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Ricardo Alarcón de Quesada. Born in the capital city of Havana in 1937. Belonging to a lower urban middle class family related to strong patriotic traditions and names (Gonzalo de Quesada), he was always a brilliant student since Bachillerato and in his early years as a student at the University of Havana. As a distinguished member of the Movimiento Revolucionario 26 de Julio, he was in charge of the students' section (Sección Estudiantil Nacional, SEN) and a key figure in organizing the National Student Front (Frente Estudiantil Nacional, FEN).

Within the ranks of the 26 de Julio, he was - together with his wife since day one - a staunch advocate of leftist and radical views with strong Marxist overtones. After January 1st 1959, he was an outstanding promoter, as a national leader in the student movement, of radicalization of the Revolution, including the alliance with the old Cuban communists (Partido Socialista Popular). Due to such attitudes he gained the active support and political protection of Raúl Castro since the early days. In early 1961, he was appointed as Secretary of Foreign Relations in the newly founded Unión de Jóvenes Comunistas or UJOTAC (Union of Young Communists), but remaining also until late 1962 as President of the Federation of University Students (Federación de Estudiantes Universitarios, FEU) after arranging with Raúl Castro for the ousting of Comandante Rolando Cubela, FEU's former President since September 1959. By now he had obtained his degree in Philosophy and Arts. It was after March 1962, after the first crisis with the old communists (known in Cuba as Sectarismo or Sectarianism, also as the Escalante Affaire), that he was removed from both the FEU and UJOTAC and appointed as Director for Latin American Affairs in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MINREX).

Three years later, in early 1965, he was appointed Cuban Permanent Ambassador to United Nations, a position he held for more than 20 years. In 2006, Esteban Lazo replaced him at the United Nations. He returned to Cuba to become First Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs and after a few years, in the summer of 1992, Alarcón de Quesada was finally appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs. This appointment was, to a considerable extent, influenced by what had happened at the IV Congress of the Communist Party of Cuba (CPC). In this congress, for the first time, secret and direct elections were held and a high number of votes were casted against most members of the Politburo. Even Fidel Castro and Raúl Castro received negative votes, something that led Raúl to criticize such votes, especially those against his brother. The other big surprise was the fact that Alarcón de Quesada, who was just an alternate member of the Central Committee since 1980, obtained the highest amount of votes after Fidel and Raúl. All of sudden, a man who was at the bottom of the Cuban political leadership, was by way of secret and direct votes transformed into the third most voted candidate of the IV Congress. Less than a

year later in a move that was expected by most people in the political class Alarcón de Quesada was promoted to Minister of Foreign Affairs, and four months later to the Politburo.

But less than a year from his promotion, Fidel Castro removed Alarcón de Quesada from the MINREX, causing considerable commotion and discontent in various political instances and institutions in Havana. Roberto Robaina, a man with no experience but a young face was appointed as a replacement, while Alarcón de Quesada was appointed as Chairman of the People's Popular National Assembly. This was perceived as a second-class position, although for others it meant placing Alarcón de Quesada in a potentially important position for future developments in the field of reforms and succession.

Unquestionably, Alarcón de Quesada remains for many as an attractive option to move ahead with reforms and an eventual succession. He is an interesting blend of Marxist liberal type of intellectual with that of a shrewd and experienced politician and an excellent expert on US affairs. Honest and very modest in his private life, unlike many other Cuban leaders, he married only once and remains very much concerned about his wife's illness. He continues to be considerably popular, although others within the Cuban political class believe that his popularity has eroded as a result of becoming an unconditional follower of Fidel Castro's policies of the 1990s and less of an asset for the reform movement, as expected by many. The other reason for his eroded popularity is the way in which he helped to undermine Roberto Robaina's position, allowing Fidel Castro to use him as a political pawn against Robaina on key US-Cuba bilateral issues.