

Russia Urges Obama to Lift Cuba Embargo, Respect World Opinion

By [Global Research](#)

Global Research, November 12, 2008

[Metro International](#) 11 November 2008

Region: [Russia and FSU](#)

Theme: [Global Economy](#)

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov called on U.S. President-elect Barack Obama to rethink the U.S. economic embargo against Cuba, which has been in place for nearly half a century.

Lavrov said after talks in Moscow today with his Cuban counterpart Felipe Perez Roque that the “overwhelming majority” of countries, including Russia, opposed the U.S. trade embargo and had voted against it in the United Nations General Assembly.

The U.S. imposed a trade embargo against Cuba in 1962 to put pressure on its Communist government, which rose to power in a 1959 revolution led by Fidel Castro, who ceded power to his brother in February. In 2000, U.S. lawmakers eased the rules to allow the export of agricultural and medical goods to Cuba. Shipments increased 31 percent last year to \$447 million.

The UN General Assembly on Oct. 29 voted for the 17th consecutive year in favor of a resolution that calls on the U.S. to lift the embargo. Three countries — the U.S., Israel and Palau — opposed the resolution, while 185 countries voted in favor and two, the Federated States of Micronesia and the Marshall Islands, abstained.

Obama has promised to review U.S. policy toward Cuba. While this is a U.S. decision, Russia hopes that Obama will take into account “the voice of the international community,” Lavrov said in comments broadcast on state television.

Russia is reviving its influence in Latin America, lost after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and challenging the U.S. in its backyard. It has developed friendly ties with Venezuela, a U.S. opponent, and is also rebuilding relations with its Soviet-era ally Cuba.

Russia may lend Cuba as much as \$335 million to spend on Russian goods and services, RIA Novosti reported on Nov. 6. Cuba may use funds provided under the state loan to cover as much as 90 percent of a contract, with a 10 percent advance paid, the state-run news service said, citing a government order dated Nov. 1.

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