

Washington, Havana and Miami

Diario Las Américas, Friday, 2 October 1998, page A-4

By Julio Estorino

On August 24 the State Department spokesperson, James Foley, commenting on the visit by the dictator Fidel Castro to the Dominican Republic, clearly identified him as the obstacle for achieving democracy in Cuba, saying his regime is "impervious to external influences." The official also said that it is only a matter of time before the regime's end. He also said that governments that choose to engage with Havana have a moral obligation to do so in a way that encourages a fundamental and systematic change by the Cuban authorities.

On September 2, the Voice of America launched, to the world, an editorial with a strong tone that said, this is the time for a fundamental change in Cuba, calling the dictatorship "a pathetic anachronism" and expressing in the end an emphatic belief in the freedom that awaits the Cuban people in the future.

The following day Washington denied the company Alamar permission to send a group of businessmen to travel to Cuba, which planned on meeting with Castro's officials, "to discuss future business opportunities." The Clinton Administration said the proposed meeting would be contrary to U.S. policy, and if it were to go ahead that it would only serve to benefit the Cuban government, not the Cuban people. The organizers, designed as a thinly veiled attempt to undermine the embargo, were left as Pacheco's bride, all dressed up and rowdy.

On the 14th of the same month, ten Cuban residents of Greater Miami were arrested by federal authorities on charges, that weren't trivial by any means, of being Castro's spies whose objective was to obtain information on U.S. military installations.

Less than two weeks later, on the 25th, the United States representative before the UN General Assembly, Peter Burleigh, responded to a series of diatribes that Roberto Robaina — Fidel's Foreign Minister, had directed to this country the previous day.

"The attack by Cuba's Foreign Minister against the United States" — said the Washington representative — "reflects the Cuban government's fear of a peaceful democratic transition in respect to human rights." He continued: "I ask this Assembly two things: when will the Cuban government permit the Cuban people to determine their own future through free and fair elections? When will Cuba release the political prisoners languishing in jails because what they wanted was to see a stable and democratic Cuba?" Mr. Burleigh concluded his intervention by reminding Robaina of one of Martí's thoughts: "Freedom is the right that every man has to be honest and think and speak without hypocrisy."

To close the month yesterday, the 30th, the State Department again spoke about Cuba through one of its spokespersons. After condemning in no uncertain terms the cruelty of Castroism against its opponents; Marta Beatriz Roque, Vladimiro Roca Antunez, Felix Bonne Carcasés and René Gómez Manzano, the representative of Clinton's foreign policy said: "History will not absolve Fidel Castro or his government for violating human rights and for the long suffering of the Cuban people".

Does the above show Washington's "hard line" against Fidel Castro's regime? It is argued, on the contrary, that this administration began and continues the practice of returning to Cuba the Cuban rafters trying to reach the shores of this nation. We must recognize that even besieged it is indefensible because of its inhumanity, but politically it is not something

that benefits Castro, quite the opposite. Interestingly, some who pull at their hair and most vehemently criticize "the Americans" for the repatriation of Cubans, no less vehemently were yesterday critical for "permitting the tyrant to use this escape valve" given that "thinking of leaving Cuba does not set off the necessary war."

It can also be said that all the paragraphs of the Helms Burton Act have not been applied, but it must also be said that despite pressures and bad forecasts against it, the Helms Burton Act like the embargo, is still there, thanks largely to having the fortune of having the Congress controlled by one party, with the other party in the White House, which maintains the Cuban case as a relatively valuable political matter – electorally for both parties.

It can also be mentioned that just in the last few days the United States government asked the Central Americans to focus on repressing activities that could be identified as terrorist, supposedly promoted by Cuban exiles against the tyranny, whom they themselves - the United States - condemn.

It must be remembered that for many, many years Washington has not lost an opportunity to reiterate that it wants freedom for Cuba, but it wants this to be achieved through peaceful means, a position which many Cubans agree with. Others that are trying to achieve this just outcome accept any means, any. And others of us say, by whatever morally justifiable method, excluding indiscriminate violence. In this case, we see, the difference is on the method not the goal.

I don't give or take. I have tried to relate the most objective and possibly dispassionate facts and important events that provide the current context for the United States position on Cuba. Certainly, these facts and these words do not indicate sympathy for Fidel Castro and his regime, or tend to in any way to assist him stay in power.

Is it justified, therefore, the continuing anti-American rhetoric to which we are subjected to that is similar to what we hear from Havana? Is it wise, does it help our cause, does it win us friends? ... Who benefits from a customary confrontation between Washington and Miami?

It doesn't matter which party occupies the White House, it doesn't matter what the president's name is, Washington will always follow what they consider to be in their own interest, which is what all governments do. Knowing this and keeping close to the truth, we must ensure we have everything we need. For them, in today's world, the demagogic exasperation must be left behind, to serve the ideal and see things as they are: those who have little ammunition cannot afford to confuse the target, nor throw itself into the enemy's world.