

The United States and Cuba: Intimate Neighbors?

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On December 17, 2014 President Barack Obama said what no other U.S. president had ever said. “Today, America chooses to cut loose the shackles of the past so as to reach for a better future — for the Cuban people, for the American people, for our entire hemisphere and for the world.” The goal of American policy, Obama said, is to “end an outdated approach that, for decades, has failed to advance our interests” and normalize relations for the sake of Cuban people. He addressed Cubans on the island, the ordinary citizens who struggle to make breakfast, lunch, and dinner for their families, the ones who say “No es fácil,” it isn’t easy.

Nearly 53 years earlier, Dwight D. Eisenhower had broken diplomatic relations with Havana. Since the 1970s other presidents had tried to ease tensions but their efforts had come to naught. While the Cold War shaped U.S. policy, the U.S.-Cuba relationship had accumulated strains well before the revolution. Such is the history between a great power and a weaker neighbor, especially one with a strong sense of itself. At heart, this chapter argues that the United States and Cuba have never had normal relations even when embassies operated in Washington, D.C. and Havana until 1961.¹ Over the course of the twentieth century, the United States and countries in the Caribbean Basin normalized relations, at least to the extent possible in the face of such power differentials. The revolutionary leadership’s decision to align their government with the Soviet Union preempted Cuba’s opportunity to normalize relations with the United States. In short, Cuban leaders also bear responsibility for the rupture and the long-enduring tensions.

Had there been a peaceful transition from Fulgencio Batista's dictatorship in the 1950s, Cuba would surely have had an opportunity to normalize relations with the United States under more auspicious circumstances. Instead, the United States and Cuba were challenged to find a modicum of normality during the Cold War. At first, Washington focused on destabilizing the revolutionary government via the Bay of Pigs invasion and the CIA-sponsored Operation Mongoose. For its part, the Cuban leadership pursued domestic and foreign policies that fueled the American alarm at having a Soviet ally 90 miles from Key West. During the Ford and Carter administrations, the United States and Cuba approached a crossroads of normalization. For the most part, Washington and Havana never quite manifested the will or the patience needed to end their enduring enmity. Even after the Cold War, with democracy taking hold in the former Eastern Europe and democratic transitions in Latin America, the United States embraced the idea of regime change in Havana. Not until President Obama made his historic announcement did the United States and Cuba finally begin the slow process of easing the long-entrenched tensions.

Why did it take so long?

After the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962, John F. Kennedy took a second look at the Third World and *re*considered nonalignment an opportunity for the United States, not necessarily the threat that John Foster Dulles had perceived it to be in the 1950s.² *JFK finally understood the pull of nationalism —Cuba being a case in point— and aimed for policies to encourage true nonalignment.* Four presidents —Gerry Ford, Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan, and Bill Clinton— took (some) meaningful steps to defuse Washington's relation with Havana. In the 1970s, Ford and Carter agreed with Kennedy: normalizing relations “with an independent communist state”

in Cuba might serve American interests.³ In March 1975, the State Department issued a review of U.S. Cuba policy that concluded:

If there is benefit to us in an end to the state of “perpetual antagonism” it lies in getting Cuba off the domestic and inter-American agendas, in extracting the symbolism from an intrinsically trivial issue.⁴

With the Cold War far from over, the Ford administration concluded that Cuba did not matter and that the United States should consider alternative policies accordingly. Superpower détente, in fact, reinforced the American idea that Fidel Castro might respond to U.S. overtures.

In 1975, the Organization of American States (OAS) ended multilateral trade sanctions that had been levied in 1964 to isolate Cuba, with the United States voting with the majority. From June 1974 to February 1976, the United States and Cuba held a discreet dialogue initiated.⁵ At the outset, Kissinger instructed American diplomats to mind their manners: “It is better to deal straight with Castro. Behave chivalrously; do it like a big guy, not like a shyster.”⁶ Both countries dropped preconditions: Washington set aside demands that Cuba sever all military ties to the Soviet Union; Havana held back its claim that the United States lift the embargo unilaterally. Both sides made gestures of good will: Washington’s the OAS vote and licensing U.S. foreign subsidiaries to do business with Havana. Cuba, in turn, released a U.S. citizen with CIA ties captured in 1965 and returned the \$2 million ransom paid by Southern Airways after the 1972 hijacking of one of its planes.

In late 1975, Cuba’s activist foreign policy, however, undermined the 20-month dialogue. In September, Cuba introduced a resolution at the United Nations calling for Puerto Rican

independence. In November Castro sent 36,000 troops to support the Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) against two CIA-backed Angolan groups and the South African army.⁷ From the U.S. perspective, Cuban actions in Angola torpedoed the talks. “There was absolutely no possibility that we would tolerate the Cubans’ moving into a new theater, becoming a strategic base in the Cold War and still improve relations,” Kissinger said.⁸ Havana considered Puerto Rico and Angola secondary to what Cuban leaders perceived as the administration’s concern that a continuing dialogue imperil Ford’s reelection. The mid-1970s, however, offered Cuba an opportunity that it could not overlook. So soon after the American defeat in Vietnam, the recent passage of the Clark Amendment, and the U.S. public’s reticence to join another war, Havana —better said, the Comandante— ordered Cuban troops to Angola, an action that Africa embraced.⁹ In a masterstroke, Cuba gained an international stature well beyond what it or any other minor power had a right to expect.

In 1976, Jimmy Carter won the presidential election. Angola aside, his administration picked up the efforts of his predecessor. Two months after his inauguration, Carter lifted the ban on travel to Cuba.¹⁰ American tourists, artists, businessmen, professors and students visited the island. In September 1977, interests sections opened in Washington and Havana. Cuba’s foreign policy again stood in the way. In February 1978, Cuba sent 15,000 troops to help Ethiopia roll back Somalia’s occupation of the Ogaden desert; as in Angola, Cuba succeeded.¹¹ In May, Angola-based Katanga rebels attacked Shaba province in Zaire with the intent of establishing an independent state, although in Zaire, the record mostly belies U.S. suspicions of Havana’s complicity.¹² Nonetheless, any Cuban activity in Africa, real or perceived, happened with Angola and the Cold War as backdrop. In addition, President Carter appeared weak due to developments

in the spring of 1980: the botched attempts to rescue the American hostages in Tehran and the Mariel exodus the Comandante unleashed.

A postscript on Cuban troops in Africa: Most significant were the four-party talks to end the Angolan civil war, establish Namibian independence, and withdraw Cuban troops from Southern Africa. Washington and Havana succeeded, establishing a precedent for the two governments resolving matters of the utmost mutual importance. In 1988, the United States, Cuba, Angola, and South Africa met a dozen times over five months before announcing the accords on Angola and Namibia.¹³ In May 1991, the last Cuban soldiers returned home from Angola. If in the mid-1970s Kissinger had decried Cuba's entrance into a new front in the Cold War, the Reagan administration had no choice but to negotiate with Havana to bring peace to Southern Africa. The weak neighbor sat shoulder to shoulder with the great power. Its activist foreign policy had borne a substantial fruit: The United States had recognized Cuba as an indispensable player in Southern Africa. Moreover, well before the talks started, Reagan had not always brandished a sword at Havana. Amid the Central American crisis in the 1980s, his administration met with a high-level Cuban official in Mexico City.¹⁴ In 1984, Washington and Havana signed an immigration agreement that served their mutual interests. In 1987, the State Department's director of the Office of Cuban Affairs called for a "smaller agenda" in dealing with Cuba.¹⁵ One of its first outcomes was the restoration of the immigration agreement that Havana had rescinded after Radio Martí's launch in 1985.

All the same, with Fidel Castro at the helm, Kennedy's premise that Havana would welcome diplomatic and trade relations with the United States was never borne out. Castro was unwilling to temper his foreign policy nor could Washington accept Havana playing on the

world's stage. . Still, Kissinger's statement on Havana's intervention in Angola had no consequences for the well-being of ordinary Americans. Castro's decision, however, underscored his penchant for giving priority to foreign policy over tending to the basic needs —starting with breakfast, lunch, and dinner— of Cuban citizens. Regarding the United States and Cuba, the question remained unanswered: How do a great power and a weaker neighbor establish normal relations? With the Cold War's end, Bill Clinton would try a different paradigm.

After 1989, Washington no longer had to worry about the Soviet Union. Still, normalizing relations did not emerge as the goal of U.S. policy. President George H.W. Bush spoke about his wish to be the first sitting president to make an official visit to a democratic Cuba with a market economy. Although Kennedy and other presidents had raised the same hopes, in the 1990s the prospects for a free Cuba seemed more propitious. The Cuban Democracy Act (CDA) —which the president signed into law only after Governor Clinton announced his support on the campaign trail— and later Helms-Burton laid down a new template for U.S. policy. CDA established a two-track policy: Track I strengthened the embargo; Track II called for people-to-people contacts. The CDA, however, did not codify the embargo into law. The Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity Act (LIBERTAD) —better known as Helms-Burton— did.

Only after Cuban Air Force MiGs fighter jets shot down three Cessna planes, killing four Cuban-American crew members from Brothers to the Rescue —an organization dedicated to saving *balseros* in the Florida Straits— did the harshest version of Helms-Burton pass the U.S. Congress. The Clinton White House had clearly favored a policy across the center. In January 1996, two bipartisan groups of Congressional staffers traveled to Cuba; Representative Joe

Moakley (D-MA) led a third group.¹⁶ Also in January, Representative Bill Richardson (D-NM) spent four-days in Havana talking to Cuban officials, including the Comandante, from whom he requested the release of fifteen political prisoners. A month-later, Richardson returned to take three of the prisoners to the United States.¹⁷ Sectors within the Cuban leadership almost certainly wanted to improve relations with the United States as well, although Castro did not, aware as he was that a more centered U.S. policy would partly depreciate the David-Goliath syndrome that had served him so well at home and abroad. Without Helms-Burton, U.S.-Cuban relations would have required a finesse that had rarely been exercised by either side in their long history together, but at least there might have been talks. At the time, Havana and the European Union were engaged in talks to create a cooperation agreement for which the EU expected penal-code reform, amnesty for political prisoners, and expanding economic reforms. In mid-February 1996, Manuel Marín —an EU vice president — traveled to Cuba but left empty handed.

Still, the Clinton administration did not give up on crafting a policy across the center. Until the end of his second term, the president worked with Congress to make changes without reneging on the CDA and H-B calls for a democratic Cuba. He did not challenge the post-Cold War template putting democracy, human rights, and a market economy at the heart of U.S. policy.

At first President George W. Bush continued Clinton's efforts. Whereas Cuban-American voters contributed to his 537-vote margin over Al Gore in Florida, the administration also had to consider that the movement to reconsider Cuba policy in the late 1990s had been bipartisan. The 2000 Trade Sanctions Reform and Export Enhancements Act (TSRA) stood to benefit agricultural exporters in the electorally competitive Midwest and the solid Republican South.

There was Cuban Miami to consider, but it could wait: The president's and Florida Governor Jeb Bush's bona fides on Cuban matters were beyond reproach. Notwithstanding the president embarked on a review of Cuba policy.

On May 20, 2002, the 100th anniversary of Cuban independence, the president announced an Initiative for a New Cuba.¹⁸ It proposed easing restrictions on humanitarian and entrepreneurial assistance to independent groups, offering U.S. scholarships to students and professionals committed to building autonomous institutions, modernizing Radio and TV Martí, and working with world leaders to empower Cuban civil society. Noticeably absent were tighter restrictions on family travel and remittances, both of which remained on the same terms as in the late 1990s: once-a-year family visits and an annual \$1200 limit on remittances. Most noteworthy were Bush's comments on Cuba's upcoming round of Popular Power elections: "If Cuba's government takes all the necessary steps to ensure that the 2003 elections are certifiably free and fair, and if Cuba also begins to adopt meaningful market-based reforms, then — and only then — I will work with the United States Congress to ease the ban on trade and travel between our two countries." Whereas recognizing that "freedom sometimes grows step by step," Bush asked Havana to invite "objective outside observers" to certify the election. Although his tone and most of his remarks hewed to Helms-Burton, his mention of the 2003 elections tacitly accepted the Cuban Constitution as a starting point for change.

In March 2003 Havana responded by arresting seventy-five peaceful opponents who were quickly convicted and sentenced to prison terms from six to twenty-eight years. On April 2 the government intercepted three men who had hijacked a fifty-passenger ferry to cross the Florida Straits. Tried and summarily convicted of terrorism, the men were executed on April 11. In mid-

August, thirteen state legislators from South Florida —ten Cuban Americans— wrote Bush a letter expressing “great disappointment and outrage” and noting the damage already inflicted on “the historic and intense support from Cuban American voters for Republican federal candidates, including yourself.”¹⁹

The White House at last understood that Cuban Miami’s patience was wearing thin. On October 10, 2003, the president announced the creation of a Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba co-chaired by Secretary of State Powell and Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Mel Martínez. In May 2004, the commission issued its Report to the President, a 423-page document that called for the “expeditious end of the Castro dictatorship” without the customary adjective “peaceful.”²⁰ In June 2004, the administration announced draconian restrictions on family travel and remittances, disposing of the more liberal policies in effect since 1998. Family visits by Cuban Americans —now defined as visits to grandparents, parents, spouses, siblings, children, and grandchildren only— were limited to once every three years from the last trip taken prior to the new regulations. Rarely if at all did the administration grant waivers for emergencies. Although the amount of money Cuban Americans could send to the island remained the same (\$300 per quarter per household), their remittances were also limited to direct-line kin.

By 2004, President Bush had settled on a hardline policy. After his reelection, Cuba remained on an automatic pilot that satisfied the neoconservatives and the uncompromising sectors in Cuban Miami. The second Bush administration, moreover, faced growing chaos in Iraq and mounting strains in the U.S. economy. On Bush’s watch, there was a smooth transfer of power from the stricken Comandante to his brother Raúl Castro. The regime followed its own script no matter Washington’s designs.

After the 2008 election, Barack Obama started to fulfill his promise of easing tensions with Havana. His administration ended all restrictions on family travel, allowed for more generous family remittances, authorized U.S. telecommunications companies to do business in Cuba and expanded the scope of humanitarian donations. Suspended in 2004, migration talks resumed. Then, in December 2009, Alan P. Gross —a USAID contractor— was arrested at José Martí International Airport for distributing communications equipment to the Jewish community. At first glance his arrest seemed to be another wrench by Havana to scuttle better relations. Yet, the Castro in charge was Raúl, and Gross's detention had everything to do with U.S. democracy promotion programs that Havana considered subversive. Only in 2013 did the two governments agree to a dialogue that turned out to last eighteen months.

U.S. Policy from Dwight Eisenhower to George W. Bush

Since 1959, the United States espoused three distinct approaches towards Cuba *that reflected Washington's expectations over time: the revolution's reversal, normalization under détente, and regime change*

- As the revolution radicalized, the Eisenhower administration drafted plans for an invasion. As American properties were nationalized, the president cancelled Cuba's sugar quota in the U.S. market. Before leaving office, he broke diplomatic relations with Havana. After *the Bay of Pigs failed*, the Kennedy administration authorized the CIA to carry out Operation Mongoose to promote a popular insurrection. Fully in place by 1962, the embargo aimed to isolate Cuba, undermine the island's economy, seek compensation

for confiscated American properties, and discourage Havana from spreading its wings in Latin America.

- A second approach crystallized in the 1970s amid détente with the Soviet Union: normalizing diplomatic and trade relations with Cuba. Gerry Ford and Jimmy Carter applied Kennedy's template but neither brought it to a fruitful conclusion. Their efforts clearly signaled their administrations conviction that the embargo had not borne the fruits expected in the early 1960s.
- Under Reagan, a third strategy emerged. While favoring regime change, the administration pursued ideological warfare whether at the U.N. Human Rights Commission or launching Radio Martí. In the 1990s, the CDA and Helms-Burton embodied the belief that a reinforced embargo would, at last, bring Havana to its knees.

For different reasons, none worked whether it was Castro torpedoing negotiations by intervening in Angola, the United States strongly objecting to Cuba's presence in Africa, Havana's Cessna downing or Helms-Burton codifying the embargo and establishing a transition template. The third policy, in particular, was built on the premise that Havana would negotiate the backbone of its power: the one-party system and the determination to stay in power whatever the costs. Cuba, the leadership argued, simply had different ideas from the United States on human rights and democracy. If Kennedy's expectation that Havana would negotiate to restore diplomatic and trade relations with the United States proved illusory, the CDA and, especially, Helms-Burton demanded no less than regime change. Neither law provided a reasonable path for negotiations between the two neighbors. In the Cold War's aftermath, both anticipated a quick transition to democracy in Cuba.

Cuban Americans in Miami²¹

In the early 1960s, exiles expected a quick return to Cuba. Frustration, anger and nostalgia for a past evermore distant, led some exiles to violence. Well into the 1970s, some persisted in attacks against Cuban diplomatic and commercial missions as well as Cuban ships in open sea, the assassination or kidnapping of Cuban diplomats and the 1976 bombing of Cubana Airline Flight 455 that killed 73 people. From their perspective, these actions constituted a declaration of war in response to Havana's "internationalism" in Angola, Ethiopia, and Central America. Under international agreements and norms, however, their activities cannot but be considered terrorism.²² When the Carter administration revved up the pace to normalize relations that President Ford had started, Cuban Miami turned to politics and slowly moved away from acts of violence against Cuba.

Founded by wealthy exiles, the Cuban American National Foundation (CANF) achieved extraordinary success. With Ronald Reagan in the White House, Mas Canosa crafted a strategy of influencing those in power. Between 1981 and 1997, their contributions to Republican and Democratic candidates who advocated a hardline towards Havana totaled \$3.2 million. Radio Martí was CANF's most signal achievement. The foundation also cooperated with the Reagan administration on helping the Nicaraguan contras and Jonas Savimbi's guerrillas in Angola. At the end of the 1980s, CANF engineered a program to bring to the United States Cuban exiles who had been stranded for years in Panama, Costa Rica, Peru, and Spain.²³

In the 1980s and early 1990s, moreover, Cuban Americans started to pull the levers of power to pursue their ends. In 1985, Xavier Suárez was elected mayor of Miami, the first Cuban

American to occupy the post. With the passing of Claude Pepper, a liberal, anticommunist Democrat, Republican Ileana Ros-Lehtinen won the special election to succeed him. In 1993, fellow Republican Lincoln Díaz-Balart joined Ros-Lehtinen in the House of Representatives. The Cuban Democracy Act and, especially, Helms-Burton codified the embargo, giving Congress the sole authority to end it. Neither would have been possible without Cuban Miami's political heft. The 1980s had put politics at the center, which set in motion a strategy of rallying Cuban Americans and lobbying Washington to reinforce the embargo.

Some exiles, however, welcomed the overtures by the Ford and Carter administrations. In late 1978, Havana convened two sessions of what became known as *el diálogo*. In August, the U.S. and Cuban governments had agreed to the release of political prisoners and the right of Cuban exiles to visit their families. Traditional exile sectors considered the Havana-sponsored dialogue and the nearly 300 mostly U.S. Cuban participants treasonous. Exile terrorism also targeted them for their advocacy of change in U.S. policy. Cuban terrorists carried out assassinations in Miami, New Jersey, and Puerto Rico. Travel agencies which chartered flights to Cuba and the businesses or homes of some pro-rapprochement exiles were bombed.

In 1979, Cuba freed 3,000 political prisoners and the United States admitted 15,000 ex-prisoners and their families. That year some 100,000 Cuban Americans took advantage of the family reunification program. While benefitting the Cuban government financially, the visits also triggered political challenges. So many *mariposas* —the popular term for the former *gusanos* returning as butterflies— all over the island likely helped to trigger the Mariel exodus in 1980. About 125,000 Cubans —most, the revolution's children— left and hundreds of thousands more were left behind waiting for another day. In the late 1970s, a semi-rapprochement with the

United States and increased contact among Cubans across the Florida Straits served the Cuban government with one of the most trying political situations ever.

Over the 1990s, exile organizations established or widened links with opposition and human-rights groups in Cuba. Frequent communication with anti-regime activists had a salutary influence on Cuban Miami, as more exiles committed themselves to nonviolence. Dissidents inside the island had embraced a nonviolent, human-rights agenda. By the early 1990s, Cuban Miami was offering up voices promoting dialogue as the best strategy toward Havana. But old habits die hard. Between July and September 1997, bombings at hotels in Havana took the life of an Italian tourist, the single fatality in the violence that otherwise caused minor material damages and human injuries. CANF allegedly paid the perpetrator to disrupt tourism.²⁴ A year later, the New York Times published a series based on a six-hour audiotaped interview with the well-known anti-Castro militant and terrorism suspect Luis Posada Carriles. Although he later recanted, Posada told the Times that CANF had been involved in the bombings.²⁵ The foundation vehemently denied all accusations.²⁶

By 2000, Cuban Miami was not what it used to be. With Mas Canosa's passing, CANF faced an internal crisis. Younger members had been arguing for a more flexible approach on the embargo and travel to Cuba. As a result, hardliners left CANF. In 1998, when Pope John Paul II traveled to Cuba, many Cuban Americans did as well. Ties between parishes on the island and in South Florida widened. Then, in late 1999, five-year-old Elián González, was rescued in the Florida Straits after his mother and others had drowned in the passage. Immigration authorities turned the boy over to his family in Little Havana, and a battle ensued between Cubans in Miami and the Cuban government with the Clinton administration caught in the middle. In the end,

Elián returned to Cuba with his father, stepmother, and baby brother. The struggle over the boy's custody crystallized changes that were already underway toward a more politically diverse community. Still, the 2000 presidential election highlighted Cuban Miami's importance. Without Elián, Al Gore's share of the Miami-Dade County vote might not have fallen 15 percentage points from Clinton's 35 percent in 1996.

In the 2000s, two Cuban-American organizations, the Cuba Study Group (CSG) and the Cuba Democracy Advocates, came into being. Founded by wealthy businessmen, they stand on opposite sides of the exile divide.²⁷ The Cuba Democracy Advocates took up the old CANF mission: lobbying Washington to keep or harden the embargo and the travel ban.²⁸ The Cuba Study Group set out to rehabilitate the exile community's national and international image after the out-of-kilter Elián months. Polls commissioned by the CSG in the Cuban-American community revealed a more open-minded, reasonable, and diverse spectrum of opinion than usually assumed. The CSG is committed to peaceful change spurred by Cubans on the island and wholeheartedly supported the Varela Project, launched by Oswaldo Payá (1952-2012) to enact legal reforms using the citizenry's constitutional right to gather at least 10,000 signatures for a petition to call a referendum.²⁹ The group maintains an active network of congressional, business, academic, international, and community contacts on behalf of changing U.S. policy to promote regular contacts between Americans and Cubans on the island.³⁰

Cuban-American Public Opinion

Over the 1990s, Cuban Miami gave indications of evolving regarding Cuba. Polls conducted by Florida International University. A sample of findings (1991-2000) follows.

- In 1991, 40 percent favored a national dialogue inclusive of government, opposition, and exile; in 2000, nearly 52 percent did.
- Early in the 1990s, nearly 87 percent supported the embargo; by 2000 that support declined to 62.4 percent. Cuban Miami did favor it, although an overwhelming majority thought it worked badly or not at all.
- In 1993, almost 50 percent said U.S. companies should be allowed to sell medicines to Havana; by 2000, over 66 percent did. On U.S. companies selling food to Cuba, just under 25 percent approved at first, but more than doubled by 2000 to 56.1 percent.
- Unrestricted travel to the island elicited similar responses: in 1991, over 44 percent approved whereas nearly 53 percent did in 2000.
- Support for a U.S. invasion of Cuba, however, remained constant (63 percent versus 60 percent).³¹

From 2000 to 2014, polling continued to show a Cuban-American community in flux.

- In a 2008 Cuba/US Transition poll, 65 percent favored ending the restrictions on sending money to Cuba for Cuban Americans imposed by the Bush administration in 2004. -A 2009 national poll found 64 percent supported Barack Obama's lifting of all restrictions on family visits to Cuba and on remittances to their relatives. By 2011, a solid 58 percent strongly or mostly supported a dialogue inclusive of the government, the dissidents, and the exiles.
- Support for the embargo continued on a downward slide: by 2014, 52 percent opposed its continuation.
- Support for U.S. companies selling food and medicine increased between 2004 and 2011: from 55 percent to 65 percent (food); from 60 percent to 75 percent (medicine).

- In 2014, unrestricted travel to Cuba by all Americans was supported by 69 percent.
- Sixty-eight percent of Cuban Americans in Miami-Dade County favored diplomatic relations with Cuba. Three quarters supported continuing or expanding trade with Cuba.

The most significant findings of these polls are the opinions of Cuban Americans under 44 years old and Cubans who arrived since 1998. Both groups—especially the latter—hold views on normalization of relations, trade, national dialogue, unrestricted travel for all Americans, and the embargo more intensely than older cohorts and earlier exiles on the same issues. Cuban Americans under 44 and post-1998 immigrants constitute a majority of Cuban Miami. Although Obama in 2012 and Charlie Crist in 2014 (defeated in Florida's gubernatorial race) narrowly won their vote, younger Cuban Americans and the newer immigrants do not yet account for a majority of Cuban-American voters. Still, as life's course takes its toll and new generations reach adulthood, these trends are likely to continue. Similarly, as long as up to 30,000 more Cubans arrive in the United States annually, recent arrivals—who have family members on the island—tended to feed the same attitudes of moderation that older exiles over 70 mostly reject.³²

The findings above also highlight the emotional pull among Cubans in Miami. While attitudes toward the embargo shifted over time, even when support was at 87 percent, most Miami Cubans did not think it worked well or at all. Even when most probably knew that the likelihood of a U.S. invasion was nil, a slight majority nonetheless supported the idea in the 2000s. Significant majorities today favor normalization of relations with Havana, yet two-thirds say that Cuba should remain on the list of countries sponsoring terrorism. Solid majorities still support the preferential treatment the U.S. government has afforded Cuba since the 1960s.³³ There is, in fact, nothing particularly unusual about individuals holding contradictory views. That the emotional pull no

longer determines attitudes toward changing U.S. policy is more telling. All the same, a few days after December 17, 48 percent of Cuban Miami opposed Obama's announcement whereas 44 percent supported the president, even though in June 2014 most favored an inclusive national dialogue, normalization of relations, and continued or expanded trade. After so long, when change finally came to Washington regarding Cuba, many Cuban Americans initially did not know what to make of it. Still, the 48-44 percent split suggests that 44 percent is the floor of support for Barack Obama's announcement that the normalization of relations with Cuba.³⁴ A national poll of Cuban Americans conducted in mid-March 2015 drew strong majority support from Cuban Americans (69 percent) living outside of South Florida and a slight majority those in Dade County (51 percent).³⁵ In short, Cuban Miami no longer speaks with one voice regarding U.S. policy toward Cuba.

Obama's Bold Move

On December 17, 2014, Obama jettisoned the post-Cold War template. Ford, Carter, and Clinton had favored a step-by-step process —first in secret, then in open dialogue— to normalize relations. In no small part due to Cuban actions abroad and at home, the piecemeal undertaking did not come to fruition. The president's declaration that U.S. policy was the normalization of relations with Havana came eighteen months of secret talks to free Alan P. Gross. Although Gross's release was expected, the breadth of Obama's statement was not. American public opinion stands firmly behind President Obama on the new policy: 64 percent agree with normalization of relations; 68 percent believe the embargo should be lifted; and 74 percent support all Americans should be able to travel to Cuba without restrictions.³⁶

As of July 2015, the following developments had taken place.

- On January 15, 2015, the Treasury and Commerce Departments issued a new set of regulations on travel and trade. Travel under a general license, i.e., no need to apply for a specific license, is allowed under the 12 authorized categories including educational activities and exchanges, and travel and other transactions to support human rights, civil society, and independent organizations. Remittances are now permitted up to \$2,000 per quarter to family members broadly defined. American companies can sell tools, equipment, supplies, and instruments to private-sector entrepreneurs. U.S. financial institutions are permitted to open accounts at Cuban financial institutions to facilitate authorized transactions. The cash-in-advance terms for agricultural sales are reinterpreted to allow for more flexible financing of authorized trade with Cuba.³⁷
- In May 2015, the U.S. State Department removed Cuba from the list of state sponsors of terrorism. In 1982, the Reagan Administration had added Cuba to the list for Havana's involvement in Africa and Central America.
- Also in May, Stonegate Bank —based in Pompano Beach— agreed to open an account for the Cuban diplomatic missions in Washington, D.C. and New York City. Without a U.S. bank for more than 18 months, the Cuban government had to pay in cash for all its expenses. The previous bank had cited Cuba's inclusion on the terrorism blacklist as one of the reasons for closing Havana's account.
- The State Department issued its 2014 report on human rights in Cuba. Abuses involved the curtailment of citizen rights to freely elect their government, official threats against peaceful opponents, extrajudicial physical assault and intimidation, violent counter-protests against peaceful assembly, and detentions to prevent free expression and independent political activity. In 2014, short-term detentions increased to 8,899, a 38

percent increase from 2013. Fair public trials are non-existent; mistreatment of political prisoners is commonplace. Although responsible for most human rights abuses, government officials enjoy widespread impunity.³⁸

After four rounds of negotiations, the U.S. and Cuban governments reopened embassies in their respective capitals on July 20, 2015. On July 1, Secretary John F. Kerry acknowledged the profound differences between the United States and Cuba on human rights and democracy while identifying agreed areas of cooperation such as law enforcement, safe transportation, emergency response, environmental protection, telecommunications, and migration.³⁹ In an on-background briefing, a Senior State Department Official also expressed confidence that “our embassy in Havana will be able to operate similar to other embassies operating in restrictive environments.”⁴⁰ For its part, Havana reiterated that fully normal relations hinged on lifting the embargo, returning the U.S. Naval Base in Guantánamo, eliminating USAID programs aimed at destabilizing Cuban society, and compensating Cuba for the embargo’s human and economic costs. Both governments noted that restoring diplomatic relations was the best avenue to address these issues.

Lifting the embargo is not a straightforward process. Under the Trading with the Enemy Act and the Foreign Assistance Act, the president can lift the embargo unilaterally without preconditions or need to consult with Congress.⁴¹ Under the Cuban Democracy Act and the Helms-Burton Act, however, the president has to certify that a transition government is in place and that it has taken steps under international law to compensate U.S. citizens whose properties were confiscated after 1959. Still, the president can ease the embargo without Congress—as the January 15, 2015 revised regulations did—using the power granted by federal statutes and the

Cuban Assets Control Regulation. The president could, for example, permit family investments in family-owned small and midsize businesses, cooperatives and family homes, sanction payment for authorized transactions through letters of credit or other means arranged by U.S. financial institutions, and agree to Cuba's participation in the International Monetary Fund, World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank. Without Congressional approval, however, the president cannot authorize American subsidiaries abroad to trade with Cuba, condone trafficking in American properties confiscated in the early 1960s, or end the ban on American tourism to the island.

As embassies reopened in Washington and Havana, the Obama administration faced the battle in Congress to confirm an ambassador, obtain funds to operate the upgraded mission and, in general, find allies in Congress to allow the new policy to flourish. Easing the cash-in-advance restrictions on agricultural sales, for example, could certainly gain favor with Republicans in the Midwest and other regions that saw their sales fall off since 2010. Engage Cuba—a public advocacy, bipartisan group that started working with Congress to lift all travel and trade restrictions—enlisted major organizations and corporations such as the National Association of Manufacturers, the National Foreign Trade Council, Procter & Gamble, Cargill, and Caterpillar. The travel ban—imposed in 1963 and briefly lifted under the Carter administration—may be easier than the embargo. Most Cuban Americans and the U.S. public at-large strongly support the right of Americans to travel to Cuba without restrictions. The TSRA includes a section banning American tourists from going to the island and, like the CDA and Helms-Burton, requires congressional action. As of July 2015, 45 senators had signed the Freedom to Travel to Cuba Act. With five more signatures, the bill would go to the Senate floor.

Raúl Castro's Response

Havana had long wanted the five spies —the *Cinco Héroes* in Cuba's view— back. In the 18-month long negotiation with the Obama administration, the last three in U.S. prisons returned to Cuba.⁴² Rolando Sarraff Trujillo —a former Cuban intelligence officer who became a U.S. agent and had been in jail since the 1990s— was exchanged for the three convicted Cuban spies.⁴³ Alan P. Gross was freed on humanitarian grounds. Understandably difficult after so long, this time the U.S.-Cuba dialogue rendered results to ease tensions. Although one-on-one between the two governments, Pope Francis and the Canadian government helped the process along.

In three speeches after December 17, President Raúl Castro laid out Cuba's perspective on the normalization of relations with the United States.⁴⁴

- Cuba restated longstanding demands: an end to the U.S. embargo, removal from the State Department's list of countries that sponsor terrorism, compensation for the embargo's economic and human costs that Cuba assesses at \$181 billion, return of the territory occupied by Guantánamo Naval Base, termination of U.S. programs to promote democracy, close down Radio and TV Martí, among others. But except for removal from the list of countries that sponsor terrorism, Cuba did not make any of these matters a prerequisite to reestablish diplomatic relations or expand other contacts.
- Cuba expected mutual respect and reciprocity from the United States, in particular regarding profound differences on politics, democracy, and human rights. Castro also expressed his government's concerns about the U.S. political system.

- At the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) meeting in Costa Rica, Castro again listed Cuban demands and added: “It wouldn’t be ethical, just, nor acceptable that Cuba be asked for anything in return.” The United States must refrain from interfering in Cuban domestic affairs, that is, relate to Cuban society “as if Cuba did not have a sovereign government.”
- At CELAC, Cuba’s president also gave a political and socioeconomic overview of Latin America hewing to the currents of neo-populism that gained momentum after Hugo Chávez (1954-2013) became Venezuela’s president. At the Summit of the Americas in Panama, he reiterated Cuba’s support for Venezuela after the Obama administration declared Nicolás Maduro’s government a national security threat, Ecuador’s actions against multinational corporations that caused ecological damages and made unreasonable demands, Argentina’s claims to the Malvinas, Puerto Rican independence, and increasing aid to Haiti. Castro recognized President Dilma Rousseff for Brazil’s efforts in promoting regional integration and its social programs. He also emphasized Cuba’s contribution to Colombia’s peace process.
- In Panama, Raúl Castro highlighted Cuba’s cooperation with countries across the world: 65,000 Cubans worked in 89 countries, mostly in the fields of health and education; 68,000 foreigners earned professional and technical degrees from Cuban educational institutions, 30,000 of which were health-related. Havana also worked with the United States, Latin America, and the Caribbean to address the Ebola crisis.

On Cuban domestic matters, President Castro stayed the course as well. Although in 2014 the economy did not grow as expected, four-percent growth was likely in 2015. Cuba, moreover,

still faced headwinds from the global economic crisis and, especially, from the embargo which he blamed for the island's economic problems. Regarding the reforms in progress, Castro reiterated their objective to be "the construction of a prosperous and sustainable socialism." Cuba, however, had not succeeded in attracting foreign investment at levels comparable to other countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. Yes, the embargo was a factor but the island's foreign investment laws were cumbersome, especially the bureaucratic process of authorization and the ban on investors from hiring workers directly. In 2014, Havana issued a new foreign investment law that improved on the previous one, particularly on lowering taxes, broadening the economic sectors for investors, allowing 100 percent foreign ownership, and including real estate investments in private housing. The government, however, stood fast on the authorization process and against the direct hiring of the work force.⁴⁵ Whereas several U.S. delegations traveled to Cuba after December 17, American capital was unlikely to invest under these conditions. Trade prospects —particularly if financing were offered on more flexible terms— seemed more promising. As long as the island's agriculture performed badly, American and other exporters had a ready market. All the same, Cuban society lacked the consumer base to purchase the broad range of products the United States could export.

On the political front, Cuban leaders moved in the same direction. In April 2016, the Communist Party is scheduled to hold its congress. Raúl Castro may or may not remain at the helm. In 2018, elections for the National Assembly are set to take place, and the younger Castro has declared that he would no longer be president.⁴⁶ As of July 2015, the likely successor seemed to be current first vice-president, Miguel Díaz-Canel. A new electoral law was not expected to meet international standards for fair and free elections. Independent Cuban society and the

political opposition could well develop a strategy to participate in the 2018 elections. The government, however, appeared set in the old modus operandi of decrying all who disagreed and opposed as pawns of the United States. If on economic matters, the leadership had shown some adaptability, there was no similar effort in politics. During the Summit of the Americas, representatives of official civil society used violence—in words and actions—against those Cubans from independent civil society at the Summit. In July 2015, State Security unleashed two ferocious attacks on the Ladies in White and other dissidents, causing at least one serious injury.⁴⁷

Without Havana's cooperation, however, some U.S. overtures will not be realized. Whereas American businesses could trade directly with Cuba's private sector, Cuban law places the state at the center of foreign trade. On human rights and democracy Havana is even less likely to make significant concessions. There was no reason to expect Cuban leaders to respond differently on matters that could well weaken their control.

Conclusion

Barack Obama's Cuba policy closed a cycle and opened another. *In* the 1990s, the Cuban Democracy Act and, in particular, Helms-Burton conditioned better relations *on a democratic transition* and respect for human rights. *Neither law* had prompted Cuban leaders to noticeably improve human rights nor to offer a hint of democracy. At the same time, the Cuban government stood seemingly strong. Even though ordinary Cubans had turned deaf ears to regime ideology, democracy and human rights *had yet to emerge within Cuban society as a platform for change.* Still, the Communist Party was worried. In July 2015, a top official implored young people “not to be dazzled by consuming pretty things” in the new era of better relations with Washington.⁴⁸

Havana —as the neighbor of a great power— needed to think creatively. Perhaps it had behind closed doors but, publicly, there was little whiff of it.

Obama's policy mostly turned the page on scolding Havana and, instead, embraced dialogue and engagement, a sign that the great power had opted for respect. Recent violations of human rights prompted the administration to express concern while saying that normalization would continue. Obama, however, was no different than the ten previous American presidents who also wanted a democratic Cuba. Only now the path was diplomacy and peace, which may or may not work. If or when it does, it would be—in no small part— because of the actions that Cubans on the island take in favor of an open society, and a government freely and fairly elected.

¹. Marifeli Pérez-Stable, *The United States and Cuba: Intimate Enemies?* (New York and London: Routledge, 2011).

². Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), 506-531.

³. Jean Daniel, “Unofficial Envoy: An Historic Report from Two Capitals,” *The New Republic* (December 14, 1963), 15-20.

⁴. Department of State, Secret, “Normalizing Relations with Cuba,” March 27, 1975.

<http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB269/index.htm>

⁵. James G. Blight and Peter Kornbluh, “Dialogue with Castro: A Hidden History,” *New York Review of Books* (October 6, 1994) <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/2128>; William M. LeoGrande and Peter Kornbluh, *Back Channel to Cuba: The Hidden History of Negotiations between Washington and Havana* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014).

⁶. Quoted in Blight and Kornbluh, “Dialogue with Castro.”

⁷. Piero Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington and Africa, 1959-1976* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

⁸. Quoted in Blight and Kornbluh, “Dialogue with Castro.”

⁹. Attached to the U.S. Arms Export Control (1976), the Clark Amendment —introduced by Senator Dick Clark (D-IA)— barred the expenditure of CIA funds in Angola except for intelligence gathering. In 1985, the amendment was repealed.

¹⁰. In February 1963, the Kennedy administration banned travel to Cuba by U.S. citizens and permanent residents. In July, the Treasury Department prohibited all financial transactions between the United States and Cuba.

¹¹. Jorge I. Domínguez, *To Make the World Safe for Revolution: Cuba's Foreign Policy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989) 157-162.

¹². Wayne S. Smith, *The Closest of Enemies* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1987), 128-142 on Ethiopia and the Shaba incident. There had already been joint Cuban-Shaba rebels military activity unrelated to the invasion.

¹³. G.R. Berridge, "Diplomacy and the Angola/Namibia Accords," *International Affairs* 65 (Summer, 1989), 463-479.

¹⁴. In November 1981, Secretary of State Alexander Haig and Cuban Vice President Carlos Rafael Rodríguez met to discuss Central America and other matters relevant to U.S.-Cuban tensions.

¹⁵. Kenneth N. Skoug, "Cuba's Growing Crisis," *Department of State Bulletin* 87 (September 1987), 85-90. In 1987, Havana and Washington agreed to restore the immigration agreement.

¹⁶. *Cuba/INFO*, January 18, 1996, 1-2.

¹⁷. *Ibid*, February 8, 1996, 3 and March 4, 1996, 5-6.

¹⁸. "Remarks by the President on Cuba Policy Review," Washington DC, May 20, 2002, <http://www.cubanet.org/CNews/y02/may02/21e5.htm>.

¹⁹. Daniel P. Erikson, *The Cuba Wars: Fidel Castro, the United States and the Next Revolution* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2008), 78-81.

²⁰. Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba, "Report to the President," May 2004. <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/32334.pdf>.

²¹. In 2013, Hispanics constituted 65 percent of Miami-Dade County's population. Once a majority, Cuban Americans represented about 35 percent of a much larger Hispanic community. Forty-eight percent of Cubans in the United States live in Miami-Dade County.

²² The United Nations has sponsored 12 multilateral conventions that classify as terrorism actions such as kidnapping of, or attacks against, planes or ships, assaults against officials and diplomats, taking hostages and financing terrorism.

²³ Guillermo Martínez, "Cuban Exiles Pour Money into Congressional Races," *The Miami Herald*, September 27, 1982; Helga Silva, "Group is a Cuban-Born Who's Who," *The Miami Herald*, May 21, 1983; and David Hoffman, "Bristling Attack on Communism: Reagan Hits Henchmen in Havana," *The Washington Post*, May 21, 1983.

²⁴. Larry Rohter, "Wave of Bombings Stop in Cuba but Tensions Persist," *New York Times*, October 13, 1997. Cuban authorities arrested a Salvadoran man who claimed that individuals tied to CANF had paid him \$4500 for each bomb he placed in Cuba.

²⁵. Ann Louise Bardach and Larry Rohter, "A Bomber's Tale: Taking Aim at Castro Key Cuba Foe Claims Exiles' Backing," *New York Times*, July 12, 1998 and "A Bomber's Tale: Decades of Intrigue Life in the Shadows, Trying to Bring Down Castro," *New York Times*, July 13, 1998.

²⁶. CubaINFO, September 11, 1997, 1-2; "Cuban Exiles Say Times Articles Are Baseless," *New York Times*, July 14, 1998. Recently declassified documents suggest a Posada-Mas Canosa connection in the mid-1960s; an FBI 1966 report released in 2005 indicates a "trustworthy source" saying Mas Canosa paid Posada \$5,000 to carry out anti-Castro operations in Mexico. The National Security Archive, "Posada Carriles Built Bombs For and Informed on, Jorge Mas Canosa, CIA Records Reveal," <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB288/index.htm>.

²⁷. Oscar Corral, "2 Groups Differ on Cuba, Not on Use of Power," *Miami Herald*, March 29, 2004.

²⁸. Corral, “Poll: Hard Line on Cuba Endures,” *The Miami Herald*, March 11, 2004. The Advocates first action was to hire the Miami-based Campaign Data Inc. to survey 600 Cuban-American registered voters in South Florida. The poll showed steadfast embargo support and outright rejection of the Varela Project. An independent expert hired by the Herald to review the Cuba Democracy Advocate poll said: “The very one-sided way in which the questions are asked really leads the respondent to an answer. I can say that this particular survey is useless in determining attitudes toward Cuban policy.”

²⁹. Payá’s *Movimiento Cristiano Liberación* (MCL) collected more than 20,000 signatures. On May 10, 2002, Payá and other MCL members presented the Proyecto Varela—which called for laws to guarantee freedom of speech and association, a free press, civil liberties, amnesty for political prisoners and the right of Cubans to earn their own living independent of the state—to the National Assembly. In November 2002, the National Assembly refused to consider the Proyecto Varela’s petition. In July 2012, Oswaldo Payá and Harold Cepero, also of MCL, died in a car crash in eastern Cuba under suspicious circumstances. The government claims the driver—a Spaniard—lost control of the car. Witnesses allege that the car was slammed by another vehicle.

³⁰. Cuba Study Group, <http://www.cubastudygroup.org>.

³¹. Beginning in 1991, researchers at Florida International University conducted intermittent opinion polls in South Florida’s Cuban-American community. The question on the sale of food and medicine was first asked in 1993. See the comparison at Institute for Public Opinion Research and Cuban Research Institute, Florida International University, *2000 FIU/Cuba Poll*, <http://www.fiu.edu/~ipor/cuba2000/index.html>.

³². Up to 20,000 Cubans arrived every year under the CAA and the immigration accords. Up to 10,000 cross into the United States from Mexico.

³³. The Cuban Adjustment Act (1966) afforded Cubans political asylum and a fast-track path to U.S. residency and citizenship.

³⁴. Marc Caputo and Joey Flechas, “Poll: Cuban-Americans split on Obama’s Cuba policy,” *Miami Herald*, December 19, 2014.

³⁵. *Special Session: Polling Results on Cuban Americans’ Viewpoint on the Cuba Opportunity*, Bendixen & Amandi <http://bendixenandamandi.com/knowledgecenter>.

³⁶. http://www.washingtonpost.com/page/2010-2019/WashingtonPost/2014/12/23/National-Politics/Polling/release_380.xml.

³⁷. <http://www.fas.usda.gov/data/us-agricultural-exports-cuba-have-substantial-room-growth>. Between 2005 and 2010 U.S. agricultural exports ranged from 33 percent to 42 percent of Cuba’s total agricultural imports. *Between* 2011 until 2014, the U.S. share averaged 20 percent, a decline largely attributable to more favorable credit terms offered by other countries. http://www.treasury.gov/resource-center/faqs/Sanctions/Pages/faq_other.aspx#cuba.

³⁸. <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/index.htm?year=2014&dliid=236680>.

³⁹. <http://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2015/07/244542.htm>.

⁴⁰. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2015/07/244549.htm>.

⁴¹. In 1961, Eisenhower invoked the TWEA in breaking diplomatic relations with Cuba. The TWEA authorized the president to impose sanctions during wartime or any other period of national emergency. In Kennedy’s first year in office, Congress enacted the Foreign Assistance Act banning American aid to communist countries. In 1962, the president issued a proclamation which proscribed “the importation into the United States of all goods of Cuban origin and goods imported from or through Cuba.” Before the 1990s, presidents declared a national emergency to maintain the embargo.

⁴². Two had been freed and returned to Cuba earlier. Altogether there were 10 spies arrested in 1998 but five collaborated with American authorities.

⁴³. Raúl Castro referred to Sarraff as being of Cuban origin, a phrase used in Cuba to depict those who have become citizens of other countries. Sarraff, however, was born in Cuba.

⁴⁴. <http://www.granma.cu/cuba/2014-12-20/discurso-integro-de-raul-en-la-clausura-del-iv-periodo-ordinario-de-sesiones-de-la-viii-legislatura-de-la-asamblea-nacional>; <http://www.granma.cu/mundo/2015-01-28/texto-integro-del-discurso-pronunciado-por-el-general-de-ejercito-raul-castro-en-la-iii>; <http://www.cubadebate.cu/opinion/2015/04/11/raul-castro-en-la-cumbre-de-las-americas-hasta-hoy-el-bloqueo-contra-cuba-se-aplica-en-toda-su-intensidad/#.VaOeZPn9wR8>

⁴⁵. <http://www.granma.cu/cuba/2014-04-16/asamblea-nacional-del-poder-popular>. The 1994 law also permitted 100 percent foreign ownership but it was only hypothetically. No such ownership ever materialized.

⁴⁶. In 2009, Castro announced he would serve two terms as president. The second term concludes in 2018.

⁴⁷. <http://www.elnuevoherald.com/noticias/mundo/america-latina/cuba-es/article26580703.html>; <http://www.elnuevoherald.com/noticias/mundo/america-latina/cuba-es/article27098392.html>.

⁴⁸. The official was José Ramón Machado Ventura, the Communist Party's second in command. <http://www.elnuevoherald.com/noticias/mundo/america-latina/cuba-es/article27080080.html>.