

# Cuba's Support For Revolutions, Self-Defense Remains Largely Intact Despite Western Propaganda

Examining changes in the U.S.-Cuba relationship, one thing becomes clear: It's the global situation -- not Cuba -- that has changed.

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*President Barack Obama's recent visit to Cuba has been [roundly condemned by his right-wing opponents](#). The fact that [the visit coincided with the Brussels bombing](#) has not been omitted from conservative diatribes.*

The conservative press voiced further outrage when it was revealed that [Secretary of State John Kerry had met with representatives of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia](#), or FARC, who were in Cuba for negotiations with the Colombian government.

The right-wing press seethed with anger that Obama, who is supposedly fighting a "war against terrorism," would visit Cuba, which was only officially removed from the State Department's State Sponsors of Terrorism list last May, several years after [the State Department confirmed](#) that the Cuban government "no longer actively supports armed struggle in Latin America and other parts of the world."

Desiree DeLoach is an organizer for the Venceremos Brigade, a group that, in an act of civil disobedience, routinely violated the recently lifted ban on Americans traveling to Cuba.

When asked about Cuba's former designation as a state sponsor of terrorism, she told MintPress News that "its hypocrisy is abhorrent."

DeLoach described how, in her analysis, the United States has actually waged a campaign of terrorism against Cuba. "There have been over 600 assassination attempts against Fidel Castro's life, bombings of hotels and many other acts of terrorism carried out or backed by the United States," she said, further noting the example of the refusal to extradite [Luis Posada Carriles](#), a man who confessed to having bombed a Cuban airplane and remains safe and free in Miami.

Looking beyond the hypocrisy, the relationship between the Cuban government and armed groups throughout Latin America — the basis for its former official designation as a state sponsor of terrorism — has evolved based on changing circumstances.

However, Cuba's ideological principles remain consistent.

The reason for Cuba's apparent shift in favor of peaceful methods of social activism points toward an unacknowledged and concealed reality about revolutionary left-wing politics.

## **‘Making violent revolution inevitable’**

In 1982, Cuba was officially designated as a state sponsor of terrorism. [According to a CIA report](#), Cuba was included on the list because:

“Havana openly advocates armed revolution as the only means for leftist forces to gain power in Latin America, and the Cubans have played an important role in facilitating the movement of men and weapons into the region. Havana provides direct support in the form of training, arms, safe havens, and advice to a wide variety of guerrilla groups. Many of these groups engage in terrorist operations.”

Indeed, Cuba was supporting armed groups throughout Latin America in 1982. The CIA document lists, among others, the 19th of April Movement in Colombia; the Sandinista National Liberation Front in Nicaragua; and the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front in El Salvador — all as receiving support from the Cuban government in their armed campaigns. The report also quotes Cuban officials saying “acts by legitimate national liberation movements cannot be defined as terrorism.”



Cuban President Fidel Castro, right, and African leader Nelson Mandela.

When asking why Nicaraguans, Salvadorans, and Colombians were engaged in armed revolutionary violence — and why the Cubans supported them — rather than quoting Cuban officials, the CIA report should really quote President John F. Kennedy, who famously said: “Those who make peaceful revolution impossible will make violent revolution inevitable.”

Those who accuse Cuba of “supporting terrorism” forget that the M-19 revolutionaries in Colombia, the FMLN in El Salvador, and the Sandinistas in Nicaragua all took up arms not against democratic states but against brutal, repressive, human rights-violating autocracies. In Colombia, paramilitaries armed and trained by the U.S. kidnapped, assassinated, and tortured almost all peaceful opposition. Many thousands of labor activists, socialist

organizers, and religious leaders were killed.

The M-19 took up arms alongside FARC and other Colombian groups in the context of extreme political repression, violations of human rights, and routine slaughter of innocent civilians. Explaining the situation in Colombia, [Fidel Castro said](#):

“The Colombian Communist Party never contemplated the idea of conquering power through the armed struggle. The guerrilla was a resistance front and not the basic instrument to conquer revolutionary power, as it had been the case in Cuba.”

The Sandinistas in Nicaragua, which Cuba is also accused of supporting, took power in an armed revolution in 1979 against a military dictatorship led by Anastasio Somoza. In 1972, when Nicaragua was struck by an earthquake that killed 10,000 people, the regime’s military shocked the world as it forcibly stole food and money from the quake’s victims. In his 2012 book “[Latin American Dictators of the 20th Century](#),” Javier A. Galván wrote:

“The military engaged in an indiscriminate operation of torture, rape, savage beatings, unjustified incarceration, and the assassination of thousands of poor peasants. The soldiers confiscated their land and kept it for themselves. In the meantime, the urban areas were simultaneously suffering under strict martial law and further censorship of all communications media.”

It was in a fight against this heavily corrupt and human rights-violating regime that the Cuban-aligned Sandinista revolutionaries seized power in 1979.

The guerilla fighters in El Salvador, who also received Cuban support, took up arms in 1979 after a repressive military junta deposed the elected government in a *coup d’état*. [The United Nations Truth Commission on El Salvador described](#) the situation this way:

“[V]iolence became systematic and terror and distrust reigned among the civilian population. The fragmentation of any opposition or dissident movement by means of arbitrary arrests, murders and selective and indiscriminate disappearances of leaders became common practice.”



Alfonso Cano, a Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) commander, was assassinated by the Colombian military in Nov. 4, 2011. In this photo Cano attends a practice ceremony for the political party opening outside of San Vicente del Caguan in the FARC controlled zone of Colombia (Photo: Scott Dalton/AP)

Nearly all the armed groups Cuba was accused of supporting in 1982 took up arms not out of bloodlust, but only when other means of struggle were made fruitless and impossible by extreme political repression. Cuba is accused of supporting Guatemalan indigenous people who armed themselves against what [human rights observers have since described as genocide](#). Cuba is alleged to have supported armed groups who battled against [the brutal military dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet](#) in Chile, where dissidents were frequently “disappeared” and their mangled corpses eventually dumped on the street.

The regimes opposed by Cuba’s Latin American allies were staffed by people trained in [the School of the Americas](#) (now known as the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation, or WHINSEC) in Georgia. At this CIA facility, paramilitaries and counterinsurgency specialists from all across the American hemisphere were trained in the art of torture, kidnapping, and other methods designed to terrify civilian populations into subservience and obedience. In the context of such brutal repression and autocracies throughout South America, the Cuban government worked with the Soviet Union to provide arms, weapons and military training to resistance forces.

Support for the violent insurgencies of Colombia, Chile, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Guatemala, and elsewhere is certainly consistent with the Cuban government’s ideological heritage. The Marxist-Leninist ideology most certainly permits its adherents to take up arms in the context of extreme political repression and a mass movement for social justice.

As *de facto* leader of the Communist International, [Josef Stalin explained the context and theory of armed revolutionary violence](#) to British novelist H.G. Wells in 1934, saying:

“Communists do not in the least idealize the methods of violence. But they, the communists, do not want to be taken by surprise, they cannot count on the old world voluntarily departing from the stage, they see that the old system is

violently defending itself, and that is why the communists say to the working class: Answer violence with violence; do all you can to prevent the old dying order from crushing you, do not permit it to put manacles on your hands, on the hands with which you will overthrow the old system.”

In current times, Cuba’s allies are largely not taking up arms. The Sandinistas of Nicaragua and the FMLN of El Salvador are in power, but this power was not won by means of armed insurrection. The Sandinistas and the FMLN took power in peaceful, democratic, internationally-observed elections. Cuba’s allies in the Venezuelan United Socialist Party, or PSUV, the Movement Toward Socialism, or MAS, in Bolivia, and other anti-imperialist, socialist-oriented governments in Latin America, have taken power by legal, electoral means.

### **Genuine communists favor peaceful methods**

But how can this be possible? Isn’t the Cuban Communist Party still a Marxist-Leninist Party? Do they not still uphold the same ideological beliefs and principles as they upheld in 1982? Do they not advocate “dictatorship of the proletariat” and the “smashing of the bourgeois state,” among other communist ideas?



Residents attend a protest to condemn Israeli military attacks on the Gaza Strip, in Havana, Wednesday, Jan. 14, 2009.

The Cuban government maintains its Marxist-Leninist political line, but the circumstances have changed. The Latin America of the 21st century is not the same as the Latin America of the 1970s and 80s. The tactical principles of Marxism-Leninism are widely misrepresented. In reality, they do not fetishize or celebrate the use of violence.

Communist Party leader William Z. Foster — not a moderate, but considered to be a “hardliner” and “Stalinist” by historians of American communism — accurately articulated the Marxist-Leninist position on violence in 1948. [He wrote:](#)

“The working class and other toiling elements are always and instinctively champions of peace and democracy...This fact is so because the toilers are the ones who always have to suffer the most from tyranny and from war’s destruction. They pick up the sword against those who oppress, exploit, or would butcher them only when they have no other alternative, only when the road of peace is closed to them.”

Even in the context of the brutal czarist autocracy, Lenin and the Bolsheviks condemned “adventurism.” Marxist-Leninists throughout the world have always opposed revolutionary

strategies based on isolated acts of violence. Describing political assassinations and bombings as ineffective, [Vladimir Lenin wrote](#):

“We know from the past and see in the present that only new forms of the mass movement or the awakening of new sections of the masses to independent struggle really rouses a spirit of struggle and courage in all. Single combat however, inasmuch as it remains single combat... has the immediate effect of simply creating a short-lived sensation, while indirectly it even leads to apathy and passive waiting for the next bout.”

### **The world situation, not Cuba, has changed**

In the context of the 21st century, progressive activists in Latin America are not compelled to take up arms. In most Latin American countries they are free to organize demonstrations and labor unions, as well as to participate in elections.

In this new context, Cuba is working to resolve — not to expand or exacerbate — one of the longest-lasting armed conflicts on the continent. In 1993, the Communist Party of Colombia and FARC terminated their relationship with each other. At that time, Cuba ended its alliance with FARC. [Fidel Castro criticized the FARC leader](#), Manuel Marulanda, by saying:

“He conceived a long and extended struggle; I disagreed with this point of view. But I never had the chance to talk with him. ... I have expressed, very clearly, our position in favor of peace in Colombia; but we are neither in favor of foreign military intervention nor of the policy of force that the United States intends to impose at all costs on that long-suffering and industrious people. ... I have honestly and strongly criticized the objectively cruel methods of kidnapping and retaining prisoners under the conditions of the jungle.”

Cuba is now neutral in the conflict between the Colombian government and the FARC rebels. Representatives of both sides are currently in Cuba negotiating a peace settlement. During Obama’s recent visit to Cuba, Kerry met with FARC negotiators.



Those who misunderstand the methods and tactics of genuine revolutionaries portray Cuba as a country of bloodthirsty revolutionaries who spread violence throughout the continent. Cuba has supported progressive forces who, like the Cubans did in 1959, took up arms in self-defense against brutal and repressive autocracies. However, like all sensible forces advocating social justice, they would prefer a peaceful transition to a better world.

The Cuban government and its allies throughout the region have demonstrated to the world that they are not violent psychopaths. Rather, they are individuals who are dedicated to social justice, and will make great sacrifices in order to achieve that. Violent methods may

be used in some contexts, but only if necessary.

The reestablishment of diplomatic relations with the U.S. certainly opens a new chapter in U.S.-Cuba relations. As tensions rise in Venezuela, [Brazil](#), and other countries throughout the region, many hope that the possibility of peaceful, democratic struggle can remain open, and that the use of brutal military dictatorships to halt social progress will remain in the history books.

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