



Stumbling blockade: Opposition grows in US over Cuban embargo

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50 years since the US imposed a crippling trade embargo on Cuba, new facts speak for a major rethink of the blockade.

When political issues are left aside, one can say that Americans miss Cuba. At nightclubs they make the most of the

only thing they can legally import from the communist island – the rhythm. However, while the love for Cuba flourishes on the dance-floor, it goes cold when the revision of the 50-year-old embargo is up for discussion.

“Wait a minute. Why after all these years should we give them benefits of trade relationships – more tourists and everything like that, when they are not going to change their system whatsoever?” questions Ray Walser from The Heritage Foundation, Washington DC.

That rationale does not stop the United States from dealing with China, but Walser says that is another issue: *“The same standards that apply for China do not apply for Cuba. Cuba has a communist regime that has [a] state un-dynamic model – it is a very weak engine. China has a big economic engine.”*

The rhetoric is reminiscent of what Steven Colbert said in one of his programs: *“Cuba represents everything against, folks. It is a totalitarian, repressive, communist state that – unlike China – can't lend us money.”*

Cuba is criticized for violating human rights not without reason. However, the harshest criticism comes from a nation that is slammed worldwide for breaching human rights at its Guantanamo Bay prison, which it rents in Cuba.

The embargo was the way the United States punished the Castro regime for seizing power in 1959, which at the same time wiped out the vast share Americans had in the Cuban economy. Arguably, the idea behind the embargo was to let Castro's regime wear out and prompt people to revolt against it. 50 years went by and that never happened.

The embargo has largely been seen as ineffective. *“It has given the Castro regime a handy excuse for the failures of its socialist experiment. It is hurting the very Cuban people that we claim to be helping,”* says Daniel Griswold from the CATO Institute based in Washington DC.

“Let's lift the embargo, move more products there, more Americans will be able to spread their influence there. I think it is our best hope for having influence in Cuba when that wonderful day comes when the Castro regime falls,” he advocates.

Cuba now hosts businesses from Europe, Canada, Latin America, and mainly lives off its beautiful resorts. But booming tourism does not seem to make life easier for everyday Cubans. They are said to make four cents of every dollar a foreign company pays them, while the government takes the rest.

The Cuban government has recently taken steps to modernize its economy. Now over half a million people are allowed to engage in small private enterprises. But for the United States to lift the embargo there needs to be a pragmatic reason. Ideological ones have proved unsustainable.

“There is a really strong economic interest. People I see are afraid that their markets are going to be exploited and if we don’t take care of them or, if we do not jump in, Europe is just going to fill in for us, and that is not in our interest. And then there is the question of oil, and that is a new thing as well”, comments Delia Boylan Lloyd, a journalist.

Russian and Spanish companies are indeed queuing up to help Cuba exploit its huge offshore oil reserves.

The opposition over the Cuban embargo in the United States has long been down to this question: will trade with Cuba make the Castro regime stronger or will it eventually help bring it down? Meanwhile, despite some minor policy changes under the Obama administration, the main restrictions are still in place, costing the United States’ economy over a billion dollars a year. Will the United States take the pragmatic route? Salsa, rum, cigars and beaches may not be strong enough. Oil, on the other hand, could be a bigger incentive.