

US Concern for Cuba, Latin America Is Spin for Intervention

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Global Research, July 16, 2021

[Green Left](#) 15 July 2021

Region: [Latin America & Caribbean, USA](#)

Theme: [Intelligence](#)

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The United States government says it is going to help Central America fight corruption, combat the “root causes” of migration in Mexico and Central America and help the Cuban people with freedom too.

But the US’s domestic and foreign track record demonstrates that it isn’t qualified to teach anyone about democracy, combating poverty, ending corruption, or anything related to human rights. Instead, its recent discourse regarding Latin American countries is aimed at dressing itself — the bully — as the saviour.

By manufacturing problems (i.e. by directly causing hunger and medicine shortages), as well as by magnifying or distorting existing problems and combining those with real hardships, the US has been framing its intervention and dominance in certain countries as help that no one can reasonably oppose. The help discourse makes it hard for many people to perceive the US’s real agenda and political interests, and it makes it very easy for the mainstream media to cover up the US’s desire to increase its exploitation of Latin America.

In US “help speak”, financial support for anti-government (read pro-US agenda) groups is spun as aid, particularly through USAID. Bringing a pro-US leader to power is framed as toppling a cruel dictator. Building towns where US corporations and manufacturing plants can do whatever they want — such as the Zones for Employment and Economic Development (ZEDs) in Honduras or industrial parks in Mexico. Imposing privatisation policies on poor countries is called “freedom”, “democracy”, “investment” or “economic support”.

While the US’s blockade of Cuba for the past six decades has caused more than [US\\$144 billion in losses](#) to the country’s economy, US President Joe Biden [sided](#) with protests there, and called for “relief from the tragic grip of the pandemic ... and economic suffering”. The blockade is what is causing severe shortages in Cuba, an oil crisis, and making it hard for the country to [manufacture enough vaccines](#).

Daniel Monterro, an independent journalist in Havana who was arrested during the protests, told *Democracy Now!* the media had skipped over the fact that most people arrested were

released the same day, and that there was violence by both police and protesters. He said the sanctions were the main cause of economic hardships, and Cubans in Florida calling for a military intervention in Cuba was “some of the most colonial behaviour I’ve seen in my life”.

Biden called on the Cuban government to “refrain from violence” — a hypocritical stance given the police murders and repression in his own country. “We are assessing how we can be helpful to the people of Cuba,” said White House spokesperson Jen Psaki, using the saviour discourse, but not considering repealing the sanctions.

Meanwhile, US Vice-President Kamala Harris has been making a show of helping Central America and Mexico by ostensibly addressing corruption and the “root causes” of migration in the region. Seven months into the year and no actual help has arrived, but she did [tell](#) migrants fleeing for their lives not to come to the US, and the US has kept its border closed — in stark violation of human rights and its own asylum seeker laws.

The White House [declared](#) a “fight against corruption” in Central America in June, and made it a US national security interest. In general, a security interest is code for war, intervention and attacks on countries that don’t conform to US interests.

Further, the State Department was [involved](#) in the Car Wash anti-corruption operation in Brazil which saw pro-poor president Luiz Inacio Lula arrested. “A gift from the CIA,” said one US prosecutor of Lula’s imprisonment. The main liaison for the FBI at the time, Leslie Backsches, [boasted](#) that it had “toppled presidents in Brazil.”

During a press conference in May, Harris hinted at the US’s real intentions with the latest so-called fight against corruption, “In the Northern Triangle, we also know that corruption prevents us from creating the conditions on the ground to best attract investment.” Even the White House statement [admits](#) the anti-corruption efforts are about securing “a critical advantage for the United States”.

The US government recently released its list of powerful corrupt figures in Central America who will be denied US visas. The [list](#) includes former Honduran president Jose Lobo, whom the US helped bring to power by supporting a coup in 2009, and a current legal advisor to the Salvadoran president. But it doesn’t include proven criminal and current Honduran president Juan Hernández — suggesting that political interests underlie the chosen figures.

The US also wants to raise the financing, resource support and “political assistance” to actors in foreign countries who “exhibit the desire to reduce corruption” (conveniently vague phrasing) and [promote](#) “partnerships with the private sector”. An Anticorruption Task Force will [provide](#) “training” to Central American authorities and US law enforcement experts will be deployed to “provide mentoring”. Here, it is worth noting the US’s long record in training coup leaders, repressive military leaders, and counter-revolutionaries.

A frequently used strategy to ensure compliance

For at least a century, the US has had an abusive relationship with Latin America, using it as a source of cheap labour, gutting its land for minerals, pillaging its resources, and demanding in an authoritarian way — ironic, given its overtures to “freedom” — total compliance with its self-benefiting trade policies.

When countries refuse to obey, when they assert their identity, strive for dignity, and combat poverty — and, therefore, reduce that cheap supply of labour — the US reacts. It supported the counter-revolution in Nicaragua with money and training, the CIA carried out a coup to remove Guatemalan president Jacobo Arbenz and end the revolution there, the US sided with the coup plotters recently in Bolivia, it repeatedly supported anti-democratic movements to overthrow Venezuela's Hugo Chávez, and time and again it has tried to kill or remove the Cuban president.

It systematically supports repressive, conservative governments because they are the ones that protect its business interests. And despite its current discourse on the “root causes of migration”, the US consistently and violently opposes movements and governments that side with the poor and could actually lower inequality and prevent forced migration.

The US, and the US-centric mainstream media, have two sets of standards: one for rebellious countries, and another for pro-US countries. That's why the US and the media are speaking out about arrests in Cuba, while staying silent about disappearing activists and journalists in Mexico. It's why the US State Department recently [talked](#) about the “violence and vandalism” of the protesters in Colombia instead of criticising the brutal repression. Biden has publicly supported Plan Colombia (currently called Peace Colombia), which makes the country one of the largest buyers of US military equipment.

The two sets of standards are also why US Secretary of State Antony Blinken [talked](#) about Cubans being allowed to “determine their own future” — something he would never call for in most other countries of the world where the majority are excluded from economic and political decision-making.

What we're seeing at the moment regarding the US's attitude towards Cuba is nothing new. I witnessed very similar tactics being employed in Venezuela. It was #SOSVenezuela placards and tweets when I was there, then #SOSEcuador was used against Correa while I was working in Ecuador, and now it's #SOSCuba.

The formula also includes versions of the following: causing or worsening food and medicine scarcity through blockades and hoarding; a media campaign portraying the government as a dictatorial regime; marches by mostly white and upper-class people; media and social media coverage of anti-government marches that exaggerate their size with selective visuals or even photos from other countries (or in the recent case of Cuba, using pro-government rallies as [photos](#) of opposition rallies); and a total media boycott of any pro-government marches. There is a focus on “freedom” and an absence of any context, historical causes of problems, or any real solutions, while everything is blamed on the government the US seeks to change.

The #SOSCuba social media campaign [began](#) just a week before the marches. The first tweets came from an account in Spain (with more than a thousand tweets in a few days and automated retweets), which was then supported by other bots and recently-created accounts. The tweets coincided with a rise in COVID-19 cases in Cuba, though the figures (about 40 deaths a day) are well below the US's current death rate.

Any help or aid from the US always comes with conditions and ulterior motives. No matter how intricate his manipulations are, the bully isn't actually going to help anyone.

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Featured image: This Associated Press photo of a pro-government protest in Havana was used to illustrate articles on anti-government protests in The Guardian and other mainstream media. Image: @AlanRMacLeod/Twitter

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