

Carter comment exposes Bush administration's "big lie" against Cuba

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The visit by former US president Jimmy Carter to Cuba may not lead to a rapprochement between Washington and Havana or an end to the four-decades-old US economic blockade against the Caribbean nation, but it has already provided a valuable lesson on the nature of the US government's global "war on terrorism."

On the second day of his trip to the island country—the first by any US president, past or present, since 1959, when a revolution toppled a Washington-backed dictatorship—Carter carried out an inspection of Cuba's Center for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology in Havana.

There, he sat patiently through speeches by Cuban scientists, who proudly cited the considerable achievements of the center, one of the most advanced biotechnology facilities in the world. It has provided an arsenal of weapons against disease worldwide, producing the only existing vaccine against meningitis B, the most effective and inexpensive vaccine against hepatitis B, and drugs to treat cancer, heart disease and AIDS.

Carter responded with praise for the strides made by Cuban biotechnology. "It may be that Cuba is unique in having emphasized the health need as a driving force, and not just how to make a profit on specific medicines developed," he commented. He went on to speak of the "tens of millions of people around the world who have benefited from this research in Cuba."

The former president, however, could not ignore the fact that the very scientific center where he was speaking had been designated by the Bush administration as a potential target for a US cruise missile.

Just days before Carter set off for Havana, US Undersecretary of State for Arms Control and

International Security John Bolton, the number-three man in the State Department, delivered an address to the Heritage Foundation, a right-wing Washington think tank, in which he branded Cuba as part of the "axis of evil" proclaimed at the beginning of the year by President Bush.

Cuba, Bolton claimed, "has at least a limited offensive biological warfare research and development effort [and has] provided dual-use technology to other rogue states." As a result, he added, Cuba and other alleged traffickers in biological weaponry, including Libya and Syria, "can expect to become our targets." The State Department official revived the lurid warnings about Cuba being "just 90 miles from our shores," invoking the supposed danger of germ warfare across the Florida Straits.

In a direct response to Bolton's charges, Carter made the following statement:

"With some degree of reluctance I would also like to comment on the allegation of bio-terrorism. I do this because these allegations were made maybe not coincidentally just before our visit to Cuba. In preparation for this unprecedented visit, I requested, and we all received, intense briefings from the State Department, the intelligence agencies of my country, and high officials in the White House. One purpose of this briefing was for them to share with us any concerns that my government had about possible terrorist activities that were supported by Cuba. There were absolutely no such allegations made or questions raised. I asked them specifically on more than one occasion is there any evidence that Cuba has been involved in sharing any information to any other country on Earth that could be used for terrorist purposes. And the answer from our experts on intelligence was 'no.'"

In other words, the biological weapons accusation was a bold-faced lie disseminated by elements within the Bush administration for the purpose of preempting calls to soften the US economic blockade, while providing a pretext for US military aggression against Cuba.

Faced with mounting pressure from sections of US big business anxious to take advantage of the Castro regime's opening of Cuba to foreign investment, the Bush administration, with its intimate political ties to right-wing Cuban exile groups, used the specter of germ warfare to intimidate opponents of the US embargo.

Asked about Carter's statement in Havana, Secretary of State Colin Powell attempted to dodge its obvious implications. The ex-president's remarks left only three possibilities: Carter was lying about his government briefings; the State Department, CIA and Bush's National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice had lied to him; or allegations about a Cuban bio-terrorist threat were a contemptible slander.

"We do believe that Cuba has a biological offensive research capability," declared Powell. "We didn't say it actually had such weapons, but it has the capacity and capability to conduct such research and this is not a new statement, I think it's a statement that has been made previously."

Thus, Cuba's offense, making it, according to Bolton, part of the "axis of evil" and a potential target for US military attack, is that it has the "capacity and capability" of conducting research on biological weapons. The same could be said about any country possessing scientists and a pharmaceutical plant. The elimination of such a "threat" is possible only through bombing such a country, in the notorious words of former US Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Curtis LeMay about North Vietnam, "back to the Stone Age."

The Bush administration's bellicose campaign against Cuba is directed by a cabal of Cuban-American officials with close ties to Miami-based anti-Castro terrorist groups, working with veterans of the dirty wars waged by the Reagan administration in Central America in the 1980s. Leading this effort is Otto Reich, the Bush administration's assistant secretary of state for the Western Hemisphere, a Cuban-American who narrowly escaped criminal indictment for directing an illegal government propaganda campaign aimed at

raising funds and winning support for the CIA-backed contra mercenaries attacking Nicaragua.

The method of the 'big lie' exposed by Carter's comments is by no means exclusive to US policy toward Cuba. Similarly unsubstantiated charges concerning "weapons of mass destruction" were used by the Clinton administration to justify the bombardment of Iraq, and are now being resurrected by Bush in preparation for a new war against that battered Arab country.

Similarly, North Korea and Iran were proclaimed by Bush to be part of the "axis of evil," for allegedly developing "weapons of mass destruction" and threatening "the peace of the world." No evidence has been provided to substantiate these claims, which originate from the same officials who fabricated the accusations against Cuba.

The US government, whose military budget exceeds those of the next nine most heavily armed countries combined, justifies the unleashing of its armed might wherever it chooses by alleging that far smaller and poorer nations, which have long suffered from imperialist oppression and aggression, are obtaining "weapons of mass destruction." Washington, meanwhile, has rejected any suggestion that it should subject its own extensive biological weapons program to international oversight, opposing all attempts to put enforcement teeth into an existing international treaty.



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