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Some Thoughts on Cuban Resistance to US Ideological/Political War

By Arnold August
April 25, 2016



Before leaving Montreal for Havana in March 2016 to cover the Obama trip, I wrote an article on Cuba–US relations. Referring to the cultural war to include, in the broad sense of the term, ideological and political aggression, I asked:

“The question is, will Obama’s visit to Cuba provide Cubans the opportunity to make headway against the cultural war, or will it allow the US to make inroads? Or are both these scenarios on the horizon?”

My intention at that time was to deal with this question immediately upon my return from Cuba. However, one feature became clear during my stay in Havana and immediately following it. Both in and outside of Cuba, the repercussions of the visit not only continued but were being ramped up. In fact, at the time of writing, a month after the trip, the ideological and political controversies are carrying on.

This situation is at present further being fostered by Raúl Castro's April 16, 2016 Central Report to the 7th Congress of the Communist Party of Cuba (CPC). He devoted important sections of the Report to the issue of Cuba–US relations.

Disinformation from *within* Cuba

The Obama visit and its accompanying international media entourage targeted the US, Canada and much of the West. It was characterized to a large extent by pointing, explicitly or implicitly, to what the US President calls the lack of democracy in Cuba. Consequently, the argument follows, there is a lack of respect for human rights, of which civil/political rights take centre stage. This is nothing new, except for one game-changing feature. For the first time since the 1959 Revolution, the US has had the opportunity to carry out this disinformation not from *outside* Cuba, but rather from *within* the island.

From anti-US Cuba policy to apologist

For people outside of Cuba, especially in the US and Canada, there is no need to detail this misinformation, as it was everywhere (except for a few exceptions) on TV, on the internet and in printed media. However, there is another feature of this ideological/political aggression that is perhaps not noticeable to many, even though it plays a significant role in encouraging the US Cuba policy. In the above-mentioned article that I wrote just before my departure to Havana, I stated:

“Before December 17, 2014, many commentators [outside of Cuba] had been strongly opposed to the US policy on Cuba. There was a gap between them and Washington. Now the situation has changed. Some of them have become the vanguard of Obama–Cuba policy, forgetting that the US has only changed tactics. They have morphed into apologists of the new policy, which serves to finally achieve its strategic goal of undermining – now from within – the Cuban Revolution.”

During the visit to Havana, I was hoping that this position would be weakened as a result of the overtly (to me, anyways, and to many of my Cuban colleagues and people on the street) arrogant attitude of Obama preaching to the Cubans about democracy and human rights. Much to my surprise, the opposite took place. The US-centric view on democracy and human rights became *emboldened* among some commentators outside of Cuba and thus even further morphed into US-centrism.

The problem of US-centrism and democracy

This narrow-minded thinking appears to be firmly entrenched in the mind-set to such an extent that the internationally respected outstanding thinker Samir Amin in his classic book

Eurocentrism perceptively highlighted a major problem. The ideological/political barrier erected over many centuries by Eurocentrism and its offspring, US-centrism, is very complex and ingrained. It operates, as Samir Amin warns,

“without anyone noticing it. This is why many specialists, historians and intellectuals can reject particular expressions of the Eurocentric construct without being embarrassed by the incoherence of the overall vision that results.”¹

For example, while some intellectuals outside of Cuba may distance themselves from some of the most grotesque features of Eurocentrism and US-centrism – such as its shallow claims to be the defenders of a superior political and economic model for the world – they may still fall prey to the main ideological/political underpinnings of the US-centric model.

It is not a question of individuals, but rather the ideological/political position that objectively exists in societies. The only manner to advance a serious resistance to a parochial view on the Cuban political/economic/social system is to take into account two factors. One is that Cuba has its *own* such system, whose tradition dates back to the mid-19th century to date. It is up to the Cubans to improve it, just as they are now striving to do. Second, irrespective of one’s opinion and analysis of the US political/economic/social system, it is theirs. The system has developed out of its own historical conditions and thus has nothing to do with the Cuban path. The dangers on the horizon result from US aggression based on its centuries-old desire for world domination. It is up to the American people to take up the road of fundamental change, not only for their own good but for the very future of the world. This is bound to take place, as the American people – especially African Americans, youth and intellectuals, in whom I have full confidence – are further waking up.

The progressive alternative press outside of Cuba

Outside of Cuba, the highly charged political atmosphere surrounding the Obama trip sparked widespread and heightened political consciousness. Many progressive people and those on the left are sharpening their anti-imperialist consciousness. They are creatively dissecting the Obama incursion into Cuba with sharp political knives while fully supporting the visit and the Cuban Revolution. This is extremely encouraging.

Cubans on the counteroffensive

What is also very inspiring is the number of Cubans who are confronting the US ideological/political war during and since Obama’s visit. This was expected, as this courageous resistance was initiated following the statements by Obama and Raúl Castro on December 17, 2014 on the re-establishment of diplomatic relations and opening of embassies.

On that occasion, Obama confirmed once again that the US is dispensing with openly *antagonistic tactics*, which did not work, in favour of diplomatic tactics that he hopes will function to finally attain the five-decades long goal of snuffing out the Cuban Revolution and undermining the island’s sovereignty. As a by-product of this rapprochement, the White House,

through this new incursion, hopes to elevate itself to a better position to influence events in Latin America – read “regimen change” – by conventional or “soft power” warfare.

The Cuban “word warriors”

The counteroffensive to this in Cuba is not that well known to many foreigners, who may be interested but do not read Spanish. This consistent and long-lasting ideological/political struggle is found especially in blogs and some websites. Among the dozens of examples are the blogs of many well-known revolutionary Cuban writers and academics such as Iroel Sánchez, Elier Ramírez and Estéban Morales, which currently consist of a full compendium of critical articles on Cuba–US relations that have accumulated since December 17, 2014.

Another of these “word warriors” is Luis Toledo Sande. His blog, while not fully devoted to Cuba–US relations since December 17, 2014, has the merit of dealing with controversial issues in the realm of culture. One example is the appearance of American flags in public places in Havana over the last few years and as clothing apparel in a carnival-type fashion. In one of my articles, his analysis of this manifestation of cultural incursion allowed me to expose the complexities of the current situation on the island in the face of the new US policy. Jesús Arboleya is another such writer and academic. His articles on the Cuba–US theme are reproduced in the above-mentioned blogs as well as on the popular website CubaDebate.

CubaDebate, for its part, has been carrying critical articles on the new chapter on Cuba–US relations and – in keeping with its name – provoking *debate* among its readers. Hundreds of comments from the public are often published in reaction to just a single article. Since December 17, 2014, CubaDebate had featured a section fully devoted to the new Cuba–US relations and has been updated virtually daily, while dealing with other national and international themes. The same applies to Iroel Sánchez’s *La pupila insomne*, a hotbed for controversial articles.

Confronting the US-centric barrier

Aside from a few exceptions, what they all have in common is to publish articles with a clear opposition to US-centric views on democracy and human rights, even though not all of the pieces deal with this directly. What’s important, in my opinion, is the ideological outlook as the base from which views on specific political issues flow. I would venture to say that the above-mentioned intellectuals and many others are immune to any US influence on their thinking, action or outlook. There is no way that this cancer can infect these writers and the revolutionaries at the grass-roots and thus eat away at the Cuban political culture from within, as would be the case if it were allowed to flourish.

These intellectuals and many others who are lesser known, even in Cuba, are at the base of this resistance, and they are far from being alone. As the commentators on the blogs themselves often divulge, the comments from the public that are published in response to posts or articles reflect what is being discussed, as they say, “on the street.”

Furthermore, Fidel Castro’s article “Brother Obama”, released on March 29, 2016, provides sustenance and encouragement to all those fighting in the same trench against US unilateral

views on democracy, human rights and its own selective and opportunist view of history. The same effect is now resulting from Raúl Castro's April 16, 2016 Main Report to the 7th CPC Congress. Raúl cautioned that Cuba is not naive about the goal to subvert the Cuban Revolution.

To top it off, on April 19, Fidel Castro attended and addressed the closing session of the Congress. His presence further galvanized the militants and the people who later watched it on TV.

This opposition to being gullible is not only present among the leaders. On April 18, it was inspiring to watch some of the proceedings of the CPC Congress on Cuban television. One of the features that characterized the many interventions by the delegates and invited guests was a clear rejection of the Obama administration's subversive policy toward Cuba. In fact, self-employed workers who were elected delegates also joined this opposition. If Obama had seen these proceedings, his perennial smile would have turned to a severe frown, as it was this very "private sector" that he had hoped to win over as a Trojan horse within Cuba.

It is clear that the CPC, from top down and bottom up, is a bulwark against the US ideological/political offensive. However, the Cubans' defiance against the US assault in the realm of ideas is not over. For example, not all self-employed workers have the same outlook as expressed by the delegates in the Party congress. The situation among sections of the youth also represents a challenge.

Cuban opposition is gaining ground against the US war on Cuban socialist culture

Thus, what is the evaluation of the query in my article written before the visit, that is:

"The question is, will Obama's visit to Cuba provide Cubans the opportunity to make headway against the cultural war, or will it allow the US to make inroads? Or are both these scenarios on the horizon?"

My tentative conclusion is that both these frameworks are presently being played out, with Cuban indigenous thinking making the most headway against the US conceptual encroachment.

It would be naive perhaps to deny that Obamamania made some inroads. This is very noticeable in some of the comments left on various posts and articles and from reactions from the street. On the other hand, Obama's narrative had a boomerang effect. The unexpected result is a very vigorous political debate at the grass roots and among many intellectuals against US preconceived notions that Obama tried to force onto the Cuban socialist political culture.

The depth and breadth of this movement is stronger than anything I have witnessed since I began investigating the Cuban political system in the 1990s. Thus, in Cuba, both these scenarios are being played out. One is the barely veiled naive perspective regarding Obama. The second is the staunch resistance to the US ideological/political war being waged against Cuba. I firmly believe that the balance of forces is in favour of the outlook that is combating the infiltration of US prejudices within Cuban society. They are, however, both evolving within the Revolution, which

requires unity based on a dynamic exchange of different opinions. The unwavering resistance to the US war on Cuban thinking is already winning or has even come out victorious.

Cuba's national hero José Martí wrote in 1895: "War is being waged on us to dominate our thinking, let us fight it by the power of thinking."

Notes

1 Arnold August, *Cuba and Its Neighbours: Democracy in Motion*, 2013, Fernwood Publishing and Zed Books, Halifax, London and New York, pages 7–8.