
USAID: nonsense and disgrace

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Mr. Alarcón is the former Cuban ambassador to the United Nations and recently retired president of Cuba's National Assembly. The Spanish version of this article appeared in the Chilean journal Punto Final on August 22, 2014 and is accessible at: <http://www.rebelion.org/noticia.php?id=188894&titular=usaid:-infamia-y-disparates>. W. T. Whitney Jr. is the translator

A Prussian Prophecy

Maybe some people think Otto von Bismark was bitter when he said, "God created a special providence to shelter fools, drunks, and the United States of America." Others might think, however, that such a humorous remark more than a century ago when very little was known about that country was a biting prophecy of what would develop afterwards in the behavior of the new empire over the course of the 20th century and so far in the 21st.

I remembered the phrase on reading much more recently, in August 1914, about Republican Senator Jeff Flake who, criticizing the most recent anti-Cuban actions of the Agency for International Development (USAD) said sarcastically: "These programs are in desperate need of adult supervision." The legislator was referring to the detailed, comprehensive investigative reporting by the Associated Press about the secret program of sending young Latin Americans to Cuba in order to recruit counterparts there, organize them, and convert them into a force capable of bringing down the revolutionary government.

A little earlier AP had revealed another USAID plan, one using as sub-contractor something called Creative Associates International, for putting together through trickery a subversive cell phone network called “ZunZuneo.” Previously a report had been published revealing the true role of Alan Gross, then in prison in Cuba. The official North American propaganda had presented him as if he had come to help the Cuban Jewish community in gaining Internet access. Such deceit was even repeated despite an emphatic, specific denial by leaders of that community who, in addition to Internet, had very cordial and respectful relations with Cuban authorities. The article included secret communications between Gross and those in charge of him where they explicitly acknowledged the illegal and subversive nature of his mission.

Six days after Gross’ arrest, USAID introduced this new project, [recruiting counterparts in Cuba]. having also, incidentally, put Creative Associates International in charge.

This time the news agency revealed secret papers that contained guidelines for clandestine communications, reports the young conspirators sent back, and the orientation they received. AP interviewed some of the new spies from Costa Rico, Venezuela, and Peru, as well as several Cubans who were “recruited.”

The operation looked like they took it from a cheap newspaper serial. The Latin Americans were trained, according to the AP report, through abbreviated courses, barely a week long. There they learned techniques for searching out and choosing candidates for more complicated subversive tasks later on, as well as encrypted language codes for communicating with those in charge on the outside. To accomplish their mission, they went to Cuba claiming to be interested in helping Cubans do community work in order to improve their living conditions. In interchanges with the recipients of “aid” they would identify the ones complaining about the difficulties and shortcomings of everyday life and would try to attract them and shape them as future opposition leaders.

Those who conceived of the idea surely were unaware that for many years in those countries and others on the continent tens of thousands of Cuban young people have participated in programs of medical care, education, culture, and sports, among others, that contribute in many ways to saving and improving lives. Governments and specialized international organizations like the World Health Organization, Pan-American Health Organization, and UNESCO recognize this. They didn’t seem to know that if there is anything in abundance in Cuba, it’s people who express their opinions openly and criticize errors and failings they encounter in their lives. They do so in the press, in meetings where elected delegates report back to them and in gatherings of their social organizations and associations. They do it, really, every day – everywhere. They do it because most Cubans born after 1959 and have gotten used to education and health care being universally available, and accustomed to social assistance and security being inalienable rights, even while they were waiting to be born. And besides, for them, police assaults on their learning centers, and beatings, and prisons for people trying to protest are stories from the past that only their grandparents lived through.

The perfect pretext

Fernando Murillo, from Costa Rica and one the chiefs of the operation, made several trips to Cuba. Interviewed by AP, he told about his excursions through Santa Clara with guys that played hip hop and rap and expressed themselves artistically in other ways. He confessed to satisfaction that the encounters qualified as “the perfect pretext” for carrying out his plan, which was to organize a workshop on preventing HIV-AIDS, although he refused to provide details.

Allegedly he had a commitment to confidentiality (nondisclosure agreement) that he had signed with his employers. He would only say that “he was teaching people how to use condoms correctly.” The State Department spokesperson was more talkative and in defending this plan he acknowledged that over and above the supposed fight against AIDS, Murillo had another purpose of a subversive nature.

He left out saying that, years back, Cuba had to face that sickness not only without any help from the United States, but also while confronting the cruelty of the blockade that impeded acquisition of essential retroviral drugs that were then being produced exclusively in the neighboring country’s laboratories. At that early stage, the few patients on the island found relief for their suffering through the solidarity help of NGO’s and particular persons. Economic war imposed on us also restricts – ever since 1964 – medicines and medical equipment and instruments. All governmental agencies took part in the implementation of this genocidal policy, among them USAID. For example, for his instructive talks Murillo was unable to show condoms “made in the USA.”

However, some time ago now, Cuba not only produced retrovirals we required and maintained its free health care system, but also carried out a special program for seropositive people that allowed 90 percent of them to survive – and under decent conditions. One keeps in mind that Cuba is one of the countries least affected by that illness, which has a prevalence rate on the island of 0.2 percent, a rate of 0.4 percent in Latin America, and 0.6 percent in the United States and Canada. As for young people 15 to 19 years of age, the Cuban figure – 0.2 percent – is the lowest in the Americas, and Cuba is being chosen as the first country in the region certified as having eliminated congenital transmission of syphilis and AIDS.

Governments of the United States have their right, of course, to show off their ignorance and to act like fools and drunkards, as the Prussian would say. But it’s an unpardonable disgrace to coarsely manipulate the health and the lives of everybody else.

A new beginning?

Ever since 1959 Washington has fruitlessly undertaken to destroy the Cuban Revolution. They’ve tried everything – economic war, military intervention, subversion, and non-stop hostile propaganda.

There was a book published in 1959 by the North American researcher Jon Ellison about psychological war and anti-Cuban propaganda. It’s basically a collection of declassified documents showing a colossal waste of resources in trying to confuse and divide Cubans and to deceive peoples of Latin America. They tried everything, even children’s comic books with editions into the millions.

The plans we denounce here are a continuation of a long saga of aggressions in which bits of nonsense often go along with crimes. The current administration concocted and promoted the most recent ones. A little after being installed in the White House, President Obama announced there would be “a new beginning” in policies toward Cuba. Obviously that’s one more of his forgotten promises. Or maybe for him, “change” means more of the same.