

Return to the Discourse of the Cold War Era to Justify US Imperialist Aggression Against Cuba

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For more than six decades, socialist Cuba has struggled against the ‘most formidable imperial power ever known to humankind’. It could be said that, ‘never has the world witnessed such an unequal fight’ when considering the respective sizes, populations, economies, and military strengths of Cuba and the US (Fidel Castro, May 1, 2003 Havana). In its anti-communist/anti-socialist zeal, the Trump administration has maintained America’s long-standing policy of attempting ‘to bring about hunger, desperation and overthrow of [Cuban] government’, which has been in place since 1960’s with the exception of a brief period of engagement from December 17, 2014 to June 16, 2017, when the Obama administration sought to normalize diplomatic relations with the island nation[i]. The Trump administration has frequently employed rhetoric reminiscent of the Cold War Era while implementing aggressive, impulsive and harsh policies against Cuba, which have strengthened the American economic embargo against the island and its people. Washington has justified such policies on the basis that Cuba has been ‘exporting its communist ideology’ to Venezuela, Nicaragua[ii] and other Latin American countries, even going so far as to claim that ‘Cuba is the true imperialist power in Venezuela.’

On June 16, 2017, just under six months after assuming office, President Trump delivered a speech in Miami where he mentioned that Americans ‘will not be silenced in the face of communist oppression any longer’. In that same speech, he also stated that ‘with God’s help, a free Cuba’ will soon be achieved[iii]. However, the aggressiveness of US policies towards Cuba has clearly intensified since Mike Pompeo (Secretary of State since April 26, 2018), John Bolton (National Security Advisor since April 9, 2018) and Elliott Abrams[iv] (special Representative for Venezuela since January 25, 2019) were given prominent roles in Washington. Subsequently, in a speech delivered in Miami on February 18, 2019, Trump went so far as to call Venezuelan president Nicolas Maduro a ‘Cuban puppet’ and make the outrageous claim that ‘the Venezuelan military are risking their lives, and Venezuela’s future, for a man controlled by the Cuban military and protected by a private army of Cuban soldiers.’ The same day, Trump elaborated on his hostile view of Venezuela’s socialist government when he claimed that:

Their tyrannical socialist government, nationalized private industries, and took over private businesses. They engaged in massive wealth confiscation, shut down free markets, suppressed free speech, and set up a relentless propaganda machine, rigged elections, used the government to persecute their political opponents, and destroyed the impartial rule of law...In other words, the socialists have done in Venezuela all of the same things that socialists, communists, totalitarians[v] have done everywhere that they’ve had a chance to rule. The results have been catastrophic[vi].

In February 2019, president Trump confidently asserted that his administration would put an end to socialist and communist regimes throughout Latin America when he announced:

the twilight hour of socialism has arrived in our hemisphere, and frankly in many, many places around the world. The days of socialism and communism are numbered not only in Venezuela but in Nicaragua and in Cuba as well.

The latest US efforts to overthrow Cuba's socialist regime include the full implementation of Title III of the Helms-Burton Act[ix] (also known as the Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity (Libertad) Act of 1996), which was announced by National Security Advisor John Bolton in a speech delivered in Miami on April 17, 2019. The Helms-Burton Act was designed to bring hunger and desperation to Cuba by extending the original commercial, economic, and financial embargo against the island nation. Title III allows for the 'protection of property rights of United States nationals' in order to discourage investment in Cuba on the part of non-US companies. More specifically, it permits 'American citizens, including naturalized Cuban-Americans, to sue any foreign company conducting business involving properties that were owned by American citizens before being confiscated by the Cuban socialist government after the 1959 Revolution.'[vii]

Subsequently, on June 4, 2019, the Trump administration announced that it was amending Cuban Assets Control Regulations (CACR)[viii] by implementing new travel restrictions on American citizens seeking to visit Cuba, including for educational trips and cultural exchanges. Furthermore, the amended CACR also includes a full ban on cruise ships, private yachts or plane travel to Cuba. These new restrictions were justified by US Treasury Secretary Steve Mnuchin on the basis that:

Cuba continues to play a destabilizing role in the Western Hemisphere, providing a communist foothold in the region and propping up U.S. adversaries in places like Venezuela and Nicaragua by fomenting instability, undermining the rule of law and suppressing democratic processes.[ix]

Despite his recent enthusiasm for anti-communist propaganda, Trump did not appear particularly interested in reversing Obama's policies aimed at re-establishing normalized relations with Cuba early on in his presidency. According to Mark Feierstein, senior director for Western Hemisphere affairs at the National Security Council under Obama, 'Trump has never demonstrated a concern about Cuba. As we know he tried to do business in Cuba. We know that he privately told Obama that he agreed with what Obama was doing on Cuba policy.' This might suggest that the Trump administration's policies towards Cuba are intended to bolster his anti-socialist/communist[x] credentials before the 2020 presidential election[xi], which could pit him against Bernie Sanders, who has called for ending the trade embargo and lifting travel restrictions against Cuba.

During the Cold War Era, neo-liberals often claimed that the destruction of Western civilisation and liberalism at the hands of fascism, Nazism, and communism could have been prevented had people recognized the warning signs and understood where these movements were headed before it was too late. It would appear that the Trump administration is employing similar rhetoric, as was evident on November 4, 2018, when president Trump declared that 'Democrats are socialists' and that 'they want to impose socialism on our country.' The Trump administration is trying to instill fear of totalitarian

regimes, as if the world was still operating under the conditions of the Cold War Era. Speeches and statements by Trump, Pompeo, Bolton and Abrams give the impression that the ideological battle against communism has not been concluded even though the Soviet Union collapsed almost three decades ago.

Despite the widespread belief that the ideological battle between capitalism and communism was settled at the end of Cold War, 'the End of History' has not yet been decisively achieved, as alternative ideologies to free-market capitalism continue to persist in some countries. Cuban socialism has managed to survive for six decades, despite being subjected to a destructive embargo, intimidation, and destabilization, including assassination attempts against its leaders, while the Bolivarian Revolution is entering its third decade. Also, the US has only recently managed to reverse the 'Pink Tide' (or turn to the left) in Latin America by supporting the electoral defeat or overthrow of progressive governments in a number of countries throughout the region and their replacement by right-wing candidates committed to the neoliberal economic model. The US government and its allies are now focusing their attention on destabilizing and overthrowing the governments of Cuba and Venezuela[xii], as well as Nicaragua, the few remaining countries in the region that prevent foreign corporations from earning unlimited profits at the expense of domestic workers and the environment.

History has shown that Washington is not averse to intervening in the domestic affairs of other countries in order to further its own interests, which includes facilitating the overthrow of a long list of governments that did not fully submit to US dictates. Such interventions were often justified on the grounds of national security, with recurring pretexts including the Cold War, the Global War on Terrorism and the War on Drugs. Given that the US is losing or has already lost the War on Terrorism and the War on Drugs, a return to the discourse of the Cold War Era appears to be the new narrative used to justify American foreign interventions. In Cuba, Venezuela and Nicaragua, the Trump administration is using the pretext of spreading democracy or, more accurately, 'their democratic model.'[xiii] On a number of occasions, president Trump has suggested that there is a risk of communist and socialist movements spreading within the US, including his last State of the Union Address where he indicated that he was 'alarmed by new calls to adopt socialism' in the American way of life, with the implication being that this would inevitably bring terror, misery, despotism, and oppression to American citizens. This type of discourse helps elicit fears and resentment among the population, directing them towards an irrational and aggressive defense of the status quo. Perhaps this is the tactic that Donald Trump is hoping will help him secure re-election in 2020. Unfortunately, the world will continue to be subjected to the destructive and malicious policies of the Trump administration that only serve the interests, wealth, and power of corporate elites until then.

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Notes

[i] On June 16, 2017, President Trump announced that he was 'cancelling' the Obama administration's

deals with Cuba.

[ii] Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela have been labelled the 'troika of tyranny' and the 'three stooges of socialism' by, National Security Advisor John Bolton.

[iii] President Trump, Miami, Florida in 2017

[iv] 'Among the leading players in the current anti-communist and neo-imperialist crusade being perpetrated by the US government include: current US vice-president Mike Pence; Mike Pompeo, Secretary of State since April 26, 2018; Florida Senator Marco Rubio; John Bolton, National Security Advisor since April 9, 2018; Mauricio Claver-Carone, senior director of the National Security Council's Western Hemisphere affairs division since fall 2018; Elliot Abrams, Special Representative for Venezuela since January 25, 2019; and, Mark Andrew Green, Administrator of USAID since August 7, 2017. All of them are well-known for holding strong anti-Castro views, opposing the Obama administration's engagement with Cuba, and being proponents of aggressive regime change strategies in Cuba, Venezuela and Nicaragua.'
<https://www.globalresearch.ca/enacting-title-iii-helms-burton-act-us-revisits-cold-war-era/5671648>

[v] Many of the hostile actions directed against Venezuela, Cuba and Nicaragua on the part of the Trump administration have been justified on the basis that these countries are socialist or communist, and that they support totalitarian regimes. However, the systems of government and economics in each of these countries are very distinct from the communism that prevailed during the Cold War Era. In fact, Venezuela and Nicaragua are mixed economies, while Cuba is reforming its socialist regime. These three nations have been trying to reduce exploitation and misery, while ensuring that society is egalitarian, communitarian, which does not suggest that their governments are totalitarian in nature.

[vi] Contrary to much of president Trump's rhetoric, there is plenty of evidence to support the view that 'revolutionary communism created a life for the mass of people that was far better than the wretched existence they had endured under feudal lords, military bosses, foreign colonizers, and Western capitalists. The end result was a dramatic improvement in living conditions for hundreds of millions of people on a scale never before or since witnessed in history. State socialism transformed desperately poor countries into modernized societies in which everyone had enough food, clothing, and shelter; where elderly people had secure pensions; and where all children (and many adults) went to school and no one was denied medical attention.' (Parenti, 1997, 85).

[vii] <https://www.globalresearch.ca/enacting-title-iii-helms-burton-act-us-revisits-cold-war-era/5671648>

[viii] 'The CACR removes an authorization for people-to-people educational travel that was conducted under the auspices of an organization that is subject to U.S. jurisdiction and that sponsors such exchanges to promote people-to-people contact (group people-to-people educational travel). This amendment also includes a grandfather clause authorizing certain group people-to-people educational travel that previously was authorized where the traveler has already completed at least one travel-related transaction (such as purchasing a flight or reserving accommodation) prior to June 5, 2019.'
https://www.treasury.gov/resource-center/sanctions/Programs/Documents/cuba_faqs_new.pdf

[ix] <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/sm700>

[x] There is little doubt that anti-communism has been the most powerful political force inhibiting the success of revolutionary movements around the world. During the Cold War, anti-communist orientation of Washington resulted in foreign interventions aimed at destabilizing governments viewed even as moderately socialist (incorrectly on some occasions) including Guatemala (1953-1954, 1960), Indonesia

(1957-1958, 1965, 1975), the Dominican Republic (1960-1966), Chile (1964-1973), Cambodia (1955-1973), Laos (1957-1973), the Congo (1960-1964), Greece (1964-1974), Bolivia (1964-1975), and Afghanistan (1979-1992).

<https://www.globalresearch.ca/the-cuban-revolution-the-u-s-imposed-economic-blockade-and-us-cuba-relations/5433797>

[xi] Preparations for the 2020 election could also have factored into Trump's decision to bring experienced anti-communist crusaders into his administration, including John Bolton, National Security Advisor since April 9, 2018, and Elliot Abrahams.

[xii] Given that 'six of the world's ten top industrial corporations are involved primarily in the production of oil, gasoline, and motor vehicles', securing Venezuela's oil reserves, which are the largest known reserves in the world, is a priority for these industrial corporations (Parenti 1997, 158). This would require the removal of president Maduro, who has been using his country's oil revenue to finance social and economic programs aimed at achieving the distributive justice.

[xiii] 'It's the false democracy of elites...a very original democracy that's imposed by weapons and bombs and firing weapons' (Hugo Chávez, 2006).

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