

The Economic War on Cuba: Western Media Remains Silent as Obama Extends U.S. Embargo

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Global Research, October 13, 2014


[Silent Crow News](#) 12 October 2014

Region: [Latin America & Caribbean, USA](#)
Theme: [Global Economy](#), [History](#), [US NATO War Agenda](#)

As the world pays close attention to the war on terror with ISIS in the Middle East, the ongoing civil war in the Ukraine and the spread of Ebola that began in West Africa, another war has been silently extended for another year with hardly any media coverage especially in the U.S. It is not a war on a new terrorist organization called 'Khorasan' or any other group; it is Washington's long economic war on Cuba which has been an ongoing policy of every administration that has occupied the Whitehouse since 1960. But the New York Times is quick to point out that "a rising tide of Cubans in rickety, cobbled-together boats is fleeing the island and showing up in the waters off Florida." Adding what Ted Henke, A Cuba Scholar at Baruch College at the City University of New York had said blaming the Cuban government's economic policies "Washington should be worried about the increase in migration, because it demonstrates that Cuba's recent economic reforms have failed to help the majority of Cubans, making the nation vulnerable to a catastrophic event." Completely ignoring the US embargo's effects it has on the economy.

Just like his predecessors before him, U.S. President Barack H. Obama extended the US embargo or as they call it in Cuba "El Bloqueo" for another year as reported by Venezuela's Telesur news network last month. Cuba responded by denouncing Obama's actions at the United Nations. The report titled 'Cuba denounces extension of US blockade' stated what Cuban officials had said about the extension of the embargo:

Diplomats from the Caribbean island said the main goal of the U.S. embargo is to inflict pain and suffering upon the Cuban people. Cuba denounced this Wednesday at the United Nations President Barack Obama's decision to extend the economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed on the island for another year, claiming it is in the "national interest of the United States

It's amazing how Obama can flip-flop on specific issues with a straight face. According to the Washington Post, in 2004, when Obama was an  Illinois State Senator, he did say that "I think it's time for us to end the embargo in Cuba." Of course Obama's was trying to score political points among potential voters when he was running for a seat in the U.S. Senate when he called for an end to the US embargo against Cuba. He went on to say in front of an enthusiastic crowd at Southern Illinois University why he opposed the embargo and that US interests should focus on fighting terrorism and economic growth. As Obama continued his rhetoric

"and I think that we have to end it because if you think about what's happening internationally our planet is shrinking, and our biggest foreign policy challenge — and it fits directly into the battle on terrorism and it fits into issues

of trade and our economy — is how we make sure that other countries, in developing nations, are providing sustenance for their people, human rights for their people, a basic structure of government for their people that it's stable and secure so that they can be part in a brighter future for the entire planet.”

Obama said that US foreign policy towards Cuba was a failure because it did not remove Fidel Castro from power nor did it help the Cuban people in any meaningful way which is obvious. “And the Cuban embargo has failed to provide the source of raising standards of living and it has squeezed the innocents in Cuba,” Obama continued “and utterly failed in the effort to overthrow Castro, who’s now have been there since I was born. So, it’s time for us to acknowledge that that particular policy has failed.” The Washington Post also reported that Obama was Speaking to a Cuban American audience in Miami, Florida in 2007 as a presidential candidate for the Democratic Party and said that he would not “take off the embargo” as president because it is “an important inducement for change.” Why not? He had to win the hearts and minds of the right-wing Cubans in Florida who have traditionally voted for the Republican Party since President John F. Kennedy failed to overthrow Castro during the ‘Bay of Pigs’ invasion. Many Cubans of the younger generation have been shifting their votes to the Democratic Party in recent years. However, Malaysia’s national news agency, Bernama reported how the Obama administration strengthened the sanctions with harsher penalties against institutions that do business with Cuba. The article ‘US Blockade of Cuba Intensified under Pres Obama’ explains:

The US blockade against Cuba was intensified during President Barack Obama’s administration with the increased persecution of financial institutions which have business relations with the island. Andres Zaldivar, a researcher of the Center for the Study of Global Economy said in a video conference on the topic that the measures were part of the implementation of Obama’s “smart power” policy.

From 2010 to 2014, out of the 130 extraterritorial actions carried out against the island, 81 were in the financial sector and 38 institutions were fined with the astronomical amount of more than US\$11.4 billion, he added. He stressed that sanctions are imposed even to US allies, like the recent US\$8.9 billion fine to the French bank BNP Paribas

The online website www.havanatimes.org published statements made by the Deputy Foreign Minister Abelardo Moreno in 2013 who introduced Cuba’s annual report on the impact of the embargo when he said “Despite Obama’s promise of a new beginning with Cuba, nothing has changed and intensified in the persecution of all who make financial transactions.” Democracy Now also reported Cuba’s Foreign Minister Bruno Rodriguez’s response to the Obama Administration’s actions:

The State Department has again included Cuba in its unilateral and arbitrary list of states that sponsor international terrorism. Its true purpose is to increase the persecution of our international financial transactions in the whole world and justify the blockade policy. Under the present administration, there has been an unprecedented tightening of extraterritorial character of the blockade, with a remarkable and unheard-of emphasis on financial transactions through the imposition of multi-million fines on banking institutions of third countries

The idea of imposing an embargo was to isolate Cuba’s diplomatic and economic

relationships with governments around the world whom many allied with the United States. Then the embargo would have direct consequences on the Cuban people allowing them to develop an animosity against their government. This would then enable them to overthrow the government because of their dire economic situation which was caused by Washington's policies in the first place. Washington's goal was to destroy the Cuban economy to produce a new government similar to Fidel Castro's predecessor, Dictator Fulgencio Batista.

This past April, The Associated Press (AP) reported that Washington plotted to destabilize the Cuban government through a 'Cuban Twitter' feed through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). USAID is an agency that was created through an executive order under President John F. Kennedy in 1961. The twitter program was called 'ZunZuneo', developed by USAID in 2010 to promote a counter-revolution against the Cuban government. This should be no surprise considering Washington's appetite for destabilizing nations in the Middle East and in Latin America. The Associated Press also reported a story titled 'US sent Latin youth undercover in anti-Cuba ploy' which describes how USAID attempted to create a revolution against the Cuban government:

Over at least two years, the U.S. Agency for International Development — best known for overseeing billions of dollars in U.S. humanitarian aid — sent nearly a dozen neophytes from Venezuela, Costa Rica and Peru to gin up opposition in Cuba

The report also described one of the Latin Americans named Fernando Murillo who was involved in the US plot as he was "deployed by a U.S. agency to work undercover in Cuba. He had little training in the dangers of clandestine operations — or how to evade one of the world's most sophisticated counter-intelligence services." According to the report, USAID re-hired a Washington-based company called Creative Associates International who was the creator of 'ZunZuneo' to form the clandestine program. It was "The same company was central to the creation of a "Cuban Twitter" — a messaging network revealed in April by the Associated Press, designed to reach hundreds of thousands of Cubans." USAID recruited "young operatives" to pose as tourists with low pay so that they themselves can possibly recruit Cuban students to turn on their government:

According to internal documents obtained by the AP and interviews in six countries, USAID's young operatives posed as tourists, visited college campuses and used a ruse that could undermine USAID's credibility in critical health work around the world: An HIV-prevention workshop one called the "perfect excuse" to recruit political activists, according to a report by Murillo's group. For all the risks, some travelers were paid as little as \$5.41 an hour

USAID split the groups for various missions:

While Murillo and the Costa Rican travelers focused on the HIV workshop and other programs, teams of Venezuelans and Peruvians were deployed to Cuba's college campuses. Their mission, documents and interviews show, was to recruit university students with the long-term goal of turning them against their government

Since the 'ZunZuneo' project failed, the Obama administration decided to extend the embargo for another year. According to the Telesur report

“In an official statement the Cuban mission to the U.N. said that the main goal of the blockade, which is in force since the early 1960s, is to cause pain and suffering of the people of Cuba, besides causing losses to the country of about US\$115 billion.”

The Costa Rican News also reported in a story titled ‘Despite Appeals Obama Extends Cuba’s Trade Embargo for Another Year’ that

“The renewal of the Act on Trading with the Enemy, which prohibits American companies to do business with the island, has a routine nature and Obama’s predecessors have also extended it annually. The law against Trading with the Enemy, which dates from 1917 and was approved in light of American entry into World War I, forbids American companies from trading with hostile countries.”

There were more than 600 failed assassination attempts according to Cuban intelligence reports on Fidel Castro, including the ‘Bay of Pigs’ Invasion orchestrated by Washington and anti-Castro groups, many of whom were the elite’s of the Batista Era. Many Cubans settled in Florida and New Jersey after Fidel Castro and his supporters overthrew Batista. Terrorists’ attacks on Cuba were frequent including the bombing of the Cubana de Aviacion airliner back in 1976 that killed 78 people by CIA-linked anti-Castro Cuban exiles such as Orlando Bosch (died in 2011 while in exile in Miami) and Posada Carriles (also still resides in Miami) with the Venezuelan secret police known as the DISIP (Bolivarian Secret Police). Cuba accused the US government for the attack. In 2005 CIA documents released indicated that the agency “had concrete advance intelligence, as early as June 1976, on plans by Cuban exile terrorist groups to bomb a Cubana airliner.” Posada Carriles who by the way is a former CIA operative stated in his book ‘Camino del Guerrero’ (Way of the Warrior) the details of the incident. So Cuba is the Hostile country?

The Costa Rican News noted how Washington had imposed harsher sanctions on Cuba since the 1990’s as a way to influence the Cuban population to revolt against the Castro government. It stated that “This was the law that was used to enforce the economic embargo against Cuba, but has been expanded and enhanced with other American laws, like Torricelli in 1992, preventing the shipment of food to Cuba with the exception of humanitarian aid or the Helms Burton in 1996.”

In 1992, when the Cuban Democracy Act which began under (R-TX) George H.W. Bush and ending up signed into law under Bill Clinton banning all food and medicine in route to Cuba allowing only for humanitarian aid. Since 1992, the United and Israel and a handful of other countries has voted not to end the blockade of Cuba. The Cuban Democracy Act or the “Torricelli Law” named after former Democratic Senator Robert Torricelli who introduced the act was passed in 1992 which prohibited U.S. companies from trading with Cuba. It also prohibited travel to Cuba by U.S. citizens and prevented family remittances to Cuba. It was described as “a bill to promote a peaceful transition to democracy in Cuba through the application of sanctions directed at the Castro government and support for the Cuban people.” By 1996, the Cuban Liberty and Democracy Solidarity Act also known as the Helms-Burton Act penalized foreign companies that conducted business transactions in Cuba were prevented from doing any form of business on U.S. territory. The European Union did not agree with the Helms-Burton act because it allowed Washington to dictate to the world who can trade with Cuba. American farmers and agricultural companies were also not in favor of

the act because it affected trade. It added pressure on Washington to ease the harsh sanctions. By October 2000, Washington had eased the embargo through the Trade Sanctions Reform and Export Enhancement Act with congressional approval which was later signed by President Bill Clinton as it allowed the sale of agricultural goods and medicine to Cuba for humanitarian purposes.

Washington Long History of Economic Embargos against Cuba

☒ Originally, the U.S. imposed an arms embargo in March 1958 due to Cuba's civil war between the Cuban Rebels led by Fidel Castro and the Batista regime. In July 1960, after the Castro government seized U.S. properties, Washington decided to reduce Cuba's sugar imports under the Sugar Act of 1948. It was the beginning of the embargo, or one can call it a new economic war on Cuba. The former Soviet Union stepped in at the time and purchased Cuban sugar as the Castro government continued to nationalize American businesses and properties. Washington's arms embargo ignited an economic war, one that followed up with more embargos that harmed Cuba's economy. 'U.S. Economic sanctions against Cuba: objectives of an imperialist policy' by Salim Lamrani author and lecturer at La Sorbonne University in Paris wrote:

The Cold War context, used for thirty years as a pretext legitimizing U.S. animosity towards Cuba, was actually a fraud since there are no facts to support this theory. If there had been any foundations to this thesis, the United States would have normalized its relations with Cuba after the collapse of the Soviet bloc. Instead of that, Washington launched a new and more serious wave of economic sanctions with the Torricelli Act in 1992 and the Helms-Burton Act in 1996. As the ancient paradigm departed this life in 1991, a new one was created. Now it is no more about containing communism but about "re-establishing democracy" in Cuba, a "democracy" devoted to the interests of Washington. No matter if it is ruled by a clone of Gerardo Machado or Fulgencio Batista: what's important is that it should make of its subordination to the United States its main virtue.

Lamrani also summarized the history of countries that were either for or against Washington's economic sanctions since the start of the Cuban Democracy Act in 1992:

Number of countries opposing the blockade Number of countries against the
end of the blockade Countries voting against the end of the blockade

1992 59 3 United States, Israel, Romania

1993 88 4 United States, Israel, Albania, Paraguay

1994 101 2 United States, Israel

1995 117 3 United States, Israel, Uzbekistan

1996 137 2 United States, Israel

1997 147 3 United States, Israel, Uzbekistan

1998 157 3 United States, Israel, Marshall Islands

1999 155 2 United States, Israel

2000 167 3 United States, Israel, Marshall Islands

2001 167 3 United States, Israel, Marshall Islands

2002 173 3 United States, Israel, Marshall Islands

2003 179 3 United States, Israel, Marshall Islands

The United States and Israel consistently voted in favor of the U.S. embargo since the Torricelli Act was passed. A handful of states who also voted in favor were either allies or governments that were bribed, blackmailed or forced to vote yes to enforce the embargo on Cuba. Washington's strategy was not just based on economics, it was also based on violent actions that included assassination attempts and US sponsored invasions that all failed. It did force Castro to take drastic security measures at home. The embargo only created an atmosphere of security concerns for Cuba after the Castro-led revolution against former Dictator Fulgencio Bastista. The US government has been actively targeting the Cuban government with a 54 year embargo. It has not changed any political outcome according to Washington's strategy. It has been a failure not only to Washington and its allies, but to the Cuban people who have been suffering through needed medicines and imports Cuba does not have. The achievements of Cuba's healthcare system and its food security have been successful under Castro despite the U.S. embargo that has banned everything except of course non-subsidized sales of food staples and medicine.

The Cuban government faces continues threats by Washington. Acts of subversion against groups are paid for by US sponsored non-government organizations (NGO's). Washington strategy has been covertly used against the Castro government. Castro did not allow Cuba to be governed democratically since Cuba was at war with the United States so he decided with the support of the majority of Cuban people not to hold elections, allow dissent or any opposition against the state of Cuba. The London-based Amnesty International reported the Cuban government's crackdown on dissent in the past although it maintains the argument that "Foreign Agents" threatens its national security. The revelations of USAID's 'ZunZuneo' program to destabilize Cuba, who can argue with the Cuban governments concerns? Other violations made by Amnesty International accuses the Cuban government of arresting dissidents, holding unfair trials and capital punishment in cases that involve armed hijackings although the Cuban government had placed a moratorium on the death penalty back in 2001. It is fair to say that Amnesty International report on Cuba's human rights issues may be true in some cases, it's is important to note that the U.S. embargo made only matters worse for the Cuban government as Washington's attempt to topple its government continued under numerous threats of invasions, bombings and economic sabotage. Amnesty International's report concerning Cuba's human rights record admitted that "The economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed by the United States against Cuba has served as an ongoing justification for Cuban state repression and has contributed to a climate in which human rights violations occur." An important element Amnesty international did not include on their report concerning Cuba's human rights is the fact that the United States government has been working relentlessly to destabilize Cuba since the 1959 revolution. The US and Human Rights Watch among others has criticized Cuba's human rights record. It is important to understand that Cubans do enjoy their rights many Americans in the U.S. don't have and that is the right to food security, housing, medical care, and education. The media remains under state control and general elections are only held for municipal, provincial and national candidates. Saul Landau, a fellow at the Institute for Policy Studies wrote an article called 'Cuba: Human Rights Again?' and said:

Washington's real issue relates to Cuban disobedience of its policies — not human rights. In fact, Cubans enjoy substantive rights American citizens don't: food, housing, medical care, and education. Cuba falls short on procedural rights regarding press and political parties

If Washington really cared about human rights as in the case of Saudi Arabia (who won't even allow women to apply for driver's licenses) and other Gulf States would have been sanctioned long ago.

Interestingly, Raul Castro and his administration are starting to change direction economically where it is looking to develop a new form of economy at a subtle pace. Lifting an inhumane trade embargo would allow Cuba to open for business and opportunity for the people. Would they open for business worldwide including the West? Yes. Castro's brand of Communism was the unintended consequence of US foreign policy that has tried to destabilize the Castro government by an economic blockade. Cuba can establish a new economic model that respects human dignity. US economic control over the Caribbean continues to weaken as its own economy continues to decline. Puerto Rico has been under Washington's Democratic and economic policies since the Spanish-American war (known as the Spanish-Cuban-American War in Cuba). Recently, the Padilla government announced that they would consider legalizing marijuana and prostitution. I could understand creating a marijuana industry especial for its health benefits, but legalizing prostitution for more tax revenue will literally turn the Puerto Rican government into "tax pimps". Ironically speaking, that is funny. But that was what Castro was concerned about, a fascist-capitalist model under Fulgencio Batista and his mafia friends with Washington's approval exploit the Cuban people. Reuters reported in 2001 on specific comments Castro made concerning prostitution in Cuba:

Once known as "the brothel of the Caribbean" due to its reputation as a haven for rich Americans looking for sex, gambling and a swinging nightlife, Cuba drastically cleaned up society after Castro's 1959 revolution. But the problem came back at the start of the 1990s against a backdrop of increased economic hardship for locals, and an opening to tourism which brought foreigners flooding back.

"The situation was very tough," Castro said, in what was only his second reference to prostitution in public following a January 1998, speech where he declared war on various growing vices, including prostitution, drugs and violent crime. "Some people were coming here with ideas of sexual tourism ... There were cases of what we call 'jineterismo'," he said, using a Cuban slang word for street-hustling and prostitution. "Perfecting our methods" "We began taking adequate measures to combat these outbreaks. And we are still perfecting our methods ... We understand this problem, and our methods are human," Castro added, saying "advances" were expected.

Castro gave no figures this time, whereas he had laced his 1998 speech with statistics like the fact that more than 6,700 prostitutes and around 190 pimps were rounded up in Havana in the first 11 months of that year

Ending the embargo is the only solution to Cuba's economic woes. Change must come from within, not outside forces. The twitter incident of 'ZunZuneo' only reinforces the belief that the United States is still trying to undermine the Cuban government. Change comes from within. It has to be dynamic in a sense. A foreign country imposing change with their form of democracy only leads to resentment and anger. Cuba's political outcome was predictable.

Cuba will find its own way. Cuba's history and culture is dynamic and that will never change no matter what Washington tries to do. Cuba is a sovereign nation, not a colony as several of its neighbors throughout the Caribbean including Puerto Rico. Washington's endless crusade to overthrow the Castro government will not change anytime soon. So in a sense, Cuba is still stuck between a rock and a hard place. US-Cuba relations will not change either at least until the embargo has ended, until then; expect more political tension in the years to come.

Fidel Castro is a legend and history will "absolve" him, no question about that. He will live in the Cuban people's hearts and minds as a revolutionary leader who defied an empire over his nation's sovereignty. In fact, his legacy will endure all over the world. But times are changing, and so is the Cuban government. The Cuban government and its people are clearly moving in a different direction economically; especially after President Raul Castro economic reforms according to the Associated Press "About 455,000 islanders are currently running or working for private small businesses as a result of the reforms, and about 450 new non-agricultural cooperatives are operating autonomously." Cuba wants its sovereignty respected as any other nation. They also understand that the world's economy will experience a pivot into a different direction. What path Cuba would have chosen? What if Washington had not imposed economic sanctions on Cuba? What type of society would Cuba have become? It would have been sure interesting. But we would never know. What we do know is that Washington's relentless crusade against Cuban Independence had prevented any progress of Cuba's political situation. Fidel Castro saw what Washington and the Fascist Dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista and his Mob friends did to the Cuban people. He grew up to despise the elite. How could the Cuban government liberalize its political process under an aggressive foreign power that would love turn the country into a US corporate dominated -gambling casino filled with drugs (perhaps freshly imported heroin from Afghanistan, courtesy of the US military as Geraldo Rivera of Fox news reported) and prostitutes? That was where Cuba was headed to. Fidel and Raul Castro share a concern that was and still is legitimate. Cuba wants to sustain itself for its future generations. The US and Israel are the main forces that are preventing any political progress that affects the Cuban people. Salim Lamrani sums up what Washington's intentions are, and that is to take control of Cuba. He wrote:

The roots of the blockade date back not to 1959 but to the beginning of the 19th century since U.S. imperialists have always wanted to take hold of Cuba. In 1902, a U.S. bookstore distributed a map of Cuba under the title: "Our New Colony: Cuba" . The United States will do whatever is in its power to go back to that pre-revolutionary situation, to make Cuba become another Puerto Rico, Haiti or Dominican Republic, places in which the wealth of a minority stands out in sharp contrast with the poverty of the majority and where U.S. multinationals make staggering profits. It will also unflaggingly cling to the same voluble and outdated arguments that its representatives keep on repeating

The only country in the Caribbean that is not under Washington's dictate is Cuba. Cuba will continue to resist the empire despite the U.S. embargo. Even the affluent Cuban-American Community in Florida has been increasingly calling for an end to the blockade, because it has not produced any positive results. This past June, A Florida International University Poll found that "Seventy-one percent said the embargo is not working at all or not very well." With a 54 year embargo and the aggressive empire to its north, the Cuban economy will continue to feel the consequences imposed by Washington's ruthless behavior. Cuba may

be independent and not under Washington's thumb, but it is been held hostage, 54 years and counting.

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