
Trump's Push to Make Cuba 'Surrender' Will Fail, Negotiator Says

20/04/2019



The Cuban negotiator who normalized relations with the U.S. during the Obama administration said President Donald Trump's push to dismantle the deal won't dislodge the communist regime in Havana.

Cuba endured almost 60 years of U.S. aggression and can survive another bout of antagonism from Washington, Josefina Vidal, now Cuba's ambassador to Canada, said in an interview. The latest White House measures to squeeze the Caribbean nation include curbs on travel, a cap on remittances and allowing lawsuits over confiscated property, a step that's prompted criticism by U.S. allies.

Vidal questioned the integrity of Trump's aides, including National Security Adviser John Bolton, and argued the renewed pressure on Cuba is a simple play for Republican votes in Florida.

"This is a policy which is condemned to be defeated again," Vidal said Thursday at the Cuban Embassy in Ottawa. "They want Cuba to surrender. They want Cuba to abandon what Cuba is, to abandon its principles, and to submit Cuba again to the desires of the U.S. But that won't happen."

Bolton delivered the Trump administration's latest salvo a day earlier on the 58th anniversary of the start of the failed U.S.-backed invasion of Cuba, addressing Bay of Pigs veterans in Miami. Allies in Canada and Europe [protested](#) the decision to allow U.S. lawsuits against foreign

companies doing business on the island.

Economic Squeeze

Even so, Cuba is starting to feel the pinch as Trump rolls back Vidal's work with the previous administration, which culminated in the restoration of full diplomatic relations and Barack Obama's historic 2016 [visit to Havana](#) and meeting with then-President Raul Castro.

With the political and economic crisis in Venezuela choking off Cuba's oil supply, shortages of [food and medicine](#) have already hit the island. Trump's bid to curb tourism will add to the crunch by taking more hard currency out of the economy.

The U.S. says Cuba is keeping [Nicolas Maduro](#) in power in Caracas, despite international efforts to depose him. "If you could [wave a magic wand](#) and take the Cubans out of Venezuela, Maduro would fall almost simultaneously," Bolton said before his speech in Miami.

[Read more: Trump Eyes Tougher Stand on Cuba Over Support for Maduro](#)

"This is slander. This is a lie. Bolton is a liar," Vidal shot back, citing the veteran American foreign-policy hawk's 2002 [allegation](#) -- questioned by U.S. intelligence agencies -- that Havana was developing biological weapons.

She also questioned the truthfulness of Trump's Venezuela envoy Elliott Abrams, calling him a criminal. Abrams pleaded guilty to lying to Congress in 1991 about the Iran-Contra scandal.

"These people are saying we control Venezuela? No," she said.

Cuba says all of the almost 20,000 Cubans in Venezuela are doctors, nurses, teachers or other community-service providers. That portrayal has been challenged by former Venezuelan military officers who say Cubans were present during their [torture and interrogation](#) by Maduro's forces.

Florida Politics

U.S.-Cuban contacts established under Obama, such as working groups on immigration and drug trafficking, have ceased, Vidal said. She suggested that Trump had been persuaded by Senator Marco Rubio -- wrongly, according to Vidal -- that Cuban-American Republican voters in Florida are critical to his 2020 re-election bid.

"You can manipulate data very easily," Vidal said. "It seems to us that Marco Rubio convinced Trump that he won in 2016 because he won Florida, and that he won Florida because he won the Cuban vote."

She added: "The reason why Trump won Florida is the same reason he won in other areas, in Rust Belt states, because of the vote in the rural areas."

Michael Bustamante, an assistant professor at Florida International University, said Vidal's assessment is fair.

While "there is a misplaced sense on the part of the White House that the election in 2016 is owed somehow to the Cuban vote," there's a potential payoff to playing the socialism card in

2020, he said Friday by phone.

'Red Meat'

"It's all about throwing red meat, as if we were still in 1985, to an electorate that they don't think knows any better and can't decipher the difference between a Democrat and a member of the Cuban communist party," Bustamante said.

Vidal declined to speculate on how Cuba views the prospect of a second Trump term, though she said she's optimistic that normalized relations will endure.

"It's very frustrating that once again they have chosen hostility instead of cooperation," Vidal said.
