

# Obama and Cuba: The End of an Illusion

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## Contents

- [McCaffrey's Signal](#)
- [Obama Pushes Back](#)
- ["We Send Doctors, Not Soldiers"](#)
- [From Trinidad to Turtle Bay](#)
- [Obama Advances Bipartisan US](#)
- [Colombia](#)
- [Endgame](#)

*"The times we live in reflect that in Latin America and the Caribbean the confrontation between historic forces is getting worse."* — Raul Castro [[1](#)]

On February 23, 2010, incarcerated Cuban Orlando Zapata Tamayo [[2](#)] died after a prolonged hunger strike, despite the efforts of Cuban medical personnel to treat him and prevent the ending of his life. Over the past several years Zapata Tamayo identified himself with Cuban opponents of the Revolution who are directed and sustained by Washington. His political "awakening" followed a career in petty crimes such as burglary and fraud that escalated into more serious offenses of assault landing him several separate stints in prison.

Zapata Tamayo's death quickly became the pretext for an orchestrated and deeply cynical campaign by the US government and its European imperialist allies — echoed in the big-business media — to slander Cuba around human rights, torture, and political prisoners.

On Capitol Hill, calls have increased to halt the supposed efforts by the Obama Administration to "improve" relations with the sovereign Cuban state and to instead step up open political hostility and action. Proposed Congressional legislation to end travel restrictions to Cuba for US citizens, never very warm in the first place, is likely to go into deep freeze. On March 11, 2009, the European Union Parliament strongly [[3](#)] condemned Cuba over the death of Zapata Tamayo by a vote of 509 to 30 with 14 abstentions. The EU resolution further mandates its "High Representative" and "Commissioner" to "immediately to begin a structured dialogue with Cuban civil society and with those who support a peaceful transition in Cuba," that is, to openly establish political collaboration with would-be clients (many of whom already are on Washington's payroll) who aim to overturn — "peacefully" of course — the Cuban Revolution and sovereign government. (The Cuban government has begun a vigorous counter-campaign. The March 1, 2010 online edition of *Granma International* corrects the factual distortions and false assertions on "political prisoner" Zapata Tamayo's life and death in the article "For Whom Is Death a Useful Tool?" [[4](#)] by Enrique Ubieta Gomez. See also the March 3, 2010 speech by Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodriguez [[5](#)] at the United Nations Human Rights Council.)

Of course, the crocodile tears shed by imperialist governments, institutions, and media over the death of Zapata Tamayo stands in great contrast to the relative silence and lack of action over the numerous (no one knows exactly how many) detainees — often picked up arbitrarily and not charged, let alone tried, for anything — who have been tortured and beaten to death in the

“democratic” custody of US, British, Canadian, and other secret European “facilities” in the so-called “war on terror.”

The US government openly spends dozens of millions of dollars in direct financial and other material “aid” to its Cuban clients and agents inside Cuba. Obviously this is a violation of Cuban law. The Cuban government — as the sovereign product of the Cuban Revolution — is under no legal or moral obligation to tolerate such activity from the conduits of a foreign power currently committed to its destruction. In fact it would be the height of naïve irresponsibility to not act rigorously and firmly against such mercenary subversion. Accordingly, there are several dozen individuals in Cuban jails, all of whom have been convicted in Cuban courts with all their legal rights protected, including right to legal council and defense. It should be added that the convictions were based on incontrovertible evidence of acts of receiving material and financial aid and direction, that is, of being mercenary clients and agents, of US government agencies, not “conspiracy” charges, which are the gambit used by US prosecutors when they lack evidence of actual deeds, as in the case of the Cuban Five. (For more information on the case of the Cuban Five, in US prisons for over 11 years, framed up and convicted on trumped-up “conspiracy” charges, for their heroic activities infiltrating Miami-based Cuban-American organizations involved in terrorist acts against Cuba, and the international campaign to free them [\[6\]](#).)

Of course, the death of Zapata Tamayo is not a cause for any happiness or satisfaction for any Cuban revolutionary or defender of the Cuban Revolution. It is particularly a cause for regret and frustration because it is an inevitable byproduct of US policy. The normalization of US-Cuban relations would bring with it the definitive end to the current US policy of “regime change by any means possible.” When that happens, opponents of the Revolution like Zapata Tamayo can present and attempt to win support for their views in a legal framework and not as agents of an aggressive foreign power.

In any case Cuban President Raul Castro has repeatedly offered to exchange all the imprisoned agents and clients of Washington in exchange for the Cuba Five.

As I will demonstrate in this essay, many months before Zapata Tamayo’s death, it had already become clearer that the Obama Administration had no hidden desire for normalizing US relations with Cuba or fundamentally alleviating, let alone ending, Washington’s economic and political war against the revolutionary socialist island. In fact the Obama-Hillary Clinton team is — after some peripheral adjustments in the opening months of the new administration — continuing the firmly bipartisan, half-century-long policy of overturning the sovereign Cuban government. This policy, set in place shortly after the triumph of the 1959 Cuban Revolution, remains the longest unchanged foreign policy position of the US government in the history of US diplomacy.

The assertion that a fundamental change in US Cuba policy was in the works with the new Obama Administration was made by many conservatives and ultra-rightists, some of whom fantasized in horror that Obama was a secret supporter of the Cuban Revolution. The illusion, from the other end of the bourgeois political spectrum, was shared as well by many liberals and leftists who fantasized in wishful thinking that Obama planned to end US sanctions and hostility. Among the former, it is still seen as useful to present Obama as a barely closeted commie. Among the latter, on this and virtually every other central domestic and foreign policy orientation of the current administration, a sobering-up, at varying pace and degree, is taking place.

## **McCaffrey's Signal**

On December 22, 2009, retired four-star General Barry McCaffrey [7] wrote a letter to Wayne Smith, a prominent voice in US academic, think-tank, and diplomatic circles who advocates an end to the US embargo of Cuba and the normalization of US-Cuba relations. In the letter, McCaffrey withdrew from a scheduled January 2010 delegation of fellow dignitaries to Cuba Smith was organizing. McCaffrey cited comments by Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodriguez sharply denouncing the behavior of President Barack Obama following the fiasco of the December 2009 Copenhagen Climate Summit as the ostensible reason for his withdrawal from the trip.

McCaffrey had visited Cuba before, met top Cuban leaders including Fidel and Raul Castro, and declared publicly and before a US Congressional panel that Cuba represented no “military threat” to US “national security.” His Congressional testimony brought him harsh criticism from elected Cuban-American officials who defend the heirs and interests of Cuba’s former ruling classes that were ousted in the 1959 Revolution and other policymakers who oppose any “liberalization” of anti-Cuba US policy. McCaffrey had long spoken out formally, and with some force, against the longstanding US policies of overt “regime change,” employing trade and travel sanctions, political hostility, and military intimidation. McCaffrey aligned himself with a significant, growing minority in US ruling circles who have argued for “engagement” as the best way to advance the goal of ending, once and for all, the Cuban Revolution and its political resonance and influence worldwide and, in particular, across the Americas.

McCaffrey is no mushy, naïve bourgeois politician. He has a “distinguished” military career defending the interests of US imperialism in combat action, from the 1965 US invasion of the Dominican Republic to multi-medaled “service” spanning Vietnam and the first Gulf War. In that latter war, McCaffrey’s command oversaw one of the most despicable examples of war crimes in recent decades, when US forces bombed and shot to death many thousands of unarmed, fleeing Iraqi troops — abandoned by their officers following the military rout by US forces — who had shed their uniforms and were attempting to return to Iraq from Kuwait, along what became known as the “highways of death.” The defenseless, forcibly conscripted former soldiers were massacred and buried in mass graves after the slaughter. Among the soldiers participating was the future Oklahoma City bomber Timothy McVeigh, who no doubt picked up a few pointers on the morality of the merciless targeting of unarmed innocents.

McCaffrey has a direct, intimate connection with US policy in Latin America, going back to the aforementioned invasion of the Dominican Republic. The liberal Democratic Lyndon Johnson Administration dispatched over 40,000 Marines and 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne troops to that impoverished island to abort an increasingly powerful popular uprising that threatened to overturn the military dictatorship that had seized power overthrowing the elected, constitutional government of Juan Bosch. At least 2,000 Dominican civilians were killed in the US invasion, which aimed at averting what Johnson called a “second Cuba.” Under President William Clinton from 1994 to 96 McCaffrey was Commander-in-Chief for Southern Command of the US Armed Forces with the charge of coordinating “national security operations” in Latin America. Next, still under Clinton, he became the so-called “Drug Czar.” Of course, the pretext of combating drug trafficking has become finely tuned over the decades as an increasingly central rationalization for US intervention in the Americas and political campaigns against governments in conflict with Washington. This has been further deepened under the Obama Administration as it has moved in 2009 to implement the Bush Administration plan to greatly expand direct US military presence on the ground in Colombia with seven military bases there and to reactivate the Fourth Naval Fleet off the waters of Latin America, six decades after being disbanded. Both moves were rationalized in terms of the “war on drugs.”

By itself, McCaffrey's announcement may seem to have limited significance. But McCaffrey is a savvy bourgeois political operative who never functions as a lone wolf. He is a disciplined figure who can read the tealeaves. So his action should be understood in its proper context, which is the downward trajectory of US policy toward Cuba under President Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton as 2009 unfolded and ended, following a period of false expectations and widespread illusions that a change was coming. More precisely, after the initial months of his administration, which found the Obama team on the defensive and isolated, Washington has subsequently pushed back and scored a certain degree of progress in asserting its positions and strengthening its allies in Latin America, while tamping down expectations of significant change in US policies towards Cuba.

The successful — for Washington — outcome of the June 2009 coup in Honduras gave impetus to the US pushback. After its isolation at the San Pedro Sula Summit of the OAS, Washington took advantage of the coup in Honduras to step up its fight to regain political leverage under the Obama Administration. The White House and State Department formally opposed the coup even as political operatives close to the Administration worked on behalf of the coup makers. Once the US government became a central player in diplomatic maneuvers and intrigue after the June 28 coup, it was guaranteed that any process that unfolded would be skewed in the most demobilizing, conservative manner possible. All of this culminated in the farcical signed agreement on October 30, 2009 which was presented as facilitating the return of ousted President Manuel Zelaya to his presidential post but which actually did no such thing. With the signed document in hand, the “de facto” Honduran regime brusquely shunted Zelaya aside, and Washington announced that it would support the outcome of the November 29, 2009 elections held under the auspices of the coup regime and significant repression and closing of democratic political space.

## **Obama Pushes Back**

In the period immediately preceding and following the time when General McCaffrey canceled his trip to Cuba, a sequence of events unfolded which underlined this shift:

- On November 19, 2009 Obama chose, in a clear provocation, to publicly correspond with Yoani Sanchez, the so-called “dissident blogger,” the latest wholly manufactured, financed, and highly promoted darling and tool of both liberal and conservative anti-Cuba forces in US bourgeois media, academic, and political circles. This was done as an answer to the repeated invitations of Cuban president Raul Castro for direct dialogue between the United States and Cuban governments where every question and political difference would be, as put by Raul Castro, “on the table.”
- On November 30, 2009 a document was issued accusing the Cuban government of persecuting an Afro-Cuban doctor and, in general, practicing institutionalized racism. The initiative was under the direction of Carlos Moore, a notorious Afro-Cuban counter-revolutionary activist who presents himself as a fighter against “racism” in Cuba. Moore has a long history of working with US-based counter-revolutionaries who are creatures of US government and intelligence agencies. The document, “Acting on Our Conscience: A Declaration of African-American Support for the Civil Rights Struggle in Cuba,” was signed by a number of prominent “progressive” African-American academics and figures such as Prof. Cornell West, Rev. Jeremiah Wright, Ruby Dee Davis, Prof. Ron Walters, and Prof. James Turner. In response to this slanderous “Declaration,” defenders of revolutionary Cuba’s exemplary role in fighting racism inside Cuba as well as its amazing record in combating colonialism, imperialism, and apartheid in Africa went into action (see the counter-petitions “In Solidarity with the Real Anti-Racist Movement in Cuba” [8] and “Declaration of African American Activists, Intellectuals and Artists in Continued Solidarity with the Cuban Revolution” [9] and the article, “Latest Attack on Cuba Falsifies History of Fight Against Racism in Cuba” [10]).

- Washington-Havana talks on legal rules and procedures governing immigration, which had been scheduled for December 2009 following their unilateral termination by the Bush Administration in 2003, were pushed back by the Obama Administration after an initial meeting in July 2009. (The talks resumed on February 19, 2010.) Since then, Washington has stonewalled Cuba's offer to expand bilateral negotiations to reach accords on the issues of combating drug trafficking and terrorism as well as collaboration and cooperation towards hurricane preparedness and relief.

- On December 5, 2009, Havana police arrested one Alan Gross, formally an employee of an outfit calling itself Development Alternatives, Inc. (DAI). Gross is being held in a Cuban prison accused of spying. DAI is a major for-profit mercenary business employing 350 full-time staff in its central office in Washington, DC suburbs and operating in over 60 countries. That is in line with the contemporary US policy of utilizing so-called "subcontractors," operating as "private" for-profit corporations, as proxies for promoting and implementing US government policy (DAI's website calls the US State Department's Agency for International Development its "principal client"). This policy of manufacturing "front" organizations with elaborate business structures is nothing new for US and other imperialist intelligence services. However, this "privatization" of US intelligence and operational tasks has become more rampant and brazenly open. (There are tens of thousands of employees of such "contractors" working for US military and intelligence agencies in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and other fronts in the so-called "war on terror.") It has the advantage of establishing degrees of separation — what spook jargon calls "plausible deniability" — from the US government source of political direction and financing, although few in the world are taken in by the elaborate charade. Perhaps most important for the individuals heading up these myriad fronts — most of whom are themselves graduates from direct government "service" in military, intelligence, or other such fields — is the lucrative material rewards involved, as these relationships are a "legal" cash cow. Gross and DAI were nabbed handing out highly sophisticated satellite cell phones and computer equipment as part of open US policies to finance individuals and groups that will work hand-in-hand with Washington to subvert and eventually destroy the Cuban Revolution under the guise, of course, of innocently promoting "democracy" and "human rights." The 2008 Federal US budget openly allocated \$45 million for this purpose. (These are separate from covert funding operations.) In that budget DAI received nearly 10% of the mercenary money. In the past, much of these funds were handed to rightist Cuban-American outfits based in Florida, who tended to just pocket the money for personal use. The botched DAI operation seems to indicate that the Obama Administration was moving towards new methods to get money and equipment directly to their mercenary clients inside Cuba, without the gusano middlemen and their sticky fingers. So far the Obama Administration has issued perfunctory statements of "concern." The above-mentioned Wayne Smith, who was the chief of the US Interests Section in Havana when it was established under the Carter Administration in the late 1970s, told the Miami Herald that if Gross distributed satellite phones and other high-tech equipment, it will be hard for Washington to argue his case. "If he was caught with simply a cell phone, even if he didn't have proper documents, they would have just expelled him. . . . I'm struck by the fact that the United States has not raised hell over this. If I were down there handling the case, and the guy hadn't done much, I'd be making noise. Maybe he was up to something he shouldn't have been up to."

- Following the Christmas Day 2009 attempted terrorist attack on a Northwest Airlines plane headed to Detroit, the US from Amsterdam, the Netherlands, Washington made all citizens of Cuba, along with a number of other countries, subject to enhanced searches and harassment at US Customs checkpoints on the basis of Cuba being on the US State Department list of states that "sponsor" and "support" terrorism. The degree of hypocrisy and mendacity involved here is breathtaking. Thousands of Cuban citizens have died in terrorist attacks launched from US soil against Cuba since the 1959 triumph of the Cuban Revolution. These attacks have either been directly organized and promoted by US government agencies or winked at and tolerated by US authorities over the years.

Perhaps the most notorious incident in a long and sordid history was the October 6, 1976 terrorist destruction of a Cubana Airlines craft and the murder of all 73 passengers aboard, which included the 24 members of Cuba's juvenile national fencing team, which had just won all the gold medals at Central American and Caribbean athletic games. The two organizers of that crime, Orlando Bosch and Luis Posadas Carriles — both former operatives of the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) — are currently living freely in the United States. There is not an iota of factual evidence tying Cuba to any act of terrorism in the United States or anywhere else. The fact that the Obama Administration has refused to remove Cuba from this list is a clear indication of its continuation of the essential core of US anti-Cuba policy.

- In the "Annual Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community" testimony before the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, given on February 2, 2010, US "Director of National Intelligence" Dennis Blair stated, "Cuba has demonstrated few signs of wanting a closer relationship with the United States. Without subsidized Venezuela oil shipments of about 100,000 barrels per day, the severe economic situation would be even worse. President Raul Castro fears that rapid or significant economic change would undermine regime control and weaken the revolution, and his government shows no signs of easing his repression of political dissidents." Translated from sophistry into English, Blair is lamenting the fact that the Cuban government has refused to surrender to Washington's demands and do US imperialism the favor of liquidating the Revolution itself in exchange for all the charms and benefits of US domination.

### **"We Send Doctors, Not Soldiers"**

It should be noted that the social catastrophe in Haiti has complicated Obama's anti-Cuba pushback in the hemisphere. Inside the United States, there has been a near-total blackout of Cuba's medical solidarity with Haiti — a truly inspiring history — where the Cuban medical personnel and brigades, who were already on the ground before the earthquake providing, free of charge, much of the medical care existing in Haiti, were the first responders in the disaster. The Cuban teams, reinforced with doctors from Cuba, as well as Haitians and others from the hemisphere trained in Cuba, set up the first open-tent clinics and operating facilities, which have already served tens of thousands. This is widely known and acknowledged in the Caribbean, Latin America, and worldwide. Cuba, by far, has the most, and the most effective, personnel and programs actually providing medical aid to the Haitian people. As Fidel Castro wrote, "We send doctors, not soldiers." [\[11\]](#)

The Obama Administration, on the other hand, has rapidly poured in troops and essentially seized the Haitian Airport at Port au Prince, while slowly getting medical equipment, supplies, and food, not to speak of on-the-ground functioning medical facilities, to the people. In the initial days and weeks, US and other Western resources went primarily to rescue UN personnel, foreign diplomats, and Western tourists and citizens, criminally failing to provide minimal assistance to devastated working-class Haitian neighborhoods. US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton was forced on the defensive as outrage mounted internationally over the heavy-handed US military role which prioritizes the landing of troops at the airport and seaports while forcing some aid shipments to travel overland via the Dominican Republic. According to the Associated Press [\[12\]](#), for every dollar in US "aid," 40 cents goes to the US military while 10.5 cents is for food, 10.5 cents is to transport the food, 1.6 cents to pay Haitians working on recovery, 1 cent goes to the Haitian government, and ½ cent to the government of the Dominican Republic. We should all be very grateful, however, that the Western imperialist hyenas, who have looted Haiti for centuries, and, with Washington in the lead, imposed the blood-soaked tyranny of the Duvalier family protecting a system where 1% of the Haitian population controls 50% of its wealth, has magnanimously agreed to cancel \$290 million of Haiti's \$890 million international debt!



(Towards the end of February 2010, the US government announced the withdrawal of those doctors under its direction, the closing of its last field hospital inside Haiti, and the departure of the highly publicized US Navy Medical Ship Comfort from its Haitian dock. Of course the medical needs of the earthquake survivors are multiplying rapidly as the legions of homeless living in “tent communities” in horrid conditions including massive rain are facing diarrhea, malaria, and all the disease produced by such conditions on top of constant undernourishment and hunger. In addition it is estimated that up to 30 percent of those who received emergency surgery in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake will need follow-up operations. While Washington withdraws its minimal direct medical assistance the Cuban medical mission in Haiti is expanding.)

### **From Trinidad to Turtle Bay**

The first months of the Obama Administration found Washington playing defense on the “Cuba Question” at a series of hemispheric meetings under the auspices of the Organization of American States (OAS), a body traditionally dominated by the US government. Obama came face to face with the political ground lost by Washington in the Bush years that needed to be made up under his Administration.

In two successive OAS Summits held in April 2009 in Trinidad and June 2009 in Honduras, the Obama Administration was embarrassingly isolated. Washington came under remarkably open pressure over its anti-Cuba policy, which formally united every other government in the OAS, and dominated the agenda, much to Obama and Clinton’s chagrin. Nevertheless at the June Summit, hosted by the soon-to-be-ousted Honduran President Zelaya, the Obama-Clinton diplomatic team was able to prevent a formal vote openly condemning US policy although it was forced to retreat and acquiesce to the abrogation of the 1962 OAS resolution expelling Cuba (see my articles “Trapped in Trinidad” [[13](#)] and “Slipping and Sliding in San Pedro Sula” [[14](#)]).

Washington’s isolation and near-humiliation over Cuba at the OAS Summits was squared a few months later on October 28, 2009 when, for the 18<sup>th</sup> consecutive year, and with the most lopsided vote yet (187 for the Cuban resolution and 3 siding with Washington with 2 abstentions), the UN General Assembly voted on, as the resolution put it, the “necessity of ending the economic, commercial, and financial embargo imposed by the United States of America against Cuba.” Washington was only able to get 2 other votes this year — Israel and Palau, while losing El Salvador, Iraq, and Afghanistan from the 2008 vote. It is surely a delicious irony — and a powerful symbol of how utterly isolated US anti-Cuba policy is (and how embarrassing for Washington’s diplomacy and political authority) that even the US-created, sustained, and dependent governments of Afghanistan and Iraq felt compelled to vote for Cuba!

Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodriguez’s UN presentation [[15](#)] was a factual, devastating indictment of the grotesque reality of US sanctions, which extend to life-saving medicines and technologies that are even partially manufactured or developed in the United States:

*“Alexis García Iribar was born in Cuba, in the province of Guantánamo. He suffered from a congenital cardiopathy known as persistent arterial duct. At the age of 6 and after successive deferrals and hemodynamic complications, he had to be submitted to an open-heart surgery on March 9, 2009, because the government of the United States prevents the US companies NUMED, AGA and Boston Scientific from selling to Cuba the ‘amplatzer’ and ‘embolization coil’ devices required to perform a catheterization that will spare children from this type of surgery. I could mention another 12 cases of children between the ages of 5 months and 13 years who have had to undergo a similar procedure in the course of the last one and a half years — two of them underwent*

*surgery after last January 20. Cuban children suffering from lymphoblastic leukemia whose bodies reject traditional medicines can not be treated with the American product "Elspar" (Erwinia L-asparaginase), created specially to treat intolerance. Consequently, the life expectancy of these children is reduced and their suffering increases. The U.S. government forbids Merck & Co. to supply this medication to Cuba.*

Cuba has not been able to acquire Gene Analyzer Equipment — indispensable to study the origin of breast, colon, and prostate cancer — which is manufactured by the company Applied Biosystem (ABI). Lactalis USA, a supplier of dairy products, was fined \$20,000 by the US government. Since the election of President Obama, there has been no change whatsoever in the implementation of the economic, commercial, and financial blockade against Cuba. The blockade remains intact."

US ambassador Susan Rice [16] found herself tangled up in Turtle Bay (the Manhattan neighborhood where the UN is located) where she defended, in a lonely place, US policy with childish knee-jerk rhetoric: "Here we go again. I suppose old habits die hard. The hostile language we have just heard from the Foreign Minister of Cuba seems straight out of the Cold War era and is not conducive to constructive progress. We will not respond in kind to painfully familiar rhetoric that we have heard in years past."

What a stupid joke! Of course it is Washington that is continuing its "Cold War" against revolutionary Cuba. It is Washington that refuses to accept — 50 years later! — the actuality of the Cuban Revolution and Cuba's right to self-determination. It is Washington not Cuba that claims a right to subvert, intervene, and harbor and protect terrorists so as to bring about a return to US domination. The surreal remarks of Rice register how tied up in knots Washington finds itself politically as it flails about furiously from its isolated diplomatic corner. But embarrassment and diplomatic isolation are far from sufficient to bring about a change in US policy. Washington under Obama is determined to change the unfavorable political relationship of forces that accumulated over its Cuba policy across the Americas under the years of George W. Bush's Administration.

### **Obama Advances Bipartisan US Policy Aims in Latin America**

Under Obama's leadership, Washington has made some progress toward its bipartisan political goals in Latin America. Obama was aided by the initially widespread hopes and illusions in him in Latin America and worldwide as well as in the United States by many self-described "progressives." While, after one year, these are being increasingly discarded, the initial illusions were a useful cover for the Obama Administration as it pushed forward an agenda in essential continuity with its predecessor in Latin America and internationally.

Under the Bush Administration there were concerted, failed efforts to subvert and overturn the proletarian state in Cuba and the left-wing, anti-imperialist governments in Venezuela and later Bolivia that came to power amid massive popular struggles. None of this worked out very well for Washington. All of its targets were politically strengthened and the policy had virtually no support in Latin America. The governments of Hugo Chavez in Venezuela and Evo Morales in Bolivia — in close alliance with revolutionary Cuba, which provided tremendous solidarity in the form of large-scale medical and educational assistance — successfully resisted US-backed military coups and counter-revolutionary plots and subversion and carried out significant policies in favor of working people.

Under the new Obama Administration there was a tactical diplomatic shift — a necessary retreat in form, more of a regrouping. The bellicose rhetoric and in-your-face confrontationalism of the Bush years were ratcheted down somewhat. Ambassadors were again exchanged with Venezuela and Bolivia. At the OAS Summit in Trinidad, Obama was photographed shaking hands with Hugo Chavez.



Nevertheless, the aims of US policy were unchanged. (And, in recent months, alongside the shift to direct contention again with Cuba, there has been a ramping up of political hostility, demonization, and destabilization against the Hugo Chavez government in Venezuela. Corporate media outlets such as the Wall Street Journal and the New York Post and the increasingly bellicose and conservative editorial page of the Washington Post have echoed, albeit more harshly, the US State Department government line painting a picture of Venezuela in utter economic and social chaos under a repressive government lashing out at dissent and “dropping the mask of democracy.”)

On Cuba, Obama quickly adjusted US policy on some secondary questions — in the face of the mounting hemispheric and near-unanimous international opposition to the US economic, financial, and commercial embargo — in order to more credibly defend and promote the core policy aim which remains the overturning of the revolutionary government, the destruction of the social relations and conquests of the Revolution, and the restoration of capitalism and US domination.

Obama fulfilled his campaign promise to end existing travel restrictions for Cuban-Americans and has eased somewhat the ability of some Cuban academics, musicians, artists, and scientists to visit the US and some similar categories of US individuals to legally travel to Cuba at the invitation of Cuban society. Also, there has been a slight US liberalization in granting so-called “people-to-people” licenses. Nevertheless, so far, the Obama moves still are far from taking us to where the policy on exchanges and licenses was under Clinton and the first several years of the George W. Bush Administration.

These anemic measures, doled out with an eyedropper, are presented by Obama and Clinton as bold moves begging for a Cuban response. They are saying in essence: “We’ve done our bit, now you must basically commit suicide and end the Revolution in exchange.”

## **Colombia**

Over the course of the first decade of the new millennium, the political and moral deterioration of the armed guerrilla movement of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) became more pronounced and apparent, to the great advantage of the Colombian officer corps and capitalist political parties. Their political consolidation took place under the leadership of Alvaro Uribe. (This entire development was candidly analyzed by Fidel Castro in a remarkable small book, *Peace in Colombia* [17], which is a treasure trove of the Marxist method and principles.)

In this framework, on October 30, 2009, the US and Colombian governments signed an agreement to significantly expand the US military presence there in seven military bases. This puts potentially large-scale US military forces directly on the ground for future political contingencies in the heart of the South American continent. Colombian territory has become the wedge by which Washington hopes to regain on-the-ground military striking power, under the cover of fighting “drug trafficking,” on the South American continent. This military presence will aim to threaten and intimidate governments in conflict with Washington and to counter the inevitable explosions in popular struggles and revolutionary bids for power that are built into the contemporary reality of economic crisis and class and social polarization throughout the Americas.

## **Endgame**

There is no question that, if Cuba were to drop its revolutionary political orientation and become more responsive to the interests and dominance of world capitalism and imperialism, then

Washington would change course and establish full diplomatic relations and end all sanctions in a New York minute. But short of Cuban political capitulation, what will end the US economic and political war against Cuba? There are three factors which can be looked at separately, but which are totally intertwined, playing upon and off each other.

First and foremost is independent mass pressure inside the US, that is, independent of the maneuverings, machinations, and intrigues of the bait-and-switch game on Capitol Hill. This first factor is weak today, although that can change. And while there is a vibrant, committed core of Cuba solidarity activists in cities across the United States, as a national movement it is decentralized and diffuse. Of course the "Cuba Question" is not at this time a pressing issue in US politics. There is no imminent momentum towards direct US aggression. Widespread sentiment against the US embargo in US public opinion exists, and there is even a small but significant layer of US public opinion that is consciously sympathetic to the example, legacy, and historic leadership of the Cuban Revolution, particularly among Blacks. There is furthermore great, broad interest in Cuba, and the prospects of visiting there, among ordinary US citizens. Preventing people from seeing the actual Cuban reality as opposed to the hell painted by imperialist propaganda is, of course, a major reason US authorities strain to maintain travel restrictions.

Second is hemispheric and world pressure. In formal diplomatic terms it's hardly possible for Washington to be more isolated in its Cuba policy, especially in the Western Hemisphere. Nevertheless, among Washington's imperialist allies who are also its dog-eat-dog competitors on the world capitalist market, opposition to the US embargo at the UN has more to do with antagonism towards US attempts to impose its economic and financial policies extraterritorially than with any sympathy for revolutionary, socialist Cuba. The above-cited EU Parliament vote strongly condemning Cuba is a truer reflection of the class and political antagonism of European imperialism. In the Americas, while popular solidarity with Cuba is very widespread and is a big factor weighing on the postures of even conservative governments, it is certain that as social and political polarization deepens in the wake of growing economic crisis, antagonism towards Cuba — the permanent example and inspiration for all hemispheric forces fighting for social justice — consciously fostered and demanded by Washington, among certain governments and political tendencies is bound to grow. There are many delicious contradictions within the actuality and dynamics of the Cuban Revolution's place in Latin American history and contemporary politics.

The third factor is divisions within the US ruling class. This factor totally flows from and is dependent on factors one and two. Short of a victorious social revolution inside the United States bringing working people to political power, it is the political representatives of the US "Establishment" that will make the decision to end the five decades of economic and political war against the Cuban Revolution. So far we have only seen tactical divergences from within an utterly united policy of defeating the Cuban Revolution and destroying Cuban socialism.

If Obama and Clinton had any illusions that the Cuban government under Raul Castro would be less inclined to promote revolutionary internationalism and solidarity with the oppressed and exploited overwhelming majority of humanity against the policies of world capital, they have had enough time to shed them.

Despite years of stupid speculation and assertions about splits and divisions between Raul and Fidel Castro, it seems fairly clear that Washington no longer thinks that anything fundamental has changed in the Cuban leadership and political orientation, either within Cuba or in its foreign policy, under Raul Castro's Presidency. Cuba remains revolutionary and Marxist. Revolutionary continuity is the reality in Cuba.

Therefore so does continuity remain the reality of US policy under Barack Obama.

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**P.S.**

\* From MRZine:

<http://mrzine.monthlyreview.org/2010/nahem160310.html>

\* Ike Nahem is the coordinator of Cuba Solidarity New York (email: cubasolidarityny@mindspring.com), a member of the National Network on Cuba. Nahem is an Amtrak Locomotive Engineer and member of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen, a division of the Teamsters Union. These are his personal political opinions.

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**Footnotes**

[1] <http://www.cubadebate.cu/raul-castro-ruz/2009/12/13/discurso-de-raul-castro-en-apertura-de-l-a-viii-cumbre-del-alba/>

[2] <http://mrzine.monthlyreview.org/2010/lamrani040310.html>

[3] [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/expert/infopress\\_page/015-70350-067-03-11-902-20100310IPR70349-08-03-2010-2010-false/default\\_en.htm](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/expert/infopress_page/015-70350-067-03-11-902-20100310IPR70349-08-03-2010-2010-false/default_en.htm)

[4] <http://www.granma.cu/ingles/2010/marzo/lun1/death.html>

[5] [http://www.csmenetwork.com/2/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=6998:speech-by-foreign-minister-bruno-rodriguez-parrilla-of-cuba-at-the-human-rights-council-geneva-march-3-2010&catid=146:opinion&Itemid=383](http://www.csmenetwork.com/2/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=6998:speech-by-foreign-minister-bruno-rodriguez-parrilla-of-cuba-at-the-human-rights-council-geneva-march-3-2010&catid=146:opinion&Itemid=383)

[6] See [www.freethethefive.org](http://www.freethethefive.org)

[7] <http://www.foxbusiness.com/story/star-gen-barry-mccaffrey-ret-cancels-trip-cuba-shallow-vitriolic-comments/>

[8] <http://www.petitiononline.com/RaceCuba/petition.html>

[9] <http://www.petitiononline.com/withcuba/petition.html>

[10] <http://www.themilitant.com/2010/7404/740404.html>

[11] <http://mrzine.monthlyreview.org/2010/castro240110.html>

[12] <http://www.informationclearinghouse.info/article24518.htm>

[13] <http://www.torontoforumoncuba.tyo.ca/?p=1680>

[14] <http://www.cubanow.net/pages/loader.php?sec=1&t=2&item=7397>

[15] <http://embacu.cubaminrex.cu/Default.aspx?tabid=15114>

[16] <http://www.undispatch.com/susan-rice-cuba-vote-here-we-go-again>

[17] <http://books.google.com/books?id=eU2P7nRjNLwC>