

Obama and Cuba: The Danger of the “Failed Policy” Concept

By Arnold August, October 2011

The OAS (Organization of American States) head, Jose Miguel Insulza (a key player in the Summit of the Americas and the exclusion of Cuba), declared on April 13, 2009, according to a Reuters report, that “Cuba needs to make clear that it is committed to democracy if it wants to return to the OAS as demanded by a chorus of Latin American governments.”¹

In an op-ed (in Spanish) afforded by mainly right-wing Latin-American newspapers, part of the Grupo de Diarios América (GDA) and others in the U.S. (*Miami Herald* and *El Nuevo Herald*), Obama wrote against the notion of being “mired in the old debates of the past.” As the example of a “new direction” for his administration, he editorialized that “this week, we amend a Cuba policy that has failed for decades to advance liberty or opportunity for the Cuban people.” In a response clearly attempting to address the expressed desires of many Latin-American countries to recognize Cuba, lift the blockade and allow it to return to the OAS, Obama wrote that he “looks forward to the day when every country in the hemisphere can take its seat at the table consistent with the Inter-American Democratic Charter [of the OAS]. And just as the United States seeks that goal in reaching out to the Cuban people, we expect all our friends in the hemisphere to join together in supporting liberty, equality, and human rights for all Cubans.”² On his way to the Summit, Obama made an official visit to Mexico, where he was confronted with a correspondent’s question in a press conference concerning the new Cuban policy outlined in the op-ed:

Your new Cuba policy is part of an effort to move beyond the frozen disputes of the 20th century. Why then is it so limited? Why not open the door for all Americans to visit Cuba? And what will you say to your colleagues at the Summit of the Americas who want you to do more?

[Obama] Firstly, I do not think that we should dismiss the significance of the step that we took.... [Our] interest is to see whether Cuba is *also* ready to change³ (emphasis added).

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- ¹ Colitt, Raymond and Natuza Nery. 2009. "Democracy Clause an Obstacle to Cuba in OAS: Report." Anthony Boadle (ed.) Reuters (April 13). At <<http://reuters.com/article/2009/04/13/us-cuba-oas-sb-idUSTRE53C3QM20090413>>.
- ² Obama, Barack. 2009a. "Op-ed by President Barack Obama: 'Choosing a Better Future in the Americas.'" White House (April 16). At <<http://whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/op-ed-president-barack-obama-choosing-a-better-future-americas>>.
- ³ ———. 2009b. "Joint Press Conference With President Barack Obama and President Felipe Calderón of Mexico." White House (April 16). At <<http://whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/joint-press-conference-with-president-barack-obama-and-president-felipe-calderon-me>>.