

The Cuba Conundrum

Will Cuba ever officially be open to U.S. travelers? We've done more than our share of stories over the past decade on the potential for Cuba tourism, or on how the market is on the verge of a boom once the U.S. embargo and travel ban are lifted.

Unfortunately, Cuba is still technically closed to U.S. tourism, although many thousands of Americans visit "unofficially." But once again we seem to be at a critical juncture where there's a chance Cuba could be opened for travel. Some members of Congress are actively campaigning to lift the U.S. Treasury Department ban on U.S. citizens spending money in Cuba, which effectively puts any American who travels to the country in violation of U.S. law.

New Opening?

Last month Jimmy Carter became the first former U.S. president to visit Cuba. He called on Cuba to open up its political system, but he also suggested that the Bush administration should ease the trade embargo and lift the ban on travel. In a May 9 editorial, even the conservative *Wall Street Journal* wrote that it was time to lift the embargo and the travel ban.

Two weeks ago President Bush, speaking to a largely Cuban-American audience in Florida, said he would neither end the embargo nor lift the travel ban until Cuba had installed a new government after open and democratic elec-

tions. Effectively, however, Cuba is being held to a very different standard from many countries with which the U.S. maintains full diplomatic relations. Indeed, Americans are allowed to travel to a host of countries run by extremely oppressive regimes.

But Cuba is a subject that produces strong emotions, even in the travel industry. Earlier this month ASTA President Richard Copland, CTC, traveled on a fact-finding trip to Cuba. He reportedly commented favorably on the potential of tourism to the island and his meeting with Fidel Castro. He also said ASTA would launch a Cuba specialist course to educate travel agents about the island.

Not surprisingly, Copland's trip produced a strong response here. Jack Guiteras, a Cuban-American and president of Lorraine Travel Bureau in Coral Gables, Fla., wrote a letter harshly criticizing the ASTA president. "At a time when our country is waging a courageous worldwide battle against terrorism," Guiteras wrote, "the president and CEO of ASTA sees it fitting to coddle the master-terrorist himself, who over all these years has trained, harbored, aided and abetted every terrorist organization that came his way, and sent them throughout the globe to spread havoc, and who personally almost launched a nuclear attack against the U.S. and would not hesitate to do so again if the weasel had the means." That's just one of the milder excerpts from Guiteras' letter, but it shows the emotion that the issue of Cuba produces.

In Copland's response to Guiteras, he wrote: "I understand your strong feelings on the subject. Given your personal experiences I probably would have similar sentiments...I was in Cuba to further ASTA's goal of free travel for all people to all areas of the world."



James Shillinglaw

Ending the Ban

Perhaps those of us who have not experienced the tyranny of Castro's regime can never fully understand the emotions of Cuban-Americans like Guiteras, who escaped to find refuge here. Nevertheless, I simply don't believe Cuba is going to change without an end to the embargo and travel ban. Such policies clearly haven't worked in the past 40 years with Cuba. Some say an end to the U.S. embargo and travel ban would prop up Castro's regime. But I have to side with those who maintain that increased contact between the peoples of the U.S. and Cuba can only lead in the end to a more open and democratic society for the Cuban people. Let's end the travel ban...it's time.

James Shillinglaw, CTC

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☐ **YES!**

☐ **NO.**

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Cuban bogeyman rides again

CHICAGO TRIBUNE, MAY 9, 2002

Charges by the Bush administration that Cuba is developing biological weapons and cooperating with rogue states interested in using them *could* be plausible. Cuba has a well-known medical industry and the manufacture and delivery of biological agents is far less costly and complex than nuclear or even many conventional weapons. Rig up a Cessna with nozzles and a tankload of deadly crud and you're in business.

Yet such accusations—particularly when offered without a shred of proof or elaboration—sound like another tedious episode in the war of words between the two countries. Coming days before former President Jimmy Carter is to go to Cuba, and amid growing congressional sentiment to lift trade restrictions against the island, this latest round of charges begins to look like a political stunt.

The charges were leveled Monday by State Department arms control chief John R. Bolton during a speech to the Heritage Foundation, a conservative think tank in the capital. He offered no concrete proof, just circumstantial allegations such as this: Castro visited Iran, Libya and Syria in the past year, and all of them are on the U.S. list of terrorism sponsors.

Unless one assumes Castro and those around him have lost their minds and plan some sort of national kamikaze mission, it's tough to imagine why Cuba would embark on such a course. CNN comes in loud and clear in Havana, and so have the images of the devastation American military power has inflicted on Afghanistan, halfway around the world. Sitting just 90 miles away, U.S.

response to any Cuban aggression would be just as deadly and that much quicker.

If anything, in recent months Castro has been a model of good behavior. A \$90 million cash sale of U.S. food to Cuba went through without incident. Cuba and Midwestern exporters seem eager to do more deals, perhaps to include the sale of medicines. In fact, an amendment to lift the restrictions of private financing of sales to Cuba would have easily passed the House, had it not been for direct White House intervention.

In preparation for Carter's visit, Castro also has freed Vladimiro Roca, the highest-profile political dissident in jail. Roca was supposed to be freed soon anyway, but Castro's move was considered a friendly gesture to humor Carter.

There is evidence, however, to suggest domestic politics are again driving American policy toward Cuba. Gov. Jeb Bush is running for re-election in Florida, and there is nothing like stoking the flames of anti-Castro sentiment in Dade County to secure the Cuban-American vote. And nothing like a new "threat" to justify continued hostility toward Cuba.

In 1962, and during the decades of the Cold War, when the Soviets bankrolled Cuban military excursions worldwide, the Castro government was certainly a threat. But after the collapse of the Soviet Union—and along with it the Cuban economy and its military—any credible threat to the U.S. has evaporated. If the Bush administration has proof of renewed Cuban aggression, let's see it—and develop a prudent response. Otherwise, let this bogeyman die a long-overdue death.

Resist the casino

TEXAS STATE LEGISLATURE'S RESOLUTION CALLING FOR THE REMOVAL OF TRADE, FINANCIAL, AND TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS RELATING TO CUBA

Passed by both houses May 23, 2001 [77R14819 ELG-D CONCURRENT RESOLUTION]

WHEREAS, The relationship between the United States and Cuba has long been marked by tension and confrontation; further heightening this hostility is the 40-year-old U.S. trade embargo against the island nation that remains the longest-standing embargo in modern history; and

WHEREAS, Cuba imports nearly a billion dollars' worth of food every year, including approximately 1,100,000 tons of wheat, 420,000 tons of rice, 37,000 tons of poultry, and 60,000 tons of dairy products; these amounts are expected to grow significantly in coming years as Cuba slowly recovers from the severe economic recession it has endured following the withdrawal of subsidies from the former Soviet Union in the last decade; and

WHEREAS, Agriculture is the second-largest industry in Texas, and this state ranks among the top five states in overall value of agricultural exports at more than \$3 billion annually; thus, Texas is ideally positioned to benefit from the market opportunities that free trade with Cuba would provide; rather than depriving Cuba of agricultural products, the U.S. embargo succeeds only in driving sales to competitors in other countries that have no such restrictions; and

WHEREAS, In recent years, Cuba has developed important pharmaceutical products, namely, a new meningitis B vaccine that has virtually eliminated the disease in Cuba; such products have the potential to protect Americans against diseases that continue to threaten large populations around the world; and

WHEREAS, Cuba's potential oil reserves have attracted the interest of numerous other countries who have been helping Cuba develop its existing wells and search for new reserves; Cuba's oil output has increased more than 400 percent over the last decade; and

WHEREAS, The United States' trade, financial, and travel restrictions against Cuba hinder Texas' export of agricultural and food products, its ability to import critical energy products, the treatment of illnesses experienced by Texans, and the right of Texans to travel freely;

now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That the 77th Legislature of the State of Texas hereby respectfully urge the Congress of the United States to consider the removal of trade, financial, and travel restrictions relating to Cuba; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That the Texas secretary of state forward official copies of this resolution to the president of the United States, to the speaker of the house of representatives and the president of the senate of the United States Congress, and to all the members of the Texas delegation to the congress with the request that this resolution be officially entered in the Congressional Record as a memorial to the Congress of the United States of America.

Chicago Tribune Editorial Against the Helms-Lieberman Bill

May 23, 2001

How not to overthrow Castro

With the introduction last week of the Cuban Solidarity Act of 2001, Sen. Jesse Helms (R-N.C.), chairman of the Committee on Foreign Relations—and a veritable geyser of bad policy ideas with regard to Cuba—may have outdone himself. No matter how large the federal surplus eventually turns out to be, it couldn't possibly be large enough to justify this waste of \$100 million of public money.

Helms' bill would underwrite dissidents in Cuba and supply them with all their needs, from crackers to cellular phones. According to a press release, recipients "may include prisoners (and family members), persecuted dissidents or repatriated persons, workers' rights activists" and anyone else working to overthrow Castro.

He described the package as a "blueprint for a more vigorous U.S. policy to liberate the enslaved island of Cuba," and compared it to the American support for the independent labor movement in Poland in the 1980s.

The Cuban-American National Foundation, the largest and best financed of the anti-Castro organizations in this country, quickly endorsed Helms' package. Most analysts suspect the foundation came up with the idea and the senator—co-author of the 1996 Helms-Burton Act and implacable foe of Castro—was only too happy to oblige.

But if piercing Cuba's isolation is what the senator seeks, there is a far cheaper and faster way: Lift the ban on Americans traveling to the island. Then just stand back and watch.

A stampede of hundreds of thousands of tourists would gladly bring the books, videos, magazines and other subversive materials that Helms wants to smuggle into Cuba. More dangerous still for Castro's regime, these blabby gringos will bring tales of life outside, including news that the 1960 Fairlane was not the last model car manufactured by Ford.

Best of all, the tourists will do it all at their own expense, in exchange for a sunburn, cheap rum drinks and enough renditions of "Guantanamera" to make anyone swear off Caribbean vacations.

In reality, of course, there is no way that Helms or anyone else can hope to filter \$25 million a year into Cuba for the next four years. Most likely, very nearly all of this windfall will go to the anti-Castro groups in Miami rather than to any starving dissidents in the island.

In Cuba, leading dissident figure Elizardo Sánchez already has said "No thanks!" to American money. The perception of being on the payroll of the U.S., he said, would be the end of his credibility. Any outside subsidies also would only give Castro a ready-made justification to tighten the vise around any dissent groups.

American support of Poland's Solidarity movement came *after* Lech Walesa had already established himself as an opposition leader and tens of thousands had joined his independent union.

U.S. money did not create Solidarity and it's not likely to ignite an opposition movement in Cuba or anywhere else. That is more likely to occur when the U.S. ends the isolation of Cuba, Cubans see some political and economic alternatives—and then go for them.