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KISS THE EMBARGO GOODBYE

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The embargo on Cuba has been in place for almost 50 years. Although it may have been an appropriate policy response to the Cuban Revolution in the milieu of the Cold War, the reality of the 21st century calls for its abolishment. It is time to kiss the embargo goodbye, while maintaining an unyielding stance that democracy is the only acceptable form of government in the Western Hemisphere.

On January 1, 1959, in the wake of several notable victories by insurgents, the dictator Batista fled Cuba for exile. His government, isolated from both the Cuban people and the U.S. Government because of its repressive policies, collapsed. Fidel arrived in Havana on January 8, 1959. He and his comrades took power in the face of a total governmental vacuum.

The United States initially responded in a conciliatory manner; however, mutual antipathy prevented rapprochement. The United States responded with support for the Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961. Cuba then allowed the Soviet Union to place nuclear missiles in Cuba. Fidel also initiated a policy of exporting revolution to the rest of the Western Hemisphere and a few countries in Africa. His Argentine lieutenant, Ernesto 'Che' Guevara, promised "one, two, one hundred Vietnams."

Only one country fell to the *foco*-based insurgencies (which relied on a vanguard to initiate the revolution rather than political preparation of the population), when the dictator Somoza fell to the Sandinistas in 1979. The fatal flaw of the *foco* theory was that it required the target government to be simultaneously isolated domestically and internationally.

This fatal flaw prevented any more of the *fidelista*-inspired revolutions from succeeding, but the cost was very high. Numerous revolutionary groups sprung up wherever educated Marxists felt like forming an insurgency. From the *Montoneros* in Argentina to the *Union Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca* (URNG) in Guatemala and most countries in between, these revolutions cost hundreds of thousands of lives and helped to ruin economies and artificially extend the lives of a number of military dictatorships.

With the nuclear missiles, the anti-U.S. information operations, and the physical support for revolutions in the Western Hemisphere, it was not surprising that the United States sought to punish the Cuban regime. Among other responses, the United States declared a commercial, economic and financial embargo on Cuba on February 7,

1962. The proximate cause was Cuban expropriation of properties owned by U.S. corporations and citizens; however, the long-term goal was to destabilize Cuba and hopefully cause regime change in Havana.

Although Soviet support for Cuban Revolution prevented the embargo from achieving destabilization or regime change, it has caused quite a bit of pain over the last 46 years. During the Cold War, this tactic was one of several that the United States could use against our international opponents. The diplomatic and economic isolation that Cuba has endured over the years certainly lessened its capability to provide even more support to world-wide revolutions. The resources that the Cuban Revolution cost the Soviet Union were indeed part of the pressures that eventually caused the dissolution of the USSR.

Since the end of the Cold War, however, the need for an embargo has lessened. There is no more Soviet Union to place nuclear weapons in Cuba. The Cuban Revolution, although still performing espionage in the United States and conceptually supporting those who would wish us harm, is not a danger to this or any other country. There is no more exportation of Marxist revolutions. The only reasons for supporting the embargo are: (1) we need to continue pressuring the regime to motivate it to reform, and (2) the Cuban community in Miami wants us to continue. This ongoing pressure led to legislation to reinforce the embargo in 1992 (the Cuban Democracy Act, or the "Torricelli Law") and in 1996 (the Cuban Liberty and Democracy Solidarity Act, or the "Helms-Burton Act").

The first reason, the need to maintain pressure to cause Cuba to reform, has manifestly failed. In spite of over 4 decades of pressure, little to no reform has taken place. The Cuban state remains repressive. Not only did the embargo fail, but it is not in step with our policies towards other communist regimes who were our opponents during the Cold War. We reestablished relations with the People's Republic of China. We reestablished relations with Vietnam. We speak routinely with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea). The only states that we do not talk to routinely are ones that are perceived to be a danger to us, such as Iran. No one claims that Cuba is a threat to us. Engagement with China and Vietnam has helped to motivate them to usher in economic (if not political) reforms. Very few, domestically or internationally, would ever say that the policy of engaging China and Vietnam has failed.

The second reason, that U.S. citizens in Miami want a tight embargo, has slowly gone the way of the Cold War. Although most people in the United States find the Castro regime odious and seek to free the Cuban people, it is difficult to find many people who believe that the embargo eventually will be effective. In addition, many Cubans in the United States got used to sending assistance home to their families in the 1990s. When the second President Bush tightened the embargo by limiting travel to Cuba and the amount of money people could send there, the resolve of many of these people began to wane when their families back home suffered as support decreased.

An additional reason that fewer Cubans in Florida support the embargo is generational. Although at one time most Cubans in Florida had fled the country in

response to the Revolution, the demographics of the diaspora have changed. Now there are several types of exiles. Some are still the original group from the late 1950s and early 1960s. They were joined by a group in 1965 from the Cuban port of Camarioca and between 1965 through 1972 on "Freedom Flights." These were joined by the *Marielitos* in the early 1980s. Since that time, a steady stream of *balseros* have come to the United States. Another group that is usually overlooked is the children (and now grandchildren) of Cuban exiles, many of whom are still in Florida. While the number of initial exiles dwindles, the number of their descendants grows. They are replacing their parents as the dominant voice of Cubans in the United States.

Although many believe there is unity in thinking among all Cubans in the United States, conversations with people from each of these groups demonstrate that this is not true. Although the diminishing group of original exiles still tends to be extremely anti-Castro, many of the others just want the whole thing to end so that they can either go home, or get this all behind them. Others just want to be able to help their families at home or be free to travel back and forth at will. The offspring of the original exiles (the oldest of whom are now in their early 50s) tend to be anti-Castro, however many of them are not as enthusiastic as their parents about overthrowing the Revolution. Most desire that the Castro regime go away and Cuba be free, but they feel that time will make this happen, and they are not usually dedicated to this cause like their parents. In private conversation, however, a trend appears. Very few Cubans in the United States actually want the embargo to continue.

While the reasons for maintaining the embargo are few and declining, there are several good reasons to lift the embargo. The first is the cost to the Cuban people, and the second is that, ironically, the embargo is the only excuse that the Castro regime has to maintain its tyranny. By enforcing the embargo, we are empowering the Cuban Revolution. The third reason is to show the world that we are willing to try a new approach to motivate the Cubans to move towards democracy. The last reason is to open up the Cuban market to the United States.

The cost to the Cuban people has been huge. Besides the violence visited upon them by their repressive regime, there is also the economic and quality of life costs of isolation. Castroite resistance to democratic and economic reforms combines with the deleterious effects of the embargo. The Cuban people, who enjoyed one of the largest economies in the Western Hemisphere in 1959, suffer from poverty stemming from a paucity of jobs and medical problems caused by a lack of protein and vitamins in their diet.

The one reason that no one mentions is that the embargo provides an excuse for the regime's tyranny. Dissidence is punished by jail or execution. The 75 dissidents who met with the head of the U.S. interest section in Havana were imprisoned for sentences that averaged 17 years. The government maintains a relatively large Ministry of the Interior to provide internal security. It also maintains the *Comités para la Defensa de la Revolución* (Committees for the Defense of the Revolution [CDR]), which makes neighbors spy on neighbors and family members spy on each other. The government points to U.S. actions as the reason for that internal security.

The United States has a motive and a history of operating against the Cuban government, and therefore against the Cuban people. The proof that the United States is still operating against them is obvious—the embargo. The government uses the embargo as the only excuse for maintaining its internal security apparatus. If we were to drop the embargo, either Cuba would have to dismantle its security apparatus, or be revealed as being hypocritical. Either result would be good for both the United States and the Cuban people. Dismantling the repressive security structure would provide a modicum of freedom for the Cubans. Maintaining the security apparatus would significantly delegitimize the Cuban government domestically and internationally and could only hasten the demise of the current system.

Lifting the embargo would be a strong sign to the international community that the United States is magnanimous and inclusive. Maintaining it makes us look petty and vindictive to the rest of the world. We cannot convince anyone that Cuba is a threat to the United States, nor can we make the case internationally that more of the same will have a positive impact. Lifting the embargo would signal that we are ready to try something different to bring democracy to Cuba.

The last reason to lift the embargo is to open a new market to U.S. goods and services. Although Cubans do buy some food and medicine from the United States, it is nothing compared to purchases that an open Cuba could make. Once the markets are opened and the Cuban people start to make money, they will need refrigerators, air conditioners, satellite dishes, and all the other accoutrements of a modern society. We saw this happen in Iraq after 2003. The United States is the logical purchase place. We are close by and make excellent products. If the Venezuelans buy most of their imports from the United States, there is no reason to think that Cuba would not.

To maintain the status quo is to continue failing to engender reforms in Cuba and to continue empowering the dictatorship. Ending the embargo would have positive results for everyone involved. The Cuban government would either have to allow reforms or be delegitimized. The Cuban people could buy American goods and services. The United States would have a new market. The international community could work together to convince Cuba to accept political reforms. Most important of all, it would be the first step in the long process of freeing the Cuban people and allowing them to join the family of Western Hemisphere nations.

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