

# The American Conservative

## Hating Stupid Interventions Does Not Require Loving Communists

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Demonstrations are sweeping Cuba. They are the biggest protests in a quarter century. Those in 1994 helped trigger a seaborne exodus backed by Fidel Castro, who encouraged the departure of “counter-revolutionaries.”

President Miguel Diaz-Canel, who succeeded Raul Castro as president in 2019, is under pressure for the Communist Party’s sustained economic failure and political repression. Lacking any answers, he turned to the old regime playbook, blaming America and deploying party thugs backed by the police. The routine has left frustrated Cubans standing in long lines to buy food and sitting in harsh prisons after voicing their frustration.

The anger is spreading. Last year artists chose liberty over conformity when protesting the aging apparatchiks who maintain party control. Luis Manuel Otero, a founder of the celebrated San Isidro Movement, complained that “People are more and more miserable, more and more hungry, more and more desperate.”

Reported Reuters: “The situation came to a head after authorities besieged the movement’s headquarters in Old Havana’s San Isidro district [and] then ... broke up a hunger strike there that had started to gain international attention. Security forces forcibly removed and briefly detained the five members on hunger strike and nine other people in the house, citing violations of coronavirus protocols.” Diaz-Canel condemned the “imperialist show” as promoted by, yes, the Trump administration. However, the Castros’ designated successor lacks Fidel’s personal charisma and Raul’s revolutionary pedigree, and the people weren’t listening to him.

Although it would take many more people on the streets to seriously threaten the regime, Diaz-Canel might be defenestrated if the pressure grows more intense. Raul Castro is formally retired but still patrols Cuba from the shadows and does not want to see the family’s lifetime revolutionary project collapse. Better to sacrifice an apparatchik who lost control than to abandon a system that failed.

The American right, which has spent six decades targeting Communist rule, wants the Biden administration to “support” the protestors, without explaining how. Praise and endorsements are profuse, but talk is cheap. Led by Trump and Rubio, most Republican lawmakers care little about the people involved while seeking political advantage. Their fervent endorsements only reinforce Diaz-Canel’s dismissal of the protests as reflecting U.S. interests.

What else to do? The regime already is under multiple sanctions, most decades old. They primarily punish the Cuban people even when they apply to the government and have most hurt the once burgeoning private business community, which had unnerved the Communist Party. Attempting to starve the population is Washington’s cruel strategy in Iran, Syria, Venezuela, and North Korea as well, but has failed everywhere to achieve the administration’s political ends.

Miami Mayor Francis Suarez would go much further, suggesting airstrikes or other military action, demonstrating how Republicans have become captives of the war party. The “humanitarian” war against Iraq had devastating consequences; America is leaving Afghanistan in conflict amid ruins after two decades of war. For many in the GOP, war—to be fought by others, not themselves, of course—is the first option, without the slightest concern over the tragic consequences likely to result to everyone else.

Such proposals reflect the GOP’s desperate desire to declare victory *after six decades of a trade embargo and multiple layers of additional sanctions*. Sadly, Republican policymakers want to double down after forcing Cubans to spend their entire lives in economic hardship for no positive gain.

Despite the ongoing protests, the Communist Party likely will remain on top. It monopolizes the tools of coercion. Moreover, the incipient business class, which the regime greatly fears, has been weakened by the Trump administration’s sanctions. When I visited a few years ago I talked with multiple entrepreneurs who had invested in anticipation of an increase in American tourists but lost badly when Trump blocked such travel.

He cared a lot about the Cuban-American vote, but not at all about the oppressed Cuban people, who ended up more reliant on their government than ever. So too Florida Sen. Marco Rubio, who predictably has called for imposing even more economic penalties. The ethnic Cuban has never visited Cuba, or, complain Cuban entrepreneurs, talked with them when they visited Washington. Apparently, the fate of actual Cubans doesn’t interest him.

The American left is awful too, but in a different way. As common Cuban people rise against the police state, some uncommon American intellectuals are taking *the communist government’s side*. Rather than defend the right of people to protest, the U.S. left is melting down over U.S. intervention, imperialism, and all sorts of other presumed evils.

Earlier this week I joined a television program to discuss Cuba, and we all criticized Washington’s sanctions policy. There is something deeply immoral about punishing the oppressed for the crimes of their oppressors. Moreover, such penalties rarely do much other than impoverish those on whom they are applied. So far economic penalties, even extraordinarily draconian ones, have not achieved their political objectives in Russia, Syria, Iran, China, North

Korea, Venezuela, or, as yet, anyway, Cuba. Sense a pattern? As the Cuban embargo nears its 61st anniversary, it has amassed a stunning record of failure.

However, my leftish compatriots swooned at the mention of the Castros. They imagine Cuba as a socialist paradise in which all people are equal and enlightened, the masses are fed and enriched, health care is wonderful and free, and all citizens love and esteem their leaders. And in which the system exhibits the wonders of collectivism to the world's peoples.

Or would do so, if it wasn't for the evil American imperialists who tremble at the thought the rest of the world might see paradise on earth and then abandon brutal, immiserating capitalism. Thus, in the left's view, Washington applies its embargo to forestall Marx's choreographed march to paradise. Yet, I must note, socialism paradoxically never works on its own. Apparently, to avoid long food lines, even communists must enter global economic markets, engage in commerce, and accept investment from the Great Global Oppressor otherwise known as America. Go figure!

Worse, my cohorts approvingly cited other "anti-imperialist powers"—China and Russia! These countries also are suffering from the ill attention of the United States. But, in the left's view, if not for Washington's constant interference, these wonderful, friendly, helpful states—ruled by the successors to Joseph Stalin and Mao Zedong, two warm, patient, grandfatherly types—would be helping lead the world toward nirvana.

In fact, there are many American government evils to oppose, including often maladroit and foolish policy toward Moscow and Beijing. However, American government evils are not the only or the worst ones. For instance, the People's Republic of China is no model of international virtue. Mao Zedong was the greatest mass murderer in recorded history. Chinese scholars have written devastating accounts of the Great Leap Forward, a mad Maoist misadventure in which tens of millions of people starved to death, and the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, a bizarre but deadly mix of party purge, civil war, social unrest, and mass madness, with a death toll in the hundreds of thousands or millions.

Orthodox communists quibble about the numbers but do not deny the Chinese Communist Party's essential responsibility. Rather, they downplay Mao's blunders since he was the essential man in the PRC's formation. And Xi Jinping is mimicking Mao as the former tightens state control at almost every turn. The great achievement of eliminating extreme poverty claimed by Xi when celebrating the CCP's founding, and often cited by China's admirers, occurred only because the communist rulers dumped crackpot communist economic theories and embraced the market. Oops!

At least Russia has dropped any ideological affinity for Marx though its leaders, too, like those in China, look to Lenin's theories to maintain control. Vladimir Putin is no vestal tribune, devoted to economic equality, social justice, and global peace. And the possibility of popular political action achieving reform is minimal. The onetime KGB operative holds elections, but who seriously believes that he is prepared to lose an honest one?

Equally dubious is the thrall in which the American left is held by Venezuela, Iran, Syria, and of course Cuba. U.S. policy interventions against them have been misguided and counterproductive,

hurting suffering peoples and exacerbating conflict. However, they all are dictatorships. Their economic failures begin with their collectivist ideologies. The governments suppress dissent and refuse to allow their people to hold them accountable.

Consider Cuba. The left would be cheering on similar popular protests in America. Holding an old, sclerotic, ineffective leadership accountable for its failures would be viewed as democracy at its finest. But demonstrations against a communist government are inherently suspect or worse, since then those in political authority can do no wrong.

Alas, Freedom House ranks the island as “not free,” very near the bottom, especially in terms of political rights. Explained the group: “Cuba’s one-party communist state outlaws political pluralism, bans independent media, suppresses dissent, and severely restricts basic civil liberties. The government continues to dominate the economy despite recent reforms that permit some private-sector activity. The regime’s undemocratic character has not changed despite a generational transition in political leadership between 2018 and 2019 that included the introduction of a new constitution.”

There is no tolerance of dissent. Reported Human Rights Watch: “The Cuban government represses and punishes dissent and public criticism. Tactics against critics include beatings, public shaming, travel restrictions, short-term detention, fines, online harassment, surveillance, and termination of employment.”

If Cuba’s leaders are so competent and virtuous, why do they jail their critics and refuse to hold free elections? How can Americans who insist on elections here advocate denying people similar rights in countries as disparate as Cuba, Iran, Russia, Venezuela, and China? If “real” socialism requires tyranny, then it is an answer only to the most stupid and evil questions.

When the left backs oppressors out of ideological solidarity, it obviously undermines its credibility even when opposing military intervention. Lefties look like they are more interested in protecting foreign dictators than peoples.

The Cuban people deserve the support of Americans as well as people of good will around the world. Like everyone else, Cubans are entitled to live in freedom, governed by those they choose and hold accountable. Ultimately, however, only they can win their freedom. It is not America’s to bestow.

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