envoy to Washington to assess the situation. McKinley met the pope's representative, and as a result of mixed messages from Washington and Madrid, the pope misunderstood that McKinley would accept papal mediation. The Vatican announced that Washington and Madrid had accepted papal mediation, and McKinley immediately denied it.

After the pope's diplomatic rebuff, the Great Powers became more active. In general the European nations supported Spain, but they were wary of alienating the United States over Cuba. Austria-Hungary strongly supported Spain because the Queen Regent of Spain was a member of the Austrian royal family. Lacking naval power and having minimal trade with the United States, however, Vienna had little influence on U.S. foreign policy. The German Kaiser strongly sympathized with the plight of the Spanish Queen Regent, but his chancellor did not want to interfere in Spanish-American affairs over Cuba that might alienate the United States and perhaps result in Washington and London forming an Anglo-Saxon alliance that could alter the world balance of power

against German interests. France also favored Spain, but because many French banks and citizens had purchased Spanish government bonds, the French government wanted a quick end to the expensive Cuban war that was moving Spain to the brink of bankruptcy. Like Germany, France also worried that European intervention on the side of Spain might result in an Anglo-American alliance that would adversely affect its global imperial interests. Because Russia had no important ties to Spain or the Caribbean, it considered Cuba to be none of its business. Nevertheless, it did not want a Spanish-American war to result in Great Britain increasing its power in the Far East. The only major European nation openly supporting the United States was Great Britain. The British government had an important stake in the Caribbean and Central America, but after the 1895 Venezuela crisis, it did not want to challenge the United States in that geographic region. Moreover, Britain viewed Spain as a declining power, and it wanted good relations with the rising United States, particularly in the Far East. Of all the European nations, Britain thought that the United States should acquire Cuba with the understanding that any change of government not adversely affect British trade with the island. In sum, Spain had considerable sympathy in Europe, but none of the European nations was willing to challenge the United States in the Caribbean or to take any diplomatic step that might bring a closer relationship between Washington and London. These diverse views supported the U.S. government's position during the Cuban crisis.

After the pope's failed initiative, McKinley decided to attempt to use the broad European desire for peace to gain some additional time for a peaceful settlement. He believed erroneously that Sagasta's government was moving toward ordering an armistice in Cuba that would lead to Spanish withdrawal from the island. Therefore, on April 6, the president delayed sending his Cuban message to Congress because he held that American citizens in Cuba needed five additional days to leave the island before the war began. McKinley's secretary of state then edited a European draft appeal for peace and a continuation of Spanish-American negotiations. The European ambassadors jointly presented this U.S.-edited appeal to McKinley and were surprised and offended when the president, in accepting it, replied that Washington had done all that it could to keep the peace and that conditions in Cuba merited early U.S. intervention. Nevertheless, the European disappointment in McKinley's response to their collective action set in motion an attempt by the powers to convince Spain that it should promulgate an immediate armistice. The Great Power ambassadors met in Madrid with the Spanish foreign minister and urged the Spanish government to end the Cuban war. Sagasta did not believe an armistice would end the fighting because he did not believe that the Cubans would lay down their arms. Nevertheless, he decided to cooperate with the European initiative by announcing an immediate suspension of hostilities. He hoped that when the United States began a war against Spain, his effort to satisfy the European nations would lead them to side with Spain. Thus, on April 10, one day prior to McKinley turning the Cuban issue over to Congress, Spain promulgated a suspension of hostilities. As expected, despite U.S. pressure on the Cuban revolutionary government, its military commanders immediately rejected it.

McKinley believed that Madrid's April 10 proclamation was a significant step toward Spain eventually leaving the island and that the United States should allow more

time for diplomacy. But congressional legislators were unwilling to delay any longer. They did not trust Spain, and they wanted to vote in favor of ending Spanish rule on the island and making Cuba independent. Unable to delay congressional action any longer, on April 11 McKinley delivered his Cuban message to Congress.

McKinley's message was controversial, primarily because he opposed recognizing the Cuban republic. Some also saw it as illogical. The president described the human horrors and economic costs of the Spanish-Cuban war that justified military intervention. McKinley's depiction of Cuba was reinforced by the State Department releasing the consular reports on Cuba. On the other hand, in the presidential message, McKinley described Spain's increasing efforts to satisfy U.S. demands for humanitarian relief and its recent decree suspending hostilities. McKinley referred to the *Maine* explosion and noted that Spain had offered arbitration to which the United States had given no reply. Many were surprised to learn that the president had never directly asked Spain to give Cuba its independence. As for the insurgent Cuban republic, congressional resistance developed immediately over McKinley's opposition to recognizing it. In essence, the issue was not Spanish-American relations but the future relationship of the United States to Cuba. The McKinley administration did not believe that the Cubans were capable of self-government, and it wanted a free hand in Cuba. It worried that recognition of a Cuban government would place an invading U.S. army under Cuban sovereignty and law. The United States might have to become an ally of Cuba, and on Cuban soil Cuban generals might claim the right to command joint military affairs. In addition, the Cuban insurgents had destroyed considerable American property, and if Cuba were sovereign, it would be more difficult to obtain compensation for property losses. In effect, McKinley believed that after expelling Spain from the island, the U.S. Army would have to secure peace throughout the island by disarming the Cuban insurgents. As McKinley visualized Cuba's future, the United States would have to hold the island in trust until it could establish a responsible government with which Washington could enter into a permanent treaty relationship.

Congressional legislators, including many prominent Republicans, were surprised and many were angered by McKinley's stand against the Cuban republic. Since 1895, many had urged the United States to recognize the Cuban republic, and in election campaigns they had taken strong public stands in favor of recognition. The result was a split in Republican ranks that produced a majority in the Senate for immediate recognition of the Cuban republic and a small majority in the House loyal to the president that favored authorizing war on Spain without any decision about the future of liberated Cuba. The debate lasted more than a week. The stalemate was broken in part by Senator Henry M. Teller offering an amendment to the military intervention resolution that asserted that the U.S. government had no intention of exercising sovereignty over Cuba, and that after peace was restored, the Cuban people could govern the island as they wished. Teller's amendment fell short of recognizing the existing Cuban republic, but it satisfied the widespread perception that the United States was intervening in Cuba to help the Cuban people and not to annex the island, and that removing Spain from the island would ultimately lead to full Cuban sovereignty. A precise relationship between the invading U.S. Army and the Cuban republic and its army was set aside. This com-

promise between McKinley and Republican legislators gave the president a free hand in Cuba during and after the Spanish-American war. When Congress passed this amended military intervention resolution, a U.S. naval blockade of the island started the war with Spain.

By April 1898, President McKinley's policies on war with Spain were evident. From the start of his administration, McKinley wanted to see Cuba free from Spanish rule. When he assumed office, he had to consider Republican Party pledges favoring Cuban independence as well as the views of those who opposed military intervention, such as conservative businessmen. McKinley personally did not want war, but he was willing to accept one if necessary. In public addresses, the president frequently referred to U.S. economic interests adversely affected by the Spanish-Cuban war, but he never saw them as justification for military intervention. The terrible human suffering in Cuba, however, convinced McKinley that war was justified, and he consistently attempted to place this issue at the forefront of his policy. To restore stability to Cuba, McKinley believed that Spain must leave the island. The president benefited from Proctor's speech and the naval report on the *Maine* that united the American public in a crusade to free Cuba from Spanish misrule. McKinley tried to minimize the *Maine* disaster as a cause for war and briefly delayed going along with Republican legislators and the public that wanted to avenge the loss of American lives. McKinley erroneously believed that Sagasta was moving Spain toward abandoning the island and that the threat of America's economic and military power would convince the Spanish government to leave Cuba. McKinley failed to understand that the Spanish government would rather fight a disastrous war with the United States than give up the island peacefully. McKinley's mistaken evaluation of Spain and his attempts to enlist the help of the pope and Europe's Great Powers resulted in several failed U.S. diplomatic initiatives. Throughout these negotiations, McKinley was careful to prevent the European powers from having any influence in Cuban affairs and to assure that the United States would have a free hand in Cuba where his goal was political stability and protection of economic interests. Not trusting the Cuban insurgents, the president opted on the eve of war for U.S. Army control of the island until Washington would be satisfied with the political and economic situation there. Thus, McKinley entered a popular war against Spain that he did not want and believed was avoidable, but at the same time he secured his objectives of a united nation at home and a free hand in Cuba.