

Blockade: An act of war in times of peace

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By María Josefina Arce

Sixty years ago, the United States made official the economic, commercial and financial blockade against Cuba, the longest in the history of humanity. This cruel and inhuman policy had already been in the making since 1959 to isolate and asphyxiate the nascent Cuban Revolution.

Although it was on February 3, 1962 that then President John F. Kennedy signed Executive Order 3447 on the economic siege, even before that date Washington was already pressuring and adopting other actions. As a result, the supply of oil to Cuba by U.S. firms was interrupted, the Cuban sugar quota in the neighboring country's market was cancelled and U.S. citizens were advised to refrain from traveling to the Caribbean nation.

A year before the blockade was made official, the United States announced the breaking off of diplomatic and consular relations with the Cuban government.

Throughout six decades the various U.S. administrations have maintained and strengthened the unilateral measure, which constitutes an act of war in times of peace and violates the most elementary norms of international law.

Under George Bush, Sr., for example, the Torricelli Act was passed in 1992, with a markedly extraterritorial character. The subsidiaries of U.S. companies located in third countries are denied the right to negotiate with the Greater Antilles, while any vessel that has touched Cuban ports in the previous 180 days is prohibited from entering U.S. ports.

Four years later, the administration of William Clinton further internationalized the economic siege with the approval of the Helms-Burton Act, which denied credits and financial aid to countries and organizations that favored cooperation with Cuba.

Since 1992, the international community has condemned by a large majority in the UN General Assembly the hostile policy of Washington which, however, has ignored the world sentiment and that of its own people, who are largely in favor of the end of that blockade and the normalization of bilateral relations.

In fact, the now former President Donald Trump approved from 2017 to 2021 more than 240 measures against Cubans, 55 of them in the midst of a world health emergency due to COVID 19. That administration prevented the arrival in Cuban territory of donations of medical supplies that made the difference between life and death.

The blockade also placed numerous obstacles in the way of research and production of Cuban vaccines against COVID 19, which required a great effort on the part of the Cuban government to guarantee the immunization of the population and protect it from the disease caused by the new coronavirus.

Twenty-nine resolutions in favor of lifting the blockade have been approved by the UN General Assembly, the last one with Joe Biden already in office as President of the United States. But the current president has followed in the footsteps of his predecessors and maintains the criminal and genocidal measure.

The accumulated damages in six decades amount to 147,853 million dollars. Beyond the figures, the blockade affects Cuban families and their welfare. It affects all spheres of socio-economic life and hinders the country's progress in building a more prosperous and sustainable society.

But the Cuban people resist and continue to work for their future, for as the historic leader of the revolution Fidel Castro pointed out, "Cuba has found the moral and material strength to emerge victorious in the political and ideological terrain in the struggle against the economic blockade, subversion and the aggressions of Yankee imperialism."

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