

Forum: ECOSOC

Issue: Necessity of ending the economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed by the US against Cuba

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INTRODUCTION

The issue of the financial, economic and commercial embargo imposed by the United States of America on Cuba is a dispute between the two states that has its roots in the Cold War, virtually the conflict of this time's main opposing ideologies, Capitalism and Communism. As it will be thoroughly explained throughout this paper, one should go back to the 1850's with the United States being actually divided between the pro-slavery party, whose lawmakers want to buy Cuba by Spain or even gain control over the territory by the use of force and the anti-slavery party, which opposes itself to this notion considering it as imperialism. However, the crisis between these two states was widely affected by the establishment of the communist regime in Cuba in 1959 led by Fidel Castro and a group of revolutionaries, who seized power by overthrowing the US-backed dictator, Fulgencio Batista. The newly formed government was initially recognized by the US, but the latter soon began imposing economic penalties on Cuba. This measure taken by the US-governement was the result of Cuba's increased trading activity with the Soviet Union as well as Castro's decision to nationalize American owned properties and hike taxes on U.S imports. In retaliation to this commercial strategy, Washington proceeded with the banning of nearly all U.S exports to Cuba, which was afterwards expanded on a full trade embargo announced by the Kenedy administration on February 7th 1962. In total, the embargo imposed by the US had disastrous effects on both Cuba's economy, which was overdependent on trade with the US, as well as on the life quality of the Cubans. More specifically, they are denied access to technology, medicine and affordable food, which could be provided to the Cubans if the embargo was lifted. A recent report by the American Association for World Health illustrated that doctors in Cuba have access to less than 50% of the drugs on the world market. Additionally, Amnesty International reported in 2011 that "treatments for children and young people with bone cancer... [and] antiretroviral drugs used to treat children with HIV/AIDS" were not readily available with the embargo in place because they were brought to commercialization under US patents.As shown by the two abovementioned reports, the US embargo on Cuba has had disastrous implications on the innocent Cuban citizens by depriving them of basic needs and services.Despite the almost six decades that have passed since the implementation of economic penalties on Cuba, US has not significantly changed its policy on this issue,

resulting in many countries decision and even the UN, since 1991, to officially denounce this act and urging the USA to lift the embargo. Cuba's economy is nowadays facing many challenges, with the inability to conduct trade with the US being a key factor to its shrinking. As a result, it is more than urgent that immediate action be taken in order to end the embargo on Cuba so as to alleviate its economy and boost the living conditions of the greatly suffered Cubans.

DEFINITION OF KEY-TERMS

Cold war

The term "Cold war" refers to the intense and multiform antagonism (political, ideological, economic and cultural) between the two superpowers, also referred to as "poles", USA and Soviet Union, which took place straight after the end of WW2 and finished at the end of the 1980's, without however escalating into an armed dispute.

Embargo

An embargo is considered to be a governmental order to restrict the trade of some goods or in case of a "full and complete" embargo severe cut all trading channels with a foreign country. The most common reason for the imposition of such a measure is political conflicts between the nations, which also applies to the discussed topic of US and Cuba. Embargoes are most commonly designed to isolate a country by pressuring its economy, hence forcing it to make the "appropriate" changes to its political behavior.

Sanctions

A sanction is financial penalty imposed by a country to another state, or individuals of another country. Sanctions are a main instrument of exercising foreign policy and particularly aim at pressuring a country's economy. Sanctions can be put into force through several ways, the most common of which being:

- Tariffs, mostly imposed on goods imported by a foreign country
- Quotas, a limit set on the imports and exports from and to another country
- Embargo
- Asset freezes or seizures, preventing state or privately owned assets from being sold or transferred

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

History of the US-Cuba relation

Pre-Cold war phase

In order to completely understand the relationship between these two countries and how the tension escalated, one should not go back to 1959 and the establishment of Castro's communist regime, but to the 1850's. During this period the USA two opposition parties were dominating the country's political scene, namely the anti-slavery and the pro-slavery politics. One of the most widely debated issues of the time was the future of the Spanish colony, Cuba. Pro-slavery politicians wanted to gain control over the colony's territory either by buying it from Spain or by using military force, so as to turn it into a new slave state and exploit its resources as well as its conducive location for trading activity. On the other side the anti-slavery party considers this intension as imperialistic and stands for respect towards Cuba's sovereignty. In 1898, Cuban nationalists revolt against Spain, following other countries who break away from the empire in the 19th century. The US, which had decided to remain neutral due to the different opinions expressed by its politicians, joined Cuba's revolution, when a US warship exploded in Havana harbor. After the end of the Spanish-American war, the defeated Spain signed the rights to its territories- including Cuba- over the US, which granted Cuba its independence, with the stipulation that USA had the right to intervene in the country's affairs if deemed necessary and be allowed by the Cuban government to construct its naval base at the Guantánamo Bay. Obviously, USA takes advantage of its right to essentially regulate Cuba's governance and an era of US interventions begins. From 1906 until 1922 America repeatedly sends its troops to Cuba so as to suppress uprising rebellions and protect its national interests, such as sugar imports. The period in which USA exercises its imperialistic policy towards Cuba technically ends in 1933 with a revolution against Cuba's government. According to the law, US is obliged to intervene in order to solve this political crisis, but president Franklin Roosevelt prefers neutrality, hence wanting to bring to an end the imperiliastic era. Over the next 20 years, democracy is being instituted in Cuba and the two countries retain good relations.

Cold war era

Cuba's democratic climate and prosperity takes a dramatic shift in 1952, when a former president and military leader named Fulgencio Batista organizes a coup d'état, seizes governmental power and suspends the constitution by imposing an oppressive rule. A year after establishment of the authoritarian regime in Cuba, a team of revolutionaries led by the young lawyer Fidel Castro begin their counterattack against Batista with the aim to overthrow the states' oppressor and restore the former democratic constitution. During this internal conflict, USA was really concerned about Soviet Union's increased influence in Europe and feare communist expansion in Latin America as well. As a result, in order to intercept Castro's onset, whose Marxist and philosoviet beliefs were commonly known at that time, US backed the Batista regime by selling him arms. In 1959 the communists won eventually the war and Castro gained control over Cuba,

hence making America's fear for the expansion of Soviet influence more tangible than ever. Castro, as expected, tightened Cuba's diplomatic and trade relations with the Soviet Union, nationalized all foreign assets, including the American and hiked taxes on U.S imports as an answer to USA's assistance to Batista's totalitarian regime. In retaliation to Cuba's drastic measures, president Eisenhower slashed the import quota of sugar, froze Cuban assets in the US and imposed an almost full-trade embargo, by cutting off diplomatic relations with Castro's administration. The next big incident that significantly deteriorated the already tense situation between the two countries was the Bay of Pigs Invasion, a CIA attempt to assassinate Castro, which ended up with the Cuban military dismantling and suppressing the whole operation in just three days. On February 7th 1962 in the aftermath of Cuba's progressively increasing relations with USSR and the continuously failed attempts to overthrow Castro, J.F.Kennedy announced a "full and complete" embargo on Cuba that prohibits every kind of trade. These actions fueled Castro's mistrust and anti-American feelings, which then resulted in the most fearful incident during the Cold War and nearly perpetrated the beginning of World War III, the so-called "Cuban Missile Crisis". The crisis started when Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev agreed with Castro to install Soviet nuclear missiles on the Cuban territory so as for the latter to protect its domain in case of a future invasion. Soon U.S spy satellites discovered the construction of the nuclear base and Kennedy immediately ordered a naval "quarantine of Cuba", while at the same time setting off a thirteen-day standoff between US president and Nikita Khrushchev. With the threat of a third, nuclear world war on the horizon, the two leaders decided to negotiate on the ongoing crisis and reached eventually a mutually respected agreement. US president pledged to remove their nuclear missiles from Turkey within a few months and never invade Cuba in the future. From his side, Khrushchev announced that the nuclear missiles be removed as soon as possible. This dangerous crisis was consequently resolved and the following July Kennedy called the travel of U.S nationals to Cuba out of order.

Post-Cold War Era

In the following decades USA adopted a policy of both economic and diplomatic isolation towards Cuba. In 1982, President Reagan characterized Cuba as a state that actively promotes terrorism due to its support of leftist revolutionary groups in Central America and Africa. Following Reagan's notion George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton signed the "Cuba Democracy Act of 1992" and the "Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity Act of 1996" accordingly, which called for the strengthening of the economic sanctions and stipulated that the embargo would only be lifted after Castros are no longer in charge of Cuba's government, Cuba has moved to a free electoral system and has released political prisoners. After almost five decades of cold relationship between the two countries Obama was the first US president after the imposition of the trade embargo to approach the issue from a different scope and try to restore diplomatic ties

with Cuba. During his presidential campaign Obama stated that it was time for the US to “pursue direct diplomacy” with Cuba and seek an atmosphere of mutual respect between the two nations. After obtaining office US president proceeded with new friendly towards Cuba’s people measures, including the permission of US citizens to visit Cuba for religious or educational purposes, the capability of Cubans living in the USA to send unlimited funds to Cuba as well as looser regulations on remittances and travel. Along with the crucial reforms made by the Obama administration, the Cuban leadership signaled a willingness to changes primarily in the economic sector. Raul Castro began in 2009 to liberalize Cuba’s state-controlled economy by decentralizing the agricultural sector, giving more freedom to small businesses and expanding access to consumer goods. These measures contributed to the rapid swelling of the country’s private sector, which was warmly welcomed by the US politics. In the climate of constant attempts by both states to normalize their relations, Barack Obama and Raul Castro announce that they would restore full diplomatic ties, following the exchange of a jailed U.S. intelligence officer for the three remaining Cuban Five prisoners as well as US subcontractor’s, Allan Gross, release. Obama’s Cuba-friendly Détente continued in the following months with further easing travel and trade restrictions and the US States Department’s decision to remove Cuba from the list of states sponsoring terrorism. On July 20,2015 the United States and Cuban embassies, which had been closed since 1961, eventually reopen, hence proving that the countries’ relations had been significantly tightened. The next major step towards normalization came on March 21, 2016, when president Obama visited Havana in the first trip to Cuba by a sitting US president since 1928. This incident signaled a new era in the US-Cuba relationship and later that year American commercial airlines began offering services between the countries.

MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANIZATIONS INVOLVED

United States of America

The USA, as it has thoroughly been explained above, sees Cuba as one of its main belligerents throughout the last sixty years. Despite the continuous pressure that the UN and its Member States have exercised on the US as well as Obama’s big steps forward to restoring the two countries’ relations, Trump administration is severely opposed to its predecessor’s policy. During his presidential campaign D.J Trump fiercely criticized Obama’s thaw with Cuba and pledged to reverse this situation once he seized governance. However, until now he has not made dramatic changes to the already existing policies, including the diplomatic ties with Cuba. The most significant changes that Trump has made, are prohibitions on trading activity with businesses owned by the Cuban military and security services and a ban on individual travel to Cuba, measures that were proposed via a June 2017 memorandum. Except for that, Trump administration announced that it would pull two-thirds of its embassy staff from Havana, after several American and Canadian diplomatic workers suffered unexplained injuries.

As a result, the majority of the embassy's tasks, including visa processing have been temporarily been suspended. Trump and his officers have repeatedly criticized the Cuban government for its poor human rights record and the single-party system. In 2018, Vice President Mike Pence and National Security Advisor John Bolton delivered condemning speeches towards the Cuban regime, criticizing it for its increased ties with the dangerous, socialist countries of Nicaragua and Venezuela, while Bolton referred to these three nations as the "troika of tyranny" that have caused massive humanitarian crisis and instability in the region.

Cuba

The Cuban government, as soon as Fidel Castro seized power, considers the US as a superpower that exercises its imperialistic policy on the Cuban state and wants to make the latter another colony in the Latin America region. Thus, Cuba's leadership finds no reason for the imposition of so harsh economic penalties and condemns the US for destroying its economy and degrading the life conditions of the Cubans. However, one should not forget Castro's ambiguous governance, which is viewed by many political and historical analysts as a brutal dictatorship. Castro shut down opposition newspapers, jailed thousands of political opponents and established the single-party system. Moreover, he limited the amount of individual ownership and almost abolished the private sector by proceeding with massive business centralization. Cuba's oppressive leadership as well as its limited economic options forced many citizens to leave the country and seek out a better future in the USA. Nowadays, Cuba has put a lot of effort in satisfying US' requirements for the lifting of the embargo, mainly through significant reforms in the economic sector and the intention to create stronger bonds with its neighbors and promote peace in the region. Nevertheless, the Cuban regime is still accused of not respecting human rights and violating International Humanitarian Law as well as maintaining the single-party system, which is clearly opposed to a democratically operating nation.

TIMELINE

OF

EVENTS

DATE	DESCRIPTION OF EVENT
21 st April 1898	Beginning of Spanish-American war (Spain vs USA, Cuban revolutionaries and Philipino revolutionaries)
13 th August 1898	End of the war with the defeated Spain signing the rights to its territories over USA
1906-1922	US era of interventions in the Cuban affairs

1933	Revolution against Cuban government, US backed militant Batista seizes power
1959	Fidel Castro leading a group of revolutionaries overthrows Batista and establishes a communist state
1960	Castro nationalizes all foreign assets in Cuba, imposes taxes on U.S imports and instigates trade deals with the Soviet Union
1961	Failed attempt of the US to assassinate Castro, also referred to as Bay of Pigs invasion
7 th February 1962	Full trade embargo announced by J.F Kennedy on Cuba
October 14 – 28, 1962	Cuban Missile Crisis
1966	President Lyndon B. Johnson announces the opening of the U.S. borders to all Cubans and gives preference to Cuban migrants with family ties to U.S. citizens or residents
March 1982	President Reagan labels Cuba a state that actively supports terrorism
October 23, 1992	President George H.W. Bush signs the Cuban Democracy Act, which increases U.S. economic sanctions on Cuba
March 12, 1996	Clinton signs the Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity Act that tightens the U.S embargo and calls for the Castro's removal from Cuban politics
January 28-29, 2014	Cuba hosts the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) summit, during which regional leaders discuss trade, peace, and human rights.
December 17, 2014	Barack Obama and Raul Castro announce they will restore full diplomatic ties
July 20, 2015	U.S. and Cuba Reopen Embassies
March 21, 2016	Obama becomes the first U.S. president in nearly ninety years to visit Cuba

November 25, 2016	Fidel Castro dies
June 16, 2017	President Donald J. Trump announces that he will reinstate travel and business restrictions
April 19, 2018	Raul Castro Steps Down

RELEVANT UN RESOLUTIONS, TREATIES AND EVENTS

The UN General Assembly has been adopting annual resolutions calling for the “Necessity of ending the economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed by the US against Cuba” since 1991 as Cuba’s economy is in an all time unstable situation. Obviously it would not make much sense to include all 27 resolution adopted, but I have listed the three latest ones, since they propose renewed measures and can thus be productive for staging our debate during the conference.

UNGA resolution A/73/85: This resolution was adopted in 2018 with 189 in favour to 2 against (Israel, United States)

UNGA resolution A/72/94 : This resolution was adopted in 2017 with 191 voted in favour and with the United States and Israel voting against

UNGA resolution A/71/91: This resolution was adopted in 2017 with 191 voted in favour and with the United States and Israel voting against

PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE

As it can clearly be understood the issue of the US embargo on Cuba is limited between these two countries’ and particularly USA’s strategy and decisions. As a result it is quite difficult for a foreign country to intervene in this dispute and implement radical measures in order to persuade the US to lift the embargo. The United Nations General Assembly as whole, except for Israel, USA’s probably most important ally, has plenty of times urged US to cease sanctions and restore its diplomatic ties with Cuba through the adoption of annual resolutions since 1991. In addition, President Obama was the first President after the end of the Cold War to take significant steps in bringing the two countries closer by implementing a series of commutation towards Cuba measures.

Other than the abovementioned actions, no actual attempts to solve the issue have been made as it is a matter that only concerns two sovereign states.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

The lift of the US embargo on Cuba is more than urgent, since its effects on the Cuba's citizens' life are dramatic. Cubans are denied access to technology, medicine, affordable food, and other goods thus confronting severe malnutrition and health issues, which could be avoided or at least be limited if the embargo were lifted. First and foremost the USA should recognize the fact that that Cuba does not pose a threat American sovereignty, as it previously did, during its tight cooperation with the USSR. Additionally, US should assist the Cuban government's efforts in meeting the conditions it called to fulfill through the provision of economic and financial support as well as humanitarian aid. Furthermore, the creation of UN body, which supervise the electoral process of Cuba, evaluate the socioeconomic situation in the country and document the situation of freedom of speech in the country would be really helpful, especially for the US so as to have a complete overview of the situation and be able to take measures accordingly so as for Cuba to eventually make the necessary political changes. Obviously, Cuba must also play an active role in the normalization of its relationship with the USA and not stick to its former-presidents, Castros, anti-american feeling and mistrust towards the US. Cuba should try to make the necessary changes in its policies and transition into more democratic practices of governance. Only if Cuba fully respects International Humanitarian Law and the UN Charter will USA lift the embargo that has caused so much damage on Cuban's life.

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