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State sponsor of peace: Cuba and the Colombia ceasefire

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At the National Network On Cuba 2022 Fall Meeting, Cuba's Ambassador to the United Nations Yuri Gala López explains how State Sponsors of Terrorism designation intensifies the U.S. blockade. Photo: Bill Hackwell

The bipartisan nature of imperialist aggression toward Cuba has never been more evident as President Joe Biden carries forward the Trumpist assault on Cuba via the U.S. State Sponsors of Terrorism (SSOT) list.

In the closing weeks of his term, Donald Trump shut down what seemed to be the beginning of a U.S. rapprochement with Cuba started by the Obama-Biden administration. Obama removed Cuba from the SSOT list, but Trump reversed that decision and added 243 more economic sanctions.

While campaigning for the White House, Biden had promised to “promptly reverse the failed Trump policies” against Cuba. Nearly three years later, Cuba is still suffering under the weight of the U.S. trade blockade, now worsened by the SSOT. Some 70 international banks cut ties with Cuba within weeks of Trump’s actions, making it all but impossible for Cuba to buy badly needed goods on the international market.

Joe Biden taking no action to separate his administration’s policy toward Cuba from Trump’s is an affront to the sentiment of the entire world. UN votes have condemned the U.S. trade blockade thirty times in annual lopsided votes in which the U.S. has never mustered more supporters in favor of the blockade than in the single digits while the rest of the world voted to end it.

Likewise, polls taken a few days after Obama’s 2014 visit to Cuba showed that a majority of people in the U.S. support normalization of relations and an end to the failed campaign of economic punishment.

Cuba hosted talks

Cuba has been hosting talks to bring an end to the bloodshed in Colombia since 2012. In the twisted line by the White House, Havana is accused of supporting terrorism because it rejected attempts to sabotage the process that offers hope for the people of Colombia.

Cuba refused to extradite ELN (National Liberation Army) peace negotiators to their home country. Former Colombian President Ivan Duque — a right-wing, pro-imperialist politician — had demanded the extradition. His demand and Cuba’s refusal provided the Trump-Biden bogus justification for having Cuba on the SSOT list. The lie was exposed on June 9 when the ELN and the government of Colombia agreed to a ceasefire.

In 2022, former guerilla fighter Gustavo Petro was elected president of Colombia. Within days he canceled arrest warrants against ELN fighters and resumed negotiations. He traveled to Cuba this week to participate in the ceremony announcing the important breakthrough.

This follows previous agreements between the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC.) Each of these guerilla armies has fought a long struggle to end the aggression and domination of the U.S. and build a new Colombia that would eradicate the deep, widespread poverty in Colombia.

Their forces have numbered at times in many tens of thousands of fighters, and they have held wide swaths of Colombia's territory. In exchange for the cessation of armed struggle, the agreements have yielded concessions that offer hope for the needs of 40 million Colombians.

It was the U.S. that had been funding, training, and providing arms to the Colombian military and death squad paramilitary forces for decades. The U.S. aimed to pacify the powerful people's struggle in Colombia and transform the country into a U.S. watchdog in Latin America. Under previous pro-imperialist administrations, Colombia launched failed attacks to sabotage the revolutionary process in Venezuela and sent troops to Ecuador to attack ELN combatants. Colombia's continued alignment with the U.S. meant more sabotage, clandestine actions, and warfare against neighbors.

With the election of President Petro, and the supportive role played by Cuba, the peace negotiations in Havana are a threat to U.S. designs on Colombia. Keeping Cuba on the SSOT list serves two purposes for the U.S. - to strangle the Cuban economy and to try to salvage their campaign to destroy peoples' resistance and turn Colombia into the Israel of Latin America.

Reagan, Clinton funded right-wing paramilitaries

Cuba was initially added to the SSOT by the Reagan administration as tens of thousands of workers, peasants, religious activists, and guerilla fighters were murdered in Nicaragua, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Bolivia during the 1980s. In 1994 U.S. President Bill Clinton launched “Plan Colombia,” which was hyped as a mission to eradicate the drug trade.

Officially it ended in 2015. Billions of dollars that could have housed people or repaired schools, or provided medical care at home, financed this campaign of terrorism. U.S.-funded, right-wing Colombian paramilitaries murdered homeless people on the streets and Colombia led the world in the murder rate of trade unionists. The UN reported that 260,000 Colombians were killed, 88% were killed by the Colombian military and paramilitaries. They also reported absolutely no change in the drug market. The CIA has been pegged in scandals involving the import of cocaine.

Plan Colombia is only one episode in the long history of U.S. terror against Latin America and others worldwide. Cuba’s refusal to extradite peace negotiators to face the wrath of a U.S.-funded client government was righteous. Cuba is not a terrorist state.

Activists across the U.S. are taking action to demand that Biden pick up a pen and write a letter instructing Congress to take Cuba off the State Sponsors of Terrorism list. Check out NNOC.org to find out where, when, and how you can get involved.



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