

## IS U.S. FOREIGN POLICY TOWARD CUBA JUSTIFIABLE?

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Allow me to make a very brief general statement to introduce our topic to be followed by the presentations and discussions. A fundamental question facing us is: is U.S. foreign policy *vis-a-vis* Cuba justifiable? In my opinion, it is not.

Naturally during almost four decades since the Revolution, U.S. and Cuban policies have varied. But since the outset, Fidel Castro's principal objective has not changed: remain in power at any cost, including war; define the United States as the great enemy; develop a violent system of control to impede the growth of viable internal opposition.

Many years have passed. Since 1959, the United States has been governed by 9 presidents—Republicans and Democrats—yet it has been impossible to normalize U.S.-Cuban relations. For one simple reason: Fidel Castro and his core followers have not wished to do so.

Remember the case of Jimmy Carter, who sought a rapprochement with Castro and moved to establish diplomatic relations with him. As a sequel to the liberalization of ties—which included allowing visits from the United States and to the island—in 1980 there was an explosion of Cuban refugees. Fidel Castro laughed at Carter's noble intentions of receiving over 100,000 refugees in Florida, sending to the U.S. about 15,000 hardened criminals and mental patients among them. In his memoirs Carter interpreted this crisis as a factor that contributed to his not being reelected. In any case, it is noteworthy that the Cuban Government supported the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, which took place about this time.

A crucial turning point in the relations was the Missile Crisis of October 1962. Before then, the American objective was the overthrow of the Cuban regime because of its political-military alliance with the Soviet Bloc and commitment to expand its sphere of influence.

But the result of this direct United States-Soviet Union confrontation was very significant: you will recall, part of the resolution of the crisis consisted of the acceptance of the continuation of Castro's rule by the American government. And although this was contingent upon conditions, in fact, since then Democratic and Republican Administrations have considered it the U.S. policy. This has meant that the anti-Castro movements, outside and inside Cuba, have not been accorded belligerent status. Since the 1960s, the U.S. Government has very substantially assisted several groups seeking to overthrow their governments, and has deployed American troops to change governments in the Caribbean and Central America, but not against Fidel Castro.

Indeed, after the Missile Crisis the American Cuban policy, with exceptional departures, had these components:

- isolate Castro;
- avoid other Cubas;
- generously give residence to Cubans wishing to settle in the United States; and
- maintain an economic embargo.

One thing is certain, of course: Castro is still in power though his wings and international projection have been severely cut.

It is impossible to isolate Cuba. Leaders of other nations wish to have contact with it. Castro himself continues to be an international guest, though in the new post-Communist climate in Western and Latin nations, he has been scolded and even asked to allow free elections during international visits. This was the notable case last November in his visit to Chile, where Salvador Allende's widow herself publicly asked him to do so.

Another item of the agenda is the refugee policy, a latent problem for all U.S. Administrations. This has been the humanitarian side of the U.S. policy: welcome into the United States those dissatisfied with conditions in Cuba. Politically, however, the migration option (recently altered by the Clinton Administration) contributed to defuse the spirit of internal protest, as hopes are placed on an alternative future in foreign lands already densely populated by Cuban contacts.

Thirdly, the "avoidance of other Cubas" has lost relevance with the collapse of the Soviet Bloc. Only in Colombia does a large guerrilla movement operate at this time; in Peru less so. Other issues of U.S. national or security interests have gained paramount importance—for instance, drug trafficking.

Finally, the U.S. embargo. We must keep in mind that the embargo is not a blockade and that total embargoes can only be achieved by war. Other countries have maintained economic ties with Cuba all along. In fact, the purpose of the Helms-Burton act is to tighten an ineffective embargo.

But interestingly, the embargo's origin was tied to U.S. policy to unseat Castro. In January 1962—the same year of the October Missile Crisis—the Eighth Consultative Meeting of OAS Ministers of Foreign Affairs in Uruguay adopted an unprecedented resolution: it excluded Cuba from the regional body, and authorized member states to take those steps that they considered appropriate for their individual or collective defense; the regional body gave the green light to any of the member states, including the United States, to overthrow Castro. And the American response was to decree a suspension of commercial relations with Cuba, declaring the embargo in

February 1962. (In January of the previous year diplomatic relations had been suspended and a more partial embargo declared.)

It is thought provoking that on November 27, 1962, aware that as a result of the Missile Crisis the United States had changed policy and would not seek to overthrow Castro, the Consejo Revolucionario de Cuba, the entity that had been formed with U. S. Government backing to lead the liberation of Cuba, after the end of the U.S. naval blockade of the island during the Missile Crisis stated:

We warn again that the diplomatic isolation and economic embargo, by themselves, won't overthrow the Communist regime of Cuba, nor reduce its expansive force of perturbation and contagion ... The crisis of Cuba can only be resolved by armed force, exercised by Cuban democrats and those [foreigners] who desire the survival of freedom in the Americas.

Five months later, José Miró Cardona, upon resigning as president of the Consejo, wrote:

I have sustained and sustain that the goal of isolating [Cuba] proposed by those who fear armed action is criminal. The economic suffocation that is exercised by ... embargo, prolonging the suffering of a people that has arrived at the unbearable limits of its resistance, to provoke an internal rebellion, cannot be justified if the time of its ending is not preestablished. To promote or intent an insurreccional movement determined by desperation, without coordinating it with armed action projected from abroad, of a people dominated by terror would lead: 1) to relive the dark page of Budapest [i.e., the unsuccessful 1956 revolt in Hungary]; 2) to create the myth of Fidel Castro's invincibility; and 3) to promote negotiations for a coexistence that has just been repudiated in the [Organization of American States].

These words have been forgotten especially by a Cuban-exile community that blindly seeks revenge, and does not know better in its frustration *vis-a-vis* the collective madness of the clique that rules Cuba led by Fidel Castro's pathological personality. Economic embargoes are, usually, relatively ineffective tools—their success depends partly on their psychological impact on the targeted rulers, and Fidel Castro obviously has felt that he is above yielding.

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Obviously the embargo has posted costs: it is more expensive to ship merchandise to Cuba from China or England than from Miami; the Cuban economy could benefit from added American investment, etc. After the fact, the embargo has acquired a reasonableness of its own as a negotiating chip, though a total embargo—an economic blockade of Cuba—is unviable.

Cuba's economic problems, however, do not rest on these partial shortcomings, but rather on the nature of its economic regime, which has proved unviable in all continents of this world when the balance has been tallied. Suppose that as a consequence of increased economic hardship there were an uprising in Cuba that is actually suppressed by the Castro gang who remains in power. What then?

To conclude, does this mean that U.S.-Cuba relations can be normalized? Castro's enemies need not fear: as long as he is the political sovereign, I don't think so.

I have recalled that after the Missile Crisis, the U.S. has basically followed policies of coexistence with the Cuban regime. Relations have turned friendlier (as

initially with Carter) and more hostile (as under Reagan). But the path to normalize, stabilize, them has not been sustained because the Cuban rulers have not wanted to do so.

A principal impediment to achieving normal relations is Castro's messianic-apocalyptic self-identity as a warrior who must perpetually fight and hold power against his enemies: the United States of America and his countrymen who happen to disagree with him. The crux of the problem is Fidel Castro, the indomitable pirate, troublemaker, who has appropriated as his personal fiefdom the island. Given his mind-set it has been impossible to establish civilized relations with him. As with criminal elements, I cannot envision relations with him without a military component. The ineffective alternative is isolating him. Paradoxically, the more international interaction with his regime, the greater the propensity toward internal opposition in Cuba, and the more the pathological side of his cruel and absurd policies is exposed.

Must or should we be at Fidel Castro's caprices?