

Che Guevara's Son on Obama's Historic Cuba Visit: "Let's See"

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Rights experts caution against US hypocrisy on human rights abuses

Days ahead of President Barack Obama's trip to Cuba, the oldest son of revolutionary Ernesto "Che" Guevara has expressed mixed feelings about the historic visit.

He will be the first sitting president to visit the island nation in [nearly nine decades](#).

Camilo Guevara [spoke](#) to the *Guardian* about the implications of the trip, which begins Sunday, and expressed some optimism, calling it "historic and very important." He also said that Obama "appears intelligent and sensitive towards the major problems of humanity."



A Che Guevara mural on a wall in Havana. (Photo: Leif Eliasson/flickr/cc)

But he qualified by noting that Obama "was supported by corporate America."

He also said that his father "felt that we could also transmit ourselves outwards ... Maybe we can influence the U.S. in a positive way," he said.

"But the U.S. is an empire," he added. "Their nature is not to set the table and invite you for a feast. History shows us that every time they set a table, you have to accept you might be poisoned or stabbed in the back. But let's see."

As the *New York Times* [reported](#) earlier this month:

Talks on the trip have been unfolding for months, after the two presidents first discussed it during a September meeting in New York at the United Nations General Assembly, their second meeting after announcing the policy shift in December 2014. Mr. Obama told Mr. Castro that he would like to visit Cuba before the end of his term, but that he would be willing to make the trip only if he could justify it by pointing to concrete progress in the normalization process. He instructed senior White House aides to begin working toward that goal.

The *LA Times* [reported](#) Friday that "Obama is expected to sharply criticize his hosts for human rights abuses, and plans to meet with political dissidents the White House has chosen."

But he should rethink such criticism, argues law professor Marjorie Cohn, [writing](#) at *Common Dreams* Friday that “a comparison of Cuba’s human rights record with that of the United States shows that the U.S. should be taking lessons from Cuba.”

“The U.S. government criticizes civil and political rights in Cuba while disregarding Cubans’ superior access to universal housing, health care, education, and its guarantee of paid maternity leave and equal pay rates,” she wrote.

And of course there’s the issue of the U.S.’s notorious offshore prison on Cuban soil.

“Guantanamo Bay is an international symbol of the breakdown of the rule of law and systemic abuse,” [said](#) Human Rights First’s Daphne Eviatar in a media statement Friday. “President Obama will likely raise Cuba’s human rights record when he meets with officials; the continued operation of Guantanamo will make it more difficult for him to have moral leadership on the issue,” she said.

While *Politico* [reported](#) that the trip marks “a symbolic next chapter in his attempts to normalize relations with the country,” Alexander Main, senior associate on international policy at the [Center for Economic and Policy Research](#), said Thursday, “Obama’s trip to Cuba is being spun as a great advance in U.S.-Latin American relations, but the reality is that the administration is doubling down on its support for the right in the region and its ongoing efforts to isolate left-wing governments like Venezuela’s, against whom the Obama administration just renewed sanctions.”

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