

That which can never be forgotten

Yesterday morning, on Sunday October 12, the Sunday internet edition of The New York Times – a newspaper which under certain circumstances follows the political line most convenient to its country's interests – published an article entitled "Obama should end the embargo on Cuba;" with opinions as to how, in its view, the country should proceed.

There are times when such articles are written by some prestigious journalist, such as someone I had the privilege of meeting personally during the first days of our struggle in the Sierra Maestra with the remainder of a unit which had been almost totally eliminated by Batista's air force and army. We were at that time quite inexperienced; we didn't even realize that giving the impression of strength to the press would be something that could merit critique.

That is not what the brave war correspondent, Herbert Matthews, thought with a story which made his name during the difficult times of the fight against fascism.

Our supposed fighting ability in February 1957 was a little less, but still more than sufficient to wear down and overthrow the regime.

Carlos Rafael Rodríguez, leader of the People's Socialist Party, was witness to what, after the Battle of Jigüe in which an entire unit of select troops were forced to surrender after 10 days of combat, I expressed regarding my fear that the regime's forces would surrender in July 1958, when the elite troops hastily retreated from the Sierra Maestra, despite being trained and equipped by our northern neighbors. We had discovered an effective way of defeating them.

I could not help but expand a little on this point as I wished to explain the spirit with which I read the aforementioned article of the U.S. newspaper, last Sunday. I will cite the most important parts in quotations:

"Scanning a map of the world must give President Obama a sinking feeling as he contemplates the dismal state of troubled bilateral relationships his administration has sought to turn around. He would be smart to take a hard look at Cuba, where a major policy shift could yield a significant foreign policy success.

"For the first time in more than 50 years, shifting politics in the United States and changing policies in Cuba make it politically feasible to re-establish formal diplomatic relations and dismantle the senseless embargo. The Castro regime has long blamed the embargo for its shortcomings, and has kept ordinary Cubans largely cut off from the world. Mr. Obama should seize this opportunity to end a long era of enmity and help a population that has suffered enormously since Washington ended diplomatic relations in 1961, two years after Fidel Castro assumed power.

"...a devastated economy has forced Cuba to make reforms — a process that has gained urgency with the economic crisis in Venezuela, which gives Cuba heavily subsidized oil. Officials in Havana, fearing that Venezuela could cut its aid, have taken significant steps to liberalize and diversify the island's tightly controlled economy.

"They have begun allowing citizens to take private-sector jobs and own property. This spring, Cuba's National Assembly passed a law to encourage foreign investment in the country. With Brazilian capital, Cuba is building a seaport, a major project that will be economically viable only if American sanctions are lifted. And in April, Cuban diplomats began negotiating a cooperation agreement with the European

Union. They have shown up at the initial meetings prepared, eager and mindful that the Europeans will insist on greater reforms and freedoms.

"The authoritarian government still harasses and detains dissidents. It has yet to explain the suspicious circumstances surrounding the death of the political activist Oswaldo Payá."

As you can see a slanderous and cheap accusation.

"Travel restrictions were relaxed last year, enabling prominent dissidents to travel abroad. There is slightly more tolerance for criticism of the leadership, though many fear speaking openly and demanding greater rights.

"The pace of reforms has been slow and there has been backsliding. Still, these changes show Cuba is positioning itself for a post-embargo era. The government has said it would welcome renewed diplomatic relations with the United States and would not set preconditions.

"As a first step, the Obama administration should remove Cuba from the State Department's list of nations that sponsor terrorist organizations, which includes Iran, Sudan and Syria. Cuba was put on the list in 1982 for backing terrorist groups in Latin America, which it no longer does. American officials recognize that Havana is playing a constructive role in the conflict in Colombia by hosting peace talks between the government and guerrilla leaders.

"Starting in 1961, Washington has imposed sanctions in an effort to oust the Castro regime. Over the decades, it became clear to many American policy makers that the embargo was an utter failure. But any proposal to end the embargo angered Cuban-American voters, a constituency that has had an outsize role in national elections (...)The generation that adamantly supports the embargo is dying off. Younger Cuban-Americans hold starkly different views, having come to see the sanctions as more damaging than helpful. A recent poll found that a slight majority of Cuban-Americans in Miami now oppose the embargo. A significant majority of them favor restoring diplomatic ties, mirroring the views of other Americans.

"Cuba and the United States already have diplomatic missions, called interests sections, which operate much like embassies. However, under the current arrangement, American diplomats have few opportunities to travel outside the capital to engage with ordinary Cubans, and their access to the Cuban government is very limited.

"The Obama administration in 2009 took important steps to ease the embargo, a patchwork of laws and policies, making it easier for Cubans in the United States to send remittances to relatives in Cuba and authorizing more Cuban-Americans to travel there. And it has paved the way for initiatives to expand Internet access and cell phone coverage on the island.

"For instance, it could lift caps on remittances, allow Americans to finance private Cuban businesses and expand opportunities for travel to the island.

"It could also help American companies that are interested in developing the island's telecommunications network but remain wary of the legal and political risks..

"Failing to engage with Cuba now will likely cede this market to competitors. The presidents of China and Russia traveled to Cuba in separate visits in July, and both leaders pledged to expand ties.

"It would better position Washington to press the Cubans on democratic reforms, and could stem a new wave of migration to the United States driven by hopelessness.

"Closer ties could also bring a breakthrough on the case of an American development contractor, Alan Gross, who has been unjustly imprisoned by Cuba for nearly five years. More broadly, it would create

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opportunities to empower ordinary Cubans, gradually eroding the government's ability to control their lives.

"...Western Hemisphere heads of state will meet in Panama City for the seventh Summit of the Americas. Latin American governments insisted that Cuba, the Caribbean's most populous island and one of the most educated societies in the hemisphere, be invited, breaking with its traditional exclusion at the insistence of Washington.

"Given the many crises around the world, the White House may want to avoid a major shift in Cuba policy. Yet engaging with Cuba and starting to unlock the potential of its citizens could end up being among the administration's most consequential foreign-policy legacies.

"Normalizing relations with Havana would improve Washington's relationships with governments in Latin America, and resolve an irritant that has stymied initiatives in the hemisphere.."

"...The Obama administration is leery of Cuba's presence at the meeting and Mr. Obama has not committed to attending.

"He must — and he should see it as an opportunity to make history."

One of the most educated societies in the hemisphere!!!! This is indeed recognition. But why doesn't it mention this straight away, that in no way is this society comparable to that which Harry S. Truman bequeathed to us when his ally and great public treasury looter Fulgencio Batista took power on March 10, 1952, only 50 days after the general election. This can never be forgotten.

The article is obviously written with great skill, seeking the greatest benefit for U.S. policy in a complex situation, in the midst of increasing political, economic, financial and commercial problems. To these are added the effects of rapid climate change; commercial competition; the speed, precision and destructive power of weapons which threaten the survival of mankind. What is written today has a very different connotation to that which was written just 40 years ago when our planet was already forced to stockpile and withhold water and food from the equivalent of half the world's current population. This without mentioning the fight against Ebola which is threatening the health of millions of people.

Add to this that in a few days the global community will reveal before the United Nations whether it agrees with the blockade against Cuba or not.



Fidel Castro Ruz
October 13, 2014
8:30 p.m.

Fuente:

Granma Internacional
13/10/2014

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Publicado en Fidel soldado de las ideas (<http://www.fidelcastro.cu>)

URL de origen: <http://www.fidelcastro.cu/es/node/60968?width=600&height=600>