

The hypocrisy over US-Cuba relations

by Roland_S_Martin

It is amazing to watch politicians and activists try as hard as they can to rip into Fidel Castro and Cuba with the fury of a hurricane yet sound like whimpering dogs when you bring up China and America's absolute double standard when dealing with that communist country.

This week, when President Barack Obama lifted travel restrictions for Cuban-Americans wanting to visit Cuba and eased rules on allowing money and gifts to be sent back to the country, the ardent Castro haters were up in arms, calling it a horrible decision.

They want to see the 47-year-long embargo continue against the island, which is just 90 miles off the Florida coast, while a growing chorus of Democrats and Republicans says that it hasn't worked, hasn't driven the Castro regime from power, and should be ended as we seek other means to get Cuba to move toward democracy.

Those who still favor the embargo "which has survived because of the clout of the Cuban-American community in the politically potent state of Florida" say we shouldn't bend to a communist nation that imprisons voices of dissent, is a major human rights violator, doesn't allow the freedoms we are accustomed to in America, and is run by a dictator.

That's how they describe Cuba, but if you asked the Dalai Lama, he'd say that description also fits China. But our politicians and even media commentators on the left and the right aren't willing to be as vicious in ripping China.

Remember when Castro was reported to be near death and some Americans talked openly about celebrating his death? I never have heard such talk related to China.

There is a double standard here, and it simply points to the difference between a small island country in our own hemisphere and a behemoth that has a large military and nuclear weapons and is a major player on the international scene. Oh, yeah, and China holds \$500 billion in U.S. debt.

In other words, the Chinese have got us by the you-know-what, and we don't want to do anything to make them angry. In seeking to persuade Congress to grant China most-favored-nation status, which is all about trade between the two countries, Clinton administration officials, under the heading "Engagement Works," told Congress in 1998, "Our strategy has been to engage China by working to identify areas on which we agree while continuing to forthrightly confront issues on which we do not."

About the instances in which U.S. pressure regarding human rights resulted in the release of a couple of political prisoners, Congress was told: "These are not meant to be exhaustive examples of the fruits of engagement; nor are they meant to mask the persistence of serious differences between our two countries. They are intended simply to show that engagement is working and that we have made progress in encouraging China's development as a full and responsible member of the international community."

In essence, engagement works, as opposed to trying to shut someone off from the rest of the world.

So much about how we confront our relations with Cuba means admitting what we never have liked to admit: We have been angered by the Cubans' refusal to bow to the wishes of the United States, which goes back even further than Fidel Castro's rising to power 50 years ago.

Stephen Kinzer writes in his book "Overthrow: America's Century of Regime Change From Hawaii to Iraq" that after the U.S. helped Cuba run Spain out of the country in 1898, President Theodore Roosevelt got the bright idea that we should be the country's new ruler, and that led to a battle between the Cuban people. After that, U.S. troops occupied the country, and American business interests controlled nearly all of the economic bright spots in the nation, especially the sugar plantations.

How did that change? When, Kinzer says, Castro said this in a speech: "This time, I promise you it will not be like 1898 again, when the Americans came in and made themselves masters of our country." And they haven't stopped resisting.

Americans cannot "waver" and should not "waver" in our desire to seek democracy in our own hemisphere and around the world. But our actions must be fair and consistent.

Treating China as a partner and Cuba as a pariah only validates our critics who say our hypocrisy knows no bounds. In this case, they are spot on.

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