

# Despite Trump, it's time to end US embargo of Cuba

I recently taught the course "Hemingway in Cuba" through a program affiliated with the University of Havana. I returned to Idaho feeling disappointed once again by failed United States foreign policy.

For nearly six decades, since a few months after the successful revolution led by Fidel Castro and the 26th of July Movement ended the Fulgencio Batista dictatorship in 1959, the U.S. has imposed an embargo against Cuba. This prevents imports of Cuban goods to the U.S., impedes exports of U.S. goods to Cuba and prohibits international financial transactions by the Cuban government and businesses in U.S. dollars.

There have been three key results:

- The Cuban government has continuously and successfully legitimized its role as a defender of the best interests of the Cuban nation
- The Cuban government has sought diverse trading partners
- The Cuban people have shown themselves as highly resilient and capable of adapting to the worst of circumstances

A thaw in the U.S. embargo commenced with the 2014 Cuba-U.S. rapprochement initiated by President Barack Obama. The results were immediate: entrepreneurship flourished, the number of small businesses expanded rapidly and the number of U.S. tourists visiting Cuba rose significantly. The current U.S. administration has rejected that initiative. Since June 2017, the number of U.S. tourists has declined.



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But have no doubt: international tourism is thriving in Cuba. Many individuals recognize that the island has much to offer, including a remarkable history, a rich culture and pristine natural environments.

While traversing the streets of old Havana, I heard languages from all over the world. One feels safe on the streets at night given that handguns are outlawed. Airbnb's fastest growing market is on the island. Cuba's tourism ministry estimates that more than 4 million individuals visited in 2017.

The recent hardening in U.S. policy does not allow U.S. citizens to stay at Hotel Ambos Mundos (Both Worlds Hotel) where Hemingway penned some of his best fiction (1932-39) or at Hotel Florida, situated near the renowned Floridita bar frequented by the author. These two hotels along with several others are described by U.S. officials as "restricted entities under the control of, or acting for or on behalf of, the Cuban military, intelligence, or security services."

In other words, the current U.S. leadership asserts that Cuba's military-tourist complex "disproportionately benefits such services and personnel at the expense of the Cuban people or private enterprise in Cuba." Yet, do not such networks in Cuba compare closely to the military-industrial complex of the United States, famously

articulated in President Dwight Eisenhower's farewell address of January 1961 and still integral to the U.S. economy?

On Jan. 3, Federica Mogherini, the highest ranking diplomat of the European Union, arrived in Cuba. She denounced the U.S. embargo and noted that the EU will sign several trade agreements in the near future. During my short visit, I encountered goods on market shelves from England, France, Spain, Germany, Italy, Sweden, Russia, Libya, Brazil, Chile, Argentina and Mexico.

Current Idaho Gov. C.L. "Butch" Otter, a Republican, has sought to end the U.S. embargo since the 1980s when he was an executive with Simplot International. Hami Ulukaya, the visionary entrepreneur who has created the largest yogurt plant in the world in Twin Falls, showed his interest in trade and investment opportunities in Cuba during a visit in 2015. Major business and agricultural leaders from our state recently signed on with Engage Cuba, a national coalition that now includes business leaders from seventeen U.S. states.

Ending the embargo would be a "fantastic deal," as our president would say. Everyone involved will benefit: a Cuban government proud of its history and achievements; U.S. and Cuban entrepreneurs and investors; workers in the U.S. and Cuba; and the hundreds of thousands of U.S. citizens interested in all things Cuban.

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