

New York Times acknowledges US interference in Cuba

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Titled "In Cuba, Misadventures in Regime Change", the Editorial Board of the influential newspaper New York newspaper on Sunday reviewed the adoption the Helms-Burton Act in 1996, and the countless plans concocted in Washington to erode national stability in the island.

The Times noted that these subversive projects only served as the basis for the American government spending \$264 million over the last 18 years, in an alleged attempt to instigate democratic reforms in Cuba.

It recognized that, far from having achieved their goal, these efforts backfired because these funds "became a magnet for charlatans and thieves."

"The stealthy programs have increased hostility between the two nations, provided Cuba with a trove of propaganda fodder and stymied opportunities to cooperate in areas of mutual interest," the New York Times said.

It also stated the US Agency for International Development (USAID) became the primary vehicle for pro-democracy work in Cuba, where it is illegal.

The editorial detailed how investment in efforts to overthrow the Cuban government increased from a few million annually to more than \$20 million in 2004, during the first years of the George W. Bush administration (2001-2009), when most of the contracts were awarded without without much oversight, to newly formed Cuban-American groups.

The New York Times added that, in 2008, the US Congress authorized \$45 million for projects against Cuba, a record.

In December 2009, Cuban authorities arrested Alan Gross, an American subcontractor who traveled to Cuba five times as part of an initiative by USAID, pretending to be a tourist, to smuggle communications equipment that was not allowed in the island, the Times highlighted.

After this, it continued, senior officials at USAID and the State Department were startled by the risks being taken, and some argued that the covert programs were counterproductive and should be stopped. But Cuban-American lawmakers fought vigorously to keep them alive.

A recent investigation by the Associated Press (AP) revealed a controversial program by a Washington firm, Creative Associates International, which developed a rudimentary text messaging system similar to Twitter, known as ZunZuneo, Cuban slang for a hummingbird's tweet, to generate social unrest in Cuba.

The editorial noted that, rather than covert projects to overthrow the Cuban government, US leaders must find mechanisms through a governmental coordination.

"Washington should recognize that the most it can hope to accomplish is to positively influence Cuba's evolution toward a more open society. That is more likely to come about through stronger diplomatic relations than subterfuge," the editorial said.

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