

Should Obama lift the Cuban embargo?

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Barack Obama is said to be mulling an end to all sanctions against Communist Cubans. In an executive order, he has quietly already lifted many travel restrictions.

“Obama took a big step towards relaxing sanctions on Cuba,” report Edward Luce and Daniel Dombey in the British magazine *Financial Times*, “lifting all travel and remittance restrictions on Cuban-Americans and permitting U.S. telecommunications companies to offer services directly to the island.”

The end of the restrictions, which Obama had promised during his presidential campaign, means Cuban-Americans will be able to travel to the island state when they like, as opposed to once a year, and send as much money as they want to relatives, as opposed to \$75 a month.

Obama also said he would permit Cuban-Americans to pay for U.S.-provided telecommunication services to relatives living in Cuba. And more is planned.

“Clearly, the Obama administration is re-examining U.S. policy towards Cuba,” said Peter DeSchavo, analyst at the Centre for Strategic International Studies.

It will be a mistake to end the trade embargo, says Cuba expert John J. Suarez.

“There is a tragic sham that harms Americans, but it is not the trade embargo on Communist Cuba. Rather, it is the cliché that ‘to pull down barriers,’ by ending trade sanctions on a ruthless Communist dictatorship and provide it with subsidies would bring political reforms.”

It simply doesn't work, says Suarez

“The sham seen today in China is proof that such a policy would also be a disaster in Cuba, and only serve multinational interests and Cuba's Communist regime. America normalized relations with Beijing in 1979. The belief then was that normal relations would lead to more human rights and a peaceful transition to democracy.

“The opposite has been the case.”

On the other hand, the evil Soviet empire was brought down by economic means.

“In the Soviet Union,” notes Suarez, “confrontation and economic isolation led to a relatively peaceful implosion of the regime.

“In China, the policy of trade and political engagement has led to a thriving economic system under Communist control, and modernization and expansion of the military and state security apparatus.”

So, we should not repeat the Chinese mistake in Cuba, says Suarez. He is the coordinator of the Free Cuba Foundation based at Florida International University in Miami.

“In Cuba today, political opposition is growing, and human-rights abuses although systematic and pervasive have in practice declined in numbers. This is not due to the good will of Fidel Castro's regime, but a lack of resources.

“The 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre revealed the failure of engagement. Still, economic engagement was not suspended but intensified afterward.

“Amnesty International said in 2001 that, ‘thousands of people in China were arbitrarily detained for peacefully exercising their rights to freedom of expression, association or religion. Torture and ill treatment of prisoners continued to be widespread. The limited and incomplete records available showed that at least 1,511 people were sentenced to death and 1,000 executed; the true figures were believed to be far higher.’”

In fact, Chinese pro-democracy leader Wei Jingsheng describes the result of current U.S. policy in China: “There is active cooperation with the Chinese oppressors, extending aid to the tune of tens of millions of dollars; on the other hand, assistance to the democracy movement in China is very limited. It does seem to be fashionable now to assist the henchmen who are engaged in butchering the people.”

U.S. Rep. Ron Paul, R-Texas, describes how American taxpayers subsidize China’s dictatorship: “China receives the largest amount of money from the Export-Import Bank. There is \$5.9 billion that has been granted to the Chinese.”

According to Paul, China has used export-import funds to build nuclear power plants, expand its airline and build steel factories.

U.S. taxpayer money is being used to modernize the Chinese military and its apparatus of repression.

“Castro is broke,” writes Suarez. “Subsidized trade is what the majority of the anti-embargo lobby is after. Chinese human rights activist Harry Wu announced his support for the Cuban embargo Dec. 10,2002 at Florida International University, while denouncing the lack of such a policy toward China.”

According to Wu, the majority of the profits have been funneled directly to “dying Communist institutions,” thus prolonging the agony suffered by the Chinese public..

“Increasing trade with China has not and will not improve human rights,” says Suarez. “Cuba is no different.”

Furthermore, notes Humberto Fontova in *FrontPage* magazine, “The U.S. has appeased Fidel Castro for decades.”

What has been the reward?

“Recently, reports have surfaced indicating that the Obama administration plans to revive efforts to further ease the ban on travel to the Communist dictatorship of Cuba.

“This is in keeping with the conventional leftist wisdom on Cuba, which holds that engagement is key to softening the attitude of the country’s despot, Fidel Castro.”

That same courtesy was not extended to Cuban dictator Fulgencio Batista seven year, who Castro overthrew in 1959. Batista had, in fact, been punished by a U.S. arms embargo and had heavy diplomatic pressure placed on him for a year to resign. Batista was subsequently denied exile in the U.S. and was forbidden to set foot in the country.

But, notes Fontova, “During Castro’s first 16 months in power, the U.S. State Department made over ten back-channel diplomatic attempts to ascertain the cause of Castro’s tantrums and further ‘engage’ him. Argentine President Arturo Frondizi was the conduit for many of these trials and recounts their utter futility in his memoirs.

“In July 1960, Castro’s KGB-trained security forces stormed into 5,911 U.S.-owned businesses in Cuba and appropriated them at Soviet gunpoint – \$2 billion were heisted from outraged U.S. businessmen and stockholders.

“Of course, not all Americans surrendered their legal and hard-earned property peacefully. Among those who resisted was farmer Bobby Fuller and Howard Anderson, whose profitable

Jeep dealership was coveted by Castro's henchmen. Both U.S. citizens were murdered by Castro and Che Guevara's firing squads.

"In July 1961, John F. Kennedy's special counsel, Richard Goodwin, met with Che in Uruguay and reported back to Kennedy:

"Che says that Cuba wants an understanding with the U.S., the Cubans have no intention of making an alliance with the Soviets. So we should make it clear to Castro that we want to help Cuba.

"The result? Soviet nuclear missiles, locked and loaded in Cuba a year later – pointed at Goodwin and Kennedy's very homes.

"In 1975, President Gerald Ford allowed foreign branches and subsidiaries of U.S. companies to trade freely with Cuba and persuaded the Organization of American States to lift its sanctions.

"Castro's response was to start his African invasion and try to assassinate Ford. On March 19 of that year, the *Los Angeles Times* ran the headline 'Cuban Link to Death Plot Probed.' Both Republican candidates of the day, President Ford and Ronald Reagan, were to be taken out during the Republican National Convention. The Emiliano Zapata Unit, a Bay Area radical group linked to the Weather Underground, would make the hits.

"Jimmy Carter, in a goodwill gesture, lifted U.S. travel sanctions against Cuba and was poised to open full diplomatic relations with Castro," writes Fontova.

"This was met with thousands of Cuban troops spreading Soviet terror and poison gas in Africa as well as more internal repression. Hundreds of psychopaths, killers and perverts were shoved onto the Mariel Boatlift and sent to Miami."

In the Mariel Boatlift, Castro emptied his prisons and asylums by sending his nation's criminals and psychopaths to the United States.

"Ronald Reagan," notes Fontova, "sent Alexander Haig to meet personally in Mexico City with Cuba's Vice President Carlos Raphael Rodriguez. Then he sent diplomatic whiz General Vernon Walters to Havana for a meeting with Castro himself.

"This was followed by Cubans practically taking over Grenada, El Salvador and Nicaragua. And how could we forget President Clinton's attempt at playing nice during the 90s?

"During his tenure, three U.S. citizens and one resident fled humanitarian flights over the Florida Straits and were murdered in cold blood by Castro MIGS. In addition, Castro agent Ana Belen Montes slithered her way to head of the U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency's Cuba division, resulting in the deepest and most damaging penetration of the U.S. Defense Department by an enemy agent in modern history.

"Now it looks like we're back to square one," comments Fontova.

"One might suggest that our longstanding trade embargo against would have taught Cuba a lesson. But according to figures from the U.S. Department of Commerce, the U.S. transacted \$710 million worth of business with Cuba in 2008, and has transacted more than \$2 billion worth of business with Cuba in the last decade.

"Currently, the U.S. is Cuba's biggest food supplier and fifth biggest import partner. Furthermore, the U.S. has been Cuba's biggest donor of humanitarian aid, including medicine and medical supplies for decades.

"All this together with the almost \$2 billion a year in remittances sent from the U.S. ranks our nation right between Red China, which did \$1.5 billion in business with Castro last year, and Hugo Chavez's Venezuela.

"Not likely to force the Cuban dictator to see it our way any time soon," writes Fontova, "but such is the example of history."

“Cuban dissidents don’t want sanctions lifted,” writes Cuba expert Jackson Diehl. “Those who argue that Western democracies should lift sanctions on Cuba often claim that even the island’s dissidents favor the move.”

So, writes Kiehl, it was interesting to see a statement issued recently by 10 of 11 political prisoners who had been deported to Spain by the Cuban government. The dissidents said the Cuban government has not taken needed steps toward bringing true democracy to the country.

“Our departure for Spain,” their statement added, “must not be considered a goodwill gesture but a desperate action on the regime’s part in its urgent request for credits of every type.”

“That declaration took some courage on the Cubans’ part,” notes Diehl, “since their host, the left-wing Spanish government of Jose Luis Zapatero, is the leading advocate of a relaxation of E.U. sanctions.”

After meeting with Raul Castro in Havana, Spanish Foreign Minister Miguel Angel Moratinos had proclaimed “a new phase in Cuba” and insisted there was no need to continue the embargo.”

The ex-prisoners disagreed. They reminded their hosts in Spain that better relations have to be linked to steps toward democratization, and not the mere deportation of political prisoners.

They advised that the best hope for a free Cuba isn’t to court the tyrant who doesn’t want change, but to encourage those on the island who do.