Normalization Policies with Cuba: Implications for Political and Economic Reform

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NORMALIZATION POLICIES WITH CUBA: IMPLICATIONS FOR POLITICAL
AND ECONOMIC REFORM

by

RAMONA N. KHAN

A master’s thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, The City University of New York

2016
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by

Ramona N. Khan

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in satisfaction of the thesis requirement for the degree of Master of Arts.

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For longer than the past half century, the relationship between the United States and Cuba has been one of antagonism, mistrust, betrayal, hostility and defiance. Decades of mutual hostility arising from Cuba’s post revolution adoption of an economic system that emulated that of the Soviet Union, along with the long history of U.S. interference in Cuba’s domestic and international affairs that predated the Castro revolution and continued afterward, have resulted in this rancorous relationship. Cuba’s move to communism shortly after the Castro regime came to power was regarded as a threat to both democracy and capitalism by the United States, particularly the national security establishment, who exerted powerful influence on the affairs of the state during the height of the Cold War. Hence, Cuba’s thorough distrust of U.S. motives throughout the period when economic sanctions were imposed upon it.

Through the years, the U.S. government has faced both support and criticism from political leaders within the U.S. and internationally for its belligerent posture toward Cuba, without having achieved the objectives of these policies – undermining the Castro government to the point of causing regime change, ideally resulting in the elimination of communism in Cuba and the Western Hemisphere.
Economic growth and development initiatives on the island have largely, although not completely, failed. The U.S. condition of implementing a system of democracy so that the embargo could be lifted has neither been accepted nor implemented. A policy of containment intended to weaken Castro, instead, enabled him to prove that his system was resilient in the face of economic punishment. Yet, despite the Castro government’s determined survival through the hardships imposed upon it over decades, the negative results have been considerable, with the worst deprivations being felt by ordinary Cuban citizens.

After completion of a thorough internal assessment and review of the U.S.’s posture with respect to Cuba, on December 17, 2014 the White House announced President Obama’s decision to take a new approach, one ending the period of estrangement and antagonism, and simultaneously beginning the process of normalization, both of which were agreed upon by Cuba through intermediaries using diplomatic channels. Obama’s engagement initiative seeks to strengthen U.S.’s leadership in the Americas, while promoting effective change and influence that can support the Cuban people.

Will a renewed policy bring about political and economic changes necessary for the Cuba people to have new prosperity and democracy, whilst bolstering American national security interests? What measurements of democracy will be used as criteria for lifting the embargo? What are the implications for both countries of this new process of economic and political rapprochement? Since small Cuba clearly has more at stake in engaging with the U.S., what effects would this new course have on it?

U.S. interference in Cuba’s sovereignty will be examined through historical lens. Key policies such as the Monroe Doctrine, the Roosevelt Corollary, the Platt Amendment, and the Good Neighbor Policy will be assessed. Analyses of the origins of the trade embargo, Castro’s
adoption of Communism and Cuba’s close alliance with the Soviet Union, Castro’s role in the Cuban Missile Crisis, and his military and financial support for communist and socialist groups and causes in Africa and other Latin American countries, will provide a measure of understanding for why the U.S. saw the need to initiate and maintain its hostile policies.

It is telling that throughout the period of estrangement from the U.S., Cuba continued trade with economically significant partners such as Russia, China, Canada and other European nations. In fact, prior to the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Cuba’s economy was heavily subsidized by Moscow. All of these, taken together, mitigated but by no means erased the crippling effect of trade sanctions imposed on Cuba by the U.S., its most important trading partner, prior to the revolution. Lack of political transparency and democracy, combined with a hamstrung economic system, have kept a high percentage of the Cuban people in poverty without prospects for upward mobility, short of an infusion of significant new trade opportunities.

Prior to 2014, these opportunities and a host of other mutual benefits were foregone in favor of political gain the in the U.S. and resistance to outside interference in Cuba. The Cuban government has blamed the West, particularly the United States, for its economic failures, and used that as a rationalization against abandoning its political systems with free, transparent, multi-party elections, continuing to follow the Soviet model long after the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

Cuba’s present position as a state in transition signals that it could undergo major political shifts within the next few years. Raul Castro, the current leader after Fidel Castro’s retirement, has instituted reforms, such as liberalizing some sectors formerly under tight state control, and allowing the small private sector to expand gradually, which has resulted in an
increase in self-employed workers. There are also many more tourist visa granted to U.S. citizens and more direct air travel to and from the U.S. In addition, some U.S. corporations are being allowed to expand information technology and internet access across the island.

Normalizing relations between the two countries will also provide opportunities for improvement in medicine and medical research in Cuba. Further, Cuba has been willing, on humanitarian grounds, to share its own medical advances and personnel with countries in the Caribbean and Latin America. These measures and exchanges are only the first steps on the road toward more abundant exchanges once normalization is fully realized.

However, that most of Cuba’s economy remains state owned and controlled, confirms to those opposed to the new engagement policy that lifting the embargo will not guarantee many benefits for private citizens there. In fact, most imports are still required to go through Cuba’s government operated agency – ALIMPORT. For the U.S., that is the exclusive negotiating and procurement agency for all purchasing, documentation and other logistics related to agricultural products. It appears that for now, at least, it might be the officials within the Cuban government who are the primary beneficiaries for the changes taking place.

The lack of complete and immediate transformation of Cuba’s systems at the inception of the normalization policy should not be seen as a failure but the result of a slow transition in a wary relationship of long standing. Despite the relative slow progress, maintaining the current process is likely to lead to further reaching and mutually beneficial results, both economically and politically. Yet, despite reasons for optimism, it is important to note that policies implemented President Obama and subsequent presidents pursuing their own foreign policy and economic agendas, might not ultimately produce the results in Cuba that many at present are hopeful and impatient to see. This is in no way should deter or derail the process. Rather than
maintaining an isolationist policy, it behooves U.S. political leaders to promote changes that stand the best chance of being mutually beneficial, including and perhaps especially the political freedom and right to self-determination of the Cuban people. It holds more potential for benefit to make Cuba a partner and ally in the Western Hemisphere than to isolate them. That is reason enough to be steadfast in pursuit of normalization now that it has begun.
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INTRODUCTION

On December 17, 2014, President Barack Obama signaled a historic day for the United States and Cuba. It was the day in which both countries announced the reopening of diplomatic relations between the two that had, until then, been closed for over fifty years. On that day the president said:

In the most significant changes in our policy in more than fifty years, we will end an outdated approach that, for decades, has failed to advance our interests, and instead we will begin to normalize relations between our two countries. Through these changes, we intend to create more opportunities for the American and Cuban people, and begin a new chapter among the nations of the Americas.¹

On July 20, 2015, both countries reopened embassies in Washington, DC and Havana. And on March 21, 2016, Obama broke barriers even more by being the first sitting U.S. president to visit Cuba in 88 years since President Coolidge did so in 1927. Renewing relations with Cuba is intended to advance American values and interests, while helping Cuba move into the 21st century. With chaos and instability happening in many parts of the world, history is unfolding as we witness a new normalization policy between the United States and Cuba.

The President has called the old approach of isolation, outdated and said that it had failed to achieve the intended objectives of promoting democracy, stability and growth in Cuba. What he has called for instead, is a policy renewing U.S. leadership in the Americas, while promoting a more effective change that can support the Cuban people and U.S. national security interests at the same time.²


This new approach is intended to encourage Cubans’ universal rights, i.e., less restrictions by the Cuban government on its people, and more political and economic empowerment for every citizen, with U.S. national interests, while giving the U.S. greater influence and ability to work with other countries in the Latin American region. This new approach will now enable Cuban Americans to travel and send remittances to their families on the island. It also allows academic, religious, and other people-to-people exchanges between the two nations. By increasing authorized travel and commerce, people to people exchange, and flow of information, this new approach is built on the assumption that Americans will transfer their values (through more contact) to Cubans.³

As a result, they will be empowered to be less dependent on the Cuban state through increased financial resources from an influx of U.S. companies, tourism, and a developing private sector, all of which, could lead to individual economic growth and less dependency on state resources. With this new approach, U.S. companies will be able to expand communications and internet access, removing the barrier to information and technology in Cuba.⁴

Perpetual antagonism and isolation of a sovereign country has little to no chance of that country adopting desirable changes. In contrast, free communication and people to people exchanges have more potential for positive and productive reform and growth. The Cuban people, unfortunately, has gotten the wrong end of the deal. Their economic misfortune has been as a result of years of antagonistic policies by two countries that refused to see the bigger picture. Containment policy and isolation was designed as punishment towards Castro and his regime. Castro’s seizure of U.S. properties and aggressive anti-American tactics were reasons enough for

⁴ Ibid.
the U.S. to implement sanctions and isolation. But isolation on the part of the U.S. did not achieve its intended goal of regime change and elimination of communism in Cuba. Open representation and democracy has not occurred. What has resulted is an economic and political system that has managed to survive for decades, while plunging the Cuban population into poverty. They are the ones that have borne the severity of an outdated U.S. policy.

Contrarily, economic sanctions imposed by the United States did not cause a total collapse of Cuba’s economy. It certainly caused a crippling effect but Cuba managed to stay afloat despite punishment from the U.S. This is mostly likely due to countries such as Russia, China, Venezuela, Canada and the Netherlands providing help. The Netherlands and Canada are main trading partners with Cuba. Tourism has also been sustained by an influx of European visitors.  

Despite this, the U.S. has faced continuous criticisms from political leaders for its isolation policies and trade embargo on Cuba. The UN General Assembly has continuously condemned the U.S. embargo, voting symbolically in 2013 for 82-2 in favor of ending it; Israel and the U.S. were the only two nations that voted against. Cuba’s foreign minister has appealed to the UN in the past, arguing, “The economic damages accumulated after half a century as a result of the implementation of the blockade amount to $1.126 trillion…” urging the U.S. to consider changing the course of this policy.  

And again in October 2015, the UN General Assembly voted 191-2 in favor of ending the embargo.  

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In contrast, the European Union continued to maintain what is called its “Common Position on Cuba.” Instituted in 1996, this policy was instrumental in the creation of a unilateral relationship with Cuba on the basis of human rights and political transparency. However, contrary to the U.S. policy, this one is not based on coercive measures that will promulgate political change, but through peaceful measures that include political discourse between both governments. The goal is to have Cuba’s economy open up through a process of increased trade and cooperation.8

The European Union has continuously criticized the U.S. for its stringent sanctions on Cuba but it has also called out Cuba for its atrocious human rights record.9 Despite the EU’s attempts at cooperation and trade, Cuba has viewed their policy as one of interventionist.10 Attempts by the European Union to encourage political and economic change in Cuba have not produced any tangible results; human rights violation and lack of political transparency have continued. This has led many members of the European Union to question whether this policy should be maintained or reformed. 11

Former presidential candidates like Ted Cruz, Marco Rubio and Jeb Bush were all against Obama’s normalization policy. But others like Rand Paul took on a more supportive viewpoint. In fact, two days after Obama’s announcement, on December 19, 2014, Paul asked, “after 50 years of conflict, why not try a new approach? The United States trades and engages with other

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11 Ibid.
communist nations, such as China and Vietnam. Why not Cuba?" Of course, it is noteworthy to mention that countries such as Vietnam and China incorporated market style economies while maintaining communist political party systems. Vietnam’s deviation from the socialist form of a central communist economic system has helped their economy prosper while Cuba, on the other hand, chose to keep a communist economic (and political) system that has not resulted in economic prosperity for its citizens. So a seemingly straightforward question from Rand Paul, but why not Cuba, indeed?

Cuba’s special relationship with the United States has been one of complication, marred by years of mistrust, betrayal, and defiance. From the moment Fidel Castro ousted the Batista regime and became the leader of Cuba in 1959, relations among the two country’s relationships have deteriorated. Spanning a long history of hegemony, the U.S. has long been labeled the “police” in Cuba and other Latin American countries. Prior to 1991, the United States had a legitimate rationale for its isolation policy towards Cuba. Cuba’s communist ideologies and anti-American rhetoric fueled distrust and national security issues for the United States.

To the U.S., the embargo was necessary because Cuba was viewed as a national security threat. It was part of a grand strategy to overthrow Castro and his movement. As time passed and Castro proved to be defiant and resistant, the goals of the embargo kept evolving. During the 70’s and 80’s, the primary goal of the U.S. was to contain the spread of communism within the Western hemisphere. In the last two decades, the embargo has been defended by many within the

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U.S. as providing leverage to force Cuba into addressing human rights abuses and promoting political change on the island.\textsuperscript{14}

However, none of these actions improved human rights. Instead, the Cuban people encountered severe economic troubles and their government used the sanctions as perfect excuse to blame its economic downfall on the U.S. while continuing widespread human rights abuses.\textsuperscript{15}

A major contributing factor to the question of why U.S. policy toward Cuba has not turned out the way it was intentioned is because these policies were established against the background of the Cold War. Cuba no longer poses any security threat to the United States, which contradicts the overall basis for the policy in the first place. Much within island has changed in terms of military and financial support Cuba provided to other countries during the days of the Cold War. Cuba no longer supports military insurgents in Latin America nor Africa and its military and defense spending has shrunk significantly over the last decades; military spending was cut by over 50\% after the Soviet Union collapsed.\textsuperscript{16}

An unfortunate outcome for the U.S. is that economic sanctions did not shape or shift the political system for Cuba, which is why the policy is viewed as ineffective by many. A Brookings Institute Report in 2009 found that the embargo has contributed to the Cuban government’s power over its citizens by creating a dependency factor for most of its people.\textsuperscript{17}


In the area of information and technology, censorship of information and ideas has helped
the government to maintain anti-American sentiments among some. Preventing and blocking
information to its citizens is one sure way a government is able to maintain its totalitarian and
communistic political system in place. What took place in Egypt and Tunisia may not necessarily
be the outcome in Cuba since they do not have the same technological infrastructure that could
help overthrow a regime, but that we can never be sure of.
Chapter 1

SPHERES OF INFLUENCE

1.1. Monroe Doctrine

American leaders and politicians have long addressed U.S Cuba foreign relations through a planned and calculated policy that was an integral part of the Monroe Doctrine.\(^\text{18}\)

In 1823, President James Monroe addressed Congress, expressing the U.S. policy as one based on a new political order being developed for the Americas while also addressing Europe’s role in the Western Hemisphere. Along with Secretary of State, John Quincy Adams, Monroe took the American and diplomatic ideals as a foundation for his doctrine, i.e. disentanglement from Europe and a defense of neutral rights. The three core concepts of the doctrine stipulated non colonization, non-interference, and two distinct areas of influence for North and South America and Europe. Independent lands in the Western Hemisphere would belong exclusively to U.S. domain. In exchange, the U.S. made a commitment to avoid political involvement in Europe or other interference in European colonies that existed at the time in the Americas.\(^\text{19}\)

This clear message signaled a break between the Americas/New World and that of Europe. It said any interference by a European power in North or South America or U.S. territories would have been viewed as aggression and would result in U.S intervention. The U.S.’s goal at the time was focused on increasing its influence and trading alliances throughout the Americas. A suggestion by then, British Foreign Minister, George Canning, was for the two countries to come together to issue a joint statement deterring any power from interfering in


South and Central America, was opposed by Secretary of State, John Adams. Adams argued (and possibly foreseeing) that it could possibly limit U.S. geopolitical power expansion in the future. The declaration served as a precedent and gained support for future U.S. expansion in the Americas. By the late 1800’s, growth of U.S. economy and military influence was instrumental in enforcement of the Monroe Doctrine.²⁰

1.2. Roosevelt Corollary

If the Monroe Doctrine was the foundation for US Cuba relations, then the Roosevelt Corollary was the building block upon which President Roosevelt amended and expanded U.S. unilateral involvement in Latin America. With U.S. power growing exponentially by the 20th century, a more assertive role in Latin America affairs became inevitable. The Roosevelt Corollary emerged from a Venezuelan crisis between its creditors in the early 1900’s. Roosevelt worried that such a crisis could escalate and lead to an invasion by Europe. The Corollary was a strategy aimed at preventing European intervention in the Americas and was also the mantle upon which justification for U.S. intervention in Cuba, Nicaragua, Dominican Republic and other Caribbean nations were upheld.²¹ On December 6, 1904, Roosevelt declared in his annual message to Congress, that the U.S. would only intervene as a “last resort, and then only if it became evident that their inability or unwillingness to do justice at home and abroad had violated the rights of the United States or had invited foreign aggression to the detriment of the entire body of American nations.” According to Roosevelt, intervention may be required and in the “Western Hemisphere the adherence of the United States to the Monroe Doctrine may force the


United States, however reluctantly, in flagrant cases of such wrongdoing or impotence, to the exercise of an international police power.”²² As it turned out, the United States increasingly utilized military force to reinforce stability to countries in the Western Hemisphere.²³ When Roosevelt said, “the cases in which we could interfere by force of arms as we interfered to put a stop to intolerable conditions in Cuba are necessarily very few,” those words would prove far from the truth.²⁴

1.3. Platt Amendment

Tracing U.S. interference in Cuba’s affairs goes all the way back to the Spanish-American War of 1898. U.S. military occupation of Cuba was an unintended consequence. In 1901 the Platt Amendment, named after Senator Orville Platt of Connecticut, was drafted primarily by Secretary of War, Elihu Root, and introduced as part of an amendment to U.S. Army Appropriations Bill. The Amendment stipulated terms, conditions and guidelines for future relations with Cuba and ending U.S. occupation in the process, i.e. releasing control of the government and island to the Cuban people. As part of the stipulations, the Cuban government had to agree to eight conditions before U.S. forces withdrew and any subsequent transfer of sovereignty could begin. It also outlined terms in which the U.S. was allowed to intervene in the

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political affairs of Cuba so that its independence could be protected and preserved.\textsuperscript{25} See some of the major conditions listed in footnote below.\textsuperscript{26}

The U.S. believed that this initial intervention was a necessary tool to protect their commercial interests in the midst of Spain’s failure to maintain such stability on the island of Cuba. It was a process by which the U.S. could maintain stability and a presence in Cuba. In addition to other demands, such as requiring the Cuban government to develop policies that would improve sanitary conditions on the island, the amendment also made it obligatory for the Cuban government to make said amendment legally binding with the U.S. and integrate it into the Cuban constitution. Met with reluctance, the Cuban government had no choice. The amendment restricted its sovereignty and made the U.S. a quasi-protectorate of the island. However, as part of negotiations and foreign policy at play, a trade deal immersed that assured Cuba’s sugar exports would be guaranteed by U.S. markets.\textsuperscript{27}

The amendment was ratified in 1901 and served as a basis under which the United States continued to intervene in Cuba’s political affairs. It remained in effect until 1934 when


\textsuperscript{26} The Government of Cuba shall never enter into any treaty or other compact with any foreign power or powers which will impair or tend to impair the independence of Cuba nor in any manner authorize or permit any foreign power of powers to obtain by colonization or for military or naval purposes, or otherwise, lodgment in or control over any portion of said island; The Government of Cuba consents that the United States may exercise the right to intervene for the preservation of Cuban independence, the maintenance of a government adequate for the protection of life, property, and individual liberty, and for discharging the obligations with respect to Cuba imposed by the Treaty of Paris on the United States, now to be assumed and undertaken by the Government of Cuba; To enable the United States to maintain the independence of Cuba, and to protect the people thereof, as well as for its own defense, the Government of Cuba will sell or lease to the United States lands necessary for coaling or naval stations, at certain specified points, to be agreed upon with the President of the United States; (See Latin American Studies, Platt Amendment, for all 8 conditions) http://www.latinamericanstudies.org/cuba/platt-amendment.htm

increasing nationalism, dissatisfaction and criticism among the Cuban people led to a repeal of
the amendment by both Cuba and the U.S. What followed was the “Good Neighbor Policy.”

1.4. Good Neighbor Policy

A departure from previous foreign policy of interventionist, the ‘Good Neighbor Policy’
was implemented by President Franklin Roosevelt and envisioned as one of global cooperation
and trade. However, the policy had more of an impact in Latin America and Caribbean countries.
Until FDR, several countries, including Cuba, Nicaragua, Dominican Republic and Haiti had
experienced U.S. military occupation and control.\(^{28}\)

Roosevelt’s Inaugural address on March 4, 1933 emphasized a world policy of “the good
neighbor – the neighbor who resolutely respects himself and, because he does so, respects the
rights of others – the neighbor who respects his obligations and respects the sanctity of his
agreements in and with a world of neighbors.”\(^{29}\)

Roosevelt sought to shift U.S. foreign policy from previous interventionist policies like
the Roosevelt Corollary and military interventions that the United States engaged in during the
1910’s and 1920’s.\(^{30}\) In his 1936 Inaugural address in Chautauqua, NY, Roosevelt stated, “this
declaration represents my purpose; but it represents more than a purpose, for it stands for a
practice…the whole world knows that the United States cherishes no predatory ambitions. We

\(^{28}\) Our Documents, 100 Milestones Documents, “Platt Amendment (1903),”

\(^{29}\) Franklin D. Roosevelt, “Inaugural Address,” (Speech, Chautauqua, N.Y., March 4, 1933), Online by
Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project,

are strong; but less powerful Nations know that they need not fear our strength. We seek no conquest; we stand for peace.”

Roosevelt’s “good neighbor policy” appeared to be critical of his predecessors’ policy of interventionism and a rebuke of the past, stating, “The American Republics to the sought of us have been ready always to cooperate with the United States on a basis of equality and mutual respect, but before we inaugurated the good-neighbor policy there were among them resentment and fear, because certain Administration in Washington had slighted their national pride and their sovereign rights.”

In spite of an isolationist position, Roosevelt believed the U.S. had an important role to play in the international community. Non-intervention was the overall policy direction of his early administration unless it was deemed necessary to pursue intervention. Though the policy was well intentioned for Cuba, since the U.S. had played a significant role in their political and domestic affairs throughout the early 20th century, the U.S. still had a presence on the island, i.e. Guantanamo Bay and a Naval base. It appears the U.S. was not quite ready to completely leave Cuba alone.


32 Ibid.
Chapter 2

EMBARGO

2.1. Origins of Economic Embargo

The United States came out as the leading economic, political and military power in the aftermath of World War II. According to State Department records, “wartime production pulled the economy out of depression and propelled it to great profits”. As a strategy to avoid another global war, the U.S. began to offer economic assistance to European and Asian countries struggling to rebuild their economies. It also began to take an “active interest in the fate of the colonies the European powers were having difficulty maintaining”. Challenges and resistance came as a result, particularly from the Soviets, who were reneging on many of their wartime promises. But more troubling for the U.S. was the expansion of communism and Soviet empire into Eastern Europe. The U.S. believed its only option was to form a Western alliance that counterbalanced the soviets’ expansion and spread of communism, especially in the Western hemisphere.33

Fidel Castro’s revolutionary arms – the 26th July Movement – overthrew the Batista regime in January 1959. The U.S. government viewed Castro’s movement as radical anti-Americanism that sought to undermine U.S. interests in the Caribbean and Latin America. A CIA report suggests that the U.S. had been surveilling Castro and the evolution of his radical communist ideology since the early fifties. Key officials within the government questioned Castro’s communist beliefs, his motives, and the powers that were actually controlling him.34


Officials within the CIA believed he was a dangerous revolutionary though they were uncertain if he was a true communist. They believed his reformist and nationalist agenda would undermine U.S. interests.\textsuperscript{35} Castro’s upbringing in poverty veered him towards a nationalistic political view. His consideration and compassion for the poor shaped his initial political policies which encouraged radical reformist socialist programs that sought to eradicate poverty, ensure a decrease in U.S. influence in Cuba’s political and economic affairs, while securing a more considerable autonomy from its dependence on the United States.\textsuperscript{36}

Although it appears the U.S. government was hesitant to directly label Castro a communist, his movement was gaining enough strength to pose a threat to the national security of the United States and that was reason enough to invest in political and covert resources to usurp and eliminate Castro from the picture. In the CIA Bay of Pigs report, it details various propaganda operation activities that had started since the mid-fifties against the Cuban Communist Party, such as anti-communist organizations, and radio broadcasts.\textsuperscript{37} Such activities did not go unnoticed to the Cuban government and the U.S. continued interference in this country’s political affairs certainly helped grow the seed of tensions, distrust and isolation between the two countries.

Rising tensions continued to rise between the two countries. In the summer of 1958, 29 U.S. sailors and marines along with 15 businessmen were kidnapped by Raul Castro (Fidel’s


\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., 10}

brother). Field officers within the CIA reported Castro’s movement was rife with anti-Americanism.\textsuperscript{38}

The U.S. had legitimate concerns and fears of a rising communist regime that was too geographically close. It meant the actions and political ideology of Cuba could impact the political direction of other Caribbean and Latin American countries. Castro’s rise became imminent and the relationship with Cuba began to worsen. By the time the U.S. government recognized the Castro regime in January 1959, it became evident that communism had entered the realms of the Western hemisphere. Castro’s popularity coupled with unpopular governments in Haiti, Dominican Republic and Nicaragua during 1959 drove Castro to engage in “armed expeditions” against said countries. Needless to say, these attempts were a failure.\textsuperscript{39}

In November 1959 Secretary of State Christian Herter sent a memorandum to President Eisenhower presenting proposed implementation of policies for Cuba, in light of continued escalated anti-American actions that was being imposed and encouraged by the Castro regime. Revealing that the U.S. has been ‘observing’ Castro for several months, it was determined that Castro’s anti-American policies seemed to be getting even more radical and were being contradictory to U.S. national security interests.\textsuperscript{40}

Castro’s revolutionary involvement in Haiti, Dominican Republic and Nicaragua was seen as undermining U.S. system. The memo revealed that Castro regime “would have serious

\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., 6


adverse effects on the United States position in Latin America and corresponding advantages for international communism.” According to Herter, Castro “tolerated and encouraged the infiltration of Communists and their sympathizers into important positions in key governmental institutions.” The department suggested that U.S. economic interests in Cuba have been “seriously affected” and that it would be difficult to “encourage and support” other trade policies and private investments in Latin America if these countries are supporting and cooperating with the Castro regime. In other words, the U.S. was unwilling to engage in trade with other nations if they were suspected of cooperating with Castro.41

Particularly concerning was Castro’s “neutralist” anti-American foreign policy. The State department’s policy guideline proposed at the time to President Eisenhower that all policies of the U.S. should be “designed to encourage” opposition within Cuba and other Latin American countries that were also involved anti-American movements and propaganda. The caveat was that all propaganda actions and programs needed to appear as “non-interventionist” by the Americans, unless there was an absolute need to defend U.S. security.42

2.2. Anti-Castro Programs

By the end of 1959, intelligence reports disclosed that any direct U.S. intervention would see violent reactions erupt from the Cuban military and population. CIA reports revealed that the beginning of 1960 was the “official” beginning of anti-Castro programs executed by the agency. One report dated January 8, 1960, indicate that both State and CIA officials held a meeting that discussed the necessity for “increased covert and semi covert programs aimed at Castro –

41 Ibid
42 Ibid
psychological warfare, political action, economic action, and paramilitary action, all of which had been conducted in some degree during the past year.”

In February 1960, Cuba signed a five-year trade agreement with the Soviet Union. Both the CIA and the National Security Council observed that the Soviets were actively supporting so called “liberation” movements in Cuba and other Latin American countries. A challenging year continued ahead for Cuba and the U.S. and relations deteriorated even more so. CIA was responsible for developing various strategic actions that supported opponents to the Castro while destabilizing his regime. This was all supposed to take place before Eisenhower’s presidency ends.

At the time, CIA director, Allen Dulles cited four major issues the United States should be concerned about regarding Cuba. These posed economic and national security concerns for the United States and comprised of sugar, political tension, neutralism and Cuba’s strategic plans.

In the summer of 1960, a congressional law was passed and the president was given the power to decrease sugar quota from Cuba. Obviously such an action did not sit well with the Cuban government. They retaliated with their own law that gave Castro the power to nationalize U.S. properties, specifying payment would only be paid through sugar sales to the U.S. Basically

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a quid pro quo. Eisenhower then went on to announce that all sugar sales from Cuba would cease immediately. To Cuba, this was seen as economic punishment and Castro went ahead and nationalized almost all of the key U.S. owned businesses worth hundreds of millions of dollars that were present on the island. It is important to note that during the 1930’s, most of Cuba’s economy – sugar, tobacco, banks, and public utilities - were owned by U.S. investors. These investors were almost as influential as U.S. officials in government.\(^47\)

2.3. First Trade Embargo

By October 1960, with heavy taxes levied on U.S. imports and private companies designated as state owned entities, U.S. administration intensified economic punishment by imposing the first trade embargo against Cuba. The main exceptions to the embargo were medicines and unsubsidized food items.\(^48\) This harsh economic policy would become the basis of an economic trade embargo that would serve as a matter of crucial dispute between the two countries for over a half of a century. The reforms implemented that year signaled a monumental moment in terms of U.S. Cuba relations. Officials within the Eisenhower administration were taking on a tougher and more hardliner approach towards Cuba. It was an election year and domestic politics played a pivotal role in the direction of U.S. foreign policy in Cuba. Castro was not letting up on his revolutionary reformist anti-American policies nor his involvement in subversive expeditions in the Caribbean.\(^49\)


In the face of continued pressure and economic challenges from the United States, Cuba remained resilient and defiant. The United States’ ‘sugar sabotage plan’ elicited an even more rebellious attitude from the Castro regime. Once Soviet arms entered Cuban soil, that pretty much ended any further relationship between Cuba and the United States. In addition, Castro was also disputing the treaty that had allowed the U.S. to retain Guantánamo Naval Base. In light of this development, United States government implemented military contingency plans in case Castro decided to attack the base.50

Given the tense situation that developed, it is no surprise the United States policies remained firm and continuous. There were doubts about Fidel Castro’s political ideology, but nevertheless, the U.S had recognized his government. But his alliance and trade with the Soviets, increased taxes on U.S. imports, and nationalization of U.S. properties left the United States with few options but to impose economic punishment in the form of a trade embargo on Cuba.51 U.S. investors experienced considerable losses when Cuba nationalized their properties and understandably U.S. aggression rose significantly. These investors sought answers and justice from their respective elected representatives, who took their grievances to the State department. The message was clear: America needs to assert her power so that future business investments abroad will not face similar vulnerabilities.52


With sugar imports reduced drastically, the United States government moved to institute a ban on almost all exports to Cuba. There were also strict travel restrictions for Americans desiring to travel to Cuba. Eventually a complete economic embargo would be instituted by Kennedy.53

2.4. Cuban Missile Crisis: Critical Turning Point

Severed diplomatic ties with Cuba culminated in January 1961 and was based on hostile actions by the Cuban government which, according to official U.S. documents, were obstructing the ability of the U.S. consular mission to carry out normal diplomatic functions on the island.54

When the U.S. launched the unsuccessful Bay of Pigs operation in April 1961, it only intensified and fueled further distrust and nationalism among the Cuban population. By this time all diplomatic ties with Cuba had been severed on the part of the U.S. government. Cuba went on to have an agreement with the Soviets permitting them to build a missile base on the island.55 The October 1962 plan to build a Soviet missile base in Cuba set off one of the most intense crisis to affect the three countries, i.e. Cuba, Soviet Union, and the United States. The Cuban Missile Crisis presented these three leaders with the possibility of nuclear Armageddon.56

The crisis was a critical turning point in the relationship between U.S. Soviet and U.S. Cuban relations. Though Castro’s role was secondary, it was nonetheless significant in that, it


56 Ibid
showed Cuba as a critical player in the crisis. According to Sherwin, the crisis “exposed the limits of what great powers could do alone and demonstrated the influence that small states could exert”. U.S. policy may not have wanted to admit or even considered that Khrushchev paid attention to what Castro said and did, but that seemed to be precisely the case. The crisis helped sustained Castro’s political survival and it changed U.S.-Soviet nuclear relationship. It was the realization that one irresponsible decision could trigger nuclear war and it redefined and shaped Cold War actions for twenty-seven years.57

Careful deliberation and decision making ensued during the thirteen-day period as officials within the Kennedy administration were still getting over the failed Bay of Pigs disaster. The United States said it would consider any missiles launched from Cuba the same as if it were being launched from the Soviet Union and an action such as this would result in a full out nuclear response from the U.S.58 After thirteen chilling days of facing possible nuclear engagement between the U.S. and the Soviet Union, an agreement was finally made for the missiles to be dismantled. In turn, the U.S agreed not to pursue an invasion of Cuba.59

Castro was not pleased when President Kennedy and Premier Khrushchev arrived at an agreement without his participation. Mariño suggests that the Cuban Missile Crisis “highlighted Cuba’s strategic insecurity and proved the need for an aggressive approach to protecting Cuba’s


revolutionary sovereignty.” Despite a peaceful resolution, the events were the basis of major concern for which a strategy of containment – in the form of economic and diplomatic isolation - were instituted against Cuba.

The trade embargo imposed on Cuba by the U.S. government in 1961 was further strengthened in 1962 through the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961. It refocused America-Cuba foreign policy to one of containment and diplomatic isolation on Cuba with the objective of helping the Cuban people achieve political freedom.

On February 3, 1962, President Kennedy, keeping with Acts of Congress and the Foreign Assistance Act, proclaimed the trade embargo between the United States and Cuba. It prohibited all goods “of Cuban origin and all goods imported from or through Cuba.” It also prohibited all exports from the United States to Cuba. The embargo went into effect on February 7, 1962. As Castro remained defiant and resistant in the face of trade sanctions, U.S. policy was reformulated to penalize Cuba for its communist ideology, demonstrating to other Latin American countries the negative impact they also could face if they decided to join in Cuba’s footprint.

2.5. Economic Impacts: Isolation and Embargo

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61 Pepperdine School of Public Policy, “Rethinking Cuba: The Maturation of United States Foreign Policy,” (Pepperdine University School of Public Policy), 5, https://publicpolicy.pepperdine.edu/master-public-policy/content/capstones/rethinkingcuba.pdf.


The effects of the economic sanctions on Cuba were substantial. According to Julia Sweig, prior to the embargo, Cuba’s economy was almost incorporated with that of the United States. Sugar exports were sold at subsidized prices to the U.S. market but its agricultural, manufacturing, telecommunications, public health, water, energy, transportation infrastructure were all comprised mostly of U.S. made materials. When the embargo hit, Cuba could no longer buy products that “contained more than 5% of U.S. content.” As globalization increased, it was becoming increasingly difficult for Cuba to find materials to sustain its infrastructure that was build prior to the embargo. Sweig attributes Cuba’s ill-fated economic collapse to the power of the U.S. trade embargo sanctions, noting, “the combination of haphazard, often chaotic, and centrally planned economic policies instituted by the Cuban government could never compensate for the financial, economic, and infrastructure cost of U.S. sanctions.”64

The United States did not stop at economic sanctions. It also attempted, with success, to gain regional support from other Latin American countries to isolate Cuba. In 1962, member states of the Organization of American States, voted to exclude Cuba as a member of the organization. Many of these nations saw Cuba’s actions with the United States as provoking instability and unrest in the region. The United States continued its pressure on Cuba and in 1964 its delegation to OAS called a vote that asked all member states to sever diplomatic and trade relations with the Cuban government.65


65 Ibid
2.6. African Intervention

By July 1975, the OAS voted to permit its member countries to resume trade and diplomatic relations with Cuba. A few weeks later the United States went ahead and removed its subsidiary trade ban that it had instituted on the island. This was done despite recent knowledge by U.S. intelligence that Cuban forces were in Angola. After a period of ten years of being isolated economically by Latin American countries, it appeared that Cuba was, once again, able to trade and buy goods produced not only within Latin America, but also with American subsidiary companies.\textsuperscript{66} Importantly enough, talks were explored (albeit secretly) between Cuba and the U.S. during the Nixon administration but these talks were suspended in 1975 when it became known that Cuba had launched a massive intervention in Angola.\textsuperscript{67} There are unconfirmed reports that suggests U.S. officials were aware that Cubans were in Africa, particularly in Algeria, Zaire and Congo Brazzaville but did not feel concerned about any of these developments. According Piero Gleijeses, “this complacency, which contrasts starkly with Washington’s reaction to even the rumor of Cuban combatants in Latin America, is explained by the fact that U.S. officials were confident that a handful of Cubans could not be effective in distant, alien African countries.” Hence, the shocked effect when they learnt of Cuba’s presence in Angola, which was in the range of 480-500 men initially dispatched, to train approximately 5,300 Angolans.\textsuperscript{68}

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\textsuperscript{66} Ibid., 91.
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\textsuperscript{67} Pepperdine School of Public Policy, “Rethinking Cuba: The Maturation of United States Foreign Policy,” (Pepperdine University School of Public Policy), 5, https://publicpolicy.pepperdine.edu/master-public-policy/content/capstones/rethinkingcuba.pdf.
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Cuba’s military justified its intervention in Angola on the basis of shared ideology. Angola’s MPLA was considered Marxist and staunch followers of the Soviets. To them, Cuba was the embodiment of what the desired communist party should entail. A New York Times article in 1987 reported that Cuba viewed the mission in Angola as a “means of reviving revolutionary spirit in a younger generation”.  

Regardless of the reason, Cuba was defending Angola against a perceived aggressor, South Africa, and the U.S. appeared to be playing its hands in a game that involved spitefulness. Historian, William Blum, contends that the “MPLA was the most organized and best led of the three factions and early on controlled the capital city of Luanda…yet, for no reason, apparently, other than anti-Soviet spite, the United States was unwilling to allow a negotiated settlement.”  

The U.S. official policy at the time was to pretend ignorance of South Africa’s covert operations. This has subsequently been disputed by historians. Whether the U.S. chose to acknowledge its involvement in South Africa or not, Cuba felt the need to intervene in Angola on the basis of solidarity. In “Contemporary Cuba,” Mariño suggests that Cuba viewed its intervention as “oppressed versus liberated states-and deliberately sought to challenge the balance of power and raise the profile of the third world.”  

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argue that Cuba would have also had strategic interests in raising its own profile in the third world.

But some have suggested that Cuba may have been reluctant in the beginning, to be dragged into what appeared to be an unending conflict. Gleijeses points out perhaps Cuba was unwilling to risk relations with the West, which was showing signs of improvement after a long period of economic hostility. Notably, the U.S. was “interested in a modus vivendi,” while the OAS was planning to remove sanctions previously imposed on Cuba.\(^73\)

Despite such delayed response, Cuba shifted gears and in November 1975, large numbers of Cuban troops began arriving in Luanda. From 1975-1976 and 1987-1988, Cuba won the war in Angola and in 1977-1978 it won in Ethiopia as well. Throughout the 70’s and 80’s, Cuba was known to have kept more troops on the African continent, in comparison to its own population, than that of the U.S military in Vietnam. Along with substantial economic and military support provided by the Soviets in the 70’s and mid-80’s, Cuba was able to rebound from economic collapse caused by the U.S. trade embargo.\(^74\)

2.7. Revolutionary Rivalry

In addition to geopolitical differences and hostility faced by the U.S., Castro also had to balance power play and infighting that marred his relationship with Che Guevara. CIA intelligence reports suggests that ‘Che’ had been engaged in a power struggle with Castro and the policy direction of the government. Che purportedly was interested in spreading the


Revolution to other parts of Latin America but other party members wanted to focus more on the internal issues the Revolution was facing. His economic policies were viewed unpopular and Che subsequently departed Cuba to start his own revolutionary fight in other parts of Latin America.

At some point between September and November 1966, Che arrived in Bolivia and made it his home base for his revolutionary cause. Because of Bolivia’s poverty and social economic struggles, it seemed the ideal place to spread his ideology. Of course, other factors such as geographic location and the perception of Bolivia as a non-threatening state also was a possible reason why Che decided to locate there. From the fall of 1966 until his death October 1967, Che was engaged in guerrilla warfare with the Bolivian army, who it was reported, was trained by CIA and U.S. Green Beret. Che was executed by Bolivian soldiers and his death remains a controversy. Che’s death certainly reinvigorated Castro’s justification of the revolution by implicating U.S. imperialism and the CIA. However, caution may have halt any careless decision to spread the insurgency into other Latin American states after what happened in Bolivia.²⁵

### 2.8. Justification for Maintaining the Embargo

Many critics have argued throughout the years that the embargo is justified and should continue to be used as leverage to put pressure on the Cuban government to improve and address human rights abuses and repression facing opposition groups and dissidents. But if the embargo is lifted, would that deter the Cuban government from seeking a more open and transparent political system and end its political prosecution of human rights groups?

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A Human Rights Watch World Report on Cuba 2015 states that Cubans are prosecuted if they criticize the government in any format. They are not granted due process and are subject to criminal prosecution. Human rights groups do not have access to prisoners and in spite of Cuba releasing 53 prisoners as part of the renewed diplomatic relations, there are still dozens more that are estimated to be in prison. The government also refuses to recognize any form of human rights monitoring agency and “denies legal status to local human rights groups. Government authorities harass, assault, and imprison human rights defenders who attempt to document abuses.” The report also notes that even though Cuba had agreed, as part of the 2014 agreement, to allow the International Committee of Red Cross and UN human rights monitors, it had not stuck to its part of the bargain by the end of the year.76

A 2015 Freedom House Report on Cuba also documented similar findings, noting, the government “increased its systematic use of short-term “preventive” detentions along with harassment, beatings, and “acts of repudiation” – to intimidate the political opposition, isolate dissidents from the rest of the population, and maintain political control of all public spaces.” The report revealed there were a record number of these detentions in 2014. Short-term detentions have also increased and the Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation reported that there were 8,899 more short term detentions in 2014 while 6,424 were reported in 2013.77

In addition, Freedom House reports that the CCDHRN estimates there could be over 100 political prisoners. Government watch groups, such as Committees for the Defense of the

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Revolution, has engaged in vigilante tactics and intimidation to silence opposition groups. Freedom of expression and the right to assemble is heavily restricted and often results in imprisonment for years. Not surprisingly, Cuba is rated a 7, with 7 ranked as “the worst” on the Political Rights scale on Freedom House.\textsuperscript{78}

In a March 2016 article by 14ymedio.com, it was reported that 209 activists were arrested for protesting and demanding release of political prisoners, addressing human rights abuses and repression. Most of the arrested were part of the opposition group, Unión Patriótica de Cuba (UNPACU) which is considered one of the largest opposition organizations in the country. And quite a number of activists were not allowed to leave their homes during police activity.\textsuperscript{79}

Obviously, Cuba will need to have a change in its political system before the embargo could be lifted. So far, lack of political participation, freedom of expression, human rights abuse and repression and travel restrictions only hurt the Cuban people. Given these setbacks, the Helms-Burton Act seems like a perfect leverage to put pressure on the Cuban government to respect these rights and have a change in political system. Sec. 9 of the findings state “The United States has shown a deep commitment, and considers it a moral obligation, to promote and protect human rights and fundamental freedoms as expressed in the Charter of the United Nations and in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.”\textsuperscript{80}

\textsuperscript{78} Ibid.


2.9. U.S. Criteria for Lifting the Embargo

Economic sanctions may not have shifted the direction of Cuba’s political system nor did a “democratic” transition materialize, but it did manage to severely impact Cuba’s economy to the point of collapse. In fact, the United States reinforced the embargo in 1992 with what is called the Cuba Democracy Act and then again in 1996 with the Helms-Burton Act, with the latter, as a consequence to Cuba having shot down two private American planes, operated by Brothers to the Rescue. 

Both Acts stipulate forms of democracy that must take place in Cuba before Congress considers lifting the embargo. So what sort of democracy would Cuba need to establish in order to satisfy U.S. criteria before the embargo may be lifted? Does a democratically elected government mean any type of leader can be elected and hence, pave the way for a lifting of the embargo? What happens if the Cuban people democratically elect someone who implements the same old policies as the Castro government? What then? According to Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan, in a democracy, rulers ought to govern democratically and should not: “infringe the constitution, violate the rights of individuals and minorities, impinge upon the legitimate functions of the legislature, and thus fail to rule within the bounds of a state of law.”

If this definition is applied as a basis for what democracy is, then Cuba has little choice but to have open representation and free and fair elections if it wants the embargo to be lifted. Some of the main criteria in both Acts stipulate:

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Cuba Democracy Act of 1992 (Sec. 6002)
1) To seek a peaceful transition to democracy and a resumption of economic growth in Cuba through the careful application of sanctions directed at the Castro government and support for the Cuban people;
6) To maintain sanctions on the Castro regime so long as it continues to refuse to move toward democratization and greater respect for human rights

Helms-Burton Act of 1996 (Sec. 3)
4) To encourage the holding of free and fair democratic elections in Cuba, conducted under the supervision of internationally recognized observers
5) To provide a policy framework for United States support to the Cuban people in response to the formation of a transition government or a democratically elected government in Cuba;

The Helms-Burton Act specifically lays out a process that must take place before Congress lifts the embargo: Free and fair elections, release of political prisoners and respect for human rights. This must all be part of Cuba’s reform system for sanctions to be lifted.83

There are some adjustments and exclusions to the sanctions that have allowed the U.S. to export medical supplies and agricultural products to Cuba, but the embargo is set to be in place until Cuba holds free and fair elections resulting in a democratic government that does not include the Castros. Raul Castro, the current leader after Fidel Castro retired, has already confirmed several times since 2013 that he will step down as president in 2018.84 As part of agreement with Washington to restore economic and diplomatic engagement, Cuba already released 53 prisoners in January 2015. This was seen as an important step made on the Cuban government’s part to engage and commit to keeping promises. But human rights activists


cautioned the release noting that the prisoner release was no indication that the Cuban
government is on its way to becoming a democracy.\textsuperscript{85}

Needless to say, Cuba does not seem to have a choice to keep the same political or
economic system in place if it wants to move forward and have the embargo lifted. If the wrong
choices are made, then an entire process that took years to come to fruition, could become
undone and sending Cuba’s economy into stagnation mode once more.

Chapter 3

U.S. DOMESTIC POLITICS

U.S. domestic and foreign policy seem to share a thin line when it comes to U.S. Cuba policy. What has resulted is a foreign policy agenda that seem to have lost its way in a myriad of players vying for control of such a policy. U.S. Cuba policy seem to be a struggle between Congress and the Executive Office, with both being influenced by outside players with their own interests. According to Haney and Vanderbush, Cuba’s policy was partially expanded by Reagan to regain executive control over foreign policy that had been hijacked by an aggressive Congress after Vietnam and Watergate. Reagan helped sponsored the Cuban American National Foundation to lobby Congress for more aggressive strategies on Cuba, and it helped Reagan politically, but in the end, Haney and Vanderbush suggested that “the short-term gain for the president turned out to be a long-term problem, contributing to a political environment around Cuba policy that is even more decentralized and harder to control.”

3.1. American Public Perception

Americans’ view of Cuba and Castro has been mixed after the revolution. According to W.G. Mayer, during the late 60’s and late 70’s, Americans had a somewhat favorable view of Cuba and Castro. Those who gave Cuba a negative rating fell from 65% in 1967 to 41% by 1976 and subsequently to 29% in early 1979. However, by late 1979 this positive perception began to shift southward.

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The two main events reported to have shaped opinions was when the United States received confirmed reports of approximately 2,000-3,000 Soviet troops based in Cuba. According to Mayer, the Carter administration, after receiving criticisms from political leaders, acknowledged that having troops on Cuban soil was a threat. Later again that year when the Soviets sent troops to Afghanistan, the Cold War was brought back into the spotlight and that shifted American views in a negative light towards anything that was remotely associated with communism. By early 1980, negative views of Cuba rose from 29% to 49%. Throughout the 80’s that attitude toward Cuba continued to be negative, with 45% of Americans believing Cuba to be an enemy of the U.S. By the early 90’s and late 90’s, the number of Americans who held this belief was down to 34% and 30%, respectively.88

In 2002, most Americans still viewed Cuba and Fidel Castro negatively. In a 2002 Gallup report, after the Cuban Missile Crisis in October 1962, almost 84% of those polled overwhelmingly supported Kennedy’s decision to impose the blockade on Cuba. According to Gallup, by 2002, there were more people in favor of ending the embargo against Cuba than previous years. They pointed out that Americans are open to rebuilding diplomatic relations with Cuba. They cited that “seven out of eight polls asking this question since 1974, a majority of Americans have favored this change in policy. Most recently, in May 2002, Gallup found 55% in favor of normalizing ties with Cuba, and just 37% opposed.” Back in 2002, Carter had called for the United States to normalize relations with Cuba but President Bush at the time countered that the U.S. would only end the embargo if Cuba met certain conditions - like democracy and pro-

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88 Ibid., 587
capitalist conditions. What is interesting is that although 50% of Americans were open to the idea of ending the embargo, almost two-thirds (63%) had agreed with Bush at the time.\textsuperscript{89}

Fast forward to 2015 and we see more Americans viewing Cuba positively. According to Gallup, 54% view Cuba in a positive light, which is an increase of 8% points from 2014, 16% points from 2014 and 33% points overall since 2006. Compared to 1996, when the Helms-Burton Act was implemented and only 10% of Americans had a favorable view of Cuba, the views and opinions of Americans have substantially changed.\textsuperscript{90} This could be due to the fact that the younger generation does not hold the same bias towards the idea of “socialism”, as the older generation does. They do not perceive it as a threat and actually seem to be attracted to the concept of social responsibility and equality, which is the core of any socialist system. At the same time, the younger generation have not had a chance to be exposed and subjected to the propaganda of the Cold War era. Perhaps this is why there is now an openness and favorable view towards dialogue and change in Cuba.

President Obama had been instrumental in building a movement that would pave the way for normalization between Cuba and the United States. This policy change is in stark contrast to the years of 2001-2008 when President George W. Bush had continued a tough policy approach towards Cuba. With Obama’s more open approach, we see that Americans view of Cuba have climbed to 25% points throughout his presidency.\textsuperscript{91}

\textsuperscript{89} Lydia Saad, “The Cuban Missile Crisis: 40 Years Later,” \textit{Gallup}, October 14, 2002, \url{http://www.gallup.com/poll/6979/cuban-missile-crisis-years-later.aspx}

\textsuperscript{90} Ibid

\textsuperscript{91} Ibid
3.2. Cuban-American Votes

All the data cited have shown that the American public and Cuban-Americans, in particular are now strongly in favor of lifting the embargo. In poll conducted in 2015 by the Miami Herald, over 56% said they support recognition of Castro government, while 46% support Obama’s shift in policy change towards Cuba. Similarly, 53% said they supported ending the embargo, while in 2014, that number was 44%. Strikingly important is the difference of beliefs between those born in the U.S. and those who arrived in the U.S. during the 60’s, with the latter staunchly opposed to ending the embargo.92

The Cuban-American voting bloc has tremendous influence in U.S. primary and general elections. In a Pew Research 2013 survey of Hispanics, those who arrived to the United States prior to 1990, identified themselves as Republican-48%, while many who arrived after 1990 – 57%, leaned towards the Democratic party. Democrats have certainly gained traction with Cuban-Americans, long understood to be conservatives. Coupled with Obama’s engagement policy and economic openness for Cuba, Cuban-American voting bloc may become a demographic up for grabs by both political parties and become a game changer in general elections.93

In another related NPR article, a poll conducted in 1991 of Cuban-Americans in Miami Dade County found that 70% were registered as Republicans. However, in May 2014, that


number dropped significantly to 53%. Democrats, in particular, could stand to gain from voters that once leaned heavily to the right.94

Florida is a major swing state and is home to two-thirds or 68% of Cuban population in the United States. The older generation (those who arrived before 1990) and the more recently arrived Cuban immigrants share different political and ideological views when it comes to the discussion of Cuba’s future political and economic direction.95

This new shift in political views is important for state electorate and U.S. domestic policies since traditionally older Cuban-Americans born in Cuba were more likely to support the continuation of the trade embargo. Political dialogue will most likely change to reflect the will of the people and also to win elections.

Pew also cited a Florida International University Poll conducted in 2014 that found 52% of Cuban Americans in the Miami Dade County area opposed the continuation of the embargo and 68% wanted relations to be reestablished between Cuba and the U.S.96 Polls continue to show that many Americans support Obama’s engagement policy with Cuba. As a matter of fact, 64% support reestablishing diplomatic relations with Cuba, while 68% believe there should be an end to the trade embargo.97

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Changing attitudes can either be due to an evolving Cuban-American generation or Obama’s concern with his presidential legacy. The long road to normalizing relations and easing some of the embargo’s restrictions have been bumpy, but steady. Obama’s policies differed from that of his predecessor, George W. Bush, who maintained tight restrictions on Cuba unless certain conditions were met.

One hopes that eventually Cuban-Americans like all other Americans, will vote not for who speaks the loudest against the Cuban government, but for those who work at promoting policies that will serve their own self-interests. This will likely occur only when the older Cuban-American generation fade away and younger generation political views are not based on the rejection of established relations with Cuba. Eventually politicians will rest assured that they can support reforms to engage with Cuba without the risk of losing electoral votes in Florida.98

3.3. Cuban Lobbying Influence

According to LeoGrande, the influential Cuba Lobby was “launched at the instigation of conservative Republicans in government who needed outside backers to advance their partisan policy aims. In the 1950’s, they were Republican members of Congress battling New Dealers in the Truman administration over Asia policy. In the 1980’s, they were officials in Ronald Reagan’s administration battling congressional Democrats over Central America Policy.”99 An organized Cuban American National Foundation (CANF) was founded during Reagan’s


presidency and chaired by Jorge Mas Canosa. Up until his death in 1997, CANF was viewed as one of the most powerful foreign policy organization in the United States.100

This well organized group had the advantage of influential electoral states of Florida and New Jersey and was able to build a strong network of congressional support by funneling campaign contributions to elected leaders, thereby influencing and intimidating State Department officials into agreeing with their policies.101

CANF’s leader was very influential in U.S. Cuba foreign policies and a New York Times Editorial in 1997 stated, “no individual had more influence over the United States policies toward Cuba over the past two decades…”102 CANF’s reputation was built on punishing anyone who seemed inclined to supporting reestablishing relations with Cuba. They made huge campaign contributions to politicians who were sympathetic to their cause. Notable supporters were Robert Torricelli (D-NJ-1997-2003) and senior U.S. senator Robert Menendez (D-NJ). Torricelli was instrumental in authoring the Cuban Democracy Act that sought to reinforce the embargo.103

The organization was structured and molded after AIPAC (American Israel Public Affairs Committee). In the 80’s and 90’s, CANF was involved in lobbying, research, and fundraising.104 With the death of its founder, Canosa, CANF found itself in precarious position undergoing internal crisis and restructuring. In 2001, members of CANF split and formed their

100 Ibid

101 Leogrande, Normalizing US-Cuba Relations.


own pro-embargo organization – Cuban Liberty Council (CLC). This organization admitted that its members were instrumental in the creation of Radio and TV Marti, the Cuban Democracy Act of 1992 and the Helms-Burton Act of 1996. In fact, it has been reported that when Senator Helms sponsored the Helms-Burton Act, he had received a $75,000 contribution from CANF and President Clinton had received initially $300,000 for his support of the Cuba Democracy Act of 1992.

Ironically, with the splitting of CANF and newly formed CLC, CANF reform its policy to embrace lifting of sanctions and the embargo. Their roles seemed to be switched. CANF and the Cuba Study Group became partners in promoting policy change within the Obama Administration. They have supported Obama’s presidency and shared openly their desire for a policy change regarding Cuba. In addition to supporting efforts that will entail direct interaction between the U.S. and Cuba, CANF has recommended a proactive approach to U.S. Cuba relations, including, “communication to advance freedom of information, support for development of Cuban civil society, increasing people-to-people exchanges, and targeting bilateral and multilateral diplomatic efforts.” However, Leogrande asserts that the new kid on the block is the U.S. Cuba Democracy PAC, which has given out more in campaign contributions than CANF in the past five elections. According to their website, U.S. Cuba


106 Pepperdine School of Public Policy, Rethinking Cuba, 9.


Democracy PAC opposes legislation that will end the embargo, indicating that the “Castro regime would be the major beneficiary of the lifting of trade and travel related sanctions to Cuba. Cuba’s tourism and trade sectors are completely state-owned or operated through joint ventures with corporations established by, and under the supervision of, the Cuban Ministry and the Ministry of the Interior.” The PAC believes that policies need to be implemented that regulate trade and travel related transactions with the Cuban government.\textsuperscript{110} Rytz also writes that Washington insiders consider the PAC “the most powerful organization representing the interests of Cuban-Americans with regard to US Cuba policy.” Jeff Flake (R-AZ) has been a prominent proponent of the group. Rytz suggests PAC’s intention was to utilize campaign contributions as a way to get politicians, particularly those who were in favor of keeping the embargo, elected to Congress. Director, Claver-Carone has pointed out that his organization has grown into one of the largest Hispanic groups in the United States and proudly proclaims that they have raised almost 5 million dollars between 2003-2011.\textsuperscript{111}

In fact, USCD PAC’s website specifies that they “contribute to candidates who either a) have key roles on congressional committees responsible for Cuba-related issues or b) have demonstrated their support for the struggle for human rights in Cuba.\textsuperscript{112}

Despite the survival and success of previous pro embargo organizations like CANF, CLC and USCD PAC, the conversation has been changing to reflect more moderate voices of a younger generation who are not as anti-Castro as the lobbying groups. But the groups continue to

\textsuperscript{110}U.S. Cuba Democracy PAC, “Purpose,” http://www.uscubapac.com/purposeandagenda.html

\textsuperscript{111}Rytz, A Cuban-American Story of Success and Failure, Epilogue in Ethnic Interest Groups in US Foreign Policy-Making, 198.

\textsuperscript{112}U.S. Cuba Democracy PAC, http://www.uscubapac.com/purposeandagenda.html
exist, feeding on the last remaining bastions of anti-Castro Cuban-Americans in the United States.

3.4. Partisan Political Ideology

Party lines still play a role in the way that Americans and American-Cuban voters view the relationship between the two countries. According to Gallup, the greatest shift in attitudes have come from Democrats and independents. In 2015 a whopping 73% of Democrats had a positive view of Cuba, while 53% of independents had the same view. On the other hand, only 34% of Republicans held a positive view of Cuba. This has obviously crossed over to the democratic and republican candidates vying for the presidency. Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders have shown their support for Obama’s normalization policy. Former Republican candidates, Jeb Bush, Marco Rubio and Ted Cruz, to name a few, have all voiced their criticism of Obama’s move to engage with Cuba. But presumptive Republican nominee, Donald Trump, has taken up a different viewpoint, agreeing with the attempts at normalizing relations, explaining, “it’s been out there for 50 years or whatever, and I think the concept of having there be some normalization is not a bad thing. Ultimately, it’s going to be good.” Of course, Trump insisted that America could have had a better and stronger deal.

However, many opponents of Obama’s policy have continued to criticize the move as reckless. Some like Rep. Mario Diaz-Balart, a Republican from Florida, have blamed Obama’s policy for a rapid increase in Cuban migration to the U.S. and also for increased political arrests

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in Cuba. Balart contends that such an increase in migration poses serious national security interests to our nation.\footnote{Felicia Schwartz, “Cuba, U.S. Agree to Resume Regular Flights Amid Slow Normalization of Ties,” \textit{The Wall Street Journal}, December 16, 2015.}

Many alluded to Obama’s policy as weakening America’s stand in the world. Senator Lindsey Graham argued, “by suggesting the dictatorship in Cuba is an acceptable or normal government, we are sending the worst possible message at the most critical times.” Former Senator Marco Rubio (R-FL) condemned Obama’s policy, explaining, “It remains unclear what, if anything, has been achieved since the President’s December 17\textsuperscript{th} announcement in terms of securing the return of U.S. citizens for properties confiscated by the regime, and in obtaining the unequivocal right of our diplomats to travel freely throughout Cuba and meet with any dissidents, and most importantly, securing greater political freedoms for the Cuban people.”\footnote{Michael Warren, “Republicans Blast Obama Restoring Relations with Castro’s Cuba,” \textit{The Weekly Standard}, July 1, 2015, http://www.weeklystandard.com/republicans-blast-obama-restoring-relations-with-castros-cuba/article/982392}

Criticisms have also come from the democratic aisle. Senator Robert Menendez, Democratic chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee has criticized the deal suggesting that it could possibly enable Cuban government to further hardened its approach on its citizens. This is not surprising since Menendez is a huge supporter of the Embargo. In spite of criticisms from the left and right, most Democrats and some Republicans believe the new policy is a step in the right direction. Sen. Jeff Flake (R-AZ) is one proponent of supporting relations with Cuba believing that we could more achieve our goals through this avenue rather than continuing to impose a blockade.\footnote{Sean Sullivan and Ed O’Keefe, “GOP Lawmakers blast Obama’s Cuba Policy shift,” \textit{The Washington Post}, December 17, 2014, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-politics/wp/2014/12/17/cuba-deal-reaction-sharply-split-on-capitol-hill/}
And Congressman Tom Emmer (R-MN) and Congresswoman Kathy Castor (D-FL), along with other members of Congress, introduced last summer, bi-partisan legislation to lift the embargo. The Cuba Trade Act of 2015 would allow businesses to trade freely with Cuba. Emmer has been rallying fellow Republicans ever since to lift the embargo. Castor reiterated her support, saying, “Lifting the embargo and reestablishing historic trade ties with Cuba will be a boost to our port and local small businesses in Tampa Bay. I look forward to working with my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to advance this policy of engagement that will not only provide an economic boost here at home, but will also help the Cuban economy and its people flourish.”

The embargo was modified and passed in 2000 (Trade Sanctions Reform and Export Enhancement Act of 2000-TSRA) and had no substantial effect on U.S. imports from Cuba, but instead, made exclusions for exports to Cuba and allowed the President to grant export licenses, valid for one year, for food and medical supplies. The big caveat was that all trade had to be paid in advance either with cash or through accredited foreign bank institutions.\(^{119}\) Despite the allowances for food and medicinal supplies, there are still many restrictions and difficulty purchasing items such as medical spare parts. Imports are therefore done on a rare basis and often times Cuba is left to seek out pricier alternatives. In addition, many U.S. medical researchers are unable to work with Cuban scientists based on the fact that most U.S. research is supported through federal grants. These grants prohibit support to Cuban American science partnerships.\(^{120}\)

Despite harsh economic sanctions, Cuba has managed to make significant strides in medical research in spite of the limited resources available to them. According to a Foreign Policy in Focus article, Cuba “has one of the most advanced medical biotechnology industries in the world. With 12,000 employees, including 7,000 scientists and engineers…” Citing the World Health Organization, the report explained that biotechnology industry encompasses


approximately 1,200 international patents and pharmaceutical products with vaccines in over 50 countries (excludes the U.S.). The report found finds that Cuba has also developed an effective medication for diabetes that has shown to cut the risks of amputation by over 78%. It is being used in Cuba and 20 other countries. Why is this important, one may ask? According to the report, every year, more than 80,000 Americans undergo amputations due to diabetic complications. Cuba is also leading in medical research in vaccine development for lung, throat and childhood brain cancer. The Head of World Health Organization country office in Cuba says that over ninety new products are being studied in more than 60 clinical trials and these are expected to increase significantly.121

With time, as the normalization policy continues to impact the relationship between the U.S. and Cuba in a positive way, it is hoped that Americans will be able to reap the medical benefits from innovative treatments mentioned above. Medical and political interests may conflict and serve different people, i.e. politicians and ordinary citizens, but if potential lives could be saved by medical advancement in Cuba, why shouldn’t the American public be able to benefit like other countries?

Modifications made to the embargo has also enabled the United States to export approximately $300 million worth in products to Cuba in 2014 with 96% of these in the form of meat, poultry, corn, soybeans and animal feed.122 With the new open policy with the U.S., Cuba hopes to have an increase in revenues from anticipated U.S. tourism and a revived agricultural

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121 Felicia Gustin, “3 Big Benefits for Americans to Ending the Cuba Embargo,” Foreign Policy in Focus, March 27, 2015, http://fpif.org/3-big-benefits-for-americans-to-ending-the-cuba-embargo/

sector.\textsuperscript{123} Embargo exclusions such as U.S. exported agricultural products possibly played a factor in sustaining Cuba’s economy but its overall economic development has certainly been impeded.

Despite restrictions and political setback seen by many anti-Castro supporters, there are also reports of increased growth of independent media popping up in Cuba. Freedom House reports that bloggers and journalists are finding innovative ways to publish news and opinion pieces for the Cuban people. Examples are “On Cuba” which was started in 2012 and another digital newspaper, ‘14ymedi’ which was started in 2014.\textsuperscript{124} Though the latter has faced continued obstacles, including hacking and damaging criticisms. According to Human Rights Watch, the site has remained inaccessible to users in Cuba since 2014.\textsuperscript{125}

\textbf{4.2. Cuba’s Economic Sustainers}

Cuba’s economy is estimated to be 75\% state owned. According to Pew Research, government and state owned enterprise represents more than “three-quarters of Cuba’s economic activity.”\textsuperscript{126} Almost all foreign trade is required to be channeled through government operated agencies. One such example is Empresa Comercializadora de Alimentos (ALIMPORT), which operates as the exclusive negotiating and procurement agency for all purchasing, documentation and other logistics related to agricultural products bought from the U.S.\textsuperscript{127} This means that

\begin{verbatim}
\textsuperscript{123} The Heritage Foundation, “2016 Index of Economic Freedom: Cuba,” http://www.heritage.org/index/country/cuba


\end{verbatim}
although Raul Castro has moved to implement incremental reforms, it’s the regime that will most likely reap the initial benefits of a normalization policy with the U.S. This kind of situation poses serious implications for progress toward a more democratic regime. Corruption, mismanagement, lack of transparency, and cronyism, all contribute to the delayed progress of any state that is going through development. As a result, Cuba could fall into this group of developing countries that fall prey to uprisings and/or military a coup. That seems to be a worse-case scenario, but blocking opportunity for people to earn a decent living can only be sustained for a certain period of time. Eventually something will have to give.

Cuba’s economy also operates on a parallel currency scale. Foreign companies are required to pay the government in hard currency, which the government then pays the individual worker in local currency (Cuban pesos). After devaluation from the conversion and an enormous amount of taxes, the worker ends up with a meager compensation that sometimes equals less than 10% of the original payment to the government. In essence, most workers work for the government and ends up earning less than $300 per year.

In addition, private citizens cannot engage in economic contracts with foreign companies and private employment opportunities are restricted. But although the people face severe financial obstacles and limitations, Freedom House reported that self-employment licenses has


increased from 157,000 in October 2010 to 483,000 by end of 2014. The report also acknowledges that the state has begun the process of transferring “management of most of its restaurants and other minor retail services to the private and cooperative sectors, targeting nearly 13,000 state enterprises for overhaul.”

Obviously, these are small steps and there could be a false sense of rapid improved quality of life for the Cuban people when they are still living under dire economic circumstances. Many will argue that normalization only benefits the regime and the corrupt system already in place. But we have seen that the original intent of containment, and to cripple Cuba’s economy in hopes that the people will rise up and overthrow Castro, has been a failure. Its economy is certainly in a spiral but it’s the people who have borne the brunt of a policy that seems to no longer serve its purpose. As Leogrande puts it, “It’s time to lift the embargo and stop punishing the Cuban people for events that happened before most of them were born.”

Cuba has been a member of the World Trade Organization since April 1995. Trade is conducted primarily with China, Venezuela, Spain, The Netherlands, and the United Kingdom. Its top importing countries are Venezuela, China, Spain, Brazil, Canada, and Mexico. China, in particular has been a financial supporter of Cuba, sustaining their economy by providing credit lines, interest free loans, and investing in healthcare and healthcare infrastructure. It has also

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invested in Venezuela’s fiber optic cable that runs all the way through to Cuba. The latter is part of Venezuela’s subsidized assistance to Cuba.\textsuperscript{135}

Nonetheless, Cuba’s economy has been cut off from the international market, for the most part. The Heritage Foundation 2016 Index of Economic Freedom reports that Cuba relies on foreign exchange revenues from Cuban emigres and oil subsidies provided by Venezuela. With decreased oil prices around the world, Venezuela’s already unstable economy has been severely impacted, which in turn, has had a domino effect on Cuba.\textsuperscript{136}

It is estimated Venezuela experienced roughly 24\% reduction in oil exports though Cuba’s method of repayment is a form of barter system—approximately 30,000 medical professionals funneled to Venezuela. Economic growth in Cuba has slowed considerably since the mid-2000s and its GDP grew only 1.3\% in 2014, with inflation adjusted. Raul Castro has been instrumental in implementing reforms—allowing private ownership and sale of real estate, easier access for Cubans to gain government permission to travel abroad, permitting private farmers to sell directly to hotels, and adopting a new foreign investment law (to name just a few)—but Cuba’s average standard of living remains at a dismal low.\textsuperscript{137} Medicine and medical research have also been negatively impacted as a result of harsh U.S. economic policy.

\textsuperscript{135} Hufbauer and Kotschwar, \textit{Economic Normalization with Cuba}, 18-20.

\textsuperscript{136} The Heritage Foundation, \textit{2016 Economic of Economic Freedom, Cuba}.

Chapter 5

RAPPROCHEMENT

Despite outward appearance of stubbornness by Cuba and the U.S., it seems both countries wanted to mend relations or to have some semblance of diplomacy. Sweig suggests that Kissinger privately “expressed his willingness to lift restrictions on the trade of U.S. subsidiaries with Cuba.” Domestic politics was having an influence on the turn of relationships. Businesses and Congress were showing their support for improving mutual relations with Cuba. Sweig also suggests that secret negotiations were taking place between U.S. and Cuba since the U.S. was also interested in playing a significant role in policy development within Latin America. It appears that some countries were not adhering to the trade sanctions and were, in effect, violating those terms by engaging with Cuba. Kissinger’s political motives were driven by the poor relations the U.S. had with Latin America. July 1975 saw OAS member countries vote to “renew diplomatic and trade relations with Cuba as each country saw fit.”

Attempts were made by previous presidents to engage and normalize relations between the two countries on many occasions. For example, during Carter’s administration, Havana viewed him as more receptive to dialogue than any previous U.S president. But Carter’s security advisors seemed bent on fueling fire and talks could never seem to fully reach the point of complete agreement on normalization with Cuba. Washington was firm that negotiation was not possible as long as Cuba had a military presence in Africa. Any diplomatic resolutions would

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138 Sweig, Cuba: What Everyone Needs to Know, 89.

be difficult to justify since Cuba was also engaging in warfare in Ethiopia. The U.S. view on this was they had no choice but to support Zaire in response to Soviet and Cuban provocation.\textsuperscript{140}

The Carter administration wanted to move to normalize relations with Cuba but it could not ignore the various concerns facing both states. Cuba’s role in Africa, its nationalization of U.S properties, his support for revolutionaries in Latin America, and the arrests of thousands of political prisoners, all posed complex challenges that were potential threats to the national security of the United States. But U.S. administration officials acknowledged that ultimately normalization would benefit and “serve the long-term interests of the United States, which included reducing Cuba’s dependence on the Soviet Union, giving Cuba incentives to cease its foreign interventions, improving human rights, obtaining compensation for nationalized U.S. property, reestablishing a U.S. market, and demonstrating Washington’s willingness to tolerate regimes of different political philosophies.”\textsuperscript{141}

Carter was determined to normalize relations between the U.S and Cuba but the obstacles were too great. He was caught in a dilemma of working towards world peace and worries of Soviet imperialism. Some of his advisers were telling him to look at a brighter future while others were beating the Cold War drum.\textsuperscript{142}

Carter believed that it was in the U.S. best interests to attempt to engage in civil relationships with countries that are perceived as aggressive. In addition, prominent democratic leaders were advocating for a new policy towards Cuba.\textsuperscript{143} President Carter went so far as to

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{140} Ibid., 173.

\textsuperscript{141} Ibid

\textsuperscript{142} Ibid., 224.

\textsuperscript{143} Sweig, \textit{Cuba: What Everyone Needs to Know}, 93.
\end{footnotesize}
issue a presidential directive on March 15, 1977 to the vice president, secretary of state and secretary of defense stating, “I have concluded that we should attempt to achieve normalization of our relations with Cuba.” Carter determined that direct and confidential talks should ensue with officials of the Cuban government. Carter viewed the talks as an advancement of U.S. national interests in several key areas, namely: Human rights, combating terrorism, reduction of relationship with the Soviets, Cuba’s foreign intervention, and compensation of American expropriated properties. President Carter expected the talks would “lead to appropriate, reciprocal and sequential steps looking toward normalization relations between our two countries.”

U.S. Cuba relations seemed to hit peaks and valleys and as Cuba continued its alliance with the Soviets during the Cold War, the U.S. policies of isolation and economic punishment seemed to be cruelly justified. Cuba’s foreign policy was taken as a serious threat to the national security interests of the U.S. For its part, the U.S. had to ensure the balance of power remained stable in the U.S.’s favor. Policy objectives were driven by what appeared to be Castro’s stubborn ideological identity with communism. Yet, in spite of various attempts to dislodge communism and the Castro regime, the government in Cuba remained steadfast and inoculated against these attempts. Washington was hopeful that it could engage Cuba in normalizing relations providing certain preconditions were met, but Cuba’s actions in Africa and its unwillingness to dissociate itself from the Soviet Union only intensified mistrust on the U.S. part.

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5.1. Obama’s Engagement Policy

Cuba’s unchanging political ideology has not posed a threat to America’s national security. So it seems only natural that the U.S. needed to revise or revisit its containment and isolation policy towards this nation. Of course, as with most policy shifts and agreements, months, and in many cases, years of negotiations were involved, before such historic moments could finally arrive. According to a report published in 2015 by the Council on Foreign Relations, eighteen months of talks between the U.S. and Cuban officials had been encouraged and brokered by Pope Francis and the Government of Canada. Terms of the agreement included the U.S. agreeing to ease travel restrictions, which means airlines will be allowed to deliver service to Cuba and Americans can visit without prior government license approval and spend dollars. In addition to remittances and banking restriction, trade regulations were also instituted. Prisoner swaps were an integral part of the extensive deal and three members of the Cuban Five were released (two were released prior; one in 2011 and another in 2014) in exchange for Alan Gross (released on humanitarian grounds) and Rolando Sarraff Trujillo.145 Gross was arrested in 2009 and had been in a Havana prison for five years as of 2014. He was accused by the Cuban government of engaging in activities that ran counter to the “integrity of the state” and disrupting the government by facilitating and bringing sophisticated technology in the country.146


Media reports suggest that Trujillo was engaged in work for the CIA and was arrested in 1995, and sentenced to twenty-five years.\textsuperscript{147}

President Obama’s policy of engagement with Cuba seems to be one built on influencing and building relationships. It hopes to transfer to the Cuban people a nation built on vision, prosperity and democracy. It hopes to promote and encourage positive change within Cuban society.

In fact, it appears the President was working towards policy change with Cuba early on in his administration. During his first presidential campaign, Obama made three promises that would become the starting point for change in U.S. Cuba relations. His first was to revoke President Bush’s policies that made Cuban American travel and remittances difficult to conduct. His second promise was to engage with any state that was willing, including Cuba, to work out their differences. His third promise of not changing much with U.S. policy with Cuba seemed a little false, since much has changed between the two countries since his time in office. In April 2009 the U.S. government eased restrictions on Cuban American family travel to Cuba and allowed an increased in money transfers with more frequency for families Cuba. He also relaxed the rules involving U.S. telecommunication links with Cuba; U.S. companies were allowed to provide cell and satellite service in Cuba.\textsuperscript{148}

His remarks at the Summit of the Americas Opening Ceremony on April 17, 2009 revealed a leader who appears set on changing the old U.S Cuba policies with new ones, while


solidifying his leadership and legacy role for the future. He addressed other leaders by making clear his administration’s commitment to a new beginning with Cuba:

The United States seeks a new beginning with Cuba. I know there’s a longer journey that must be traveled to overcome decades of mistrust, but there are critical steps we can take toward a new day. I’ve already changed a Cuba policy that I believe has failed to advance liberty or opportunity for the Cuban people…Over the past two years, I’ve indicated, and I repeat today, that I’m prepared to have my administration engage with the Cuban government on a wide range of issues – from drugs, migration, and economic issues, to human rights, free speech, and democratic reform.149

Renewed normalization relations between Cuba and the U.S. did not entail a complete alleviation of the embargo; only Congress can legislate this action. However, the agreement eased some of the economic sanctions by allowing Americans to use U.S. credit and debit cards, U.S. insurance companies to cover health, life and travel insurance for those living in or visiting Cuba and for U.S. companies to invest in small businesses. Banks can also facilitate authorized transactions.150

**5.2. Failed Political Discourse**

When Obama announced his policy change in December 2014, many officials were not pleased by the way in which negotiations with Havana had transpired. A Congressional Hearing by the Foreign Affairs Committee on February 4, 2015 revealed that many key departments were left in the dark. According to Chairman of the Committee, Ed Royce (R-CA) most of Congress and the President’s own administration, including the State Department, were not included in any part of the negotiations. Royce complained, “Most of the administration – including the State Department - was left in the dark. Instead, talks with the Cuban regime were conducted by two White House officials.” He went on to suggest that “had the White House consulted more

149 President Barack Obama, “Remarks at Summit of the Americas Opening Ceremony” (Opening Remarks, Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, April 17, 2009), The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-summit-americas-opening-ceremony.

widely, it may have heard that Havana is facing the threats of losing Venezuelan oil subsidies and mounting public pressure from basic reforms within the country. This could have been used to leverage meaningful political concessions on human rights in Cuba…But this was a one-sided ‘negotiation’, with the U.S. making a series of concessions to Havana.”

Some of the other notable critics, including Eliot Engel (D-NY), Jeff Duncan (R-SC) and Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL) all agreed that with U.S. policy should change, but also said that the Cuban government must enact real reform if it wants U.S. policy makers to support its path to democracy. These reforms include free and fair elections, respect for the rule of law, independent press, releasing each and every political prisoner that is currently in jail, ending harassment of political activists, and upholding the “values enshrined in the Inter-American Democratic Charter.”

Though Obama has the authority to reestablish relations with Cuba, only Congress has the authority to lift the trade embargo on Cuba and it looks like they are quite willing to play that power card as long as they feel necessary. Those on the Committee felt that the steps to normalization had to be a two-way street; a quid pro-quo scenario. If Congress feels that Cuba is not willing to change its political system, then it is very likely that the embargo may be in place for a longer time.

The difference today is that the world is no longer dominated by a Cold War reality. Younger generations who hardly remember the cold war era possibly do not hold the same


152 Ibid.

153 Ibid., 4.
ideologies as those in power back then, would have. This opens up the door for political change and new leaders to take Cuba in a new direction.
Chapter 6

POTENTIAL CHALLENGES TO NORMALIZATION POLICY

6.1. Cuban Migration

With US Cuba relations change on the horizon, there are potential migration challenges that could put a damper on the progress between the two countries. Since President Obama’s announcement in December 2014, migration from Cuba to the United States has spiked. In a Pew Research report, data from the U.S. Customs and Border Patrol (CPB) shows that 43,159 Cubans that entered the U.S. through ports of entry, compared to 24,278 that came in FY 2014. That is a 78% increase from the previous year. CPB Statistics indicate that the numbers for 2013 had already increased significantly once travel restrictions were lifted by the Cuban government (FY 2011 saw only 7,759 Cubans entered the U.S.). A total of 9,900 had entered the U.S. between January 2015-March 2015 (doubled the numbers from the previous year). And it appears that more Cubans are seeking entry to the United States by land, instead of sea. U.S. Coast Guard data reveals that approximately 3,505 Cubans were captured by sea for FY 2015; a slight increase from 2,111 for FY 2014.154

What does this all mean for U.S. Cuba relations? It could suggest that Cubans are fearful the special immigration status, i.e. the Cuban Adjustment Act of 1966, they have enjoyed for so many years could potentially end and that they will have to go through the normal immigration channels like all other countries.

Cuban migrants have received special treatment ever since the Cuban Adjustment Act of 1966. It enables Cubans to become legal permanent residents at least two years after they arrive

on U.S. soil. The policy of “wet foot, dry foot” gives hope for Cubans who manage to make it to the United States without being caught beforehand. As an amendment to the 1966 Act, it was introduced in 1996; if caught by sea, they are sent back to Cuba. But once they make it here, then all avenues of legalization of status are given to them, unlike other migrants from other Latin American countries.

Whether by land or sea, data continues to indicate that there is a sharp increase in the number of Cubans seeking to enter the U.S. ever since the announcement of new open diplomatic relations. Besides the obvious economic reasons to escape Cuba, there appears to be a sense of urgency to migrate sooner, rather than later.

The new policy appears to be designed to prevent and manage migration issues between Cuba and the U.S. but recent mass migration could detract from the positive benefits of normalization policy and lead political leaders to repeal said policies.

There are lawmakers who have introduced bills and are calling for end to this policy. Republican Rep. Frank Artiles argues that the law “provides Cuban migrants with an advantage that migrants of other nationalities do not have.” And Rep. Gosar (R-AZ) believes the law is a

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tax burden to Americans. Gosar explained his bill is meant to “terminate three outdated policies that provide amnesty to Cuba aliens and are costing taxpayers billions of dollars.”

These are challenges the Obama and future president will have to face, since the open policy seems to encourage migration, rather than curtail it. Even though curtailing migration does not seem to be an immediate goal of the normalization policy, it certainly can be a benefit, if reforms are implemented strategically by both governments. For now, the numbers are not reassuring for either country.

For Cuba, in particular, a downside to the policy is that mass migration of its citizens, particularly those well-educated and highly skilled individuals, will impact the development of their country, creating what is commonly known as the “brain drain” effect. After all, a country’s human resources are vital to its economic and political development and the loss of human capital only makes it more difficult for any kind of development to occur at a steady rate.

Perceptions seem to indicate that this policy might end if lawmakers succeed in convincing Congress to end it once and for all.

### 6.1.1 An End to Special Privileges?

In January 2015, the Miami Herald reported that Miami-Dade County Commission voted unanimously to ask Congress to revise the Cuban Adjustment Act. The vote was a symbolic one but the County represents one of the largest Cuban American communities and implies the cost at which lawmakers would like to see the act revisited. According to Commissioner Bruno Barreiro, the act has -ironically-benefited the Cuban government on large scale. It encourages political dissidents to leave but it also provides access for the Castro regime to send spies to the

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U.S. And former Senator Marco Rubio had been very outspoken about his opposition to the laws, believing the Adjustment Act need to be revised and restrictions tightened. His, and many others, reason that it is difficult to justify a person’s immigration status as an exile or refugee when the immediately fly back to Cuba multiple times after they have attained legal requirement in the United States.\textsuperscript{160}

In addition, the media in Florida has also been critical of the Act. In an editorial in November 2015, the Miami Herald called for the Adjustment Act to be rescinded citing widespread abuse in welfare programs and Medicare fraud. According to the article, Cuban refugees end up costing U.S. taxpayers $680 million in welfare benefits for 2014.\textsuperscript{161} Assurances from the U.S. government that immigration policies regarding Cuba will not be altered has not alleviated rumors to the contrary.

Part of the reason why Cubans feel the need to flee and take a chance landing on U.S. soil could be a fear that the liberal immigration policy for Cuban migrants might end and that the Cuban Adjustment Act rescinded. The Cuban government, on the other hand, long held the belief that this policy has contributed to illegal and dangerous immigration for the Cuban people. Immigration will continue to be a hot topic for political leaders and at the moment, it seems that the Cubans have little faith in Obama’s policy or his promises that the act will stay in place. This will surely pose a challenge for our national security and increase the need for more resources securing our borders, as engagement might continue to open the door for more rapid ‘illegal immigration’ from Cubans.


6.2. Potential Obstacles to free trade and Investment

Despite promising figures and easing license restrictions on travel and remittances, obstacles prevent U.S. investment from flowing freely in Cuba. As noted earlier, the majority of the Cuban workforce is in the government and foreign companies have to hire workers through the government, who end up paying these workers a small portion of what was actually paid to them. The fact that all U.S. exports to Cuba are conducted on a cash basis means there is little room for credit and will pose risks for investors who may not get paid in some cases. In 2013 the U.S. government supplied license sales of almost $300 million in medical products and another $3 billion in agricultural exports to Cuba. However, the return on these licenses was only about $359 million in trade. This can be explained through the law that requires Cuba to pay for U.S. exports in cash that is a problem for a country that is struggling with its economy and widespread debt.162

6.3. Challenges to Rapid Transition

Another potential challenge will be Cuba’s transition to economic and political freedom. Rushing into a capitalism market could leave Cuba in a situation not so unlike that of Russia today. Hufbauer warns of the disaster that could occur within Cuba’s economy if a transition does not take place first. He argues many Russians had faced the same consequences as a result of the hasty transition from communism to capitalism and contends, “Without proper institutional framework, much the same could happen in Cuba, given its huge portfolio of state-run companies closely tied to the military and its entrenched bureaucracy.” Given this scenario, the authors believe the best path for a smooth transition involves one in which Cuba fully adopts

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a market economy and democratic institutions that work together to create economic growth and development. In their estimate, once normalization takes full effect, potential trade could total almost $20 billion annually.\textsuperscript{163}

\textsuperscript{163} Hufbauer and Kotschwar, \textit{Economic Normalization with Cuba}, 15-16.
Chapter 7

ADVANTAGES OF AN ENGAGEMENT POLICY

In many ways one could argue that the embargo has been a success and a failure, depending on which side one views it from. Success for the U.S., in part, because of the negative impact the isolation policy and economic punishment has had on the Cuban economy for over fifty years. There has been no doubt that the U.S. embargo has been successful in achieving its partial goal of crippling the Cuban economy. On the other hand, failure because Cuba’s political system remained unaltered in spite of economic punishment. The policy of isolation toward Cuba has had the opposite effect for the U.S. It has allowed Cuba to rally and gain support for its cause against a hegemonic (imperialist, in their view) power. These policies have done more damage to the Cuban population that high ranking officials.

With new policies in place, the United States can have the influence in Latin American and Western Hemisphere it once possessed; one that seeks to promote American values and democracy. But with a new normalization on the horizon, will the Cuban people benefit?

Ever since modifications were made to the trade sanctions (TSREEA) in 2000, leading to a resumption in some exports to Cuba, there has been an estimated $3.8 billion worth of products exported from the U.S. Most of the exports went from southern states and with the recent effort to ease travel and finance restrictions, a study by Texas A&M University, estimates that southern exports could increase even more by $122.1 million a year. The study found that if these restrictions are eased, then rising demand for agricultural products made in the south could increase, since Cuba is known to be a strong market for U.S. agricultural products. Also, tourism
is one of the major avenues for foreign exchange, which means an increase in travel will surely bring a boost to the economy.164

In fact, the CIA World Factbook explains that Cuba’s incremental reforms have allowed Cubans to purchase electronic appliances and cell phones, sales of used and new cars, stay in hotels, and open up retail services for those seeking self-employment.165

In addition, open relations with Cuba could benefit Americans in the medical field and also boost our economy in the agricultural sector. In 2005, Daniel Griswold gave a speech at Rice University suggesting that dollars Cubans earn from U.S. tourists could potentially come back to the U.S. to buy American farm goods and products. He pointed out that losses from the embargo “costs American firms a total of $700 million to $1.2 billion per year. Farmers in Texas and neighboring states are among the biggest potential winners.” But he also acknowledged that real change could only come about if serious market reforms are implemented in Cuba.166

Arguments that negotiating with the Cuban government will weaken the United States’ status internationally does not stand up since the U.S. negotiates with other nations that have similar political systems (China, Russia, Iran, to name a few). As part of the ongoing process, challenges will present themselves, but it seems that the benefits will outweigh the costs. Ending the trade embargo could create thousands of jobs for Americans in farming and other areas.


Lifting the sanctions will help Cuba to reintegrate into the world community and be able to compete globally. It will bring Cuba out of political and economic isolation while ensuring the United States’ economy benefits. The United States will be able to rebuild its geopolitical influence in other Latin American countries as well.167

The U.S. embargo and its support for Cuba’s exclusion from the Summit of the Americas have resulted in broken relationships with the Latin American region. Regaining influence seemed to be a determining factor for the normalization policy within the Obama administration. Restoring relations allowed the United States to present itself as country willing to engage in mutual partnerships within the Caribbean region. Any backpedaling to this policy could impede on Cuba’s reintegration into the inter-American community and have the U.S. face backlash in the form of uncooperativeness within the Latin American and Caribbean region.168

Continuous criticism from the Latin American region have created isolation for the United States. A Brookings Institute report in 2009 concluded that U.S. policy toward Cuba have had the opposite effect, namely, “undermining the well-being of the Cuban people and to eroding U.S. influence in Cuba and Latin America.”169 Failure of the United States to require Latin American countries to uphold sanctions on Cuba is a testament to the loss of influence in this region. Almost every Latin American country has diplomatic relations with Cuba. Once the Organization of American States (OAS) lifted its sanctions in the 70’s, almost all of Latin America resumed trade with Cuba. These trade agreements have resulted in hundreds of millions of dollars for the region. With Cuba’s generous support in humanitarian aid (doctors) to Latin


168 Piccone, United States-Cuba Normalizations: Strategic Implications for U.S. National Security.

America and the Caribbean, Cuba is viewed as an “international leader in establishing coalitions among developing nations.”\(^{170}\) Of course, one could argue that Cuba’s generous humanitarian aid to the Caribbean and Latin America is not based on altruism but on maintaining influence and economic benefits from trade relations within this region.

With continued political pressure from the Cuban people, the United States and the international community, it seems likely that lifting the economic embargo will drive Cuba into a direction of political change. Change seems inevitable and ending the trade sanctions would benefit the United States, Cuba, and the international community.

CONCLUSION

Charting a New Direction

The ineffectiveness of an outdated policy warrants a change in course, which will lead to different results that will potentially benefit both countries economically, while creating an environment for political reform in Cuba.

Obama’s step at shaping and redirecting a new course between the United States and Cuba may be positive for both countries in the long term. Lifting the trade embargo by Congress seems inevitable and an open economy for Cuba means an economic boom for both states. The CATO Institute reports that Cuba could potentially become a $1 billion agricultural export market for U.S products produced by farmers. For example, since the modification to the embargo in 2000, total farm product sales to Cuba have increased dramatically from zero to almost $5 billion. In FY 2014, U.S. agricultural exports totaled $300 million, which was 16% of Cuba’s $1.9 billion in agricultural imports.171

And the USDA 2015 Foreign Agricultural Service report on Cuba revealed that the U.S. share of the Cuban market has fallen substantially from 42% in FY 2009 to 16% in FY 2014. However, the report also says that the U.S. is still Cuba’s third largest supplier, after the European Union and Brazil. Clearly, the embargo has prevented the U.S. from competing freely and fairly in comparison to the other nations. Full normalization and liberalization of trade between the U.S. and Cuba would allow U.S. agricultural exports to compete on a more open and level playing field by permitting usage of credit facilities, export and technical assistance and

171 Griswold, Four Decades of Failure, CATO Institute, (Speech, Presented at James A. Baker III, Rice University, TX).
marketing development programs. Having these opportunities in place would pave the way for U.S. export competitiveness, while helping the U.S. capture this vital market share.\footnote{USDA, “US Agricultural Exports to Cuba Have Substantial Room for Growth,” \textit{USDA FAS}, June 22, 2015.}

President Obama hopes to reverse the course of history by creating more opportunities for Cubans and Americans and renew relationships in Latin America. Normalization is the first step and engagement will eventually advance shared interests like health, immigration, counterterrorism, drug trafficking, and disaster operations. Increased commerce, travel, and flow of information will benefit both the American and Cuban economy. The President believes these interests and more open flow will lead to empowering the Cuban population, help the U.S. stand up for its values and help Cuba move into the 21\textsuperscript{st} century. Hopefully it will bring Cuba back from the brink of possible collapse to a country that successfully transitioned into a democracy. All this while, it is hoped, promoting our national interests in the Western Hemisphere.\footnote{President Barack Obama, “Cuba Policy Changes,” (Statement, December 17, 2014), White House, Office of Press Secretary, \url{https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/12/17/statement-president-cuba-policy-changes}.}

It appears that President Obama’s new approach hopes to encourage allies in the region to support respect for human rights and essential freedoms in Cuba. The U.S. policy will continue to support civil society in Cuba and believe the people should be free to exercise their universal right to assemble and be heard; Cubans should not have to experience harassment, arrests, or beatings because of this. By encouraging regional allies to support independent groups and voices, the U.S. policy hopes to bring a wide breadth of insights and diversifying views within the Cuban society.\footnote{\textit{Cuba: Assessing the Administration’s Sudden Shift}: Hearing before the Committee on Foreign Affairs, House of Representatives, 114\textsuperscript{th} Cong., 1 Sess., (2015), 7.}
By engaging with Cuba, Obama has ensured that Cuba’s historical turning point is associated with his presidential legacy. Perhaps he sees his policies as a way of facilitating a slow but certain transition for the Cuban people and pave the way for them to be less reliant on the Castro regime.

Normalization or engagement with Cuba will be a gradual process and many signs point in the direction of political and economic reform in the future. The question is when and what type of reform. The relationship between Cuba and the United States is complicated and one stemmed from years of mistrust and defiance.

Cuba has shown resolve and managed to stay afloat despite sanctions, U.S. isolation, economic downfall, mass migration, restrictions and punishment. It is a nation that (hopefully) will continue to survive, regardless of policies that aim to cripple its economy. But Cuba does not need to “survive”. It needs to thrive and have economic development that rivals its neighbors in the Caribbean and Latin America. And for this, it needs the support of the United States. For over a half century, stubbornness has not benefited the Cuban people and it will take cooperation and a willingness to embrace change and reform in a peaceful democratic process to ensure this island become the coveted destination it once was.

As with most transitional states, Cuba will most likely undergo major political shift within the next few years. It has already taken steps at reforms, whether it’s loosening visa and travel restrictions, liberalizing state controlled sectors and decentralizing the agricultural sector, and allowing flights from the U.S. or allowing U.S. companies to expand information technology and internet access. The very small private sector has also undergone a shift, though slowly, resulting in tripling of self-employed workers. Normalization will provide opportunities for improvement in medicine and overall development for Cuba. These reforms will certainly aid in
the reversal of Cuba’s economic woes that resulted from economic sanctions from the United States and will help the Cuban people rebuild their country to one that prospers. Equally important is that this policy will lead to an emergence of America’s leadership role in Latin America and the Caribbean region. Such a policy is intended to promote a more effective change that support a smooth transition of the Cuban political system that works together with U.S. national security interests.175

What remains to be seen is what kind of political system will emerge as a result ongoing changes. Will there be peaceful elections with peaceful transition of government? Will it lead to a more democratic system? These are all part of the process and one can surmise that the Cuban people would not want to see their country recede into another unstable country. Supporting normalization with the U.S. is positive and the best direction to take at this moment. It will give Cubans a chance to directly change the politics of their state and to influence their government to implement policies that reflect international criteria for transparency and democracy.

Likewise, with the ongoing process of normalizing relations, Cuba’s blame rhetoric will no longer hold up. With reports of continued systemic punishment in the form of arrests and short term detention for critics and dissidents, the Cuban government will have to open its door international scrutiny if it wants to be a part of the international community. Understandably, isolation and the trade embargo have often contributed to Cuba’s blame game, i.e. capitalizing on the victim role. But Cuba’s atrocious human rights record sits with the Cuban government, not the U.S.176 Cuba will need to take responsibility for its actions instead of blaming the U.S for its


mismanagement. Expanding the engagement process and an eventual lifting of the embargo with Cuba will reveal to the world whether Cuba can stand up on its own, since it will no longer have excuses for the failure of its economic system.

Policy makers and political leaders must understand that engagement and lifting the embargo can only be beneficial to U.S. interests. Policies implemented by the current President or a future one, are unlikely to produce the fast results that many would like to see, but that does not mean these actions should not be pursued. The policies that Obama has implemented will (hopefully) lead to major changes within the Cuban political system. It is in the U.S. interests to promote the change that will be desirable for both countries, instead of maintaining an isolationist policy; a change that includes political freedom as well for the Cubans. Of course, ultimately change will need to stem from within and the U.S. will have a partnership that not only cooperates but also serve our national interests.¹⁷⁷

Ultimately, one can only speculate how this renewed open engagement will affect Cuba’s political system in the future. Actual outcomes and implications of changing political strategies usually take years before we can see the impact in terms of bilateral, regional or global relations.

Bibliography


