

**Testimony by Antonio G. Rodiles Before the Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere
House Foreign Affairs Committee
Field Hearing - Miami, Florida
Date, 2015**

Cuba-US Relations, Neo-Castroism, and Regional Authoritarianism

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. It is an indeed an honor. Maybe someday soon, in Cuba, a Cuban Congress will be allowed to listen to the people and allow them to come before them, like I do here today before you, to share ideas about the challenges that they face.

My name is Antonio G. Rodiles. I am director of State de SATS, a forum created in 2010 by a group of young artists, intellectuals, and professionals to encourage debate about social, cultural, and political issues in Cuba. I am also one of the coordinators of the **Forum of Rights and Freedoms** in Cuba. I holds a master's degree in Mathematics from Florida State University and was a Ph.D. candidate in Physics at the National Autonomous University of Mexico.

A patent reality of today's world is the emergence of a new international bloc of authoritarian and neo-totalitarian states which are closely working together to stem the tide of liberal democracies which has swept the world for the past 200 years. From Europe to the Middle East to Latin America, this bloc continues to grow and to exercise greater repressive influence in their respective regions.

The Castro Regime in Havana, together with Russia's Putin and the dictatorial theocracy in Iran, are an essential part of this global alliance. The Castro regime is closely aligned with this group, and it is under its aegis and protection that what we term as "Neo-castroism," is emerging, in order to prolong the denial of fundamental rights and freedoms to the Cuban people.

In order to guarantee their economic survival, not only of the regime but of this new alliance, the bloc allows for certain market freedoms, all the while preserving structures that subject fundamental rights and freedoms to the interests of strongmen and populist groups. And this should come as no surprise to those of you who have studied Marxist Leninism, this bloc will adapt in order to survive, even if it means they must pretend to be free marketers.

As the examples of the People's Republic of China and Vietnam clearly demonstrate, the argument that certain economic freedoms always allow for the development of civil and political liberties is false. The use of state institutions to dismantle democratic mechanisms has become a very useful and effective machinery.

Furthermore, China and Vietnam's economic transformations have been cited by the Obama Administration to justify its change of policy towards Cuba. However, foreign

companies are allowed to freely recruit and directly pay to their employees in those Asian countries, while the Castro regime exerts an absolute monopoly retaining the hard currency from the labor of the Cubans, who are effectively enslaved, and get as little as a 5% of their wages. These profits are subsequently invested in the regime's repressive machine. This is modern-day slavery.

In this sense, the situation of Venezuela in our region is most alarming. Proponents of neototalitarianism have learned to twist electoral processes in order to legitimize their power. The use of paramilitaries as a method of repression, permits that the violation of fundamental rights and liberties have no legal consequences for the authorities.

We must emphasize that, given our understanding of how Castroite totalitarianism works, the Maduro regime is nothing less than a puppet regime, directly run by Castroite advisers at the behest of the dictatorship in Havana. And it is not just limited to Caracas. This system includes other countries in South America as well as Central America, including an old ally of Cuba, Nicaragua and Daniel Ortega.

Indeed, the formation of anti-American regional organizations such as ALBA and CELAC provide the necessary international support to said regimes to pressure democratic nations to accept these spurious democracies.

In this global scenario of the crisis of human rights and democracy in today's world, the case of Cuba is very pertinent. The Castroite regime not only survived the downfall of the Soviet bloc, but it has also extended its influence throughout the region. Poor decisions made by the international community and a fragmented society allowed Fidel Castro to manipulate the situation and prevent the end of the dictatorship.

One of these decisions, made by the Clinton administration, facilitated the drainage of all internal pressure through a mass exodus at a moment when Cubans demonstrated a clear sense of being fed up with the regime. The subsequent appearance of Hugo Chávez and his oil guaranteed the survival of the Castro regime for the next fifteen years, amid a regional context more favorable to dictatorship.

Twenty years later, Castroism dies. Neo-Castroism, which for some time now has been pressing for greater legitimacy, has found a path in President Barack Obama's measures. The presumed family and political heirs of Castro begin to find the urgent legitimacy they need.

The outlook on the Island is complex. The transition from totalitarianism to authoritarianism will have to muddle through an already miserable situation, a nation completely de-capitalized, growing social unrest, and widespread corruption. To sustain the transfer of power, they utilize repressive bodies trained in impunity, judicial power subject to State Security, structures that influence peddling, and social groups prostituted to political power.

There are other warning signs, such as the significant increase in the human trafficking of Cubans through Mexico in coordination with organized crime, especially the Zetas

narco trafficking group. There is strong evidence of a possible connection between the Cuban military and intelligence services with a Venezuelan military involved in the growing drug trade. However, suspicions of this link begin to appear, above all, due to the great influence that the former group has over these military institutions. Moreover, the connections among the Castro intelligence, Venezuela and the FARC guerrilla in Colombia could allow this terrorist organization to gain power in that country as a result of the peace talks sponsored by Cuba.

The future of the region will have much to do with the democratization or non-democratization of Cuba. The influence the Castro regime over the region reach not only South and Central America, but it is also reaching South Florida as the abuse of the Cuban Adjustment Act has allowed the flourish of criminal rings staging car accidents for insurance fraud, hijacking trucks, Medicare fraud, and credit card fraud among others. The monies from these illegal enterprises are smuggled back to Cuba and its level of sophistication and impunity suggest at least some involvement of the Cuban regime.

Despite what opponents of US law and policy say, it has worked, even if sanctions have been, at best, anemically imposed. When laws were updated in 1992 and 1996, there was no civil society to speak of in Cuba. That has changed dramatically and it bothers the regime. The opposition on the island and in exile has to prevent that the regime achieves a transfer of power.

Our work is focused on seeking a democratic transition and the establishment of the rule of law in the midst of a very complex external and internal environment. Internally, we confront a regime that enjoys full impunity in abusing its population. Externally, we are in a situation where democratic principles have taken a serious hit.

In the international arena we have made some progress regarding the demand that the regime ratify and implement the United Nations' Covenants on Human Rights, especially those on civil and political rights. Such ratification would oblige a change in key elements of the judicial and legal system prevailing on the island and that violate, even in writing, fundamental freedoms. This demand has already been heard by the European bloc that is presently working on a bilateral agreement with the regime. However, after the US policy shift, the Europeans have followed US lead on appeasing the dictatorship.

In the present context, the steps taken by President Obama are not wise and prove very dangerous. They grant legitimacy and additional resources to a regime that has shown ample capacity to adapt at crucial moments. For this reason the majority of Cuba's civil society has expressed its disagreement with the lack of transparency, the unconditional character, and the ignoring of vital players both in the internal opposition and in exile during these discussions.

Up until December 17, 2014, the American people could be counted on to stand with the people of Cuba because president after president, Democrat and Republican, refused to kowtow to the regime. This Congress still stands with the people of Cuba.

While Europeans and Canadians make it easier for the regime, America does not, and the Cuban people will not forget that in a free Cuba. But President Obama has, as you say, muddied the waters.

A change of direction is fundamental in this political process; that concrete demands are made to the regime and that the process involve the active participation of indispensable leaders of the opposition. Recently, the "**Forum for Rights and Freedoms**" was created in Cuba and brought together an important assembly of leaders and groups within the island and in exile, who demanded a Roadmap with seven points that we consider to be of vital importance. The logic of this document lies in the implementation of the United Nations' Covenants on Human Rights. The Forum, together, with the vast majority of the Cuban resistance, has signed on to the **10-point Agreement for Democracy**, which lays out a consensus on what the rational standards should be for a transition to democracy in Cuba.

Raúl Castro expects to survive, and guarantee a political future to neototalitarianism, with the support of all regional allies and the international bloc. His hopes are pinned on that President Barack Obama, provides him with the necessary support for the new authoritarian experiment that has its essential core based around his family and political descendants.

The good news in this grim scenario is that in every one of these neototalitarian or authoritarian states there are pro democratic movements which are tenaciously struggling for freedom. Such is the case in Cuba. For the past 29 Sundays, the **Forum for Rights and Freedoms** has carried out the "**Todos Marchamos**" campaign, which consists of weekly demonstrations led by the courageous Ladies in White, together with organizations like the Resistance Front, Estado de Sats, UNPACU and others, demanding a General Amnesty, an end to political persecution in Cuba.

The courage of these civil rights marchers has been met by the brutality of the Castro Regime and its paramilitaries. All types of beatings and abuses are taking place as the Regime tries to stop this movement that has spread throughout the island, demanding a future of true freedom for all Cubans. These marches have become a gathering place for Cubans from all walks of life, who in spite of repression and persecution, gather to demand their liberty in defiance of callous repression.

We hope that the United States, with its global leadership in the promotion of democracy, will provide great support to those on the island and in exile who ask for real and measurable changes toward a true democracy.

Prioritizing rights and fundamental freedoms, and promoting the idea that these are key elements in the structuring of our nations, is vital at this crucial moment in time. We are debating the next twenty or thirty years as a country and region. Taking steps toward the consolidation of Neo-Castroism implies tacit validation of authoritarianism as an alternative to democracy throughout the region.