

[The only american ex-president i have met](#)

Carter is the only ex-president of the United States that I have had the honor of meeting, other than Nixon who was not one yet.

I had visited Washington to take part in a press conference that meant a tough challenge for me because of the questions that the expert reporters would be asking. The president had suggested to Nixon that he invite me for a conversation in his office. He was deceitful and hypocritical. He left that office with the idea of recommending the destruction of the Cuban Revolution.

Following his advice, Eisenhower was the author of the first plans to eliminate me physically, of the terror campaign against Cuba and the mercenary Bay of Pigs invasion.

The year 1959 marked the beginning of the treacherous history that President Carter tried to rectify 18 years later.

I knew, or rather I guessed, that he was a man of a religious ethics, from a long interview in which difficult subjects were broached and which he handled with sincerity and modesty. In those days, there were strong tensions between Panama and the United States. The leader of that country, Omar Torrijos, was an honest, nationalist and patriotic soldier. He could be persuaded by Cuba to not adopt extreme positions in his struggle for the return of the Canal territory which, like a sharp knife, was splitting his country in two. Perhaps because of that, the small nation was able to avoid a blood-bath although later on the country would be portrayed to the people of the United States and to the world as an aggressor.

Later, and without talking to anyone in the United States, I could predict that maybe Carter was the only president of that country with whom it would be possible to reach an honorable agreement without spilling one single drop of blood.

Not much time had passed before Washington would sign the agreement between the United States and Panama in the presence of other heads of state, excluding Cuba of course.

I mention this because Omar Torrijos himself, on a visit he made to our country, spoke about the efforts Cuba had made in this respect.

As president of the United States, Carter agreed with Cuba to create the Interests Sections in Havana and Washington. With that move we saved a lot of diplomatic procedures and paperwork that were driving the austere and meticulous Swiss diplomats insane. Maintaining the colossal building in the former United States Embassy in Havana was already in itself quite a feat for Switzerland.

Another thing: Carter discussed major issues with Cuba, such as the limits of territorial waters and the rights of each, the use of energy resources included in the jurisdictional waters of Mexico, Cuba and the United States as well as fishery resources and other subjects of inescapable attention. Not all the agreements favored Cuba. Our fishing fleet had been catching in international waters, as it was established, 12 miles off the coasts of Canada, the U.S. and Mexico. However, in solidarity, Cuba was supporting Chile, Peru and other Latin American countries in their right to exploit fishery resources on their respective sea shelves. The final result was that our modern expensive fishing boats finally ceased to work in those waters, when such a battle was finally won. The requisites established by the U.S. authorities were such on the rich shelves where our boats were fishing near the coast of that country, and other limitations in the light of the new law, that they priced themselves out of the market.

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When Carter became president of his country, the aggressions, terrorism and blockade against the people of Cuba had existed for many years. Our solidarity with the peoples of Africa and many other poor and underdeveloped nations in the world could not be the object of negotiations with the U.S. government. Nor would we leave Angola, or suspend the assistance already committed to the African countries. Carter never actually requested it but it is clear that many in the United States were thinking along those lines.

The defense of our sovereignty not only unleashed deep contradictions with the U.S. but also with the USSR, our ally, when as a result of the October [Missile] Crisis, without consulting our country, the USSR negotiated a mutually convenient agreement with the U.S. by which the blockade, terrorist actions and the Guantanamo Base remained intact in exchange for strategic concessions by the two superpowers. We did not seek unilateral advantages. Revolutionaries who act that way do not survive their mistakes.

Compliance with the international standards would have never been an obstacle for Cuba and, as we have often said, peace is also an unavoidable objective of the Cuban Revolution. Many forms of cooperation are possible between peoples with different political concepts.

One proof of that is the war against drug trafficking, organized crime and the trafficking of human beings; this can be extended to many forms of cooperation in the fight against epidemics, natural catastrophes and other problems.

The Revolution has never used terrorism against the United States.

That country invented plane hijackings to strike against Cuba. That action, in a society with so many social conflicts, became an epidemic. How could they have resolved it without Cuba's cooperation? We had adopted severe laws to punish the culprits, but it was useless. Finally, we made the decision to return them in the very same hijacked planes after warning them about it earlier.

Thus, the first plane we returned was the last one hijacked in the U.S.; this coincided exactly with the Carter years. I have spoken about this at greater length. I'm not saying anything new.

After Carter, Reagan took the dirty war to Nicaragua, using drugs to get around the laws of Congress and with the incomes supply weapons to the counterrevolution, mining ports; his policy took thousands of Sandinista lives while many were wounded and maimed.

Bush senior carried out the horrible slaughter of El Chorrillo to punish Panama and erase the marks left by Carter's gesture.

When Carter visited Cuba between May 12 and 17 of 2002, he knew that he would be welcomed here; I attended his lecture at the University of Havana; I invited him to an important baseball game played between the national Occidentales and Orientales teams at the Latin American Stadium. Both of us were there at the opening pitch to which he was invited, with no bodyguards whatsoever, surrounded by 50,000 people in the stands, perfect targets for any sharp-shooter hired by the CIA. Bush Jr. was already governing the U.S. I only wanted to show Carter the relationship of the country's leaders with the people. When we arrived at the stadium, he accepted with dignity my invitation to persuade his chief of security to leave him on his own, and that's what he did.

What I know about forestry in the U.S. was explained to me by Carter at the dinner we hosted for him on the last day: how the trees are planted, what varieties, the time they need to grow, production per hectares, and so on and so forth.

I observed his faith in the capitalist system where he was raised and educated; I respect that.

When he was in the government, times were difficult. He had to carry the burden of the effects of an economic crisis, but he was austere, he didn't drown the future generations in debt. His successor,

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Ronald Reagan, would squander all the savings Carter had made. He was a movie actor and handled the teleprompter well, but he never asked himself where the money was coming from.

Yesterday, former President Jimmy Carter said to the Folha de São Paulo newspaper: “‘I would like (the embargo) to end today. There is no reason why the Cuban people should continue to suffer’, stated the former president who heads a human rights organization and this week was visiting Brazil to meet with President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva.

“According to Carter, the initiatives adopted so far by Obama to ease the restrictions dictated against the island were less daring than what would be desired.

“‘I think that Obama’s initiatives were not as good as those of the two U.S. Congress houses which today are one step ahead of the president with regards to Cuba.

“‘The next step should be immediate removal of all travel restrictions to the island, not just for Cuban-Americans. It was what I did when I was president 30 years ago. The end of the embargo will follow suit’, the former president said.

Carter finally expressed that results were also depending on the Cuban leaders; surely, on us and on all the Cubans who have struggled and are willing to struggle.

Fidel Castro Ruz

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