IdeAs
Idées d'Amérique

10 | 2017
États-Unis / Cuba : une nouvelle donne ?

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Édition électronique

URL : <https://journals.openedition.org/ideas/2258>

DOI : 10.4000/ideas.2258

ISSN : 1950-5701

Éditeur

Institut des Amériques

Référence électronique

William M. LeoGrande, « Reversing the Irreversible: President Donald J. Trump's Cuba Policy », *IdeAs* [En ligne], 10 | 2017, mis en ligne le 19 décembre 2017, consulté le 20 octobre 2022. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/ideas/2258> ; DOI : <https://doi.org/10.4000/ideas.2258>

Ce document a été généré automatiquement le 20 octobre 2022.

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Introduction

- 1 It took President Barack Obama six years to fulfill his 2008 campaign promise to make a “new beginning” with Cuba. But in the two years after the December 17, 2014 announcement that he and Cuban President Raúl Castro had agreed to normalize relations, Obama moved fast to lock in gains that would make the new policy “irreversible” (Obama B., 2016). He did not mean *legally* irreversible. Faced with a recalcitrant Congress, Obama had no choice but to use his executive authority to engage with Cuba. Using that same authority, a president determined to return to the status quo ante of hostility could undo everything Obama had done. In the 24 months from December 2014 to January 2017, the Obama administration’s goal was to make the opening to Cuba *politically* irreversible—to demonstrate such unmistakable success, both diplomatically and commercially, that reversing course would, in the words of Deputy National Security Adviser Ben Rhodes (2016), “make no sense.”
- 2 The opportunities for trade and travel opened up by Obama’s regulatory reforms were intended to create stakeholders—constituencies with a self-interest in defending and extending the new policy. “There’s already increased commercial activity. There’s already increased travel,” Rhodes (2015) explained, nine months into the new policy. “The U.S. business community, which has traditionally supported the Republican Party, are enormous advocates for this change. Republicans would have to be going against

their key stakeholders in places like the Chamber of Commerce if they were to reverse this process.”

- 3 Donald Trump began his presidency promising to negotiate a “better deal” from Havana, or else he would “terminate” the opening to Cuba (Heavey S. and S. Marsh, 2016). But he faced an impressive array of stakeholders both at home and abroad determined to resist any backsliding. The result, announced on June 16, 2017, was a policy composed of a few new economic sanctions tightening the embargo cloaked in fiery rhetoric reminiscent of the Cold War, but leaving most of Obama’s initiatives untouched.

Demonstrating Success

- 4 In the final two years of Obama’s presidency, the United States and Cuba made astonishingly fast diplomatic progress. Washington endorsed Cuba’s participation in the Seventh Summit of the Americas in Panama in April 2015, and took Cuba off the State Department’s list of state sponsors of international terrorism in May. The two governments restored full diplomatic relations in July. Obama and Castro met face-to-face for substantive discussions at the Summit and at the United Nations General Assembly in September. Then in March 2016, Obama became the first sitting president to visit Cuba since Calvin Coolidge in 1928.
- 5 The two sides established an infrastructure of diplomacy to manage the complex welter of issues between them. A Bilateral Commission, meeting semi-annually, oversaw negotiations taking place in some two dozen separate conversations on a wide range of issues, including migration, human trafficking, law enforcement, counter-narcotics cooperation, maritime safety, Coast Guard cooperation, environmental protection, global health cooperation, property claims, and human rights. In just 25 months, these negotiations produced 23 bilateral agreements on issues of mutual interest.
- 6 In October 2016, Obama signed Presidential Policy Directive 43 (White House, 2016), which explained in detail the rationale for his policy of engagement and tasked various executive branch agencies with carrying out aspects of it under their jurisdiction. Just before leaving office, Obama ended the “wet foot/dry foot” migration policy that had offered Cubans preferential immigration status since the 1960s (Hirschfeld D. and F. Robles, 2017).
- 7 Despite this progress, key issues remained unresolved. On Cuba’s agenda were the remnants of the old U.S. policy of hostility: the economic embargo (which Cubans referred to as *el bloqueo*—the blockade—because of its extraterritorial scope); the ban on U.S. tourist travel; “democracy promotion” programs designed to stimulate opposition to the Cuban government; TV and Radio Martí, U.S. government stations broadcasting to Cuba; and the U.S. occupation of Guantánamo naval base. On the U.S. ledger were claims for nationalized property, the return of fugitives from U.S. justice, and human rights inside Cuba.
- 8 A key element of Obama’s strategy was to relax sanctions enough to foster robust commercial ties, both to build a business constituency with a stake in continuing the opening, and to create conditions in Cuba favoring greater economic freedom. As Obama said in an interview on the anniversary of December 17, “The more that [Cubans] see the benefits of U.S. investment, the more that U.S. tourist dollars become

woven into their economy, the more that telecommunications is opened up so that Cubans are getting information unfettered by censorship, the more you are laying the foundation for the bigger changes that are coming over time" (Knox O., 2015).

- 9 To that end, Obama promulgated five packages of changes to the Cuban Assets Control Regulations (CACR), the rules governing U.S. economic sanctions. The changes punched successively larger holes in the embargo by licensing a range of financial and commercial activities, and travel. As bilateral relations warmed, Cuba became a top attraction for U.S. travelers. The number of non-Cuban American visitors skyrocketed to 161,000 in 2015, up 77% from the previous year, and up another 74% to 284,937 in 2016 (EFE, 2017). Nevertheless, the development of commercial relations lagged. By the end of the administration, fewer than four dozen new U.S. companies (besides agricultural exporters, who had been doing business with Cuba since 2000) had signed business deals (U.S.-Cuba Trade and Economic Council, 2017). The dearth of agreements was due in part to the slow pace of decision-making in Cuba's bureaucracy, but equally important was political uncertainty in the United States. The U.S. embargo remained inscribed in law with no prospect of imminent repeal by Congress. When Donald Trump won the 2016 presidential election having threatened to reverse Obama's policy unless Havana made unspecified concessions, the business climate chilled.
- 10 On balance, President Obama's relaxation of restrictions on trade and travel succeeded in creating stakeholders ready to resist a return to the politics of hostility. Despite the slow pace of commercial engagement, U.S. businesses wanted the Cuban market to remain open, public opinion was firmly behind the policy of engagement, and the foreign policy establishment regarded Obama's policy as a boon to national security.

The 2016 U.S. Presidential Campaign

- 11 Cuba was not a major issue in the 2016 U.S. presidential campaign, but U.S.-Cuban relations suffered collateral damage. The contrast between the two parties was stark. The Democratic Platform (Democratic Party Platform Committee, 2016) declared, "In Cuba, we will build on President Obama's historic opening and end the travel ban and embargo." Hillary Clinton not only supported Obama's opening to Cuba but she had called for ending the embargo even before December 2014 (Clinton H., 2014). The language in the Republican Party Platform (Republican National Convention Committee on Arrangements, 2016) denounced Obama's Cuba policy as "a shameful accommodation to the demands of its tyrants," and offered normal relations only "after [Cuba's] corrupt rulers are forced from power and brought to account for their crimes against humanity."
- 12 During the campaign, Donald Trump expressed contradictory views about Cuba. At first, he supported engagement. "Fifty years is enough," he said in late 2015. "The concept of opening with Cuba is fine. I think we should have made a stronger deal" (Mazzei P., 2015). A few months later, in March 2016, he told CNN that he would probably maintain diplomatic relations. "I think Cuba has a certain potential and I think it's OK to bring Cuba into the fold" (Diamond J., 2016).
- 13 He said little else until September, 2016, when *Newsweek* broke the story that in 1998, Trump had secretly explored business opportunities in Cuba, in violation of the U.S. embargo, and then tried to disguise the illegal activity as a charitable project (Eichenwald K., 2016). *Newsweek's* exposure of Trump's hypocrisy fueled speculation

that his unconsummated 1998 business proposition might cost him Cuban American votes in 2016. Shortly thereafter, Trump pivoted, announcing via Twitter: “The people of Cuba have struggled too long. Will reverse Obama’s executive orders and concessions towards Cuba until freedoms are restored” (Flores R., 2016).

- 14 In the final weeks of the campaign, the Republican ticket focused on energizing its base, including conservative Cuban Americans. Campaigning in Miami, Trump and Pence both pledged to roll back Obama’s policy in its entirety. “All of the concessions that Barack Obama has granted the Castro regime were done with executive order, which means the next president can reverse them,” Trump said. “And that is what I will do unless the Castro regime meets our demands. Those demands will include religious and political freedom for the Cuban people and the freeing of political prisoners” (Diamond J., 2016).
- 15 In the end, Trump’s appeal to Cuban American voters had limited success. He won between 52 and 54 percent of the Cuban American vote, only a few percentage points better than Mitt Romney and far below the 2-1 margins Republicans racked up before 2012 (Mazzei P. and N. Nehamas, 2016). Yet Trump believed he owed Cuban Americans a political debt. When Fidel Castro died on November 26, 2016, President-Elect Trump condemned the Cuban leader and promised he would work for a free Cuba. “Today, the world marks the passing of a brutal dictator who oppressed his own people for nearly six decades,” Trump wrote. “Our administration will do all it can to ensure the Cuban people can finally begin their journey toward prosperity and liberty. I join the many Cuban Americans who supported me so greatly in the presidential campaign...with the hope of one day soon seeing a free Cuba” (Trump, 2016). Two days later, he tweeted, “If Cuba is unwilling to make a better deal for the Cuban people, the Cuban/American people and the U.S. as a whole, I will terminate deal” (Mazzei P., 2016b).
- 16 Cuban officials scrupulously refrained from commenting on the U.S. presidential campaign while it was under way, simply saying that they hoped whoever won would carry out the will of the American people, who were overwhelmingly in favor of normalization (Gómez S. A., 2016). The day after the election, Raúl Castro congratulated Trump on his victory, and the daily newspaper *Granma* quoted the olive branch in Trump’s victory speech: “We will get along with all other nations willing to get along with us... We will seek common ground, not hostility; partnership, not conflict” (Granma, 2016). At the same time, the Cuban government also announced the beginning of its annual national defense exercises. Weeks later, on January 2, 2017, Cuba marked the anniversary of the triumph of the revolution with a massive military parade, which was not something normally part of the celebration (Reuters Staff, 2017a). The message to Washington was clear: Havana was ready to continue the diplomatic dialogue but prepared to defend itself if necessary.

In Search of a Policy

- 17 The early months of the Trump administration were marked by an unusual degree of chaos in the foreign policy process. The State Department’s role appeared greatly diminished. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson stayed largely in the shadows, left out of key meetings with foreign leaders, while the White House proposed to cut the department’s budget by a whopping 37 percent, later reduced to 28 percent (Toosi N. and B. Everett, 2017; Morello C. and A. Gearan, 2017). The department’s entire senior

management team was dismissed within weeks of inauguration, but four months into Trump's presidency, he had nominated only one of the department's other 42 senior executives (Labott E., 2017). Appointments at the Departments of Defense and Homeland Security lagged as well, stalled by White House attempts to impose Trump loyalists on the newly appointed secretaries (De Luce D. and J. Hudson, 2017). Meanwhile, the president repeatedly contradicted policy statements by senior members of his foreign policy team, leaving his cabinet secretaries to explain away the inconsistencies as best they could (Parker A., 2017; Nakamura D. and K. DeYoung, 2017).

- 18 The National Security Council was roiled by the abrupt departure of National Security Advisor Michael T. Flynn after just 24 days on the job and the replacement of most of Flynn's staff by his successor, Lt. Gen. H. R. McMaster. Shortly after Flynn's dismissal, Lt. Col. Craig E. Deare (ret.), NSC office director for Western Hemisphere affairs, provided a candid look behind the curtain of the administration's chaotic foreign policy process. According to Deare, White House advisors Steve Bannon and Jared Kushner were making policy decisions on the fly without consulting the NSC. Within days of making the comments at an off-the-record briefing, Deare was fired (Johnson E., 2017). He was replaced by CIA operative Juan Cruz, a veteran of the clandestine service (Adams D. and E. Acevedo, 2017).
- 19 The lines of authority regarding Cuba policy were even more uncertain because President Trump assigned responsibility for negotiating with Havana to Jason Greenblatt, an attorney for the Trump Organization who was named the president's Special Representative for International Negotiations. It was unclear when Greenblatt might get around to Cuba since his main responsibility was to negotiate peace in the Middle East (Labott E. and T. Schleifer, 2016).
- 20 The new administration's first step on Cuba was to launch a "full review" of policy (Reuters Staff, 2017a). Pending its outcome, the administration suspended all the bilateral talks except for those related to migration, which were mandated by the 1994 U.S.-Cuban migration accord. Although the White House had originally hoped to announce its new Cuba policy on May 20 (Cuban Independence Day), the review was not completed in time because of disagreements within the administration over what elements of Obama's policy to change (Gámez Torres N. 2017; Hirschfeld Davis J. 2017).
- 21 When an inter-agency group convened in early May to assess the results of the policy review and make recommendations to the president, virtually every agency reported that the policy of engagement was working well in their area of responsibility and ought to be continued. The White House rejected that consensus. Faced with unrelenting pressure from Cuban American hardliners on Capitol Hill, who kept reminding the administration that the president had promised during the campaign to roll back Obama's policy, the White House took control of the process away from the bureaucracy. The struggle, one administration official said succinctly, was between "policy and politics" (Zanona M., 2017).
- 22 Trump believed he owed a special debt to the Brigade 2506 veterans association — the veterans of the exile force that stormed ashore at the Bay of Pigs in 1961—which endorsed him for president at a time when the race in Florida looked close (Mazzei P. 2016a). The president tasked two of the most strident critics of Obama's policy, Congressman Mario Díaz-Balart (R-Fla.) and Senator Marco Rubio (R-Fla.), with drafting a new policy for him. Rubio even tweeted a picture of them in Rubio's office captioned, "Picture of the night @MarioDB and I hammered out the new Cuba policy" (Kroll A.,

2017). But strong counter-pressure came from the business community, which hoped to profit from the newly opened Cuban market. Bolstered by that support, the bureaucracy fought back successfully against proposals to reverse most of Obama's policies and produced a final package far less severe than Díaz-Balart and Rubio proposed.

Paying A Debt to Miami

- 23 “America will expose the crimes of the Castro regime and stand with the Cuban people in their struggle for freedom,” Trump (2017) declared before a raucous crowd of Cuban exiles at Miami's Manuel Arttime Theater, named for the leader of Brigade 2506. He acknowledged that he had come to Miami to pay off a political debt. “You went out and you voted. And here I am like I promised,” he told the crowd. “Effective immediately, I am canceling the last administration's completely one-sided deal with Cuba. I am announcing today a new policy, just as I promised during the campaign.”
- 24 Trump proceeded to denounce the Cuban regime as brutal, criminal, depraved, oppressive, and murderous. Listening to his combative rhetoric, one might have thought that the full panoply of U.S. economic and diplomatic sanctions was being reimposed on Cuba. Not so. Trump's diatribe disguised the limited scope of his new sanctions. The National Security Presidential Memorandum (2017) he signed on stage in Miami tightened the embargo against Cuba in several areas, but left the basic architecture of Obama's opening to Cuba in place.
- 25 The new regulations limited the “people-to-people” sub-category of educational travel by restoring the requirement that visitors travel in groups with a licensed travel provider. No more self-guided tours. (But visitors could still bring back rum and cigars). U.S. companies and travelers would be prohibited from doing business with enterprises linked to the Cuban military, with the exception of enterprises that run the ports, airports, and telecommunications. Those exceptions were important because they let U.S. cruise lines, airlines, and tech companies off the hook. The presidential memorandum also exempted existing contracts so as not to “disrupt” on going business. Finally, the new regulations expanded the number of Cubans regarded as government officials who cannot receive remittances from relatives in the United States. Trump's sanctions were likely to pinch the Cuban economy, but fell far short of what it would take to do serious harm.
- 26 Trump did not roll back Obama's other regulatory reforms expanding travel and business opportunities, or impose any other restrictions on Cuban American family travel and remittances. He did not break diplomatic relations or put Cuba back on the State Department's terrorism list. He did not restore the wet foot/dry foot policy that gave Cuban immigrants preferential treatment. He did not abrogate the bilateral agreements on issues of mutual interest negotiated by the Obama administration, and he did not close the door to future negotiations—though given the hostile tenor of his speech, it remained to be seen whether further agreements would be possible.
- 27 Further evidence of the limited character of Trump's policy reversal came in July when, like his three predecessors, he continued to waive implementation of Title III of the Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity Act of 1996. Title III would allow U.S. nationals to file suit in U.S. courts against anyone “trafficking” in their confiscated property in Cuba—that is, anyone assuming an equity stake in it or profiting from it.

Had Trump allowed Title III to go fully into effect, as Díaz-Balart advocated, it would have opened the door to as many as 200,000 law suits by U.S. nationals whose property was taken by the Cuban government after 1959. U.S. courts would have been swamped and the ability of U.S. companies to do business on the island would have been crippled for years to come.

- 28 Cuba's official response was pragmatic but firm. A statement released shortly after Trump's Miami speech declared, "The Government of Cuba reiterates its willingness to continue respectful dialogue and cooperation on issues of mutual interest, as well as the negotiation of pending bilateral issues with the United States Government... But it should not be expected that Cuba will make concessions inherent to its sovereignty and independence, nor will it accept any kind of conditionality" (Government of Cuba, 2017).
- 29 Why did Trump, despite his obvious sympathy for the most recalcitrant Cuban American hardliners, settle on such a limited policy? The answer is that Obama's strategy of creating constituencies in favor of engagement succeeded. Public opinion, elite and mass, supported engagement by wide margins, as did a majority of Cuban Americans. The business community and its allies in Congress — many of them Republicans—were solidly opposed to sanctions that would close off the Cuban market. Even the federal executive bureaucracy was won over by the diplomatic successes scored by the policy of engagement. Asked why Trump did not impose tougher sanctions, a senior administration official explained, "You can't put the genie back in the bottle 100%" (White House, 2017).

Public Opinion

- 30 Although Cuba was not a salient issue for any constituency other than Cuban Americans, the public reaction to the December 17, 2014 announcement was overwhelmingly positive. Poll after poll showed that the new Cuba policy was widely popular, even among Republicans, and favorable opinion grew as the policy unfolded over the next two years. A CBS-New York Times poll taken right after the December announcement found that 54% of the public approved of both reestablishing diplomatic relations and allowing trade with Cuba, while only 28% disapproved (Dutton S. *et al.*, 2014). A CNN poll found 63% in favor of diplomatic relations and 55% in favor of ending the embargo (Diamond J., 2014). A Washington Post-ABC News poll found 64% in favor of restoring relations and 68% in favor of lifting the embargo (Clement S., 2014).
- 31 Six months later, Pew (2015) found support for Obama's policy had grown, with 73% of the public in favor of diplomatic relations and 72% in favor of ending the embargo. A majority of Republicans agreed (56% and 59% in favor respectively), as did even self-identified conservative Republicans (52% and 55% in favor). As Obama's term was coming to a close in December 2016, support for his Cuba policy remained strong, with 75% in favor of diplomatic relations and 73% in favor of lifting the embargo. Republican support had risen to 62%, and conservative Republican support to 57% on both issues (Tyson A., 2016).
- 32 The real political test for the opening to Cuba was how Cuban Americans reacted. For years, they voted for or against candidates based on their position toward Cuba, and most Cuban Americans favored a hardline policy. A major obstacle to policy change was politicians' fear of the electoral consequences in the swing state of Florida, where

Cuban Americans made up five percent of the electorate and registered Republican by a two to one margin. Gradually, however, Cuban Americans became advocates for engagement. Polling by Florida International University since 1991 has chronicled the evolution of the Cuban American community in south Florida, as Guillermo Grenier's article in this issue describes. By 2014, before Obama's announcement, 68 percent of Cuban Americans in south Florida favored the reestablishment of diplomatic relations (Grenier G. and H. Gladwin, 2014).

- 33 Shifting attitudes in the community manifested themselves at the ballot box. In 2008, running on a moderate policy favoring dialogue with Cuba, Obama won 35 percent of the Cuban American vote, more than any Democrat except Bill Clinton in 1996, who got 35 percent after signing the Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity Act (also known as Helms-Burton), which wrote the embargo into law. In 2012, after loosening restrictions on travel and remittances, Obama won almost half the Cuban American vote in Florida. Statewide exit polls showed Obama winning the Cuban American vote, 49% to Romney's 47% (López M. and P. Taylor, 2012) , or losing it narrowly, 48% to Romney's 52% (Bendixen & Amandi International, 2015). No Democrat had ever done so well (Tamayo J., 2012; Bendixen S., 2012).
- 34 Cuban American reactions to Obama's opening to Cuba reflected the community's changing attitudes. A Bendixen & Amandi International (2015a) poll in March 2015 found 51% in support of normalization and a plurality of 47% in favor of lifting the embargo. By December, a year after Obama's announcement, Cuban Americans supported normalization (56% in favor, 36% opposed) and lifting the embargo (53% in favor, 31% opposed) (Bendixen & Amandi International, 2015b). Even those living in Florida supported Obama's policy (52% in favor, 40% opposed). An FIU poll of Cuban Americans in south Florida conducted in the summer of 2016, after Obama's March trip to Cuba, found that support for Obama's policy of normalization had grown to 56% and support for ending the embargo to 54% (Grenier G. and H. Gladwin, 2016).
- 35 Not surprisingly, Trump's partial reversal of Obama's policy was not well received, either by the general public or moderate Cuban Americans. A Morning Consult (2017) poll released on the eve of Trump's June 16 announcement found that 65 percent of the public supported Obama's policy changes and only 18 percent opposed them. Republicans supported Obama's policy by a margin of 64 percent to 21 percent. Sixty-one percent of the public and 55 percent of Republicans favored ending the embargo. An online poll of Floridians by Florida Atlantic University taken shortly after June 16, found pluralities in support of Trump's decision to limit travel and business with the Cuban military, but by a margin of 47 percent to 34 percent, they preferred Obama's policy of normalization over Trump's return to hostility (Leary A., 2017).
- 36 As details of Trump's new policy leaked to the press in the days leading up to his speech in Miami, moderate Cuban American groups spoke out in support of engagement. CubaOne (2017), a group of young Cuban Americans working to reconnect Cubans on the island with Cubans abroad, sent Trump an open letter imploring him not to return to "Cold War policies." The Cuba Study Group (2017a), a moderate pro-business group that supported Obama's opening, sent its own letter to Trump, reminding him that a majority of Cuban Americans favored normalizing relations with Cuba and urging him not to reverse course. After Trump's announcement, the group criticized the new policy as bad for the Cuban people and bad for U.S. interests (Cuba Study Group, 2017b).

Elite Opinion

- 37 During the Cold War, Fidel Castro drove successive U.S. presidents crazy by denouncing U.S. imperialism, aligning with the Soviet Union, and supporting revolutionaries around the world. But after the Soviet Union collapsed, Cuban troops came home from abroad and Castro made peace with his Latin American neighbors. The security concerns that were a driving force behind U.S. policy evaporated. Yet long after the foreign policy establishment had concluded that hostility toward Cuba no longer made sense, the old policy remained in place due to domestic politics in Florida. When President Obama finally jettisoned the anachronistic policy of hostility in December 2014, most foreign policy professionals breathed a sigh of relief and U.S. allies around the world applauded.
- 38 A bipartisan cross-section of the foreign policy and national security elite supported Obama's opening to Cuba on the grounds that the old policy was an ineffective remnant of the Cold War that was damaging U.S. relations with allies, especially in Latin America. Polling by the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations (2004) found that foreign policy "opinion leaders" had been in favor of lifting the embargo on Cuba for over a decade. A 2004 poll found that 80% of opinion leaders favored opening trade with Cuba.
- 39 In May 2014, 46 luminaries of the policy and business world signed an open letter to President Obama urging him to adopt a policy of engagement with Cuba. (Support Cuban Civil Society, 2014). The signatories included a bipartisan cross-section of former diplomats, retired military officers, and Cuban American businessmen, among them Ambassador Thomas Pickering, Admiral James Stavridis, sugar magnate Andres Fanjul, and President George W. Bush's first director of national intelligence, John Negroponte.
- 40 In January 2015, 78 former government officials and opinion leaders, including David Rockefeller and George Shultz, Ronald Reagan's Secretary of State, signed a second letter congratulating Obama on his opening to Cuba, noting that the bipartisan character of the signatories represented, "the broad support these changes have from across the political spectrum. We may disagree on a number of issues, but we've found common ground for a simple reason; our fifty-four-year-old approach intended to promote human rights and democracy in Cuba has failed" (Support Cuban Civil Society, 2015).
- 41 A few months after Donald Trump's inauguration, 16 retired senior military officers, including a former commander of the Southern Command, sent National Security Advisor McMaster an open letter urging the administration to maintain engagement with Cuba. "Completing the reopening of diplomatic relations with Cuba will provide long-term national security benefits to the United States," the officers argued, citing successful cooperation on counter-terrorism, border control, drug interdiction, environmental protection, and emergency preparedness. "If we fail to engage economically and politically," they warned, "it is certain that China, Russia, and other entities whose interests are contrary to the United States' will rush into the vacuum" (American Security Project, 2017).
- 42 It was unclear how much influence traditional foreign policy elites would have on a president who disdained Washington insiders. Most Republican international affairs experts openly opposed Trump during the campaign and in August 2016, 50 senior

foreign policy officials from previous Republican administrations released an open letter declaring their opposition in the sharpest terms (Sanger D.E. and M. Haberman, 2016). When President Trump assembled his foreign policy team, he spurned traditional experts in favor of corporate leaders and military officers.

- 43 The prevalence of military officers in top foreign policy and national security posts may have had a moderating effect on Trump's Cuba policy. At the Pentagon, the intrusion of extra-hemispheric powers seeking influence in Latin America was a perennial concern, with China, Russia, and Iran topping the list—all countries with which Cuba maintained good relations. For some policymakers, this geostrategic concern translated into support for engagement with Cuba, giving Havana less incentive to extend its economic relationships with China and Russia into politico-military ones. K. T. McFarland, who served briefly as Trump's deputy national security adviser, summarized the argument succinctly before she joined the administration: "We must take steps now to ensure that Cuba doesn't become a Russian or Chinese pawn, and thus serve as a launch pad to threaten America's security were they to establish a military presence" (Ordoñez F., 2016).
- 44 The U.S. Southern Command's annual Posture Statement detailing security threats and U.S. capabilities in Latin America has not listed Cuba as a threat (except for concerns about migration) since the 1990s, but in recent years it consistently warned about the risks of Russia, China, and Iran gaining influence in the region. The April 2017 statement was no different, and three recent Posture Statements (2013, 2014, and 2015) were prepared by then-commander General John F. Kelly, Trump's first secretary for Homeland Security and his second chief of staff.

The Business Community

- 45 The initial surge of excitement among U.S. businesses after December 17, 2014 was palpable: finally, they had the opportunity to enter a largely unexploited market, forbidden for half a century. Over the next two years, a parade of trade delegations visited Havana, nine of them led by sitting governors. New York's governor Andrew Cuomo was the first, taking a group of 20 business leaders in April 2015 (Craig S., 2015). He was followed by governors representing Gulf states with trade ports (Louisiana, Texas, and Mississippi), and states hoping to export agricultural goods (Missouri, Virginia, Arkansas, Colorado, and Western Virginia). Legislators and local officials led other trade delegations from Alabama, California, Kentucky, Illinois, Indiana, New Mexico, North Carolina, Ohio, and Florida.
- 46 In March 2015, the U.S. Agriculture Coalition for Cuba—a broad-based group formed after December 17, 2014 to promote agricultural trade—took 95 people to Cuba, including two former secretaries of agriculture (Frank M. and D. Trotta, 2015). The U.S. Chamber of Commerce launched the U.S.-Cuba Business Council representing over two dozen major corporations, including Caterpillar, Kraft Heinz, Sprint, Boeing, Home Depot, and American Airlines. By 2017, ports in Virginia, Alabama, and Mississippi had signed agreements with Cuba to explore opportunities for increasing trade. Florida ports at Tampa Bay, Palm Beach, and the Everglades were forced to withdraw from negotiations when Governor Rick Scott threatened to cut off state funds to any port doing business with Cuba (Mazzei P., 2017c).

- 47 Yet despite the widespread interest in commerce with Cuba, relatively few deals were completed in the two years after December 2014. Apart from the sale of agricultural goods, only about four dozen new agreements were signed and some of them, like the port agreements, were memoranda of understanding that expressed interest in pursuing future opportunities rather than firm contracts. The completed agreements were predominantly in the travel and hospitality sectors, which accounted for 25 of the 45 agreements as of early 2017. Telecom was also well represented, with seven agreements (five with cell phone providers). But in other sectors, no more than one or two companies had closed deals (U.S.-Cuba Trade and Economic Council, 2017).
- 48 Even under Obama, progress was stymied by obstacles in both Washington and Havana. Despite the exceptions to the embargo that Obama licensed in 2015 and 2016, the core of the economic embargo remained intact. U.S. businesses could not invest on the island or establish joint ventures with Cuban state enterprises except in telecommunications and pharmaceuticals. U.S. exports were still limited to agricultural, medical, and some consumer goods. Agricultural sales (Cuba's principal import from the United States) still required Cuba to pay cash in advance. Just the complexity of the Cuban Assets Control Regulations and the burden of compliance was enough to deter some businesses from entering the market for fear of inadvertently violating the sanctions and incurring millions of dollars in fines (LeoGrande W., 2016).
- 49 Moreover, the 2016 U.S. presidential election created political risk, making businesses cautious during the final year of the Obama administration. A Republican president could tighten the embargo once again, and any business that had invested time and money to build commercial ties with Cuba could find its investment wiped out. Donald Trump's election chilled the business climate even more, given his threats on the campaign trail to reverse Obama's policy (Robles F., 2016).
- 50 Nor was Cuba an easy place to do business. Cuba's infrastructure—its roads, energy grid, and digital network—lagged behind most neighboring countries. Foreign companies still had to hire labor through the state's hiring agency. Cuba's bureaucracy remained notoriously slow to make decisions and opaque, making dispute resolution problematic. And Cuba's domestic market was relatively small since so few Cubans had sufficient income to purchase imported goods (Cuba Journal, 2016).
- 51 Nevertheless, the agricultural, hospitality, and telecom industries lobbied actively and successfully in defense of the policy of commercial engagement. Over 100 agricultural businesses and associations signed a letter to President Trump in January 2017, in support of continuing engagement. "As a broad cross-section of rural America, we urge you not to take steps to reverse progress made in normalizing relations with Cuba," they wrote, "and also solicit your support for the agricultural business sector to expand trade with Cuba to help American farmers and our associated industries" (Engage Cuba, 2017). In May, 46 travel companies signed a letter asking Trump not to tighten restrictions on travel to Cuba (Paul K., 2017).
- 52 The U.S. Chamber of Commerce remained committed to ending the embargo as it had been since the 1990s. After taking eight corporate executives to Cuba in May 2017, Jay Timmons (2017), CEO of the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM), added his voice, calling for an end to the embargo. "Expanded economic engagement means new opportunities for us, and greater prosperity and freedom for Cubans," he wrote. "It is time to demonstrate our American values in action."

- 53 The fact that Trump's cabinet was populated by so many corporate executives meant that senior officials lent a sympathetic ear to business lobbyists' calls to expand commerce with Cuba in order to increase U.S. exports and create jobs—two of Trump's top economic priorities. The farm lobby, for example, had an ally in Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue, a long-time supporter of food sales to Cuba who, during his confirmation hearing, said, "We would love to have Cuba as a customer... We have the product they need and they would like the product" (Williams J., 2017).
- 54 Business reaction to Trump's policy announcement was uniformly negative. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce (2017) lamented the new constraints on U.S. business opportunities. "U.S. private sector engagement can be a positive force for the kind of change we all wish to see in Cuba," it said, reacting to the Miami speech. "Unfortunately, today's moves actually limit the possibility for positive change on the island." The American Farm Bureau, the U.S. Grains Council, the National Corn Growers Association, the Rice Growers Association, and the U.S. Agricultural Coalition for Cuba all criticized Trump's new sanctions. "We need to be opening up markets for American farm goods, not sending signals that might lead to less access," said American Farm Bureau President Zippy Duvall (Murakami K., 2017).

Congress

- 55 As the business community's interest in commerce with Cuba grew, so did their support in Congress. The 115th Congress that convened in January 2017 was little-changed from its predecessor; Democrats gained just two seats in the Senate and seven in the House of Representatives. Yet despite its Republican majority, the new body included a growing number of Republican members who supported relaxing the embargo in order to benefit U.S. businesses. A majority of the 114th Senate had gone on record cosponsoring Senator Jeff Flake's bill to abolish the ban on tourist travel, and that majority was intact in the new Congress. The new version of Flake's bill was introduced in May 2017 with 55 cosponsors (Reuters Staff, 2017b).
- 56 A near majority of the 114th House of Representatives supported the sale of agricultural goods to Cuba on credit, forcing the leadership to broker a compromise that promised to facilitate increased agricultural sales (Tomson B., 2016). When that compromise fell apart in the new House, Rep. Rick Crawford (R-Ariz.) vowed to reintroduce his legislation. Supporting him was the bipartisan Cuba Working Group, comprising an equal number of Democrats and Republicans (Zengerle P., 2016). Its two Republican co-chairs, Rep. Crawford and Tom Emmer (R-Minn.) both supported Trump during the campaign and presumably had some political capital with the new administration—but not enough to prevent the imposition of the new trade restrictions. The congressional Cuba Working Group blasted Trump's policy when he announced it. "We strongly disagree with the decision to reinstate failed isolationist policies towards Cuba," it said in a statement. "Restricting travel and trade and limiting our ability to export American democracy and values will hinder, not help, efforts to improve human rights and religious liberties in Cuba." Senator Flake rejected Trump's new travel limits as a step backward and called on his colleagues to change the law (Merica D., 2017) and Republican Senators John Boozman of Arkansas and Jerry Moran of Kansas also issued critical statements (Lardner R., 2017)

- 57 Despite the emergence of bipartisan majorities in favor of commerce and travel, the hostility of the Republican leadership in both the House and Senate toward engagement with Cuba meant that legislation to relax the embargo was unlikely to make much headway. But neither was Congress likely to cooperate in tightening the embargo. President Trump, like Obama before him, would have to craft his Cuba policy relying on his executive authority.

Conclusion: predictable uncertainty

- 58 In hammering out his Cuba policy, President Trump faced a political dilemma: how to fulfill his campaign promise to conservative Cuban Americans that he would gut Obama's policy, while at the same time not angering other stakeholders — especially the business community — who support engagement. To square the circle, Trump announced limited, ineffective sanctions, but then wrapped them in the harshest Cold War rhetoric and marched a parade of Cuban exile heroes across the stage of the Manuel Artime Theater. As is his style, Trump gave a speech to rouse the base while pursuing a policy that actually fell well short of his promises. In all likelihood, political pressures from the constituencies Obama's policy created will continue to constrain Trump's ability to impose sanctions on Cuba. However, his loyalty to the exile right and his embrace of the policy of regime change will make it difficult to achieve further progress toward normalizing relations, as the unproductive Bilateral Commission meeting in September 2017 demonstrated.
- 59 Trump's new policy will come into clearer focus as the Department of the Treasury and Department of Commerce promulgate the new regulations governing travel and business, and U.S. and Cuban diplomats feel out one another about whether progress is still possible on issues of mutual interest. Trump's presidential memorandum said little about state-to-state relations, but did include a single paragraph authorizing continued engagement with Cuba on topics that serve U.S. interests. The direction of U.S.-Cuban relations going forward will depend on whether Trump's performance in Miami was a one-time reward to his conservative Cuban American audience, or the opening salvo in an escalating policy of hostility.

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RÉSUMÉS

Le président Barack Obama a tenté de rendre sa politique d'ouverture à Cuba "irréversible" avant de quitter le pouvoir. Cet article analyse l'état des relations à la fin de l'administration Obama, ce qui a été accompli et ce qui restait à faire, puis la transition vers la nouvelle politique du président Trump à partir de ses déclarations de campagne, le débat sur la question cubaine au sein même de l'administration, ainsi que les premières mesures prises au cours des six premiers mois de gouvernement. Enfin, nous analyserons les forces politiques qui ont empêché Trump d'abroger totalement les mesures prises par Obama.

President Barack Obama intended to make his opening to Cuba "irreversible" before he left office. This chapter examines the state of relations at the end of the Obama administration; what was accomplished and what remained to be done. It then describes the transition to President Donald Trump's new policy, tracing what he said during the campaign; the debate over Cuba inside the administration; and the initial policy steps taken in the first six months of the administration. Finally, it analyzes the political forces that prevented Trump from fully reversing Obama's policy.

El presidente Barack Obama pretendía que su apertura a Cuba fuera "irreversible" antes de dejar el cargo. Este capítulo examina el estado de las relaciones al final de la administración Obama; Lo que se logró y lo que quedaba por hacer. Luego describe la transición a la nueva política del Presidente Donald Trump, siguiendo lo que dijo durante la campaña; El debate sobre Cuba dentro de la administración; Y las medidas políticas iniciales adoptadas en los primeros seis meses de la administración. Finalmente, analiza las fuerzas políticas que impidieron a Trump invertir completamente la política de Obama.

INDEX

Mots-clés : Cuba, Trump, Obama, embargo, politique étrangère américaine

Palabras claves : Cuba, Trump, Obama, bloqueo, política exterior de los EEUU

Keywords : Cuba, Trump, Obama, embargo, U.S. foreign policy

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