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US Cuba Relations
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US and Cuba: The Embargo Should Remain

On March 3, 2013 a chartered plane with eighteen Hiram College Garfield Scholars and faculty members took a flight to Havana, Cuba. It was my spring break and I did not know what to expect. I have had read about Cuba and its relationship with the United States. In the trip, we interacted in diverse environment. We also shared our experience and learned from various Cuban age-group lifestyles. Our mission not only to seep into the Cuban way of life, we also had a question – what should US policy be towards Cuba, in our mind.

Cuba and United States lie approximately 90 miles away from each other. However, the history they share still has fresh wound. The fresh wound has turned into a more than fifty yearlong economical and political embargo. The embargo has severely affected Cubans. I was emotional to see the hardship Cuban had to face. I thought probably, US has been bullying Cuba. However, when I did my research and combined my Cuban experience, I came to a decision that US should not open up with Cuba. I strongly think US should not lift the embargo. I will justify my argument using my experience in the Cuba and US-Cuban relationship history.

Before, I start talking about US Cuba relationship. I believe it is crucial to know their history. At the end of the Spanish-American war, in 1898, the defeated Spain signed a treaty.

“This gave US the rights to Spain’s its territories — including Cuba, Puerto Rico and Guam. This subsequently granted Cuba its independence. However, there was US intervention in the country's affairs if necessary. US was also given a lease on its naval base at Guantanamo Bay. For the next half-century the two countries more or less cooperated, with the U.S. helping to squash rebellions and heavily investing in the economy of its tiny neighbor. The American mafia used Havana as a conference center in 1946. Ernest Hemingway lived there for 22 years; he wrote *The Old Man and the Sea* at his villa just outside the Havana.” (Suddath)

The 1959’s Cuban revolution changed their life entirely. The Castro arrived and made sure things were not the same. They nationalized all the properties. The US Hilton Hotel changed to Habana Libre. Various casinos that attracted US citizens were shut. There were strong sentiments and actions against US role in Cuba, which could be translated as Cuba would say, “Cuba was no longer prepared to play the prostitute to the desires of US imperialists and and their local lackeys.” (Miller,147) The US since the 1960s has been trying to pursue the regime change in Cuba. Both countries, have therefore remained at loggerheads with each other.

US should not lift the embargo at least until the future leader of Cuba initiates, at least some, democratic movement. For this, I am going to look into the history of the embargo and prove that it is not the right time to lift the embargo. President John F. Kennedy signed the Proclamation 3447, that put the embargo in place. It mentioned the threat to the US security whilst aligning with communist powers. Also, there were the

Cuban Democracy Act, 1992, and the Cuban Liberty and Democratic Act of 1996. All of these posed, certain conditions that Cuba should eventually agree to, in order for the US to lift the embargo. Cuba needs to legalize their political affairs. They need to conduct free and fair elections while stepping towards a democratic future. They need to grant freedom of press. They need to abide by the international human rights laws. On top of this, they need to release any political prisoners, including Alan P. Gross. Despite the fact that no country should decide how someone else needs to behave, these certain things are evident within the US legislatures. Therefore, as Cuba, lacks in the fulfillment of most of the above conditions, US, has every legitimate reason not to lift the embargo.

US risks feeding Cuban ego, if the embargo is lifted. Cuba understands the role of education in public policy. C.A Torres in his paper, "*Educational Policy Making,*" backs this argument. He says that there is a strong interrelation between state and education, yet it is not thoroughly studied. (Torres, 84) When we visited the primary school in Cuba, I was particularly interested in their primary core curriculum. It focused on the existing regime, and its ideologies. Therefore, they have engaged into injecting the history of revolution as part of ego of the entire nation. Cubans severely emphasized US embargo in their normal life. They mentioned how much the embargo is costing Cuba, and eventually hurts their growth and development. I think US is exposed to the risk of being shown as a player who surrendered and eventually forgave Cuba, for nationalizing the US property on the island.

Now there is a risk involved, if US opens the embargo right now. This can make Cuba see the lifting of embargo, as a way that US surrendered. They can use this opportunity to further their anti-American sentiments, and join hands with other nations including Iran.

Lets say US decides to lift the embargo. But Cuban's risks of unequal participation of benefits from lifting embargo. The state and the close allies are the one gaining the major share of benefits. Cuba is a highly regulated economy, everything is owned by the state. The foreign companies that are operating in Cuba have to hire workers through the state. The wages they receive is converted and devalued with a ratio of 24:1. This regulation allows the state to keep the most and the people get barely 1/8th of the actual wage. (google: exchange rates) Though state pays for the education and healthcare, the income common Cuban makes is not fulfilling. However, if in future Cuba is moving progressively to a state of unregulated economy, lifting the embargo then seems logical. Therefore, even if the embargo is lifted, unless the economy is free market competition, it will not help the common person that we met in the streets of Havana and Trinidad.

This brings to the question; well then how can US help? I think US has already taken many steps to ease relations with Cuba. Some of them include the cut in restrictions to travel to Cuba and sending cash remittances to family members from the US to Cuba. I think that in itself is a huge move taken by the US. This allows Cuban-Americans who want to send money across to the island possible. According to the Congressional Research Service's report, "*Cuba: Issues for the 112th Congress*," \$197 million has been sent to Cuba through USAID between 2001 and 2012. I think, now, it is Cuba's turn to demonstrate legitimate moves to the US, for US to probe into the removal of the embargo.

We all know that other democratic nations have free trade with Cuba, with no travel restrictions. Yet, that has never helped the Cuban nationals understand democracy

or has helped the regime observe this. On the contrary, according to an article, "*Don't Lift the Cuba Travel Ban*," by Jamie Suchlicki, mentions, how Cuban regime maximizes control over the people. The article states that limited Cubans are allowed in tourist areas and resorts. Public is absolutely forbidden to visit such places.

I was sad to visualize how the Cuba is way behind the world in terms of economic development. They are still stuck in time and have not advanced in any field. Despite the fact that they have free education and healthcare, that is not enough to feed the amount of productivity that remains untapped. The houses were shaggy, torn and not maintained at all. When I came back I was emotional about Cuba, and I wanted the embargo to end. However, when I picked the issue up with a clear head, I realized that the normal people are being fooled. They deserve democratic life.

Why should US lift the embargo when clearly Cuban regime wants their public to live in the state of limited knowledge. In that case, we can also argue that, US needs to do something to help the common man understand their good and rise to ask their due rights and better living standards. I argue, that US does not need to do anything. If Cubans themselves wanted a better life, then like the recent Arab Springs , they would be active in managing a regime change and improving the living standards of the country.

However, clearly in my opinion that is not the case. Henceforth, US should not lift the embargo, until Cuba displays equal or more interest in the bilateral relationship. Also, at least until the next leader, the US needs to keep calm. With the next leader, it will be clear what the Cubans actually want. Maybe then the embargo can be lifted as United States' interests permit.

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