

Cuban Embargo Must End

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For more than 40 years, select Cuban-Americans have directed U.S. policy toward Cuba. This policy is largely two-pronged: an ever-broadening trade embargo and U.S. government funding of political dissidents within Cuba. Neither has proven to be successful, despite 40-years of effort.

Their latest directive is suggesting the appointment of Otto Reich as the top U.S. State Department Latin American official. Mr. Reich has strong ties to this failed two-prong approach, and is therefore the wrong person for this 21st century position.

Understanding why U.S. policies toward Cuba have failed is easier to grasp when put into historical context.

Between about 1512 and 1902, Cuba was consistently occupied by Spain, England or the United States. Slavery became common practice in Cuba by its conquerors. The conquests often ended with massive Cuban deaths by pure homicide or exposure to European diseases such as smallpox.

In 1901, the U.S. military occupied Cuba. It was in that year that U.S. Senator Platt attached an amendment to the U.S. Army appropriation bill, giving the U.S. the right to intervene militarily in Cuba's internal affairs whenever the U.S. decided the intervention was desired.

Cubans had an undesirable choice: accept the enacted amendment or remain under U.S. military

occupation. They accepted the amendment and gained limited independence in 1902. In 1903, the U.S. used the Platt amendment to obtain a naval base at Guantánamo Bay. We also used the amendment to support a series of corrupt and weak Cuban governments.

The 1950's Cuban revolution was a reaction to this 450 years of domination by other countries. The revolution, however, led Cubans toward economic dependence on the Soviet Union rather than independence.

The Soviet Union's 1991 collapse created an export loss of \$5 billion a year for the Cuban economy. Its gross domestic product in 1993 represented only 33 percent of its 1989 level.



This economic retraction caused massive hardships in the early 1990s. The limited availability of food staples such as milk, and other items we take for granted, continue today. In 1989, Cuba imported about 100,000 tons of milk. It now imports 45,000 tons, a 55 percent reduction.

The physical capacity of public transportation decreased by 90 percent after Soviet withdrawal. Demonstrating its cultural resilience, Cubans began riding bicycles.

Cubans are proud people, united by history. In the face of massive economic adversity, they choose

to work incrementally toward a better future for their children, encompassing an independent national identity.

One of its first steps toward an independent identity, the Cuban National Assembly eliminated all references of Marxism-Leninism from the Cuban Constitution in December 1991.

In July 1992, Cuba further amended its constitution to guarantee freedom of religion. A step that China, a U.S. trading partner, refuses to embrace.

In September 1993, Cuba legalized self-employment for more than 100 trades. As a result, Cubans are exposed daily to entrepreneurship and market economics. About 160,000 Cubans, or about 4 percent of the work force, are licensed entrepreneurs. Many more entrepreneurs participate in an underground economy.

In October 1994, private farmers began selling some of their produce in farmers markets for personal profit. About 20 percent of all crops produced are sold in these markets. This exchange has been so economically successful for some private farmers that the Cuban government allows them to own a second home on the beach.

In September 1995, Cuba allowed foreign companies to run Cuban-based businesses and possess Cuban real estate. There are now almost 400 foreign ventures in Cuba.

Public policies work when they match widely held societal beliefs. Whether correct or not, Cubans overwhelmingly believe that the U.S. embargo is responsible for their slow economic recovery after the loss of Soviet subsidies.

It is time for U.S. policies toward Cuba to reflect the desires of all Americans. If we truly believe that the market economy works regardless of one's beliefs, then we must move toward ending the failed embargo. Doing so will allow Cuba to discern which of its government policies are working, eliminating the embargo as its scapegoat.

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