

Washington Post Letters to the Editor

America's tricks don't help Cubans

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While, in the abstract, supporting freedom of expression is good, in the context of U.S. relations with Cuba, Sen. Patrick J. Leahy (D-Vt.) was correct to describe the U.S. government's secretive attempt to undermine the Cuban government through Twitter as "dumb, dumb, dumb." For more than 50 years, the United States has attempted through subterfuge, exploding cigars, economic blockade and invasion to undermine the Cuban government to no avail. It's time to retire the tricksters and build a relationship that can have a positive impact.

Tom Miller, Oakland, Calif.

The writer is a head of the nonprofit Green Cities Fund, which sponsors environmental and humanitarian projects in Cuba.

The April 6 editorial "The right call in Cuba" endorsed the U.S. Agency for International Development's abortive attempt to build an ersatz Twitter network in Cuba on the grounds that there's nothing wrong with "undermining a tyranny." But fomenting unrest in another country by secretly trying to manipulate its domestic politics violates U.S. treaty obligations under the charters of both the United Nations and the Organization of American States.

For example, the OAS Charter declares: "No State or group of States has the right to intervene, directly or indirectly, for any reason whatever, in

the internal or external affairs of any other State,” and it is explicit that this prohibition is not limited to the use of force.

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Historically, international law has not stopped the United States from engaging in covert intervention abroad, especially in Latin America. The fact that destabilizing other governments violated treaty obligations was one reason such programs were conducted secretly by the CIA. During the Cold War, we justified this behavior on the grounds that the Soviet Union did not play by the Marquess of Queensberry rules, so neither could we if we hoped to survive. We no longer have that excuse.

With U.S. influence receding, USAID’s Twitter-like program reminds Latin American nations that the United States still does not fully respect their sovereignty and that we still see the region as our back yard.

William M. LeoGrande, Washington

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The editorial stated, “If anyone’s stuck in the past, it’s the Castros, who insist on a level of political control that has gone out of style.” If anyone else is stuck in the past, it’s the U.S. government, which, after more than 50 years, has not learned that travel restrictions and boycotts are not going to undermine the Cuban government. Isolating the Cuban people from the free flow of outside information provided by open trade and tourism is exactly what the Castros depend on to prop up their regime. Such strategies have rarely engendered freedom and democracy anywhere and generally lead, as Cuba amply demonstrates, to the exchange of one dictator for another. The right call is to abolish U.S. sanctions against Cuba that perpetuate the situation they were intended to change.

Barbara Hyde, Alexandria