

Obama, the “new era” with Cuba and the CELAC Summit

Escrito por Carlos Fazio

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On December 17, after 18 months of secret negotiations with Vatican mediation, President Barack Obama recognized the failure of the strong-arm policy of the United States with respect to Cuba, and established a change of direction that should lead to a normalization of diplomatic relations with the island.

The principled policy of Havana had won. This was a historic victory; Cuban diplomacy led to the burial of the cold war logic that had characterised the ten successive administrations of the White House, from Dwight Eisenhower to George W. Bush. And this was done without the Cuban government abandoning its vigilance.

On Thursday, January 22, in the Palace of Conventions of the Cuban capital, the aggregate secretary for Latin America of the Department of State, Roberta Jacobson, and Josefina Vidal, general director for the United States of the island's foreign ministry, took the first concrete step towards leaving behind 54 years of a relationship that was not based on confidence. After the meeting, both officials recognized that it will be difficult to overcome political and ideological differences, and that the process for normalization of relations will be a long one. Long and tortuous, one might add. But without a doubt we are seeing the beginnings of a new dynamic, in which, if it is to prosper, the United States will have to abandon its old dreams of imperial domination and forsake their traditional subversive policy of forcing “regime change” on the island.

From his speech and the first actions of Obama it is clear that he accepts the Raul Castro government as legitimate, one with which they can coexist and dialogue. The United States did this previously with China, with the Soviet Union and with Vietnam. Why not Cuba? In this there is an obvious change of attitude on Obama's part, which will be resisted by the Republican Party which now controls Congress.

It is reasonable to speculate that the political calculation of the strategists of the Oval Office has shifted, mainly due to the changes produced in the Cuban-American community of Florida and

Washington, more moderate today than in the past, as well as the opposition to US policy towards Cuba from a number of Latin American countries with progressive governments. With respect to this, we should recall that President Obama had serious difficulties during the sixth Summit of the Americas in Cartagena, Colombia, where several Latin American heads of state insisted on the need for a change in the bilateral relationships between the US and Cuba, based on diplomatic principles such as the non-interference, self-determination and the sovereignty of peoples and the pacific resolution of controversies.

Nevertheless, from the discourse and the behaviour of Roberta Jacobson in Havana, and looking beyond the respectful and constructive ambience of the first round of negotiations with Josefina Vidal, it is easy to assume that Washington has not renounced intervention in the internal policies of the island and that it will continue to count on subtle forms of political penetration.

As indicated by Manuel E. Yepe, Washington will continue to use a strategy of “soft power”; defeated in the exercise of brute force, the Democrat establishment will insist on the method of “seduction”. As Fidel Castro noted in the year 2000, given that they have been unable to destroy the Revolution with criminal actions, they now “dream” of achieving this through “seductive methods”, such as what they call the “policy of people to people contacts”. At that time, Fidel accepted the challenge and said to the Washington authorities: “But play clean.”

Today Obama knows that a key element in the process of normalization of relations involves the removal of the criminal economic, commercial and financial blockade. Obama also realizes that the unjust inclusion of Cuba in the list of States that promote terrorism must be rectified. It is also clear that neither he nor anyone can expect Cuba to renounce its principles, and that the opening of diplomatic relations must be on the basis of relations among equals. That is to say, based on the respect for the sovereign equality of States, a fundamental principle of the United Nations’ Charter.

In this context, it is important to note that, during the 3rd Summit of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), to be celebrated in San José de Costa Rica on the 28th and 29th of January, some of the old voices of Washington’s undercover policies and their allies will attempt to discredit Cuba and weaken the policies of ALBA (Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America).

There is evidence that in meetings taking place in Mexico in December of 2014, a series of actions were planned to develop an event parallel to the CELAC Summit, aiming at weakening the regional bloc of progressive countries grouped in ALBA and UNASUR (Union of South American Nations).

The project was devised during an event called “Paths towards a democratic Cuba”, under the auspices and the financing of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation (KAS, for its German name), a powerful German conservative institution associated with the Christian Democratic Union party, whose headquarters are in Wesseling, Germany.

The event, “Paths towards a democratic Cuba”, co-supported by the Christian Democrat

Organization of America (ODCA), took place in Veracruz, on the eve of the twenty-fourth edition of the Ibero-American Summit of Heads of State and of Government, celebrated in Veracruz on December 8 and 9. It was preceded by a Summit of Ibero-American youth, also supported by the Konrad Adenauer foundation and OCDA.

It should be noted that KAS forms part of the World Movement for Democracy, an international organization created by the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), whose financing is approved by the US Congress and appears in the annual budget of the Department of State under the Agency for International Development (USAID). Several conspicuous members of NED have been linked to clandestine operations of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA).

At the time of its creation, the World Movement for Democracy signaled a new strategy on the part of the global right, whose objective was and still is the establishment of a globalized movement of activists engaged in the promotion of democracy, directed from Washington D.C. by NED. To speak clearly, NED provides political and ideological content and part of the financing, and the Konrad Adenauer carries the flag and contributes another part of the resources.

In the Veracruz meeting there were a number of Cuban counter-revolutionaries and figures of the regional extreme right, among whom was the “communication” aristocrat Yoani Sánchez, the discredited Guillermo Fariñas and Dagoberto Valdés Hernández. Even though there was little publicity from the closed-door meeting – given the contradictions to achieve a minimum of unity – provocative actions were discussed to take place in the framework of the CELAC Summit against Cuba, Venezuela and Nicaragua.

These included reediting projects developed during the CELAC Summit in Chile (2013), with the consent of the local Christian Democracy and the representation of the Konrad Adenauer in that Southern Cone country. In January of 2014, they attempted to do the same in Cuba, but failed, and given this, moved their venue to the International University of Florida, in Miami.

The “working breakfast” of Roberta Jacobson with seven Cuban dissidents, on Friday 23rd in Havana, following the first high level conversations between the US and Cuba in 35 years, indicates the intention of the Obama administration to continue to count on burnt out figures. Among opponents who spoke with Jacobson in the house of the Head of US interests, were Martha Beatriz Roque, Guillermo Fariñas, José Daniel Ferrer and Elizardo Sánchez.

But the leader of the so-called Damas de Blanco (Ladies in White), Berta Soler, did not attend, because, as she said publicly, there was no “balance” with respect to the “diversity of opinions” of the participants. In this case, as in many previous ones, the “balance” and the “diversity” had more to do with the fat budgets received from USAID and KAS, which yearly have cultivated the counter-revolutionary industry.

Obviously we are in a very early phase of President Obama’s change of course towards Cuba. There are some indications that the President of the United States will look to capitalize on his bold move during the Summit of the Americas to be celebrated next April in Panama. As the New York Times suggested on December 27, US diplomacy is putting pressure on Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto and Brazilian Dilma Rousseff to invite Cuban dissidents to the

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Panama Summit.

In this context, it is worth asking if this week, in Costa Rica, during the 3rd Summit of the CELAC countries, the Konrad Adenauer will affirm its disposition to finance a new parallel event against Cuba, Venezuela and Nicaragua. In any event, if it does, whether through inertia or with a planned undercover participation from Washington, such actions will respond to the strategy of “soft power” and the method of “seduction” favoured by the White House; but such events would detract from the overwhelming international support for Obama following his announcement of a “new era” in his relation with Cuba.

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(Translated for ALAI by Jordan Bishop)

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