

Testimony
before
the Senate Committee on Finance
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by
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Good morning. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you.

I am the Executive Director of The Center for a Free Cuba, a non-partisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to the promotion of human rights in the island. The Center administers a grant from USAID to help achieve that goal. Our activities in the U.S. and part of our program in Cuba are funded by private donations. The Center has been granted 501c-3 status by the IRS, and does not take a position on any bill before Congress.

I have spent my life as a human rights advocate, notably as Washington's representative of Freedom House, in which capacity I denounced all types of dictatorships before the United Nations Commission on Human Rights. By training, I am a political scientist.

Last week, many called for an investigation of the CIA burning of tapes and documents of enemy combatant interrogations. But this is not the only intelligence matter the Congress has to look into. Why not asked the intelligence community for a full disclosure of the damage done By Ana Belen Montes, a high level intelligence analyst currently serving a 25-year sentence for spying for Havana. She divulged American secrets, but most importantly, by preparing numerous reports for the Pentagon, that were sometimes leaked, she helped shaped the debate on Cuba. It is time for Congress to realize that arguments advanced by Mrs. Montes, are sometimes repeated by folks who should know better. They are simply recycled Cuban government disinformation.

The Department of State lists the Castro dynasty as a "State Sponsor of Terror." Castro provides safe haven for U.S. fugitives, including killers of American police officers. The Castros' 50 year effort to harm Americans did not end when he urged Moscow to drop an atomic bomb on the U.S. in 1962; and did not end with the collapse of the Soviet Union. He has murdered American citizens and he nurtures like minded regimes that share his hostility to America.

The Castros' support for terrorism and his cooperation with violent anti-American groups and regimes cannot be swept under the carpet. Timing, in life as in politics, is extremely important. What is happening outside these chambers today that should be taken into account in this discussion?

- There has been a renewal of political repression on the island. Cuban police broke just last week into a Catholic Church, beating up several people. Other dissidents were detained yesterday. But Cuba's peaceful opposition had not been cowed. The Ladies in White, mothers, sisters, daughters of political prisoners, joined by foreign women, protested early this week before Cuba's Parliament. The Ladies in White were awarded in 2005 the prestigious Sakharov award by the European Union. The European Union recognized earlier Oswaldo Paya for his pro-human rights work, which included the gathering of more than 20,000 signatures demanding change.
- The Europeans have conditioned Havana's admittance to a tariff accord to respect for minimal human right standards.

- The President just awarded the Medal of Freedom to Oscar Elias Biscet, a Cuban physician and Amnesty International prisoner of conscience sentenced to 25 years.

This is not the time for the U.S. to cuddle the Cuban dictatorship. As Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice has said: “in Cuba Fidel Castro is still the one man through whom everything has to go, any trade that goes through Cuba is going to strengthen Cuba’s regime.” Or as former Secretary of State Colin Powell wrote in a 2002 letter to the Congress: “trade by other nations with Cuba has brought no change to Cuba’s despotic practices... Two governments have approached the US to complain that Cuba’s payment of cash for US agricultural products have meant that they are not getting paid at all... the lack of a sound economic rationale makes it more likely that Castro would use any liberalizing of our trade position for his political benefit.”

The situation has not changed since Secretary Powell wrote that letter. I would like to ask that the letter be included into the record.

As a political scientist I deplore the tendency of some members of Congress to want to usurp not only the responsibilities of the Secretary of State, but of the duties of consular officer responsible for issuing visas. Congressional micromanagement of foreign policy is a mistake. I urge the Committee to ask the Administration to provide input into your deliberations.

To conclude:

- 1- This is not the time to make Cuba an exception on U.S. restrictions on state sponsors of terrorism, such as Iran, North Korea, Syria and Sudan.
- 2- This is not the time, in the aftermath of the courageous vote of the Venezuelan people to send a message that a regime could bring the world to the edge of nuclear Armageddon, confiscate American properties, murder Americans, and while it continues its anti-American campaigns, the U.S. will reward it with business-as-usual, including access to American financial institutions.
- 3- Many in Congress mean well, but ordering the Executive to facilitate travel to the US by Castro’s government officials, Congress denies the President one of the few levers he has to influence the regime’s behavior. At the very least, these hearings need to include a full review of the lack of reciprocity in the treatment of American diplomats stationed in Cuba and Castros diplomats in the US. The work of the US Interests Section in Havana is severely curtailed by the regime’s effort to impede its work, intimidate, and harass American diplomats and their families. Despite US waivers of constraints affecting Cuban diplomats in Washington, the flow of American needed supplies is often interrupted and the US diplomatic pouch has been broken into. Is this the time to reward such behavior?
- 4- Havana is broke. It owes billions to the Paris Club, a consortium of banks and governments. If the U.S. were to facilitate trade with the Castro brothers outside current guidelines, it could end up holding the bag at the end of a long line of

creditors. Let's not forget that when there is a financial catastrophe corporate interests like Enron come to Congress asking for a bailout from the American tax payers. Furthermore, business with the Castro brothers is done outside any real legal protection, as BANCAMEX discovered when Havana stopped payments in response to a political controversy between the two governments.

- 5- Some of the trade with Havana is likely to have violated American law. I urge any of you to ask the Justice Department to look into it. At least in one case, a multimillion dollar sale was cancelled when company executives discovered their export deal included a commitment to lobby the US in exchange for Castro's business. They had signed a memorandum to that effect. How many business deals are currently taking place albeit without an incriminating piece of paper? American exporters believe they are selling products; the Castros believe they are hiring lobbyists.
- 6- It has been argued that American companies trading with the regime would help improve the human rights situation on the island, by using their access to urge the release of political prisoners. But no such appeals have been made.

And there is also the travel ban, which U.S. Courts have found constitutional. The ban denies hard currency to Havana for the reasons already mentioned. And because Cuba's tourist industry is controlled by the military, and Cubans, like blacks during South Africa's apartheid, are not allowed to stay in hotels, patronized beaches, hospitals, etc. set aside for tourists.

Congress needs to take into account that a growing portion of Cuba's tourism is channeled to tourist enclaves in offshore islands: tourists fly in from abroad without even setting foot in Cuba proper.

The issue of traveling to the island by Cuban Americans is misunderstood. Cuban nationals who have been granted political asylum in the United States should not demand the right to travel on vacation to the island while their countrymen are kept outside tourists enclaves.

Travel restrictions by Cuban Americans should be revamped to permit travel to the island for emergency reasons while bringing Cuban Americans under the general ban of tourist travel to the island.